

Accompanies the first-ever museum presentation examining the Salon de la Rose+Croix, a series of annual exhibitions established by eccentric French author, critic and Rosicrucian Joséphine Péladan

The Guggenheim Museum

Mystical Symbolism

*The Salon de la Rose+Croix in Paris,
1892–1897*

70 illustrations

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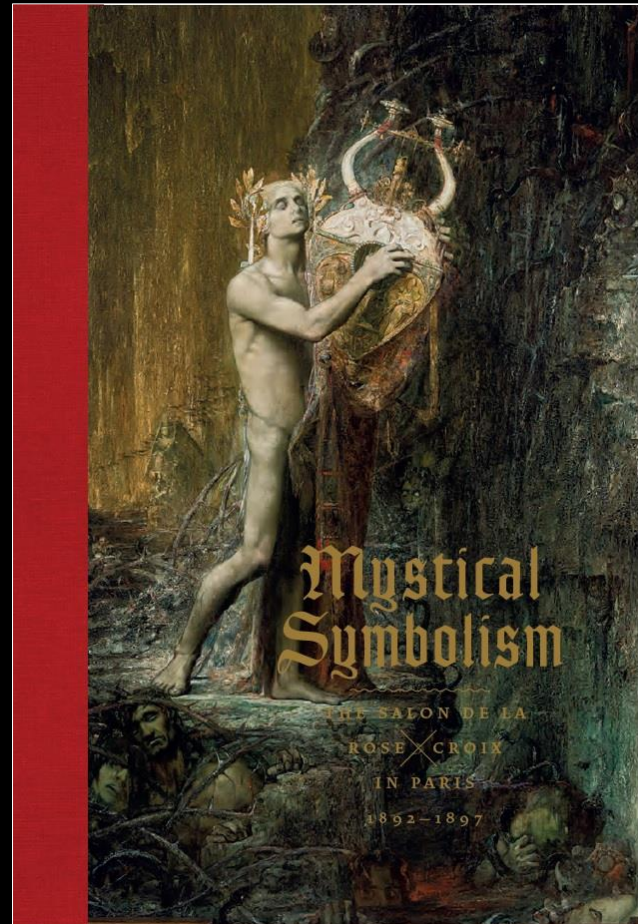
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Key Sales Points

- Published to accompany the retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, showing from 9 February to 9 May 2018
- In a 20,000-word essay featuring new scholarship, Guggenheim curator Katherine Brinson offers a thorough examination of the artist's 15-year production. Twenty exhibition sections include detailed descriptions, installation images, and artwork images.
- Danh Vo (b. 1975, Bà Rịa, Vietnam) is a key conceptual artist whose work dissects the power structures, cultural forces, and private desires that shape our experience of the world, and addresses themes of identity, religion, colonialism, capitalism, and artistic authorship.

The Salon de la Rose+Croix

THE RELIGION OF ART

VIVIEN GREENE



A

call to arms for the worship of beauty, the Salon de la Rose+ Croix (R+C) was founded in Paris by the eccentric Symbolist author and critic Joséphin Péladan (1859–1918).¹ The Salon privileged a hermetic and numinous vein of Symbolism, which reigned during the 1890s when Christian and occult practices were often intertwined in a quest for mysticism undertaken by many who yearned for a renewed centrality of faith. The Salon aimed to transcend the mundane and material for a higher spiritual life—the movement’s holy grail. Péladan consecrated the Salon in 1891 as part of L’Ordre de la Rose+Croix du Temple et du Graal, a fraternal secret society he ordained after having broken with the Rosicrucian sect led by poet and occultist Stanislas de Guaita.² The rose and the cross, whether in the form of images or words, conjoined by the symbol +, †, x, or a Maltese cross, referred to the Catholic devotion of the esoteric order. Held from 1892 to 1897, the annual exhibitions of the R+C gathered an international brotherhood of artists, many of whom became standard-bearers for Péladan’s Rosicrucian precepts.

Péladan and the R+C circle repudiated the empirical bedrock of Naturalism and, by extension, Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, as well as their subjects from everyday life. Painters and sculptors who showed at the Salon de la R+C sought to convey the “ideal,” a term popularized by the Symbolist theorist Albert Aurier in reference to elevated thought, at a far remove from the prosaic.³ Sinuous lines, attenuated figures, and hieratic compositions characterized their artwork. Imagery was mystical and visionary in tenor and often depicted mythical, literary, or spiritual themes replete with arcane symbols, ethereal women, androgynous beings, chimeras, and incubi. These artists rejected realism not only in art but also in life, finding respite in the intuitive, the imaginary, and the spiritual. They often conjured the latter with New Testament subjects and iconography, but with idiosyncratic refinements and fantasy that had little to do with Catholic strictures.⁴

Péladan’s project of cultural renewal—albeit through the retreat into a total aesthetic experience—was symptomatic of late nineteenth-century reactions against Positivism, which had disavowed the inner life in favor of reason and the hard sciences.⁵ In France, where republicanism had gone hand in hand with secularism, Roman Catholicism made a comeback among all classes.⁶ Syncretism—the study and equation of world religions—led to investigations of Eastern mysticism and a burgeoning interest in the occult. Esoteric orders and secret societies, often informed by a hybrid of these religious philosophies, multiplied, and among them, in addition to L’Ordre de la Rose+Croix du Temple et du Graal, were the Martinists, Occultists, Spiritists, and Theosophists.⁷ They countered the perceived ills of industrial modernity and capitalism: the mechanization of labor, loss of community, and overcrowded urban centers.⁸ The 1890s also witnessed radical political divisions, anarchist bombings, and the emergence of a reactionary right wing.⁹ For his part, Péladan flaunted his anti-republican and pro-monarchy stance.

The Reception of the Rose+Croix

A SYMPTOM OF THE
RÉACTION IDÉALISTE

JEAN-DAVID
JUMEAU-LAFOND



In his *L'entr'acte idéal: Histoire de la Rose+Croix*, published in 1903, Léonce de Larmandie retraced the development of the Salons that Joséphin Péladan organized from 1892 to 1897. This close friend and collaborator of Péladan commented on a review from March 1892:

One can say that the opening had a worldwide resonance, and . . . three thousand two hundred and forty newspapers of every format, every tendency, from every land in the four corners of the world — even Australia, even Honolulu — devoted long articles to the Rose+Croix.¹

Larmandie's enthusiasm explains his exaggeration of certain facts, because no articles about the official opening have been found in Australian or Hawaiian newspapers. But the exhibition did have considerable success and was widely commented upon. It made such an impression on Marcel Proust that he mentioned it twenty years later in his *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913) in order to situate the context of his narrative that takes place during the 1890s.² In spite of their imperfections and the difficulty that Péladan encountered while trying to realize his ideas, his exhibitions allowed the public to discover a greater number of artists, but their critical reception underlines several issues, including the scale and innovative character of the Salons (which precipitated the complex task of commentary), and the impact of the Rose+Croix (R+C) on contemporary aesthetic discussions. By tackling head-on Realism in art and materialism, Péladan may not have realized that he was going to offer the opportunity for multiple viewpoints and cause a violent clash of opinions. The reception of the Salon de la R+C demonstrates that it actually crystallized the developments of a period and highlighted what was then referred to as the *réaction idéaliste*.

A MAJOR EVENT

From 1891 to 1892, during which time the idea of Symbolism — established by Jean Moréas with a manifesto on poetry published in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1886 — had extended to the visual arts, Péladan's initiative embodied the claims of an "Idealist art" in a spectacular way. The impact should not be solely attributed to the publicity effort implemented by the Sâr (the Assyrian royal title Péladan had given himself), but to the response that the Salon brought to bear on the larger issue at the beginning of a decade that was to break away from twenty years of materialism and to become the symbol of a new phenomenon. At a time when Paris was in the throes of a spiritualist revival, art manifestos with similar tendencies appeared more frequently after 1890. The theories of Albert Aurier, Maurice Denis, Alphonse Germain, Camille Mauclair, and others announced a rejection of Realism and Impressionism in art in the same way that a rejection of Naturalism in literature had been heralded a few years before. This was the rise of an art form that, among other things, departed from the description of nature and

Afterlife

THE IMPORTANT AND
SOMETIMES EMBARRASSING
LINKS BETWEEN OCCULTISM
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ABSTRACT ART, CA. 1909–13¹

KENNETH E. SILVER



The idea that abstraction, an art of pure form freed from all literary and extrapictorial content, might have its origins in fin-de-siècle religious revivalism and esoteric spiritual theory has long been a source of discomfort to certain students of modernity. "Although this condition could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century," as Rosalind Krauss reminded us in 1979, "now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence."² Yet, whether turbulently expressionistic or coolly geometric in style, many of the most significant early twentieth-century artistic movements developed, in part and indisputably, out of an acquaintance with an amalgam of spiritual sources—Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, kabbalistic, alchemical, and just plain wacky. What are the anomalous connections between advanced art and spiritualism, and how can we account for them?

It is worth keeping in mind, as every self-consciously advanced artist was well aware, that the great French Realist painter of the mid-nineteenth century, Gustave Courbet, had thrown down the gauntlet in a posthumous letter published in *Le courrier du dimanche* in 1886. Challenging any young practitioner who would still traffic in Christian or religious imagery, or even mythic subject matter, he wrote: "Art in painting should consist only of the representation of things that are visible and tangible to the artist. . . . An abstract object, not visible, nonexistent, is not within the domain of painting."³ If Rosicrucianism had lost its hold on youthful practitioners by the time of the new century, other cults (some quite venerable) and "new religions" had significant roles to play in the move from empirically based naturalistic art to one kind or another of nonmimetic abstraction.

Convincingly argued by art historians since the late 1960s—a period especially open to cults and spiritualist initiatives—esoteric ideas of various kinds, and Theosophy, in particular, were crucial in allowing a number of artists, major and minor, to make the leap from the readily apparent (i.e., the empirically observable) to the hidden, invisible, or latent. Founded in New York in 1857 by Helena Blavatsky, William Quan Judge, and Henry Steel Olcott, The Theosophical Society (whose name expresses its self-conscious blend of theology and philosophy) soon spread east to London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, and Anglo-India, among other places, with an ever-expanding circle of new adherents, including a host of new leaders and theorists (the movement appears to have peaked on the eve of the First World War). Theosophy was a New Age faith, combining the esoteric and the rational—the mystical and the scientific—in preparation for the coming "Epoch of the Great Spiritual," Vasily Kandinsky's term for a kind of heaven on earth of enlightened, peace-loving equals. The English wing of Theosophy, headed up by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, was especially attractive to artists because of its strong visual component, much of which was a reworking of earlier Symbolist notions of synesthesia (the correspondence of the senses). In Leadbeater's *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance* (1903) and in their widely disseminated text *Thought-Forms* (1901), Besant and Leadbeater claimed that thoughts

CHARLES MAURIN

An artist politically committed to the left, Charles Maurin (1856–1914) was from a modest background in Puy, France.¹ A scholarship allowed him to study in Paris, first, in 1875, at the Académie Julian and, from 1876, at the École des Beaux-Arts. By 1885 he had become a professor at the Académie Julian, where he taught and befriended future Rose+Croix (R+C) coexhibitor Félix Vallotton. Maurin was a virtuoso printmaker as well as a painter, and his woodcut technique proved formative for the graphic work of this younger Swiss artist. Maurin was also close to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, with whom he shared a profound investment in lithography.

Maurin challenged viewers with his quasi-indecipherable allegory at the first Salon, which was otherwise dominated by Idealist paintings.² Influenced by Japanese prints, he cropped, simplified, and stylized the pictorial forms in his *Dawn* triptych. Despite the clarity of its imagery, the narrative remains hermetic, although Maurin did indicate that the central panel, *The Dawn of Labor*, depicts the revenge of miners.³ It presents a chaotic scene populated by naked men, women, and children. The main protagonist, perhaps invoking Eugène Delacroix's *July 28: Liberty Leading the People* (*Le 28 juillet: La Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830), is a striding woman — a child clutching at her — who squeezes a breast with one hand. To her right a woman seated backward on a white horse brandishes weapons, and another lies on a path of blood, ostensibly praying.⁴ In the distance, behind a hillock, is a crowd with a red flag possibly signifying revolt, while below them spreads an industrial landscape punctuated by smokestacks.⁵ Nearer to the viewer, figures emerge from the mire of the earth, including a man who raises a lantern as if having just exited the mines, and a tortured soul who gnaws his own hands, recalling Ugolino della Gherardesca in Dante's *Inferno*. On the far left a muscled male inspiring power holds fiery torches.

One of the side panels, not illustrated here, *The Dawn of Love* (*L'aurore de l'amour*), subtitled "*The Illumination*" by Arthur Rimbaud ("*Les illuminations*" de Arthur Rimbaud), presents another discomfiting image of naked women, but in states of erotic pleasure. A fully dressed man observes from the edge of the frame — supposedly the artist, drawing in a sketchbook. *The Dawn of the Dream*, the third panel, also references a poet seminal to Symbolism with its subtitle "*The Flowers of Evil*" by Charles Baudelaire ("*Les fleurs du mal*" de Charles Baudelaire). But the clothed man (again), amidst strongly delineated naked women of various ages, is actually Maurin's hometown friend Rupert Carabin. In a dreamscape, Carabin sits under a tree, looking corpse-like, his face tinged green. Impossibly, he is on a bed, propped by an Orientalist cushion. The women alternate in mood from a utopian group dancing to the distressed young girl covering her face to the potentially pregnant woman prostrated in the immediate foreground with a greenish hue coloring her closed eyes and parted lips. The proliferation of references in these works elicited an avalanche of critical commentary as many struggled to unpack their meanings.⁶ Notwithstanding these criticisms, Maurin exhibited another triptych on material, emotional, and spiritual love at the 1895 Salon and showed three works again in 1897.

— VG

1. For Maurin's biography, see Maurice Fritchuet, *Charles Maurin: Un symboliste du réel*, exh. cat. (Lyon: Éditions Fage; Le Puy-en-Velay, France: Musée Chauriat, 2006).

2. Fritchuet addresses the trio of paintings in detail without, however, arriving at a concrete interpretation. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–58.

3. Quoted in Fritchuet, *Ibid.*, p. 149. Many also questioned the title, and Maurin himself later wrote that *The Dawn* was arbitrary, though whether this is true is uncertain. *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 151.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

5. A red flag was usually a symbol of anarcho-communism at this time.

6. Maurin's staunch friend Vallotton mocked the public and critics alike for their lack of comprehension before this enigmatic ensemble. Félix Vallotton, "Beaux-arts: Le salon de la Rose+Croix 11," in *Carnet de L'Estime* (journal satirique) (March 22, 1892), n.p.



The Dawn of Labor (*L'aurore du travail*), ca. 1891
Oil on canvas, 79 × 148 cm. Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint-Étienne Métropole, France
First Salon de la Rose+Croix, 1892, cat. no. 97, p. 27
(title: *L'Aurore*)

The Dawn of the Dream (*L'aurore du rêve*), ca. 1891
Oil on canvas, 81 × 100.4 cm. Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint-Étienne Métropole, France
First Salon de la Rose+Croix, 1892, cat. no. 97, p. 27
(title: *L'Aurore*)

ALPHONSE OSBERT

Alphonse Osbert (1857–1939) was born in Paris to an aristocratic family. In 1877 he enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he studied with Léon Bonnat and Fernand Cormon, attended the atelier of the academic painter Henri Lehmann, and befriended the artists Aman-Jean, Alexandre Séon, and Georges Seurat. The Spanish old master painters Diego Velázquez and Jusepe de Ribera, as well as the Nabis, had a strong influence on Osbert's early style, which featured voluptuous figures and dramatic lighting. Osbert also produced marine landscapes that were dominated by broad, painterly brushstrokes. Nevertheless, like many of his contemporaries, including Séon, it was painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes who had the longest-lasting impact on Osbert's oeuvre, and Osbert became his unofficial successor. Osbert exhibited extensively in Paris throughout his career and received high praise from writers, peers, and press. In conjunction with his shift in style toward Symbolist themes and techniques, he preferred exhibiting at the alternatives to the salon of the Académie des Beaux-Arts: the Salon des Artistes français, Salon des Indépendants, Salon de la Société, and Salon de la Rose + Croix (R+C), among others. He was also an indefatigable participant in many literary and artistic circles.¹

Osbert's engagement with the Salon de la R+C was continuous (he showed at every Salon), and the respect between its organizer, Joséphin Péladan, and the artist was mutual. *Vision*, a painting presented at the 1893 Salon, focuses on a young woman whose presence is simultaneously majestic and modest. She joins her hands in front of her, gazing upward. A yellow aureole encircles her head, a detail that underlines a possible religious metaphor. At the same time a sheep tenderly nuzzles her, suggesting she may be a shepherdess and alluding to a harmonious human-animal relationship. A blue mist envelops the composition, and the timid yellow light, enhanced by small brushstrokes probably influenced by current Pointillist theories, implies a sunrise or a sunset, adding further ambiguity to the scene.² This blue tonality became a signature of Osbert's paintings. As with Puvis and Séon, he repeatedly adopted specific hues to create "seductive calm and remote landscapes that persuade pleasant daydreaming."³ The compositions he exhibited at the 1896 Salon de la R+C were described similarly, as "evenings of liquid gold traversed by calm and dream-like forms."⁴

The artist's themes remained more or less consistent throughout the rest of his career. Much like his mentor Puvis, Osbert continued to depict ethereal figures — "princesses in white dresses" in tranquil landscapes, as described by Henri Degron in an 1896 article published in the noted journal *La Plume* that paid tribute to the artist's oeuvre.⁵ Osbert's large-scale commissions also explored a Symbolist idiom. After 1892 he exhibited internationally in Boston, Saint Petersburg, and Tokyo.

—YB

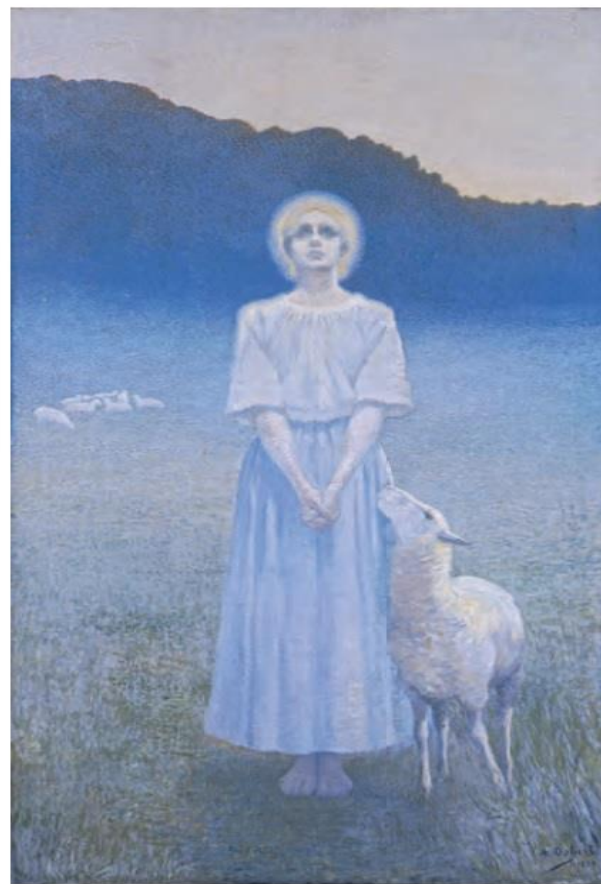
1. For an extensive account of the artist's work and life, see Vronique Dumas, *Le premier symboliste Alphonse Osbert (1857–1939)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005).

2. On the influence of Pointillism and Michel-Eugène Chevreul, see *ibid.*, pp. 119–25.

3. "Les paysages d'Osbert... sont méditatifs et donnent une impression de calme et d'abandon favorable aux douces rêveries." Raymond Wery, "Notes d'art: Salon de la Rose-Croix, petites expositions," *L'œuvre de l'art* (May 1895), p. 267.

4. "ces noirs d'or liquide où passent des formes calmes et rêveuses." Gustave Soulier, "Notes d'art: Salon de la Rose-Croix," *L'œuvre de l'art* (January 1894), p. 384.

5. "Princesses aux robes blanches." Henri Degron, "Alphonse Osbert," *La Plume*, no. 165 (March 1, 1896), p. 138.



Vision, 1892
Oil on canvas, 235 × 138 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Gift of Yolande Osbert, 1977
Second Salon de la Rose + Croix, 1893, cat. no. 167, p. xviii
(title: *Vision*)

JAN TOOROP

Jan Toorop (1858–1928) was born on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Toorop's Dutch father and multiethnic mother sent him to be educated in the Netherlands when he was a young boy. In his late teens and early twenties Toorop enrolled in polytechnic and art schools in Delft and Amsterdam before studying in nearby Brussels, where he became closely involved with the radical exhibition circle les XX. Talented and adventurous, he embraced stylistic trends with alacrity. By the early 1890s he had experimented with Impressionism and Pointillism, and had begun addressing innocence, evil, death, and the afterlife in mysterious allegorical works characterized by intricately patterned forms and swirling lines that recall the art of his native land. Around this same time Toorop came into the orbit of Joséphin Péladan, who included two of his pictures in the inaugural Salon de la Rose+Croix (R+C) in 1892. These paintings were *The Hataera* (*Een Hataera*, 1891), which depicts a courtesan, and the symbolic landscape *The New Generation*.¹ Péladan's chief collaborator, Count Antoine de La Rochefoucauld, was eager to purchase the latter artwork, but for unknown reasons he never acquired it.²

When Toorop displayed *The New Generation* in Amsterdam that summer, his friend Jan Veth, an artist and critic, published an account of its dense symbolism. He explained that the image of the child (modeled after Toorop's nearly year-old daughter, Charley), sitting in a "tropical magic forest," represents the new generation of humanity, full of promise, and the railroad and telegraph poles in the foreground signify the "modern life of action."³ The willow, a traditional symbol of mourning, contrasts with this uplifting imagery, as does the barren tree trunk at right enfolded by a snake, and the woman holding a wilted flower inside a crumbling building. According to Veth, the painting's gloomy elements connote the old generation and "life that has been sucked dry."⁴ He did not mention the tiny Buddha figure in the background at right, which may symbolize enlightenment.

Veth found the realistically depicted child in her high chair to be at odds with the fantastical setting. Yet he still praised the painting as akin to "a Persian embroidery worked in red, green, and purple silk . . . the complete expression of . . . youth."⁵ For his part, Péladan later excoriated *The New Generation* as "imponderable and bizarre . . . [one of] Toorop's smears," but he cannot have been entirely displeased with the artist's showing.⁶ During a trip to the Netherlands in November 1892, he inducted Toorop into L'Ordre de la R+C du Temple et du Graal. However, Toorop did not exhibit in the remaining Salons. He went on to become a leading artist and designer of the Dutch Art Nouveau movement and subsequently devoted himself to expressing his ardent Catholicism through his work.

—AH

1. *The Hataera* is also known as *Wau of the Sea*.

2. Robert Siebelhoff, "Jan Toorop and the Year 1892," *Canadian Journal of Netherlands Studies* 9/10 (1988–89), p. 78. Siebelhoff paraphrases a letter from Raymond Nys to Toorop, dated April 27, 1892. On *The New Generation*, see Victorie Heffing, *Jan Toorop*, exh. cat. (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1985), p. 24. Where the painting's title is translated as *The New Generation*, and Gerard van Wierdt, *Jan Toorop: Zing der ogen*, exh. cat. (The Hague: Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, 2016), pp. 56–57.

3. "woek aan het opgroegen kind . . . in een tropisch wonderwoud. . . de rijke mysterie-pracht eener verbeeldde toekomst, ongeperst leiding geprepareerd" and "het moderne leven van actie: een spoorbaan met een telegraafpaal." Jan Veth, "Jan Toorop-de Keuzen-tenoonstelling te Amsterdam," *De Nieuwe Gids* 7, no. 2 (1892), quoted in Wierdt, *Jan Toorop*, p. 57.

4. "het uitgegroegen doork-leven." *Ibid.*

5. "als in een nood-paarsch-groene-zijde beveste Perzisch-bouduurrel uitsienend, schilderd, in de totaal-uitdrukking van scherpende jonge jeugd." *Ibid.*

6. "éléments impondérables, bizarres, tels que les . . . taches de Toorop." Joséphin Péladan, "L'Ordre de la Rose+Croix du Temple et du Graal et ses salons," *L'Artiste* 64 (April 1894), p. 246.



The New Generation (De nieuwe Generatie), 1892
Oil on canvas, 96.5 × 110 cm. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
First Salon de la Rose + Croix, 1892, cat. no. 176, p. 32
(title: *Une Génération nouvelle*)

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