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SUZANNE VALADON

THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST

by

THÉRÈSE DIAMAND ROSINSKY

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

1996

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHRONOLOGY

1865
September 23: Birth of Marie-Clementine Valadon, daughter of Madeleine Valadon, thirty-four years old, sewing maid, and unknown father, in the town of Bessines-sur-Gartempe, Haute Vienne, France.

Christened on September 24: godfather, Matthieu Masbeix; godmother, Marie-Aline Coulaud.

1865 to 1870
Mother and child move to Paris. Madeleine works as charwoman. Marie-Clementine is sent briefly to Nantes to her half-sister Marie-Aline, then back to Montmartre. Attends religious school until 1876.

1873
Starts drawing.

c. 1876 to 1880
Apprentices in dress factory, florist shop, and outdoor market.

1880
Lives with mother. Works briefly in a circus until an injury from a fall prevents her working. Becomes a model for Puvis de Chavannes (Sacred Grove, 1883), Renoir (Dance in the Country, Dance in Bougival, Dances in the City, 1883; The Braid, 1885; several Bathers); Toulouse-Lautrec (two Portraits, 1887, Gueule de Bois, 1887-88); Henner, Wertheimer (Kiss of the Mermaid, 1884); Voytech Hynais (Truth, 1893); Hector Leroux (1891).

1883
December 26: Birth of Maurice Valadon, father unknown; acknowledged in 1891 by the Spanish journalist Miquel Utrillo y Molins. Valadon moves with the child and her mother to 7 rue Tourlaque. Does first known drawings: Autoportrait, pastel, and Portrait of My Mother.

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1883-1893
Makes numerous drawings modeled by her son, her mother, herself, and Miquel Utrillo--portraits, family scenes, and nude children. Start of a long friendship with Degas that lasted until the Impressionist's death.

1893
Has affair with Eric Satie, who lives next door. First known paintings: Portrait of a Little Girl, Portrait of Eric Satie, Portrait of Bernard Lemaire, Tale to a Child, and Young Girl Crocheting, probably started in 1892.

1894
Perhaps encouraged by Degas--who buys a drawing--and Bartholomé, sends five drawings to the Salon de la Nationale, where they are exhibited: Toilet of the Grandson (No. 1671), and four studies of children (Nos. 1672, 1673, and 1674).

1894-1895
Degas teaches her soft-ground etching in his atelier. Continues to draw.

1896
August 5: Marries Paul Mousis, whom she had known since 1891. He was chief clerk in Bel and Sainénat Co., and a man of means. Valadon keeps an atelier at 12 rue Cortot but lives in a house at Montmagny near Pierrefitte. She paints Grandmother and the Little Rosalie, her first oil since her 1892-93 series.

1896-1909
Leads a comfortable life with time for her art. Makes few paintings, but many drawings and etchings, sold by Le Barc de Boutteville and Vollard, who publishes her prints in 1897.

Maurice Utrillo, raised by his grandmother, starts drinking at an early age. Studies poorly at Collège Rollin. Helped by his stepfather, he works for a few months as a clerk at the Credit Lyonnais bank. Valadon consults Dr. Ettinger, who suggests teaching Utrillo to paint as therapy. Utrillo paints "against his will" but continues to drink and has to leave his parents' house.

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1909
Meets one of Utrillo's friends, the painter André Utter, born in 1886 and twenty-one years her junior. Leaves Mousis, and asks for a divorce. Starts to live with Utter at 5 Impasse Guelma but moves to 12 rue Cortot, to a studio vacated by Emile Bernard.

Utter convinces her to concentrate on painting. Does numerous oils, among them Nude with Mirror, After the Bath, Adam and Eve, and Summer, which is exhibited at the Salon d'Automne (No. 1677).

1911
Paints Still Life With Teapot, as well as large compositions, including Nude Women under the Trees. First solo show at Clovis Sagot. Joy of Living and Hairdressing shown at Salon d'Automne (Nos. 1605 and 1606). Six works shown at the Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 6073-6078). Utrillo is "discovered" by Francis Jourdan, and later by Octave Mirbeau.

1912
Paints Family Portrait, Portrait of the Artist's Mother, The Future Unveiled, and Game.

Travels with Utter and Utrillo to Brittany on the island of Ouessant. Does several landscapes.

The Future Unveiled shown at the Salon d'Automne (No. 1658); three works at the Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 3219-21). Exhibits in Munich in a group show organized by Clovis Sagot.

1913
Paints Marie and Gilberte, Nude Having Her Hair Combed, and several still lifes. Travels with Utter and Utrillo to Corsica. Does fine views of Corté and Belgodère in a strong linear style.

Shows at Salon d'Automne: Young Girl with a Mirror (No. 2020); and Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 3013-14, which includes The Tub.)

Exhibits with seven other artists at Berthe Weil in December.

1914
Makes large masterpieces: Casting of the Net, shown at the Indépendents (No. 3324), and The Seamstress. Paints still lifes and landscapes in the Oise region. In August marries Utter shortly

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before he joins his regiment in Belleville-sur-Saône. Utrillo is rejected by the army and goes back to his mother at rue Cortot.

1915
Paints Portrait of Madame Mauricia Coquiot. Has solo show at Berthe Weil. Her mother dies.

1916
Makes series of beautiful nudes after the model Gaby. Paints Arlequin at same time of Utter's Arlequin. Paints flowers and landscapes of Montmartre, and of the Oise region.

1917
Paints Rest, modeled by Gaby, and landscapes of Montmartre. In June, joins Utter, who had been wounded and is recovering in Meyzieux military hospital. Paints local landscape. Has group show with Utter and Utrillo at Berthe Weil and Bernheim Jeune.

1918
Makes Autoportrait, done at Decimes, Isère, and Portrait of Madame Gebel, as well as nudes. Utter returns from the war to rue Cortot and presses her to work more.

1919
Does extensive work, including portraits: Utrillo Painting and The Tigress; numerous beautiful still lifes, landscapes, large series of nudes modeled by a mulatto girl (Black Venus, Reclining Slave). These two paintings and two additional works shown at the Salon d'Automne (Nos. 1864-1867). Has drawing exhibition at Berthe Weil. Utrillo has first major exhibition at Lepoutre.

1920
Paints many still lifes, as well as portraits (Portrait of Victor Rey). Nudes in elaborate setting, and genre scenes (Small Italian Girl with a Doll). Shows several works at "Young French Painting" at Manzy Joyant Gallery. Elected member of the Salon d'Automne, she sells one painting (No. 3139) at its yearly show. Some of her works sold at auction at the Hotel Drouot, October 22 and December 16.

1921
Does portraits of Utrillo and her niece Gilberte, as well at the Utter Family. Paints nudes, The Cast-Off Doll, and still lifes.

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Takes trip to Beaujolais. Paints landscapes: Castle at Jonchet, Cowshed in Beaujolais. Exhibits with Utter and Utrillo at Berthe Weil. Shows one nude at the Salon des Indépendents (No. 3437).

Four major works at the Salon d'Automne: Family Portrait (No. 2372), The Cast-Off Doll (2373), Gilberte (2374), and Portrait of Utrillo (2375). In December, solo show at John Levy includes Casting of the Net, Adam and Eve. Shows two portraits at the International Exhibition of Modern Art in Geneva.

Enjoys increasing fame with public and critics, and has frequent shows and excellent press reviews written by Robert Rey, André Warnod, Tabarant.

1922
Portraits: Lily Walton, Madame Zameron, Germaine Utter, Madame Levy, as well as nudes and Montmartre landscapes. Trip to Genet in Brittany, where she paints landscapes.

Shows two paintings at the Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 3582 and 3583). Two nudes at the Salon d'Automne (Nos. 2247 and 2248).

Has two shows: Valadon and Utrillo at Berthe Weil in April and July; and Valadon, Utter and Utrillo at the Delpayat Gallery.

Robert Rey publishes the first monograph on Valadon.

1923
Paints The Blue Room, Autoportrait, as well as large nudes and still lifes. Visits the painter Georges Kars' family in Ségalas in the Basses Pyrénées.

Buys a castle at Saint Bernard in the Saône Valley. Valadon, Utrillo, and Utter have their own atelier. The trio commutes between Paris and Saint Bernard. Large Valadon-Utrillo show at Bernheim Jeune Gallery.

Exhibits two paintings at the Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 4598 and 4599); one nude and Still Life with Pineapple at the Salon des Tuilleries (Nos. 994 and 995); and the Blue Room and Still Life with Game at the Salon d'Automne (Nos. 1955 and 1956). Participates in several group shows, and enjoys increased public recognition. Lavish life style for the family.

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1924
Does numerous portraits, nudes, and still lifes, as well as first landscapes of Saint Bernard, which she will paint until 1932. Although frequently asked to show, exhibits only at Berthe Weil and Bernheim Jeune, with whom she signs a first contract. Tabarant gives a banquet in her honor.

Exhibits Madame Fontaine and Her Daughter at the Salon des Indépendents (No. 66).

1925
Valadon-Utrillo-Utter show at Bernheim Jeune. Exhibits two paintings at the Salon des Indépendents (Nos. 3343 and 3344).

1926
Bernheim Jeune Gallery buys a house for Utrillo at 12 avenue Junot, to which Valadon and Utrillo move; Utter remains at rue Cortot. Outstanding works at the Indépendents' Retrospective: Casting of the Net (No. 2256), Family Portrait (No. 2257), Gilberte (No. 2260), and two others (Nos. 2258 and 2259).

1927
Paints nudes, still lifes, Saint Bernard landscapes. Retrospective show at Berthe Weil in January with a foreword in free verse by Berthe Weil. Show is acclaimed. Exhibits four paintings at the Salon des Tuilleries (Nos. 2347-2340).

Does outstanding series of nudes and still lifes.

1928
Has several group shows abroad, in Amsterdam and New York. Shows two paintings at the Salon d'Automne (Nos. 2480 and 2481). Has solo show at the Galerie des Archers in Lyon in January, and at Berthe Weil in April. Is now internationally known. An important article appears in a German journal, Deutsche Kunst und Decoration. The following year, Adolphe Basler publishes a monograph on Valadon.

1929
Paints important landscapes at Saint Bernard. Has two shows at the Galerie Bernier: a retrospective of drawings and prints including about one hundred works, with a foreword by Robert Rey (shown from January to April); also a show of recent works.

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1930
Does several still lifes and Saint Bernard landscapes. Participates in the show "Living Arts," at the Pigalle Theatre.

1931
Troubled relationship with Utter. Paints Self Portrait with Bare Breasts, Woman Putting Shoes on a Little Girl, as well as many still lifes and landscapes at Saint Bernard. Participates in the exhibition of the School of Paris held in Prague. Has show of recent works at the Galerie Au Portique with a foreword by Edouard Herriot. Large retrospective in Brussels at the Galerie le Centaure.

1932
Paints Portrait of André Utter and His Dogs and last still lifes and landscapes of Saint Bernard.

Most important retrospective at the Georges Petit Gallery with a foreword by Edouard Herriot in the catalogue. Show well received by the press, but almost no sales. Has exhibition of drawings and prints at Au Portique and participates in group show with Utter and Utrillo at the Moos Gallery in Geneva, which includes around one hundred paintings. Daragnès publishes a luxurious book that includes the complete engraved works of Valadon; it sells poorly.

1933
Paints less and suffers drastic mood swings. Utrillo's fame increases. He becomes a devout Roman Catholic and is baptized. Valadon joins a woman's organization, Femmes Artistes Modernes (F.A.M.), headed by the painter Marie-Anne Camax-Zoegger. Shows yearly with F.A.M. until her death.

1934
Portrait of Paul Pétridès. Sees Utter only occasionally. Befriends a young painter named Gazi, who addresses her as Mémère" and tries to have her share his profound devotion.

1935
Treated at the American Hospital in Neuilly (a Paris suburb) for diabetes and uremia. Allegedly asks Lucie Valore--the widow of Robert Pawels, a Belgian banker and collector of Utrillo's works--to marry Utrillo. However, Utrillo's departure for his mother's home is emotionally violent.

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1936
Does paintings of flowers, which she dedicates to her friends, and a few still lifes.

1937
Paints Portrait of Madame Maurice Utrillo and Portrait of Madame Pétridès. The state buys Adam and Eve, Casting of the Net, and Grandmother and Grandson, as well as several drawings, for the Musée du Luxembourg, at the time a museum of modern art. The Luxembourg already owns two of the artist's paintings.

1938
Dies suddenly of a stroke at the Piccini Hospital, on April 7, at 11 a.m. A funeral service is held at the church of Saint Pierre of Montmartre.

From the catalogue written by Pierre Georgel for the 1967 exhibition held at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC Georges Pompidou in Paris.

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INTRODUCTION

Reality is infinitely greater than any story, any fable, any divinity, any surreality.

Antonin Artaud, 1915

This dissertation will concern itself with the early events that contributed to the making of Suzanne Valadon as an artist. It will focus on the formative years of this extraordinary woman, from her birth in 1865 to the end of World War I, when she entered the active phase of her artistic maturity.

Suzanne Valadon was one of the first nineteenth century women from a working class background to become a professional artist whose works were shown at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1894, five of her drawings were exhibited in this most prestigious and exclusive art show of the time. Her presence there among celebrated contemporary artists was unusual, since Valadon lacked the most basic elements needed for entering an official Salon.

Valadon's acceptance at the Nationale was against the odds. As a woman, she belonged to a minority whose art was seldom taken seriously. Self-taught, she lacked the long years of practice with an established Beaux-Arts teacher whose sponsorship would command an invitation to the Salon. The works she exhibited--drawings of scrawny children tended by a worn-out old woman--looked "unfeminine" as well as unappealing. Worst of all, because of a

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rigidly compartmentalized hierarchy, Valadon's ongoing work as a model should have prevented her from being recognized as a professional artist. These two careers were viewed as irreconcilable, even during the late nineteenth century. Therefore, her art seemed to be doomed to failure.

Yet, Suzanne Valadon's success was almost instantaneous. In 1894, when she was only twenty-nine, Degas started to purchase her drawings and, in 1897, the dealer Vollard gave her a first show. Not only did Valadon prevail in establishing herself as a professional artist, but she did so while maintaining her personal vision. Always remaining away from all contemporary art movements, she imparted to some of her subject matter such bold and novel treatment that she broke with centuries-old traditions.

In order to understand and appreciate her work, one must place it within the context of French nineteenth-century art, where it is unique. The illegitimate daughter of an illiterate charwoman (fig. 1), Valadon, herself a self-taught painter, did become a well-known artist. A hard-working Montmartre model, she ultimately fulfilled her artistic vocation and established her own style without relying on the influence of Puvis de Chavannes, Renoir, and Toulouse-Lautrec, her employers as well as her lovers. It was actually her uniqueness that marked Valadon as an outsider, so removed from the expected social and esthetic norms that she could not be judged by the criteria applied to other women artists. Her art has resisted attempts to categorize it as either Realist, Fauvist, or Expressionist, and it can be tied only loosely to the School of Paris, a regional rather than stylistic designation.

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Valadon's own concern, however, was not with a theoretical allegiance to some given movement but with a desire to capture the life she saw around her. While Courbet humorously defined his Realist approach by stating that he would have painted an angel had he seen one, Valadon could not even conceive of seeing, let alone painting, an angel. A member of the desperately-needy working class, she rendered the harsh but true images of her daily existence. Her works are based on her perceptions, and these perceptions were conditioned by two determining factors: her gender and her life in Montmartre.

Any reading of Valadon's art must start with her identity as a female model and unmarried mother at the age of eighteen, functioning in a male-dominated society ruled by strict social and sexual codes. Of equal importance is the fact that she grew up on and spent her entire life in bohemian Montmartre. There, a permanent contact with art allowed her to view its creation as a natural function stripped of any esoteric mystique.

Valadon's art and life are inseparable. While many artists escape the drudgery of their immediate existence by creating on their canvas a world of their own, she did the opposite. It was her early life--the familiar faces of her family (fig. 2) and friends, the gardens and landscapes of her neighborhood--that she retraced for her viewers. The scrawny children, the banality, and often vulgarity, of her intimates, the inexorable passage of time, clinically recorded in her self-portraits, are all faithfully transcribed, without hope of pity or fear of judgment (fig. 3).

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When Suzanne Valadon died at seventy-three, she left 278 paintings, 231 drawings, and 31 etchings. Her range of subject matter includes nudes, portraits (fig. 4), landscapes, and still lifes. It is mostly in her representations of female nudes and children, and in her portraits, that she showed her most daring innovations and disrupted many of the existing conventions. There is no doubt about the greatness of her talent and the innovative quality of her art. But she also possessed an extraordinary nature that enabled her to turn into positive assets situations that would have presented insurmountable handicaps to another. She combined both careers of model and painter--a situation that had rarely been successfully achieved before. It might have caused an unmanageable duality between the passivity of the first one and the creativity of the second. Instead, Valadon gained from her experience in posing a new awareness of her body, used and seen as an object by male painters and viewers (fig. 5, fig. 6). This realization added a new dimension to her pictorial approach to female nudity that enabled her to purge it of its pre-existing sexual connotations. For the first time in centuries, women depicted were no longer offered as subjects of lust to male spectators, and they were shown on their own.

The artist's integrity was never compromised. Her many portraits were done with complete objectivity, even when commissioned, and thus revealed an unusual clinical sharpness of observation.

Valadon's images of children stemmed from her own experience as a mother and her observation of her son and her young neighbors. They broke with an iconographic code that traditionally

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placed children in a sheltered familial environment. Valadon exposed their physical awkwardness, poor health, as well as their alienation and despair.

As a single parent, Suzanne Valadon had to provide for her son's needs as well as those of her mother, who looked after the child. The artist had to work full-time as a model and she had neither the money, the time, nor the accessibility to private art instruction available to such contemporaries as Berthe Merisot and Mary Cassatt. Whatever Valadon knew about art was acquired through her own personal efforts. Her resourcefulness enabled her to sue her modeling career as an asset for the making of her art. By closely observing the techniques of those for whom she posed and painstakingly practicing alone, she was able to develop a mode of expression that is unmistakably her own.

Little was known previously of the artist's childhood and adolescence. Besides a birth certificate, there were hardly any records that allowed one to retrace with certainty the course of her life from her birth in 1865 to the year 1883, when she started to work as a model and did her first extant self-portrait.

Retracing the progression of her early years with accuracy is essential to the establishment of any valid scholarship concerning her oeuvre. Certain biographical problems, such as her illegitimacy and that of her son Maurice Utrillo, have never been meticulously investigated. Whole periods of her childhood, such as a stay in Nantes in her mother's half-sister's home, have not been mentioned before. Since Valadon was an autodidactic artist, her acquisition of an early academic technique and imagery have to be examined. The

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extent of the influence that the painters for whom she posed exercised on her works must be placed within the context of her own art. Most importantly, the major role that the enlightened guidance of her husband, the young André Utter, played on her stylistic "coming of age" must be studied. All these factors that were so instrumental in shaping Valadon's artistic persona have never been seriously addressed.

With her liaison with André Utter in 1909 and her subsequent marriage to him in 1914, Suzanne Valadon's stylistic development changed course. After a decade under the young man's influence, her formative years were over. This dissertation concludes with the last days of World War I, when Suzanne Valadon reached the new phase of her artistic maturity.

To date, no serious attempt has been made to fill in the missing parts of Valadon's early years. Although there is on her life an abundant bibliography, both in French and in English, the majority of the works are devoted to her mature years. Most are often devoid of accuracy or real insight and dwell on the sensational aspect of her life.

The few early serious essays (Robert Rey, Suzanne Valadon, Paris, 1922; Adolphe Basler, Suzanne Valadon, Paris, 1929; Nesto Jacometti, Suzanne Valadon, Geneva, 1947) are out of date. Geneviève Barrez's 1947 dissertation bypasses certain biographical events such as the illegitimacy of the artist and her son. Despite its title, Paul Pétridès' Catalogue Raisonné (L'oeuvre complet de Suzanne Valadon, Paris, 1971) is far from complete and its dating occasionally incorrect. Janine Warnod's Suzanne Valadon (Bergamo,

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Italy, 1981), although accurate, is too brief to offer much help to researchers. More recent publications of great merit, such as Rosemary Betterton's "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Works of Suzanne Valadon" (Visibly Female, New York, 1988), Eunice Lipton's "Representing Sexuality in Women Artists' Biographies: The Cases of Suzanne Valadon and Victorine Meurent" (Journal of Sex Research, Vol. 27, No. 1, February 1990), and Patricia Matthews' "Returning the Gaze. Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon" (The Art Bulletin, September 1991, Vol. LXXIII, No. 3), are primarily concerned with feminist issues. There is no doubt about the necessity of placing Valadon within the context of the gender problems inherent to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet this task should greatly benefit from a more thorough knowledge of Valadon's formative years.

This study focuses on two distinct aims: a) establishing the truth about the unresolved problems and formerly undisclosed events of the artist's early life, and b) analyzing the causes that triggered her most unlikely vocation. By using Valadon's rare writings and unpublished correspondence from her family and entourage, it is possible to provide for the first time a precise accounting of her youth and adolescence. Interviews with friends and familiars are instrumental, too, in defining Valadon's character and state of mind. This new information will provide her scholars with the tools so indispensable to understanding the origins and evolution of her art and to assessing the role that, at the time, she assumed as a woman and a painter.

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Suzanne Valadon left her own evaluation of her debts and her achievements: "I had great masters. I took the best of them, of their teachings, of their examples. I found myself, I made myself, and I said what I had to say."[1]

[1] As quoted from Jean Vertex in Jeanine Warnod, Suzanne Valadon (Bergamo, Italy: Bonfini Press S.A., Narfels, Switzerland, 1981), 89.

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CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

> The life of Lorenzo Ghiberti seems at first glance to have run a smooth course... and yet confusion surrounds even his birth date. ...Ghiberti's lapse of memory may not have been unintentional, for apparently the legitimacy of his birth was in doubt.[1]

The confusion that surrounds Ghiberti's life looms even larger over Suzanne Valadon's,[2] particularly over her youth. As with Ghiberti, the confusion involves her birth date and her legitimacy, and it extends to so many facets of her life that each of her biographies seems to refer to a different person. Much of the information appears to be either missing or contradictory and most of the events of her mature years have been distorted. While there is some factual knowledge of her middle and late years, almost nothing is known about the events of her early years that were so instrumental in shaping her character and personality and, most importantly, in conditioning the making of Suzanne Valadon as an artist.

What are the causes of this state of confusion? One certainly

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Note: All documents kept in the Archives of the Musée National d'Art Moderne will be referred to as: Archives, CNAC. The letters quoted have not been published previously.

[1] R. Krautheimer and T. H. Krautheimer, Lorenzo Ghiberti (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1956. Revised edition 1971), 30.

[2] Suzanne Valadon changed her surname from Marie-Clementine to Suzanne in 1883, but it seems less confusing to refer to her as Suzanne throughout her biography.

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stems from a serious lack of primary documents. Save for a birth certificate, there exists no reliable record to help retrace with accuracy the course of Valadon's life until she turned fifteen. Neither her name nor her mother's appears on any school records, post office directory, or general census. Nowhere is there a trace of Marie Clementine Valadon or Madeleine Coulaud née Valadon. The search for documents was further hampered by the artist's incorrigible tendency to invent stories and change dates.

It would have been simple to chronicle Valadon's life and career had the artist kept a steady correspondence. But writing was a difficult task for her, since her schooling had been minimal. Therefore she did not keep a diary or write any letters that would enable her biographers to accurately reconstruct her elusive past. To her relatives and friends she sent postcards and notes, often written by another hand and signed by her.[3] No one in her entourage published memoirs that involved details of her life or kept worthwhile accounts of some relationship with her. The only remaining member of the Valadon family, Danberger,[4] is reluctant to provide narrative details that would lead to a better understanding of the artist's childhood and adolescence but that might damage the family's good name.

The later years of Valadon's life and career are better documented. One of her close friends, Nora Kars, the wife of the

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[3]Most of the notes she wrote were only thank you's for the food packages her half-sister sent her during World War I, or brief messages to her and Utrillo's dealers.

[4]The husband of Gilberte Coca, Valadon's grandniece.

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painter Georges Kars,[5] shared some of the memories of her acquaintance with the artist during the 1930's.[6] This period is also recollected by Jeanine Warnod and Geneviève Barrez,[7] although the chronologies of both of these writers omit several important events.

Newspaper articles, a helpful source of biographical information, must be dealt with cautiously in Valadon's case since the contemporary press seemed to be more concerned with her tumultuous life than with the quality of her art. A few months after her death, France-Soir published an article about her that was so outrageously fictional that a letter of protest, signed by Picasso, Derain, Dufy, Friesz, Kisling, Vlaminck, and many other artists, appeared in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts.[8]

While it is true that Valadon's life unfolds with a pathos worthy of soap opera plots, many of its facets have been distorted and shamefully exploited by journalists who fed on the mystery of her birth and that of her son, the youth of her second husband, André Utter, and the fame of her lovers. The myth of the "Trinité Maudite"[9]

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[5]Georges Kars, a member of Valadon's entourage, was a respected painter and writer for whom Valadon wrote the foreword in the catalogue of a 1931 Exhibition at Berthe Weil's gallery.

[6]Robert Beachboard, La Trinité Maudite: Utter, Valadon, Utrillo (Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1952); also The Montmartre Colony (Paris: Presse de Savoie, 1963).

[7]Jeanine Warnod, Suzanne Valadon (Bergamo, Switzerland: Bonfini Press S.A. Narfels, 1881); Geneviève Barrez, Suzanne Valadon (Paris: Ecole du Louvre,1947. Doctoral dissertation, unpublished). Warnod does not account for Valadon's life until 1880, while Barrez does not deal with Suzanne Valadon's and Maurice Utrillo's illegitimacy and the latter's alcoholism.

[8]France Soir, M. Beton, June 1928, "Roman d'Amour," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, November 18, 1938.

[9]The "Trinité Maudite," or "Cursed Trio," included Suzanne Valadon, her son Maurice Utrillo, and her husband André Utter. The term was coined by the press in

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was nurtured by the press, whose interest in the "sensational" was constantly rewarded by the trio's unorthodox behavior. The violent fights between Valadon and Utter, Utrillo's alcoholic bouts, and Suzanne's extravagant spending sold many newspaper copies.

The quest for historical truth is further complicated by Valadon's mythomania. Her tendency to mythologize began early in her life as she tried to escape her sordid daily existence by inventing stories about her family and her past. As she grew up, she continued to create variations on tales presented differently to each listener. These lies and fabrications were earnestly accepted by her biographers, who unsuspectingly recorded them for posterity. Since Valadon's distortions were often minimal, most of her inventions seemed believable: An identity card and a passport delivered to Madame Utter, known as Suzanne Valadon, show July 23, 1867, as a birth date instead of September 23, 1865.[10] The error is still found in the files of several international museums. It took nearly a century to correct the mistake which was discovered in 1867 when the Musée National d'Art Moderne of Paris sent for her birth certificate to document a Centennial exhibition honoring her.[11] Unfortunately, in 1960, twelve years after her death, the French Government, to honor her memory, had issued a coin which read, "Suzanne Valadon: 1867-1938."

Many artists escape the reality of their existence by creating

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1936 after the three artists' group show at the Galérie Bernheim Jeune.

[10]Identity card delivered in Paris on October 2, 1931; passport No. 58562, document in the Archives, Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC.

[11]Suzanne Valadon, Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1967.

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on canvas a world of their own. Suzanne Valadon did the opposite. It was the portraits of her son, her mother, and her lovers, the tired faces and heavy limbs of her neighbors, the Montmartre hills and rooftops, and humble objects of her everyday existence that she offered her viewers. Never an intentional social comment, her art mostly dealt with her life in the Butte. The needy children who personify both her son and her own young self, the vacuous stare of a prostitute, the healthy sexuality of the solid females of her entourage as well as the progressive damage that age inflicted upon her own beauty, constitute impartial documents stripped of passion, tears, or vindictiveness.

When she started to model in 1880, Marie Clementine Valadon adopted the name of "Marie." In 1883, when she began to keep her art works, she signed them "Suzanne Valadon." Yet, her personal need to escape went further than a change of identity. It involved the creation of an adventurous alternate self who, besides a new name and a later birth date, was given an ever-changing romanticized past.

As a young girl, she cast her alter ego in many roles: the abandoned scion of an illustrious family, an infant found on the steps of Limoges Cathedral, or a spirited youth growing up alone in a Parisian garret.

However, the mythical Valadon solely lived for the entertainment of her creator, who never lost track of a reality that she faithfully retraced with her pencil and brush. While the "other" pretended to be an orphan, Valadon the artist constantly depicted her real mother, the humble "Maman Madeleine," patiently attending to

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the care of her grandson.

Valadon only amused herself with the extravagant stories she told, but it is mostly these inventions that surface a century later, generating most of the confusion associated with her life.

One must deal with those fantasies and analyze them. It is imperative to aspects of her life: the identity of her father, the gap in locations, dates and events of her early years, and the problems of Utrillo's paternity. Some aspects of Valadon's personality, such as her mythomania and her relationship with her family and friends, must be examined in depth in relation to her iconography. Most of these problems have never been addressed seriously and an analysis of both truth and fantasies will provide the keys to Valadon's art, whose themes are intimately connected with the course of her everyday life.

The uncertainties, fabrications, and errors strewn throughout Suzanne Valadon's life started at her birth. She was an illegitimate child and the name of her father remained unknown. Later inquiries to discover his identity were handicapped by a two-year discrepancy between the artist's real birth date and the one she claimed.

A birth certificate delivered by the town hall of Bessines-sur-Gartempe, states the truth irrevocably:

> The year of 1865, on the 23rd of September, at 4 p.m., we Pierre, Paul, Emile, Dumontel, Mayor, acting as Registrar in the commune of Bessines, chief town of the canton, arrondissement of Bellac, in the department of Haute Vienne, received the visit of François Poignand, blacksmith, aged 38, residing in the town of Bessines, who presented to us a child of female sex, born that same day, at 6 a.m., in the house of Madame Guimbaud, widow, situated in the present town, to Madame Valadon, aged 34,

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sewing maid, and to an unknown father residing in the town of Bessines, and to whom he stated he wished to give the first name Marie-Clementine.[12]

Madeleine Valadon, the artist's mother, was born in October 1830, in Bessines-sur-Gartempe, where she married the blacksmith Léon Coulaud on February 13, 1845. The couple had two daughters, Marie Emilienne, born in 1849, and Marie Alice in 1855.[13] In 1856, Léon Coulaud was arrested with an accomplice, Pierre Louis Planchet, and accused of manufacturing and selling false gold coins. Both men were tried in Limoges and sentenced to life at hard labor on January 29, 1859.[14] Leon Coulaud presumably died in jail that same year.[15]

Humiliated by her husband's notoriety, Madeleine left her two elder daughters with relatives in Bessines and moved ten miles away to Saint Sulpice-Lauriere, a small town where a new extension for the Paris-Orleans railroad line was being built.[16] Madeleine Coulaud, a sullen and unattractive woman, became pregnant during

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[12]Birth certificate delivered by Bessines Town Hall, Haute Vienne. Archives, CNAC.

[13]Jean Fabris, Utrillo (Paris: Frederic Birr, 1982), 6. This work does not refer to the birth of Marie Emilienne but mentions another child, Leger Coulaud, born in 1850, who allegedly died two years later. There is no evidence to support this theory.

[14] Courrier de Limoges, Dimanche et Lundi 2 Mars 1867 - Report on the decision of the Haute Vienne Court. A mention of Leon Coulaud's death appears in Marie Coca's unpublished letter to André Utter, 1939, Archives, CNAC.

[15]Beachboard, 17.

[16]Fabris, 8; John Storm, The Valadon Drama (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959), 7.

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the early part of 1865, and to escape local gossip moved back to Bessines, where she found work as a laundress in the home of a kind widow, Mrs. Guimbaud.[17] It was there that Marie-Clementine Valadon was born. The house now bears a plaque commemorating the birth of the artist, unquestionably the most famous inhabitant of Bessines.

Madeleine never mentioned the man who impregnated her. His identity remains conjectural. Her lover was guessed to have been a miller[18] or an engineer working on the construction of a bridge erected in the area.[19] However, the most reliable source of information comes from a questionnaire sent by Utter soon after his wife's death to Valadon's niece, Marie Coca,[20] who also had an extensive correspondence with him. In a 1939 letter, she explained that she was born when Valadon was eight and obviously could not recollect personally any event that took place during the first years of her life. She added that her own father, soon after his marriage in 1870, had tried to find out the truth about Madeleine Coulaud's lover. Convinced that the latter was a railroad engineer, he had traveled to Saint Sulpice and learned that a segment of the Paris-Orleans railroad line which went through the small town had

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[17]Peter de Polnay, Enfant Terrible. The Life and Works of Maurice Utrillo (Paris: Morrow & Company, 1969), 9, gives the name of Duclos, instead of Guimbaud.

[18]Storm, 10.

[19]Jean Paul Crespelle, Utrillo, La Bohème et l'Ivresse à Montmartre (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1970), 48; Beachboard, 47.

[20]Unpublished questionnaire sent to Marie Coca by Utter in 1939, Archives, CNAC.

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recently been completed.[21] This information was confirmed by André Utter, who believed that Madeleine came to Saint Sulpice to hide her shame after her husband's trial. According to Utter, she found work in a local inn, and met an engineer connected with the building of the railroad.[22] Doctor Le Masle, Valadon's friend since 1914 and her most serious collector, was intrigued by the circumstances of the artist's birth. He wrote to one of his friends, whose grandfather had been involved in the construction of the Paris-Toulouse railroad line, to find out if any of the engineers who had worked in the area of Saint Sulpice were still alive.[23] The response was negative, but the inquiry shows Le Masle's belief that Suzanne's father had been one of the railroad engineers.

According to Marie Coca, no one dared to ask Madeleine direct questions about the man who seduced her, nor was her "problem" ever discussed openly:

> ...as time passed, no one in the family wanted to see or even talk about Madeleine, since, in those times, people who defied the established rules of social and religious behavior were treated as outcasts.[24]

However, when asked if Valadon's father was a married man and, therefore, reluctant to acknowledge an illegitimate child, Marie

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[21]Marie Coca to Utter, January 28, 1939, Archives, CNAC. After her marriage to Coca, Marie Emilienne signed her letters: "Marie Coca."

[22]Utter to Dr. Le Masle, 1939, Archives, CNAC.

[23]Dr. Le Masle to Mr. Aujol, 74 Bd Maurice Barrès, Neuilly, 3/31/1947, Archives, CNAC.

[24]Marie Coca to Utter, Ancenis, January 28, 1939, Archives, CNAC.

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Coca could not answer, since her mother had never discussed the situation.[25] Furthermore, the man might not have realized Madeleine's condition since she left Saint Sulpice in the early stages of her pregnancy.

One can logically assume that the man was a married railroad engineer who only stayed in Saint Sulpice until the completion of the railroad line. It is most probable that he never knew he had a daughter who would become a great artist. As for Suzanne herself, she never commented upon her illegitimacy nor seemed to have shown any curiosity about her father's identity.

After the birth of her illegitimate child Madeleine, unable to cope with this new disgrace, left her two elder daughters in Bessines with the relatives who had taken care of them while she lived in Saint Sulpice-Lauriere. She fled with Suzanne to Paris, resumed her maiden name of Valadon,[26] and settled with the child in a flat on the Boulevard Rochechouard. The street was located in the district of Montmartre which had been recently attached to Paris and was well known for its steep hills, cheap rents, and large population of artists.[27]

The capital had become a place of exile for many rural workers, and particularly some Limousin peasants, who fled the

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[25]Questionnaire, #6.

[26]Utter to Dr. Le Masle, 1939, Archives, CNAC.

[27]For various descriptions of Montmartre in the mid-nineteenth century, see: Octave Charpentier, A travers Montmartre (Paris: "Le Croquis," 1913); André Warnod, Ma Jeunesse à Montmartre (Paris, n.d.); John Milner, Studios of Paris (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

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poverty of their region to find work in Paris. The Haussmanization of the city was still in progress, and jobs for brick layers, masons, and laundresses were readily available. Madeleine could have heard about the situation and decided to move to the city to start a new life. It has been unconvincingly alleged that she did so on the advice of a friend, a construction worker who wrote to her suggesting she might find work in the capital as a laundress.[28]

There exists no record to pinpoint the time of Madeleine's arrival in Paris and trace her activities there. Nothing is known of the life of the mother and daughter between 1865 and 1880. Valadon's biographers are either silent about this period or offer varied and often contradictory reports about it. In some versions, Madeleine came to Paris shortly after Suzanne's christening,[29] in others, the woman and child arrived in the capital either in 1867 or 1870.[30] None of the given dates are substantiated in any documents.

However, several of Marie Coca's unpublished letters and the questionnaire she answered help us now in retracing some of the steps and activities of the two Valadon women during the period extending from 1865 to 1880 that had not been documented until now.

Valadon's half-sister, Marie Alice Coulaud, married in 1870 and followed her husband to Nantes, a coastal city southwest of

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[28]Poinay, 16. Poinay's suggestion of a letter to Madeleine is unsupported by any evidence. Furthermore, Madeleine could neither read nor write.

[29]Storm, 30; Yves Bonnat, Galerie des Arts, No. 50, p. 90, February 1968.

[30]Crespelle, 50; Warnod, 8; Robert Coughlan, The Wine of Genius. A Life of Maurice Utrillo (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 53.

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Paris. In 1873, she gave birth to a daughter, Marie Emilienne, (known as Marie Coca) who kept in contact with her aunt throughout her life. She even stayed with her in Pierrefitte, a suburb near Paris where Valadon lived after her marriage to Paul Mousis in 1896,[31] became one of Valadon's favorite models, and was familiar with her aunt's entourage.

After Valadon's death in 1938, André Utter and Dr. Le Masle plied Marie Coca with questions in the hope that she would provide them with details on Valadon's early days. Utter was attempting to write Valadon's biography, while Le Masle kept a file on the artist.[32] Marie Coca's answers provide valuable insight into the lives of Valadon and her mother during the fifteen-year gap. Answering Utter's inquiry about Madeleine Valadon's arrival in Paris, Marie Coca stated emphatically that immediately after Suzanne's birth Madeleine fled to the capital. Since she could not find employment as a laundress, she tried to earn a living "doing all kinds of menial work."[32] This situation is confirmed by Utter in a letter to Dr. Le Masle.[33]

After marriage in 1870, Marie Alice, Marie Coca's mother, "settled in Nantes where she kept her sister (Suzanne Valadon) for a few years."[34] Marie Coca again mentioned this stay in Nantes to

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[31]Marie Coca's trip to Pierrefitte is confirmed in a letter to Dr. Le Masle. Cète September 3, 1939, Archives, CNAC.

[32]Questionnaire, #7. ("Tous métiers manuels.") Also, Marie Coca to Dr. Robert Le Masle, September 3, 1959 ("Elle a du, pour gagner sa vie, faire un peu de tout."), Archives, CNAC.

[33]Utter to Dr. Le Masle, n.d., Archives, CNAC.

[34]Questionnaire, #7. Question: Garde-t-elle longtemps sa fille avait elle? Oú

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Utter in a later note: "I know that she (Valadon) stayed with us during a few years, but she had a rotten disposition and my father, who was short-tempered, sent her back to grandmother (Madeleine)."[35] Twenty years later, Marie Coca repeated her story to Dr. Le Masle. "As far as my aunt is concerned, my father, when he married my mother, took her (Suzanne) with them."[36]

The artist's stay in Nantes has never been documented previously. Yet, the name of this city has been occasionally mentioned by a few writers who interviewed Valadon, the only one who could have brought it up. However, all failed to offer any explanation on their brief reference to the town.[37] Even Pierre Georgel, who initiated vital new research on Valadon, does not report a stay in Nantes and drew a blank in the artist's life for the period 1870-1875.[38]

After settling in Paris, Madeleine's hours of housecleaning were long, and she was forced to leave her child with the concierge most of the day.[39] Knowing that her daughter Marie Alice was

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était la dernière à cette époque? Answer: "Ma mère s'étant mariée a pris sa soeur pendant quelques années à Nantes où elle habitait." Archives, CNAC.

[35]Marie Coca to Utter, January 28, 1939. Archives, CNAC.

[36]Marie Coca to Dr. Le Masle, March 9, 1959. Archives, CNAC.

[37]Polnay, 17; Robert Rey, Suzanne Valadon et Son Oeuvre (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1922), 19; Jean Bouret, Suzanne Valadon (Paris: Edition Pètridés, 1947), 6.

[38] Pierre Georgel was the main contributor of Suzanne Valadon, 1967. See *Chronology*.

[39] Soaping-women, for instance, worked a 14-hour day during the nineteenth century. See James Mc Millon, Housewife or Harlot--the Place of Working Women in France, 1870-1914 (New York, 1981), 69.

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comfortably married in Nantes, she asked her to take care of her half sister for a while. Marie Coca could not provide additional details. "I cannot answer you with precision. I was very young at the time, and you must understand that it is very difficult for me at present to remember if Suzanne stayed at my father's."[40] To further justify her lack of information she evoked again the conspiracy of silence surrounding the Valadons.[41]

When did Suzanne Valadon stay in Nantes? It was probably during the time of the Paris Commune, in the early 1870's, three years before the birth of her niece. Valadon, who was so fond of melodramatic events, would not have failed to mention the terrible Parisian uprising, had she witnessed it as a small child. Even if there is no written proof of her stay in Nantes,[42] she must have remained there from approximately 1870 to 1872. This period of the artist's life, when she was sent away from her mother into the home of silent and hostile relatives, bears great importance in the development of her personality and her behavioral patterns.

After she was expelled from Nantes by her uncle, Suzanne

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[40]Marie Coca to Utter, Ancenis, 1/28/1939. Archives, CNAC. "J'ai reçu en effet un questionnaire mais je ne crois pas pouvoir vous donner exactement ce que vous me demandez. Car à l'époque de ma première jeunesse--comme vous le dites--ma tante avait huit an quand je suis venue dans ce monde et si elle se trouvait chez mon père, avouez que je ne saurais m'en souvenir. Je sais seulement qu'elle resta plusiers années chez nous, mais elle était épouvantable et probablement mon père, peu patient, elle repartit avec ma grandmère."

Questionnaire à Madame Marie Coca (envoyé par André Utter). "Mais après cela, jamais on parlait deux. Donc pendant beaucoup d'années, je ne savais que quelques mots...."

[41]Ibid.: ("Jamais on ne parlait d'eux à la maison....").

[42]Nantes was greatly damaged during the war and many official records have been destroyed.

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returned to Montmartre, where Madeleine rented a room in a large building overlooking the Boulevard Rochechouard. The child was around seven at the time, and her mother enrolled her as a day student in Saint Jean de Montmartre, a nearby convent, run by the nuns of Saint Vincent de Paul.[43] It was located on rue Colaincourt, a street close to Boulevard Rochechouard, where the Valadons lived.

At Saint Jean de Montmartre, the child learned to "read, write and do simple arithmetic."[44] When she was about eleven, she happily left the convent and for the rest of her life retained a terrible memory of the nuns.[45] She loathed their strict discipline and was ill-suited for the rigors of religious education. She was obviously more gifted with the brush than the school pencils.

According to different sources, Valadon is said to have entered the convent school at five,[46] sometimes at eight,[47] and to have left it in 1876, when she was eleven.[48] Peter de Polnay, who interviewed several members of Valadon's entourage, wrote that Valadon herself "did not remember her school days, but these meant

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[43]Saint Jean de Montmartre included a school, an orphanage and a sewing room. (Letter to author from Ecole Saint Jean de Montmartre, 11 rue Colaincourt, Paris 75018, August 24, 1988.) In France, most of the public schools were run by religious orders until 1907, when there was a schism between the government and the clergy.

[44]Coughlan, 19.

[45]Fabris, 6. Archives, CNAC.

[46]Beachboard, 10; Crespelle, 48; Storm, 27.

[47]Coughlan, 19.

[48]Sophie Monneret, L'Impressionisme et son Époque (Paris: Denoël-Filippachi, 1979, Vol. II), 5.

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so little to her that she was not certain when they ended."[49] The artist's rare letters are convincing evidence of the briefness of her education, as most of them contain gross spelling errors.[50]

The child was withdrawn from the convent to earn a living, and started as an apprentice in several jobs. She never kept them very long because of her lack of patience and her fierce independence and difficult temper. She started and soon abandoned diverse positions: waitress helper in a cheap restaurant,[51] groom in a livery stable,[52] and vegetable merchant aide in an open market on Boulevard des Batignolles.[53] She allegedly worked as an apprentice in a dress factory,[54] assembled feathers to make dusters,[55] and even baby-sat for children in the Jardin des Tuileries.[56] André Utter contends that she entered a garment sweatshop when she was fourteen or fifteen.[57]

Regardless of different opinions of the nature of Valadon's

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[49]Polnay, 27-28.

[50]Valadon, unpublished correspondence. For instance, in a letter to Utter in 1907, she suggested meeting him in a "musé" (sic). Archives, CNAC.

[51]Monneret, 5; Warnod, 90.

[52]Warnod, 90.

[53]Beachboard, 48.

[54]Fabris, 6.

[55]Crespelle, 50.

[56]Storm, 68.

[57]By 1874, the working age of children had been changed from five to thirteen, and their working hours decreased from twelve to ten. Wendy Slatkin, Women Artists in History (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 93.

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early work, one fact remains certain. The young girl heartily disliked every job she tried until she joined the circus and found her raison d'être.

> The circus life fired Valadon's imagination. The excitement, the colors, the atmosphere of a carnival were close to her; she seemed to have prepared for it unconsciously all her life.[58]

The circus, with its simultaneous acts--jugglers, clowns, acrobats, and wild animals as well as a cacophonic mixture of shouts and brassy music[59]--must have bewildered and enchanted the fifteen-year-old girl. Although there is no mention of her name in any of the contemporary programs, her passage in a circus, even if it were very brief,[60] has been included in most chronologies. The place where she worked, the length of time, and the nature of her employment are still conjectural, and Valadon's erratic information has contributed to the general confusion.

The name of the establishment varied with each of her stories. To Lucy Valore, her daughter-in-law, she said that she had arrived in Paris with a traveling circus,[61] and to Gazi, the faithful companion of her last years, she bragged about her fall from a trapeze in the ring of a very distinguished circus.[62]

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[58]Storm, 51.

[59]In a number of large circuses, there was a live band situated on the upper level of the ring.

[60]Storm, 51, writes that Valadon only worked in a circus for seven months; Coughlan, only six.

[61]Beachboard, 92.

[62]Ibid. She was obviously referring to the elegant Molier Circus.

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The circus had enjoyed immense popularity in France since the Second Empire. Napoleon III, Empress Eugénie, and the court loved the elaborate spectacles and particularly the lavish equestrian shows. The mid-nineteenth century became the Golden Age of these establishments.[63] In 1840, a well-known acrobat, M. Dejean, the Cirque Olympique's director, was allowed to replace his temporary wooden rotunda with a solid structure. The new circus boasted an immense ring, Pompeian columns, and the celebrated sculptor Pradier[64] carved the half-naked Amazons decorating the main entrance. Located on the Champs-Elysées, it was first called Cirque de l'Impératrice during the Second Empire, and in 1850 became Cirque d'Eté since it only performed during the summer. In 1852, M. Dejean erected, on the Boulevard du Temple, the Cirque Napoléon, to be inaugurated by the Emperor himself. In 1870 it was christened Cirque d'Hiver, and still operates in Paris as the oldest circus in the world.[65]

After the fall of the Empire, circuses continued to flourish and several traveling ones settled in the capital on a permanent basis. Among those were the Cirque Fernando, the Hippodromes, (fig. 7),[66] and the very select Cirque Molier.

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[63]See Alex Coutet, La Vie au Cirque en France (Paris, 1948), 14.

[64]Jean-Jacques (known as James) Pradier, 1792-1852.

[65]Coutet, 19. The Cirque d'Eté was demolished in 1900.

[66]The Hippodromes were located on the Place de l'Alma, Avenue des Champs-Elysées and Place Clichy in Montmartre. They were built like Roman circuses; the chariot races had women conductors, as depicted in James Tissot, Les Dames du Char, 1884, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

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All the circuses presented extraordinarily lavish shows and, in addition to the usual acts of clowns, jugglers, and wild and trained animals, some of them offered authentic reconstructions of hunts, complete with packs of dogs and galloping horses[67] Some of the most popular features were chariot races occasionally led by lightly-clad amazons (fig. 8).

The Cirque Fernando enjoyed its greatest fame in the 1880's and has been immortalized by Degas, Forain, and Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as Seurat.[68] Built in 1874 by the Belgian equestrian Fernando Boire, it was inaugurated in 1875. It became the Cirque Médrano when it was acquired in 1897 by the illustrious clown Boum-Boum (Geronimo Medrano), who gave it his name.[69] The stars of the circus shows enjoyed an astonishing popularity and were loved by the audiences as fervently as were contemporary actors like Réjane, Dujazel and Frederic Lemaire.[70] The public's enthusiasm for the circus was so overwhelming that after 1870 music halls such as the Folies-Bergère and the Moulin Rouge included circus acts in their repertory.[71]

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[67] Le Cirque Français, Musée de l'Affiche, Paris, 1984, No. 28 and 29. The hunts were a specialty of the Hippodromes.

[68] Edgar Degas, Lola au Cirque Fernando, 1879, London National Gallery; Jean Louis Forain, La Corde Raide, 1885, Chicago Art Institute; Toulouse-Lautrec, Au Cirque Fernando: Le maître de piste, 1888, Chicago Art Institute; Georges Seurat, Le Cirque, 1890-91, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

[69] See Jules Claretie, Le Train 17, Vie à Paris 1880-1901 (Paris, n.d.) The book retraces the Cirque Medrano story.

[70] Coutet, 21.

[71] Julian, 158.

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The Cirque Molier (fig. 9) was a unique establishment directed by Ernest Molier, a passionate horse lover and student of the Franconis.[72] Molier only presented his show twice a year, and continued to do so from 1880 to 1935. The spectacle was followed by a lavish ball[73] held in his hôtel particulier on the rue de Benouville. The Cirque Molier was unique because most of its performers were not professional. They belonged to the elite of magistrature, finance, medicine, and the nobility,[74] and their ranks included well-known actors.[75] Even if Valadon hinted that she had performed there, it is most unlikely for her to have been recruited by the management of such an exclusive establishment. However, in a tentative biography of his wife, André Utter writes that she had encountered in l'Auberge de Clou, a Montmartre nightclub, the Count Hubert de la Rochefoucault and his friend Theo Wagner. Both had performed as amateurs at Molier. Through them, Valadon met Mr. Villemessant, who presented her to the director of the circus. She was said to have been practicing an acrobatic act with Theo Wagner when she suffered an accident. However, since Utter received this information from Suzanne herself, there are many doubts as to its

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[72]The Franconis were members of an illustrious circus family, headed originally by Antoine Franconi (1738-1836). Two of his sons died young, but his grandson, Adolphe, kept the tradition of circus acts.

[73]Le Cirque Français. No. 30.

[74]Charles Rearick, Pleasures of the Belle Epoque (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 101. I am grateful to Professor Linda Nochlin for suggesting that it could be Molier's ring that was depicted in 1884 by James Tissol, Amateur Circus, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

[75]Le Cirque Français. No. 31.

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credibility.

In a establishment as selective as Molier, Valadon's working-class origins would have presented as great a handicap as her lack of professional experience. Furthermore, the location of the circus on the western edge of Paris near Bois de Boulogne made its access difficult from La Butte. Since the circus only gave two performances a year, even if Valadon worked there it would have been on a part-time basis that would not have generated any substantial income. Regardless of these unlikely circumstances, several of Valadon's biographers believe, without any proof, that she did work there.[76]

In the late nineteenth century, Montmartre became a recruiting center for music hall and circus performers[77] since it provided an ideal location for café concerts and cabarets, as well as the famous Cirque Fernando. It seems probable that it was in this circus that Valadon started to train for her new profession. The adolescent must have been an enthusiastic recruit with her "devil-may-care" nature and her love for the unconventional. The Cirque Fernando was located close to her home on the Boulevard Rochechouard, and she must have found steady work there, since the circus gave performances all year round. Whereas it is probable that

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[76]Paul Caso, La Vie Tragique d'Utrillo (Paris: G. M. Dutilleul, 1956), 17; Coughlan, 19; Crespelle, 50; Fabris, 6; Gauzi, Toulouse-Lautrec et son Temps (Paris: David Perret, 1932); Gerstle Mack, Toulouse-Lautrec (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 264; Pierre Mathey, Six Femmes Peintres (Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1951), 10; Monneret, Vol. II, p. 11; Polnay, 28.

[77]Philippe Julian, Montmartre (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1874), 158. Many jugglers, acrobats, and magicians lived in small hotels near the Place Blanche, a square at the bottom of the Butte Montmartre.

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she could not have been hired without any former professional experience at Cirque Molier, it would have been possible for her to find some menial job at Fernando while training as an acrobat, aerialist or equestrian.[78]

Another type of establishment, such as a traveling circus, could have attracted Valadon. These companies were part of street fairs and their popularity spread from America and England to France, where they began to appear in the eighteenth century.[79] Valadon could have found temporary employment in one of the small outfits that erected their tents in the wastelands of Montmartre and were strewn throughout the city from the Foire to Trone to the small tents in Neuilly.[80] The artist told her daughter-in-law, Lucy Valore, that she had arrived in Paris with one of these traveling circuses, and pretended to have appeared there as the Snake Woman.[81] Whether or not she expected to be believed, she continued to give different versions of her circus functions to different people. "One day she was an acrobat, next day a circus rider."[82] Although it has generally been assumed that she always wanted to be an acrobat and joined a circus at fifteen to be trained as such,[83]

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[78]Coutet, 23; Beachboard, 30; Bonnat, 35; Doris Krininger, Modell-Malerin-Akt (Darmstadt, Germany: Sammlung Lusterhand, 1986), 30; André Salmon, L'Air de la Butte (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle France, 1945), 83.

[79]Coutet, p.23.

[80]Storm, 50. Foire du Trone was a most popular amusement park.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Coughlan, 20; Crespelle, 50.

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she has also been described as an equestrian or aerialist.[84] Regardless of the nature of her employment, the general belief is that her career was short-lived and abruptly ended by a bad fall. The character of her accident is problematic. It has been described alternatively as a broken leg[85] or back[86] or, at times, as a concussion[87] suffered falling from a horse or a trapeze, a version that rallies the most support.[88] The conclusion of the story, however, never changed: "And they gathered up the poor little broken body"[89] was Valadon's pathetic ending of the often-told story of the accident.

Although the adolescent did not sustain any major injury, she had to remain immobilized for a few months.[90] When she recovered, she had lost the agility needed by a circus performer, and at fifteen, Suzanne Valadon regretfully had to look for another career. Yet, her accident, no matter how traumatic, possibly gave her a chance to concentrate on her drawings, on which she had already been working secretly since the age of eight.[91]

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[84]Center Ring, Two Centuries of Exhibitions, Milwaukee Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1991, 60.

[85]Polnay, 28.

[86]Wernod, 13.

[87]Beachboard, 22; Crespelle, 50.

[88]Bonnat, 30; Bouret, 2; Coughlan, 20; Crespelle, 50; Fabris, 6; Nesto Jacometti, Formes et Couleurs (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1947), 100.

[89]Storm, 51.

[90]Fabris, 6.

[91]Valadon ou l'Absolu, Archives, CNAC.

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CHAPTER 2

VALADON'S VOCATION

> Her [Valadon's] decision to paint remains mysterious. How does a woman from such a background become an artist? What facilitates her dreaming, and what gives her access to institutions which are determinedly outside of her class?[1]

"I was so young when it hit me [the need to draw]. At eight, I was hooked."[2] These are Valadon's quite rare, personally-written words. In her seemingly off-hand remarks about her life and art, she never made an attempt to explain this compulsion, but merely accepted it without question. This desire to draw at an early age is not an uncommon phenomenon among other artists as well, both men and women. Vigée-Lebrun wrote:

> "My love to paint started during my early childhood. I was sent to a convent between the ages of six and eleven. During this time, I drew everywhere, every moment. The margins of my notebooks, and even those of my schoolmates, were covered with profile or full-face, small heads. I sketched landscapes and figures with charcoal on the dormitory walls. Then, during recess, I drew in the [courtyard's] sand, anything that went through my head...."[3]

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[1] Eunice Lipton, "Representing Sexuality in Women Artists' Biographies. The Cases of Suzanne Valadon and Victorine Meurend," The Journal of Sex Research, Vol. 27, No. 1, 81-94 (February 1990), 84.

[2] Suzanne Valadon ou l'absolu, Archives, CNAC. "Ç'a m'a pris si jeune, á huit ans, ça y était."

[3] Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Souvenirs, Une edition féministe de Claudine Hermann, Dijon Quatigny, Tome I (1986): 24. "Mon amour pour la peinture s'est manifesté dés mon enfance. On me mis au couvent à l'age de six ans; j'y suis restée

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When Vigée-Lebrun showed her drawings to her father, himself a painter, he was so elated that he exclaimed: "If ever anyone is to become an artist, you will be the one, my child."[4]

Such parental enthusiasm certainly never overtook Madeleine Coulaud as she caught her small daughter trying to draw on whatever scrap of paper fell into her hand.[5] Valadon's constant "scribbling" bewildered and angered her mother, whose great preoccupation was to provide for the small family's daily meals. When Madeleine Coulaud came home after a long day of washing and scrubbing, the older woman had neither the patience nor the energy to share her young daughter's strange world, and she often found solace in a bottle of "gros rouge."[6] So, unlike Vigée-Lebrun, instead of praises, the young Valadon received constant reproaches and occasional slaps from her mother.[7] She was thus deprived of the parental support so vital to a budding artist's self esteem.

As a young girl, Valadon was essentially alone, and she resigned herself to her fate: "I was in good hands with this solitude

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jusqu'a onze ans. Dans cet intervalle, je crayonnais sans cesse et partout; mes cahiers d'écriture et même ceux de mes camarades étaient remplis à la marge de petites têtes de face ou de profit; sur les murs de dortoir, je tracais avec du charbon des figures et des paysages. Puis dans les moments de récréation, je dessinais sur le sable tout ce qui me passait par la tête."

[4]Vigée-Lebrun, "Tu seras peintre, mon enfant, ou jamais il n'en sera!"

[5]Valadon ou l'absolu: "J'écrivais sur tout ce que je voyais."

[6]Vernacular for cheap red wine.

[7]John Storm, The Valadon Drama (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1959), 35.

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of mine."[8] At school she did not partake in group play, and her independent nature denied her the warmth of close friendships that would have ended, anyhow, with her leaving school at the age of eleven. She was restless and troubled, and she later admitted: "My child's brain did too much thinking."[9] It was through her art that her isolation and impatience found an outlet and a vehicle of expression.

The family's extreme poverty, however, kept her from having the materials needed to continue drawing, and she may have picked up discarded pieces of paper, bits of charcoal, or broken pencils. One might not even exclude the possibility of the child being reduced to stealing what she could not find in the refuse on the streets.

Valadon took up painting when she was fourteen years old.[10] According to her own account, she was "too proud and too undisciplined"[11] to pick up brushes, feeling that this medium would be her hardest challenge. "It is in one's paintings that it is most difficult to reach greatness,"[12] she admitted. But as soon as she started to paint, it was with the same eagerness that possessed her when she began drawing: "I painted with whatever I had, without discrimination."[13] Later on she came to the conclusion that her

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[8] Valadon ou l'absolu: "J'étais à bonne ecole avec ma solitude exagèrée."

[9] Ibid., "Mon ciboulot d'enfant pensait trop."

[10] Ibid., "J'ai peint à quatorze ans."

[11] Ibid., "J'ètais trop fière et sauvage."

[12] Ibid., "La peinture, c'est le plus difficile pour étre grand."

[13] Ibid., "Je peignais avec ce que j'avais sans discernement."

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early works were not of the quality of those done in later years, which she qualified as her "real paintings."[14]

Nothing is left of Valadon's first drawings and canvasses, for she destroyed them herself. "I don't mind [admitting it]....I tore up everything."[15] Valadon must have thrown away all of her youthful creative efforts, for her first known drawing is dated 1883, and her first known oil, 1892.[16]

It has generally been acknowledged that many successful women sculptors and painters were themselves daughters of artists.[17] Besides being offered the obvious advantage of steady training and parental encouragement, the young girls could perceive art as a natural part of their daily lives. Other talented children, male or female, who did not come from a family of artists, and who needed to learn a trade that would enable them to later earn their own living, were often directed toward an art-related career. Such was the reason for the porcelain painting training received by Auguste Renoir. His brother Edmond explained that "since [Auguste] used pieces of charcoal on the walls, it was concluded that he was fitted for an artistic profession."[18]

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[14]Ibid., "Quand j'ai vraiment peint."

[15]Ibid., "Cacher ça m'est égal puisque je décrirais!"

[16]Her first known drawing is Portrait de l'artiste, 1883, and her first known painting is Portrait d'une petite fille, c. 1882, oil on canvas, 20 1/2 x 18 1/8", private collection.

[17]Anne Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, Women Artists 1550-1950, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 4.

[18]Lionel Venturi, Les Archives de l'Impressionisme, Vol. I (Paris: Durand-Ruel, 1932), 335. "A quinze ans, monsieur mon frère était donc obligé d'apprendre un métier qui le ferait vivre plus tard. De ce qu'il usait des bouts de charbon sur les murs,

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Valadon did not benefit from any of the above circumstances. Her mother was unsympathetic to her vocation. There was not, in her family, any artist who could be seen as a role model.[19] In her milieu, she was not expected to engage in a career that would rate professional training, and none of the miscellaneous jobs she took before she turned fifteen were related to any decorative craft. Moreover, even had Madeleine Coulaud been inclined to acknowledge her daughter's artistic disposition, she certainly did not have the means to pay for the basic art supplies, nor for a modest training in one of the Montmartre academies or private schools,[20] which actually charged higher fees for women than for men.[21]

There was no logical reason for the small girl to persevere in her obsessive "scribbling," and when André Utter later tried to analyze the phenomenon in his notes for a Valadon biography, he could only conclude that she had been "possessed" by a magical force. "She was led by some kind of a spell that had taken hold of her will."[22] She herself admitted: "J'étais hantée."[23] Indeed, bewitchment presented an exciting explanation for her ever

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on en conclut qu'il avait du gôut pour une profession artistique." Edmond Renoir's letter to Emile Bergeret, June 19, 1879.

[19]Since Valadon was illegitimate, there is no information on her father's family.

[20]After 1880, the Academie Julien opened several new branches for woman artists, one of them located in Montmartre in the rue Fromentin. Alfred Stevens taught classes for women in a studio in Place Pigalle, and Francois Fayon, on the boulevard Clichy. Barbara Weinberg, The Lure of Paris (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 218.

[21]Ibid.

[22]André Utter, unpublished notes for Suzanne Valadon's biography. Archives, CNAC.

[23]Valadon ou l'absolu.

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wandering imagination. Reality was more simple. Valadon sketched as other talented children compose music or write poems. It was for her a spontaneous function that lasted her entire life. She drew because she had to, not for amusement when she was a child, not for money when she grew into an adolescent, not for fame when she became an acknowledged artist.

Since one has to discard supernatural as well as apparent genetic or social sources in Valadon's vocation, what then was the actual factor that contributed, if not to the origin, at least to the *nurturing of her gift?*

Perhaps not enough emphasis has been placed on the importance of one geographical element that led to the determination and development of Valadon's vocation: Montmartre!

Montmartre was the source, the background, and finally the catalyst of Valadon's art. Growing up and living most of her life on the Butte, a daily contact with artists gave her the unique opportunity to become one herself. In Montmartre, and in Montmartre only, since nowhere else in the nineteenth century could one, under similar handicaps of social class, cultural background and female gender, achieve Valadon's goal: to become an artist and to be acknowledged as one. Valadon had the talent, but it was Montmartre that made her aware of it and gave her the strength and the means to develop her gift.

By the 1890s, there were twenty-five hundred artists living and working professionally in Montmartre.[24] These artists were

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[24]Michel Melot, Les Femmes de Toulouse-Lautrec (Paris, 1987), 7. By the late 1880s there were a total of fourteen thousand artists living in all the twenty Paris

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everywhere, whether they occupied luxurious studios or wooden shacks.[25] They crowded the winding streets and set up their easels near the windmills and vineyards. They canvassed the model's markets, and went from outdoor restaurants to café terraces, endlessly discussing their work wherever they went. From her earliest years, Valadon was constantly exposed to art and the men who dedicated their lives to it. When she started to draw, the commitment of these artists validated the yearnings she might have suppressed had she not observed others absorbed by a similar passion. Through them, she found the justification for her own needs. Seeing them passionately involved in their creation sheltered her from the fear of being different that often stifles children's talents. Drawing became, if not fully acceptable, at least justifiable in her own eyes.

After Valadon left school and started working she continued drawing "on every piece of paper that fell under her hand," as she later explained to Tabarant.[26] But the problem of finding out how to develop and extend her skills became urgent. Since Valadon did not fall into the path of naive painting, she had to look at other art avenues. She had obviously found a solution when she did her Self-Portrait (fig. 10). This solution stemmed from a basic awareness of

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arrondissements. Montmartre was located in parts of the Ninth and the Eighteenth Arrondissement.

[25]John Milner, The Studios of Paris (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 23.

[26]Adolphe Tabarant, "Suzanne Valadon et ses souvenirs de modèle," Bulletin de la Vie Artistique (December 15, 1921), 628. "Je couvrais de croquis tous les papiers qui me tombaient sous la main."

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classical portraiture and a respect for academic values. How could Valadon have become aware of such conventional methods? Where had she seen the works that illustrated these methods?

The Self-Portrait, as well as several of her early works, appears to have been influenced visually by the Cours de Dessin,[27] a series of academic studies used as at-home exercises by many students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and independent artists eager to improve their technical skills. Very popular during the nineteenth century, the Cours de Dessin were available in many of the art supply stores and were known by all serious art students.

Originally offered in black and white, the Cours de Dessin were later published on tinted paper, highlighted with colors for the pastel and water color series. Printed on large sheets (19 1/2 x 22"), they contained reproductions of classical masters' works such as Michelangelo's Head of David (fig. 11), and those of famous contemporary artists such as Cogniet, Deveria, Robert-Fleury, and Horace Vernet.

Cogniet's (1794-1880) original Cours de Dessin (fig. 12) was by far the most popular series, and remained in favor until World War I. Originally intended for the use of Beaux-Arts atelier students, the subject matter was diversified and ranged from "figures, paysages, ornements," to "animaux, marines, and oiseaux."[28] The series was continuously renewed and expanded, progressing

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[27]Cours de Dessin par Léon Cogniet. Lithographes par Julien, Collection des modéles gradués depuís les premiers Elements jusqu'aux Etudes Academiques, Groupes, etc., Paris, n.d.

[28]As described in Nouvelles Publications: Etudes pour le Dessin, n.d.

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from plaster details, studies of life drawn figures, or religious themes illustrating the life of Christ, and incidents from the lives of the saints and martyrs.

One could buy sets of sheets illustrating full male or female anatomies, as well as separate copies representing various parts of the body from head to toe. There was, for example, "douze grandes et belles têtes de fantaisie" which depicted models with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The models bore appropriate names: Valike for a young girl shown with a Turkish soldier, Vanessa for the Italian peasant. A range of emotions was also recorded: Philomena's head, for instance, was described as one of a "femme inspirée."[29]

Discovering these sheets may have been relatively simple for Valadon. She often accompanied her mother to the studios that Madeleine cleaned, and she could have found new or discarded Cours there. She possibly met the tenant-artists who, intrigued by the young girl's fascination with art, might have offered her a few of the studies that were no longer of interest to them. Since the Cours were in great demand, they were neither rare nor expensive. Once Valadon obtained the first one it was easy to find others.

The Cours de Dessin were designed for students with varied drawing skills, and they covered "des premiers éléments jusqu'aux études académiques."[30] Since the degrees of difficulty were graduated to fit the students' capacities, Valadon could have followed the Cours progression as the quality of her work improved.

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[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

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Had she been interested in "Marines," for instance, she would have started drawing rowboats, progressed to four-masted ships or steamships, or copied small naval battles, to finally cover major sea disasters such as shipwrecks, fires, or tornadoes.[31]

Prices of the Cours varied with the quality of the reproductions, ranging from sixty centimes for floral studies done in black and white to four-to-six francs for "fancy women heads" imitating watercolors and printed on tinted sheets.[32] Some series offered etchings taken from Horace Vernet's paintings of "beaux sujets bibliques." Also available were "charmants sujets gracieux," a "délicieuse collection" of Paul et Virginie book illustrations, as well as "les vues les plus interressantes de l'Italie," drawn from nature by Ph. Benoist. Eighteen famous ballerinas, copied from François Gérard (1778-1837) and presented on 12 3/4 x 9 1/2" tinted sheets highlighted with gold and color accents cost 1.50 francs, the same price as each of the "six jolis portraits du 'Juif Errant's'" main characters.[33]

The Cours de Dessin were advertised as being used by all the main teaching schools.[34] Each sheet was illustrated by two or three evolutionary states of the same work. It started with an initial sketch, often done or "squared off" on a background divided by grids

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[31] Cours de Dessin.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Nouvelles Publications.

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that was followed by a more comprehensive study. The final version of the drawing was done with shading and minute details (fig. 13).

The Cours was originally printed by Maison Aumond, which later was taken over by Francois Delarue; they were located in Paris, rue Jean Jacques Rousseau No. 10. Their popularity extended to England, where they were published in London by Gombar, Junin & Co., 25 Berners Street, Oxford. The Cours originated with Cogniet[35] but in the latter part of the century new series, designed by Forregio, Jacobet and others were added.[36] All the works were lithographed by Julien, who had conceived these drawing models and obtained exclusive rights to the lithographic procedure utilized in all the publications.[37]

Indeed, there were ways to learn the elements of academic art other than copying exercise sheets. However, most of them would have been off limits to a poor and unsophisticated Montmartre girl. Had Valadon come from a different social milieu, her family would have accompanied her to the Louvre to admire the glorious remnants of Napoleonic pillage. But no member of her family was likely to go to a museum, and the Louvre was an improbable place to

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[35]After his initial Cours de Dessin, Cogniet published Nouveau Cours de Dessin.

[36]Le Cours Ferrogio Collection d'études progressives et élémentaires pour paysages, figures et animaux. Jacobet, Cours élémentaire de paysage, Adolphe Billordeaux Cours de Dessin pour l'ornement and Cours progressif de fleurs depuis les premiers élements jusqu'aux compositions de bouquets dessinés par Vitasse.

[37]Bernard Roman Julien (1802-1864). For details on drawing practice in France during the nineteenth century, see Albert Boime, The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1971), 24-28, 192, footnote 16.

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visit alone. The yearly Salons with their displays of contemporary and mostly academic art were also, for similar reasons, out of her reach.

Actually, the only art works that Valadon could have seen as a child were those done by the neighborhood artists. In spite of her being uncommunicative, the adolescent may have questioned the painters about their works in progress and accumulated some tidbits of information. But, assuredly, it was neither in the streets nor in private studios that she could have acquired the awareness of academic rules that prevails in her first known works. Her art, particularly in its beginnings, stems from a practice similar to that taught at the ateliers of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. For the long hours that the students spent in the classes under a teacher's supervision, Valadon substituted her own long hours of lonely practice, copying over and over the exercises illustrated in the Cours. The constant practice of these lessons, and a gradual increase of their difficulty, may account for Valadon's familiarity with basic principles of formal academic methods so evident in the Self-Portrait. However, it soon will be shown that she did not always apply these principles accurately.

Had she been less secretive about her art work, it could be argued that she had shown her drawings to some local artist who, impressed by her talent, guided her hesitant steps. But Valadon herself wrote, almost as a boast, about her isolation and her unsociability. She made it clear that she had not shared her secret with anyone.[38] Utter described the occasion when Renoir

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[38] Valadon ou l'absolu.

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accidentally caught Valadon drawing.[39] Allegedly surprised by her talent, the Impressionist exclaimed in awe: "You too! [are an artist] and you were hiding it from us!"[40] Utter suggests that the incident took place precisely when Valadon was working on her 1883 Self-Portrait (fig. 10). That Valadon was not inclined to show her work even to Renoir, with whom she had an intimate relationship at the time, and whose talent she greatly admired, reveals the extent of her uncommunicative nature.

Valadon's restraint with Puvis de Chavannes was similar. She later told Tabarant that she was too overwhelmed by the older artist to be able to open her mouth in his presence.[41] She waited until 1893 to approach Puvis with her drawings, only to be unequivocally told that, for a woman, the careers of model and artist were irreconcilable and under no circumstance interchangeable.[42]

Much has been written about Valadon learning her trade from the painters for whom she sat, "carefully watching their gestures, their technique, the way they constructed their work, organized their composition and set up their figures."[43] Even if there is little doubt, as will be seen later, about the influence that Valadon's employers exercised upon her work, it is important to remember

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[39]Utter, Archives CNAC.

[40]Ibid. "Vous aussi! Et vous nous le cachiez!"

[41]Tabarant, 628.

[42]See chapter II, Terrible Maria.

[43]Warnod, 1981, 49.

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that she did not start to pose before 1880 at the earliest, and that her first known work is dated 1883.

Had she only drawn by instinct until she started to model, she would only have had three years to assimilate the academic principles used in her Self-Portrait. But since she was posing full time, the hours left to practice her drawing were sparse. Undoubtedly, working on her technique at home by copying the Cours exercises was for Valadon a more logical way to learn the basis of her art.

Teaching herself to draw required not only self discipline, it also demanded qualities of self-criticism. Since Valadon had no mentor to guide her, she had to stand as her own judge. Her lack of self indulgence--"One must be hard with oneself,"[44] and her awareness of the difficulties of her task--"One does not achieve greatness without hard blows,"[45] helped set criteria for her art which were far more severe than those of the most demanding teacher.

A respect for traditional balance and harmony constitute the governing attributes of Valadon's first Self-Portrait. The work shows the conventionalism of an academic painting with its simple, broad forms, outlined in dark blue, stressing the importance of the linear drawing. The colors are evenly applied and smoothly graduated. The portrait presents Valadon in three-quarter profile, set against a mottled blue-green background, somewhat reminiscent

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[44] Valadon ou l'absolu. "Il faut être dure avec soi-même."

[45] Ibid. "Si l'on ne reçoit pas de coups, on n'a pas de grandeur."

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in some of David's portraits.[46] The unity of the composition is enhanced by the limited use of color, including only variations of blue, green, and earthy yellow-browns.

Ingres once said: "The accessories in a painting play a role similar to that of the confidants in a tragedy."[47] There are no accessories, however, in Valadon's Self-Portrait. There are no "props" used as clues to the sitter's personality or function. In this work, Valadon does not place herself in front of an easel, holding a palette, as many illustrious women artists such as Katharina van Hemessen (fig. 14) or Vigée-Lebrun (fig. 15) had done--or as Valadon herself would do in the later Self-Portrait (fig. 16). The austerity of the composition is kept intact. In the 1883 pastel, her head and shoulders stand out against a luminous background whose source of light is not determined. Valadon strongly holds the viewer's gaze, a grave and intense image whose cool delicacy is softened by the graduated shades of surrounding blues.

But if the apparent smoothness of the composition and the fluidity of the colors point to the work of an experienced draftsman, the stiffness of the sitter's pose and a definite unevenness in the treatment of forms and volumes suggest that Valadon had not yet fully mastered some of the academic techniques. The young artist,

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[46]See J. L. David: Portrait de Pierre Seriziat, 1790, oil, Ottawa National Gallery of Canada; Autoportrait, 1794, oil, Musée du Louvre.

[47]Daniel Ternoi, Monsieur Ingres, peintre d'histoire: Tout l'oeuvre peint de Ingres, (Paris, 1971), préface: "Les accéssoires d'un tableau jouent le même rôle que les confidants dans une tragedie." In the classical Corneille and Racine plays, the confidant's function was to enable the main characters to reveal the intricate details of the plot.

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undoubtedly inspired by specific classical portraits, adopted some of their elements but occasionally neglected to alter their proportions to adapt them to the scale of her own work. For example, the distance between Valadon's nose and ear is too wide for a three-quarter view, but is accurately sized to a drawing reproduced in the Cours de Dessin, Classical Head (fig. 17) that Valadon might have studied. The ear's incorrect placement in her Self-Portrait creates an awkward disproportion between the two sides of the face.

The ear itself, possibly copied from the same engraving, is also out of scale. Although it is delicately rendered, its sinuous volutes skillfully highlighted with red and blue dots, it appears oversized for a woman's head. But, as Valadon's skills progressed, she revised her early mistakes, and the size and positioning of her features in an 1893 oil portrait profile, seem correctly handled (fig. 18).

The modeling of the sitter's head in her first Self-Portrait is also questionable. The central hair parting rises too sharply, creating the illusion of an elongated skull. Shading is equally problematic, and at times altogether neglected. Through the conventional use of dark and light areas, Valadon properly modeled the nose, mouth and chin, but did not succeed in highlighting the strong cheekbones gracing her 1893 and 1902 Self-Portraits (fig. 19). In contrast with the well-rounded neck, the torso is treated without feeling of volume or relief, and the left shoulder seems hollow. Even though Valadon managed the illusion of a stand-up collar on the left side of the dress, the opposite part of the same collar lies flat. Much of the successful rendering of forms appears to have been copied from engravings. Some of the anatomical details such as the eyes, done with excessive care by Valadon, seem

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inspired by the meticulous illustrations of the Cours de Dessin (fig. 20).

But if Valadon's draftsmanship appears uneven at times, there is no doubt about the 1883 Self-Portrait's strength and individuality. The artist aimed at--and succeeded in--offering to the viewer more than a physical likeness when she exposed the salient traits of her personality. Although the even features, the small straight nose and the sinuous mouth reveal her delicate loveliness, it is her determination, uncompromising spirit, and resilience that dominate an image that has been called "imperieuse et austère."[48] Valadon's motto, "One must be hard with oneself," is reflected in the set jaw, the defiant expression, and the unflinching gaze. However, the austerity of the image is softened by a hint of youthful vulnerability.

One of the most striking aspects of the work is the off-center location of the sitter, who is pushed back to the left upper corner of the composition. In none of Valadon's later portraits, save for the 1893 oil (fig. 18), did she ever assign such an unorthodox placement to the image. Was this choice a result of her inexperience, or was it calculated? The asymmetrical placement was certainly not inspired by any of the works illustrated in the Cours, and was rarely used in contemporary art, even by the unconventional Impressionists, whose works Valadon could have seen. The model's unusual location at the edge of the pastel divides the composition into two oblique sections. The vast expanse of blank space that surrounds the sitter creates a psychological void that isolates her from the rest of the world. Was this feeling of separation actually intended by the artist? Even if this

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[48] Suzanne Valadon, 1967, #88.

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effect was unpremeditated, it still brought forth the aura of loneliness that was the climate of the artist's young years.

The Self-Portrait contains other unsettling factors that can only be the result of the artist's inexperience. There is a definite lack of unity in her technique, as seen in the erratic treatment of forms, alternating flatness and modeling. The contrast between the shallow cheeks, cardboard torso, and the well-modeled nose, mouth and chin were probably not planned, and reflects Valadon's unfamiliarity with modeling skills, more than her desire to emulate Puvis de Chavannes' use of flattened figures. This occasional two dimensional effect observed in the Self-Portrait does not reoccur in Valadon's mature works.

The artist's use of conventional academic principles as the foundation of her early style was most apparent between 1883 and 1893. During this decade, she mostly did portraits of herself, her mother, her son, and one of her lovers. It was then that "Maria" modeled extensively and had the greatest opportunities to observe the working techniques of those for whom she posed, were they Academicians or Impressionists. Even though she incorporated elements of the latters' methods into her own work, she never forgot the Cours de Dessin. The influence of a particular illustration is reflected in her drawing in Maurice Utrillo at the Age of Two (fig. 21) done in 1886. Her son's profile closely resembles that of the small angel illustrated in the Cours #50 (fig. 13). The low forehead, turned-up nose, and the descending lines of the mouth appear similar in both works, as are the curve of the eyebrow and the shape of the eye. This likeness is too pronounced to be accidental. But, in Maurice Utrillo's portrait, Valadon

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discarded the shading that gives the angel's face its plumpness. There is no indication of relief on her son's face, save for the few downward lines that suggest the start of a cheek. However, in this specific work, the flatness is intentional and gives the work the ethereal quality sought by the artist.

Although Valadon's reliance on the Cours images faded, it never completely disappeared, and in the 1910 Grandmére et petit fils (fig. 23) Maurice Utrillo's face becomes a younger version of Bearded Man's Head (fig. 24), one of the Cours illustrations drawn from a plaster cast. The Portrait of Madeleine Gerieud (fig. 25) also stands as a reminder of another Cours drawing: Her profile, the shape of her nose and nostril are very similar to those of Man's Profile (fig. 26). But save for some rare exceptions, the references to the drawing exercises grew rarer as Valadon gained confidence in her own skill. Her self-taught foundation of academic norms became a springboard and tool that liberated her from the hardships of technical problems. Her increasing ease with the drawing pencil is reflected in an 1893 Self-Portrait (fig. 27). Although the work's representation of classical physical beauty, its reduction of forms and fluidity of lines recall some of the Cours sketches on the grids, the simplicity of design and bolder drawing look forward to Valadon's mature style that triumphed after 1909 when the artist dedicated herself almost totally to oil painting. However, it was not until 1902, as seen in another Self-Portrait that Valadon shed most remnants of classicism and came into her own style. Her 1916 Self-Portrait (fig. 28) offers the essence of her later manner with its flattened planes and expressionist colors. One can fully measure the extent of three decades of evolution when one compares the 1916 Self-

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Portrait to the one dated 1883. The two works seem to have been done by different hands. However, while there is no reason to contest their authenticity, there are some who challenge the dating of the earlier portrait.

The 1883 Self-Portrait, regardless of some awkward details, looks almost too accomplished to be the work of a beginner, even one who, based on visual evidence, faithfully pursued the progressive training of the Cours. However, there is a hypothesis which would account for the smooth technical handling of the pastel and the mature appearance of its sitter, namely, a later date than 1883 for its completion. Valadon could have begun her portrait at this date (as it is boldly inscribed on the upper right corner) and reworked it some years later when she had become a more skilled draftsman.[49] Perhaps the portrait was left undated for a while, possibly until 1922, when Robert Rey published Suzanne Valadon et son Oeuvre,[50] the first scholarly monograph written on the artist. The essay contained several illustrations and Rey undoubtedly requested examples of the artist's early work.[51] Valadon must have selected the Self-Portrait, telling

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[49]Valadon never displayed any sense of organization in her dating and record keeping. For instance, she painted La Grandmère et la petite Rosalie in 1896. The painting was damaged and reworked in 1900 by the artist, who never changed the date "1896" inscribed at the upper right corner (Barrez, 78). Nus à la Toilette, oil on cardboard and canvas, was signed and dated 1908 twice on the upper right hand corner.

[50] Robert Rey, Suzanne Valadon et son Oeuvre (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, Collection "Les Peintres Français Nouveaux," 1922).

[51]The essay contained several illustrations; although the Self Portrait was not reproduced, the work was discussed at length. Rey, 11-12.

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Rey that she had done it in 1883, "when she was barely sixteen."[52] She had never been preoccupied with historical accuracy since she always lied about her own age and fabricated all aspects of her life. Furthermore, she was most anxious to convince people that hers was "a free inborn talent" as well as a precocious one, as she candidly reported in a most important article published by the art magazine Prométhée.[53] In it she gave 1883 as the year she officially began her artistic career.[54] Since she presented the Self-Portrait as her first work, it was natural that it should be dated in that year.

Another factor supports the theory of a later dating for the Self-Portrait. In this work, Valadon's features and even her obvious self-assurance seem to be those of a more mature person than the adolescent she claimed to be. A photograph (fig. 29), taken in 1881, when she actually was sixteen, shows her looking vulnerable and far younger than the determined sitter of the Self-Portrait. On the other hand, two pictures (fig. 30, 31) seem to present a great physical resemblance to the sitter of the first Self-Portrait. The author's conviction that the pastel was reworked at a later date than 1883 is shared by Geneviève Barrez.[55]

The first Self-Portrait entered the collection of the Paris Musée du Luxembourg collection in March 1936, when this museum still

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[52]Ibid. "Valadon...à seize ans, dans un portrait qu'elle fit d'elle-même en 1883." The artist was actually eighteen at that time.

[53]Prométhée, March 1939, 53, "Formation libre, talent inné, exceptionellement douée."

[54]Ibid., "Dessina dès 1883, ses débuts."

[55]Interview with Geneviève Barrez, Paris, February 22, 1992.

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functioned as a museum of modern art.[56] The work was bought with government funds from the Ministry of Culture along with another Valadon drawing, Deux femmes nues.[57] Robert Rey, who had just been appointed Directeur des Beaux-Arts, was responsible for the two acquisitions. Already in 1929, when he became the Musée de Luxembourg's deputy director, he was the first to introduce Valadon's work into the collection of a French museum collection.[58] He numbered among Valadon's personal friends, and sincerely admired "her pure vision free of intellectualist pretensions.[59] His 1922 monograph on Valadon had been preceded by articles on the artist whose talent he felt was underrated. "We [the French] have a very great artist: Suzanne Valadon, whose quality, for the least, equals Morizot's [sic]. However, we barely seem aware of it."[60]

Maurice Utrillo à l'age de deux ans (fig. 21) is another drawing whose dating might be challenged. Signed by the artist, it bears a 1886 date that must be questioned on the basis of physical appearance. Since Utrillo was born on December 24, 1883, he was only two in 1886. Yet, his profile seems to be that of an older child whose firmly set

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[56]The Musèe du Luxembourg was initially conceived as "le Musèe des artistes vivants." It was replaced by the Musée d'Art Moderne, which was inaugurated in 1937 but not opened to the public until 1946.

[57]Deux Femmes Nues, 1897, charcoal. Musée d'Art Moderne, CNAC Georges Pompidou, Paris.

[58]La Chambre Bleue, 1923, oil on canvas, 35 7/16 x 45 5/8". Gift of Sir Joseph Duveen. It was first shown at the Musée de Luxembourg in 1927.

[59]Rey, 11. "Cette vision si pure de tout plaquage d'intellectualisme."

[60]L'Opinion, December 25, 1921: "Nous avons en Suzanne Valadon une très grande artiste d'un plan au moins égal à Berthe Morizot [sic] et nous n'avons pas l'air de nous en douter."

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features had already shed the uncertainty that characterizes the faces of very young children. Based on his appearance in this portrait, Maurice must have been closer to the age of four. The reason for an early dating is unclear but could be the result of Valadon's faulty memory or a biographer's error.[61] Regardless of its actual dating, the quality of the drawing is remarkable. The work possesses a haunting grace and melancholy that is at times found in some of Dürer's works.

Valadon's first Self-Portrait, were it done in 1883 or 1886, certainly deserves Rey's enthusiastic accolade: "An unusual work achieved with only a few simple lines and touches of beige and grayish green pastel blurred with the artist's thumb. All the defiant pride, the stored daring of female adolescence are retained within boundaries of a narrow frame, in the unpolished but pure image of the 'Terrible Maria.'"[62]

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[61]This belief is also shared by Geneviève Barrez. Interview, Paris, February 22, 1992.

[62]Rey, 11: "Oeuvre étrange réalisée par quelques traits légers, quelques rehauts de pastels beige et vert-de-gris, estompés au pouce. Toute la téméraire fierté, l'audace imployée de l'adolescence feminine tient dans ce cadre étroit, dans cette rude et pure effigie de la 'Terrible Maria.'"

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CHAPTER 3
TERRIBLE MARIA

In 1880, the fifteen-year-old Suzanne Valadon had to look once more for a new profession. Since she had no training other than her brief experience in the circus, her options for finding work were limited. To return to the sweatshops where she had briefly worked in the previous years was for her as unthinkable as to become a laundress like her mother. She had neither the physical endurance[1] nor the inclination to spend the rest of her life washing and ironing other people's clothes.

It was at this time that she decided to become a model. Several factors contributed to her decision: the hope of making good money (modeling fees were high), her fascination with the profession,[2] and a bohemian unstructured schedule that would fit her unconventional temperament.

Furthermore, she must have seen, during her stay at the circus, some of the "féeries" or "tableaux vivants" that in the previous twenty-five years had become a popular feature in circus

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[1] Valadon was only 4'11" tall. Heuzé, one of her acquaintances, claimed she was too small to reach the standard ironing board. Crespelle, 53.

[2] She said that she adored living intimately in the artists' colony. See Michéle Deroyer, Quelques Souvenirs Autour de Suzanne Valadon (Paris: A. Fayart, 1945), 209.

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rings.[3] Those elaborate spectacles that staged lavish fairy-tale enactments were often the excuse to display young women clad in revealing flesh-colored body suits. Many of these girls, whom Valadon might have met, were models, although they liked to think of themselves as actresses. They were as popular with the male audience as with the circus musicians.[4]

In early 1880, Valadon had moved with her mother from 2 rue du Mont Cenis[5] to 3 rue du Poteau. There, she had every opportunity to observe the activities of numerous models since the small street was located near Place Pigalle where, every Sunday, a "Models Market" was held. Men, women and even children gathered around the tiny fountain in the hope of being selected by the artists who came there looking for the ideal god, nymph, or cupid that populated the academic painters' gigantic "Machines."

There were several other markets in Montmartre, but the one on the Place Pigalle was the liveliest and most extensive. It attracted a mixed crowd of mostly out-of-towners. Many of the would-be models had originally come from rural provinces, as Valadon's mother had done fifteen years earlier, lured by the prospect of better working conditions in the capital.

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[3]Jacques Lethève, La vie quotidienne des artistes Français au XIX Siècle (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1968), 80. These performances originated in 1865 at the Cirque Olympique.

[4]Louis Leroy, Physionomies Parisiennes, Paris, 1965, 107.

[5]It was also called rue de la Maison de Mimi Pinson, since Mimi had lived there. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, several artists had their studios there, including the engraver G. Daragnès who, in 1926, moved to the avenue Junot in the same house as Valadon.

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But their hopes, like Madeleine Coulaud's, never materialized, and occasional modeling brought them a much-needed additional income. The work was irregular, but paid well. In 1885 a seamstress or a modiste only earned 2.5 francs for a twelve-hour workday, while the lowest paid model received a minimum of 30 francs a week.[6]

The Pigalle Market was overcrowded, noisy, and oppressively dusty. During the eighteen-eighties, horse-drawn tramways and double-deck omnibuses that operated between the Villette and the Trocadero were still functioning[7] and made stops on the Place Pigalle. Amid the tumult, the models congregated around the fountain, laughing, gossiping, and striking poses for the benefit of artists searching for an inspiring figure.

An "Italian Market" was also held on Place Saint Victor and it extended into the rue Linné and the rue Saint Medard. Whole families in folkloric costumes came there from the neighboring rue Mouffetard and the rue des Carmes, where many Italians lived.[8] They did not mix well with their French counterparts, although most of them also came from peasant stock. They had left the poverty of the Roman campagna or the vicinity of Naples when they heard there were good modeling jobs to be found in Paris. By 1895 more than

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[6]Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1985, 90.

[7]See André Warnod, Ceux de la Butte (Paris: Juillard, 1947), 83. There were two lines, the "I" between Pigalle and the Halles aux Vins and the "J" between Montmartre and the Palais Royal.

[8]For more details on the life of models in Paris, see Paul Dollfus, Modèles d'artistes, (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1888), 48.

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500 Italian men and women lived in the capital, almost exclusively supported by their modeling fees.[9] Some of them found additional income playing music in courtyards. Their children passed the hat when they were not posing as young Saint John the Baptist or Eros.

The small fountain of the rue de l'Abreuvoir also hosted another market and was the meeting place for some of the most popular sitters: the Jewesses. These girls were often strikingly beautiful and professed a total disregard for bourgeois conventions, an ideal combination for the vocation of model.[10] Unfortunately, these attributes made them equally suited for the bicherie,[11] and Leroy narrates the predicament of several artists who could never be certain of keeping a hired Venus long enough to finish their masterpiece.[12] The girls were rumored to spend their free time dancing the cancan and drinking bowls of heated wine at the Astic dance hall, later known as the Reine Blanche. Their bad reputation was perhaps triggered by traces of religious superstition and antagonism.[13]

By 1885 the markets had become so popular that an Italian named Socci opened a model agency on the Place Clichy. Artists could select from photographs, and even plaster casts, the models

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[9] Lethève, 80.

[10] Leroy, 107.

[11] The nineteenth century vernacular for prostitution.

[12] Leroy, 107.

[13] Dollfus, 136.

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who best suited their requirements.[14] Numerous similar agencies such as the Académie Humbert later opened in Montmartre but the number of models did not multiply as swiftly as that of the artists. Toward the end of the nineteenth century there were 14,000 painters and sculptors living in the capital.[15] A large percentage of them lived in Montmartre. La Butte had become a haven for artists who wanted to rent studios at considerably lower prices than those paid for the elegant ateliers of the Plaine Monceau, mostly occupied by successful artists. Studios located in good neighborhoods had recently become fashionable and were leased at high prices by hommes du monde,[16] while Montmartre ateliers such as the one occupied by Renoir on 12 rue Cortot cost only 1000 francs a year in 1875.[17]

Most of the artists, even the impoverished ones, needed a model. They all dreamed of showing at the Salon[18] an historical composition that required the use of live models. Some of the established painters employed highly-paid "regular" sitters,[19] but they resorted to the Markets whenever they needed extras.

How Suzanne Valadon obtained her first modeling engagement

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[14]Lethève, 80.

[15]See M. Melot, Les Femmes de Toulouse-Lautrec (Paris, 1985), 7.

[16]See Edmond de Goncourt, Maison d'un artiste, Paris, 1881.

[17]For a more detailed description of the living conditions of artists in Paris, see Milner, 159.

[18]In 1880 1,190 works were exhibited at the Salon.

[19]Bougereau paid his favorite model 300 francs a month. Lethève, 80.

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remains conjectural and there are several possible--but undocumented--answers. Did she offer her services to the nearby Académie Humbert, located on rue du Mont Cenis where she had lived before moving to the rue du Poteau? Was she selected on a Sunday at the Pigalle Market? Did Puvis de Chavannes notice her walking down a street, as she often claimed, and instantly ask her to pose for him?[20]

Choosing to earn her living as a model seemed a logical decision for a young, attractive--but untrained--girl living in Montmartre in the late nineteenth century. At fifteen, Valadon possessed a curvaceous adolescent face, crowned by luxuriant venetian blond hair, with striking blue eyes set in an elfin face. In spite of her small size she had a voluptuous body whose maturity contrasted with her youthful features.

Her first sitting was an overwhelming experience. "I remember saying to myself," she later explained:

> ...this is it! Over and over...I said it all day long. I did not know why. But I knew that I was somewhere at last and I should never leave.[21]

She loved her new profession, and was naturally gifted for it. She instinctively struck the right pose and was capable of sustaining it for long periods of time. Suzay Leudet, a young painter who studied in Hector Leroux's Pigalle atelier where Suzanne Valadon modeled, praised her skills: "She posed intelligently,

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[20]Crespelle, 50; Polnay, 29; Storm, 31.

[21]Storm, 52.

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keeping the same position for a long time without any signs of fatigue."[22] This unusual endurance was also admired by Henner, for whom she later sat.[23]

Valadon started her new career with the passionate enthusiasm she had felt when she discovered the circus world. She also was fiercely determined to be a successful model in spite of the overwhelming competition in this field from girls her own age or younger.[24] A report dated 1884, states:

> A few years ago, there were 671 women and girls in Paris who served as models for painters, sculptors and photographers. ...only 130 of those were over twenty-one years old; the others were between sixteen and twenty with some of them even younger.[25]

The majority of models came from the lower middle class and the proletariat, as did Valadon. Modeling was mostly a way of earning additional money for women who held regular jobs but could not survive on one salary. Among the 671 women cited were sixty actresses, forty milliners, thirty-five florists, and thirty seamstresses.[26]

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[22]Suzay Leudet, "Suzanne Valadon chez les Pompiers" (Beaux Arts, 56), 1938. Hector Leroux (1829-1900) was a successful academic painter.

[23]Beachboard, 32. Jean-Jacques Henner (1829-1905) was one of the most popular academic artists.

[24]By 1874, the legal restrictions for working children were changed from twelve to ten hours a day. The working day for women was still twelve hours. Children's working age was changed from six to thirteen. Wendy Slatkin, Women Artists in History: From Antiquity to the 20th Century (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985), 93.

[25]Eduard Wesseley, Das weitslichen model in seine gechicher Erwicklung (Leipzig, 1884). Quoted from Krininger, 16, footnote 9.

[26]Ibid.

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The price paid for models working in private studios varied; women commanded higher fees than men, who did not age as quickly. The pay was flexible, often determined by the solvency of the artist.[27] Around 1885, a female model, if she was beautiful, could earn as much as ten francs for a sitting. Italian sitters rated only five francs per sitting for a painter, six for a sculptor. There were two daily sittings, from 8:00 A.M. to noon and from 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.[28]

These wages were considerably higher than those of an unskilled worker. For example, a girl threading pearls in a shop would only earn 1.5 francs per day.[29] The models were paid after each sitting and hard-working girls could pose for two daily sittings. Exceptional models like the celebrated Sara Brown could sometimes demand as much as twenty-two francs a day for their services.[30] Not only were the rates conditioned by the beauty of the sitter, but they also varied for the parts of the body that were modeled. Best paid was posing in the nude for the "ensemble" or the whole body, as Valadon did. However, some artists were only interested in arms, hands, or legs, for which the subject only received two or three francs.

Unusual poses were remunerated in terms of their difficulty,

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[27]Leroy, 104.

[28]Ibid., 137.

[29]Dollfus, 140.

[30]Ibid, 138.

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and Dollfus relates the case of an artist who wanted to record a hanging scene. He had to pay ten francs for a two-hour sitting to an Italian man who could only remain hanging from a rope for a few seconds every ten minutes while his facial contortions were attentively captured by his sponsor.[31]

Even though modeling was paid on a higher scale than other professions, the demand for atelier models was capricious and lasted only until the conclusion of the artist's project. The sitters who worked for academies such as the Suisse were paid less. They received three francs for each daily sitting and collected their pay at the end of the week. However, they were compensated by steady employment, and during periods of competition for prizes their salary was raised to forty francs per week.[32]

Many young girls, dazzled by the high fees they earned during occasional assignments, left their steady jobs in the hope of posing on a full-time basis. They were soon disappointed. New sittings were hard to find, the competition grew daily, and the demand was seasonal. Many artists left Paris during the summer and some of the girls who had left their work could not find new jobs and were faced with the alternative of either starving or engaging in galanterie.

Valadon never experienced this problem. Because of her beauty and endurance, once she started to model she never lacked engagements and continued to pose until at least 1894.[33]

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[31]Ibid.

[32]bid, 139.

[33]Leudet, 1938.

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Delighted by her new profession, she adopted a new name. This desire for different identities was a recurring pattern in the artist's behavior. As a model, she became known as Maria, a sophisticated version of Marie Clementine, and it was as "Terrible Maria" that Degas addressed her in many of his letters.[34] Tabarant, in his 1921 article on Valadon, mentioned how proudly she had informed him, "Maria was my name (then), my name as a model."[35]

Adolphe Tabarant was an art critic who, as early as 1911, began to praise the works of the artist[36] and later became her close friend and confidant. He interviewed her in the rue Cortot atelier she shared with her husband André Utter and her son, Maurice Utrillo. The writer questioned her informally on her career as a model and on the artists for whom she had posed. Showing him faded photographs, she retraced with candor the circumstances of her acquaintance with Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir, the only painters whom she mentioned by name.

Eighteen years later, the magazine Prométhée published an article consisting solely of a questionnaire completed by Valadon for the art historian Germain Bazin's benefit.[37] The latter was

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[34]Paul André Lemoisne, Degas et son oeuvre (Paris: Paul Brame and C. M. de Hauke, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1946-49, reprint edition. New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1984), pp. 76, 180, 193, 200, 250, 257.

[35]Adolphe Tabarant: "Suzanne Valadon et sus Souvenirs de Modèle," Bulletin de la Vie Artisque (May 15, 1921), 629; also Deroyer, 207.

[36]Valadon's name had also been briefly mentioned by Guillaume Apollinaire in his Critiques d'art, 1912-1918, Salon des Indépendents (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 16.

[37]Prométhée, Vol. 1, 3/1/1939. "Les expositions; Suzanne Valadon par elle-même," 53-54. The questionnaire had been sent to her in early 1938, but the article only appeared after her death.

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planning to include her among the painters surveyed in the History of Contemporary Art which he was writing at the time. Valadon answered questions dealing with her life, art, and career in the briefest and presumably most accurate manner. Commenting on her beginnings in modeling, Valadon explained that as an adolescent she earned her living posing for several artists such as de Nittis, Inais,[38] Toulouse-Lautrec, and Zandomeneghi, in addition to Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir. Why did she omit so many of her patrons in her interview with Tabarant? Apparently, by the 1930's, the painters mentioned to Bazin had come into the limelight and Valadon realized that it might be to her advantage to reveal her relationship with them.

In addition to these two important articles, there have been several writings referring to Valadon's modeling career, unfortunately none too accurate. The list of the painters for whom she allegedly posed kept increasing, and one must determine who the artists were who hired her and where and when she worked for them. As these questions are settled, it will become necessary to remove some names from the list and add a few others.

Among the painters associated with Valadon, Degas is the most frequently presented as a patron and sometimes as a lover or a friend. Although Degas' relationship with Valadon will be later examined, it must be said that Valadon was never either his model or his mistress but always remained his friend.

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[38]Vojtech Inais (also spelled Hynais or Anais), Czechoslovakian painter, 1854-1924.

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The so-called misogynous Degas became Valadon's first collector as well as the mentor who taught her etching, and remained in contact with her until his death. Other artists are incorrectly listed as Valadon's patrons. They include A. Howland, Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, and Berthe Morisot. In view of a lack of evidence or credibility their names should be discarded.

A. Howland has been frequently mentioned,[39] and this name might refer to Alfred Cornelius Howland (1838-1909). This American painter worked for two years in the Paris atelier of Lambinet but never resided in France after his return to the United States in 1865. Since Valadon was born in 1865, her connection with Alfred Howland is most improbable. Valadon allegedly also modeled for Napoleon III's niece, Princesse Mathilde Bonaparte,[40] who, after the fall of the Empire, continued to live in Paris, remaining active in the field of art.[41] However, it is improbable for anyone in this distinguished entourage to have recommended Valadon to the Princess or for the latter to have canvassed the Montmartre Markets in search of a model.[42]

Another most unlikely artist to have asked Valadon to pose

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[39]Beachboard, 33; Crespelle, 51; Nesto Jacometti, Suzanne Valadon (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1947), 5.

[40]Warnod, 1981, 30.

[41]Mathilde Bonaparte, 1820-1907, daughter of Joseph Bonaparte, was active in the arts; she befriended Bonnat and Detaille and, later, Helleu and de Nittis. Fréderic Masson, Princesse Mathilde, artiste et amateur d'art (Paris), 1-8; Monneret, I, 193, 345.

[42]Lethève, 218. Also see Florent Fels, Utrillo, Paris, 1959, 80.

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was Berthe Morisot, whose Danceuse de Corde[43] portrays an aerialist sometimes said to be Valadon.[44] Although Morisot could have met Valadon through her friends Puvis or Renoir, none of her biographers suggests a possible acquaintance between the two women.[45] Although Valadon worked briefly in a circus, nothing leads us to believe that she sat for the aerialist figure in this painting, dated six years after she gave up the ring. The sitter was formally identified as Isabelle Lambert, one of Morisot's favorite models.[46] Assuredly, the ethereal form of the young girl could never be mistaken for that of Valadon when portrayed by Renoir during the same period.[47]

While it is important to discard the artists for whom Valadon did not pose, it seems even more significant to investigate those for whom she did. Since Valadon neither received formal instruction in art nor attended any academy or drawing school, she learned part of her trade by watching the artists who painted her. As a model, she was the one who studied the "creators," and her exposure to their works was her formal introduction to art. The teachings they

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[43]Danceuse de Corde, 1886. Berthe Morisot Catalogue des dessins, pastels et aquarelles. M.L. Bataille et G. Wilderstein, Paris, 1961, P1.55, cat. 504. Collection Berheim de Villiers.

[44]Fels, 80.

[45]Jean Dominique Rey, Berthe Morisot (New York: Crown Publishers, 1982); Ch. F. Stuckley and Wm. P. Scott, Berthe Morisot, Impressionist (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1987); Anne Higonet, Berthe Morisot (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

[46]Bataille and Wilderstein, 55.

[47]Danse à la ville, Danse à la campagne, 183, La natte, 1885.

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unknowingly dispensed established guidelines, providing conscious and unconscious references, particularly at the start of her career. Although she always denied having been influenced by any painter other than Gauguin,[48] it is undeniable that her observing the subject matter, techniques, and even the philosophies of her unsuspecting mentors contributed heavily to the elaboration of her oeuvre. The fragments of their individual visions found their place in the kaleidoscope of her personal creations.

Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) was the first painter of importance to hire Suzanne Valadon as a model. Theirs was a long association: Valadon presumably met Puvis in 1880 and for the following seven years continued to pose intermittently for the older artist.[49] There are several variations, at times fabricated by Valadon herself, on the circumstances of the two artists' first meeting. The most credible one seems the most obvious: Puvis noticed the young girl amid the crowd of models in the Pigalle Market, where she had been taken by a friend.[50] Since 1852 Puvis had been renting a studio at 11 Place Pigalle, in the small house with a garden where twenty years later Henner and Boldini also rented ateliers.[51] Puvis' windows faced the Market, which he undoubtedly visited whenever he needed an "extra." The older painter

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[48]See Suzanne Valadon, 1967, Foreword.

[49]Barrez, 23; Beachboard, 31; Crespelle, 55; Tabarant, 227; Warnod, 30. André Warnod, Ceux de la Butte (Paris: Juillard, 1947), 219. Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) was fifty-six when he met Valadon in 1880.

[50]A young model named Celia, according to Barrez, 66.

[51]Milner, 146.

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had a second studio close to his friend Seurat's. It was located in Neuilly, a quiet suburb eight kilometers from Paris. There, in his sparsely-furnished sanctum away from the bustle of Montmartre, he painted his large compositions and murals.[52]

There are alternate scenarios, equally flattering to Valadon's ego, on the circumstances of her encounter with Puvis: The latter, upon seeing her walking with a friend on rue Lepic, a version favored by several writers,[53] or after hearing about her beauty and talent,[54] demanded that she immediately come and pose for him.

When did Puvis hire Valadon? The date varies between 1880 and 1882. Puvis' most serious scholar, Wattenmaker, feels that the muralist engaged Valadon in 1882,[55] but Valadon told Tabarant that she started to work for Puvis at age fifteen, therefore in 1880.[56]

Although she might have posed briefly for other artists, it was Puvis whom she mentioned with the most pride when she recalled her beginnings as a model.[57]

Puvis de Chavannes' impact on Valadon's life and art was

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[52]Ibid., 146; Warnod, 30.

[53]Beachboard, 31; Crespelle, 33; Poinay, 29-30; Storm, 56; Warnod, 30.

[54]Storm, 56.

[55]Richard Wattenmaker, Puvis de Chavannes and the Modern Tradition, Art Gallery of Toronto, October 20-November 30, 1975, 107; Storm, 56. The two-year discrepancy in Valadon's birth date should also be taken into account.

[56]The only confirmation for the earlier date is Valadon's tentative identification as Femme mengeant une pomme (c. 1870-1880). See Puvis de Chavannes, 148; Sigismund, 56-59.

[57]Tabarant, 228.

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considerable. There is little doubt that she became his mistress as well as his model and their affair has been acknowledged by most writers.[58] She was fifteen and Puvis fifty-six. Valadon herself never referred openly to an intimate relationship with the older painter but neither the forty-one year gap in age nor the hopelessness of the relationship could have troubled her. She had grown up in the bohemian, unconventional atmosphere of Montmartre where "If men were artists, it was assumed that they had more or less unlimited access to the bodies of the women who worked for them."[59] One of the tacit functions of the model was to provide them with a "repos de guerrier."

Although nothing is known about Valadon's early sexual experience(s), she was supposed to have lost her virginity to Puvis.[60] However, Utter, Valadon's second husband, implied that Suzanne, at fifteen, was far from being innocent, and that Puvis caught her in his atelier in the arms of a color grinder.[61] Valadon ultimately preferred the master to the assistant. Her choice was quite understandable. In addition to being talented, rich, and already famous when she met him, Puvis offered an ideal father's image to a young imaginative girl who had grown up deprived of a male parent.

The length of their liaison is conjectural. Since Valadon was

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[58] Paul Caso, La vie tragique d'Utrillo (Paris: G. M. Dutilleul, 1956), 18; Fabris, 11; Storm, 59; Warnod, 13; Wattenmaker, 107-108.

[59] See Linda Nochlin, Women, Art and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 9-10.

[60] Crespelle, 52: "'C'est lui qui a eu sa fleur' affirmait Heuzé."

[61] Ibid, 54.

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rumored to be unable to sustain any relationship for a prolonged period, estimates vary from six months[62] to several years.[63]

Born in 1824, Puvis de Chavannes at fifty-six was a celebrated artist whose murals decorated the walls of several French museums, including the Musée de Picardie[64] and the Musée de Marseilles[65], as well s the later Paris Pantheon.[66] Hailed as the greatest decorator of his time, he had earned the respect of his fellow artists and particularly of Rodin, who "...shook [Puvis'] hand as if it were Poussin's."[67]

Puvis presented the appearance of a dandy. Wearing spats[68] and a top hat, he carried with dignity on his morning coat a "ruban de la Légion d'Honneur," judged by Valadon to be the "size of a saucer."[69] He grew an imperious beard that Rodin proclaimed "to have been already there when he [Puvis] was a schoolboy."[70]

But in spite of an appearance of sophisticated formality,

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[62]Storm, 56.

[63]Wattenmaker, 107.

[64]Musée de Picardie panels were Concordia and Bellum, 1861, Travail and Repos, 1863.

[65]Musée de Marseilles panels were Marseilles, Colonie Grecque and Marseilles, Porte de l'Orient, 1865-1869.

[66]Puvis did several panels illustrating La Vie de Sainte Geneviève, 1876-1898.

[67]Milner, 146.

[68]Polnay, 30.

[69]As related by Crespelle, 52.

[70]Storm, 57.

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Puvis was a bon vivant whose unexpected sense of humor is revealed in the caricatures he secretly drew.[71] An occasional visitor to the Montmartre cafés, he was listed as one of the patrons of the Chat Noir along with Degas, Edmond de Goncourt, Huysmans, and Zola.[72]

The scion of a noble family from Burgundy, Puvis was rumored to be immensely rich, and his financial independence had enabled him to withstand the Salon's early rejection of his works. At eighteen, on a convalescent visit to Italy, he discovered the Quattrocento painters and fell under the spell of Giotto's frescoes. He briefly studied in the ateliers of Delacroix, Arie Scheffer, and Thomas Couture, but he rapidly lost all interest in easel painting. He began to develop a unique "classical" style by simplifying his drawing, muting colors and flattening surfaces. His 1861 first murals stood out as works of such lyrical serenity that they earned him the favor of the public as well as of his fellow painters.

A hopeless romantic, Puvis for forty years carried on an intense yet platonic relationship with the wife of an Italian nobleman, the Princess Cantacuzène, whom he had met at Chasseriau. Puvis married the Princess when she was widowed in 1898, only to lose her shortly after their union. Two months after she died, Puvis followed her to the grave, having completed the last of his Pantheon panels, Sainte Geneviève veillant sur Paris endormi, in which he

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[71] Leon Worth, Puvis de Chavannes (Paris, 1926), 45-57.

[72] Listed in Rodolphe Salis: Le guide du Chat Noir, Paris, 1887-1888. See Theophile Alexandre Steilen, Philip Dunnes Cate & Susan Gill, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1982, 24.

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gave his wife's features to the saint.[73]

This lengthy ethereal idyll did not prevent the painter from carrying on earthier interludes such as an affair with the adolescent Suzanne, who was overwhelmed by his talent, his fame, and his personality. Many years later, reminiscing about walking at his side from Neuilly to Montmartre, Valadon admitted, "I could never answer him....I was too intimidated...."[74] Working for Puvis gave Valadon the added advantage of a financial security that she had never before experienced. The painter was a generous man and his wealth enabled him to pay his models' fees regularly--an unusual occurrence in the art world of the time. Indeed, it was not uncommon among many impoverished artists to offer their sitters one of their works in lieu of payment.[75] A thoughtful employer, Puvis, when he did not need Valadon's services for a substantial stretch of time, recommended her to some of his colleagues.[76]

Valadon took great pride in being Puvis' sitter. When Tabarant interviewed her four decades later on her memories as a model, she emphasized the magnitude of her work for the muralist: "I can't tell you how many hours I spent posing for him in Neuilly."[77]

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[73]André Michel, Puvis de Chavannes, Paris, 1926, 84; Puvis de Chavannes, Grand Palais, 1976, 242; Les caricatures de Puvis de Chavannes, Préface de Marcelle Aden, Paris, 1906.

[74]Deroyer, 209.

[75]Anne Manson, "Suzanne Valadon la frénètique," from Les Maudits, Gilbert Guilleminault, Paris (1949), 261.

[76]Crespelle, 59.

[77]Tabarant, 627.

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Oddly enough, she did not mention having modeled for any work other than for the first panel done for Le Bois Sacré (Sacred Grove) (fig. 31). Puvis had been commissioned by the town of Lyon to decorate the staircase of the local museum, the Palais Saint Pierre, which had been renovated from 1879 to 1881. He envisioned a series of decorative panels that were to be collectively entitled Le Bois Sacré cher aux Muses, and a reduction of the first panel, called Le Bois Sacré also posed for by Valadon, was shown in 1884 at the Salon des Artistes Français. By 1886, Puvis had finished the three additional panels, called Vision Antique, Inspiration Chretienne and the Saône and the Rhone, with which Valadon has been associated.[78]

Valadon never forgot the details of her first assignment: "[In Sacred Grove] not only did I model for the women, but also for the young men...."[79] She claimed to have sat for the composition's fifteen figures, including those of the two young boys seen at the lower right: "Look at the adolescent picking a branch off the tree," she said to Tabarant in front of the photograph of the painting, "He has my hands and my legs."[80] Although she cannot be specifically recognized in many of the figures of the Sacred Grove, there is no doubt that she posed for the sketch of Femme assise de profil à gauche,[81] a study for the muse Malpomene, or Tragedia, seen at the

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[78]Wattenmaker, 108.

[79]Tabarant, 627.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Black pencil study, 0.277 cm by 0.201 cm, Marguerite Boucher, n. 104. Catalogue des dessins et peintures de Puvis de Chavannes, Marguerite Boucher, Palais des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Paris, Musée du Petit Palais 1979.

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far left of the composition, whose likeness to Valadon has been acknowledged.[82] Her features are also those of the flying muse in a sketch located in Baltimore and a similar study in the Art Museum of Princeton University.[83] It is unquestionably Valadon's image that confronts us in several works related to the Bois Sacré in particular in the Saône.[84] There is a definite resemblance between the figure of Au Clair de la Lune and that of the muse Malpomène in the Bois Sacré for which Valadon posed.[85] Furthermore, Wattenmaker is convinced that Valadon sat for the Allegorie de la Sorbonne as late as 1889.[86]

In addition to his role as patron and lover, Puvis unknowingly performed another function in Valadon's life--that of art teacher. Valadon indicated how "he loved to talk,"[87] and assuredly the young girl loved to hear "his deep low voice."[88] Listening to Puvis must have been as much a part of her "live" education as watching his working techniques when she modeled for him. At this time, he was undoubtedly the best known artist among her patrons, and since she had no mentor to guide her artistic endeavors, the muralist assumed

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[82]Ibid., 88.

[83]Ibid.

[84]La Saône, Musée Saint-Pierre, Lyon.

[85]Au Clair de la Lune, 1885, oil on canvas, 17 1/2 cm by 14 cm, Wattenmaker, No. 26.

[86]Allegorie de la Sorbonne, 1889, Wattenmaker, Nos. 103 & 105.

[87]Deroyer, 209.

[88]Ibid.

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a major influence on her early works. The memories of Sacred Grove and other murals lingered for many years in her paintings, eventually to fade out of her mature period.

Direct references to some of Puvis' representations and concepts are particularly noticeable in works she did between 1903 and 1914. As Valadon's self-assurance and artistic skills increased, only the tapestry-like flatness of some of her compositions could be linked to Puvis' stylistic idiom.[89]

Although Valadon started to work with oils around 1892, she did so sparingly and awkwardly. By 1909, when Utter encouraged her to persevere in this medium, she had painted less than twenty-five canvasses, several of which reveal the muralist's strong influence.

The Moon and the Sun or The Brunette and the Blonde (fig. 32) is Valadon's first attempt at depicting two nudes in an outdoor setting.[90] A dark-haired woman is seated on the grass of a shaded clearing while her standing blond companion playfully attempts to crown her with a garland of flowers. The figures' solid forms are too realistically rendered to be linked to those of Puvis' elegant nymphs, and their monumental size overpowers the composition. But it is Puvis' peaceful evocations of Antiquity that Valadon recreates as the blond girl teases her friend with her wreath. A sense of archaism prevails, perhaps triggered by the stiffness of the figures awkwardly planted in an ill-defined landscape. But if Moon and the

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[89]See Alfred Werner, "Unknown Valadon," Arts, Vol 30, No. 8 (May 1956).

[90]The location has been identified by Barrez as Luna Park, a popular amusement park in Paris.

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Sun lacks the tastefulness that graces Puvis' compositions, it nevertheless is endowed with the strength and character that soon were to become Valadon's trademarks.

On the other hand, the genuine classicism of Adam and Eve (fig. 33) with its simplified drawing and the figures' harmonious proportions successfully recalls the qualities of Puvis' harmonious murals. Adam and Eve offered Valadon a first--and last--opportunity to paint a biblical scene. What dominates this painting is Puvis' mood of serenity as well as an evocation of his symmetrical arrangements and lyrical lines. It is the older artist's theme of fruit-picking that inspired the image of Adam and Eve reaching together for the apple. The couple's gesture and the decorative quality of the tree could originate from his Inter artes et naturam.[91] Although the work recalls the background of Gauguin's Where Do We Come From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?,[92] it is from Puvis that Valadon borrowed the well-balanced design, the frontality and symmetry of the figures, the nudes' classical proportions, and the rigorous purity of the lines.

Valadon also remembered Puvis in such sizable paintings as Games (fig. 34), Pastoral Scene, and Joy of Living (fig. 35). These outdoor scenes are treated in a spirit similar to that of Adam and Eve, although the nude figures playing in the landscape are not handled with the same ease. If Valadon still aimed for a stable classical composition, she did not attain the flowing frieze-like

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[91] Puvis de Chavannes, Inter artes et naturam. 1890, Musée de Rouen.

[92] See Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 30-32.

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lyricism of Puvis' large works.

Casting of the Net (fig. 36) offers a vision of idealized nature and mankind that echoes Puvis' simplicity and grandeur. Three monumental male figures share the surface of a harmonious composition where lines and colors are equally balanced. Valadon dealt solely with the male nude, a subject at the time off limits to female artists, but she reverted to academic traditions and offered an idealized vision of man in nature, as did Puvis in several of his murals. André Utter, who became Valadon's husband the same year, modeled for all three fishermen. However, unlike Puvis, Valadon did not attach a symbolic meaning to a work that stands as a joyous and sensual testimony of love to her beautiful young mate. Neither is the colorful background of mountains and sea a mythical evocation, but a realistic landscape painted in situ near Corte in Corsica, where the trio was vacationing. On the other hand, the figures retain a two-dimensionality and flatness that links them to those of Puvis' murals. Indeed, another painting, Le pecheur à l'epervier[93] seen at the Salon d'Automne 1912 retrospective, inspired Valadon.

It is interesting to note that the few historical or allegorical themes undertaken by Valadon were stripped of the moralizing and allegorical connotations always present in Puvis' works. Although her early paintings contain unmistakable references to some of his works, she only emulated his visual language, discarding the older artist's intellectualized and sometimes pompous message. Neither was she seduced, as he was, by physical beauty. When she borrowed

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[93]Bazille, Le pêcheur à l'épervier, 1888, oil on canvas, 54 1/4 x 34 2/8".

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his figures' simplified plastic forms, she rejected their classic perfection. Valadon's women are earthy, their heavy and solid forms exuding a sensuality and a strength foreign to Puvis' ethereal goddesses. For the latter's serene but innocuous settings she substituted richly decorated ones. Yet, since her massive females often take up most of the canvas' surface, little room is left for the background.

If Puvis' thematic and stylistic influence ultimately faded from Valadon's art, occasionally a subtle reference to his art finds its way into some of her later paintings. In Still Life with Violin,[94] the artist incorporated on the background wall a fresco-like part of Casting of the Net. On the lower left side of the segment, a fisherman's leg seems to step over a Chinese vase. The larger fragment of the second man's figure is visible, and it is on his chest that Valadon elected to inscribe her signature and the date of the painting. Could this reference to a work so reminiscent of Puvis' classicism be seen as a covert homage to the muralist of whom she stood in such awe?

In 1894 Valadon showed Puvis some drawings she was hoping to send to the forthcoming Salon de la Société National des Beaux-Arts. She sought his help since three years earlier the older painter had been elected president of this newly-created salon.[95] Puvis

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[94]Still Life with Violin, 1922, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

[95]The Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts was created in 1889, after a disagreement among the members of the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français. Its first president was Meissonier, succeeded by Puvis de Chavannes in 1891. The Salon was sometimes referred to as the Salon du Champs de Mars, or simply La Nationale after 1900, when it was held in the Grand Palais.

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allegedly was indignant: "You are a model, not an artist!"[96] Indeed, this story might have been fabricated, but it would seem natural for Valadon to expect the support of a former patron and lover. Ultimately it was the sculptor Bartholomé who wrote a kind letter of recommendation on her behalf to Paul Helleu, an influential member of the Nationale's jury.

It must have been a serious disappointment to Valadon not to be accepted as a fellow artist by Puvis. By 1894, she had already been working seriously on her art for over a decade, and her professionalism was acknowledged by Zandomeneghi, Bartholomé, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Although the approbation of Puvis, whom she so much admired, would have been very meaningful, she never expressed any resentment toward him, and for the rest of her life retained her admiration for him. Shortly before her death, Valadon, reminiscing about her times with the muralist, still confessed, "I was so proud to stand by his side...."[97]

As a rule, it seems that other than Zandomeneghi and Toulouse-Lautrec, none of the artists for whom Valadon modeled were aware of her talent or even, perhaps, willing to accept it. Pierre Auguste Renoir was among them.

During the summer or fall of 1882[98] Puvis de Chavannes introduced Valadon to Renoir, with whom he was on excellent terms. The latter was planning to start three large-size compositions

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[96]Fabris, 11.

[97]Deroyer, 209.

[98]Wattenmaker, 107.

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called Dance(s), and he asked Valadon to sit for the preparatory drawings.

As with most facts of Valadon's early life, the details, dates, and nature of her relationship with the Impressionist remain ambiguous, although the extensive research compiled for the 1985-86 Renoir exhibition rectified several inaccuracies.[99]

Renoir's art, from the early 1870's to 1900, is sometimes seen as growing out of Montmartre.[100] He rented several studios there but only kept them for a short time. He settled down when he married Aline Charigot and in 1890 moved with her and their son Pierre to 13 rue Girardon.

In 1873 Renoir had found in 39 rue Saint Georges a studio that he kept for ten years.[101] However, the street was far from the "Butte," and in the spring of 1875, with the help of his friend Pierre Franc Lamy,[102] he found an inexpensive atelier in 12 rue Cortot. It was at a short distance from the Moulin de la Galette that Renoir had already started to paint, and it was surrounded by a large abandoned garden.[103] There, sheltered from the curious glances of outsiders,

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[99]Renoir, Hayward Gallery, London January 30-April 21, 1985; Galerie du Grand Paris, January 5-February 2, 1985; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, October 9, 1985-January 5, 1986.

[100]Georges Slocombe, Rebels of Art: Manet to Matisse (New York: Robert Mc Bride, 1939), 139.

[101]Lethève, 54. The street is located a short distance from the Gare Saint Lazare.

[102]Lamy was a minor artist who, in the 1870's, belonged to Renoir's entourage, which included Forain, Georges Rivière, Emmanuel Chabrier and Pierre Lhote (White, 48).

[103]Renoir painted two versions of this garden: Nini in the Garden, 1875-1876, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Annenberg Collection; The Garden 12

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he spent long hours swiftly working on several canvasses at the same time.[104]

Valadon retained a vivid recollection of Renoir's appearance when she first met him: "(He) was very lively, with a lean face already quite wrinkled...his eyes were of a piercing blue with tiny pupils that did not dilate."[105]

The magnitude of the work she did for the Impressionist, as well as the locations where she sat, left vivid memories: "I cannot tell you how often I posed for him [Renoir]," Valadon confided nostalgically to Tabarant.

> He painted my face many, many times in the atelier of the rue Saint Georges and of the rue d'Orchampt. I also modeled, in the garden of the rue de la Barre[106] and in the studio of the Boulevard de Clichy,[107] for several nudes and particularly for one of the Bathers.[108]

Unfortunately, only a few details of Valadon's relationship with Renoir are as precise as these recollections. There are several

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rue Cortot, 1876, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh. The building 12 rue Cortot and its garden now house the Musée de Montmartre.

[104]Quoted by Georges Slocombe, 134. In 1909 Valadon moved to the same building with her son, mother, and André Utter.

[105]Gustave Coquiot, Renoir (Paris: A. Albin, 1925), 97.

[106]Rue de la Barre was also called rue du Chevalier de la Barre; the studio that Renoir rented there, after 1892, had a large garden bordered by thick lilac bushes (Barrez, 66).

[107]Renoir rented the 11 Boulevard de Clichy studio in 1885. See Renoir, 388. It is unlikely that Valadon posed there. The same mistake is made by Coquiot, 95, and by Storm, 92.

[108]Tabarant, 627.

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versions of their first meeting, most of them to be discarded. The Impressionist accidentally encountering at the Moulin de la Galette "a lovely dark-haired girl (?) with slanting eyes" whom he asked on the spot to pose,[109] is a romantic but unlikely tale, whereas Valadon being recruited by the artist at the Models Market appears more plausible.[110]

Valadon's own story differed: "I met Renoir in rue Saint Georges studio, although I never modeled there. I was introduced to him by one of his models... a girl called Nini Gerard."[111] But there is little doubt that it was Puvis who introduced his model to his friend in 1882.[112] The latter was planning to undertake three new compositions representing dancing couples. In the Moulin de la Galette and Luncheon of the Boating Party[113] Renoir had already started to illustrate working-class pastimes in the country and suburbs near Paris; the new works were to deal with a similar theme.[114]

Danse à Bougival (detail) (fig. 37), Danse à la ville (fig. 38) and Danse à la campagne (fig. 39) were painted in a studio that

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[109]Coughlan, pp. 21-22; Philippe Jullian, Montmartre, New York, 1967, 61.

[110]Polnay, 31.

[111]Coquiot, 95.

[112]As related by François Daulte, Auguste Renoir: catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint, Lausanne, 1971, 420; Crespelle, 54; Monneret, I, 135; Warnod, 3; Wattenmaker, 108.

[113]Moulin de la Galette, 1876, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Luncheon of the Boating Party, 1881, Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

[114]Renoir, 178.

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Renoir rented at 12 rue Rostigan.[115] Although done simultaneously, only Danse à la ville and Danse à la campagne show similar dimensions and might have been conceived as a pair.

The works were shown at Durand-Ruel in April 1883,[116] and it is thought that Valadon originally posed for the female dancers in the three compositions. But when Aline Charigot allegedly caught her in Renoir's arms, she demanded and succeeded in having Valadon's image erased from the Danse à la campagne and replaced with her own.[117] Paul Lhote, the painter's close friend and one of his frequent models, sat for the male partner in the three paintings.[118]

Danse à Bougival and the Danse à la campagne have often been mistaken for each other, an error caused by the similarity of their titles and misleading entries in Durand-Ruel's ledgers. In 1886, both paintings were written in the ledgers as Valse à la campagne, a title transformed in 1891 into Danse à la campagne.[119]

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[115]12 rue de Rostigan was later known as the Bateau Lavoir; Valadon's having modeled there is confirmed by Paul Lesourd, Montmartre (Paris, 1875), 274.

[116]Renoir, 218.

[117]Barrez, 1; Warnod, pp. 36-37; Paul Yaki, Montmartre, Terre des Artistes (Paris, 1947), 37.

[118]Paul Lhote was a merchant marine officer and an amateur painter.

[119]When the Danse à la campagne was first shown at Durand Ruel in April 1883, it was simply called Dancers (Bougival). To add to the confusion, Danse à la campagne was written up in Durand Ruel's records as Danse à Chatou. Danse à la Bougival was listed in the inventory as Danse à la campagne. In 1886 both paintings were entered in the ledgers as Valse à la campagne, a title transformed in 1891 into Danse à la campagne. The misleading files caused Valadon to be identified as sitter for Danse à la campagne. Renoir, 216-218; White, 127; Pierre Courthion, Montmartre (Genève: Skira, 1956); Tabarant, 627; Barrez, 61.

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At first glance it is difficult to identify the three female figures portrayed in the Dance(s). However, closer examination reveals that in the Danse à Bougival, Valadon's pointed face and slanted eyes offer quite a contrast to the softer rounded features of Aline Charigot in the Danse à la campagne. Only Valadon's profile appears in the Danse à la ville, but her body looks more slender and elegant than Aline's voluminous form and her delicate extremities are far more patrician than those of Renior's future wife. Valadon was very proud of her tiny hands and bragged that Renoir had to go to a shop in rue d'Amsterdam to place a special order for the long white gloves she wore in the Danse à la ville.[120]

Valadon has been named as the sitter for some other works done in the 1880's by Renoir. Among them are Young Woman Standing[121] and Girl Braiding Her Hair (fig. 40), an identification confirmed by Valadon herself: "That was me...I had to put some pomade on my hair."[122] She also posed for Woman With a Fan[123] and Girl Fixing Her Hair[124] (fig. 41), and claimed to have been one of the models for The Bathers (fig. 42), a work that took Renoir three years

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[120]Coquiot, 56.

[121]See John Rewald, Renoir's Drawings (New York and London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1958), 1947. No. 16: Young Woman Standing, 1880, crayon drawing. This dating is questionable since it is established that Valadon first modeled for Renoir in 1882, as stated in Renoir, 218.

[122] Coquiot, 74.

[123]Renoir, Woman with a Fan, 1886, 22 by 18", Barnes Collection, White, 158.

[124]White, 158; also Renoir No. 74, 242.

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to achieve.[125] The three women's poses are inspired by François Girardon's Nymphs Bathing, a relief located in Chateau de Versailles' Allée des Maronniers,[126] and Valadon said she posed for the dark-haired girl in the center.

Valadon was not always an anonymous sitter for Renoir, who did a Portrait of Suzanne Valadon,[127] unconvincingly dated 1880 by Vollard and 1883 by Daulte.[128]

Valadon told Coquiot: "Renoir adored women's hats and he made me wear them all the time,"[129] but in no painting other than the Danse(s) and Young Woman Standing can we admire Valadon wearing one of these chapeaux that the Impressionist "bought her all the time at the milliner."[130] In Renoir's oeuvre, what mostly confronts us now are visions of Valadon's glorious nudity.

There is no doubt that the young model carried on an affair with Renoir.[131] "He fell in love with me!"[132] she bragged about the latter, who by 1883 was already living with Aline Charigot. As she

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[125]Storm, 7; Tabarant, 627.

[126]Wattenmaker, 108.

[127]Renoir, Portrait de Suzanne Valadon, Daulte, n. 444. 0.41m by 0.32m, signed right: "Renoir."

[128]Ambroise Vollard, Auguste Renoir (Paris: Crès, 1920, n. 27); Daulte p. 444.

[129]Coquiot, 94.

[130]Ibid, 97.

[131]Storm, 70; Warnod, 7; Wattenmaker, 101.

[132]Henri Perruchot, La vie de Renoir (Paris: Hachette, 1964), 190.

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did throughout her life, Valadon manufactured a few stories for the benefit of Renoir, who afterwards related some of them to his son Jean. The latter described Suzanne as "a very-well brought-up girl who had to model because her family had been bankrupted for some unknown reason."[133] But it seems that Valadon's social status mattered little to Renoir, to whom she presented an ideal of feminine beauty. "At this time, my hair was very blond," she told Coquiot, "my eyebrows and lashes quite dark and my eyes as blue as Sèvres porcelain."[134] She also had pearly skin that "caught the light," a diminutive but curvaceous figure and the charm and sauciness of a typical titi parisien.[135]

Valadon continued to pose for Renoir until 1887, in spite of some embarrassing incidents caused by Aline Charigot's jealousy. In 1883, the latter moved in with Renoir, to whom she bore a son the following year. By this time the Impressionist's society portraits had been favorably received in the Salon.[136] He was forty-two when Valadon met him and she must have seen him as a symbol of success and a father image, a dual role already assumed by Puvis de Chavannes. Furthermore, Renoir came from the Limousin countryside

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[133]Jean Renoir, 132. "Une jeune fille bien élevée."

[134]Coquiot, 96. "J'avais alors des cheveux très blonds dorés...mes sourcils et mes cils très noirs, mes yeux d'un bleu de Sèvres."

[135]Vernacular for a young girl or boy whose impertinent wit illustrates the Parisian easy repartee.

[136]Among these works are: Actress Jeanne Samary, 1878; Bust Portraits of Jeanne Samary, 1877, Pushkin Museum, Moscow; Madame Charpentier and Her Children, 1878, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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where Suzanne was born, and they shared a complicity bred by a common background.

Before attempting to trace Renoir's influence on Valadon's art, one should indicate that the young woman herself became, to some extent, a factor in Puvis' indirect influence on the Impressionist's style in the mid-1880s. Wattenmaker examined the extent of the older artist's effect on Renoir and emphasized the role that their model played in it.[137] Renoir had an inquisitive nature and knowing that Valadon also shared Puvis' intimacy he must have felt compelled him to question her and discuss the muralist's approach to painting.[138] He could have acquired, via "Maria," a knowledge of Puvis' preparatory drawings that later surfaced in several of his own detailed studies.[139]

Although Girardon's Nymphs Bathing remains the main iconographic inspiration for Renoir's The Bathers, another source for the fresco-like disposition and pictorial space of this composition can be found in Sacred Wood. Valadon had posed for it, and it was exhibited at the 1884 Salon. At this time, Renoir was entering his "dry period" and had started on the preparatory drawings for The Bathers. He respected the talent of the muralist, whose adherence to classical tradition attracted him. This admiration,[140] as well as

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[137]For a detailed analysis of Puvis' influence on Renoir and Valadon's part in it, see Wattenmaker, pp. 105-108.

[138]Wattenmaker, 108.

[139]Ibid, 107.

[140]In 1889, Renoir organized a banquet in Puvis' honor with Monet's help.

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his own curious temperament, led him to further investigate the issues of a more conventionally-inspired style. In The Bathers, Renoir tried to capture the fresco-like quality of Puvis' oil painting, unequivocally admitting to this debt by subtitling his work Attempt at Decorative Panel.[141]

Indeed, several other influences coexist within Renoir's art of the 1880s, and it might be problematic to overemphasize Valadon's indirect part in it. Nevertheless, her twice-removed effect on his stylistic evolution stands as an important, although unplanned, factor.

Unquestionably, Renoir's investigations into Puvis' techniques also benefited Valadon and enabled her to better define her own artistic problems and aims. As she did with Puvis, she carefully observed Renoir's working methods:

> Before he started to paint, he sketched, real fast, not wasting too much time. Immediately he felt at ease with his colors. At the time, he used very finely and tightly grained canvasses.[142]

If it is easy to examine the impact Puvis de Chavannes made on Valadon's early works, Renoir's influence on her art is considerably less noticeable and remains limited to a few stylistic areas. She occasionally appropriated from him, without much success, some of the figures' gestures and positions. But what mostly interested Valadon was Renoir's technical skill.

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[141] For a detailed analysis of Puvis' influence on Renoir and Valadon's part in it, see Wattenmaker, pp. 105-108.

[142] Coquiot, 96.

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When Valadon turned to oils in 1892, the hues on her first canvasses appear indecisive and blurred.[143] They seem closer to those used for pastels, a medium in which she first experimented with color.

"When I started to do serious painting, it was the Impressionists' palette that enchanted me," explained Valadon later.[144] What she awkwardly qualified as "serious" could more fittingly be called "professional" and concerns the works she started to do under Utter's guidance in 1909. It was the time when she became attracted to the Impressionists' bright palette and decided to use their pure colors, a crucial change triggered by one of Renoir's principles.[145] Neither Black nor White (fig. 43), the title Valadon gave to a 1909 oil,[146] allegedly stands as a quote from Renoir, who contended that neither pure black nor white could be found in nature. Until then, Valadon had always used black outlines for which, in Neither Black nor White, she substituted colored ones, a technique she was to continue for the rest of her life.

Also remembering the china-like texture of the figure for which she posed in The Bathers, Valadon gave a gleaming smoothness to the fishermen's bodies in Casting of the Net. As the

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[143] See Young Girl Crocheting, c. 1892, P4; Eric Satie Portrait, 1893; Nudes at Their Toilette, 1908.

[144] Valadon ou l'Absolu.

[145] See Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 28. By 1909 Valadon was no longer in contact with Renoir, but she undoubtedly remembered this advice given at an earlier time.

[146] Also called Two Figures or After the Bath, 1909, oil on cardboard, 10 1/2 x 32 1/4", Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC, Paris.

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Impressionist often did in his outdoor scenes, she accentuated the contrast between glossy flesh and the shimmering hues of a bright landscape.[147]

At the time Renoir met Valadon, drawing had begun to become of cardinal importance to him. His studies reveal an increasing degree of intensity and linear research tempered by a keen sensitivity. The young woman modeled for several of these works and soon became aware of the flexibility and resourcefulness of conté crayon, one of the Renoir's favorite tools. She was to utilize this medium for some of her most exquisite drawings that are strongly influenced by Renoir's own works.

Utrillo at the Age of Two (fig. 44) was done the same year as Renoir's Pierre Renoir as a Child (fig. 45). In this first portrait of her son Valadon, perhaps moved by the tenderness Renoir showed toward his own, displayed a lighthandedness that unveils an unsuspected vulnerability. The use of the red chalk's blurry contours contributes to an overall impression of fragile delicacy also found in the Impressionist's Standing Woman with a Hoe (fig. 46). Valadon took advantage of the softness of the conté crayon to suggest in Nude Girl in a Tub (fig. 47) the texture of nearby objects and materials. The treatment of the model's body particularly evokes Renoir's sensual handling of women's flesh.[148]

Portrait of the Poetess Adrien Farge (fig. 48) remains one of the artist's most sensitive works. Perhaps inspired by Renoir's

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[147]See Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 40.

[148]Ibid., 83, No. 125.

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masterly handling of The Lovers (fig. 49), Valadon has played with the delicate gentleness of the red chalk to soften the underlining dry linearity of the composition.

When Valadon started large compositions staging nude men and women playing outdoors, she recalled the poses she assumed for Renoir for similar scenes. Although her bathers' images suggest, at times, sources as eclectic as Courbet, Gauguin, and Matisse, some of the nudes populating her landscapes evoke those painted by Renoir. Among them are variations on the theme of three women in a clearing. Bathers in a Landscape,[149] a pastel transposed from the etching Nude Women Under a Tree,[150] was followed by Three Nudes in the Country.[151] These works were used as preparatory studies for Joy of Living (fig. 36), an ambitious interpretation of the Bath of Venus, a motif favored by Renoir.

In Pastoral Scene (fig. 50), Valadon extended the realm of her previously restricted outdoor settings by opening a large vista of rolling hills into which she integrated human figures. In the foreground of the painting, a reclining female figure precariously stretches her leg. Her pose is similar to that of Valadon in Renoir's Bather (fig. 42), itself inspired by Girardon. However, the figure in Pastoral Scene looks artificial and stilted, as if Valadon had been overwhelmed by the realization that this very image had already been rendered by two great artists whose skills she could not hope

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[149] Bathers in a Landscape, 1904, pastel on paper, 21 3/4 x 18 1/8".

[150] Nude Women Under a Tree, 1904, soft-ground etching, 9 x 9 1/2".

[151] Three Nudes in the Country, 1909, oil on cardboard, 24 x 19 6/8".

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to match.

If Valadon did not hesitate to borrow some of the Renoir's representations, she unequivocally rejected his concept of women as erotic offerings to male viewers. Her nudes might repeat the poses and gestures of Renoir's sitters, but never their function. They possess the healthy sensuality that graces some of Courbet's and Manet's models and they resist any hint of passive acceptance. They are the hunters, not the prey. In no work is the state of mind of her women--as well as her own-- better expressed than in Joy of Living, in which a young voyeur observes a group of bathers. Each of the bathers is shown in a different position, but the women are linked by a common factor: their indifference to the male glance. This indifference, shared by Valadon herself, is magnificently embodied by the model whose pose stems from Courbet's Bathers (fig. 51). Standing apart from the group, she offers the sight of her solid back to the viewers. It is Valadon the artist and Valadon the woman who defiantly turns her own back to contemporary art restrictions, social conventions, and female servitude.

It has been written that Renoir accidentally caught Valadon drawing and, awed by her gift, exclaimed admiringly: "Ah, you too! ...and you hide this talent!"[152] Even if there is some truth to this tale, the Impressionist did nothing to encourage the young woman in further developing her artistic abilities. Valadon did not resent him for failing to support her vocation although she allegedly thought that Renoir envied her instinctive draftsmanship.[153] However, she

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[152]Utter, How to Become a Painter.

[153]Storm, 72.

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carried a grudge against him for having taken Aline Charigot's side in the Dance in the Country quarrel. She rarely spoke of him later on, but when she did, she called him: "a tomato soup painter."[154] Sometimes she added a further comment: "A fine artist, all brushes and no heart!"[155]

This "fine artist" has been a contender "among others"[156] for the title of father of Maurice Utrillo. However, his paternity cannot be seriously considered. Had Renoir sired Maurice, why not acknowledge him as he did sixteen months later for Charigot's son Pierre?

When Valadon's own child was born on December 26, 1883, his father's name was listed in the town hall registry as "unknown," and has remained so for over a century.

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[154]Jullian, 61.

[155]Storm, 71.

[156]Renoir, 216.

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CHAPTER 4

UTRILLO'S FATHER

> Les jeunes filles de Montmartre qui posaient pour Renoir n'etaient pas toutes des modèles de vertue. Les moeurs du quartier etaient loin d'être sévères, et les gosses nés de pères inconnus y pullulaint.[1]

Among the fatherless children of Montmartre was Maurice Valadon (Utrillo) who was born at 1 P.M. on December 26, 1883. He was illegitimate, as was his mother. The mystery surrounding his father's identity presents one of the greatest problems to confront Valadon's historians. Several theories have been ventured but most of them originate from wild guesses or plain gossip aggravated by "sensational" reports from the press.

Valadon gave birth to her son in the squalid one-room flat that she shared with her mother at 3 rue du Poteau. The street was located on the edge of Boulevard de Clignancourt in a no-man's land called the "Maquis"[2] on the underdeveloped northern side of Montmartre, far from the heart of the Butte. The infant was registered at the 18th arrondissement Town Hall as "born to Marie Clementine Valadon and unknown father,"[3] and therefore received

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[1] Jean Renoir, Renoir (Paris: Hachette, 1962), 198.

[2] The maquis, or "zone," was an area near the foot of the Hill, still covered with low houses and country gardens. It had been described in Zola's novels and illustrated by Steinlen. See Nicole Dupré, La Butte Montmartre (Rennes, 1981), 20.

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the name of Valadon, after his mother.[4] He was not christened in a Catholic church, since Valadon was anti-clerical.

Eight years later, a Catalan journalist, Miquel Utrillo i Melius,[5] formally acknowledged Maurice as his son in a notarized document recorded at rue Drouot in the 9th arrondissement Town Hall.[6]

> Registered on 1/27/1891, the legitimate acknowledgment of Maurice, male, born on 12/26/1883, originally recorded on 12/29/1883 in the eighteenth arrondissement Town Hall as son of Marie Clementine Valadon and unknown father. Witnessed by me, Charles Pierre August Bernard, mayor assistant and civil servant in the ninth arrondissement of Paris Town Hall, and according to the testimony of Miquel Utrillo, twenty-eight years old, journalist, residing at 57 Boulevard de Clichy, who acknowledged as his son the so called Maurice. Done in the presence of Charles Mahaut, forty-four years old, waiter, living at 5bis Impasse Rodier, Paris, and of Charles Dunion, forty-four years old, waiter, living at 63 rue Saint Rustique, Paris, who signed with the declarer and myself. Paris, 4/8/1891. The Mayor.[7]

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[3]Registration records, 8 rue Drouot, Paris, 18th arrondissement Town Hall, Paris.

[4]A 1792 law required all newborns to be inscribed in the "registre de l'etat civil." This procedure replaced the registration used during the Ancien Regime, of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths kept in local church records by members of the clergy. Under the new Republic, newborns were to be reported to their arrondissement. Shortly afterwards, a doctor came to examine the infant and issued a medical certificate that had to be returned, within the next three days, to the Town Hall by the father accompanied by two witnesses. A birth certificate was then issued. The same lengthy procedure had to be followed for any illegitimate child who had to be identified by one of his parents. Maxime du Camp, Paris, ses origines, ses fonctions et sa vie, 3rd edition (Paris: Hachette, 1875), 81.

[5]Sometimes written as Utrillo i Moulin.

[6]According to the Code Penal Civil, article 182, any child born illegitimately could, at any age, be legally acknowledged by his father. du Camp, 83.

[7]"L'an mil huit cent quatre-vingt- onze, le vingt-sept janvier, acte de reconnaissance de Maurice, du sexe masculin, né le vingt-six décembre mil huit cent

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This belated legitimization, destined to give Maurice's birth a seal of bourgeois respectability, did not, unfortunately, solve the question of a problematic paternity, since Miquel Utrillo's gesture has often been regarded as a chivalrous deed[8] rather than a late but truthful recognition.

Since the age of fifteen--or probably earlier--Valadon had led a sexually uninhibited life. As her popularity as a model testified, she was an extremely desirable young woman whose attraction to men was enhanced by an unmistakable sex appeal. There is no doubt that she started at an early age to reveal an unusual appetite for physical pleasures, which she proceeded to fulfill to the best of her capacities. She was indeed fortunate to live in "fin du siècle" Montmartre since

> no group so clearly broke with the bourgeois world imperatives and immersed itself in amusement, public or private, as did the Bohemian artists and writers of late nineteenth century Montmartre.... They were not just an avant garde in arts and literature, but an avant garde in Belle Epoque pleasures.[9]

The Butte offered the quintessential location for an adolescent like Valadon, whose promiscuity would have been

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quatre-vingt-trois, et inscrit le vingt-neuf suivant en la dix-huitième arrondisement mairie comme fils de Marie Valadon et de père non dénommé.

Dressé par nous, Charles-Paul-Auguste Bernard, adjoint au Maire, officier de l'état civil du neuvième arrondissement de Paris, sur la déclaration faite par Michel Utrillo âgé de vingt-huit ans, journaliste, boulevard de Clichy 57, qui reconnaît pour son fils le susdit Maurice.

En présence de Charles Mahaut, âgé de quarante-quatre ans, employé, demeurant à Paris Impasse Rodier 5bis et de Félix Dunion, âgé de quarante-quatre ans, garçon de restaurant, demeurant à Paris, rue Saint-Rustique no 63 qui ont signé avec le déclarant et nous-même après lecture. Paris, le 8 avril 1891. Le Maire."

[8]Beachboard, 34; Coughlan, 34; Yaki, 148.

[9]Rearick, 46.

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frowned upon in any other part of the city. Renoir's "none too virtuous" models attested to the moral laissez faire and the absolute sexual freedom enjoyed by working women. One found in the community an unquestioned acceptance of the neighborhood enfants naturels. These had to be raised by a grandparent, since their mothers had to work as milliners, dressmakers, florists, or at "whatever it was they did...," as tactfully worded by Jean Renoir.[10] For a single girl like Valadon to leave her child to her mother's care while she went to work was a frequent situation in Montmartre. It was Madeleine Coulaud who became the boy's true mother as Suzanne left home to earn the family's living during the day and in the evenings to enjoy herself in the numerous inexpensive night spots that flourished on the Butte.

It might have been at the Lapin Agile, Chat Noir, or Mirliton[11] that Valadon met Adrian Boissy, one of Maurice's alleged fathers. Boissy was a native of Montmartre who worked in local establishments as a part-time singer or chansonnier and as a full-time womanizer. It was rumored that he was occasionally employed as a clerk by the insurance company l'Abeille[12] and was also an amateur painter judged by Tabarant as "a detestable artist."[13] Were

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[10]"Quand les mères travaillaient, ou ...'autre chose!'" Jean Renoir, 199.

[11]Poinay, 38; André Warnod, Ceux de la Butte (Paris: Juillard, 1947), 212; Francis Carco, Utrillo, Paris, 1928, 12.

[12]Crespelle, 12; Tabarant, 12, wrote that Boissy worked in a brokerage firm, Bel & Sainbenat, rue Bourdaloue, Paris.

[13]Tabarant, 7.

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he Maurice's father, as it was often thought, his only legacy would have been an hereditary alcoholism.[14]

A number of writers have believed in Boissy's paternity but the most forceful of his advocates was Valadon's niece, Maria Coca, who wrote to Doctor Le Masle in 1959:

> I can only tell you that according to my aunt and my husband, poor Maurice is the son of the notorious Boissy. When the child was born, Boissy left both Paris and my aunt, who tried everything to locate him.[15]

Valadon never mentioned this possibility to anyone save, allegedly, her son. The latter claimed that, as he was walking one day on the rue Girardon with his mother, she pointed to Boissy who was standing on the opposite sidewalk and informed Maurice that the man was his father.[16] On the eve of Maurice's birth, Boissy was reported to have bought a round of drinks at Lapin Agile to celebrate the event.[17] Boissy's paternity rallied several advocates[18] and it was even mentioned that he sired Valadon a second son, who died in infancy.

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[14]Yaki, 148.

[15]Marie Coca to Dr. Le Masle, Cète, 9/3/54, unpublished letter. Archives CNAC.

[16]Florent Fels, Roman de l'Art Vivent (Paris: Fayard, 1959), 79. It is difficult to give credence to Utrillo, who, since his youth, lived in a chronic state of alcoholism.

[17]Crespelle, 61-62.

[18]See Jacometti, 1947, 10; Tabarant, 1926, 162; Werner, 4; Yaki, 148. Robert Coughlan, Life, "The Dark Wine of Genius" (January 18, 1950), mentions another child.

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During the early part of 1883, Valadon had been simultaneously the mistress of Puvis, Renoir, Boissy, and Miquel Utrillo among others. Questioned about the identify of her son's father, she allegedly replied: "It is quite difficult to tell since I don't know myself,"[19] even wondering if "it could have been Puvis who was only sixty at the time."[20]

Puvis de Chavannes was an unlikely sire to Utrillo, although Lucie Valore, Maurice's wife, told the press in 1957 she was convinced that Puvis was her late husband's father. "Both men" she announced quite unconvincingly, "had the same face and skeptical character." (fig. 52, 53)[21] Valore swore she had seen a letter from Puvis' lawyer, who promised a 200-franc yearly pension to Utrillo during his lifetime. However, she failed to produce the alleged document.

A notarized record signed by Puvis and offering the same sum to Valadon[22] was allegedly discovered by André Utter, who claimed to have destroyed the document.[23] However, in an unpublished statement signed by René Puvis de Chavannes, the painter's grandnephew declared that neither Valadon nor Utrillo were mentioned in his uncle's will, and were Utrillo Puvis' son, "a man of

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[19]Warnod, 16; Banlin Lacroix, Appendix.

[20]Crespelle, 67.

[21]Time Magazine, "Within the Sacred Woods," (February 1, 1950), 54,

[22]Warnod, 1988, 30.

[23]Crespelle, 162.

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his class would not have failed to settle some funds for the future of his own child."[24]

Had Valadon been raising Puvis' son and receiving his financial help, she would have remained on good terms with the older man. The latter, regardless of his social and sexist prejudices, might have been inclined to help his child's mother when she tried to enter the Salon rather than bluntly rejecting her as he did.

Auguste Renoir seems equally unconvincing in the role of Maurice's father, although the 1983 Renoir catalog states that "Suzanne Valadon gave birth, in December 1883, to Maurice Utrillo, whose father, she sometimes said, could have been Renoir, among others."[25] His paternity, however, cannot be considered seriously since he neither acknowledged Maurice (as he did Charigot's illegitimate son Pierre) nor maintained any relationship with Valadon or Maurice.

Actually, it is most likely that Miquel Utrillo i Melius, the man who gave Maurice his name, was his actual father as it is suggested by other evidence.

Miquel Utrillo was born in Barcelona in February 1862 and was the scion of an aristocratic Catalan family that left Spain to escape the rigors of Isabella II's monarchy. His parents settled in Avignon as political émigrés but were able to return to Barcelona

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[24]René Puvis de Chavannes, unpublished letter, undated, Archives CNAC.

[25]Renoir, 218. Renoir was also named as Maurice's father by Coughlan, p. 88; Beachboard, 25.

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when their son was still a teenager. The young man began to study engineering there but he had to interrupt his education in 1880, when the family moved to Paris. Miquel at first tried to resume his engineering classes but gave them up in 1882 in the hope of pursuing a painter's career. Dazzled by the capital's glamorous life and particularly by the colorful Montmartre Bohemia, he rented a room in the Moulin de la Galette. It was in this popular dance hall that he met Valadon, with whom he had an affair.[26] The artist kept wonderful memories of their idyll and, fifty years later, still commented with enthusiasm on their life together. She told Miquel i Vidal, the Spaniard's legitimate son,

> With him (Miquel) I lived the best years of my life... At a time when no one cared for me, he encouraged me and gave me strength.... Together we led a life of artists and Bohemians.[27]

They remained lovers until Miquel had to leave Paris in 1883 and start to earn a living. He only returned to the city for the 1889 World's Fair, as a correspondent for the Barcelona Vanguard. At this time he resumed his relationship with Valadon and on January 27, 1891, he formally recognized Maurice as his son.

Many theories have been elaborated as to Miquel Utrillo's motives for this belated acknowledgment, the most obvious one being that Miquel was convinced that Maurice was his son.

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[26]Beachboard, 24; Carco, 28; Coughlan, Life, 33; Tabarant, 11, believed that they met at the Moulin de la Galette which rented a few rooms in the old Debray farm. Polnay, 65, thought they met at the Chat Noir.

[27]Catherine Banlin-Lacroix, Appendix, 14, in Fabris, 1981. This interview was published in 1945, by Miquel Utrillo i Vidal, Miquel's son.

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Indeed, there was a striking resemblance between the Utrillos. Paul Pètridés, Maurice's dealer, believed that this extraordinary physical likeness irrevocably established their kinship.[28] His opinion was based on portraits that Valadon did of the two men when they were approximately the same age. Among those are four profiles of the twenty-eight year-old Miquel, done in 1891 (fig. 54),[29] and three portraits of her son, dated 1910 and 1911 (fig. 55).[30] A 1925 drawing of an aging Maurice, whose sagging face bears the marks of his degeneration,[31] bears a resemblance to Miquel (fig. 56). The art historian Robert Rey stated that Maurice, as shown in Valadon's 1912 Portrait de famille (fig. 57), looked so much like Miquel that he had to be his son.[32] The Figaro Littéraire published an

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[28]Paul Pètridés, L'oeuvre complet de Suzanne Valadon, Paris, 1971, 17.

[29]Ibid.:
D5 Portrait de Miquel Utrillo fumant sa pipe, 1891, black pencil
D6 Portrait de Miquel Utrillo de profil, 1891, conté crayon
D7 Portrait de Miquel Utrillo de trois quart, 1891, conté crayon
D8 Portrait de Miquel Utrillo de profit, 1891, conté crayon.

[30]Ibid.:
D177 Etude pour portrait de famille, 1911, black pencil
D178 Portrait de Maurice Utrillo de profil, 1910, black pencil on paper (fig.2).
D179 Etude pour le portrait de famille (Utrillo), 1911, pen drawing.

[31]Ibid.:
D272 Portrait de Maurice Utrillo, c. 1925, drawing.

[32]As quoted by René Barotte, Les Arts, "La seule qui ait mis peintré au féminin" (March 23, 1967).

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article in 1971 entitled "Tel père, tel fils,"[33] stating that the relationship could not be denied, an opinion shared by many.[34]

It could be argued that the likeness might have been subconsciously emphasized by Valadon. Yet when the art dealer Berthe Weil saw Miquel's picture in the Barcelona Vanguard's obituary, she mistook it for Maurice's photograph. Confronting Valadon, she bluntly asked if the Spaniard was her son's father. Valadon, who was already aware of Miquel's death, acquiesced, but immediately threw the paper away.[35]

Several romanticized explanations have been offered for Utrillo's acknowledgment of Maurice. One of them stemmed from Miquel's gallant nature. It was thought that "the chivalrous Utrillo made this noble gesture spontaneously."[36] There are several alternate versions: As Valadon complained about ignoring whether Maurice's father was Degas or Renoir, Utrillo magnanimously exclaimed "I would be proud to sign my name to the work of such artists!"[37] There is, however, more tangible evidence as to Utrillo's paternity.

In April 1934, three months after Miquel Utrillo's death, his two legitimate sons journeyed to Paris to see Valadon, who asked

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[33]Figaro Littéraire, December 12, 1971, "Tel père, tel fils," signed "R.C."

[34]Yves Bonnat, Galerie des Arts, n. 50, 1960, 36; Crespelle, 64; Jullian, 189; Elsa Honig Fine, Woman and Art, From the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century (Montclair, New Jersey: Allanheld and Schram, 1978), 138.

[35]Beachboard, 26; Storm, pp. 99-100. Miquel died in Sitges in January 1934.

[36]Yaki, 148.

[37]Coughlan, Life, 33.

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her close friend Nora Kars to witness the meeting.[38] The young men had traveled to France to inform Valadon that under Spanish law any illegitimate child was entitled to a share of his father's estate, unless the claim was disavowed by the mother.[39] Valadon stated emphatically that Maurice had no right over Miquel Utrillo's properties and signed a document to that effect. However, a few moments later she produced a voluminous stack of letters and announced that she was going to read one of them aloud. But after painfully deciphering it for herself,[40] she threw it into the fireplace with the rest of the missives, cryptically exclaiming: "It's all over now!" Before Miquel's sons left, Valadon presented them with a series of drawings which included a portrait of their father.[41] Shortly afterward, André Utter painted Maurice's picture, emphasizing his dark Spanish features, presumably to acknowledge his stepson's origins (fig. 58).[42]

But it is an economic factor that speaks most eloquently in favor of Miquel's paternity. Until 1883, Valadon's only source of income had been her modeling. Undoubtedly, as her pregnancy advanced, her engagements became rarer,[43] and her working power

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[38]As told by Crespelle, 69; Storm, pp. 100-101; Beachboard, 25, dated the meeting in 1910.

[39]Storm, pp. 100-101.

[40]Valadon never became a fast reader or writer.

[41]Storm, pp. 100-101.

[42]Beachboard, 26.

[43]Storm, 66.

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still remained limited while she nursed the child. Yet, it was during this period that her mother abandoned her cleaning jobs to take complete care of her grandson.[44] Shortly after the child's birth, the family moved from a single-room lodging at 3 rue du Poteau to a three-room atelier in "Les Fusains,"[45] a house at 7 rue Tourlaque where Toulouse-Lautrec established his atelier three years later. The street was located in the heart of the Butte, near the Church of Saint Pierre and Saint Vincent Cemetery. Valadon's studio was on the ground floor across from Zandomeneghi's, who had helped her to find it. Her new rent was considerably higher than the previous one. Without any savings, how could she pay the flat's expenses and the additional cost of child rearing? She obviously had found an additional income, and since Miquel was the only person of means among her lovers, he had to be the source of her sudden wealth. Valadon must have convinced the journalist of his paternity, for he would not have helped to support a child who he did not believe was his.[46] As a true gentleman, he must have believed that he had to assume his financial responsibilities.

What were Valadon's own reasons for providing an official father to her son eight years after his birth?

This lengthy interval might have been necessitated by Miquel's absence from Paris, a most obvious explanation. However,

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[44]Beachboard, 25.

[45]Fusain: a charcoal pen used for drawing.

[46]Beachboard, 25; Storm, 67; Banlin Lacroix, Appendix, 14.

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other more complex factors might have been involved in her decision. Around 1891, she had begun an affair with Paul Mousis, a wealthy stockbroker.[47] The latter allegedly refused to wed the mother of an illegitimate child,[48] and the artist might have asked Utrillo to help her solve the problem However, Miquel's gesture did not accelerate the wedding plans, and Valadon did not become Madame Mousis for another five years.

Marie Coca, questioned on the circumstances of Maurice's recognition, explained them unconvincingly as a prank played on Mousis by her aunt, who was irritated by his bourgeois morality.[49] However, it seems unlikely that Valadon would have gone to such lengths to mock her future husband's conformity.

Since, at the time, Spanish law gave the father absolute authority over all of his children, even illegitimate ones, Valadon might initially have feared that Miquel would want to raise Maurice in Spain, away from her.[50] Eight years later, convinced that her son was to remain at her side, she might have hoped that his father's acknowledgment would bring into the child's troubled life an element of reassurance.

Maurice Utrillo never openly revealed his feelings about Miquel. He was six years old when the latter returned to Paris and

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[47]Andre Warnod, Utrillo, 216. Warnod thought that Valadon's affair with Mousis began in 1893.

[48]Marie Coca, Cète, March 9, 1959, to Dr. Le Masle, unpublished letter, Archives, CNAC. The Mousis family was religious and followed a strict moral code.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid; Bonnat, 20.

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he must have developed a strong affection for him. He had always lived in a household that functioned without a man, and Miquel could have stood as a strong father figure. It seems certain that Miquel himself saw his alleged son in more than a casual fashion. He even referred to the child in a letter to his mother, dated 12/3/1891, where he mentioned the "few lines that Maurice had addressed her." He added that Maurice was feeling good but "continued to be fragile, his mother being in an extremely delicate state of health."[51]

In 1957, Arts magazine published a long letter that had resurfaced mysteriously in 1955. Allegedly written by Maurice to offer his wishes for the new year, it was sent to the Spaniard from Pierrefitte, around January 1896. In it, Maurice assured the journalist that he still loved him, sent his kisses to his "petit papa," and signed: "Your son who wants to be with you."[52]

Maurice did not harbor such warm feelings toward his stepfather. Mousis, after his marriage to Valadon, attempted to treat Utrillo as his own son. He provided him with a weekly stipend and when the whole family to a new home in Pierrefitte, sent his stepson to a private school. But his efforts were wasted and the adolescent never returned his affection.

In April 1883, the time of her son's conception, Valadon might have been infatuated with Miquel Utrillo, but this period was for her one of intense sexual activity and she shared her bed with several other men. If she jested about not knowing herself who the child's

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[51]Banlin-Lacroix, 13.

[52]Arts, December 1957. Also quoted by Banlin-Lacroix, 14.

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father was, she stated no more than the truth. When she implied, as she did with the sons of Miquel, that the latter was Maurice's father, her assurance only stemmed from her heart. As Maurice grew up and came to bear a great resemblance to the Spaniard, she may have realized that Miquel was, after all, Maurice's biological father. When the Spaniard returned to Paris in 1889, he thought, at the time, that Maurice was his son.[53] But faced with his mistress' multiple amorous involvements, he might have harbored some doubts about his paternity since it took him two years to sign the recorded acknowledgment. Ultimately, he must have decided that Maurice's legal recognition was the proper commitment to make. This official deed was all that Valadon could obtain from Miquel. He had never considered marrying her, although he allegedly mentioned her existence to his mother.[54] Formally recognizing Maurice seemed to have fulfilled his moral obligation, and when he left Paris in 1893, he also left Suzanne Valadon forever. By then he knew that she was well on her way to a certain, if modest, success. She had become a popular model in Montmartre, and was seriously working on her art. With her son, her mother, and her eventual marriage to Mousis, she did not have to fear poverty or solitude anymore.

Marie Coca, who profoundly disliked Miquel Utrillo and his family, wrote (erroneously) that he "swiftly took the train back to Spain after he acknowledged Maurice."[55] Actually, Miquel did not

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[53] Banlin Lacroix, Appendix, 14.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Marie Coca to Doctor Le Masle, Cète, August 7, 1965, unpublished letter, Archives CNAC.

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leave the capital until 1893, and it seems that he never lost his interest in Suzanne and her son. The writer Francis Carco met Miquel during a trip to Barcelona and the two men spoke about Valadon. Utrillo left no doubt as to the intimacy he had shared with the artist and showed an unmistakable familiarity with her life.[56] He was the only person who could have given her address to his sons, asking them to get in touch with her after his death. However, according to Marie Coca, the two young men would never have appeared were it not for Maurice's newly-acquired fame.[57]

Valadon herself never lost track of Miquel Utrillo's whereabouts during his long absence from Paris. For the rest of her life, she kept a passport delivered to him by the Spanish Consulate of Hamburg in 1884. Until she met André Utter, Miquel stood as her favorite--although betrayed--lover, as well as her first true love. For the compulsive story-telling Valadon, to choose to remain silent about the role that the Spaniard played in her life testified to the strength of her attachment to him. It brings, as well, an additional proof of Miquel Utrillo i Molius' paternity.

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[56]Francis Carco, Montmartre vécu par Utrillo (Paris: Edition O. Pètridés, 1947), 69.

[57]Marie Coca, August 17, 1965. Archives, CNAC.

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CHAPTER 5

CHILDREN

> One should never put suffering in drawings, but all the same one has nothing without pain. Art [is here] to eternalize this life that we hate.
>
> Suzanne Valadon ou l'absolu

The suffering that Valadon hoped to withhold from her drawings could not be successfully erased from her art and dominates her images of children. The youths' sorrow and alienation, as well as their occasional deprivation, are the obsessive themes of her early works. For over three decades, she drew representations of small boys and girls. They look pensive, often clumsy and, most importantly, lonely. Eventually, they seem to become resigned to their solitude. It is assuredly the estrangement of the artist's own early years that surfaces in these stark portraits. Unable to suppress her past suffering, Valadon "eternalized" it with a powerful graphic eloquence.

It was five drawings dealing with the theme of childhood that Valadon chose to exhibit at the 1894 Salon d'Exposition Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris. For all of them, she had used the same sitters, a nude boy often assisted by an elderly woman.[1] These

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[1] Exposition Nationale des Beaux Arts, Catalogue illustré des ouvrages de peintures, sculptures, dessins, gravures et objets d'art et architecture exposés au Champs de Mars, April 25, 1894. The works exhibited were: 1670 La toilette du petit fils; 1671 Grandmère et petit fils; 1672 Etude d'enfant; 1673 Etude d'enfant; 1874 Etude d'enfant.

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works broke existing conventions associated with representations of children.

During the nineteenth century, images of children mostly followed a strict iconographic code that presented happy youngsters sheltered by their loving family. The stark realism of Valadon's drawings, depicting the sitters in a nudity that borders on nakedness, their pathos and physical awkwardness, instills a feeling of uneasiness in the viewer. The pictures appear particularly reprehensible since they expose not only the genitals of anonymous children but those of the artist's own son, whom she drew in the nude until the age of thirteen. Moreover, they contained psychological implications of loneliness and even maternal abandonment: Maurice is shown playing by himself or indifferently tended by his unattractive grandmother. The portrayal of small girls is even more disturbing as it often speaks of their plea for love as well as their rejection, alienation, and even despair.

From antiquity to modern times, children, in or out of their clothes, have played an important role in the language of art. Indeed, if Valadon's subject was not novel, her frank handling of her sitters was. But more than the youths' nudity or their physical deprivation, it is their unhappiness that disturbs the viewer. Contemporary images of children were limited to a few types shown with variations and handed down from centuries of use.[2] Most artists adhered to severely restrictive rules, although there were a few exceptions. For example, in the late eighteenth century and the

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[2]For a detailed exposé of children's images in the nineteenth century see Claire Barbillon "Images de l'enfant, mythe et réalité," Conférences du Musée d'Orsay, Quarante Huit/Quatorze, No. 2, (Paris, 1986).

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beginning of the nineteenth, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun attempted to instill some warmth and individuality into her portrayal of children, including those of royal blood. Her sitters look contented, loving, and seemingly loved in return as they nestle on their mother's lap or gather happily around her. However, their pose is as artificial as their smiles. They function as members of a ready-made family and faithfully assume the part that is assigned to them. They are but models playing the role of happy children whose spontaneity has been carefully rehearsed.

Interest in children, which had slackened during the Empire and Romantic eras, was revived during the second part of the nineteenth century. Because of a rapidly changing economic and social order, the importance of the family grew and young boys and girls began to reappear in contemporary paintings and sculptures. Infant mortality decreased significantly, public education expanded,[3] and new laws were passed to reduce child labor. The profound alteration that had taken place within the family structure brought forth a new awareness of the need for affection both in children and parents.

The format of art also experienced changes. The size of the works was scaled down, and the machines, those huge and prestigious historic scenes, were replaced by easel paintings more in proportion to the smaller lodgings of the bourgeoisie, the new class of art buyers. But if the dimensions of art works changed, the images did not. Inviting goddesses were still surrounded by flying

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[3]André Burguiére, ed., Histoire de la famille (Paris: A. Colin, 1988), 375.

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putti, whose innocence remained a ploy to enhance Venus' or Juno's erotic message.[4] Secular themes were superimposed on religious ones, as Madonna and Child became Mother and Child, the new venerated icons of a republican state. Young saints gained a new popularity on their own, or as a welcome addition to the family circles. Most of the recycled images shed their element of formality to celebrate the natural warmth of parental relationship. Even the iconoclastic Impressionists painted tender portraits of their offspring enjoying themselves in the blooming family gardens, as does the young Jean Monet in Madame Monet and Child (fig. 59). Mary Cassatt's nieces and nephews nestled affectionately on their mother's knee, and the aristocratic young Julie Manet, Berthe Morisot's daughter, never ventured far from her parents' discreet guidance (fig. 60).

It was not only the iconography of childhood that was restricted to a few stereotypes, but also the concepts ruling the representations. The youngsters shown had to be healthy, happy, and protected within the family circle, although brutal descriptions of abusive child labor and alcoholic parenthood--substantiated by real-life cases--sprang from the pens of such contemporary writers as Emile Zola and Alphonse Daudet. Even the Realist painters did not break the unspoken rule and presented children who worked enthusiastically for ten hours a day. For the images of well-loved, well-fed, and idle bourgeois or noble children, the Realists substituted the images of well-loved, well-fed, but enterprising

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[4]Barbillon, 13.

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working-class children who took joyous part in the survival of their economically deprived families, as shown, for instance, in Bastien Lepage's Small Bootblack (fig. 61).

The conventions were broken by Valadon, whose youngsters never looked rosy-cheeked or contented. Her own brand of realism, a far cry from that of Bastien Lepage's, accentuated the children's unhealthy appearance and their obvious mental insecurity. These frank representations were unsettling images that had no place within the realm of regulated contemporary French art and the sitters' stark nudity might have seemed, to the nineteenth century viewer, closer to child pornography. The unspoken conventions that Valadon violated continued to exist in the male-dominated society of late nineteenth-century France. The prevalent rules reflected the utopian vision needed in a state still regulated by Napoleonic laws that gave total moral and legal power to men.[5] All household functions were left entirely in the woman's care, and, in the lower economic classes, the hardships of child raising were assumed by the mother. But the father still had the final and absolute say in family matters. The manufacture of reassuring images of a happy family with well-adjusted children therefore remained essential in order to demonstrate the validity of the current political order. Valadon challenged the myth of these conventions, both morally and psychologically, by presenting children whose maladjustment and

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[5]The "Code Napoléon" is actually Le Code Civil des Français, promulgated on March 21, 1804 by Napoléon Bonaparte, the concepts of which were already obsolete by the end of the nineteenth century.

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helplessness were unmistakable and who seemed to function outside of the protective care of their familial circle.

Drawing had been Valadon's first means of artistic expression. In her personal notes she wrote that she "started to draw like crazy at eight."[6] She practiced for ten years and waited until she was eighteen to keep her first known work. Everything she did before 1883 was mercilessly destroyed. Among the drawings that she found worthy of preserving were the portraits she did of her son.

Valadon, from the start, showed an instinctive affinity for the medium of drawing. Most of the artists for whom she posed from the age of fifteen to twenty-nine manifested a distinct predilection for line over color. Puvis de Chavannes, Toulouse-Lautrec, who first exposed her to graphic arts, pompiers like Jean-Jacques Henner, Hector Leroux, and the juste milieu Giuseppe de Nittis--all were trained in traditional ateliers, where the teaching of drawing took a cardinal place and lasted for several years.[7]

Most important for Valadon's life was her friendship with Degas [8] whose sincere admiration for her skill gave her the incentive to pursue her efforts. It was undoubtedly the

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[6] Suzanne Valadon ou l'absolu.

[7] Juste Milieu, an attitude adopted by official art during the July monarchy, blossomed significantly during the Third Republic. The juste milieu artists struck a stylistic compromise that enabled them to escape from the heavily regulated style of the Academicians and to achieve a degree of technical freedom to evoke sensory expressions. Albert Boime, The French Academy and French Paintings in the Nineteenth Century, New York, 1971, 16 and 17.

[8] Valadon never modeled for Degas. Her relationship with him will be examined in a later chapter.

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Impressionist who exercised the most influence on her choice of subject matter, technique and style. Although he himself little interest in children, it was his severe graphism and unerring line that Valadon emulated in her drawings of youngsters.

Valadon's interest in human nature surfaced in her first works. Rather than copying the exercises or the reproductions illustrated in teaching manuals, she sketched those who were nearby: her mother, her lover Miquel Utrillo, or the cleaning woman. But it was her son Maurice who became her favorite model. Although the drawings exhibited at the Nationale were neither dated nor described in the exhibition catalogue, they portray, without a doubt, her son and her mother. Both remained her most frequent sitters until 1896, when Maurice Utrillo turned thirteen and Valadon married Paul Mousis.

Yet Valadon's son, when he was newborn, failed to inspire her. Actually, she only left two representations of infants in her entire oeuvre. Her lack of interest in babies seems paralleled by her indifference to images of motherhood. This subject was frequently treated by many other artists in the late nineteenth century with several formal, thematic, and conceptual variations.[9] It was not until seventeen years after the birth of Maurice that Valadon did her first and only Maternity (fig. 62). This work must be seen as a sketch rather than a finished drawing. Valadon has placed the image of a maternal figure with an infant suckling at her breast in the center of the composition. Several babies' heads are scattered at

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[9]Linda Nochlin, Women, Art and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 36-57.

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random on the surface of the paper. The nursing female is solidly built, and her vast figure seems to envelop the small shape crushed against her breast. Valadon's belated interest in motherhood is even more puzzling since there is no follow-up of this theme, save for a small study, done in the same year, showing two infants suckling an invisible breast (fig. 63). The woman's identity and function are difficult to determine, although she is likely to be one of Valadon's neighbors. Her face reflects a tender concern for the newborn whom she holds protectively. She might be a wet nurse hired by the child's parents, as was often the case with prosperous families. But since Valadon mostly drew impoverished Montmartre dwellers, the portrait is more likely that of a mother feeding her own child, as the title Maternity suggests. The work is less indicative of the artist's interest in motherhood than of her constant curiosity about scenes in her daily life. Indeed, the sight of woman either pregnant or nursing a newborn was a common one in Valadon's neighborhood.[10]

Valadon waited until Maurice was two to draw a first portrait, Maurice Utrillo at the Age of Two (fig. 64). The child looks older than the age his mother gives him in the title. This work is unusual for Valadon who, even at the start of her career, generally displayed a bluntness of line and a decisiveness of contour that seem almost brutal. In Maurice's portrait there a softness and tenderness revealing an unsuspected vulnerability in his mother's personality. The use of the blurry lines of the red chalk contributes

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[10]Some of Valadon's images are ambiguous and could be read as representations of a pregnant woman. The portrait of the poet Adrien Farge presents a nude woman with a distended abdomen reclining on an armchair. Portrait of the Poetess Adrien Farge, 1909, 11 x 14", conté crayon on paper, D.150, private collection.

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to the overall impression of fragile delicacy. The 1886 dating of this sensitive drawing is questionable on the basis of physical appearance. It is the opinion of the writer that this work should be dated a few years later.[11] Maurice's profile seems to be that of an older boy whose firmly set features have shed the uncertainty that characterizes the faces of very young children.

It was not until her son turned six that Valadon began drawing him extensively, either alone or with his grandmother. There are fourteen known portraits of Maurice from the age of two to thirteen. All of these, save for a sketch showing him on his way to school, are nude images. They do not seem to have been formally posed and present Maurice engaged in a series of daily activities: getting washed or dried by his grandmother, playing some solitary game, sitting idly by himself, or simply sleeping on a cot.

In Nude Utrillo Playing with a Bowl (fig. 65) Maurice is shown leaning on a table, his left foot inside a wash bowl too small to hold it. This is not a bathing scene, since the bowl does not contain any water. Maurice seems absorbed in an attempt to roll the empty container around in a self-devised game that does not appear to amuse him. The composition is simple without any indication of decor. However, there is a feeling of immediacy and three-dimensionality created by the intrusion, into the illusionist space, of details such as the boy's right foot, the bowl, and the table legs that clearly delimit foreground, middle ground, and background. The small body is shown in a contrapposto pose, and the volumes are

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[11] Valadon waited until 1889 to do another portrait of her son (D9).

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indicated by lines of different thickness. These lines are pure and energetic but reduced to their absolute minimum. The work indicates an extraordinary assurance. Valadon has unerringly selected the essential contours that define in shorthand the character of the sitter.

The table against which Maurice leans is partly hidden Only two of the voluted legs are visible. The inclusion in the decor of what must be a dining room table suggests that the scene takes place in an "all-purpose" room rather than in the cabinet de toilette found in luxurious homes. By the suggested value of specific objects, Valadon defined the child's social class plays in a room used in humble households for all the family's activities.

In most of her son's portraits, Valadon displayed a remarkable quality of objectivity. But occasionally, maternal love breaks through her self-imposed detachment, as when she drew the sensitive Maurice Utrillo at the Age of Two. In Utrillo at the Age of Nine (fig. 66) the artist has sketched the child asleep on a cot. The bed is obviously too short for the growing boy, and he has to bend his long, skinny legs to fit its frame. His angular limbs, the bones of his rib cage, and a glimpse of his unguarded sleep elicit some mixed emotions, partly of pity for the youth's vulnerability and awkwardness. There is an added feeling of uneasiness as the spectator becomes a voyeur. But if the onlooker experiences some embarrassment while looking at a scene not meant for a stranger's eye, this concern is not related to any sexual implication. Maurice, as well as all the nude youngsters who populate his mother's drawings, are just presented as children, and the artist does not

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allude to their sexuality. They are shown unconcerned by their nudity and oblivious of the eyes that observe them, of the hand that draws them. Valadon's frank depictions do not contain any ambiguous undertones. She only directed her attention to the essence of her sitters, an essence eminently too guileless and unsophisticated to evoke any erotic suggestion.

Valadon must have been unaware of the far-reaching consequences that her portrayals of Maurice in the nude could trigger in her son's fragile mind. In numerous drawings, his grandmother stands at his side, a towel in her hand, ready to dry him as he steps out of the tub, his genitals exposed to her gaze (fig. 67). Utrillo, regardless of his later success as an artist, was a troubled character who became an alcoholic at the age of eight. Being observed and drawn naked by his mother, as well as being attended by his grandmother while bathing, even after he reached puberty, might have created internal conflicts that could be at the source of his psychological imbalance.

It is Madeleine Coulaud's efficiency and her care for her grandson's physical welfare that is stressed rather than her love for him. However, even if Maurice's solitude is undeniable, he does not seem to suffer by it. It is his introverted personality that surfaces in his portraits, as he is most often pictured daydreaming or lying down quietly. When Valadon places women next to children, they are grandmother, servant, bathing companion but never mother.[12] It is interesting to note that, with the exception of a few photographs,

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[12]Save for the two 1900 maternities previously discussed.

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she never shows herself at Maurice's side, choosing her role as artist over that of mother. Nor does Valadon ever include the comforting image of a father, or of any male adult. There was no paternal love or protection in the artist's childhood and there is none in the lives of the youngsters she draws.

Valadon sketched several children besides her son, most often girls. They are young adolescents from her neighborhood, pubescent girls, grown up too fast, uncertain of their identity as child or adult. They are shown in the same daily activities as Maurice, and Valadon sketched them in the nude, apparently unaware of her gaze. Occasionally they are washed and dried by an elderly grandmother or a maid, and shown combing the hair of a female companion, also nude.

The theme of child alienation, sadness, and rejection recurs throughout Valadon's oeuvre but it appears most frequently in her drawings of small girls, who, unlike Maurice, often seem to be in a severe state of despair. In Nude Girl Sitting (fig. 68), the child holds back her tears, and her face reflects an intense unhappiness. This sorrow is shown through very simple but very effective means--the frown on her brow, the pout on her lips. Nude, she sits stiffly on a wooden floor where she holds herself back by leaning on her hands. Valadon has exaggerated these hands, which lie flat on the ground as if they were meant to help the small girl bear the weight of her despair. The scene is reduced to a minimum, and the artist's "wicked and supple"[13] line reveals the essence of the drama. The form is

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[13]Lemoisne, 203. The expression was used by Degas to characterize Valadon's drawing.

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defined through its total unity rather than through separate details. There is a stoic quality expressed by means of a simplicity of composition and line.

In this drawing, as well as in several other works, Valadon's intense characterization is translated through a deliberate distortion of certain forms, the importance of which is enhanced by their unexpected size. For instance, the over-developed hands of the child become the receptacle of her sorrow while the unrealistic length of her legs points to the awkward disproportion of an adolescent's body growing too fast.

Most of the time, the children's alienation is expressed through reductive images whose effectiveness is enhanced by their simplicity. An example of Valadon's abbreviated line is found in Nude Girl Sitting on a Cushion (fig. 69). The dejected adolescent becomes the focal point in a bare room, her head and shoulders bent while her arms rest listlessly on her lap as if she had lost the strength or the power to move them. In a foreshortened face, where there is no room for emotion, only a small nose and a lowered eye can be seen, but Valadon has succeeded in evoking the child's distress through body language, using an attitude rather than a facial expression to convey a mood.

Some of the artist's most expressive means of communication are the sitters' gestures, which become the key to a small drama. In Crouching Nude Holding Grandmother's Skirt (fig. 70), a nude girl squats on the floor next to an elderly charwoman, who turns her back to her. She tries to reach the skirt of her

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companion with her extended arm. The gesture resembles that of a sightless person who needs to touch what she cannot see in order to find reassurance. It is this pathetic reaching out, with its unmistakable request for affection, that is infinitely moving. In 1895, Valadon had done a less detailed version of this drawing titled Nude Louise Crouching near Grandmother.[14] Situations such as this one, with their implications of parental shortcomings, were never treated by the artist's contemporaries, even by the Realists.

It was mostly through such images that Valadon exposed some of the children's unfulfilled need for affection and their feelings of alienation. The scene shown in Crouching Nude Holding Grandmother's Skirt might reflect as well the artist's unhappiness during her own childhood, when as a baby she was left to the indifferent care of a concierge and as a small child sent to hostile relatives by a mother too overworked to take care of her.

In 1913, Valadon did a black pencil drawing titled Young Girl Hiding Her Forehead (fig. 71). The simplicity of the scene heightens its dramatic effect. The image of a small nude girl occupies most of the left side of the work. She appears to be walking, since her right foot is extended forward as in a stride. Her long uncombed hair falls freely on her shoulders, and the upper part of her face is almost hidden by her right forearm in a gesture of embarrassment or sorrow. She seems dragged by her extended left hand, which is linked to the lower right arm of an unseen person. The strength of the scene is enhanced by the abruptly cut-off arm, the size of which

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[14] Nude Louise Crouching Near Grandmother, 1895, private collection.

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would indicate that of an adult, probably the child's mother. The incongruity of the floating limb, so abruptly amputated, points to Valadon's knowledge of the cropping techniques used in Japanese woodcuts and found as well as in contemporary photographs. The fierce, bold lines and the heavy- handedness of the contours give the composition a psychological realism that is striking for its time.

The image of a distressed little girl hiding her forehead had great importance in Valadon's iconography since she did two other versions of the same theme. The earliest, the 1904 Women and Children near the Water (fig. 72), is a dry point that Valadon treated as an outdoor bathing scene. In it, the young child seems to be forcefully pulled by her mother toward the water. The gesture of hiding her face altogether expresses her fear, shame, and distress. Valadon was certainly conscious of the effectiveness of the girl's attitude since she repeated it in a second drawing done in 1912, Woman and Small Child Near the Water (fig. 73), where the scene centers around the nude mother whose tall body dwarfs her daughter's diminutive frame, enhancing the girl's helplessness. Valadon still retains the semblance of an outdoor setting with the suggestion of tall trees in the background. The artist's draftsmanship and her unfailing sense of theatrical statement can be best appreciated in her handling of the three successive states of a same drawing, where a progressive elimination of unnecessary details culminates in a final image that stands as the essence of the unfolding drama. Valadon selected the lines that best define the model's personality and, through a rigorous rejection of inessential elements, achieved with stark simplicity a work of the highest

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psychological and aesthetic quality. Most of her drawings, particularly those of children, illustrate her keen sense of observation. The impact of her simple images is enhanced by a choice of few details, whose specificity gives to the scene its unique character.

Perhaps because of Degas' influence, or in order to justify the children's (as well as the women's) nudity, most of Valadon's dry points and soft-ground etchings center around bathing activities. In 1908, she did a series of drawings on the theme of young girls, often shown with mature women and innocently engaged in their toilette. They gather around the tub, dry each other's hair, but most often it is the child who cares for the woman.

In Two Nudes after the Bath (fig. 74), a child fastens her companion's hair. The woman's heavy body and full breasts offer a startling contrast to the adolescent's skinny and flat-chested figure. Valadon gives us a detailed description of the bathroom where the models stand. In most of her drawings, the bathing takes place in a small movable tub set at random on the floor of what is most likely the apartment's unique room. However, in Two Nudes after the Bath, a partly hidden but full-size bathtub with one visible claw foot occupies the upper left side of the composition, indicating the presence of what appears to have been a separate bathroom. The narrow planks of the floor are set in an obliquely ascending pattern that is reminiscent of Degas' use of diagonal space.

Although this is a private scene, there is no apparent intimacy between the two sitters. The older woman in particular seems oblivious of her companion's assistance and is solely

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concerned with drying her own body. The young girl is solemn but somewhat detached, and there is no trace of the playful atmosphere often present in conventional à la toilette scenes. One detects a palpable quality of resignation in the youth whose assistance is not acknowledged. This work, as do many of Valadon's drawings, suggests the overt rejection experienced by a child. The body language of the models translates their feelings: The girl extends her arms as in an offering, while the woman's back and bent body speak of defensiveness and hostility.

In Valadon's early works, all the boys were modeled by her son until he turned thirteen. However, when the latter grew into a young man, the artist's interest in children did not cease. She drew a tender Head of a Sleeping Child (fig. 75) as late as 1922, one year before she abandoned drawing to devote herself exclusively to painting. Although she did fewer images of children in oil,[15] the theme of Grandmother Dressing a Little Girl (fig. 76) and Grandmother Putting Shoes on a Little Girl (fig. 77), both painted in 1931, reflects her ongoing concern for the state of mind of children raised by a grandparent. In these works, the two small girls display a curious state of apathy. Each face looks as vacuous as that of a doll, each body stiffens as the girls commit themselves into the proficient hands of an older woman, perhaps a grandmother. The overall mood is uneasy, even threatening. We look into a lifeless scene, as frozen in time as a movie still. The girls stand motionless, their faces untouched by animation or emotion. The unhappiness and alienation so deeply perceived in the artist's earlier

[15] Valadon did sixty drawings but only sixteen paintings of children.

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children's representations have given way to a more dramatic implication of resignation.

The paintings done in 1931 were Valadon's final images of childhood. They demonstrate the artist's pessimistic outlook on the familial and social difficulties of child-raising. This negative attitude was undoubtedly aggravated by Suzanne Valadon's disinterest in childhood imagery brought about by Maurice Utrillo's personality problems as well as by the artist's own loveless youth.

At times Valadon borrowed her imagery from more traditional sources, and did several drawings and a few paintings on the theme of a woman (or girl) with a mirror. In Young Girl with a Mirror (fig. 78) a nude girl is holding a looking glass in her right hand while the left is raised to her shoulder. She twists her head as she tries to catch her own reflection. The scene is so candid that it rejects any hint of sexuality, an element forever present in Balthus' later images of young girls engaged in similar activities (fig. 79). His works are always permeated by an undercurrent of sexual equivocation. The sitters, prepubescent girls, know instinctively the power of their pseudo-innocence and its perverse attraction. Valadon's adolescents have no such intuition; their nudity is incidental, and their sole preoccupation is curiosity about their own images.

The world of children held strong ambiguousness for the late nineteenth-century art world, and one found in contemporary exhibitions occasional paintings and sculptures presenting equivocal images of nymphets.[16] However, none of Valadon's representations

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of children, in particular Young Girl With a Mirror, contain any suggestion of sexual perversity, either covert or in the open. Neither can the image be categorized as a vanitas. The work only portrays a child trying to catch her reflection in a mirror, and it stands as a piece of Valadon's perceptive reporting on children at play.

Valadon's drawings are severe and implacable. Her lines shed all decorative function to exist by themselves and for themselves. They have been praised by contemporary critics as "virile"[17] because of their strength. Her art, regardless of its initial spontaneity, is channeled through a methodical organization that purifies and summarizes through a few essential strokes to achieve a synthesis often seen in the works of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec. However, her lines are too strong to be linked to Degas and too candid to be those of Lautrec. They are uniquely Valadon's.

The artist never requested a "pose" from children she drew. She observed them during some of their daily activities, most often à la toilette, a taste she shared with Degas, Lautrec and Forain. Her settings are almost bare and her accessories limited to tub, sponge, or towel. At times, Valadon drew her figures against an empty background that allowed her to emphasize the value of a movement, the weight of a gesture, made more resonant in the emptiness of a

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[16]For a discussion on the ambiguity of some representations of children, see Bram Dijkstra: Idols of Perversity, Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de Siècle Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 185-188.

[17]Gustave Coquiot, Cubistes, Futuristes et Passéistes (Paris: Ollendorff, 1921), 165 : "Elle ne se contente pas de peindre virilement"; Frank Elgar, "La plus virile des femmes peintres," Carrefour, (March 12, 1967).

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blank space. In Young Girl with a Mirror, for instance, she placed her model on a white background that focuses attention on the child's concentration as she intensely looks at her own reflection with a mixture a curiosity and narcissism.

Valadon's renditions of models--women and children--in a graphic nudity so unusual for her time, liberated them from the constraints of their clothing and allowed her to render more succinctly the expression of their movements. She always chose her sitters from her neighborhood of Montmartre. They often came from a rural background, unsophisticated people who left their villages to try to find employment in the capital and found cheap lodgings in Montmartre. The sitters seem unpreturbed by the artist's presence, since her gaze is unobtrusive and nonjudgmental. The women are monumental, mother-earth images who stand as solidly on their robust limbs as Courbet's female peasants.

No such sturdiness has been passed on to their youngsters. Nor do they inhabit the same world as Cassatt's pink, dimpled, and secure small girls or Morisot's aristocratic teenagers, but seem closer to Degas' little dancers. Valadon's children are puny, sometimes underfed or uncoordinated, true heirs of Gavroche[18] or contemporaries of Poulbot,[19] whose creator was Valadon's neighbor in Montmartre. Valadon captured their faces and bodies with an almost caricature-like deftness, perhaps inspired by Toulouse-

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[18] A character from Victor Hugo's Les Misérables who symbolized the brave and saucy Parisian boys.

[19] French caricaturist (1879-1946) whose name also came to stand for a witty and touching young boy. He was Valadon's neighbor in Montmartre.

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Lautrec, and with incisive strokes, she exposed the salient traits of their character. Her candidly honest images extend far beyond contemporary concepts of pictorial realism and form the counterpart to Zola's literary naturalism. The artist's disregard for an established iconography, of which she had no knowledge, did not stem from a deliberate defiance of the existing order or a wish to impose her personal vision--her driving desire to transpose with honesty what she actually saw and felt. "In what I painted, not a stroke, not a line that is not based on nature. Nature brings me a control on absolute truth."[20]

Since Valadon mostly posed in the nude,[21] it was in this genre that she accumulated her most extended knowledge. Few of the painters for whom she sat had any interest--save for Renoir--in representations of children. Even academic patrons, such as Henner or Leroux, included only limited appearances of young Saint John the Baptist or winged Eros.

Therefore, when Valadon became involved in drawing her son, she had neither role model nor artistic references to guide her. Yet, it was in her representations of children that she displayed her most daring innovations, both thematically and stylistically. Hers were spontaneous renditions of a subject about which she had no preconceived notions. She drew these haunting images with

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[20]"Dans ce que j'ai peint, pas une touche, pas un trait que ne soit appuyé sur la nature. Le nature m'apporte le controle de verité totale." Suzanne Valadon, Attestation, Archives, CNAC.

[21]For a contemporary account of a model's life in the late nineteenth century, see Paul Dollfus, Modèles d'artistes (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1888), 140. Posing in the nude was a specialty that was highly paid at the time.

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innocence and created these incisive strokes so solidly imprinted on the paper with the strength of her unchanneled energy. With an unerring eye, she selected the raw deformations of her forms and with all these factors, and more, she achieved a remarkably blunt psychological realism.

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CHAPTER 6

VALADON AND TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

Loved and painted by several artists, Suzanne Valadon incarnated for each of them a very different woman. For Puvis de Chavannes, she was the slender androgynous nymph whose repeated portraits populated the Sacred Wood. In Renoir's Dance(s), she appeared as a radiant young girl on the threshold of womanhood, sensuously abandoned in her lover's arms.

Quite a different vision emerged under Lautrec's brushes. Over the period of a few years, his images of Valadon became increasingly harsh and in his last works he portrayed her as an ageless shrew, stripped of human dignity. His first two portraits, previously dated 1885,[1] emphasize Valadon's blunt features, puny shoulders and elongated neck, but her awkwardness is redeemed by a quality of determination and strength that commands respect. Only a few years later, in Gueule de Bois, a picture of alcoholism and isolation, Lautrec gave his model the looks of a dejected woman, far older than her actual twenty-four years.

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[1] Toulouse-Lautrec, Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste peintre, 1885, Buenos Aires Museum, Argentina. Madame Suzanne Valadon, 1885, Ny Carlberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.

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In 1891, Lautrec painted A ma mie, a work that depicted a drunken couple who appears to have reached an ultimate state of human degradation. The female sitter has been identified as a Montmartre model,[2] but it is conceivable that she was none other than Suzanne Valadon, cast as the female version of the Picture of Dorian Gray.

What were the events that led Lautrec to conjure such a spiteful and disillusioned image of a young model whose vivacious beauty still enchanted several other painters?[3]

It was only during the summer of 1884 that Toulouse-Lautrec moved to Montmartre into the apartment of recent acquaintances, the Greniers.[4] The couple lived at 19 bis rue Fontaine in a small building facing the courtyard where Degas kept his studio. In 1882 Lautrec had enrolled with Anquetin in Cormon's atelier, where he worked with François Gauzi, Henri Rachou, and René Grenier.[5] He struck up a friendship with the latter and his handsome wife Lili, whose beauty he admired.[6] Lautrec shared their Bohemian social life

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[2]Cooper, 20; Loftus, 20; Richard Shone, Toulouse-Lautrec (New York: Saint Martin Press), 1977, #12.

[3]As late as 1894, Valadon was still modeling in the nude for Jean Jacques Henner and Gaston Leroux. C.f. Suzay Leudet, "Suzanne Valadon chez les Pompiers," Beaux Arts 56 (May 2, 1938), 2.

[4]Huisman-Dortu, 54; Jean Devoisins, L'univers de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paris, 1980, 84; Phillip Dennis Cate and Patricia Eckert Boyer, The Circle of Toulouse-Lautrec. An Exhibition of the Works of the Artist and of his Close Associates, the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 1986, 65.

[5]Van Gogh à Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 1988, 311.

[6]Göetz Adriani, Toulouse-Lautrec, translated from the German by Sebastian Wormell (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 89-90.

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and in their company haunted Montmartre music halls such as the Elysée Montmartre and Le Mirliton. But he longed for a studio of his own, and after a year of constant pleas his family let him rent one at 7 rue Tourlaque, where Valadon had moved in late 1883. The street was located in the heart of the Butte near Saint Vincent cemetery. It was close to Cormon's atelier,[7] the Moulin de la Galette, and the Moulin Rouge, establishments soon to become Lautrec's joint headquarters.[8] The painter only worked in rue Tourlaque since he had promised his parents he would share a flat with his friend Bourges,[9] a medical student who found an apartment at 19 rue Fontaine near the Grenier's. Lautrec was to live there for several years.[10]

The building on the rue Tourlaque predominantly occupied by artists. As he had done for Valadon the previous year, Zandomeneghi had located a studio for Lautrec [11] next to Gauzi's on the fourth floor. His own atelier was across from Valadon's on the first.

Lautrec's space was open, commanding a sweeping view of the maquis. A loggia led to a tiny bedroom where the Count Alphonse de Toulouse-Lautrec, in order to keep an eye on his son, stored some of

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[7]Cormon's atelier was originally located at 10 rue de Constance, then later moved to 104 Boulevard de Clichy.

[8]The Moulin Rouge opened its doors in 1889.

[9]Bourges was a medical student. André Warnod, 1947, 79; Perruchot, 124-125; Polnay, 140-141.

[10]Mac Orlan, 63, wrote that Lautrec stayed there until 1897; Huisman Dortu, 87, until 1889; and A. Warnod, 1947, 72, until 1891.

[11]Storm, 87.

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his own paraphernalia.[12] The bedroom could only be reached by way of a huge ladder also used to reach Lautrec's large works. Discarded canvasses, cardboards, tracing papers, various Japanese Kakimonos and Netsukis, dance slippers, women's hair ornaments, and a clown's hat filled the atelier.[13] In the center stood a platform heaped with magazines, books and portfolios.[14] Dust covered everything since the housekeeper was forbidden to ever sweep the objects intended as accessories.[15]

On the loggia's upper wall Lautrec's huge parody of Puvis de Chavannes' Sacred Grove[16] hung over a bar cluttered with the multiple bottles needed to prepare the artist's lethal cocktails. It was in this room that Lautrec's friends met, drank, and discussed art. The audience included his fellow artists Gauzi, Anquetin, and a taciturn Van Gogh, as well as models and neighbors. Among the habitués were Maurice Joyant, a schoolmate from the Lycée Condorcet, the art critics Gustave Coquiot and Arsène Alexandre, and Aristide Bruant. Suzanne Valadon officiated as hostess during the

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[12]Maurice Joyant, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (New York: Arno Press, 1928; rev. ed. 1968), 77.

[13]Joyant, 77.

[14]Huisman Dortu, 86.

[15]Perruchot, 133-134.

[16]Joyant, 77. Toulouse-Lautrec, Parodie du Panneau de Puvis de Chavannes au Salon de 1884. Joyant (1864-1930) was a publisher, art historian and dealer who throughout his life supported Toulouse-Lautrec, whose biography he wrote. He became Director of the Galerie Boussod Valadon on the death of Theo Van Gogh. When the Musée du Luxembourg refused the Toulouse-Lautrec works that his mother wanted to donate, Joyant arranged for the bequest to be sent to the Musée d'Albi.

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Sunday parties[17] that ended when the crowd invaded another studio or the restaurant Chez Bouscarat, to end up at the Chat Noir, Moulin de la Galette or the Cirque Fernando.[18]

Most historians believe that the Valadon-Lautrec meeting took place before the winter of 1884,[19] when the Parody was painted. There is no reason to change this date although later ones have been suggested.[20] It was Zandomeneghi, who, learning that his friend Lautrec needed a model, introduced him[21] to his neighbor, "the attractive and not too virtuous"[22] Valadon. She immediately became his mistress,[23] in keeping with the tacit law of the ateliers as well as Lautrec's own:

> ...One of (Lautrec's) absolute necessities was the possession of his model's body. For a woman, to pose meant first to offer herself lying on the studio's couch.[24]

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[17]Storm, 77; Robert Beachboard, The Montmartre Colony (Ambilly-Annemasse: Presse de Savoie, 1963), 140.

[18]Storm, 76.

[19]Wattenmaker, 98; Meyer Schapiro, Art News, vol. 57, No. I (April 1958); John Rewald, Post Impressionism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 28-29; Gerstle Mack, 109.

[20]Perruchot, 350; Emil Schaub-Koch, Psychanalyse d'un peintre moderne, Paris, 1935, 207; Oberthur, 57; Beachboard, 33, gave 1885 as the meeting date; Georges Beaute, Il va cent ans, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (Genève: Cailler), 1964, 12; Circle of Toulouse-Lautrec, 65; Van Gogh à Paris, 1887, 311.

[21]Gauzi, 100; Perruchot, p.100.

[22]Francois Gauzi, Lautrec et son temps (Paris: David Perret, 1932), 132.

[23]Ibid., 132.

[24]Schaub-Koch, 103: "La possession du modèle lui était tout d'abord impérieusement nécessaire. Poser...consistait en première ligne, pour une femme, à s'entendre, offerte sur le divan de l'atelier."

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Although Lautrec was not handsome, "with his swollen lips, fat nose and myopic eyes hidden by a ridiculous pince-nez,"[25] the affair blossomed with a frenzy for pleasure ignited by the respective needs of the lovers, who at first saw each other constantly. Valadon had always been an avid participant in the turbulent local night life, and with Lautrec as "The Grand Connetable des nuits de Montmartre,"[26] she explored with renewed enthusiasm his own world, and night after night went from dance halls to café concerts with a lively group that included the Greniers, Anquetin, and Paul Sescau.[27]

During the 1880's, a few cafés located around Place Clichy became meeting grounds for artists and models. When the Tambourin ended its brief existence in 1887, its neighbor, Le Rat Mort, inherited its large clientele. Valadon had sat there in Puvis and Renoir's company. Lautrec worked on the Portrait of Van Gogh[28] in this café where he sketched Valadon in Gueule de Bois in 1886. A contemporary journalist described the scene:

> Anarchists and bourgeois, artists and bankers, writers and businessmen depart as soon as they finish their coffee or beer

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[25]Crespelle, 72.

[26] Crespelle, 42; Coquiot, 71.

[27]Paul Sescau, a photographer and a pianist, was one of Lautrec's best friends. He often posed for the artist's posters and paintings, of which the best known were Dance at the Moulin Rouge, MacIlhenny Collection, Philadelphia, and Baraque de la Goulue, Art Institute, Chicago.

[28]Toulouse-Lautrec, Portrait of Van Gogh. 1887, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

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> leaving the place to the "girls" who rally under the flag of Lesbos and pay no attention to the few remaining males.[29]

Should these few males resent Le Rat Mort's crowd, they could patronize its rival establishment: Le Rat Qui N'est Pas Mort.

Lautrec's faithful entourage--including Valadon--followed him every evening to the Mirliton, whose proprietor was the legendary Aristide Bruant, who commissioned Quadrille de la Chaise Louis Treize[30] for the walls of the cabaret. When Bruant was asked to perform at the elegant nightclub the Ambassadeurs, he requested that the poster for the show be designed by Lautrec,[31] on whom he exercised a strong influence. It was allegedly at his suggestion that Lautrec expressed the social comments found in Gueule de Bois and A ma mie.[32] Although Valadon had previously visited the Mirliton, she now developed a sincere friendship with Bruant, who became her neighbor when she moved to Avenue Junot.

Aristide Bruant had started his career as a performer at Salis' Le Chat Noir which in 1885 was moved to a better neighborhood. Bruant replaced it with his Mirliton and within a few years gained outstanding fame. He was indeed a remarkable character. His caustic wit was tempered by a great poetic gift, and the blending of

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[29]Le Courrier Français. October 20, 1886. As quoted by Francis Carco, La Belle Epoque au Temps de Bruant (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 136.

[30]Toulouse-Lautrec, Le Quadrille de la Chaise Louis Treize à l'Elysée Montmartre, 1885.

[31]Monneret, I, 82.

[32]See Pierre Courthion, Montmartre (Genève: Skira, 1956), 120, footnote 20.

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those traits enabled him to erase the extraordinary social differences of a clientele that presented an unusual array of Parisians. Local prostitutes in white caraco,[33] with pimps hiding from the police, sat on hard benches next to bourgeoises who flocked there to seemingly enjoy Bruant's insulting remarks. The latter was also a singer who mesmerized his audience with haunting ballads. Several of them were illustrated by Lautrec in paintings that hung on the cabaret's walls.[34] Among those was A Grenelle, for which Valadon posed in 1888.

Leaving the Mirliton, Lautrec and his friends would proceed to Le Moulin Rouge. Located at 90 Boulevard de Clichy, the music hall opened its doors during the World's Fair of 1889, and its golden days lasted until 1900. Its owner Charles Zigler had commissioned Willette to renovate the gardens, and the latter scattered there some unusual constructions. Among them was a gigantic elephant carrying on its back a small stage sheltering a full orchestra[35] that blasted loud music for the dancers of the Quadrille Naturaliste, better known as the French cancan. Tame monkeys ran between the metal chairs of the garden, where clients could take a donkey ride while female performers costumed as Moorish slaves, performed exotic belly dances. "Tout Paris" ran to Le Moulin Rouge to gaze at such illustrious members of the international nobility as the Prince

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[33]Mac Orlan, 78. Caraco: a white sleeveless shirt.

[34]Huisman Dortu, 51. Lautrec signed those under the pseudonym of Teclau.

[35]Louis Chevalier, Montmartre du plaisir et du crime, Paris, 1980, 164.

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of Wales or to join a group of academic artists that included Alfred Stevens or Henri Gervex.[36]

Toulouse-Lautrec had his own "table" there and several of his large canvasses, such as At the Cirque Fernando,[45] hung on the walls. In 1891, Zigler commissioned the celebrated poster Au Moulin Rouge, La Goulue. The cabaret came to life from midnight to dawn, during which time the mill's wings rotated, diffusing on the facade their scarlet glow. It stood proudly, an apotheosis of the excesses committed on its premises by the very rich as well as the very poor.

While Valadon was an enthusiastic nocturnal companion, she turned out to be "an undisciplined model who came to pose whenever it pleased her."[37] The relationship between the two lovers, marked from the start by violent quarrels,[38] became chronically stormy. Lautrec, in spite of his obvious infatuation, questioned the validity of his model's commitment and wondered about the role that his wealth played in Valadon's attachment. Indeed, Lautrec's suspicions might have been justified. As soon as Valadon realized the depth of his "affection," she started to play a baffling game:

> She left, came back, and made up incredible stories that exasperated her lover, who bitterly commented upon her remarkable imagination and her continuous lies.[39]

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[36]Huisman-Dortu, 68-71. Toulouse-Lautrec, Le Cirque Fernando, 1888, 36 1/8 x 53 3/8", Chicago Art Institute.

[37]Gauzi, 132.

[38]Monneret, II, 6; Huisman Dortu, 66.

[39]Perruchot, 1958, 133.

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To exacerbate Lautrec's jealousy, she would disappear without warning,[40] and she once was gone for three days. A distressed Lautrec feared she had left him for Forain, to whom he had introduced her when the caricaturist needed a model. But Valadon did return, telling another extravagant story.[41]

Valadon's attitude during previous sentimental involvements was hardly symptomatic of a shrewd or greedy nature. But in the case of her relationship with Lautrec, the lure of great wealth and social position as the artist's wife could have been overwhelming. Lautrec's indifference to his social inheritance suggested that he might not be wary of her own background. Furthermore, she had spent many evenings in the company of René Grenier's former model, now his wife, and she might have decided to emulate Lili's example.[42]

Unfortunately, Valadon staged an event that precipitated the final break in her relationship with Lautrec. To hasten a decision about their future, Valadon enacted a drama often labeled as her "fake suicide,"[43] of which Gauzi gave a first-hand account. One afternoon, his friend appeared at his door wildly proclaiming that "Maria" was about to kill herself. He begged Gauzi to run down to her flat with him to prevent a tragedy. As they approached, they heard

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[40]Crespelle, 74.

[41]Gauzi, 134.

[42]Huisman Dortu, 64.

[43]Crespelle, 74-75; Huisman Dortu, 64; Perruchot, 141-42; Jeanine Warnod, 8.

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Maman Madeleine screaming that Valadon's threats of suicide would frighten Lautrec. The revelation of his mistress' manipulative tactics stunned the painter, who allegedly ran to his studio to "hide his tears" and, according to Gauzi, never to see Valadon again.[44] However, a total estrangement is as unlikely as the story of Lautrec remaining a thoughtful companion to Valadon for many years.[45]

The length of the affair is problematic, ranging from one year to five.[46] The assessment was formerly based on works modeled by Valadon but since several of these are now redated, it seems possible that she remained Lautrec's model after the breakup. The painter, finding her proximity convenient, might have rehired her but her presence could have rekindled his anger. A mounting bitterness, perhaps worsened by his general decline, invaded his work and induced him cast Valadon sinking into alcoholism and debauchery, through images that he felt prophetic.

When Suzanne Valadon began to pose for Toulouse-Lautrec in 1884 she was already a popular model who sat for Puvis and Renoir, as well as other Montmartre artists such as Zandomeneghi, Henner, Forain, and de Nittis. Her earnings provided her livelihood, as well as those of her son and her mother who had stopped working to care for her grandson.

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[44]Gauzi, 64-67. To believe that Lautrec never saw Valadon after he realized her duplicity is unrealistic. Since they were living in the same small building, they had to meet, if only by accident.

[45]Devoisins, 84.

[46]Dr. Le Masle, as quoted by Crespelle, 74, estimated it lasted one year; Monneret, II, 6, two years; Perruchot, 350, three years; Beachboard, The Montmartre Colony, 140, from 1884 to 1888.

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Parodie du Panneau de Puvis de Chavannes au Salon de 1884,[47] the first work posed by Valadon for Lautrec, remained in the rue Tourlaque studio until 1897. Lautrec transformed Puvis' Sacred Grove, a "pallid landscape where white robed classical figures strolled through Greek columns,"[48] into a world of contemporary men with grotesque deformities,[49] and he planted himself reading a newspaper amid a crowd of visitors in modern garb. Although no element of Puvis' work was free of Lautrec's wit,[50] the latter endowed the nymph's images with loveliness and dignity. Did his iconoclastic brush spare his model's beauty to contrast the pedestrian absurdity of the composition, or did his indulgence stem from an infatuation with the young woman whose grace he preserved in the midst of a ungainly crowd?

Only in the Parody did Lautrec offer an idyllic image of his mistress. As the affair soured, so did the portraits of Valadon. Within a few years, the virginal young nymph turned into a debauched and ageless prostitute. The escalation of Lautrec's unhappiness is reflected in his paintings where Valadon's representations reflect a progressive physical and psychological deterioration.

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[47]Toulouse-Lautrec, Le Bois Sacré, Parodie du Panneau de Puvis de Chavannes au Salon de 1884, oil on canvas, 68 x 150", Estate of Henry Pearlman. This "caricature" was done with the help of other Cormon students. See Gauzi, 1954, 116.

[48]As described by Wattenmaker, 98.

[49]Meyer Shapiro, "New Light on Seurat," Artnews, vol. 57, no. 2 (April 1958), 45. Toulouse-Lautrec painted his own dwarfed body.

[50]Wattenmaker, 98.

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Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste peintre (fig. 80) and Madame Suzanne Valadon (fig. 81) were previously dated 1885. The portraits are now believed to have been executed in 1887 since their technique is similar to the one used in Lautrec's 1887 Portrait of Van Gogh.[51]

The works reveal a sense of psychological characterization rather than a desire to create an attractive image. They were done en plein air, in the Jardins du Père Forest.[52] Called "l'archer de Montmartre," Forest allowed Lautrec to establish his outdoor atelier in his little-frequented walled gardens of rue Colaincourt, near an area occupied by a wine merchant.[53] The property was partially cultivated and lilac bushes grew freely among large lindens, sycamores, and plane trees. The place's tranquillity was only interrupted three times a week by local archers who went there to practice.[54] It offered an ideal location for an outdoor studio and, weather permitting, Lautrec went there daily. The artist kept his art supplies in a small wooden structure appropriately called the "buvette"[55] since the innumerable bottles needed for his bar were stored there.

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[51]1885 dating: Beachboard, 1952, 37; Huisman Dortu, 249, 250; Gauzi, 132; Gerstle Mack, 269; Perruchot, 103. 1884 dating: John Rewald, Post Impressionism, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 29. 1887 dating: Van Gogh à Paris, 320.

[52]Beachboard, 33; Gauzi, 132; Gerstle Mack, 26; Perruchot, 102.

[53]Forest was a former photographer and archery enthusiast. See Laurence and Elisabeth Hanson, Toulouse-Lautrec, (London, 1986), 72.

[54]Joyant, 78.

[55]Hanson, 72. A buvette is a small simple café.

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It was in this bucolic setting that Suzanne Valadon posed for her bust portraits. Both were treated in an almost caricatural style that emphasized her stiff posture and angular features. Gone is the touching softness that graces the Parody's nymph. Through the sitter's pose and demeanor, the new works convey a forbidding sternness as well as a solid determination, judged "plus virile que feminine."[56]

The Copenhagen painting shows Valadon frontally against an unfocused background while the Buenos Aires version presents her in three-quarter profile with, behind her, the suggestion of a wooden beam, perhaps a part of the buvette's structure. In both pictures, Valadon is dressed in simple outfits whose austerity is relieved by voluminous hats. In the Buenos Aires portrait she wears the straw canotier and tight high-necked blouse favored by girls patronizing the Moulin de la Galette. But far from exuding the joie de vivre of Renoir's midinettes, Valadon displays the determination or aggressiveness fitting an "artiste peintre" ready to conquer the Parisian art world. The Copenhagen work stages her in a simple black dress, coifed by a formidable hat, a towering structure topped by a large bow whose frivolous appearance blatantly contrasts with her angular features. Secretive and austere, her unflinching stare hints at a wisdom and maturity far beyond her young years.

Stripped of flattery, the portraits aim at projecting a perceptive insight into the sitter's character. Bypassing her physical attractiveness, Lautrec exaggerated some of her features

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[56]Perruchot, 103.

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to suggest stubborn and proud personality. He paid a unique homage to his model. With the title of Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste peintre, he achieved a triple aim: He retrieved his mistress from the anonymity of a negligible model, gave her a seal of bourgeois respectability by using "Madame," and propelled her, as an ungendered "artiste peintre," into the upstanding masculine universe of nineteenth-century Paris. In no other works did Lautrec ever specify his sitters' alternate profession--if any--nor did he address them as "Madame," reserved at the time for married women. The word signified Valadon's worth as a human being and stood as a social tribute from the Vicomte de Toulouse-Lautrec to the unwed daughter of an illiterate charwoman. The label "artiste peintre" proclaimed his professional endorsement of a colleague.

The portraits have been at times perceived as unkind to Valadon's beauty,[57] although Lautrec never flattered any model. As a student, unable to "paint pretty," he was criticized by his teacher Cormon for his realism.[58] A true caricaturist, he drew swiftly, capturing with a few strokes the essence of his sitter's personality. It was Valadon's character rather than her prettiness that he aimed at--and succeeded in--bringing to his viewers' attention in these two outstanding portraits.

According to Gauzi, Lautrec cast Valadon in eclectic roles: "...an equestrian, a woman combing her hair, an errand girl running

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[57]Ibid.; Cooper, 24.

[58]Perruchot, 9.

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through Paris, a heavy cloth basket under her arm."[59] She has been identified as the equestrian in Au Cirque[60] done at Cirque Fernando when Lautrec painted clowns and equestrians. On the other hand, Valadon did not model, as suggested by Gauzi, for the 1886 Laundress, but she posed two years later for a grisaille published as an illustration in Paris Illustré. Gauzi also wrongly identified Portrait of Hermine Pledger[61] as a Portrait of Suzanne Valadon and dated Celle qui se peigne or Le modèle in 1891, years after Lautrec had sworn "never to see (Valadon) again."

More credibly, Valadon has been named the model for Poudre de riz (fig. 82) whose sitter had not been identified previously.[62] The work was among eleven paintings shown by Lautrec in February 1888 at the XX Exhibition in Brussels.[63]

Poudre de riz was thought to take place in a café since the woman leans on a gueridon similar to those used in local establishments. More recently, the painting has been designated as a genre scene "staging the last minute dressing of a Parisian woman

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[59]Gauzi, 30: "Il lui distribua des roles divers. Élle fut ecuyière, celle qui se coiffe, trottin, blanchisseuse et il la fit courrir dans les rues de Paris une corbeille pesant lourdement à son bras."

[60]Toulouse-Lautrec, Au Cirque, 1888, study for a screen, canvas, 33 1/2 x 18 3/4". See description in Huisman-Dortu, 314; also in Gauzi, 131-2; Toulouse-Lautrec, 1991, 225.

[61]Also called La Dame aux gants noirs. Huisman-Dortu, 397.

[62]For Valadon's identification and the dating of late 1887, see Van Gogh à Paris, p. 178.

[63]Ibid. The painting had been sold in January 1889 to Theo van Gogh, under whose ownership it was listed.

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before her nocturnal rounds of bars and cafés."[64] The gueridon is actually a dressing table on which top lay a powder puff and a maroon box of poudre de riz that gave the painting its title. Save for a chair and the faint outline of a curtain next to the right wall's plane, the picture does not offer any indication of setting, although it was painted in Lautrec's atelier.[65] Against the blank background, the woman's features are as clearly drawn as those of a portrait and it is undoubtedly a demi-mondaine who faces the viewer. Slumped on a chair, a vacuous look in her eyes, she is an incarnation of disenchantment and ennui. Traces of premature aging and the stigma of debauchery mark the face of the woman who sits there worlds apart from the proud Madame Suzanne Valadon, artiste peintre.

Based on a letter from Theo to Vincent van Gogh, a former 1889 dating of Poudre de riz has been changed to November-December 1887, and seen as contemporary to Lautrec's Portrait of Van Gogh.[66]

Valadon's identification as the sitter for Poudre de riz permits us to recognize her as the as the model for La grosse Maria (fig. 83)[67]. Different techniques were used for each of these paintings. La grosse Maria's somber palette is in keeping with the realist style

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[64]Ibid. "La preparation d'une Parisienne, avant une virée nocturne dans les bars et cafés."

[65]The model sits on a caned chair already seen in Lautrec's La Rousse au Caraco blanc: Carmen Gauzi dans l'atelier de l'artiste, oil on board, 22 x 17 3/4", Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, a work modeled for in Lautrec's studio.

[66] See Van Gogh à Paris, 322.

[67]See Toulouse-Lautrec, 1991, 72. The painting has been dated 1884 by Douglas Cooper, Toulouse-Lautrec (New York: Harry H. Abrams, 1952), 62.

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of the work. In Poudre de riz the artist chose the bright divided touch, admired in Van Gogh's contemporary portraits. But if one finds dissimilarities in the styles, colors, and brushstrokes of both works, there is no doubt about the two sitters' resemblance: It is Valadon who faces the viewer both times.

"When I see kids of seventeen, I remember when a long time ago I was a virgin in Grenelle," recalls the sullen drinker of Bruant's ballad A Grenelle.[68]

Other Lautrec paintings were inspired by the chansonnier's songs, such as A la Bastille and Aux Batignolles, all tributes to the "girls" who lived and worked in the sordid neighborhoods of Paris.[69]

In A Grenelle, the "girl," whose profile is partly hidden, is sprawled on a round café table, her back turned to the viewer, Her unruly hair hides her forehead and eyes, and the glass almost touching her lips becomes the picture's focal point. Although the model's heavy nose and bent back bear no likeness to Valadon's actual delicate profile and erect posture, she has been identified as the latter.[70]

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[68]"Quand j'vois les filles de dix sept ans, ça m'fait penser qu'il y a bien longtemps, moi aussi j'l'ai été pucelle à Grenelle." Lautrec painted the woman from Bruant's ballad n. 36 for the Mirliton, March 1, 1886. Toulouse-Lautrec, A Grenelle, or L'attente, oil on canvas, 22 x 18 1/2", Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

[69]"Bruant donna les titres de ses chansons, publiées en 1886, a des tableaux de Lautrec qui viennent l'un après l'autre, completer la collection du Mirliton. Ce sont des portraits de "filles" et, à leur manière, de bonnes illustrations des oeuvres du chansonnier." Perruchot, 143.

[70]Monneret, I, 964.

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In A Grenelle, as in Poudre de riz, Lautrec, through few key details, conjures up a negative climate. The frivolous powder puff and the hardened features of the model in Poudre de riz speak of dissipation and wantonness. In A Grenelle the fille's dejected attitude and a focus on her glass point to her addiction. Were Valadon the model, she has been demoted from the rank of call girl to that of alcoholic prostitute.[71] The work was painted in January 1888 after the lovers broke up.[72]

Although Valadon does not appear in a flattering light, Gueule de Bois (fig. 84),[73] is the best known and only work, besides her two portraits, in which she has been positively identified.[74]

> A street walker in a white caraco leans on a zinc-topped table in front of a bottle and glass. She is shown in profile resting her chin on a hand, a chignon on the neck and a loose lock of hair on the forehead.[75]

Her face is blank with unfocused eyes and lips that almost touch the bottle. She is slumped on a stool and her body's upper part forms a pyramid that fills most of the fore- and middleground.

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[71]Lautrec painted another illustration for A Grenelle, called Buveuse d'absinthe, using a model whose coarse face and thick body could not be mistaken for Valadon's. The title could be an homage to Degas' 1876 Absinthe as well as an indication of the contents of the glass.

[72]Perruchot, 350.

[73]Dated 1889 and identified by Adriani, 93. Lautrec did two preparatory sketches and a drawing published in the Courrier Francais in 1889.

[74]Toulouse-Lautrec, 1991, 190; Van Gogh à Paris, 520.

[75]Maurice Joyant, 14: "Une pierreuse en caraco blanc est assise devant une table de zinc portant un litre et un verre, de profil, chignon sur la nugue, mèche sur le front, la joue appuyée sur sa main."

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Strongly outlined, her profile stands out against a dark column. The downward lines of the features speak of isolation and disillusionment while the dejected posture and unkempt hair tell a story of physical neglect. No superfluous detail draws attention away from the sitter. One perceives Lautrec's lack of interest in a background merely suggested by the oblique lines of a counter. A small round table, parallel to the central one, occupies the center of the composition. The rest of the decor is left to the viewer's imagination.

If the painting is viewed as a character study or a social comment, the choice of a model should be meaningless. However, in this work, since the model's profile is so easily recognizable, it might perhaps have been Lautrec's subconscious wish for Valadon to be identified with an incurable addict.

The problem of alcoholism was of great concern to Parisians during the later part of the nineteenth century.[76] The subject, already treated by Manet and Degas, fascinated Toulouse-Lautrec, who did several illustrations on its effects. His was a morbid interest since the artist himself died prematurely of excesses that included heavy drinking.

Ironically, alcoholism, if it were not a great concern for Valadon herself, was to play a strong role in her life. Her son Maurice remained prey to a vice so pathetically incarnated by his mother in Gueule de Bois.

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[76]See Toulouse-Lautrec, 1991, 190.

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Lautrec was known to feel a strong attachment to Gueule de Bois.[77] It has been suggested that he kept it out of sentimentality although Valadon's betrayal might have deepened a firmly-rooted antipathy which he felt toward women. Her behavior allegedly prevented him from ever again establishing a trusting relationship with any woman.[78]

A ma mie (fig. 85) was first shown at Salon des Independents in March 1891. Even more emphatically than Gueule de Bois, the work constitutes Lautrec's most severe indictment of alcoholism as well as his cruelest portrayal of human degradation.

The painting is at times called Portrait de Maurice Guibert.[79] Although the latter was a relatively young man in 1891, he is presented as a pitiful old drunk, sprawled over a tabletop. Only his head and shoulders are shown and his hand reaches for the glass of wine. He is dwarfed by the bulk of his companion, a repulsively voluminous woman twice his size, who stares belligerently into the distance. She wears a caraco and her left hand, clutching a rag, falls on her striped shirt. The gruesome couple share a café table where bottle and glasses are placed next a piece of bread and a quarter of Brie. The coarseness of their features emphasizes Guibert's stupid grin and the woman's malevolent glance, both of which are done with the savage dexterity of a caricaturist.

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[77]Loftus, 38; Cooper, 9.

[78]Loftus, 37.

[79]Maurice Guibert was one of Lautrec's constant companions during the 1880's and used to visit bars and brothels with him. He worked as a Champagne salesman for Moet et Chandon and sat for over twenty drawings and caricatures.

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Identifying the background is problematic. The scene could take place in a café, since the square table with its wrought iron legs is similar to those used on the contemporary "bistro" terraces. Lautrec might also have worked in Père Forest's Gardens, inside his "buvette," as one distinguishes the outlines of curtains on the left and a few rectangular shapes, possibly pictures, on the back wall.[80]

The figures were posed by live sitters but Lautrec also used a photograph in which Guibert has been identified.[81] The woman, invariably described as actually being a "young and attractive" Montmartre model,[82] might be Valadon[83] whom, as an evil magician, Lautrec turned into a repulsive old shrew. The painting's extreme realism makes it unique in the artist's oeuvre and it has been viewed as a picture of disillusionment, cynicism, human degradation, and vice.[84]

Was A ma mie a broad condemnation of alcoholism, Lautrec's masochistic anticipation of his personal fate, his ultimate revenge on his mistress, or both? Although his harshness might have stemmed from other causes, all these motivations are undoubtedly combined, the latter appears as the stongest one. The lack of physical likeness between the washerwoman and the twenty-six

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[80]See Coquiot, 1921, 9. The buvette was a small wooden structure in Père Forest's gardens. See footnote 55.

[81]Cooper, 90; Shone, 90. The photograph was taken by Lautrec's friend Paul Sescau.

[82]See Loftus, 20; Cooper, 90.

[83]Lucy-Smith, fig. 11, felt that A ma mie was closely related to Gueule de Bois.

[84]See Cooper, 8; Loftus, 20; Perruchot, 167.

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year-old Valadon does not eliminate the latter as the sitter. Since A ma mie follows the theme of degradation treated in Poudre de riz, A Grenelle and Gueule de Bois, it offers a logical conclusion to a saga documenting the "Downfall of Suzanne Valadon."

It could be argued that the artist was equally cruel in the depiction of Maurice Guibert, against whom he held no grudge. However, Lautrec never painted a truthful portrait of his friend, whom he mostly sketched and caricatured.[85] But even though the male sitter looks years older than Guibert and is marked by debilitating signs of alcoholism, his features are not as grossly distorted as those of his companion. Furthermore, in the male-dominated society of nineteenth-century Paris, being an alcoholic was judged far less severely for a man than a woman, for whom this condition was socially unacceptable.

If Toulouse-Lautrec's disappointment with Valadon is unquestionable, little is known about the latter's feelings for him. The suffering that she caused did not seem to provoke any remorse on her part.[86] She recalled only the exciting moments when the two were in love. Until her last days, she loved to tell stories of her lover's eccentricities and some risqué details of their affair.[87] She professed a total admiration for Toulouse-Lautrec, rating him among

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[85]Cooper, 90. A 1900 caricature shows him in pursuit of a girl on the quayside at Bordeaux.

[86]Jean Gabriel Domergues, Les femmes de Toulouse-Lautrec (Paris, 1962), 144.

[87]Crespelle, 73.

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her "greats." When he died she cried at least for a week--or said so thirty years later.[88]

Among Valadon's patrons and lovers, Toulouse-Lautrec was the first to realize the extent of his model's talent,[89] and to suggest that she should devote her life to art.[90] He allegedly displayed on the walls of his studio some of the portraits she did of her son and, praising their quality, challenged his visitors to guess the artist's identity.[91]

Valadon's own respect for Lautrec's achievements is reflected in her whole oeuvre. But further than appropriating his images, palette, or techniques, as she did from Puvis and Renoir, what she borrowed from Lautrec was the character of his art.

Both Lautrec and Valadon were essentially draftsmen. For them, the line was all important and its function, essential. The heir of a long line of Montmartre caricaturists, Lautrec was mostly interested in human beings, as was Valadon. He captured and synthesized his sitters' personality with a few strokes that emphasized their salient traits. Exposed to Lautrec's abbreviated sketching, Valadon realized the value of reductiveness and characterization. Methodically, she started to simplify her drawing in order to capture the model's essence with the greatest economy.

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88 Polnay, 42.

89 Gauzi, 134-35.

90 Storm, 82.

91 Gauzi, 134; Henri Perruchot, La vie de Toulouse-Lautrec (Paris: Hachette, 1958), 133.

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This summarizing is illustrated in Young Girl With a Mirror (fig. 86), where a blank background focuses attention on a movement that expresses the child's fascination with her own reflection.

Not only did Valadon learn from Lautrec the value of a simple gesture, she also realized the importance of ordinary objects. In the 1909 Young Girl Putting on a Stocking (fig. 87), a work possibly inspired by Lautrec's Nude Study,[92] the adolescent's black hose becomes the picture's focus, a detail as meaningful and electrifying as Yvette Guibert's long gloves and Bruant's red scarf. Further inspired by Lautrec, Valadon placed her model in the position assumed by the dancer Jane Avril in a celebrated poster (fig. 88).

The two artists' reciprocal admiration stemmed from a common need for uncompromising realism as well as a contempt for "pretty pictures." These principles are best illustrated in Lautrec's 1887 portraits of Valadon where she became the subject of his implacable observations. In a 1915 Portrait of Madame Coquiot (fig. 89), Valadon's brush was equally unyielding.

In 1900, Toulouse-Lautrec saw La Belle Hélène at the Bordeaux Opera and did several paintings and sketches of Melle Cocyte (fig. 90), a stately singer who played Hélène. Fifteen years later, Valadon painted the portrait of Madame Coquiot, whose theatrical presence and peacock-like posture evoke Melle Cocyte's own demeanor. However, Lautrec's gaze was essentially that of a caricaturist. He seized the singer's flamboyant nature and her unmistakable self-satisfaction with a great economy of detail, lingering over her

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[92]Toulouse-Lautrec, Nude Study, 1893, oil on canvas, Musée d'Albi.

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excessive corpulence and developing double chin. Valadon's interpretation, although truthful, is less cruel. If she recorded faithfully her sitter's stubborn and arrogant stare, the defiant toss of her head and the proud display of bare flesh, she granted her an arresting presence and a magnificent physicality. Madame Coquiot's ripe beauty has been joyfully transcribed by an artist whose evident pleasure in her work is communicated to the viewer.

It was Lautrec's need for a swift delineation that led him to adopt some of the methods he so admired in Japanese woodcuts. His "Japonisme" was appropriated in turn by Valadon who, in her Portrait of a Woman with a Bare Breast (fig. 91), followed with success Lautrec's use of decorative applications of outlines and silhouettes The broad areas of unmodulated colors seen in so many of his posters are repeated in her 1924 Woman with White Stockings (fig. 92) where large flat surfaces of red dominate the canvas. Valadon also utilized Lautrec's occasional tilted viewpoints in the 1903 The Moon and the Sun (fig. 93), and she also borrowed his sharp diagonals and receding space in Portrait of Miss Lily Walton (fig. 94).

Having observed that Lautrec cut his figures at the edges to suggest depth and continuity, Valadon amputated the hands of Nude with Bare Breasts (fig. 95) and cropped part of a dog's head in André Utter and His Dogs (fig. 96).

However, Valadon seems to have lacked Lautrec's fascination for movement, as well as his talent in expressing it. Her solid figures remain anchored to the ground with everlasting stillness. Because of an absence of academic training, her repertory of human gestures and attitudes was limited and she often turned to Lautrec's

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works as a source of guidance. In her Woman with White Stockings, she repeated a fragmented close-up observed from a particular angle that Lautrec used in Salon de la rue des Moulins (fig. 97), but she reversed the gesture of the foreground figure who circles her raised knee with her arm.

In Valadon's oldest known painting, Young Girl Crocheting (fig. 98), an adolescent, seen in profile, sits near a window in the immediate foreground. She is shown a contre-jour leaning forward, her eyes downcast, and bestows on her crocheting the same concentration that Lautrec's mother gives to her reading in Portrait of the Countess A. de Toulouse-Lautrec in the Salon at Malrome (fig. 99). Placed in the same position as the Countess, she bends her head in a similar gesture. The two women's profiles and bodies are lightly outlined, but they stand clearly out of their surroundings, and both figures are cut below the chair's arm rest. The artists' styles, however, are different: For Lautrec's free brushstrokes, Valadon has substituted a linear treatment. Young Girl Crocheting was done at the very beginning of her experimentation with oils when she still looked for guidance. Since she could have seen the Countess' portrait, or its study,[93] in Lautrec's studio, the similarities between the two works might not be coincidental. They can be explained by a young painter's need to emulate her employer whose art she so admired.

Lautrec's Monsieur Boileau in a Café (fig. 100) seems to have set the pattern for a casual portrait of Paul Mousis (fig. 101).[94] The

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[93]Toulouse-Lautrec, Artist's Mother, 1885, charcoal, 25 1/4 x 18 1/2", Musée d'Albi.

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two works are done in different mediums--oil painting with an unusually crowded background for Lautrec and a plain drawing on a biank setting for Valadon. The latter eliminated Lautrec's busy café decor as well as a foreground table that forbids a direct visual access to Monsieur Boileau.

The two sitters share numerous common points. Boileau, a well-to-do bourgeois, was a bon vivant from Lautrec's entourage and his picture might have provided Valadon with a paradigm for her portrait of Mousis, himself an older man of means. The latter adopted Boileau's relaxed posture, leaning back with satisfaction on his armchair. The unguarded position of each man's open arms and legs expresses contentment through explicit body language. Each sitter glances to the right and sports a bicycle-handle mustache on his well-fed round faces. What confronts the viewer is an embodiment of social and financial success, qualities that counted among Mousis' assets. By marrying him, Valadon hoped to find a security that never was hers in the past. As a wishful prediction of happy domesticity, she placed at her future husband's feet a dog lying peacefully, the symbol of a faithfulness she herself was to forsake thirteen years later.

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[94]The work is dated 1891 in the Museum's archives, although Pierre Georgel gives 1893 as a date for the first Valadon-Mousis meeting in the chronology compiled for Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 11. Since Valadon occasionally predated some works when she exhibited or sold them, it is this writer's opinion that the work should be dated c. 1893-96.

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CHAPTER 7

VALADON AND DEGAS

Cette diablesse de Maria avait le génie du dessin.[1]

There is no doubt that among all the artists whom Valadon knew, it was Degas who exercised the deepest psychological and stylistic influence. He acknowledged her talent as soon as he saw her drawings, purchasing one immediately. His tribute gave the young woman a sense of her own worth, never before experienced. Furthermore, in 1895, Degas took the time and the care to teach her soft-ground etching on his own press. For the rest of his life, he never ceased to express his admiration for her "bold and supple lines,"[2] and during her moments of despair, dispensed his unfailing support. "Use the rare talent that I am proud to find in you,"[3] he exhorted her, urging her to think of nothing but her work.[4]

He believed that she was an "excellent artist,"[5] and he collected her works, which were displayed in prestigious company.

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[1]Edgar Degas, 1901. Paul André Lemoisne, Degas et son oeuvre (Paris: Paul Brame and C. M. DeHauke, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1946-49; reprint edition, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984), 218.

[2]Marcel Guérin, ed., Degas Letters, translated by Marguerite Kay (Oxford: L. Cassirier, 1947), 194.

[3]Ibid., 204. Letter dated November 1897.

[4]Ibid., 203. Undated letter, c.1897, postmarked "Tuesday".

[5]Ibid., 213. Letter postmarked January 3, 1900.

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Some of her drawings were hung above his bed, next to Kiyonaga's diptych Women Bathing, two small Corot landscapes, Manet's Pear, and a painting by Gauguin.[6] The red chalk drawing he bought from her in 1894 was hung in his dining room, where he could "look at it from time to time,"[7] and it remained in his permanent collection.[8]

Valadon's own admiration for the Impressionist's genius is reflected throughout her oeuvre, where her linear technique, reductiveness, sense of space and choice of subject matter acknowledge her debt to her mentor.

It is improbable that Valadon met Degas on her own. She could have seen him in her neighborhood or at the Café de la Nouvelle Athenes,[9] where he occasionally joined some of his friends and painted the Absinthe Drinker in 1876, but she was only eleven then. The older artist could not have known "Maria" as a model since she never posed for him.

Valadon herself could not remember who introduced her to Degas, but guessed that it might have been Bartholomé, Toulouse-Lautrec, or perhaps both artists together.[10] But while Lautrec might have been instrumental in showing some of her works to Bartholomé,

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[6]Degas inédit, Ecole du Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Actes du Colloque Degas, April 18-21, 1988, Musée d'Orsay, 73.

[7]Guérin, p. 218. Letter dated 1901. Guérin, 219.

[8]The work is likely to be Standing Nude near Chair, 1894, conté crayon, 9 7/8 x 8 1/4". See Suzanne Valadon , 1967, 83, footnote 96; Cabannes, 288.

[9]In 1885 Valadon posed there for Zandomeneghi's Au Café de la Nouvelle Athenes.

[10]Tabarant, 629.

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his relationship with Degas was too formal to warrant a recommendation for an unknown artist. Nevertheless, his unlikely role as a go-between has been argued by several writers.[11]

A more credible candidate for this mission would be Zandomeneghi, Valadon's next-door neighbor and friend who had close ties with the Impressionist, to whom he had already presented other artists. A letter from Pissarro to his son Lucien reveals that Gauguin had asked Zandomeneghi for an introduction to Degas.[12] However, Zandomeneghi's name does not appear in Degas' early correspondence to Valadon, whereas Bartholomé's is often present.

"Bartholomé must have written you about a drawing he was terribly anxious to have...," announced Degas in his first note to Valadon.[13] Bartholomé, a member of Degas' "inner circle" was the person most likely to have instigated the encounter between the two artists, an assumption further confirmed by several biographers.[14] Valadon herself remarked that whenever she visited Degas, she saw Bartholome "with whom he was inseparable."[15]

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[11]Deroyer, 207; Storm, 82; Polnay, 32; Warnod, 46.

[12]Letter dated May 5, 1895, John Rewald, Post Impressionism, New York, 1959, 474, footnote 47.

[13]Guérin, p.189. Letter dated July 1894.

[14]Beachboard, 36; Jean-Pierre Crespelle, La vie quotidienne au temps des Impressionistes: du Salon des Refusés (1863) à la mort de Manet (1883), (Paris: Hachette, 1981), 181; Henri Loyette, Degas (Paris: A. Fayard, 1991), 636; Roy Mac Mullen, Degas: His Life, Times and Works (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 446; Monneret, 39; Robert Rey, Suzanne Valadon et son Oeuvre (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française [Collection "Les Française Nouveaux"], 1922), 7; Denys Sutton, Edgar Degas, Life and Work (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 294.

[15]As quoted from Pierre Cabannes, Edgar Degas (Paris: Pierre Tisné, 1989), 288.

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Although it has been assumed that both Degas and Bartholomé met Valadon around 1894, it appears that the sculptor had already been corresponding with the latter since 1891, as revealed in one of his unpublished letters. In it, he offered the young woman his best wishes for the forthcoming year which, he admitted, "had started poorly for her." He tried nevertheless to comfort her: "Is it not true that everyone must lose something to bad luck, but the good one (luck) is now forthcoming."[16] He called her with formality "Dear mademoiselle" and wrote again a few months later with apologies for having previously been too busy to inquire about her health. Pledging to soon visit her, he asked: "Why do you always thank me? As an artist, you have brought me real joy and I am the one in your debt."[17] Bartholomé must have started collecting Valadon's drawings since, in his first note to Valadon, Degas mentioned a work that his friend "was terribly anxious to have."[18]

Degas himself acknowledged Bartholomé's greater familiarity with Valadon's works when he sent the young woman the price of three drawings that the sculptor alone had seen. Degas added that the latter "insisted on coming to congratulate her himself."[19]

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[16]Unpublished letter, January 6, 1891, Archives, CNAC Georges Pompidou, VAL C3 199. "Elle (the new year) commença mal pour vous, mais ne faut-il pas toujours donner quelque chose à la mauvaise chance, c'est la bonne qui va venir maintenant."

[17]Unpublished letter, June 10, 1891, Archives CNAC, Georges Pompidou, VAL C3 199. "Pourquoi me remerciez-vous toujours? Vous m'avez apporté une veritable joie d'artiste et c'est moi qui suit votre obligé."

[18]Letter postmarked July 1894. Guérin, 189.

[19]Undated letter, c. 1894, quoted from Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 96, No. 191.

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However, one of Bartholomé's letters could be misleading as to the date of his actual meeting with Valadon: "Four or five days ago," wrote the sculptor in 1894 to Paul Helleu,[20] "a friend[21] sent me a 'poor soul' who wanted to exhibit at the Salon and needed help."[22] Bartholomé only asked Helleu to look at drawings signed "Valadon" that were to be submitted to the jury. He admitted to the works' serious flaws, but nevertheless remained convinced that their unusual qualities would compel Helleu to have them accepted by the jury. Since "the Nationale's" yearly exhibitions lasted from April 15th to June 30th, Bartholomé's letter must have been sent several weeks before the opening of the exhibition, in time for the jury's selection, possibly by mid-March.

A few questions arise. Why would Bartholomé pretend that he had just met Valadon, whom he already knew for three years and called "poor soul," a painter whose works brought him such "artistic joy"? A valid explanation would be the desire to arouse Helleu's curiosity and offer him the opportunity to encourage an undiscovered and talented young artist. His aim was fulfilled since, against all probabilities, five of Valadon's drawings were selected to be shown at the 1894 Salon de la Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

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[20]Paul Helleu, 1839-1927, a fashionable painter and engraver. He was a friend of Monet and Whistler as well as Proust's inspiration for Elstir in A la Recherche du Temps Perdu. He became the president of the Nationale in 1894.

[21] This anonymous friend might have been Toulouse-Lautrec or Zandomeneghi, both on excellent terms with Bartholomé.

[22]Letter from Bartholomé to Paul Helleu, c. 1894, from Mrs. Howard Johnson's collection. Quoted in Suzanne Valadon, 1967, No. 191, 96. "Il y a quelques jours, se presentait chez moi envoyée par un ami, une pauvre femme...."

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A precise date for the encounter between Valadon and Degas, as engineered by Bartholomé, is conjectural. It fluctuates from 1883,[23] 1887,[24] the early 1890's[25], and 1894.[26] It was in July of 1894 year that Degas sent his first letter to "Mademoiselle Maria Valadon, 11 rue Girardon, Paris,"[27] in which he related his recent visit to the Champs de Mars[28] and complained about not finding any of Valadon's drawings there, including the one he had bought for himself.

One must assume that when Degas first wrote to Valadon in July of 1894 that he already knew her well, since he called her "Illustrious Valadon" with an affectionate familiarity suggesting more than a casual acquaintance. He asked her to come to his flat the following morning to bring the drawing he undoubtedly had purchased before it was shown at the Salon. Degas' note must have been written during the first week of July, when the exhibition was being removed from the Salon's walls. Furthermore, Bartholomé's glowing praise of Valadon to Helleu, whom he only knew casually,

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[23]Pétridès, 18.

[24]Storm, 87.

[25]Roy McMullen, 445.

[26]As dated by Loyrette, 636.

[27]Cabannes, Edgar Degas, 287; Guérin, 189.

[28]Degas was referring to the Salon de la Société des Beaux-Arts, created in 1890 by Meissonier as an alternative to the official Salon des Artistes Français. It became known as either "the Nationale" or "the Champs de Mars," after the location where the exhibitions were held yearly. Its shows, juried but without medals, took place in one of the pavilions built for the 1889 World Fair by Formigé and were moved in 1900 to the Grand Palais. In 1919, the Nationale was integrated with the Société des Artistes Français to become the Société des Beaux-Arts de la France d'Outre-mer.

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suggests that the sculptor would have been even more eager to introduce his old friend to an artist whom he valued so highly. A first meeting between Valadon and Degas must have taken place before Bartholomé wrote to Helleu, therefore in late 1893 or during the early part of 1894.

Regardless of the actual date of the encounter, it was a great success for the aspiring artist, who related the scene with her customary theatrical flair:

> Timidly, Suzanne knocks at the Master's door. After being introduced by the faithful Zoé, shaking, she takes out her drawings, one after the other. Degas frowns and examines them without a word. Finally, he looks at the girl, who, white as a sheet, seems to expect a death sentence. But with a smile warming up his beautiful eyes, the artist says the few words of such crucial importance for Suzanne's future: "You are one of us!"[29]

"Degas received me warmly and showered me with compliments," recalled Valadon in 1922.[30] She affirmed that as soon as they met, she "became a part of his home."[31] Actually, for a young artist to be asked to Degas' flat was not unprecedented. The old master invited and encouraged several beginning painters as disparate as Maurice Denis, Rene Piot and Georges Rouault.[32]

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[29]As told to Barrez by the artist herself, around 1935. Unpublished dissertation. Quoted by Loyrette, 804, footnote 571; Jean-Paul Crespelle, Utrillo, la Bohème et l'ivresse à Montmartre (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1970), 76; Edouard Herriot, Foreword, catalogue Suzanne Valadon, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, October 1930, 6; Polnay, 32; Storm, 89. Zoé was Degas' housekeeper.

[30]Tabarant, 629.

[31]Cabannes, 288.

[32]Loyrette, 636.

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Soon Valadon went almost every afternoon to rue Victor Massé, where she encountered habitués like Bartholomé and Rouart.[33] In return, Degas himself visited Valadon in her studio, as a note written on March 30, 1895, testifies: "You see, my poor Maria, that I am still unable to climb up to see you...."[34] According to Pissarro, Degas was supposed to be "very kind and sensitive to other people's misfortunes";[35] he must have been touched by the hardships of "Maria's" personal life and the tremendous obstacles she would have to surmount to achieve her artistic goals.

His correspondence to Valadon reveals a growing concern for her well-being as well as a knowledge of her daily life, family problems, and whereabouts that is unexpected in view of his well-known emotional aloofness. The evolution of this unlikely friendship is recorded in the notes that Degas sent to Valadon from July 1894 to approximately 1902. But his concern for her did not stop with his writing. Her name frequently appears in his letters to mutual friends such as Zandomeneghi, who informed Valadon in 1914: "Dining at Mr. Bartholomé's, I met Degas, with whom we spoke about you."[36]

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[33]Henri Rouart (1833-1912), Degas' wealthy schoolmate and close friend, was himself an avid collector and painter who exhibited with the Impressionists. His son Ernest married Julie Manet.

[34]Guérin, 199. Letter postmarked 30 March 1895. At the time, Valadon lived at 2-4 rue Cortot on the upper floor of a house which was later destroyed.

[35]Pissarro's letter to his son Lucien, May 1891, quoted from Rewald, Post-Impressionism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 464.

[36]Zandomeneghi to Valadon, unpublished letter, Gif, 1914, Archives CNAC Georges Pompidou, VAL C 3199: "...a dinner chez Mr. Bartholomé, j'ai rencontré Degas avec qui nous avons parlé de vous."

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Degas' sympathy was reciprocated. In 1910, when Degas had to leave his apartment Boulevard Victor Masse, Valadon was greatly instrumental in finding him another one in 6 Boulevard de Clichy.[37] There is every reason to believe that Valadon's devotion to Degas lasted until the painter's death. To her he was a friend and a fellow artist, as well as an idol.[38]

When questioned about her relationship to Degas, Valadon declared that she had never been his model, his student, or his mistress. "I never posed for Degas, although the contrary has been said a hundred times," she adamantly told Tabarant.[39]

Degas never treated Valadon as a pupil. Initiating her into soft-ground etching on his own press in his own apartment, was the proof of the esteem he had for her in his own apartment. He collected prints avidly and remained in constant contact with the dealer Gosselin.[40] Introducing Valadon to the world of etching stood as an invitation to share one of his greatest sources of pleasure: "I left everything to look by daylight and with a magnifying glass at magnificent Gavarnis," he confessed to Alexis Rouard, "I keep a

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[37] Degas catalogue , 496.

[38] "She had but one God, and his name was Degas." See Beachboard, The Montmartre Colony, 144.

[39] Tabarant, 628: "Je n'ai jamais posé pour Degas bien qu'on ai dit cent fois le contraire." Yet, Florent Fels, in Le roman de l'art vivant, (Paris, 1959), 81, quotes Valadon: "Il (Degas) trouvait un moi un modèle complaisant et comprehensif...." But Valadon's alleged statement is not confirmed by any reliable source and it is most unlikely that she ever posed for Degas.

[40] Guérin, 191. Undated letter to Alexis Rouart.

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special box for pieces of this class and beside each one an ordinary print that doubles my delight in the extraordinary one."[41]

Degas treated Valadon not as a student, but as a fellow-artist. He had too much respect for her unusually strong personality to "try to influence her with advice which she would have rejected."[42] Nevertheless, he must have commented on the works she showed him and tried to offer some suggestions.[43] "It was in vain," Valadon emphatically declared, adding that "not a single [one of her] drawings or plates was ever corrected by Degas."[44] Yet, considering her respect for his talent, it is unlikely that she dismissed his recommendations entirely, and perhaps waited to put them to good use on later works. Her lack of docility might have been one of the traits that appealed to Degas. Indeed, he was accustomed to more acquiescent attitudes from his female friends, were they Berthe Morisot and even Mary Cassatt.

What she valued above all was his friendship, a privilege to which the young woman attached great importance, since it was so rarely given. The strength of Valadon's own attachment to Degas was considerable. That a man and an artist of his stature should pay such interest to an insignificant model and aspiring painter must have seemed at first incomprehensible. Her beauty and the nature of

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[41]Ibid., 192. Undated letter to Alexis Rouart.

[42]Lemoisne, 194.

[43]Eunice Lipton, "Degas' Friends and a question of Stylistic Choice." La condition sociale de l'artiste, Centre Interdiciplinaire de Recherche sur l'Expression Contemporaine. C.N.R.S., October 12, 1985, 78-79.

[44]See Robert Rey, 1922, 8.

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her profession made her the prey to men's solicitations but their attentions usually remained of a sexual nature. Degas' sincere friendship and admiration must have touched and flattered her immensely. Actually, she allegedly broke her vow never to keep any correspondence[45] and preciously conserved all of his letters.[46]

In view of Degas' customary pattern of behavior, his affectionate relationship and familiarity with Valadon may appear unusual, particularly on a social basis. Most members of his "inner circle" came from distinguished and cultured backgrounds or were acknowledged artists and musicians. While Degas rarely divulged his personal feelings about the people he knew, in Valadon's case he expressed throughout his letters a great interest in her problems, and dispensed words of wisdom, even, at times, of consolation: "In spite of your son's sickness, it is necessary for you to start bringing me again some of your wicked and supple drawings."[47] When, shortly afterward, Degas acknowledged Valadon's own recent illness, he admonished her: "Once you are up and about, seeing that your livelihood is now assured, you must think of nothing but work...."[48] Whereas Degas ended most of his letters to friends and acquaintances with "Greetings," "Sincerely," or most often nothing at

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[45]Beachboard, 1963, 145.

[46]Tabarant, 629.

[47]Guérin, 203. Letter postdated 1897. "Utrillo's "sickness" was a euphemism for the latter's bouts with alcoholism and mental problems.

[48]Ibid., 204. Undated letter. Degas was referring to Valadon's 1896 marriage to Paul Mousis which had brought her financial security.

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all, he concluded some of his notes to Valadon with "Your friend"[49] and "Courage and take care!"[50] Degas' kindness toward the young woman was not unique and his reputation for misogyny is belied by his warm relationships with Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, and her daughter Julie Manet but they, after all, were of his social class.

Besides a justified admiration for Valadon as an artist, Degas felt a genuine affection for her as a person.[51] He appreciated her earthiness and the prodigious enthusiasm she never ceased to generate, and was amused by her titi parisien charm. Since gossip was not foreign to him, Valadon's lively tales about her world of models and painters could have brought an element of stimulation into his reclusive life.[52] On the other hand, Valadon's sincere admiration and devotion might have warmed both his ego and his heart. Yet, he did not take her concern for granted and sought and valued her presence: "Do not miss coming next Sunday...," he wrote her in March 1895.[53] In January of the following year: "Will it reach you, this small thank you for your good wishes and your continued remembrance?"[54] Two years later, he pleaded with her: "When the fancy takes you or you have the time to come to Paris, do not fail to come and see me,"[55] thus proving he knew that at this time she

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[49]Ibid., 194.

[50]Ibid., 193.

[51]Loyrette, 36.

[52]Coughlan, 29-30.

[53]Guérin, 193.

[54]Ibid., 193-194.

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divided her life between Montmagny and Montmartre.[56] Actually, he was always familiar with her whereabouts, and Degas once gave her her address to Bartholomé, who had lost it.[57] Degas sought her company and wrote to her, in 1898: her a few days later: "I received your good wishes.... You would make me very happy and do not disturb me as you fear, if you came at the end of the day with a box of beautiful drawings."[58] He continued to express the same complaint: "We [he and Bartholomé] received a letter from Maria, wishing us all the best, excepting the pleasure of seeing her drawings and of seeing her in person...."[59] "Every year, I see this clearly inscribed handwriting arriving. But I never see the author arriving...."[60]

Degas' kindness toward Valadon extended beyond technical suggestions and written encouragement. In addition to buying her drawings, he recommended her to some of his friends and acquaintances. In 1897, he wrote her: "I have a small commission for you from one of my friends, Mr. Dumont, a painter."[61]

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[55]Guérin, 199. Undated letter c. 1897.

[56]She lived in the suburbs with her husband but had kept a studio in rue Cortot.

[57]Unpublished letter, Bartholomé to Suzanne Valadon, January 1, 1898, Archives, VAL C2 122-128, CNAC.

[58]Guérin, 206. Letter postmarked January 1898.

[59]Ibid., 213. Letter postmarked January 3, 1900.

[60]Ibid., 219. Undated letter, c. 1902.

[61]Guérin, 199. Undated letter, c. 1987.

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Toward the later part of his life, Degas seems to have turned more possessive and perhaps was even jealous of Valadon's other friendships. Zandomeneghi warned Valadon after her visit to his country home: "I beg you not to tell (Degas) that you came to Gif. I will explain why when we meet."[62] Degas' possessiveness, however, was that of a close friend, not of a lover, as it has sometimes been wrongly assumed.

Indeed, there have been uncorroborated rumors of a love affair or at least of an amitié amoureuse between the twenty-nine year- old woman and the aging Degas, who was sixty when they met.[63] Norma Broude pointed out that "Degas' scholars...have, thus far, been able to see little more in his correspondence than a symptom of the artist's approaching senility rather than the result of an "unsubstantiated affair between the two."[64] When asked bluntly if she had slept with Degas, Valadon candidly replied that he was too afraid to do so.[65]

Although there is no doubt about Degas' genuine attachment to Valadon,[66] his feelings were likely to be of an avuncular nature, even

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[62]Unpublished letter, Zandomeneghi to Valadon, 1914, Archives CNAC Georges Pompidou, Val C3199. "Je vous prierais de ne pas lui (Degas) dire que vous êtes venue à Gif; je vous expliquerai ça quand nous nous verrons."

[63]See Jean-Paul Crespelle, Degas et son monde (Paris, 1972), 29.

[64]Norma Broude, "Misogyny," Bulletin, V. 59 (March 1977), 108.

[65]Florent Fels, Le Roman de l'Art Vivant (Paris: Fayard, 1959), 81.

[66]Loyrette, 636.

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paternalistic.[67] Nevertheless, while it is possible that, at times, Degas longed for the warmth of family ties, in Valadon's case he probably cast himself as a mentor rather than a concerned relative. On the other hand, Valadon would have welcomed a substitute father, in keeping with the type of relationship she had shared with Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir. Those artists, however, had been employers and lovers, not friends, and both were considerably younger than Degas was when he met Valadon.

Much has been written about Degas addressing Valadon as "Terrible Maria" and this adjective has been interpreted as conveying a sense of "terribilità."[68] However, "terrible" seems to have been a term that Degas occasionally used to address his friends, without giving it a particular fearsome connotation.[69] Actually, in a letter to Eugene Manet, Degas asked the latter to present "a thousand good wishes to his 'terrible' wife."[70] It seems obvious that the word "terrible" when applied to the demure and patrician Morisot could only be a humorous reference to her original or awe-inspiring talent. Degas was fond of unexpected epithets and he called Valadon "Illustrious Maria" when she still was an obscure artist.[71] Under his

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[67]Eunice Lipton "Representing Sexuality in Women Artists' Biographies: The Cases of Suzanne Valadon and Victorine Meurent," The Journal of Sex Research, Vol. 27, No. 1, (February 1990), 81-94 .

[68]In the context of Michelangelo's awesome and sublime quality.

[69]Interpreted in the nineteenth century vernacular sense, the word mostly carried an implication of unusualness and nonconformity.

[70]Guérin, 1945, 56. Also quoted in Anne Higonet, Berthe Morisot (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 182.

[71]Guérin, 189. Letter postmarked July 1894.

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pen, Mme. Henri Rouart, a respectable and respected bourgeoise became the "formidable Mme. Rouart."[72] Whether called "terrible," "illustrious," or simply "my dear Maria," Valadon was always treated affectionately by Degas and there is no reason to find any pejorative hints in terms most likely to have been the expression of the aging man's particular sense of humor.

In 1912, Degas had to give up the apartment at 37 rue Victor Masse where he had lived for twenty-two years. The building in which he occupied three floors was to be demolished and replaced by a new construction of "rentals."[73] Although some of his familiars such as Bartholomé thought he should rent an atelier in Auteuil or Passy, Valadon was convinced that he would "die of boredom" away from Montmartre.[74] She found him a large studio with a flat in 6 Boulevard de Clichy, at the corner of the rue des Martyrs, within walking distance of rue Victor Masse.[75] However, Degas never regained any peace of mind after moving. He stopped working, narrowed his circle of friends, and from then on limited his social visits to Bartholomé, Zuloaga and Suzanne Valadon.[76]

However, Degas' respect for Valadon's talent was not without limitations. What he most admired was the quality of her

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[72]As quoted from Crespelle, Degas et son monde, 26.

[73]Lemoisne, 90.

[74]Tabarant, 629.

[75]Loyrette, 663

[76]Jean-Jacques Lévèque, Edgar Degas (Paris: Editions Siloe, 1978), 98. As quoted from Paul Valéry.

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draftsmanship and he only purchased her "excellent drawings." Even though he remained in close contact with her until the end of his life and never ceased to praise "her rare talent," he neither mentioned nor acquired any of the paintings that became Valadon's largest artistic output after 1909. It is likely that he was more interested in her talent as a draftsman than her talent in painting.

Valadon herself tried to define which one among Degas' qualities assumed the most importance for her:

> It is not Degas' aesthetics that influenced me the most, but the quality of his observation.... I am referring to a specific attitude toward an object [sic] whose vital expression one feels compelled to render.[77]

Although Degas' analytical scrutiny conditioned Valadon's basic attitude in her own quest for "vital expression," his influence was manifold. One cannot ignore his contribution to the development of her technique and style. Furthermore, it was Degas who introduced her to the etching and engraving media, giving her the opportunity to reveal her original talent. From him, she gained an understanding of the value of pure drawing done without shading, which Degas had learned from Ingres. In order to obtain the fluid uninterrupted lines that he recommended, Valadon started to use tracing paper as he did. Aware of the importance that space assumed in his art, she duplicated his oblique views and Japanese perspective. Since she was not very inventive, she appropriated

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[77]As quoted by Fels, 82: "Degas a eu beaucoup moins d'influence sur moi par son esthétique que par la qualité de ses observations....Ici, il s'agit plutot d'une certaine attitude vis à vis de l'objet que l'on est decidé à poursuivre dans son 'expression vitale.'"

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some of his themes and images. In those, what she attempted to express was not Degas' timeless quality but the intensity of a moment. To do so, she adopted his themes only in the most general sense. Whatever she borrowed from him was absorbed and transformed in the context of her own vision.

As is already manifest in her first drawings, Valadon was herself endowed with a keen power of observation. This quality was unhindered by artificial conventions and fortified by a refusal to deviate from a rigorous truth. However, Valadon did not remain an unconcerned observer as was Degas. Although she studied her sitters with an apparent objectivity, her impartiality, unlike his, was tinged with a latent sympathy, often masked by the austerity of her drawing.

In 1895, only a year after Degas met Valadon, he had such confidence in her potential that he taught her soft-ground etching on his own press.[78] However, an unpublished letter from Valadon, dated August 5, 1894, and addressed to Mr. Marty, director of L'Estampe Originale, implies that the artist had had some previous experience with engraving: "Yesterday, I saw some friends who agreed to train me....Starting immediately, I hope to get soon some satisfactory proofs. I will then allow myself to intrude upon you and show them to you."[79]

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[78]Lemoisne, 194. Incorrectly dated 1896 by Pétridès, 1971, 18.

[79]Letter from Valadon to M. Marty, Paris: "Hier soir, j'ai vu des amis qui veulent se charger de mon apprentissage; aussi entrant tout de suite en campagne, je pense pouvoir obtenir quelques épreuves me donnant satisfaction. Je me permettrai alors de vous déranger pour vous les faire voir." Sold on December 1987 (No. 7) by Autographes et Documents Historiques, Librairie Henri Sartroi, Paris.

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It was Degas' belief that soft-ground etching was best fitted to the young woman's talent and temperament[80] since it relied on the skillfulness of a draftsman's hand.[81] It also offered several advantages to a neophyte. It presented the texture and appearance of chalk or pencil drawing and "its swift and expeditious process made it possible to preserve the original work."[82] It gave Valadon the clarity of lines and feeling of spontaneity that she needed for her informal sketches. During the next fifteen years, she did thirty-one soft-ground and drypoint etchings and three lithographs. She began in 1895-96 with twelve soft ground plates, published in a small edition by Vollard. She turned to etching in 1904 and, two years later, to dry point, which became her favorite medium. This process eliminated the unpredictable effects caused over metal by chemicals and gave her complete control over the plates.[83] Nowhere is Degas' presence more strongly felt than in Valadon's etchings that mostly deal with themes of women à la toilette. These works stand as an homage to her mentor whose fascination with bathing rituals was shared by Toulouse-Lautrec and Forain, devoted heirs of the Utamaro tradition. Valadon, following the path of Mary Cassatt, broadened the subject by introducing into her scenes images of children,

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[80]Loyrette, 636.

[81]Beachboard, 1952, 35.

[82]Roger Marx, 1932, 433.

[83]Bonnat, 26.

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themselves engaged in bathing activities and often tended by a grandmother or an older servant (fig. 102).

Although Valadon's technical skill is undeniable, her reliance on Degas' motifs has sometimes been too narrowly viewed: "These etchings, so remarkable for the vigor of their lines, depth of engraving and supple drawing, remain, in spite of their originality, close to those of Degas."[84] Yet Valadon, without denying Degas' influence on her choice of theme and figures, was able to project her own character into the images. In no subject matter is her quality of compassion so powerfully felt than in representations of children who often echo a solitude and alienation familiar to her own childhood (fig. 103). Furthermore, as soon as Valadon mastered the medium, she transformed its traditional techniques by her vigorous and personal approach. Indeed, the strength of her contours, and the depth and width of the lines profoundly incised into the zinc[85] are exceptional. In 1932, Roger-Marx saw the re-issue of eighteen etchings done by Valadon between 1895 and 1910[86] and marveled at "the singular merit and incomparable power of one of the only women-painters who succeeded in taming hard metal." The critic further believed that "no other (woman) had dared to use pencil or chisel like an offensive weapon, as males do."[87]

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[84]Lemoisne, 184.

[85]Degas had advised Valadon to use zinc instead of the traditional copper. See Storm, 91.

[86]The plates, originally done from 1895 to 1910, were reissued on June 1932 by the printer Daragnès in an edition of seventy-five.

[87]Quoted from Claude Roger-Marx, Preface and Essay, Eighteen Original Etchings Engraved from 1895 to 1910, Paris, June 1932.

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"Do your drawing with a single line. There is no drawing without tracing paper!" Degas adamantly instructed Valadon.[88] Since the start of his career, he had been using tracing paper in a conventional manner. In the 1890's he was initiated to a variation of this technique by his Italian friend Luigi Chivola (1842-1914), an insignificant painter of animals.[89] The latter had rediscovered it through his own son, who corrected his architectural drawings with this method taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.[90] Degas never ceased to use it thereafter. He relied on it to duplicate a specific movement, study a certain gesture and modify or refine it.[91] In many of his works, pastels in particular, he utilized tracing paper as a support, often stacking it in superimposed layers.

Several of Valadon's drawings suggest that it was through this method that she obtained a seemingly effortless fluidity of line. In Two Nude Girls Combing Their Hair (fig. 104), Valadon drew on the same sheet two small girls seen in profile. Showing identical proportions, they lift their right arms in a similar gesture. However, Valadon has made subtle alterations on the right figure and trimmed buttocks and abdomen. It becomes evident that the child was drawn from a tracing and placed higher on the sheet. Her feet

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[88]As quoted from Barrez, interview, 8/7/1992.

[89]Loyrette, 576.

[90]Ibid., 577.

[91]Cabannes, 236.

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become more visible than those of her companion while the tip of her left hand, holding a bow, is cut off by the edge of the sheet.

Certainly, one of the best examples of Valadon's use of tracing paper is a Self-Portrait (fig. 105), where her face's contours are drawn with an uninterrupted line that had to be achieved through this technique. Dated 1893, this work must have been done at the very beginning of her acquaintance with Degas.

In Nude Girl at Her Toilet (fig. 106), Valadon adopted Degas' preferred motif of a woman washing in a small tub (fig. 107) and probably utilized tracing paper to obtain a continuous unbroken stroke.

However, in Poetess Adrien Farge (fig. 108), one sees a faint second drawing of the woman's left leg, a pentimento that recalls Degas' early Study of a Nude Girl (fig. 109), done before he discovered the advantages of tracing paper.

During her frequent visits, Valadon had the opportunity to see some of the early works that Degas kept in his apartment. The old master was particularly fond of Young Spartans (fig. 110) and "displayed it prominently on an easel in front of which he often stood."[92] The adolescent seen at the composition's far right could be the source for the male figure in Valadon's Joie de vivre (fig. 111). Both Degas' and Valadon's nudes are shown from the side and stand erect in an attitude of youthful defiance. Once more, Valadon's borrowing from Degas remains superficially limited to a body's position, and the works' psychological climate differs greatly.

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[92]As quoted in Degas catalogue, 100, from Daniel Halevy in 1924, Paris, 24.

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Degas' young Spartan looks on the alert, ready to interfere in an impending physical confrontation, while Valadon's model remains the passive observer of a bathing scene and an eventual but still naive voyeur.

Draperies played an important role in Degas' compositions. Valadon introduced them in her own works but used them with greater simplicity. Discarding the compulsively-filled backgrounds of her early paintings, she placed some her nudes against minimal backdrops, such as a plain curtain or her "drapery with the eyes" (fig. 112)[93], but kept them from intruding upon her figures. While Degas' details establish the work's spatial foundation (fig. 113), those selected by Valadon describe a scene but do not function as an intrinsic part of the composition.

If Valadon's nudes comb their hair, crouch in small tubs, and dry themselves with twisted limbs <u>à la</u> Degas, the figures' concept and treatment reflect her individuality. What she struggled for, was "to express with intensity an aspect of life,"[94] and her determination to capture the intensity of a particular moment differentiates her from Degas, more intent upon expressing a timeless scene. While observing and recording with lucidity what she saw, Valadon introduced into Degas' careful analysis of forms and movements an element of spontaneity. This permeates her

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[93]A material with a print that, for Valadon, looked like eyes with lashes. Barrez, interview, August 13, 1993.

[94]Fels, 82: "Faire rendre intensement un aspect de la vie, c'est à quoi j'ai employé mon activité."

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works with the organic vitality that energizes Women Drying Themselves (fig. 114).

Louise Holding Catherine (fig. 115) reveals another facet of Valadon's emotional spontaneity. Her young sitter extends her arm and tries to hold on the woman's skirt. This gesture that translates her loneliness is traceable to Degas, who utilized it in quite a different context. In Le client serieux[95] (fig. 116) one of the monotypes on brothel scenes, he showed some of the prostitutes extending their arm as Louise does.

One finds in Valadon's style some trademarks that Degas himself appropriated from Japanese art. She adopted his plunging views in The Moon and the Sun (fig. 117) and his oblique vision in Two Nudes After the Bath (fig. 118), where she set the ascending narrow planks of the floor in Degas' diagonal pattern. At times, she used his disconcerting cropping. In Still Life with Violin (fig. 119) the partially-seen bodies of the male figures on the background walls evoke the headless dancers of The Orchestra of Paris Opera (fig. 120). Inspired by his frequent intrusions into the viewer's space, she invaded the composition's picture plane with segments of jutting objects as in Bouquet of Marigolds and Violets (fig. 121).

It is not in Valadon's portraits, landscapes or still lifes that Degas' influence is most potent, but in her nudes that predominantly depict working women, often caught during rare moments of relaxation (fig. 122). But while washing or drying themselves, they

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[95] I am grateful to Professor Diane Kelder for calling my attention to the influence of Degas' monotype images on Valadon's. The same gesture appears in Dans le salon d'une maison close, c. 1879.

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perform their ablutions with a nervous energy seldom possessed by Degas' bathers (fig. 123).

Valadon's lack of compositional imagination led her to also borrow from Degas' repertory some of her sitters' gestures. The servants or grandmothers who hand a towel to the bathers are among those (fig. 124). The woman combing her long hair in Nude After My Cleaning Woman (fig. 125) had to be inspired by Degas' lithograph series Woman Drying Herself (fig. 126), while the similarity of her Sitting Nude Drying Her Arm (fig. 127), to Degas' Nude Woman Drying Herself (fig. 128), seems too great to be discarded as a coincidence.

Degas' intrusions into female privacy have been judged as bordering on voyeurism.[96] Because of her gender, Valadon's intimate representations function as objective illustrations of women's activities. Still using Degas' images, she eliminated their erotic connotations by infusing a sense of dynamism into the composition. This is superbly illustrated in After the Bath (fig. 129), a pastel for which she did a rare finished drawing.[97] It was inspired by Degas' After the Bath (fig. 130), a study done for a similarly titled painting[98] (fig. 131) that remained in his studio where Valadon could have seen it.[99] A bromide print is closely associated with the three

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[96]See Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Works of Suzanne Valadon." Visibly Female, New York (1988), 264.

[97] Nude Young Girl Leaning on an Armchair, c.1908, drawing, colored crayons, 17 3/4 x 23 1/4", private collection.

[98]It was part of a series of three works, published in 1896-97 by Michel Manzi. See Degas catalogue, 550, #3410.

[99]This painting was acquired at Degas' death by Vollard. See Degas catalogue, 551.

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paintings.[100] The model, seen from the back in a contrived posture, reclines on a chaise-longue. Her body, reduced to a curvaceous trunk and plump buttocks, fills the whole foreground. It establishes the focus of the composition and casts the viewer as a voyeur. Although the woman seems to writhe in pain, the placement of her arms brings an element of sexual ambiguity to the scene. The figure has been viewed as "a poignant blend of eroticism and anguish,"[101] and her suggestive abandon might justify a reading of "intense physical pleasure."[102] The pose of Valadon's sitter, although superficially like Degas', seems far less distorted and might be judged awkward rather than pain-inducing. Her nude body is shown off-center in the middleground of a spacious room. One perceives her extreme youth as a bony shoulder blade interrupts the sinuous line of her spine. Her nubile figure discourages any sexual association and there is no suggestion of auto-eroticism in her gestures. She appears poised to jump up, her weight on one foot, her left hand on the armchair. Only part of her profile is visible, and small braids erupt incongruously amid her gathered hair. The only feelings she conveys are those of impatience and nervous dynamism associated with adolescence. Whereas some of Valadon's hefty female nudes can exude a healthy sensuality à la Courbet, the nude girl in After the Bath seems to have retained the innocence of her childhood.

In this work, Valadon only borrowed Degas' imagery on the limited basis of body position. She infused her figure with an

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[100] Ibid., 548.

[102] Ibid. As quoted from Eunice Lipton.

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element of energy that transforms its message more than the elimination of ambiguous gestures. By displacing the focus of the composition and putting the figure in an open setting, she stripped Degas' scene of its sexual context.

Valadon's and Degas' working methods were dissimilar. Although the latter was not a cruel man, he forced his models to keep their required position for hours. On the other hand, Valadon did her best work looking at her sitters "live" and never asked them to assume a pose, children least of all. She observed them and selected the lines and details that illustrated their nature. Such is the case of The Abandoned Doll (fig. 132), a curious and suggestive work. Using the sitter's body language in a seemingly banal scene, Valadon has succeeded in evoking the adolescent's problems of puberty, sexual awakening, and those of maternal guidance.[103]

On the other hand, Degas, who wanted to find out what made his model "tick," tried catching the mechanical side of a gesture.[104] Whereas the synthesis achieved in his works is obtained through patient analysis, Valadon achieves her goal spontaneously.[105]

Valadon has been accused of being pitiless.[106] Indeed, no more than Degas did she ever hide her models' flaws. Occasionally,

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[103]See Betterton, 267.

[104]Bernard Dorival, Etapes de la peinture française contemporaine (Paris: N.R.F.,1946), 213.

[105]Bernard Dorival, 20th Century Paintings, Nabis, Fauves and Cubists (New York: Universe Books, 1958), 33-34.

[106]Pierre du Colombier, "Suzanne Valadon est morte" Amour de l'Art, April 8, 1938: "On lui a reproché [Valadon] d'être impitoyable."

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she even seemed to accentuate them, out of defiance rather than insensitivity. Nevertheless, she never criticized, and objectively only reported what she saw.

Valadon's lucidity and her "harsh and exacting graphism"[107] owe much of their strength to Degas' example. But her impulsive and passionate temperament surfaces in forceful and spontaneous lines that are ultimately synthesized through an instinctive simplification and expressive reduction of forms. Her gift of understanding and expressing a human condition is infused in her works, unveiling a quality of empathy never felt by Degas. On whatever Valadon learned from him, she superimposed the seal of an individual vision and personality that make her art intrinsically her own.

Valadon acknowledged her artistic debt to Degas in her 1913 Marie Coca and Gilberte (fig. 133), the double portrait of her maternal niece and grandniece. On the background wall, the artist placed a painting showing a group of ballerinas on stage. This "picture within a picture" was a technique frequently used by Degas but rarely by Valadon. The inclusion of one of Degas' favorite scenes was Valadon's unequivocal homage to her mentor, her colleague, and her friend.

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[107]Bernard Dorival, The School of Paris in the Musée d'Art Moderne (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1958).

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CHAPTER 8

VALADON AND MARRIAGE

Valadon and Paul Mousis

On August 5, 1895, Suzanne Valadon married Paul Mousis (fig. 134), to whom she had been introduced by Miquel Utrillo in 1891. He was a well-to-do banker from a "respectable" background. A quiet habitué of Montmartre's Le Chat Noir and l'Auberge du Clou, his placid nature as well as his solid fortune might have influenced Valadon's decision to settle in a bourgeois life. Her son had turned thirteen and she was experiencing increasing difficulties with the rapid development of his precocious alcoholism. Her mother, who had always taken care of the child, did not have the moral strength or authority to cope with the crisis. Furthermore, Madeleine herself drank[1] and she might have been partially responsible for Maurice's problems. Mousis seemed to like the adolescent and had promised to treat him as his own, a pledge of utmost importance to Valadon. Additionally, he had accepted Maman Madeleine as part of the family, a commitment of no small value since Suzanne, in spite of her complete failure to communicate with her mother, had always shared her lodgings with her.

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[1] Storm, 33.

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Marriage was an eventuality that Valadon had not considered seriously in the past, except for the time of her liaison with Toulouse-Lautrec.[2] She provided for her own needs as well as those of her family; social and sexual freedom seemed indispensable to her. Faithfulness had never counted among her virtues. Although she felt a strong attachment toward Miquel Utrillo, she had continued to maintain a free lifestyle after the Spaniard returned to Paris in 1889 and resumed his liaison with her. Her lovers were numerous but her relationship with them was short-lived. Such was the fate of an affair she carried on with Erik Satie in 1893 which allegedly left the composer broken-hearted.

Erik Satie was employed at the time at the Auberge du Clou, where he had been playing the piano since 1891. This boisterous and inexpensive nightclub was a rendezvous for artists and it was there that Satie met Miquel Utrillo and the Spanish painters Rusinol and Casas.[3] Even by the Bohemian standards of contemporary Montmartre, Erik Satie's appearance and garb appeared eccentric. Never seen without his top hat, he exhibited a flowing lavalière and wore a pince-nez. He presumably met "Maria" at the Nouvelle Athenes on January 14, 1893,[4] and immediately fell in love with her. The same evening, he proposed to the young woman, who promptly

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[2]On Valadon's hope to marry Toulouse-Lautrec, see Chapter 6.

[3]See 1893 l'Europe des peintres, Musée d'Orsay, February 22-March 23, 1893, Paris, 246. Santiago Rusinol, 1861-1951; Ramon Casa i Garbo, 1866-1932.

[4]Marc Bredel, Erik Satie (Paris: Mazarine, 1982), 15.

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declined: "She had too many things on her mind to get married," Satie explained, "so we never brought up the subject again."[5]

Valadon was twenty-eight when she met Satie, who was one year younger. Her studio on 6 rue Cortot was located conveniently next door to the musician's "miserable closet"[6] and, regardless of her a liaison with Mousis that lasted since 1890, she seems to have carried on a volcanic affair with the composer, who became obsessed with her. He inundated her with impassioned notes and poems in which he addressed her as his "Biqui" and marveled at "her exquisite eyes, gentle hands and tiny child's feet."[7] As a gift, Valadon painted his portrait (fig. 135) and Satie did two drawings of her, both of which he kept. They were sketched on music sheets and one of them contained a song fragment titled: "Bonjour, Biqui, Bonjour" (fig. 136).[8]

The idyll lasted six months and was acknowledged by their friends, as Romance, a painting by Rusinol, testifies[9] (fig. 137). The sitters have been identified as Erik Satie and, most probably, Suzanne Valadon, who modeled for several of Rusinol's works.[10]

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[5]Alan M. Gilmore, Erik Satie (Boston: Twain Publishers, 1988), 96.

[6]Ibid.

[7]As quoted from Satie's letter dated March 11, 1893. Archives, CNAC.

[8]Gilmer, 96.

[9]See Europe des Peintres, 246. The entry suggests that the picture might allude to Satie's romance with Valadon.

[10]Ibid. She posed in particular for La Riallera, c.1893, Museu National de Catalunya, Barcelona.

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On June 20, 1893, the fickle Maria ended the relationship, leaving Satie with "nothing but an icy solitude that fills one's head with emptiness and the heart with sadness."[11] The musician's sorrow was as violent as his passion for Valadon, who seems to have been the only woman to break the inner circle of his life.[12] On the other hand, this romance did not play a great role in "Biqui's" life, and she only mentioned Satie in 1937 as "timid admirer" in another of her unbelievable tales.[13]

For Valadon, "painting was the most difficult [medium] in which to reach greatness,"[14] and she worked for thirteen years before showing her oils to the public. The wait seems worthwhile when one sees her Portrait of Erik Satie (fig. 135), which was one of the first canvasses that she kept.

The picture is divided into two squares: The bottom square contains Satie's black-clothed bust, and the upper shows the background painted in a striated blue-green that sets off the composer's face and dark hat. His head constitutes the focus of the work. Strategically placed in the center of the composition, it seems to stand upon a light oval pedestal, which is actually the white collar of the shirt.

The portrait is relatively small, its height double that of its length, but it achieves a monumentality far beyond its actual size.

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[11] Ibid. Satie's letter dated March 11, 1893, Archives, CNAC.

[12] Gilmer, 95.

[13] Deroyer, 191.

[14] Valadon ou l'absolu.

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Its unusual dimensions accentuate the sitter's elongated appearance; an abrupt cropping amputates both his arms, while his tall hat emphasizes the verticality of the image.

Clues to Satie's character are revealed only in the facial details: a decisive and stubbornly-fixed glance, sensuous red lips, the unconventional waxed mustache, and an incongruous pince-nez project a personality conscious of but unafraid of its own originality. Satie was twenty-six when this portrait was painted, and his lively complexion and taut features so emphatically stress the youthfulness of the face that his skimpy beard appears fake.

The linearity of the image where every contour is imprisoned in black outlines is contrasted by the treatment of the visage. Valadon has modeled the features solely with layered patches of color, a Cézannesque technique that she was to pursue throughout her career.

The Portrait of Erik Satie is endowed with an extraordinary physicality. By filling three-quarters of the surface of the canvas with Satie's image, Valadon gives her sitter an overwhelming presence. The musician seems to advance toward the spectator, an illusion created by the receding qualities of the muted background. The life radiating from the painting draws its source from the vibrancy of its colors. Large areas of velvety black sparkle with elusive blue-green accents and Satie's red cheekbones set off his startlingly blue eyes outlined by the rims of his pince-nez. Although the portrait was done at the start of Valadon's idyll, passion did not lessern her lucidity. This honest assessment of her lover reveals a methodical frankness almost caricatural. While emphasizing his

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powerful yet sensitive presence, she did not hide his aloofness and a judgmental quality that sets him apart. Satie stands alone, towering over the viewer, his strength as well as his weakness captured by his mistress' impartial brushes.

Although the Portrait of Erik Satie is stamped with Valadon's personality, it reveals several interacting influences, a distinctive feature of the artist's early style. The search for an intense characterization speaks of Degas while the overwhelming presence and strength of the image evoke the immediacy and sobriety seen in several of Lautrec's posters, in particular Aristide Bruand at the Ambassadeurs.[15] The artist's emphasis on few individual traits gives the representation an exaggerated quality that links the portrait to the tradition of the Montmartre caricaturists to whom she was perennially exposed in her neighborhood. When Valadon reached her artistic maturity, she kept certain characteristics acquired by observing the works of painters whom she admired. But she was by then able to incorporate some of their trademarks into her personal style, in which they became an integral part.

Satie kept Valadon's gift for the rest of his life. At his death, the portrait, as well as his own two drawings of the artist, were found by his brother hanging together in his room at Arceuil.

There is no doubt that Valadon had several other brief affairs during the period preceding her marriage to Paul Mousis. It is probable also that the latter was aware of some of her involvements with other men, namely Miquel Utrillo and Erik Satie, whom he

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[15]Toulouse-Lautrec, Aristide Bruand at the Ambassadeurs, 1892, poster, Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi.

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befriended. Yet, he must have believed that Terrible Maria, upon becoming Madame Mousis, would step into bourgeois respectability, and this is actually what Valadon did for the next thirteen years.

When she married Paul Mousis, Valadon gave up her work as a model. Her husband was well-to-do, and matrimony ended the financial difficulties that had plagued her family. She had decided to devote herself to her art, for she had been immensely encouraged by her admission into the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1894. Her decision to become a professional artist was strengthened by Degas' praises of her "rare talent." Soft-ground etching, which the latter taught her, occupied an important place in her oeuvre. After painting half a dozen oils between 1892 and 1893, she lost interest in the medium for a decade[16] and devoted herself to graphic works. In 1894, two small galleries, Le Barc de Bouteville, 2 rue Pelletier, and Le Veel, rue Lafayette, started to carry her drawings.[17]

During his liaison with Valadon, Mousis rented a house in Pierrefitte, a small village in the Val de l'Oise, twenty-five kilometers north of Paris. The place was originally leased to provide the benefits of country fresh air on week-ends. However, aware of his stepson's drinking problem, Mousis felt that there would be fewer temptations in a village than in the capital, and he soon moved the family on a permanent basis to Pierrefitte. Maman Madeleine accompanied her daughter, as did Marie-Emilienne (Coca)

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[16]She only painted one work: Grandmother and Little Rosalie, 1896, oil.

[17]See Degas' letter, postdated November 1894, Guerin, 190.

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who joined the household in 1895 after her mother's death.[18] The young girl helped with the daily chores and took Utrillo to the village school before his enrollment in Collège Rollin, a private school in Paris to which he commuted daily.[19]

As for Valadon herself, she had convinced her husband that although she was willing to abandon Montmartre as her main residence, she still needed her own atelier to pursue her work. Mousis agreed to keep the studio on the ground floor of 12 rue Cortot where they had lived together. The artist would frequently drive to Montmartre in her own light carriage drawn by a mule (fig. 138) and escorted by five Alsatian dogs jumping around.[20]

The family did not stay long in the rented house. Soon after moving to the country, Mousis received a small inheritance that enabled him to build a modest home,[21] located on the nearby Butte Pinson, between Pierrefitte and Montmagny and surrounded by a large garden. Valadon settled happily into a pleasant suburban routine. She grew her own flowers and entertained her neighbors as well as her husband's business associates. For the first time in her life, she was free of financial worries and could now devote herself to her art. Helped by Degas, whom she visited in Paris,[22] she worked

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[18]Marie Coca's letter to Dr Le Masle, Cète, September 3, 1959, Archives, CNAC.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Polnay, 48.

[21]Marie Coca's letter to Dr. Le Masle, September 3, 1959, Archives, CNAC.

[22]Degas' letter, postmarked March 1895. Guerin p. 193.

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on her drawings and etchings which were shown at Vollard in 1897.[23] She did not lose her creativity and tried her hand at designing furniture.[24] Not only did she execute several models in white pine, but with saw, hammer, and chisel she built massive rugged chairs[25] for which she used yellow oak and walnut.[26] Regrettably, nothing remains of these creations.

Valadon's peace of mind was short-lived, marred by her son's increasing bouts with alcoholism. His condition deteriorated, and in 1901 he was formally diagnosed as suffering from precocious dementia or schizophrenia. He was interned for two months in Sainte Anne, a hospital specializing in the treatment of nervous disorders and lunacy, the first of a series of psychiatric institutions that Utrillo was to visit periodically for the rest of his life. His confinement was decided by Mousis with the consent of his wife, who hoped for a total cure. Her prayers were not answered and her son's condition worsened.

Additional problems contributed to the couple's disharmony. Never before had Valadon lived away from La Butte. She missed her friends, her neighbors' familiar faces, the turbulent night spots and, most of all, the life and tumult of its winding streets. Playing charming hostess was losing its thrill, and she found herself unchallenged by a husband with whom she shared nothing but a large

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[23] Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 110.

[24] Polnay, 59; Storm, 134.

[25] Beachboard, 167.

[26] Storm, 134.

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house and whose bourgeois concepts were so foreign to her. She was bored with her newly-acquired respectability and the monotony of her daily life. Mousis had given up on trying to help Maurice after the latter had to be withdrawn from school in 1900 and afterwards was fired from every position that his stepfather found for him. Eventually, the adolescent remained in the house, terrorizing his grandmother and stealing money to buy liquor. His violent fits would lead to new internment but no sooner was he released than he began drinking again in excess.[27]

Despairing, Valadon sought the help of Dr. Ettinger, a local physician as well as friend who had commissioned some of her furniture and who advised:[28] "Find an outlet for his over excitement. Hand him a pencil or even a brush. Why not give him a taste for painting?"[29] Valadon decided to try the therapy and attempted to stimulate her son's interest by giving him a few basic instructions. She offered him her own palette, which contained two chrome yellows, one vermilion, one deep red and one zinc white, the five basic colors she used.[30] In spite of his initial reluctance Utrillo, to please a mother he adored, started to follow her directions, soon showing an unusual talent for painting. Unfortunately, his new vocation did not cure either his alcoholism or his mental dysfunction

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[27]Utrillo, peintures de 1908 à1950, Montmagny les Cormeilles, Centre Picasso, 1992, 11.

[28]Polnay, 59.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., 62.

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and his progressive degradation ultimately became intolerable to Paul Mousis.

Valadon and André Utter

In 1909, after thirteen years of marriage, Valadon fell in love with André Utter (fig. 139), Utrillo's friend and contemporary. With his golden beard and hair, the young man, an aspiring painter himself, was remarkably handsome, "the type of man whom the girls spot immediately and are dying to meet."[31] He was introduced to Valadon by her son, whom he had met in Montmagny where he was convalescing from "the excess of ether and hashish in which he had indulged in Modigliani's company."[32] When Utter first saw the artist, her beauty, personality and budding fame left a deep impression on him: "A still youthful woman, filled with charm, who went by unconcerned, holding two magnificent German shepherds on a leash."[33] He met her again in rue Cortot and after a few months confessed to his love during a visit to the Musée Moreau.[34] Between

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[31]Francis Carco, Montmartre vécu par Utrillo. (Paris: Edition O. Pètridés), 1947, 16.

[32]André Utter, How to Become a Painter, II, c. 1914-15, unpublished handwritten manuscript, Archives, CNAC.

[33]Ibid.

[34]"Je suis obligée de remettre notre visite au Musé (sic) Moreau." Valadon's note to Utter, dated 9/23/1909, Archives, CNAC.

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the two, "an intense love story was born."[35] André Utter was twenty-three, Suzanne Valadon, forty-four.

Utter, three years older than Maurice, was born on March 20, 1886, in Clignancourt, a poor Parisian neighborhood. His father owned a small plumbing store and wished for his son to continue his business. Utter began to work with him, but his sole ambition was to devote himself to painting. With his parents' reluctant approbation, he moved to Montmartre where he became an habitué of the Bateau Lavoir. He was a promising painter who had exhibited at Le Barc de Bouteville and was under contract to the shrewd art dealer Louis Libaude.[36]

Valadon was dazzled by the good looks and Bohemian charm of her son's friend, who conveyed a sense of dynamism and excitement that she had not found in her husband. Soon she decided to leave Mousis and, followed by Utrillo, her mother and her two dogs, happily settled back in Montmartre with Utter in a small building near Place Pigalle, at 5 Impasse de Guelma. It was divided into five studios, where Braque and his wife lived next door to Severini and Raoul Dufy.[37] The family remained there until 1911 when Utter found an atelier at 12 rue Cortot recently vacated by Emile Bernard

The opinion of the writer Francis Carco was that "not enough importance has been given to Utter who, under his easygoing

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[35]Utter, How to Become a Painter, II, 90.

[36]Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 97.

[37]For more details on the site, see Courthion, 106.

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appearance, showed good sense, stability and tenacity."[38] During the first decade of his relationship with Valadon, Utter was a good influence, both psychological and professional, on mother and son. The latter was delighted to see his friend living under the same roof, although this pleasure that did not prevent him from drinking more heavily than ever. He painted Montmartre cityscapes which were purchased by the enterprising dealer Clovis Sagot, who had a small store in rue Lafitte and was selling some of Valadon's oils. In 1910, Utter introduced him to Louis Libaude who had bought few of his mother's works and immediately put him under contract.

Utter was responsible for the broadening of Valadon's cultural and intellectual horizons. Under his guidance, she happily changed her art and her life. Despite his youth, he had the prestige of a painter who counted critics such as Coquiot and Salmon among his acquaintances, discussed art philosophy with Max Jacob,[39] and befriended the Bateau Lavoir's inhabitants. A capable artist himself, he was an even better critic, and he seized upon Valadon's potential. He convinced her to pick up her brushes again and to start exhibiting in the salons and galleries.

Valadon had never traveled, and with Utter she began to explore new sites, which they painted together. They went to the Louvre and the Musée du Luxembourg, visited galleries and, most importantly, exchanged ideas. Valadon, in spite of having numerous

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[38]Carco, 1945, 25.

[39]Storm, 152.

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friends, had never shared her interest in art with any companion who had Utter's intelligence and sound critical judgment.

Utter realized that "when he became the head of the family, he assumed the charge of two infants, Suzanne and Maurice, both totally deprived of practical sense."[40] He took their careers in hand and turned into a "marvelous manager" for both Valadon and Utrillo.[41]

"It was at my contact and on my pleading that she [Valadon] started to paint," claimed Utter, aware of the artist's feelings at the time: "She had stopped showing and was too afraid to paint."[42]

André Utter, besides giving Valadon the self-confidence of a woman loved by a young and handsome man, incited her to explore a different facet of the talent that Degas was "so proud to see in her." Actually, although the latter, according to Utter, allegedly kept asking when she would start painting,[43] no such question appears in his letters. Degas' only requests were for more of his Terrible Maria's wicked and supple paintings. Unquestionably, it is Utter who must be credited with Valadon's decision to devote herself to oil painting after 1909.

According to Utter, even if his friends from the Bateau Lavoir knew of Valadon's "very great talent," they never talked about it. She counted among them "the artists against whom they reacted and

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[40]Ibid, 14

[41]Francis Carco, Souvenirs sans fin, Paris, 1956, 106.

[42]Utter, How to Become a Painter, II, 17: "Ce fut à mon contact et sur mon adjuration qu'elle se mit à peindre....Elle avait cessé d'exposer et en réalité, elle avait trop peur pour peindre...."

[43]Ibid.

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kept a conspiracy of silence"[44] Undoubtedly they were those who rallied under the academic flag. Utter convinced Valadon to abandon the traditional style that she had acquired with such effort and to step into modernity.

Utter felt that Valadon had almost been forgotten[45] since she had not contributed to any Salon after 1894. Only small galleries like Le Barc de Boutteville Le Veel carried her drawings, as did Vollard, who published her etchings in 1887 in the edition of Les peintres-gravures.

With Utter's encouragement, she started to exhibit her oils with Clovis Sagot, who included her in several important shows. She even tried to sell her own art from her studio on the Impasse de Guelma, as an unpublished letter indicates.[46] She sent one painting to the Salon d'Automne in 1909[47] and three the following year.[48] In 1911, after an exhibition at Clovis Sagot, she had two oils at the Salon d'Automne[49] and, for the first time, contributed to the Salon

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Handwritten letter, (no name or address) dated 25 Mai 1911: "Je serais très flattée si vous vouliez venir voir quelques peintures et dessins...." Valadon indicates her presence every day from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. at 5 Impasse de Guelma. Archives, Bibliothèque du Musée d'Orsay.

[47]No. 1677: Summer.

[48]No. 1159: Love is Life's Reason (fragment); No.1169: Old Woman and Child; No. 1161: Three Nudes under the Trees.

[49]No. 1605: Joy of Living, (fragment); No. 1606: The Hairdo.

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des Indépendents.[50] In 1912, she had one entry at the Salon d'Automne[51], three at the Indépendents,[52] and was included in an important show organized by Clovis Sagot in Munich, Germany.[53] It was the first time that her works were seen in a foreign country, where they appeared along with those of Braque, Cézanne, Delaunay, Derain, van Dongen, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso and Vlaminck. In 1913, she had one painting at the Salon d'Automne,[54] two at the Indépendents[55] and, on December 1, was among eight artists shown at Berthe Weil Gallery. In 1914, she only had one work at the Indépendents.[56]

During the World War II (1914-18), she did not participate in any of the Salons. Utter had been drafted and, with his absence and her mother's death in 1915 taking their toll, she painted less than fifty canvasses in four years. She only sent some paintings to Berthe Weil in 1915, and her works were shown in 1917 with those of Utrillo and Utter. At the latter's return, she regained her energy

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[50] No. 6073: Grandmother and Grandson; No. 6074: Little Girl's Bath (pastel); No. 6075: Juliette; No. 6076: Portraits (drawings, three works in one frame); No. 6077: Joy of Being; No. 6078: Still Life (drawing, Still Life with a Teapot).

[51] No. 1658: The Future Unveiled.

[52] No. 3218: Portraits; No. 3219: Woman and Children at Their Toilette (drawing); No. 3220: Woman at Her Toilette (drawing).

[53] The show was held at Neue Kunst Haus Goltz Odeon Platz.

[54] No. 3020: Little Girl with a Mirror.

[55] No. 3013: The Toilette; No. 3014: Two Figures.

[56] No. 3324: Casting of the Net.

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and her joie de vivre, and in 1919 contributed to the Salon d'Automne.[57] The following decade was one of the most fruitful of her career.

Utter felt that as soon as Valadon would start to paint with a new stylistic and emotional freedom, she would capture the interest of older critics like Tabarant and newcomers like Adolphe Basler, Robert Rey and Gustave Coquiot, to whom he introduced her.[58] Her drawings at Le Barc de Boutteville were admired by the young writer Francis Jourdain: "Suzanne Valadon's line was crude but firm, executed with undaunting courage which gave her studies unexpected character and revealed a mania for truth."[59] In 1911, Guillaume Apollinaire, a neighbor and acquaintance, alluded to: "Suzanne Valadon's blasé-like nudes"[60] and in 1913, André Salmon exclaimed: "What an unusual art is the one of Suzanne Valadon. She still paints with the same sharp talent, [depicting the] same shrew still washing the same nude young girl, but with what rage!"[61] Yet, it was not

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[57]No. 1864: Black Venus; No. 1865: Lying Slave; No. 1866: Montmartre Landscape; No. 1867: Still Life: Flowers and Fruits.

[58]Utter, How to Become a Painter, 17.

[59]As quoted by Storm, 114.

[60]Guillaume Apollinaire, Chroniques de l'Art 1902-1918, 1911 Salon des Indépendents: "Les nus comme désabusés de Suzanne Valadon."

[61]André Salmon, Montjoie, December 1913. "Curieux talent que celui de Suzanne Valadon. Elle peint toujours avec the même talent aigu, la même mégère procedant à la toilette de la même petite fille."

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until 1920 that her name started to appear consistently in newspapers and art publications.[62]

Valadon's first paintings were characterized by an awkward yet powerful graphism tinged with naiveté. After progressively gaining control over her rhythmic lines and extending her the range of her colors, she still maintained a severe rigor of forms that translated an uncompromising desire to capture nature in its basic essence. In no genre is her stylistic evolution more apparent than in her nudes.

The human figure was of particular significance to Valadon. As a model, it was by revealing her body that she earned her living and supported her family. She knew it was a major factor in the art of the painters for whom she posed. She realized too, that it was the only subject to which she had constant access and she soon understood that she did not have to be confined to her own body. The images of her family, friends or acquaintances were there for her to paint. With the exception of her mother, whoever stepped into her studio could be asked to disrobe and pose for her, from her niece Gilberte to the cleaning woman Louise or the poetess Adrien Farge. Soon, her favorite subject became the female nude, most often presented on a theme of Bathers.

In 1903, Valadon rendered the first of her ambitious paintings of nude women. The Brunette and the Blonde (fig. 140), also titled The Moon and the Sun by one of her students, was painted

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[62]Robert Rey, "Suzanne Valadon," L'Opinion: Arts (February 14, 1920); André Warnod, L'Avenir: Notes d'art (December 1929). Valadon's 1920 exhibition at the Manzy Joyant Gallery had a foreword by Louis Vauxelles.

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in the Garden of Luna Park, as a first-state photograph indicates.[63] One of the models was Catherine, a local charwoman who often figures in the artist's works.

Standing against a background of luscious thick trees, a nude blond woman seems about to crown her companion's dark head with a garland of leaves. A plunging perspective emphasizes the bulk of the hips and thighs of their voluptuous figures. Every contour, every shape, every detail in the composition is outlined in black as if the artist felt the need to define meticulously the areas destined to be filled in with colors. Valadon borrowed this severe linearism from contemporary Montmartre painters who gave a rigorous definition of forms to their realist works.[64] The figures' monumentality evokes Gauguin, the only artist to whom Valadon claimed allegiance. In one of her rare stylistic evaluations, she confessed having been "intrigued by Pont Aven techniques," although she wanted them: "applied to Naturalistic subjects."[65] Yet, if the decor recalls Gauguin, none of his sensuous undertones has remained. In spite of their nudity, the stiffness of the models' poses and the awkwardness of their bodies deny any sexual connotation. It is Puvis' classical tradition that the gracious offering of a wreath brings to mind. The women's attitude, however, even at this early period, is pure Valadon. Oblivious of their audience, the Blonde and the Brunette

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[63]As confirmed by Geneviève Barrez, interview, February 6, 1992. Luna Park was a large popular amusement park in Paris western periphery. It was torn down during the mid-1940's.

[64]See Yves Bonnat, Valadon (Paris: Club d'art Bordas, 1968), 60.

[65]As quoted in Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 8.

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stand by themselves, for their own enjoyment rather than the one of some male onlooker.

Regardless of its powerful execution and discreet harmony, this problematic composition reflects Valadon's inexperience. The figures seem stilted, clumsily posed, and their gestures artificial. The range of colors is limited and these remain narrowly imprisoned in black outlines. The scene seems frozen in time and the rendering of the bodies retains a naive character soon to disappear from Valadon's vocabulary.

The theme of Bathers reappeared in 1909, in a far more sophisticated painting: Neither Black nor White (fig. 141). Done shortly after Valadon met Utter, it already reflects her newly gained confidence in handling an intricate composition where color is used as an autonomous medium. The rigid stylization ruling The Brunette and the Blonde gives way to a free flow of lines, a calculated rhythmic balance as well as a new concern for the work as an entity. While the artist still utilizes outlines, these are now done in varying colors. The title Neither Black nor White has been interpreted by Dr. Robert Le Masle, Valadon's collector and friend, as a reference to Renoir, who had explained to the young woman that neither pure white nor black existed in nature.[66] Valadon told Le Masle that she had tried to follow the Impressionist's precept, as demonstrated in this canvas, where she eliminated black from the outlines and shaded all white areas. It is interesting to note that at the time Valadon had had no contact with Renoir for almost two

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[66]Ibid, 28.

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decades. To apply some of the latter's principles after such a lengthy interval indicates the profound changes that had taken place in her outlook on art under Utter's catalysis.

Encouraged by Utter's faith in her abilities, Valadon dared to treat subject matters never attempted in the past, at least not openly, by women artists. Breaking all existing conventions, she started to paint men in the nude. She was the first French female painter to do so in the early twentieth century, and it was not until half a century later that American female artists approached nude male portraiture with a similar casualness.

Utter offered Valadon full support in her daring undertaking since he became her first--and only--model.[67] She only painted nude male figures from 1909 to 1914, when Utter was drafted. However, she did not represent him as informally as she did her female sitters. The pictures for which Utter posed are historical scenes, taking place in outdoor settings. Valadon must have thought that these nude male portraits would gain dignity and credence when shown in an heroic context.

It is in Adam and Eve (fig. 142) that the first of these nude male representations appears. Although the picture was painted in 1909, it was only exhibited in 1920 at the Salon des Indépendents.[68] In order to show the work, Valadon had to add a stretch of vine leaves over Adam's genitalia, but did not (fig. 143). Only the latter

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[67]The nude representations that Valadon did of her son until he was thirteen cannot be viewed as male portraiture.

[68]No. 4433.

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version has remained but the initial painting can be seen in a contemporary photograph.[69]

Several innovations contributed to turn Adam and Eve into a groundbreaking work. Valadon might have been the first female artist to show a nude man next to a nude woman. The display of the pubic hairs of both figures was also a rare occurrence. Eve's representation was modeled from Valadon's likeness and offered as a nude self-portrait, a genre only attempted at the time by Paula Modersohn-Becker.[70] Equally unconventional was Valadon's personal interpretation of the Garden of Eden before the Fall: As she envisioned the scene, the serpent is missing and the couple share the guilt. Eve holds the apple, but Adam guides her hand.

The artist achieved a perfect balance between figures and landscape. The couple seems to float above the ground in a joyful choreography, perhaps inspired by Utter, who once described Suzanne "as walking on air."[71] More than a biblical tableau, the painting stands as a celebration of love where human factors such as the passing of time have been abolished. Valadon and her twenty-three year-old lover posed for the original man and woman and the artist ignored all signs of age difference. Although the scene is a realistic depiction carrying some sensual undertones, Adam and Eve still

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[69]Photograph taken by Bernès, Marouteau and Cie. See Pètridés, 1971, 284.

[70]Paula Modersohn-Becker did Bust Portrait with a Necklace, Portrait with a Loincloth and a full-figure Nude Portrait in 1906.

[71]As quoted from Warnod, 65.

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retain the quality of innocence that was theirs before the original sin.

The couple's harmony is echoed in the Arcadian landscape, where the grass is lustrous, the sky blue, and the fruit, even the forbidden kind, is bountiful. The figures' frontal representation and their harmonious classical proportions, the flat areas of color, are pointers to Puvis de Chavannes' style. Yet, in spite of Valadon's allegiance to the muralist's traditional vision, it is from Utter that she received the courage to achieve a work of such iconoclastic concept and realization.

Although the artist did not represent naked men after 1914, she continued to work on series of nude self-portraits, the last of which was done in 1931 when she was sixty-six (fig. 144). These paintings constitute an extraordinary clinical documentation on the process of aging as recorded objectively by Valadon on her own body.

"I paint people to learn to know them," explained Valadon.[72] Portraiture was to become became her lifelong endeavor. From her first self portrait in 1883 to her last oils done in 1937, she strived to capture her sitters' personalities through honest and insightful representations. She loved her art and she loved people. Using one to discover the other was a spontaneous undertaking for her. Yet, her interest in portraiture seemed to have slackened from 1893 to 1910, to be revived shortly after she started to live with Utter. Until then, Valadon must have felt that she had reached a dead end in this genre and had given it up. Actually, her early portraits point to

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[72] Valadon ou l'absolu.

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both a lack of experience and self confidence. Utter had a far greater familiarity with the oil medium, and he offered technical advice that assumed a particularly important place when she started to work on portraiture again.

Young Girl Crocheting (fig. 145) is one of Valadon's first known paintings, although its 1892 dating is approximate.[73] Done a decade later than her first Self-Portrait, it points to an increased skill in handling a more intricate composition.

In Young Girl Crocheting, Valadon's aim seems to be set on resolving technical challenges such as the interior filtered light, the shadows sculpturing the sitter's features and hands, and introducing decorative details such as the Art-Nouveau wrought-iron motif on the handrail. She did fulfill her task while remaining within the limits of her newly-acquired academicism.

Her previous experience with soft hues of pastels helped her in rendering the "subtle atmosphere of reverie"[74] emanating from this tranquil domestic scene that evokes Carrière's interior scenes bathed in clair obscur.[75] Yet, the artist failed to capture the viewer's interest in the adolescent whose lifeless profile does not reveal her character. Missing in the work is a stamp of strength and originality that was to characterize Valadon's later portraits.

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[73]Date given in Berthe Weil's 1927 exhibition catalogue.

[74]Suzanne Valadon, 1967, 23.

[75]Eugène Carrière, 1849-1906, exhibited regularly at the Salon(s) de la Libre Esthétique and de l'Art Nouveau. He became the first president of the Salon d'Automne in 1904.

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Grandmother and Grandson (fig. 146) constitutes a radical departure from the traditional type of portraiture that Valadon had followed until then. It confirms her intention to pursue this new path since it counted among five paintings and a group of drawings that were the artist's first entry at the Salon des Indépendents in 1911.

Assembling members of her small family circle, Valadon has placed on a crowded background her seventy-year-old mother, twenty-seven-year-old son, and the family dog, Pierrot. The three figures form a pyramidal structure. Perhaps inspired by Egyptian art, Valadon has ignored traditional laws of perspective and given her sitters sizes reflecting their hierarchic importance. A gigantic Maurice towers over the group, his head the apex of the pyramid, his Byzantine Christ-like features inscrutable. Maman Madeleine, who sits on a low stool beneath him, offers a blatant contrast to her grandson's regal handsomeness. Witch-like in appearance, toothless and devastatingly wrinkled, she nevertheless maintains the quiet and resigned dignity seen in old women whose entire life has been spent in hard work. The dog, Pierrot, places his paw on the grandmother's lap, his eyes as vacuous as hers. The figures' dark clothing melts into a reddish-brown background that a busy floral pattern enriches. The sitter's pale faces "pop out" from their somber garments and their heads become decorative elements placed as randomly as the flowers in the wallpaper.

The composition is powerfully constructed with a linearity that reminds us that Valadon drew long before she painted. Several influences are combined. Part of the style can be linked to the

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"primitive" masters. The presentation of the sitters recalls some of the donors in Jean Fouquet's diptychs while the grandmother's face reflects a humility and intensity often present in Cranach's portraits. The composition also contains references to nineteenth-century Japanese woodcut artists, and contemporary painters.

The most striking effect of Valadon's severe composition is the repetition of curvatures. Shaping the sitters' forms, they are echoed in the background by a rhythmic floral pattern that evokes Gauguin's style. This device, borrowed from Symbolism, contrasts strongly with the figures' stylization, whereas the abrupt cropping recalls Japanese woodcut techniques. However, this apparent disjunction of styles is not incongruous. On the contrary, Valadon's unorthodox treatment enriches the painting with an original and unique quality.

Although every inch of the canvas' surface is compulsively covered, suggesting a horror vacui, Valadon's love for dramatic contrasts and decorative forms did not hide her essential concern: the evocation of two human beings whose alienation is a sole common factor, regardless of their blood ties. Their bodies seem to overlap, but they actually do not touch nor do they face in the same direction. Maman Madeleine, who raised her grandson, deliberately turns away from him. Pierrot's head is parallel to hers, woman and dog staring in the same direction, away from Maurice.

To evoke the nature of human presence, the artist used simple understated means, such as a gesture or a glance. The old woman's crossed hands reveal her resignation while Utrillo's fixed gaze betrays his psychological difficulties. With the conciseness and

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strength found in Cézanne's portraits, Valadon has brought the grandmother and grandson to life for her viewers.

It is a coming-of-age statement that Valadon offered with Grandmother and Grandson. In her preceding portraits she had relied on a self-acquired technique, faithfully following required guidelines. In Grandmother and Grandson, she dared to be herself. Inspired by disparate artists' visions, she found the audacity to borrow from them eclectically, as references rather than laws. Her new freedom brought forth the creation of a personal style, still revealing an awkwardness that disappeared with her artistic maturity. As one compares this picture to Young Girl Crocheting, it is difficult to believe that both were conceived by a same mind and done by a same hand. The early painting seems done by a conscientious and accomplished student of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The boldness of conception and the freedom of expression of the Grandmother and Grandson could only originate from a self-confident painter, liberated from artistic conventions and sure of her talent.

Although during her whole life Suzanne Valadon remained a city dweller, she always admitted to nature's complete hold on her: "I am passionately and profoundly charmed with the trees, the sky, the water."[76] Yet, it was only in 1909, upon Utter's urging that she found the courage to paint the nature she loved so well. Her first known landscape, Tree at Montmagny Quarry (fig. 147), was started in an area bordering Butte Pinson where she was living at the time. The work, along with three other canvasses dealing with the same

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[76]Valadon, Attestation.

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theme,[77] was interrupted by her separation from Mousis and her return to Montmartre, where it was completed in the atelier at 5 Impasse de Guelma.

A single sizable tree occupies the center of the painting, its branches almost extending to the edges of the canvas. Yet, although it stands as the composition's sole element of interest, it seems quite unimpressive. Its foliage is not luxuriant, nor are its stature and proportions as imposing as those gracing Courbet's Oak of Flagey (fig. 148). It is viewed from a low perspective and its top branches seem to struggle to elevate the canvas' edges that cut them off abruptly. Placed on an uneven terrain, the tree rises from the middleground, surrounded by the repeated gentle curves of the local quarry's pasty hills. Parallel undulating lines animate the surface of the composition and create a feeling of rhythm, a device that the artist continued to use in several of her mature works. The strong expressive colors reflect the influence of Gauguin.

Tree at Montmagny Quarry, as well as the other paintings of the series, are honest compositions that take a character of studies. The artist has earnestly observed and rendered details of the local landscape, but she seems to remain too close to it. However, the work presents one of her first attempts to return to painting and to render nature, and it bears the traces of an awkwardness that Valadon was soon to shed.

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[77] All four works are studies of different trees, save for Landscape with Church Tower, (1910, oil on cardboard, 25 6/8"x 20 1/8", private collection) where Valadon included a small church with its steeple emerging above a curtain of trees.

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The sight of a single tree dominating a hilly landscape kept its interest for Valadon. In 1923, the trio spent a vacation with the painter Georges Kars and his wife Nora at Segalas in the Basses Pyrenees, where Valadon painted four views of the countryside. Among these is Chestnut Tree at Segalas,[78] in which Valadon transcribed the tree's appearance as minutely as that of a live model. She tried to evoke as well its commanding presence. Placed centrally, its top reaching the edge of the canvas, its luxurious branches extending majestically, the tree dominates the sky and all surrounding fields.

Far different in scope and technical mastery is View of Corté, Corsica (fig. 149). This extraordinary re-creation on canvas of an entire city offers the unquestionable proof of Valadon's new self confidence and striking individuality. Painted only three years after Tree at Montmagny, it was done during the summer of 1913, when Valadon vacationed in Corsica with Utter and her son.

Valadon had never before traveled away from Paris, under whose cloudy skies she had been raised. In 1912, the trio vacationed in Brittany in the Island of Ouessant. Valadon was overwhelmed by the savage character of the region, but did very little painting there.[79] Utrillo, who had suffered a delirium tremens attack, had just been released from a private sanitarium in Saint Sanois and his difficult mood[80] affected the whole family.

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[78]Chestnut Tree at Segalas, also called The Big Tree, 1923, oil on canvas, 28 6/8 x 36 2/8", Musée Municipal de Nevers.

[79]Landscape from Brittany, 1912, 011, private collection, is the only known work from this period.

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The trio's stay in Corsica was more peaceful. Valadon had never seen any Mediterranean shore and she was ill prepared for the rugged and blinding beauty of the island, from which she brought back a series of magnificent landscapes. "A jumble of houses, walls, gardens, the true objective view of the town exactly as I saw it this summer...."[81] is what Valadon offers in her View of Corté. The work's breadth of vision encompasses a wide panorama that stretches to the top of the gentle twin mountains rising in the background. The artist chose a high vantage point to offer almost an aerial view of Corté. With painstaking attention she recorded minute details of the small city and its surrounding landscape. Every stone of the foreground wall has been drawn, every window of every house reproduced, every bush, every yew tree accounted for. Yet, in spite of this intense detailing, Valadon did not succumb to Mannerism since, while presenting each individual part of her subject, she kept her mind on its entity. One recalls some of Durer's Italian works where the painter's unusual interest in topography led to what was called "the first portrait of a town."[82]

Certain elements of View of Corté speak of Cézanne. The plunging vantage point, the solidity of the structures, and the static quality of a reconstructed nature evoke the series of Mont Sainte Victoire. But Valadon did not use Cézanne's passages and she

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[80]Storm, 178.

[81]Deroyer, 188.

[82]Kenneth Clark, Landscape into Art (New York: Harper and Row, 1979 reprint), 41. I am grateful to Geneviève Barrez for pointing out some of this work's similarity with Durer's.

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imprisoned each shape within dark contours, her own trademark. While Cezanne invested the Provençal mountain with the holiness of an ancient site[83] no such reverence is shown in Valadon's view of Corté, where the main concern is a faithful rendering of the site. Yet in spite of the austerity of a rigorously graphic style, Corté comes to life with the grace of Valadon's sumptuous palette.

Corsica's rugged mountains etching their sharp outlines on the bright sky, the Fauvé hues of a scorched vegetation, and the oasis of greenery under shading trees, overwhelmed Valadon, who recorded her rapture in a minute and loving description.

The artist painted a view of Belgodere, another small Corsican town,[84] but it is restricted to a small area around the local church. In most of her previous landscapes, she avoided developing extensive vistas, a trait perhaps inspired by Utrillo, whose cityscapes remained confined to single Montmartre streets.

In View of Corte, Valadon directed her sight toward larger open spaces and even an entire city, thus revealing a new self-confidence in her talent. The added ability to offer and share with the viewer her feelings of joy and wonder testifies to her newly-acquired emotional as well as stylistic emancipation.

A constant evolution toward a more liberated personal expression is recorded in most of Valadon's subject matters. In 1900, she painted her first extant still life, Apples and Pear (fig. 150). In this simple and unpretentious work, four pieces of fruit are

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[83]See Meyer Shapiro, Cézanne (New York: Harry Abrams, 1988), 84.

[84]Belgodère, 1913, oil on canvas, 29 1/8 x 36 1/4", private collection.

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gathered on a round white dish edged in blue. The table's sharp corner juts into the composition as a reminder of Degas' diagonal space. Horizontal stretches of yellowish grey and mottled blue divide the background and only the bright accents of the fruits infuse few luminous spots into the painting. Valadon has tried to model the apples through tonal values of yellow and red, or acid green and pale yellow. The contours of each form have been sharply outlined with dark blue for the dishes and brown and grey for the fruit. At the time, Valadon's palette was limited to five colors: chromium yellow, vermilion, deep madder lake, and zinc white, with the addition of ivory black and bitumen. Under Utter's influence, these were extended to fourteen and included yellow ocher, raw sienna, light crimson lake, Venetian red, cobalt blue, deep ultramarine, and English and emerald green.[85] When she started to paint, she mixed her colors herself, but after a decade she resorted to the convenience of tubes.[86]

Valadon admitted being "enchanted by the Impressionist palette," but she wanted this palette to remain so simple that "she did not have to think about it."[87] Apples and Pear testifies to this simplicity that extends to motif and execution, and in which any problematic element have been eliminated. The forms, reduced to circles and rectangles, seldom overlap and the colors are primary blue and yellow with secondary green. There is no shading and the

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[85]Interview with Geneviève Barrez, September 11, 1992.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Valadon ou l'absolu.

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paint is applied thinly. Yet Valadon must have been pleased with this early work, for she boldly signed her name on the upper right corner.

Although Apples and Pear could also have been inspired by Cézanne, Valadon's handling of the subject differs from his. Even though his fruits are to be contemplated, not consumed, they do exist on their own. Valadon's apples and pear remain irrevocably lifeless, nature morte in the true sense of the word, deprived of the extraordinary presence that Cézanne grants his. However, the work was done shortly after Valadon started to paint and was struggling with technical difficulties and a search for her own formula.

Fourteen years after it was painted, Apples and Pear reappeared unexpectedly in the background of Still Life with a Teapot (fig. 151). On the surface of a wooden table, a few apples lay on a white tray. Next to a slate grey teapot, Valadon has placed a half empty wine carafe and a cylindrical vase filled with camellias and fern. In the back of the table top, a thick gold border frames "a picture within a picture" that displays Apples and Pear, partly hidden by the bouquet. Still Life with a Teapot must have assumed a particular importance for the artist since she did a rare preliminary drawing for it in 1911.[88]

Still Life with a Teapot is an ambitious composition in which the artist's aim appears to be at the opposite of the one behind Apples and Pears. While in the latter she strove to eliminate any possible technical difficulty, she seems to multiply them purposely

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[88]Still Life with a Teapot, 1911, black pencil on tracing paper, (torn) 11 6/8 x 22." Valadon only did drawings for two other still lifes.

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in the former. The variety of shapes, the abundance of details, and a subtle attention to the play of colors and values reveal a virtuosity unconceivable to the painter of the 1900 still life.

Valadon must have been aware of the discrepancy between the quality and artistic skill of the two works. By placing the image of Apples and Pear in the background of Still Life with a Teapot, she seems to invite the viewer to compare the earlier work's elementary simplicity with the sophistication of the later one.

Still Life with a Teapot opened the way to the increasingly opulent compositions done during the artist's mature period. As Valadon's virtuosity developed, she continued to disperse in her works heterogeneous assemblages of flowers, fruits, and assorted utilitarian objects chosen for their shapes and colors. The accessories, rearranged in different combinations, are always shown with fresh flowers and fruits, and often blended by the unifying effect of a tablecloth or a drapery, as seen in Still Life with a Candle Holder (fig. 152).

Occasionally Utter and Valadon worked together on a same moif, sharing the same model. Such was the case for Valadon's The Future Unveiled[89] (fig. 153) and Utter's La Rouquine (fig. 154). The works were done simultaneously in 1912 in the 12 rue Cortot studio[90] and modeled by a redheaded sitter whose nickname gave Utter's work its title.[91]

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[89]The Future Unveiled, also called The Fortune Teller was exhibited at the 1912 Salon d'Automne, (No. 1658).

[90]As confirmed by Geneviève Barrez, January 4, 1994.

[91]Rouquine is the vernacular term for a redheaded woman.

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It is interesting to examine the two painters' handling of a similar theme: a nude woman lying on a couch. Both used a linear technique, a realistic approach, a low viewpoint and emphasized the horizontality of the composition, sectioned off in wide chunks of space. Yet Valadon turned her subject into a genre scene by introducing, in the lower third of the composition, a dark gypsy crouched in front of a bright deck of cards. Utter felt no such compulsion and simply painted a nude reclining female. A comparison between the two paintings reveals that in spite of their apparent similarity, they present fundamentally different points of view, conceptually, artistically and iconographically. Valadon, by treating the same subject as Utter in such a different manner, disengaged herself from his influence and affirmed her personality as a woman and an artist.

Utter has chosen to eliminate most of the background details. Only a small area of the wallpaper pattern appears in the upper left corner of the room. Most of the setting is hidden by the massive bulk of the couch on which hangs a piece of white material.

Eyes downcast, body acquiescent, la Rouquine seems resigned to her function of object of desire as she passively lies unprotected from voyeuristic gaze. While her raw animal beauty does not quite conform to the smoother contemporary cannons of feminine mystique, her pose and implied function follow the traditional reading of the female nude.

Valadon's Future Unveiled is far more subtle. The composition is divided into three almost-even horizontal parts. As

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in La Rouquine, the model occupying the middleground provides the undisputed focal point of the work, her nude body contrasting with that of the clothed gypsy's. An area of busy floral wallpaperextends behind the red velvet couch. Numerous accessories such as bright draperies, Oriental carpets, and patterned fabrics are strewn throughout the composition and oppose their sumptuousness to Utter's unadorned setting.

With the introduction of a fortune teller in the foreground, Valadon denies a direct visual access to her sitter, whose lowered glance focuses on the gypsy. By providing the redhead with an outside interest, Valadon shifts her role from "object" to thinking human being and "ruptures the particular discourse of the fine art nude in which nudity equals sexual availability equals male pleasure."[92] Yet, Valadon sacrifices none of her model's physical beauty, nor does she hide her triumphant sexuality, which is not flaunted but accepted joyously.[93]

In The Future Unveiled, Valadon introduced an Odalisque theme for the first time. Previously, her nudes were shown with a companion, and often engaged in bathing activities. After 1912, the sitters were shown on their own, without a story-telling context. The image of a beautiful nude woman reclining on a sofa

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[92]Rosemary Betterton, "How do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Works of Suzanne Valadon," Visibly Female, New York (1988), 269.

[93]For alternate readings of Valadon's iconography regarding the female nude, see Patricia Mathews,"Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations if the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon," The Art Bulletin (September 1991), 420.

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sumptuously upholstered and laden with exotic brocades was to recur frequently in several variations throughout her iconography.[94]

The artist's interest in overdecorated backgrounds, already seen in her contemporary Grandmother and Grandson, reached its epitome in her 1923 Blue Room,[95] Valadon's quintessential representation of a female figure. There, a rich array of decorative fabrics and an overwhelming variety of patterns are subtly united by a dominant blue tone that bathes the composition and gives it is name.

Should some uninformed viewers be questioned about the skills of the painters of The Future Unveiled or La Rouquine, there is little doubt that they would name Valadon as the more sophisticated of the two. This judgement would be based on the composition's technical prowess, on the creativity of the narrative, and, most importantly, on the effectiveness of the end result. Yet, in 1912, Valadon was still under Utter's stylistic influence, and it would take her another four years to enter her mature period. But she had already accepted her own individuality, and it was this mental freedom that enabled her to paint what she chose rather than follow Utter's path when the two of them faced a similar subject.

The first ten years that Valadon's shared with Utter were immensely fecund. During this period she shed most elements of an academicism that she had thought indispensable to her visual

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[94]See Nude on a Red Sofa, 1920, Musée du Petit Palais, Genève. The model is shown in a revered position.

[95]Blue Room, 1923, oil on canvas, 35 7/16 x 45 5/8", Musée National d'Art Moderne, CNAC Georges Pompidou, Paris.

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language and dared to step into twentieth-century modernity. She progressively learned to trust her own nature, to rely on her own vision and, ultimately, to be her own person.

An important part of Valadon's evolution was due to Utter's moral support and wise technical advice. Yet, had Valadon not had an intuitive perspicacity that enabled her to uncover her models' nature, had she not been blessed with the skill to transpose her observations and, most of all, had she not possessed the talent to impact to import a rare individuality into her works, Utter's enlightened advice would have been wasted. What this insightful young man offered her were the means and the encouragement to develop the vast potential that she had held in restraint until then.

Had she not met André Utter, she might have undergone a similar evolution on her own. Undoubtedly, his tutelage precipitated a maturing process that without him might have taken place at a later time or assumed a different aspect.

On September 1, 1914, Suzanne Valadon became Madame André Utter at the city hall of the eighteenth arrondissement. Her groom had been drafted and soon went off to fight with the 158th Infantry Regiment that included the poet Reverdy, Galanis, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Louis Marcoussis. In June of 1917 he was wounded and Valadon rushed to his bedside, where he was convalescing in Saint Mezieux in the Soane Valley. She missed her young husband, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and worried about the depth of his love. She came back reassured both about his health and his attachment and impatiently waited for him to return to La Butte in 1918.

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Unfortunately, the couple's relationship deteriorated rapidly. Utter was forced to neglect his art since he spent so much time promoting Valadon's and Utrillo's works. He became envious of his stepson's success, which he judged unwarranted, although the family lived extravagantly from the sale of Maurice's Montmartre cityscapes. The couple had been experiencing troubles for a long time and their fights were violent.[96] Valadon's "difficult temper"[97] did not improve with age and she became increasingly jealous of her much younger husband. Eventually her suspicions were justified and the couple separated in 1926, when Valadon moved with Maurice to a small house at 12 Avenue Junot purchased for Utrillo by the owners of the Bernheim Jeune Gallery. The owners had the two artists under contract and were worried about the family's reckless spending. Regardless of their separation, Valadon continued to love Utter, who continued to depend financially upon her, although Suzanne's income had diminished considerably when her son married in 1935 and his works were sold by his ambitious wife, Lucie Valore.

On April 7, 1938, Valadon suffered a stroke while painting. Rushed to the Piccini Hospital, she died there at eleven in the morning. A funeral mass took place in the Church of Saint Pierre de Montmartre. "Tout Montmartre" came to pay its respects. Among the mourners were Picasso, Max Jacob, Derain, Carco, Salmon. The eulogy was given by French Premier Edouard Herriot. Valadon was buried next to her mother at the cemetery of Saint Ouen

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[96]According to the poet Reverdy, who lived in a studio below Valadon's, the fighting was so loud that he had to shoot his pistol through the floor to stop the noise. Montmartre, Les Ateliers de Génie, Salon des Indépendents, Paris, 1983, 39.

[97]Marie Coca's letter to Utter, January 8, 1939. Archives, CNAC.

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Eleven years later, a coin etched by the sculptor Pierre Poisson was issued in the Suzanne Valadon's honor. On one face of the medal is the profile of the artist inspired by her 1883 self portrait; on the reverse, a heart with a rose. The center bears the artist's motto: "To give, to love, to paint."

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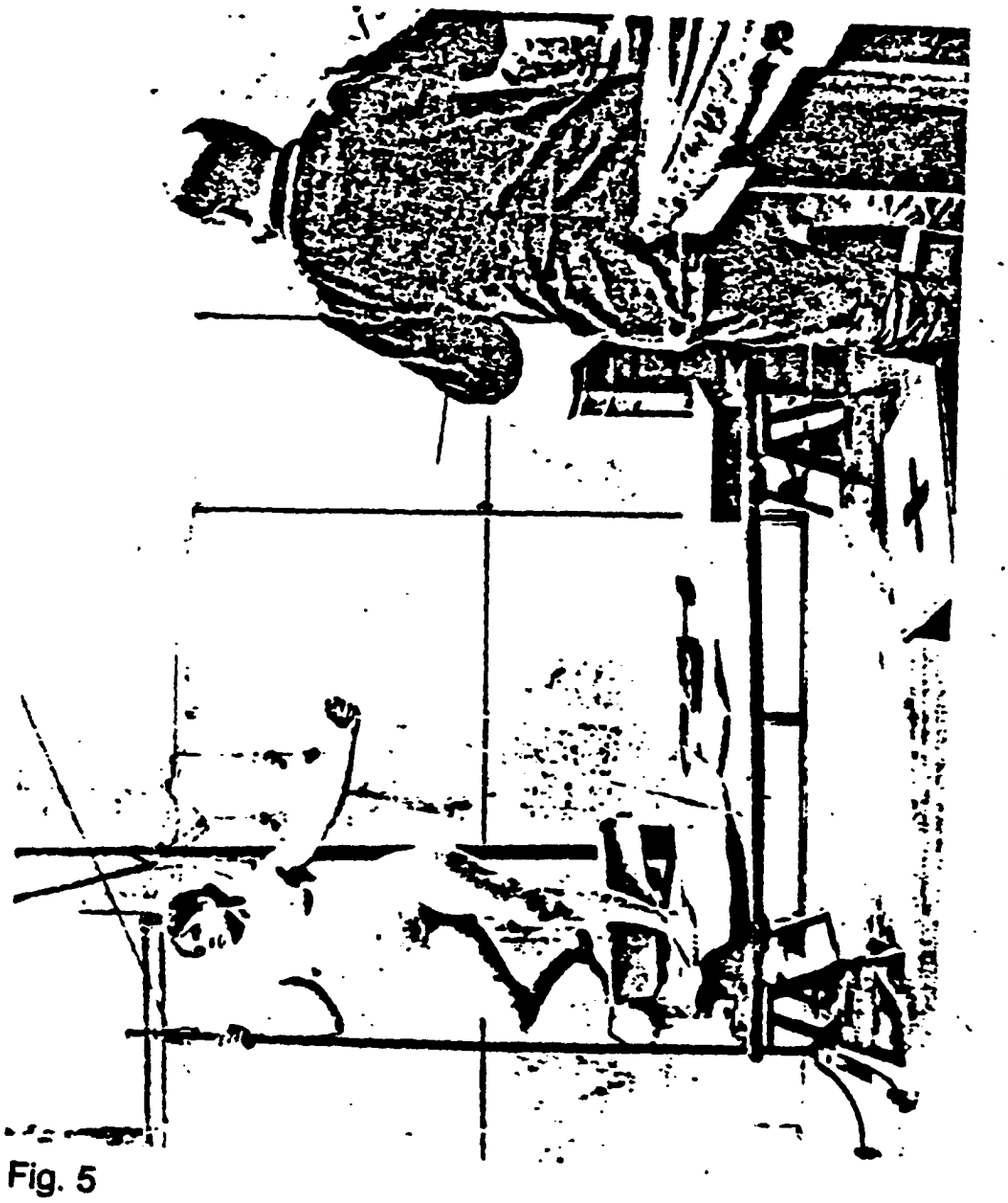

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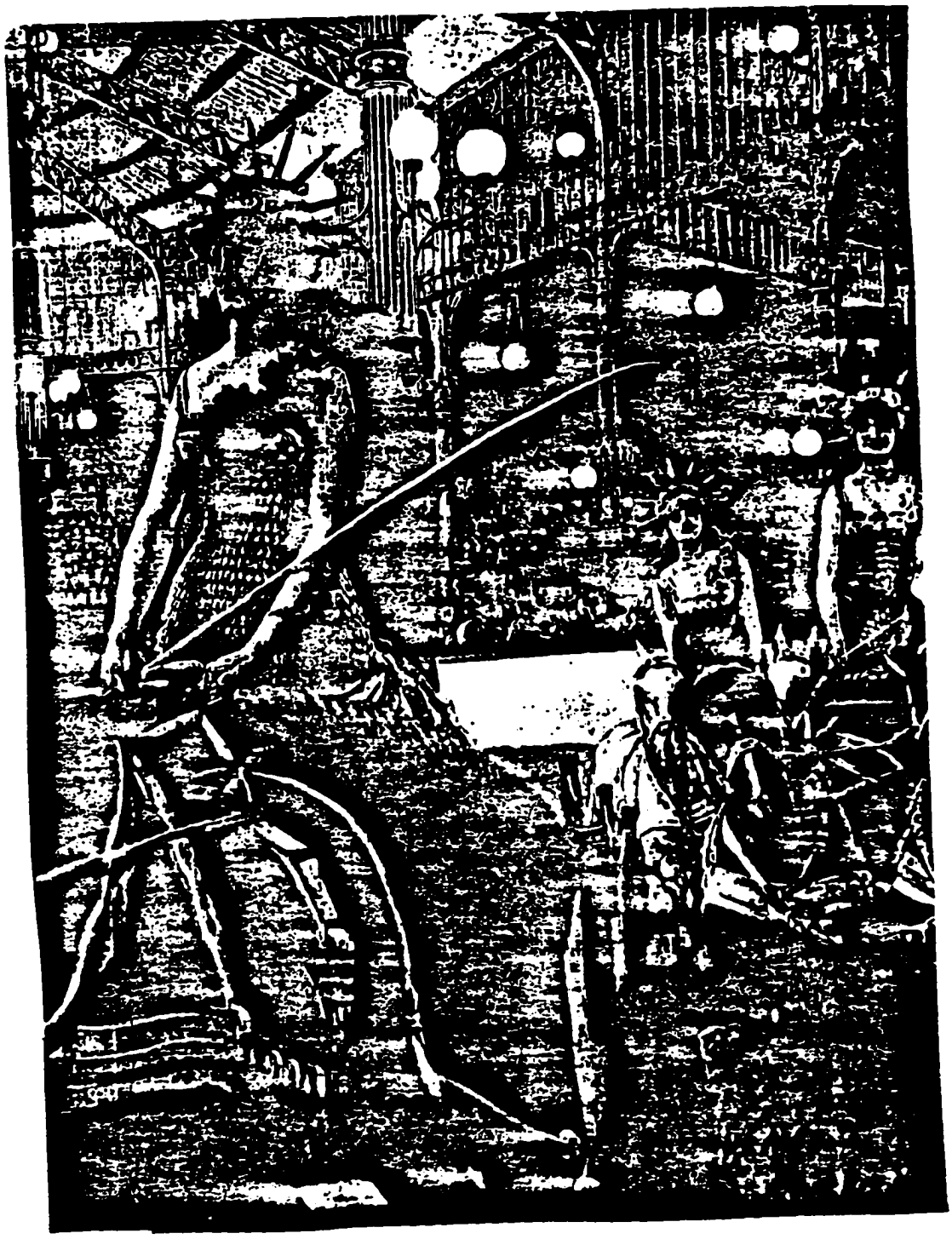

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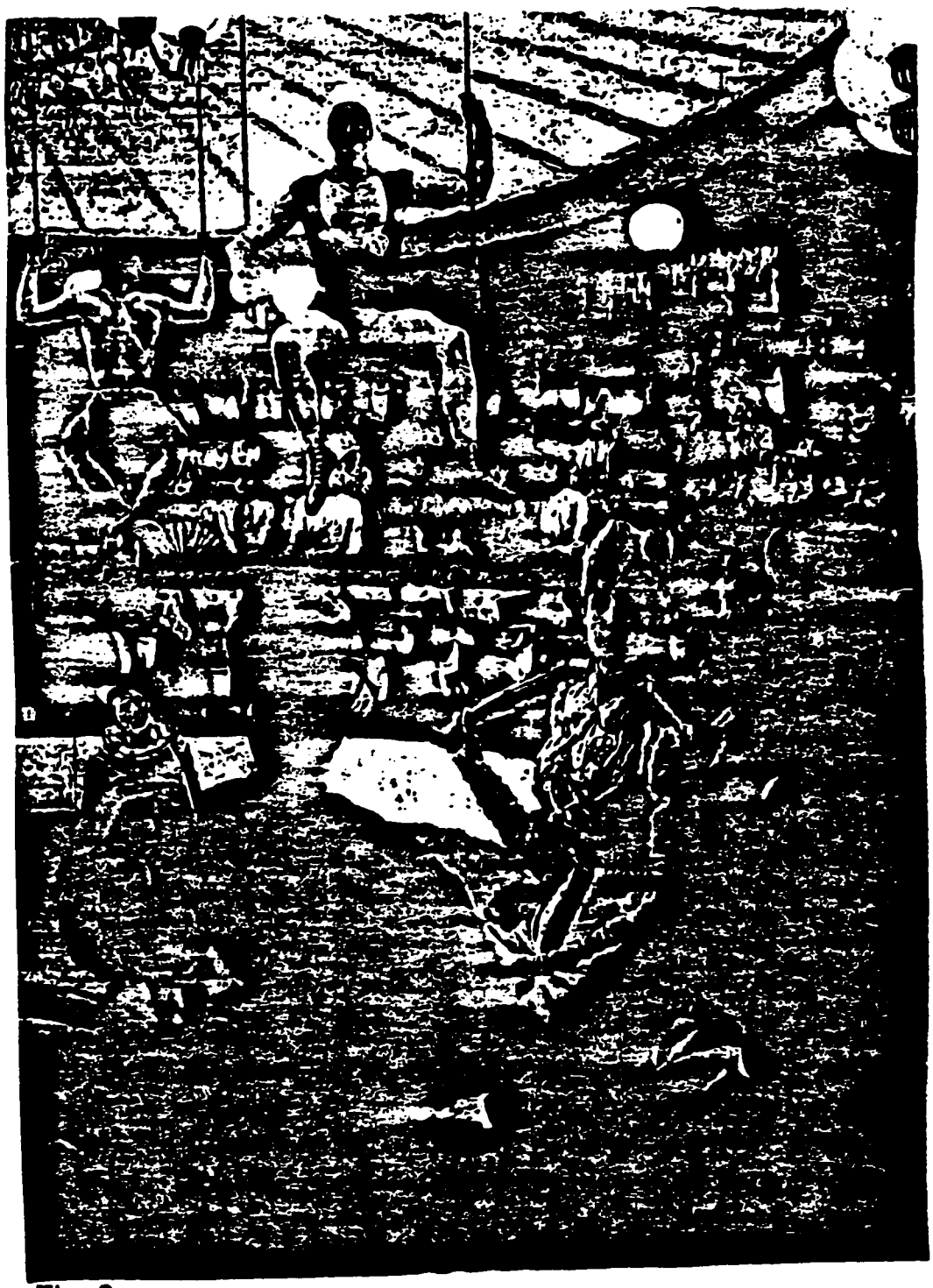

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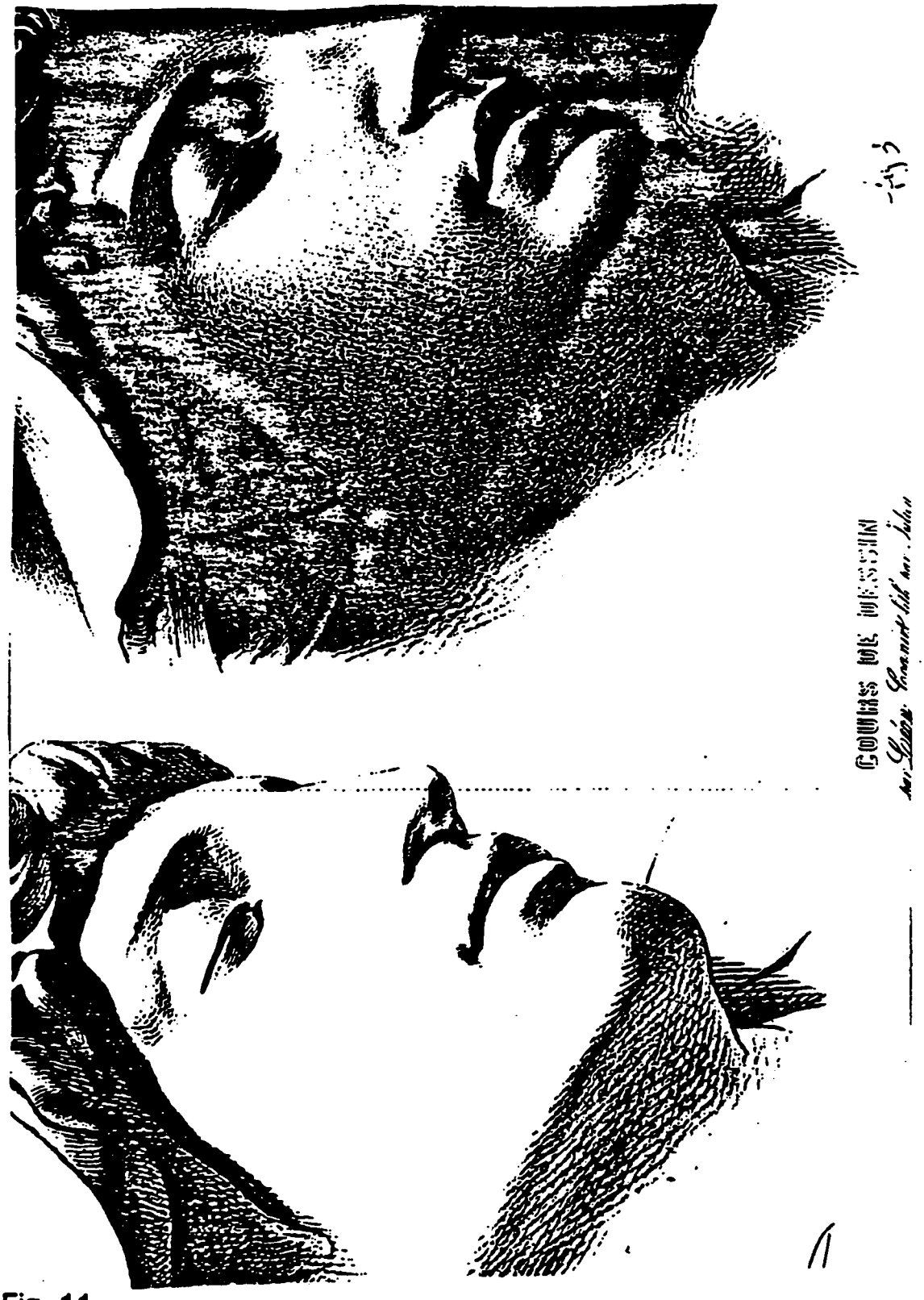

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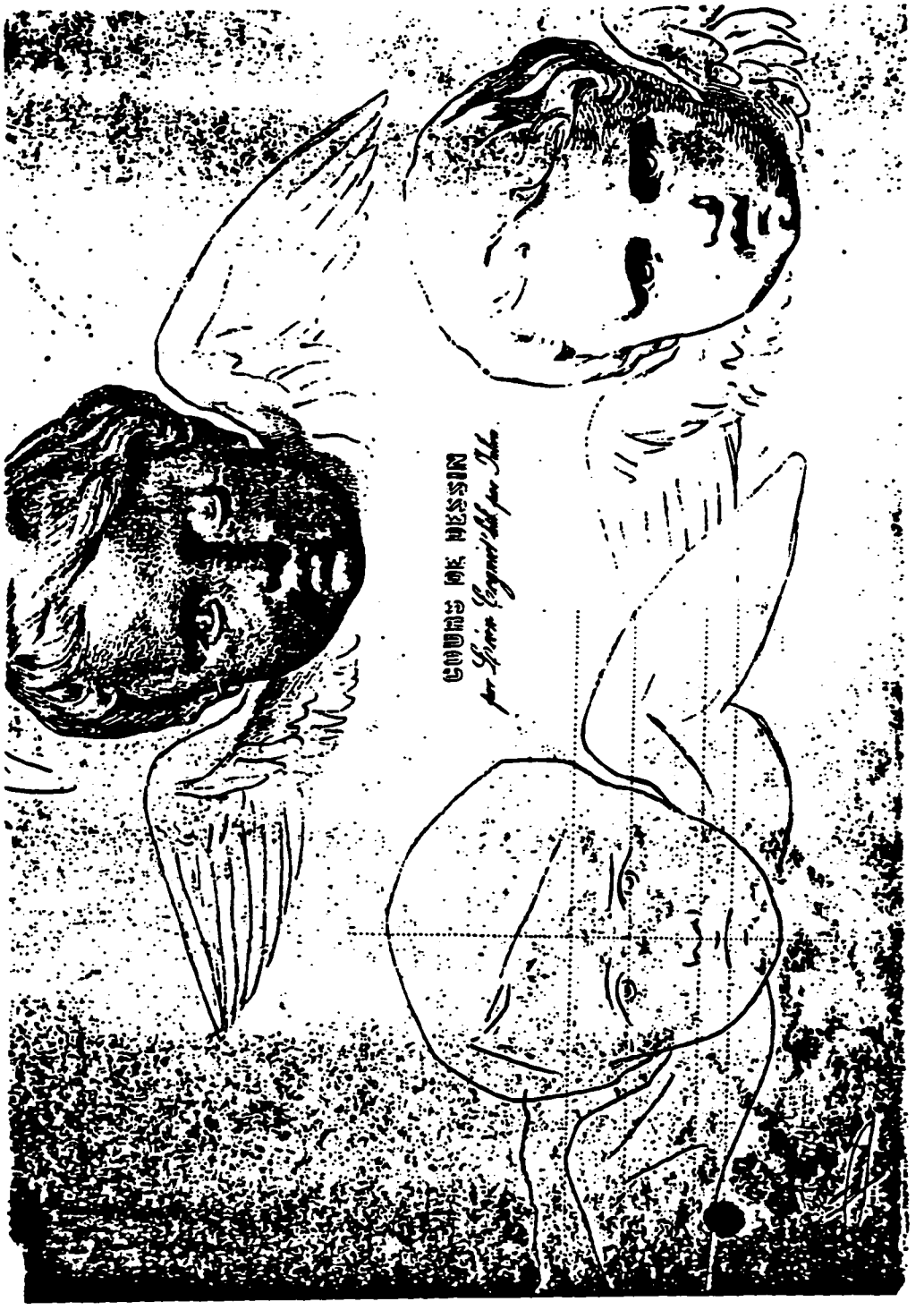

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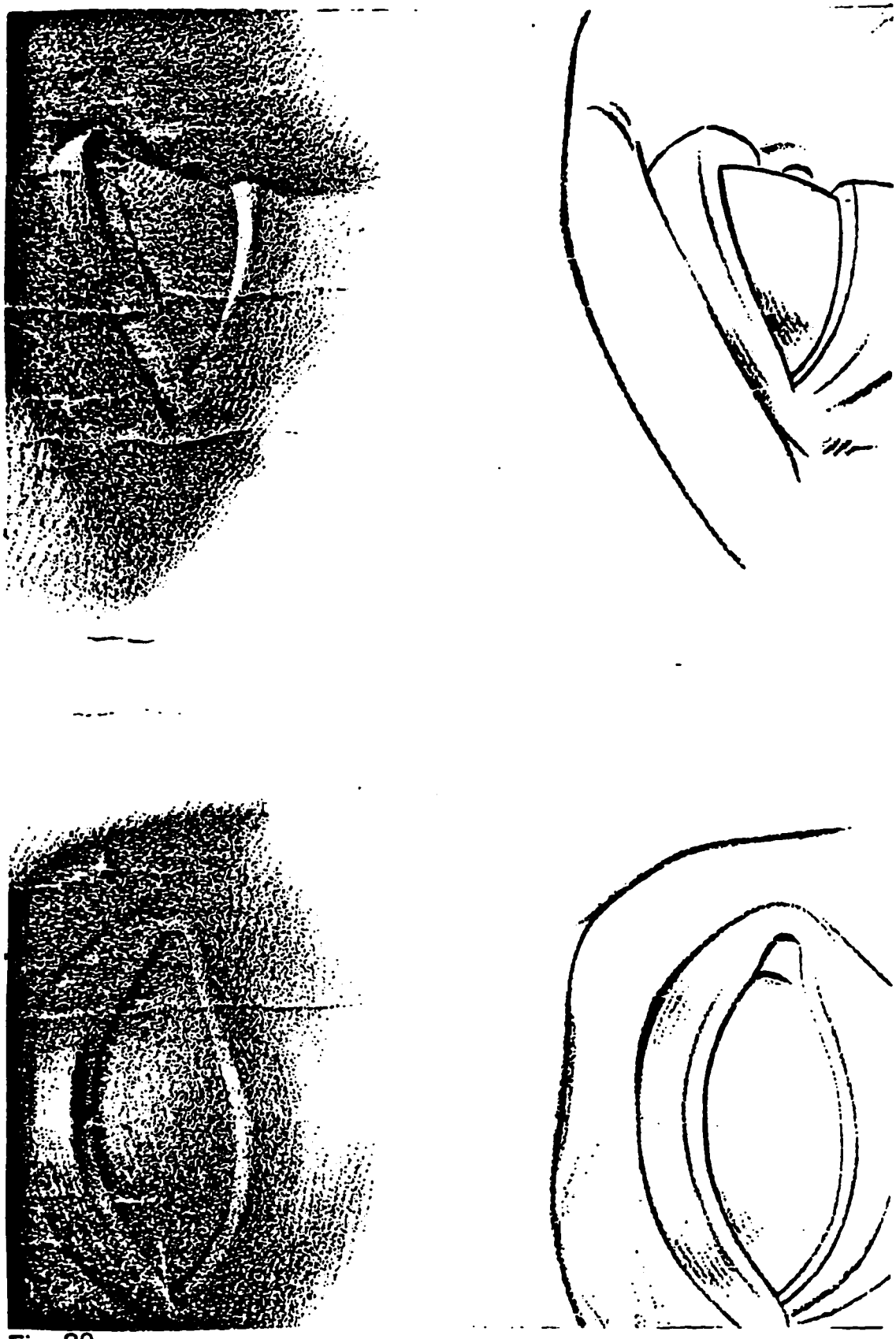

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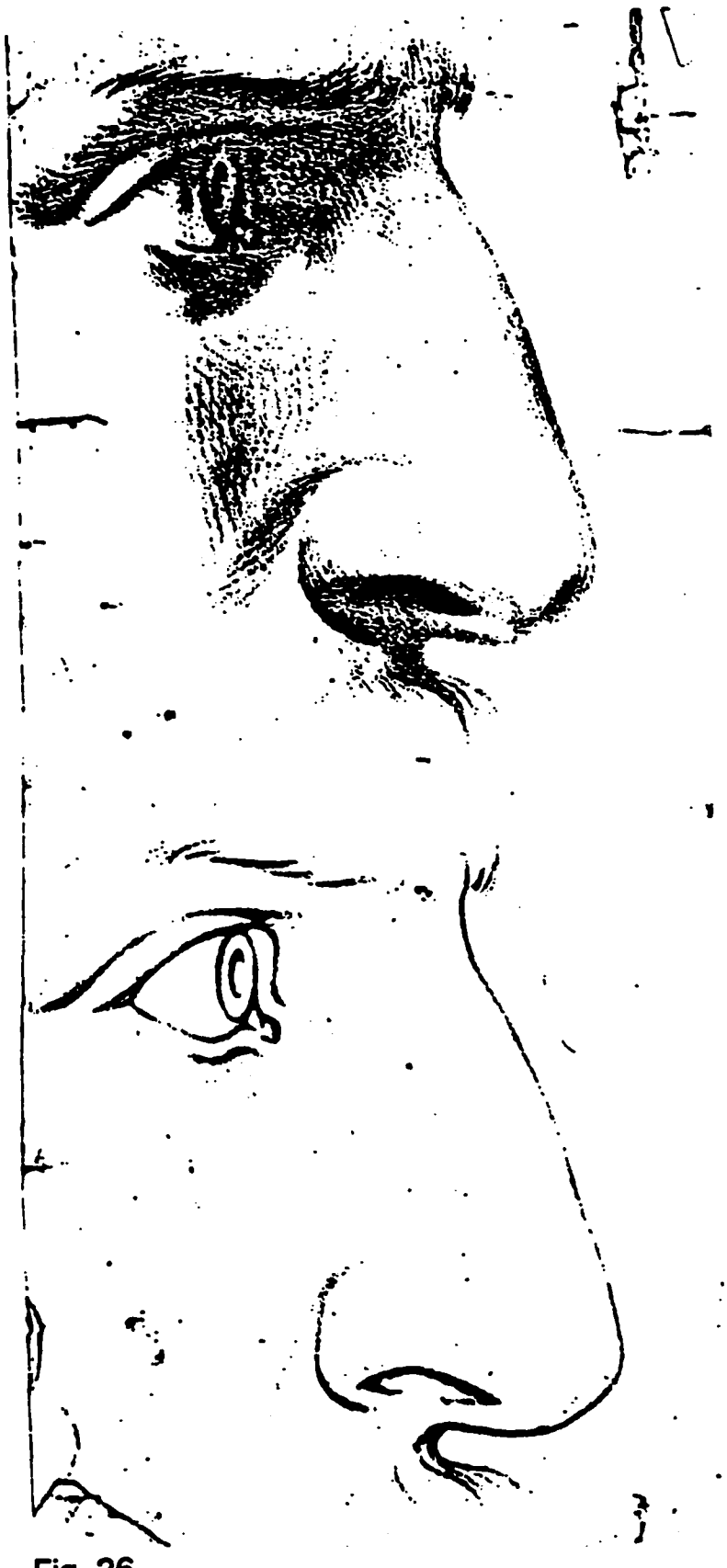

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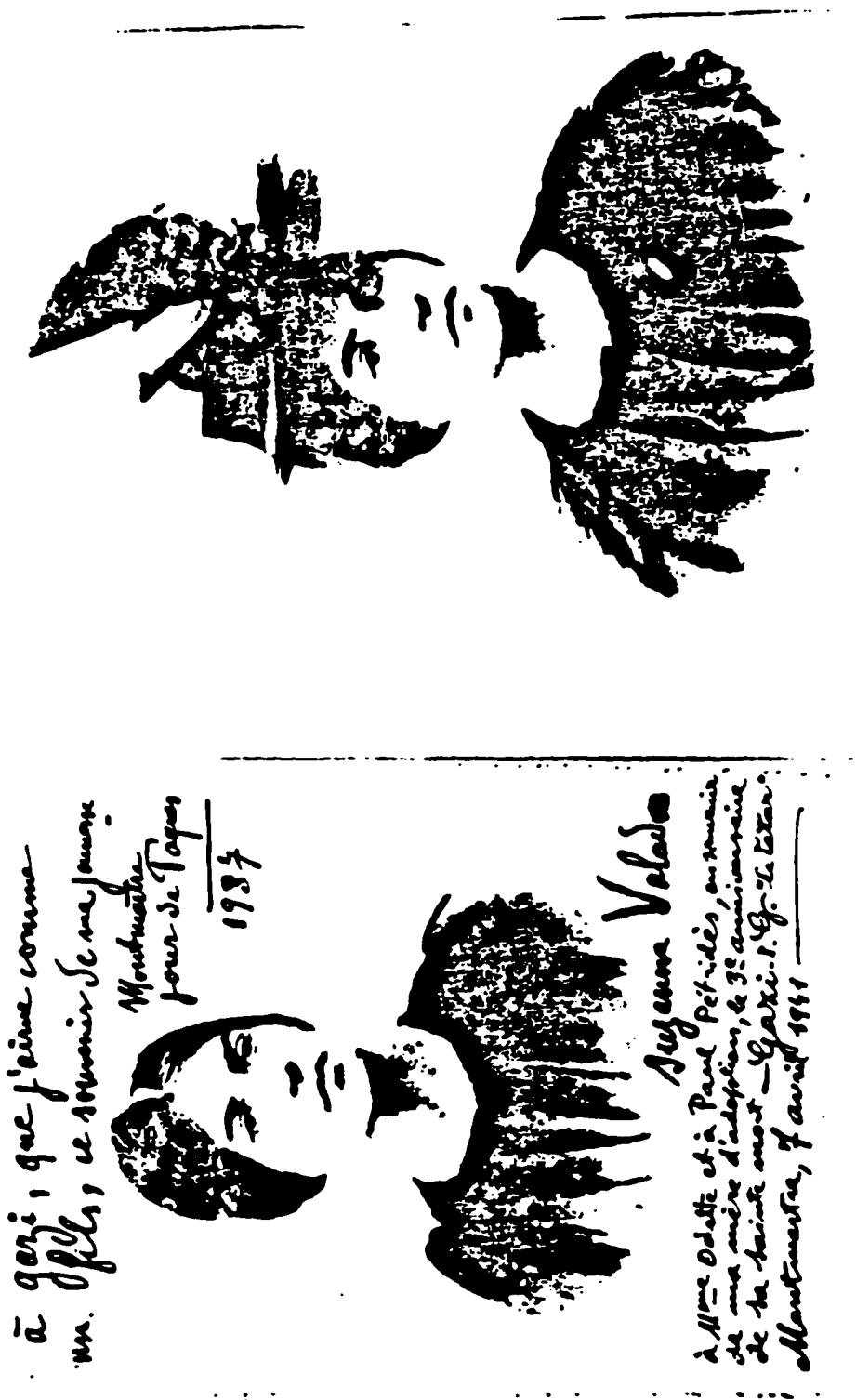

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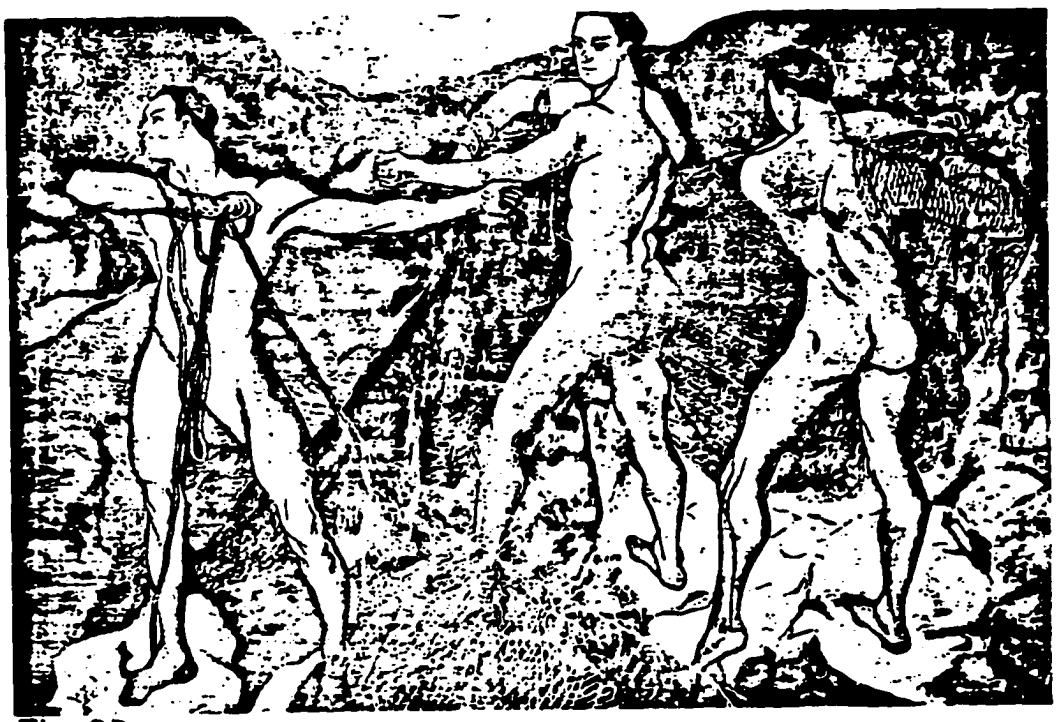

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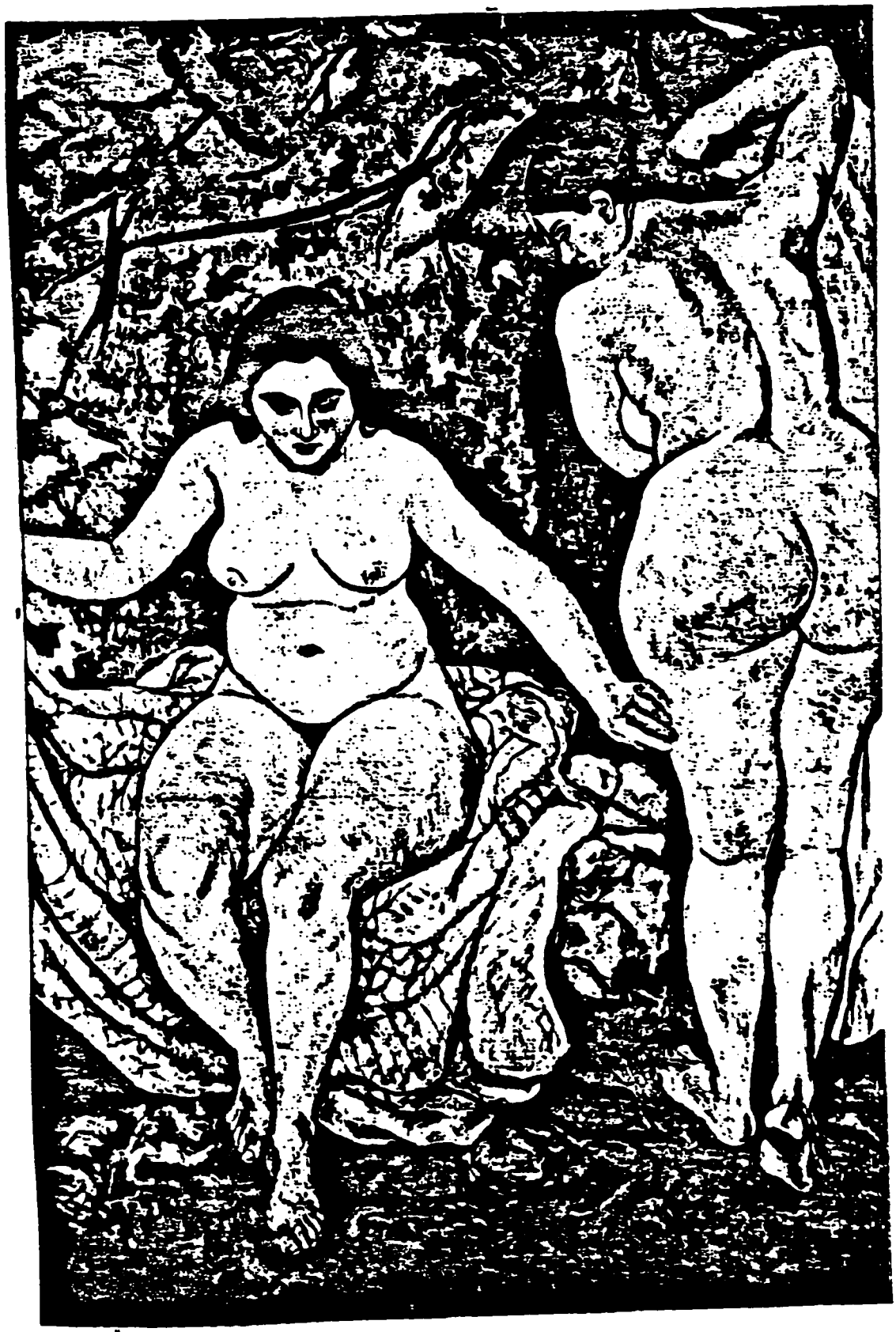

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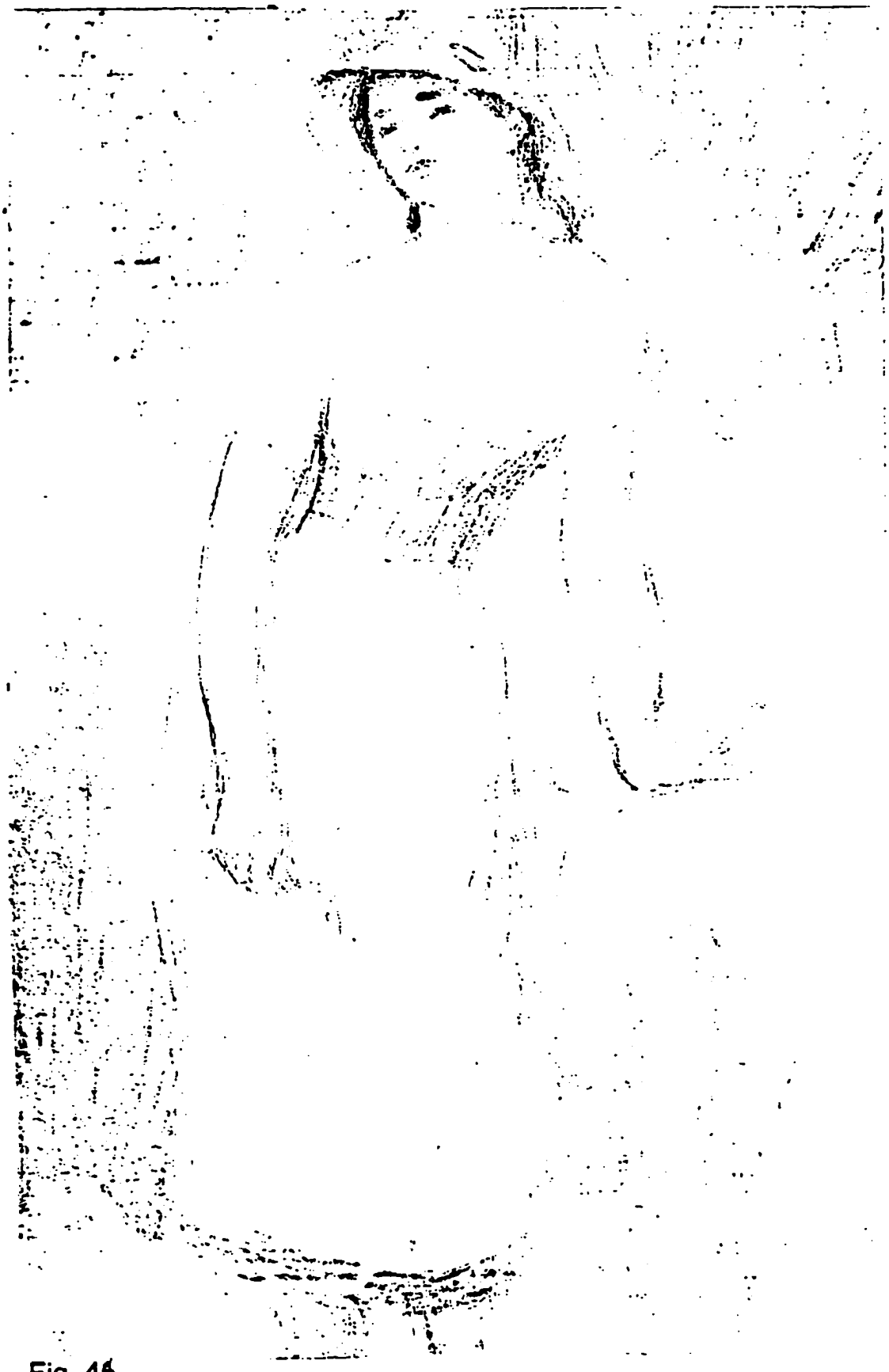

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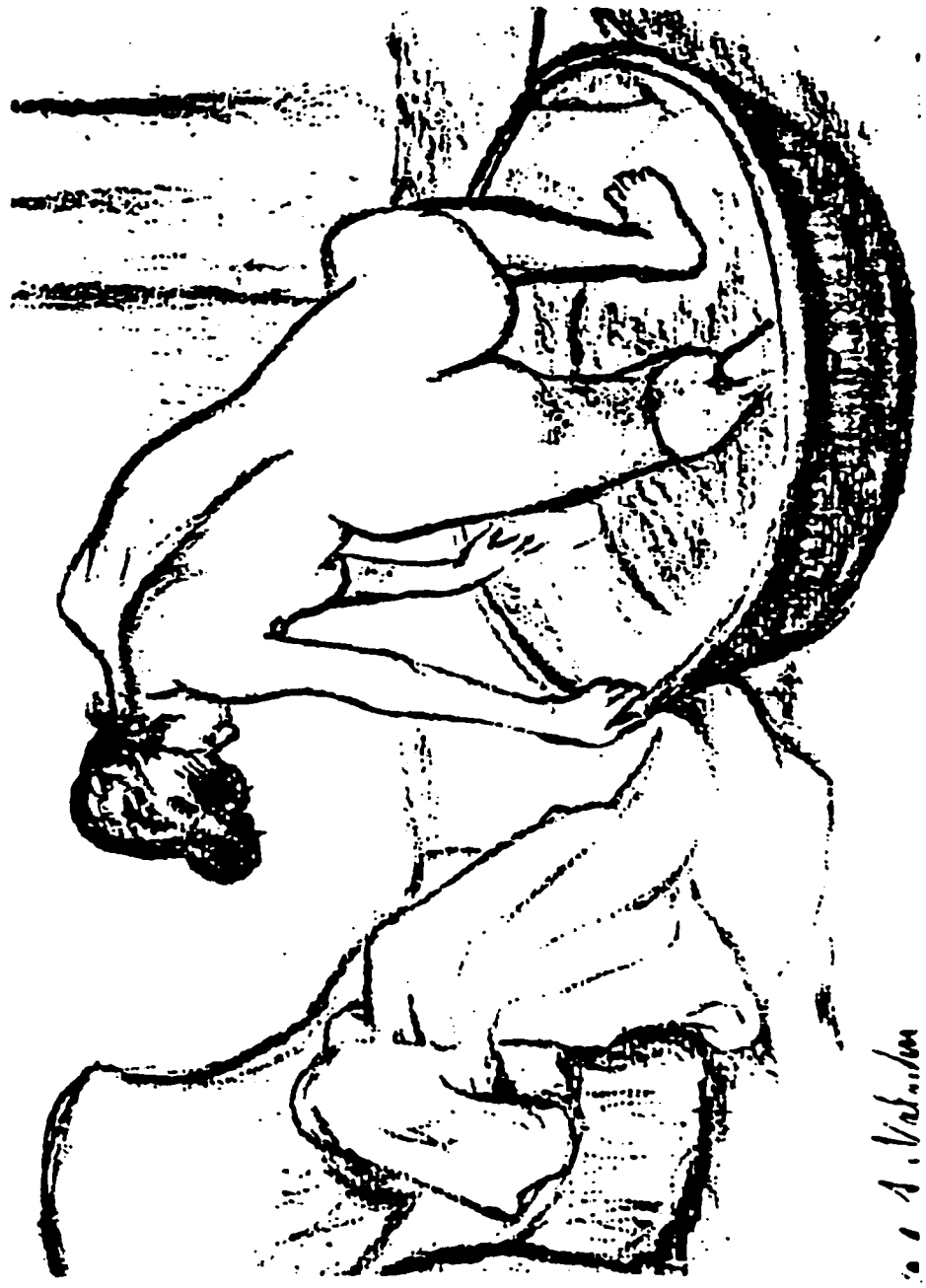

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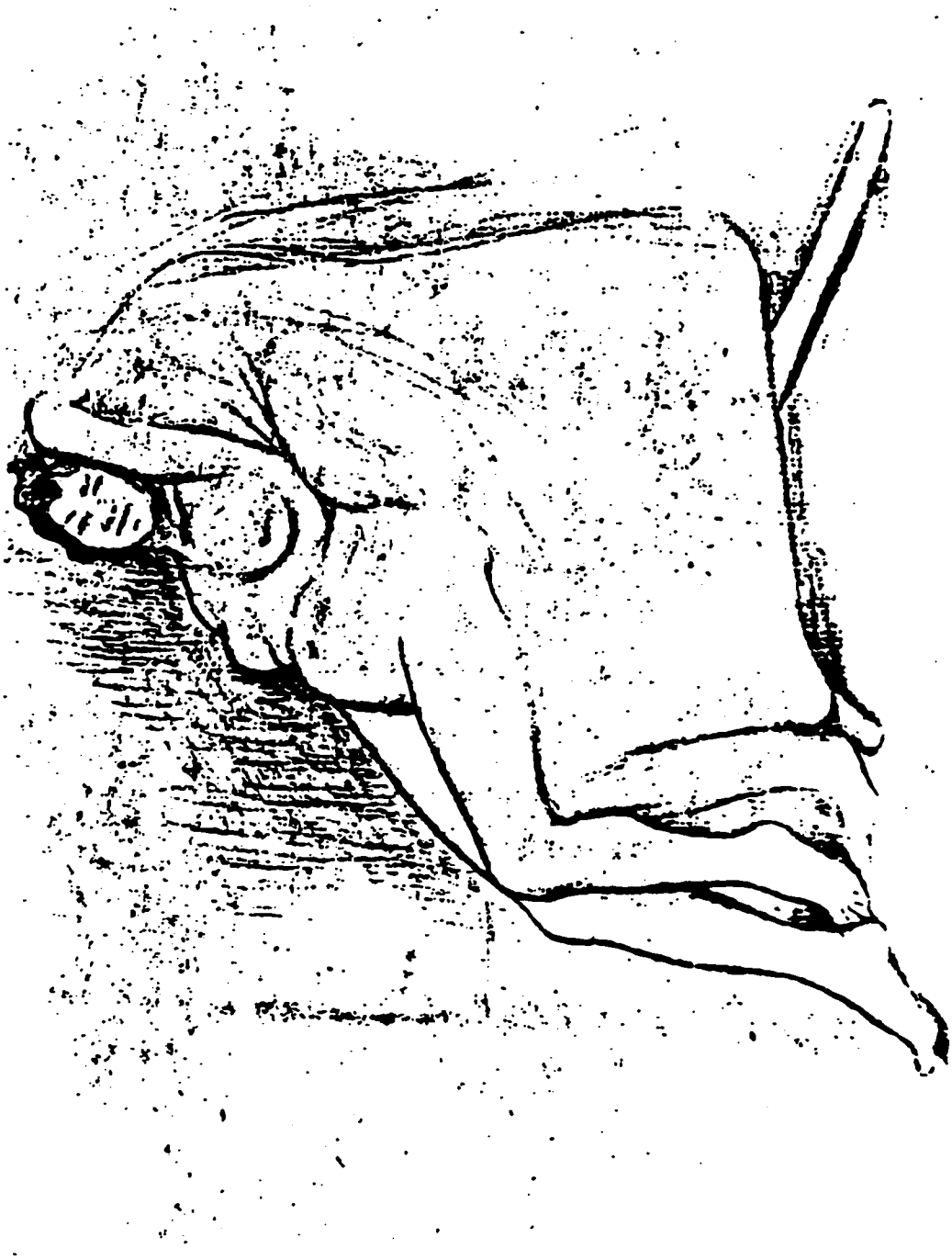

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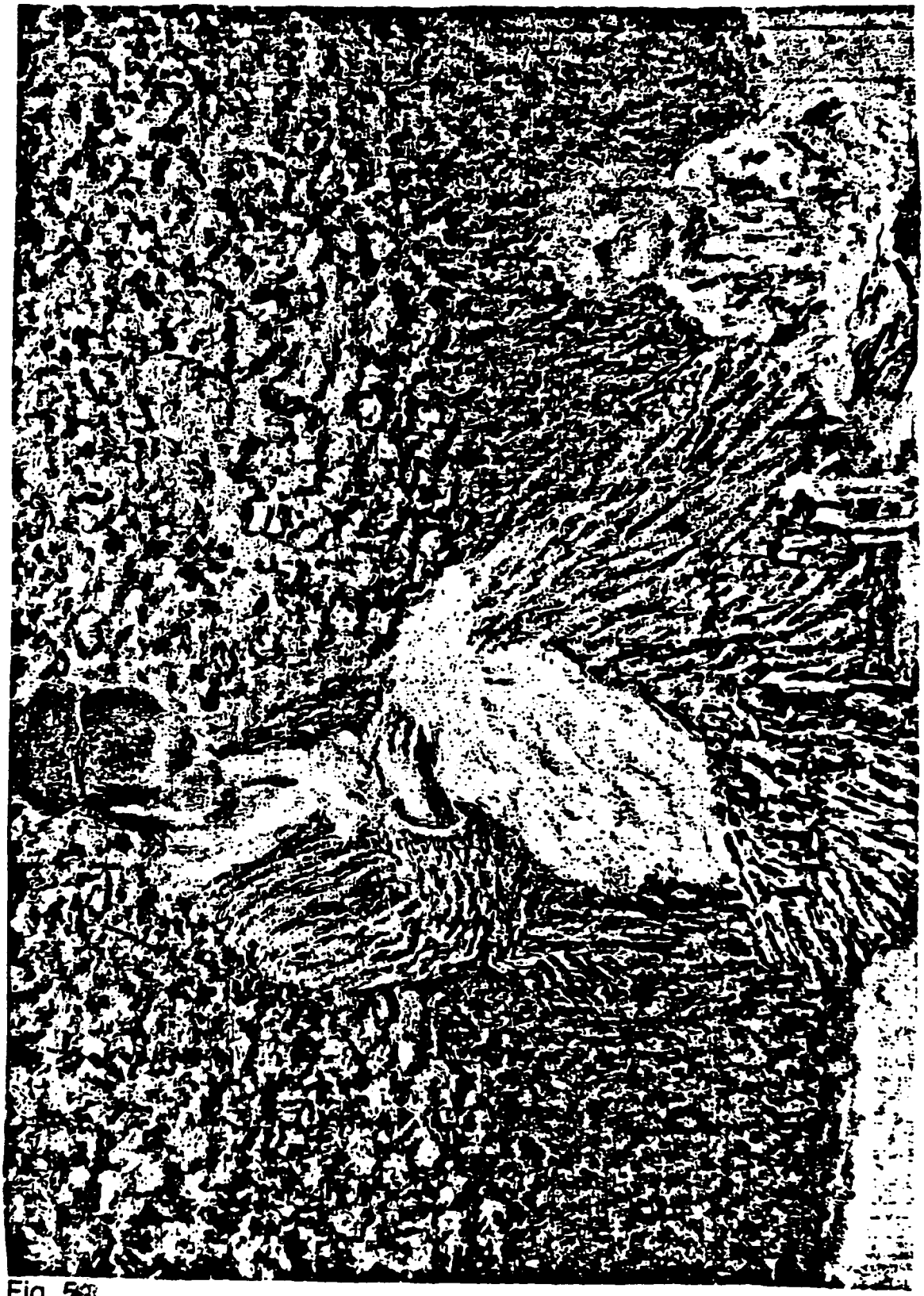

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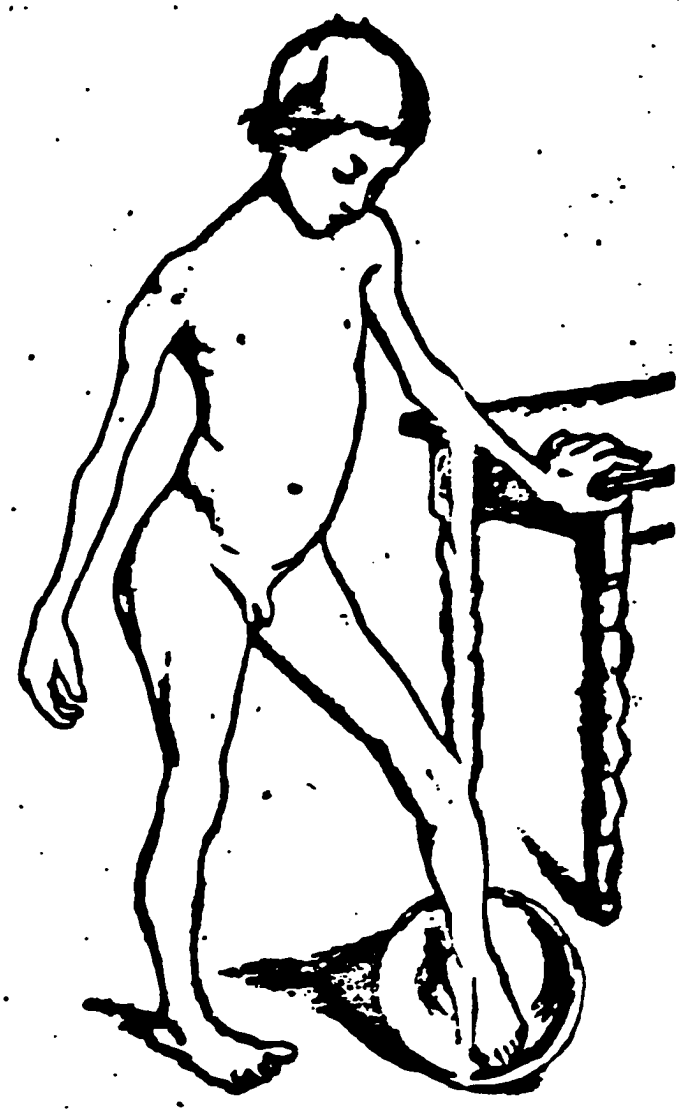

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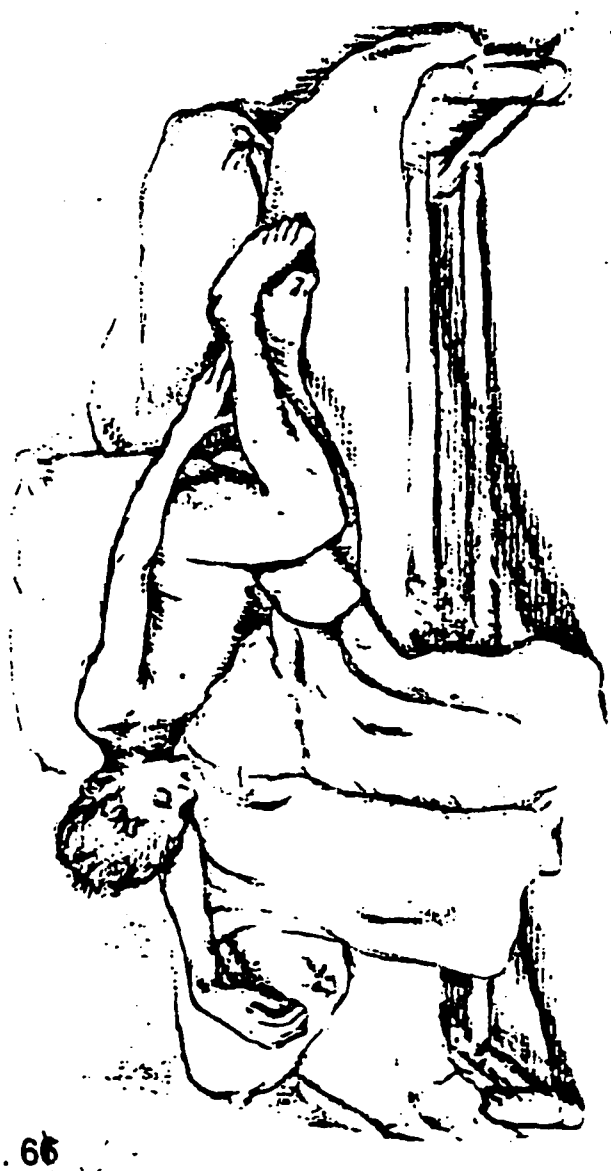

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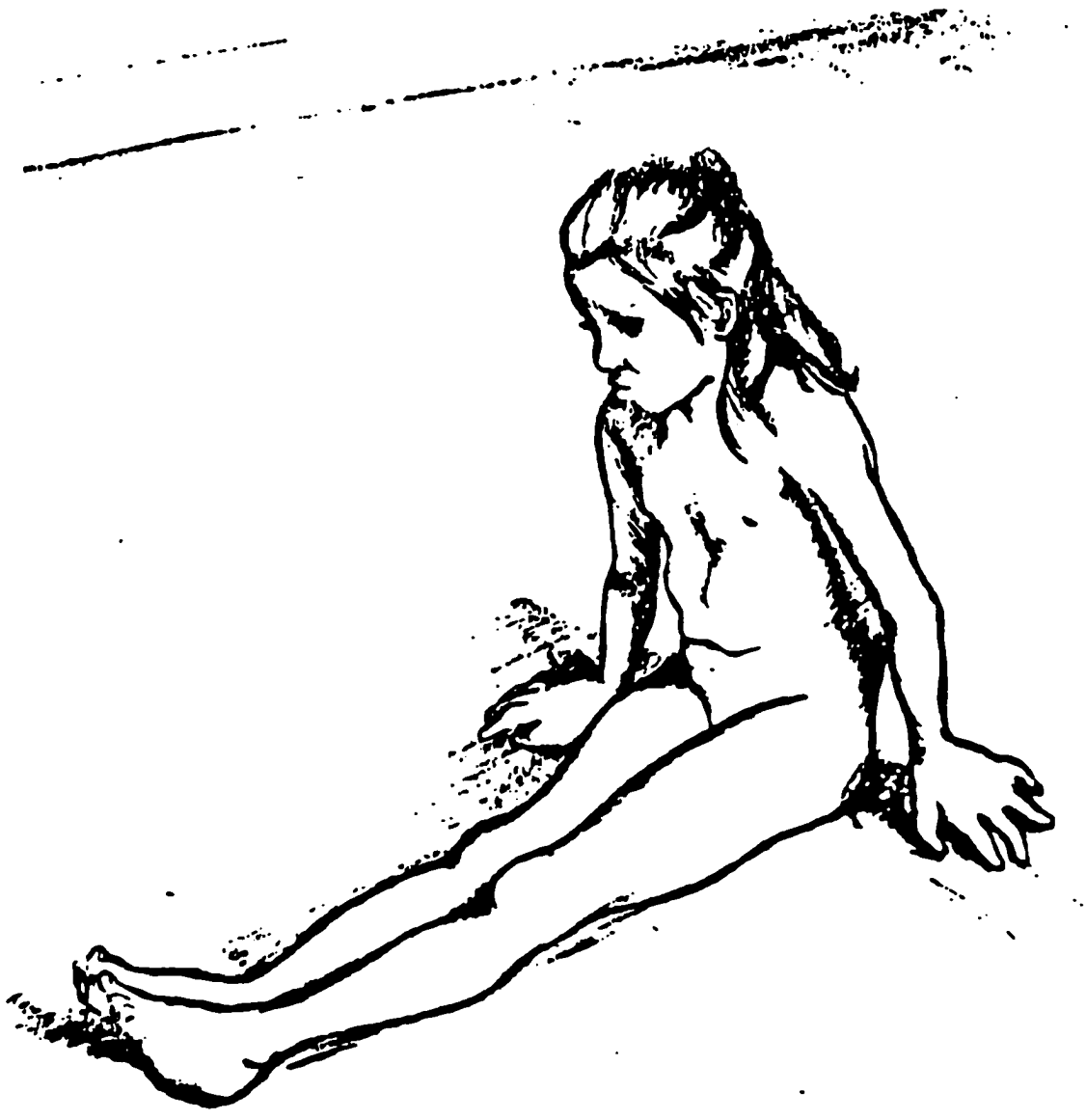

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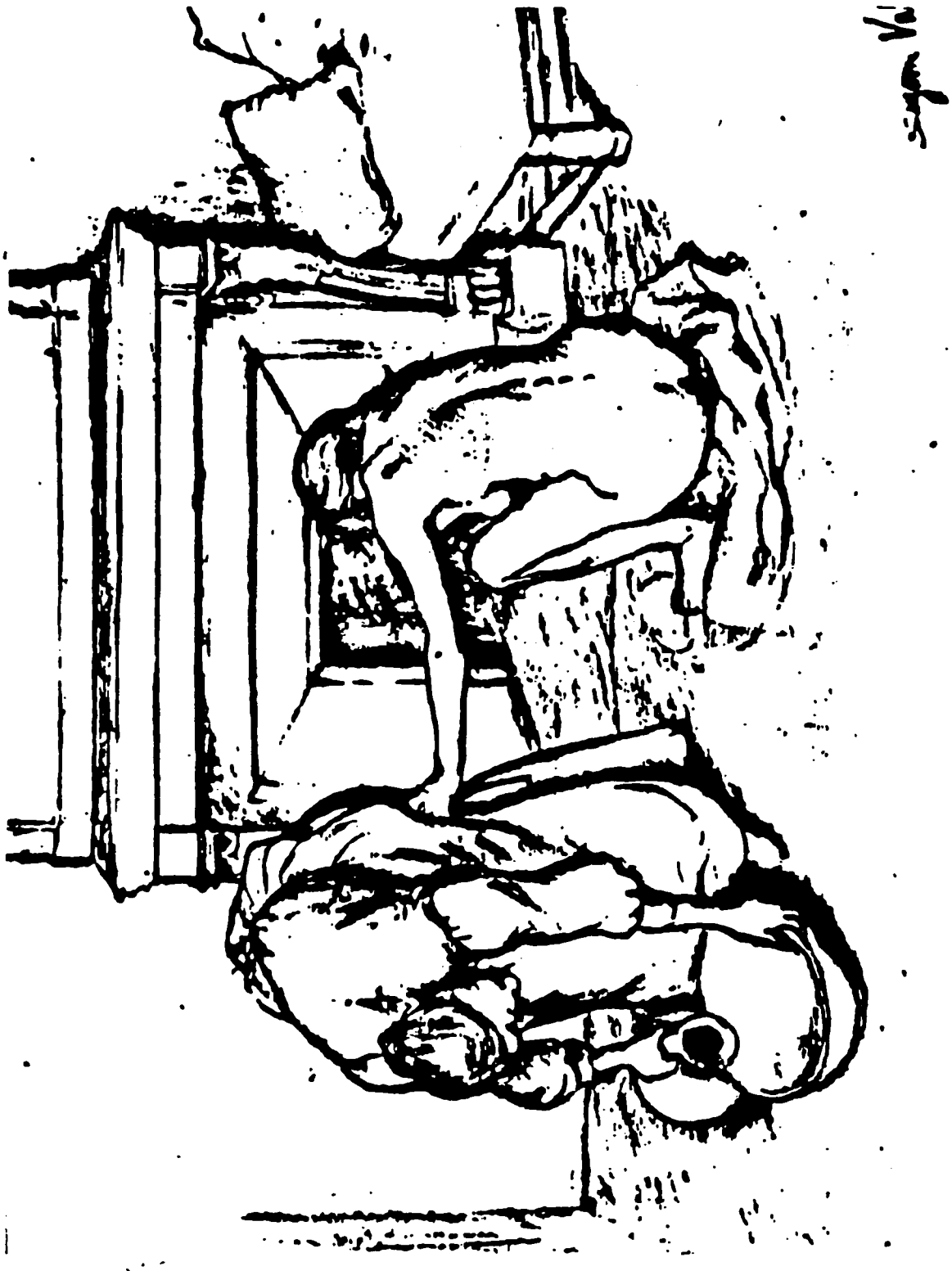

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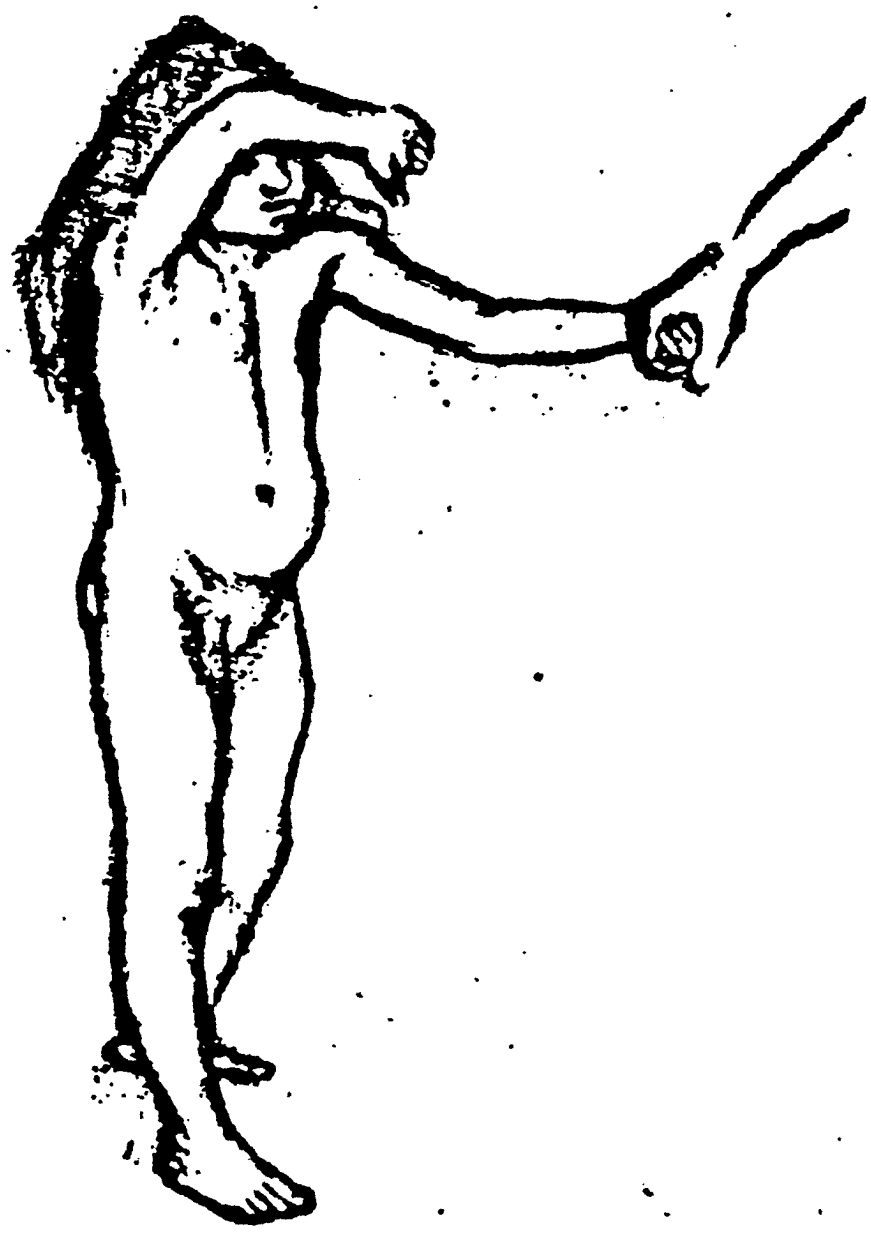

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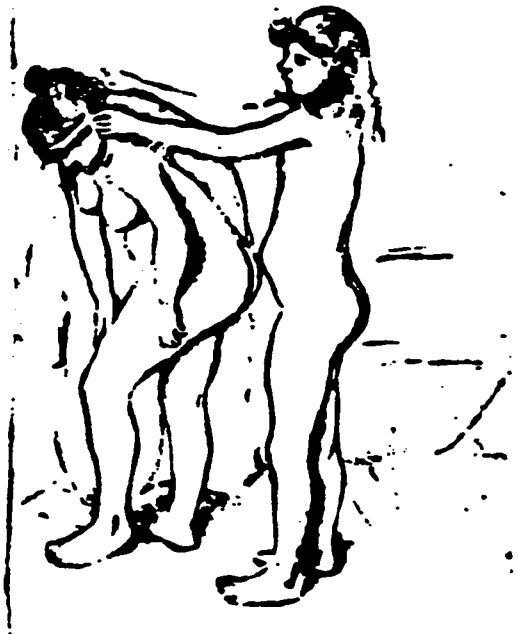

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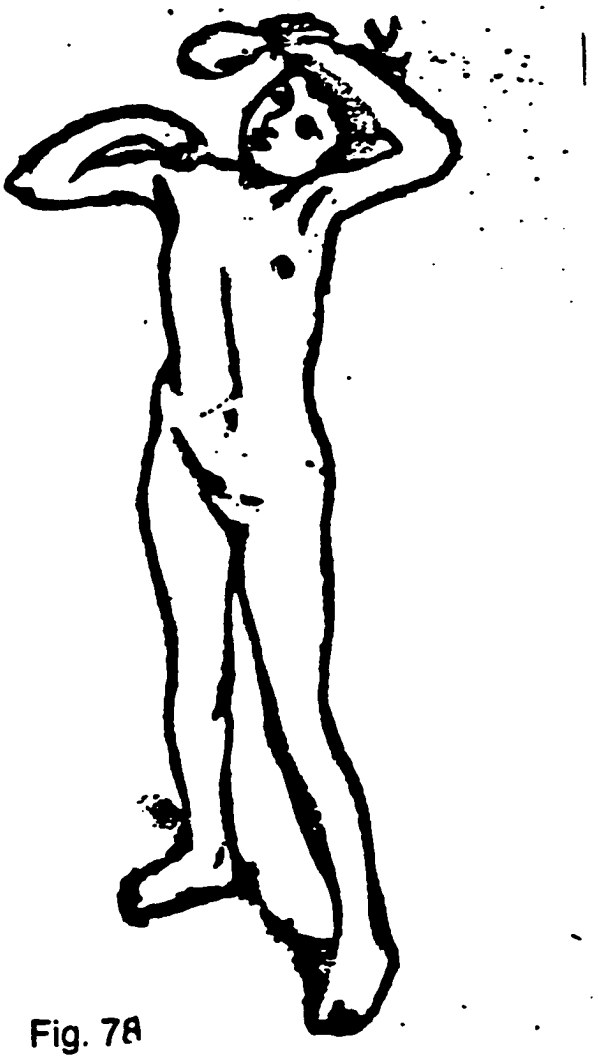

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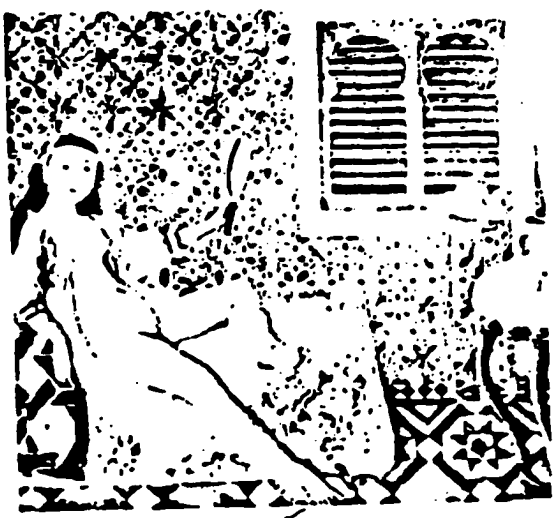

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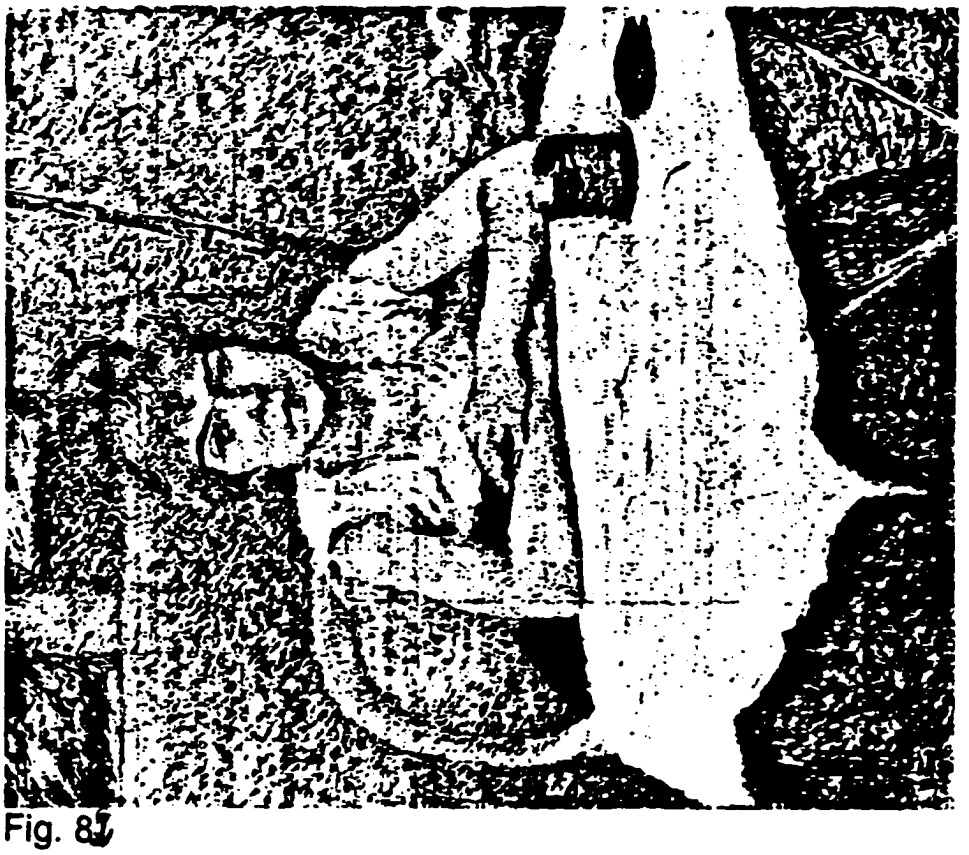

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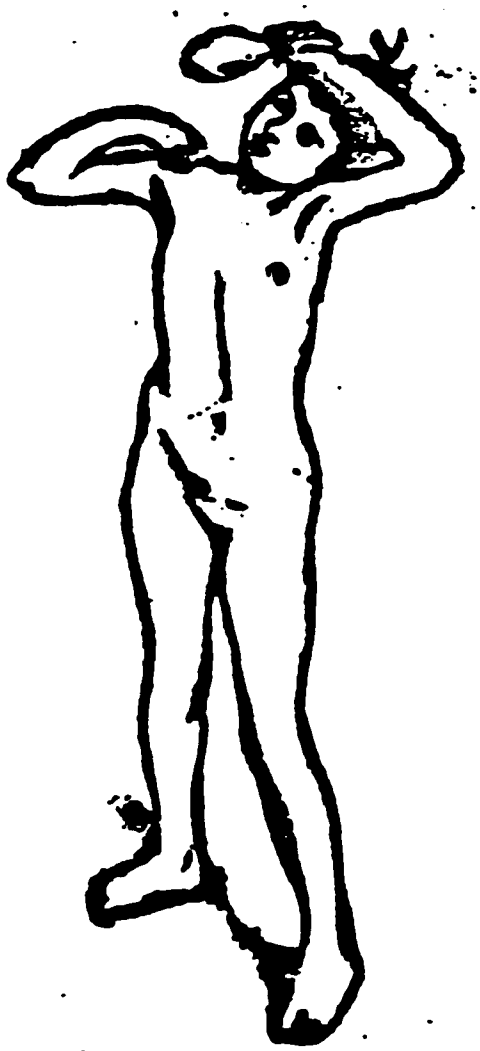

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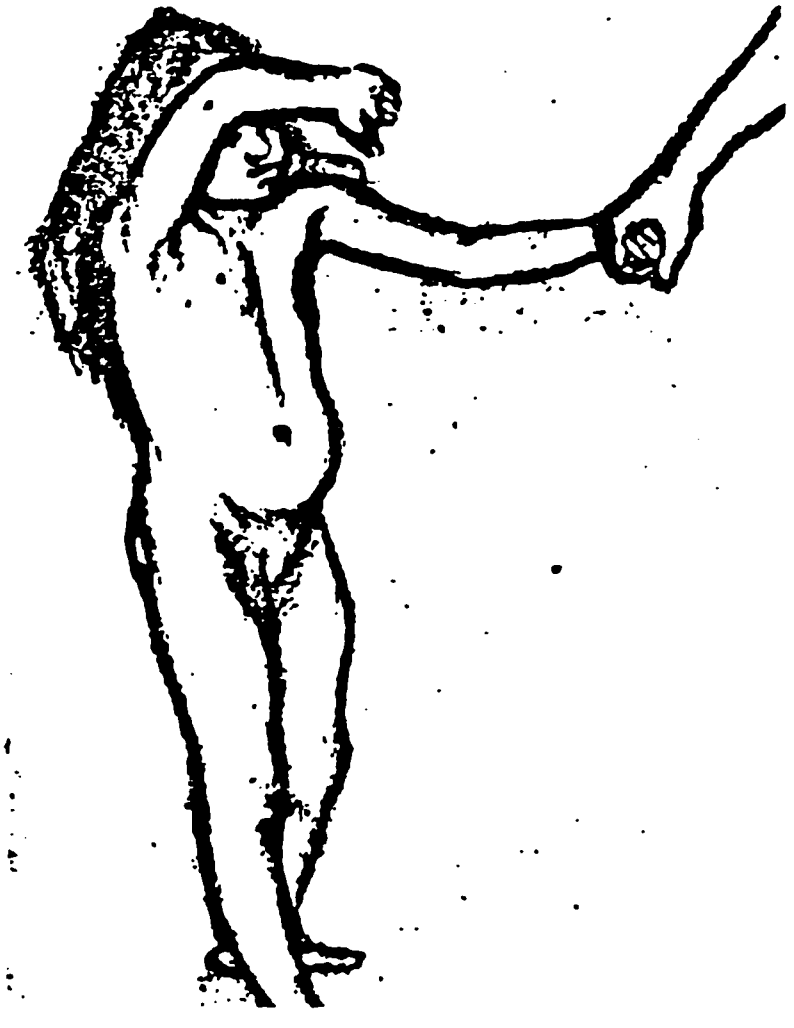

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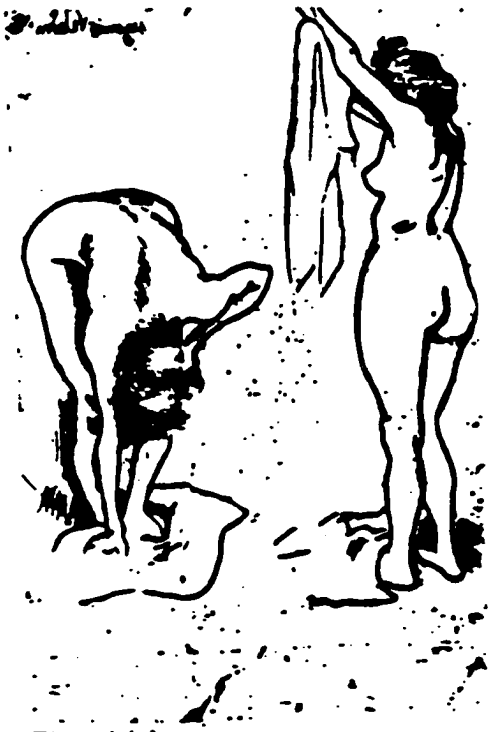

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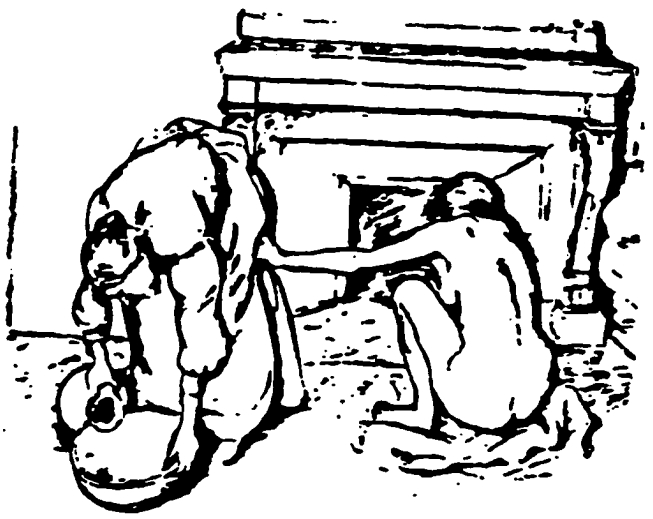

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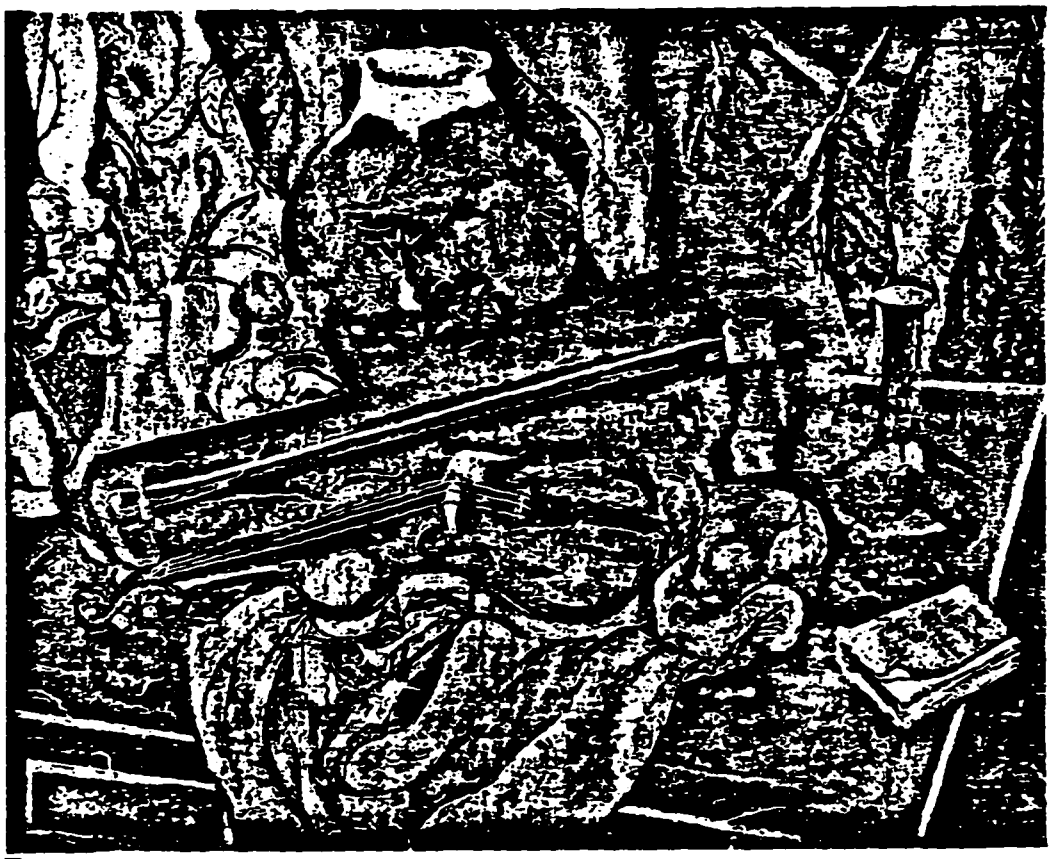

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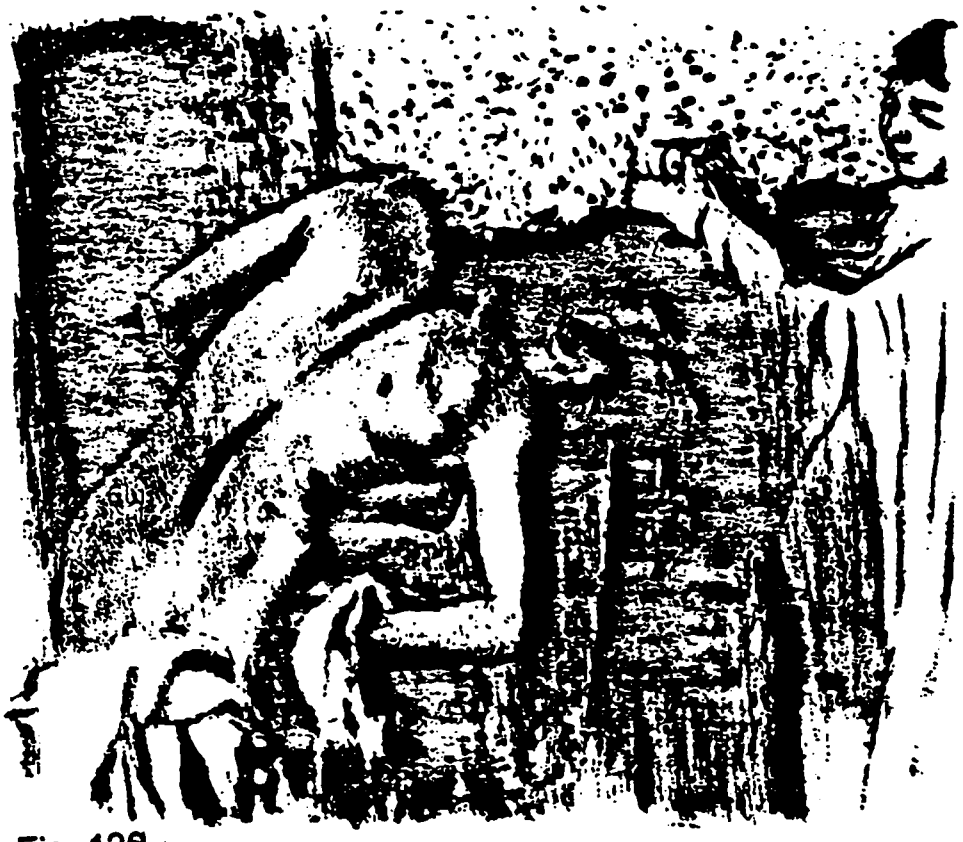
Fig. 125



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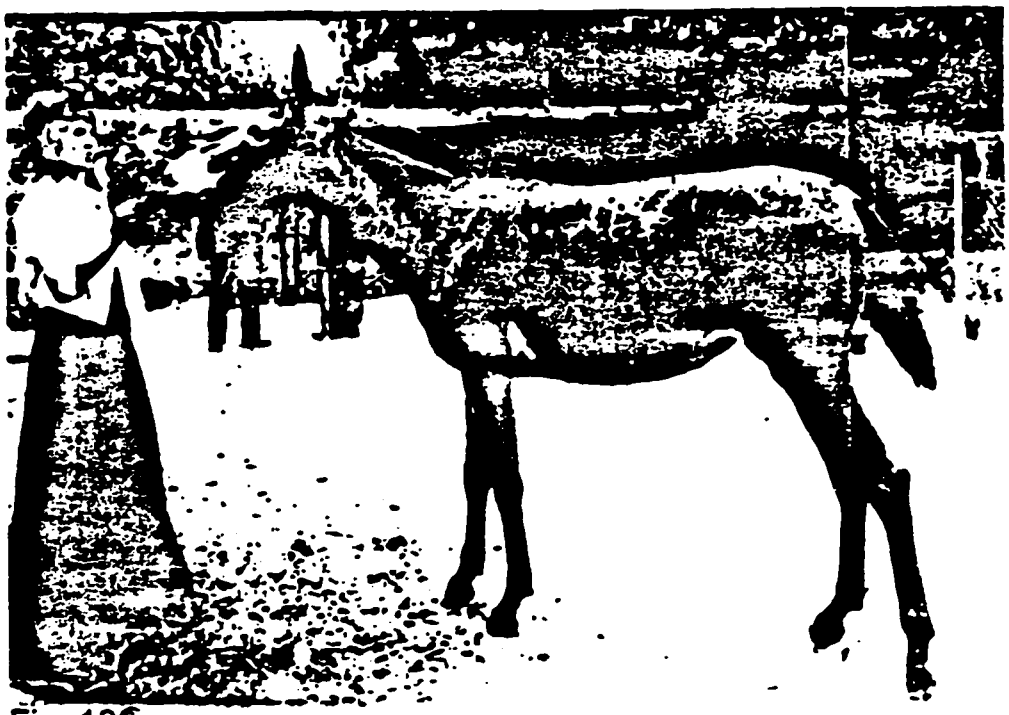

Fig. 136

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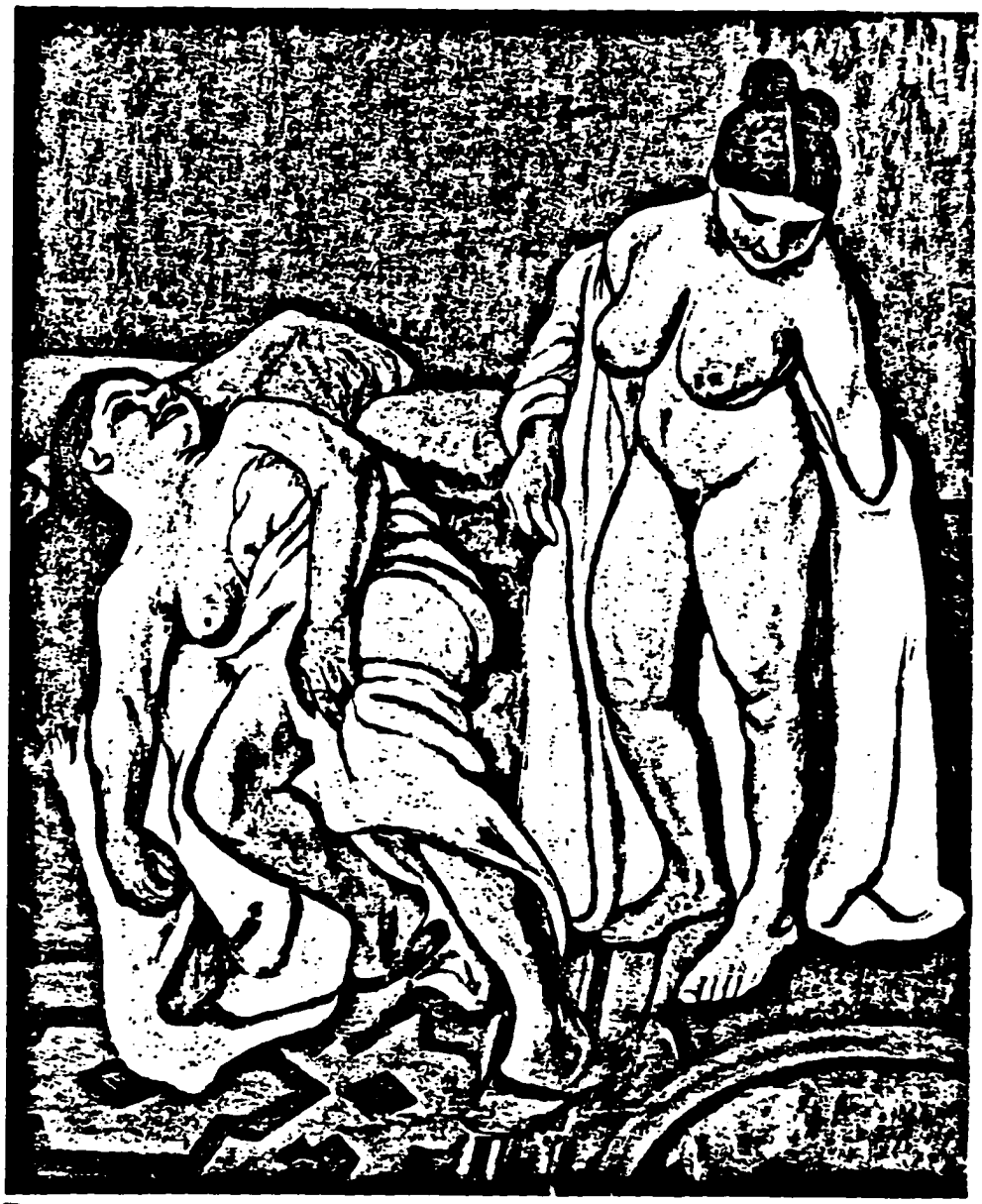

Fig. 141.

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Fig. 14β

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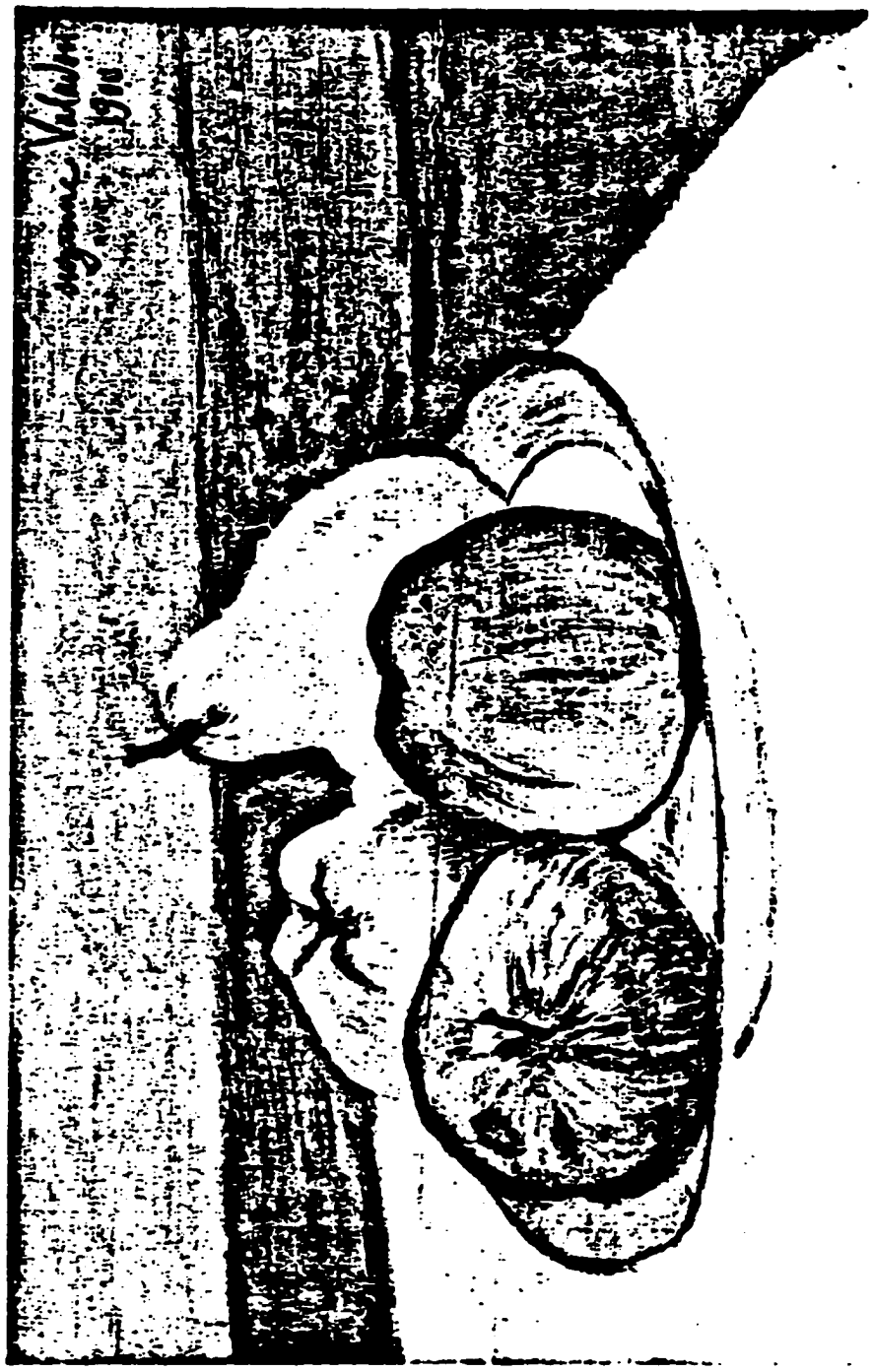

Fig. 156

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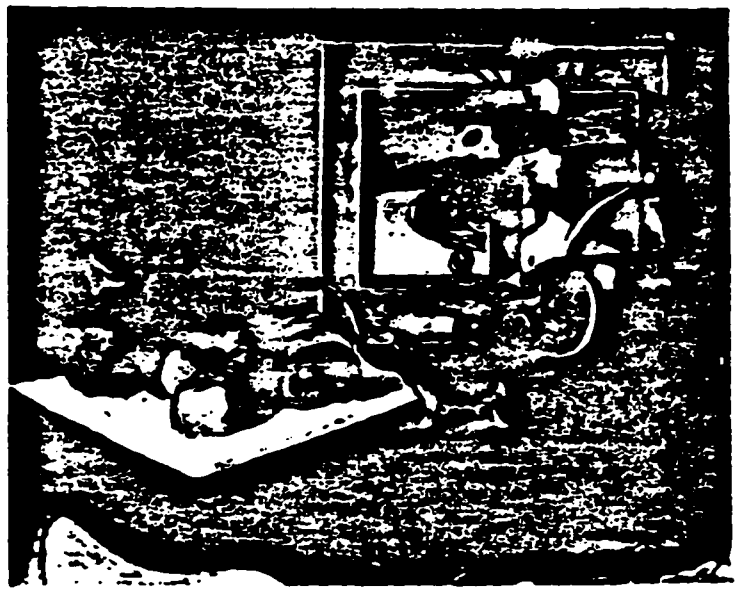

Fig. 15.

Fig. 15

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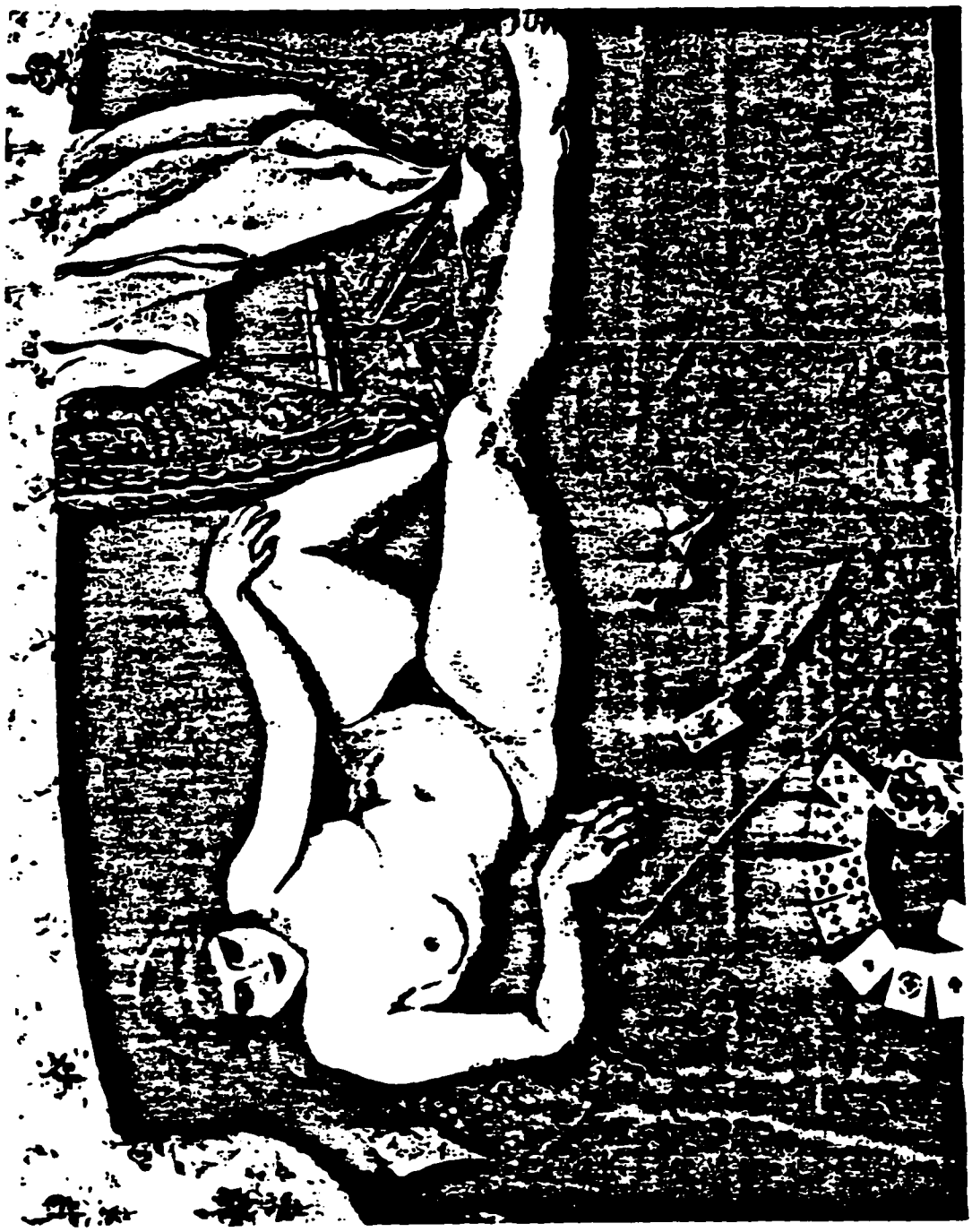

Fig. 15

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