

2007

Review of *Pierre-Victor Galland, 1822-1892: Un Tiepolo Français au XIXe Siècle*, edited by Jérémy Cerrano; *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, edited by Jean-Paul Bouillon; *Maurice Denis: Six Essais*, by Jean-Paul Bouillon; *Correspondance 1892-1945*, by André Gide and Maurice Denis, edited by Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer with Claire Denis; and *Maurice Denis: La Légende de Saint Hubert 1896-1897*, by Agnès Delannoy et. al.

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Froissart-Pezone, Rossella. Review of *Pierre-Victor Galland, 1822-1892: Un Tiepolo Français au XIXe Siècle*, edited by Jérémy Cerrano; *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, edited by Jean-Paul Bouillon; *Maurice Denis: Six Essais*, by Jean-Paul Bouillon; *Correspondance 1892-1945*, by André Gide and Maurice Denis, edited by Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer with Claire Denis; and *Maurice Denis: La Légende de Saint Hubert 1896-1897*, by Agnès Delannoy, et. al. Translated by Pamela J. Warner. *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15 (2007): 210-17. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/652854>.

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Jérémy Cerrano, ed., *Pierre-Victor Galland, 1822-1892: Un Tiepolo français au XIXe siècle*

Jean-Paul Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*

Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Six essais*

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Agnès Delannoy et al., *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert 1896-1897*

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Review by: Rossella Froissart-Pezone

Studies in the Decorative Arts, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall—Winter 2007—2008), pp. 210-217

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of the [Bard Graduate Center](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/652854>

Accessed: 21/11/2012 10:36

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would have been very desirable to show an enlarged section of it, since in the reproduction one can barely see any details even with the help of a magnifying glass.

These are all only small points, however, and they are of minor significance in comparison to the great achievement of this survey, which shows the remarkably rich holdings as well as the very high quality of Islamic art in public collections in Germany.

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Jérémy Cerrano, ed., *Pierre-Victor Galland, 1822-1892: Un Tiepolo français au XIXe siècle*. Paris: Somogy Editions d'Art, 2006. 232 pp., 266 color pls., 13 b/w ills., bibliog. Paper, EUR 35.

Jean-Paul Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, exh. cat. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2006. 304 pp., 242 color pls., 26 b/w ills., 1 map, 2 appendixes, bibliog., index. Paper, EUR 39.

Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Six essais*. Paris: Somogy Editions d'Art, 2006. 191 pp., 46 color pls., bibliog., index. Paper, EUR 23.

André Gide and Maurice Denis, *Correspondance 1892-1945*, ed. Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer with Claire Denis. Paris: Gallimard, 2006. 421 pp., 89 b/w ills., 4 appendixes, index. Paper, EUR 25.

Agnès Delannoy et al., *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert 1896-1897*. Paris: Somogy Editions d'Art, 1999. 132 pp., 123 color pls., 24 b/w ills., bibliog., 3 appendixes. EUR 15.

In the fall of 2006, two exhibitions and several books emphasized an important aspect of French painting from the last decades of the nineteenth century: the renewal in decorative art, understood in the limited sense of mural painting, but also in the larger sense of a “decorative” conception of painting. The first exhibition, which took place at the Piscine-Musée d'Art et d'Industrie André-Dilgent in Roubaix (July 1–September 17, 2006), then at the Galerie Nationale de Tapisserie in Beauvais (October 18, 2006–January 28, 2007), featured an artist, Pierre-Victor Galland, who should be a much better known figure in French art of the second half of the nineteenth century. Responsible for numerous decorative ensembles

in public buildings and private homes, representing an eclecticism perfectly in keeping with the tastes of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie of the Second Empire and Third Republic, Galland does not seem, at first glance, to have much in common with Maurice Denis, whose painted oeuvre was shown in a large exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay from October 31, 2006, to January 21, 2007.

Receiving much greater media attention, the Maurice Denis exhibition was the culmination of two parallel programs, all at the Musée d'Orsay: an exhibition of Denis's photography,¹ and another exhibition about his work as an illustrator,² the two acting like two wings of a triptych for which the large painting show was the central panel. Moreover, the Musée Départemental de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, “Le Prieuré,” cleared out its own collections to present the painter's drawings, thereby enlightening those wanting a better understanding of the genesis of several large decorative ensembles that could not be transported to the Orsay's galleries. A symposium,³ whose proceedings will be published, we hope, helped to clarify certain points concerning Denis's oeuvre and its influence across Europe.

The publications that accompanied the Denis events, here under review, are numerous: first of all, *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, the exhibition catalogue of the painting show at the Orsay, conceived and directed by Jean-Paul Bouillon; Bouillon's republication of his six earlier essays as a book (these had appeared at different dates but are now joined together and easily accessible);⁴ *Correspondance 1892-1945*, letters between Maurice Denis and André Gide assembled and presented by Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer with Claire Denis; and finally the reprinting of a book by Agnès Delannoy and others published for an exhibition on the mural decoration *La Légende de saint Hubert* in 1999.

Space precludes an exhaustive account of the richness of these recent events. I will nevertheless at least try to track how some of the principal elements relate to a more general investigation that interests me a great deal: the question of the “decorative” in painting as it appeared in French artistic debates beginning in the 1860s with Galland and then pursued next with Denis, a question that remained vital to the threshold of World War II and included consideration of modern religious decoration (painting, stained-glass windows, furniture).

From the outset, it must be stated that the light brought to bear on Galland by Jérémy Cerrano in *Un Tiepolo français au XIXe siècle* is not as instructive as that brought to bear on Denis by the books considered here. The seriousness, erudi-

tion, and rigor of the ensemble of books inspired by Denis's work offer a strong contrast to the superficial and often summary, even questionable analyses of Galland. Cerrano's short career as a historian may partly explain this disparity, in contrast to the long-affirmed status of Jean-Paul Bouillon, author of the most interesting contributions on Denis, but the offhanded nature of Cerrano's historical analyses does not incline one to be indulgent. I will not reiterate the judicious and timely criticisms that Didier Rykner published in the *Tribune de l'art*, to which I refer interested readers.⁵ I will only express my regret, with Rykner, that this overdue and justifiable exhibition of Galland's works was not the occasion for a wider and deeper study, all the more so because Cerrano recently defended his doctoral dissertation on the artist.⁶

Bruno Foucart, a noted specialist on painting formerly qualified as "academic," and whose book on religious art⁷ was instrumental in sparking the renewal of interest in nineteenth-century art, offers an introductory but too rapid overview of the talent and fortunes of Galland. The ensemble of his oeuvre and drawings seems to justify in my mind the reading that Foucart gives it: in place of the more familiar image of Galland as a fan of the Italian Renaissance, the historian substitutes a new image of an artist whose admiration for seventeenth-century Dutch painting supplemented the attention he brought to reality, thereby situating Galland closer to Thomas Couture and Édouard Manet than to the Italianizing take-offs of Paul Baudry.⁸ Foucart comments in passing that Galland's working method, founded on drawing from memory, recalls that put into place by Lecoq de Boisbaudran at the same time and adopted for a short period at the *École Royale Gratuite de Dessin* (Free Royal School of Drawing), but Foucart does not confirm whether the connection between Galland and Lecoq de Boisbaudran was real or if he is simply making a deduction based on comparison. I cannot follow Foucart, however, when he tries to turn the Nabis and Henri Matisse into Galland's hypothetical disciples, seeing "decoration" and the "decorative" extending from Galland's aesthetic of "abnegation and subordination" (p. 13). The laws that subordinated mural painting to architecture in regard to compositional structure were too commonly articulated at the time of Galland to allow us to attribute their paternity or specificity to him, and they were simply part of the discourse emanating from the rationalist architect and theorist Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc.⁹ Moreover, other important decorators posed the question of mural painting and

of its adaptation to the walls that were its support (Eugène Delacroix, Théodore Chassériau, and obviously Pierre Puvis de Chavannes), and their thinking from the 1870s to the 1890s was fully part of the critical discourse. Neither "realism," nor the Venetian sources of Galland's superb ceiling paintings—which Foucart sees as reconciling Gustave Courbet and Giovanni-Battista Tiepolo—really have anything in common with the religion of surface and flatness practiced beginning with Paul Gauguin and pursued by the Nabis and Matisse, among others.

This objection is not intended to diminish Galland's talent, which is astonishing in its ease and invention. There is no need, in order to appreciate him again, to turn him into the spiritual father of the supposed "avant-garde" (of the early twentieth century), a concept that lies behind the forced construction of a market in nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting. Beyond these historical approximations (and even errors), the main fault of Cerrano's *Pierre-Victor Galland* is that it wants to "rediscover" this artist at all costs by branding him with the label of an "opponent" of the "academicism" of the Salons, and worse, by turning him into a member of an avant-garde before its time. Adopting a historiographic reading of the very outdated hagiographic approach, Cerrano says that Galland was unjustly forgotten because of his atypical method: a student of the architect Henri Labrousse and the illustrator and decorator Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri, he courageously preferred to be a decorator rather than acquire the facile status of a "Salon painter," Cerrano writes, but just a few lines later (p. 26) affirms that he was rejected because he was considered to be an "academic" painter. Galland can thus, according to Cerrano, be "rediscovered" for two contradictory reasons: first as a representative of marginality, and second as a painter practicing the eclectic aesthetic perfectly in harmony with the aesthetic of his time. Cerrano could have very easily spared us the first solution. One can hardly affirm in effect that Galland was held off to the side when—and the author himself asserts this—he benefited from an impressive number of commissions and purchases by the state and private collectors (and this under the different regimes of the Second Empire and the Third Republic). The fact that Galland renounced showing at the Salon was not determined by the rejection of his painting, nor by some kind of failure to adapt to the imposed rules: the decorator was so busy executing his numerous projects that he simply did not have time to do anything else. If it is regrettable that his subjects, inspired

by a tenderly observed family life, appear only in his rapidly sketched canvases, it is no less true that today we must judge Galland above all by his large decorative ensembles.

Paradoxically, this part of Galland's oeuvre is not emphasized enough by Cerrano, who neglects to provide any precise locations for the decorative works and also omits even the most summary study of the essential components of Galland's decorative painting: their commissions and patrons, iconography, working method, composition and disposition, and reception. No precise entries on these decorations, no reconstitutions, even schematic and incomplete, come to shore up an essay that is only a collage of citations. Even these citations do not really help retrace Galland's critical fortunes, because they are only texts full of praise that leave unexplained the mystery of the rapid decline of the painter's reputation among his contemporaries.

Galland, however, was not only one of the favorite painters of the aristocracy and of the grand French bourgeoisie of the second half of the nineteenth century. His importance resides in equal (if not greater) measure in the role that he played as a professor. Teaching at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and at the Gobelins manufactory, he tried to transmit the rules that governed large decorative projects, preoccupying himself with the "unity of art" and inciting his students to take their inspiration from the most everyday flora, among other models. His attention to the real is manifested not only in his loving observation of his children (who were the models for the beautiful boys one finds everywhere in his painting), but also in the sense of wonder he felt before the most common plants that he chose as elements for his repertoire. (With Viollet-le-Duc and Victor-Marie-Charles Ruprich-Robert, he was among the first to discover them.) Galland's drawings for a project manual to be used by student decorators form a superb and abundant series of studies that anticipate the vitality of Art Nouveau flora.

This branch of Galland's production has already been studied by Marie-Noël de Gary in an article and in a small catalogue¹⁰ where, in taking up the important information given by Galland's two principal biographers, Henry Havard¹¹ and Victor Champier,¹² Gary placed the accent on the freshness of the decorator's inspiration, treatment, and intention. Cerrano adds nothing to de Gary's first study (sometimes even paraphrasing it) except a very general panorama of publications on ornament that flourished in Europe during the second half of the nine-

teenth century. Considering the French and European context, which witnessed a radical renewal in ornamental theories and practices, would have helped to situate Galland's aesthetic more precisely, but there is nothing of this. It is not enough to mention a broad range of publications: one must show what was known in France and by Galland in particular. The forced comparison of Galland with Viollet-le-Duc and Ruprich-Robert is hardly more pertinent: it is true that they shared inspiration by the simple plants of the fields, but the conception of nature and of ornament that underlies the works of the two architects is totally opposed to that of Galland. If Eugène Grasset can be considered a disciple of the first two, the capacity for observation and for rendering with organic flair that became Galland's strength can be more readily located in the drawings of the School of Nancy artists, some of whom were Galland's disciples, we are told, but without, yet again, any further evidence.

It is nonetheless absurd to see an Art Nouveau before its time in the garlands and luxuriant spills of flowers of most of Galland's decorations, because these decorative elements are part of a traditional Italianate repertoire or were drawn from the much-loved Dutch painting of the seventeenth century. In the same way, it is just as absurd to link Galland—because he was an adept of "decorating" and he renounced easel painting—to William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. This is to forget the political and social project of that movement, and it is to transfer Galland into a context completely foreign to him, very far from the ideals and practices that were his own. Galland did indeed cultivate a political ideal, but it was that of a (very relative) democratization of the arts through teaching. Galland also believed in the equal dignity of techniques, but he was not really motivated by the desire to improve the domestic environment of the middle or lower classes by making an "art for all." This socially concerned goal, with its limits, is identified with monumental painting during the 1880s and 1890s under the Third Republic by men such as Puvis de Chavannes, Roger Marx, and Léonce Bénédite. Nothing is said in the Galland catalogue, however, about the intellectual and artistic climate so specific to the republican France of Galland.

On Galland's functions as a pedagogue at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and for Gobelins, Jean Vittet tells us a little bit more in the essay that concludes the catalogue. Readers will nonetheless learn no more than what Pierre Vaisse already recounted about the famous "course in

decorative composition” that Galland taught beginning in 1873, which turned into a “course in the simultaneous teaching of the three arts” (architecture, painting, and sculpture) in 1879.¹³ The glimpse at the training of weavers in manufacture is more interesting, but the study of Galland’s commissions in this context is not very clear: his iconographic or stylistic choices remain unexplained, and diagrams that would have helped readers keep track of the placement of the various elements (the “elements” are the various painted panels that compose the decor, which were often lost or have undergone changes) are missing.

At least this book on Galland has the merit of showing us a corpus of well-reproduced works, giving us a measure of the extraordinary talent of a painter who, if he did not have the calm and deep melancholy of a Puvis de Chavannes, fully embodied the role of a decorator in the grand classical tradition as it was understood in the nineteenth century, before the major changes of the 1890s. Galland finally appears as occupying an indispensable step in the history of nineteenth-century decorative painting.

Important changes in the theory of the “decorative” in relation to this tradition are the appropriate focus of the abundant critical literature on Maurice Denis published on the occasion of the Musée d’Orsay exhibition. With their different approaches, all of these books help us to understand not only Denis’s art as a painter, but also the astonishing lucidity and critical depth of his work as a theoretician. Nevertheless, if one wants a complete understanding of the former, it is imperative to begin with Jean-Paul Bouillon’s monograph published in 1993 and with the catalogue of an important exhibition held in 1994 at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon.¹⁴ The theoretical aspect of Denis’s career can, on the other hand, be approached only after reading of at least some of the painter’s critical writings, brought together and republished by Bouillon in 1993.¹⁵ This volume of 1993 will have to suffice while we wait for a complete publication that would make the fascinating ensemble of Denis’s writing (over two hundred texts!) more accessible.

After the publications of 1993-1994, it can be asked whether or not the more recent studies bring anything new to these debates. I think that the best among them appear in Bouillon’s collection, *Six essais*, which deepen and enlarge the paths he opened in his earlier monograph with extreme finesse. The exploration of Denis’s philosophical sources (1999), his construction of a “Cézannian model” (1995), and the comparison of his concept of art

with those elaborated by Matisse and Wassily Kandinsky (1996) constitute a sinuous yet coherent journey that leads us from the knowing synthesis of Positivism and Spencerianism of his youth, to the years around 1910, when the painter confronted completely new aesthetic propositions. Bouillon lays out the directions of this path with an irreproachable historical acuity and intellectual rigor.

To the reader who began with these extraordinarily demanding essays, the texts by the various authors of the 2006 exhibition catalogue can appear as light and even sometimes complacent syntheses, as if there were nothing left to prove and as if Denis had been installed once and for all in the pantheon of twentieth-century art. This does not seem to me to be so straightforward, contrary to what Serge Lemoine asserts in his introduction to this catalogue, which has Denis sharing the same destiny as Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard, his first fellow travelers, men whose post-Nabi period no longer raises any questions, at least for Bonnard. Beyond some fifteen splendid years (mainly, with some remarkable exceptions, the decade 1888-1905), Denis’s painting is not always easy to swallow, especially if one separates it from the incredibly stratified terrain of his thinking, where his strong philosophical, ideological, religious, aesthetic, and emotional commitments come together. In spite of the personal and often intimate themes chosen by Denis—his wife, found everywhere, his children, his circle of friends—his painting gives a general impression of cerebral coldness, and intention seems to win out over emotion. I can only share Denis’s regret in February 1930 when he reflected on his differences from his friend Bonnard: “what I’m missing is that obedience to sensibility that Bonnard manages to give the upper hand to in so many aborted masterpieces.”¹⁶

In this rare moment of doubt, Denis ends up questioning not only his own painting but also the very notion of the “decorative” as he had explored it from the beginning of his artistic career: should one envision a “return to Impressionism,” he wondered—a tempered version of Impressionism, to be sure, which is not a total abandonment to “retinal” vision, but rather a means of “using nature without losing sight of the essential object of painting, which is expression, emotion, delight,” and which would be nonetheless “in conflict with the decorative imagination.”¹⁷ This definition of art emerged in Denis’s thinking beginning in 1890, in his famous formula that claims for painting the right to its own means of

expression, an expression to which the subject, theme, or motif must be subordinated: “Remember that a painting—before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some kind of anecdote—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.”¹⁸ It is therefore not a simple question of “ornamentation,” that is to say of something superfluous that would be added to the form, to an underlying structure, but rather of a painting that has no other goals but itself and its own internal order. The “decorative” supposes a “synthesis and economy of means” in order to achieve “style,” which is nothing other than a “system of subordination,” of “submission of the visible to the disorder of the sole sensations of nature and of emotions.”¹⁹

The difficulty resides in Denis’s relation to nature, that opposing yet always necessary pole that the painter must endlessly confront, the primary source of emotion. The complex equilibrium between “style” and “emotion” evolves, and its epicenter shifts, it seems to me, as the visitor progresses through the series of galleries in the Musée d’Orsay, toward always more “submission” and always more “polished, refined” style (to use Denis’s own terms).²⁰ We move along, then, from the sumptuous arrangements of the colored surfaces of the 1890s to the classically ordered compositions of the 1910s, passing through the important turning point of 1896–1898 and Denis’s famous encounter with André Gide in Rome in 1898. This was the turning toward classical art, Raphael for example, which was marked by the meeting of Denis and Gide during that 1898 trip. This meeting is celebrated because it is the culminating point of Denis’s evolution: he passed from the phase of the Nabis to the classical phase. This passage began in 1896, when Denis Cochin (discussed below) commissioned from him the mural of *La Légende de saint Hubert*, but the passage was completed after the meeting with Gide, after which Denis wrote the article “Les arts à Rome ou la méthode classique,”²¹ in which he elaborated the concept of the “style châtié” (polished, refined style). This meeting is important because of the related correspondence between Denis and Gide, which had already begun in 1893, on the occasion of their collaboration on illustrating Gide’s book *Voyage d’Urien* (1893). After 1898 their correspondence took a more theoretical tone.

For me, the most interesting part of the recent exhibition—and the value of the point of view chosen by its organizers, especially Bouillon—is the way it pushed the “decorative” back into the center of investigations into

Denis, and this, paradoxically, in spite of the absence of actual art objects, which had largely been presented in Lyon in 1994. The exhibition was punctuated by three fundamental moments presented by the important cycles of *L’Amour et la vie d’une femme* (1895), *La Légende de saint Hubert* (1896–1898), and the *Histoire de Psyché* (1908). The *Légende de saint Hubert*, a large decorative ensemble conceived for Denis Cochin, who was an eminent figure of the right-wing social Catholicism that Denis practiced and preached, constitutes a true aesthetic and spiritual turning point, and it was therefore logically placed at the heart of the exhibition. The complexity of this commission, its personal meanings and pictorial choices, justify the highly enriching essays by Bouillon, Agnès Delannoy, and Marianne Barbey for the book *Maurice Denis: La Légende de saint Hubert* published in 1999, on the occasion of an exhibition centered around the ensemble’s various elements and preparatory drawings.

Beyond this, the “decorative” and “decoration” reappear in almost all of the essays of the 2006 catalogue, *Maurice Denis (1870–1943)*: in the two opening syntheses established by Bouillon as well as in the briefer glance by the same Bouillon on Denis’s illustration, and by Sylvie Patry and Paul-Louis Rinuy on his religious painting. The 1994 catalogue, *Maurice Denis 1870–1943* (unfortunately out of print), remains, however, an excellent and indispensable complement to its homologue of 2006: the essays in the 1994 catalogue by Jane Lee, “Denis et l’école de Matisse,” and by Dario Gamboni, “Baptiser l’art moderne? Maurice Denis et l’art religieux,” are major contributions to any understanding of the aesthetic and ideological stakes of both Denis’s painting and his epoch.

I must give up trying to account fully for the richness of the multiple approaches in the publications mentioned above, which are impossible to summarize. Three points, in any event, in the profusion of perspectives that are opened for readers, gave me pause for reflection. First, the comparison between Denis and Matisse, and with what the former called his “school,” helps us to define the specifically decorative and the more general pictorial project of each of these artists. To make Denis the interlocutor of Matisse, the Fauves, and André Derain considerably modifies the historiographic perspective of the early twentieth century. The synthesis of this confrontation can be found in “Denis, Matisse, Kandinsky,” Bouillon’s final text in *Maurice Denis: Six essais*. Bouillon’s point of departure is Jane Lee’s reading of the relationship between Denis and Matisse: the “incomprehension” of the former toward the latter

that Lee supposes is nothing more than, following Bouillon, a radical conceptual difference that can be summed up in the opposition between the “religion” of one and the “sacred” of the other. This opposition, rather than throwing Denis back into the rear guard, would make of him the relay of an aesthetic that does not renounce “content” and that can be connected to the transcendental symbolic meaning given to painting by Kandinsky, thus guaranteeing Denis’s posterity in the heart of the twentieth century. By freely admitting with Bouillon the theoretical legitimacy and fecundity of the transcendent path taken by Denis in his painting, it strikes me as inevitable to wonder if Denis’s accusation of Matisse’s “excess of theory” does not pertain quite simply to an ideological conflict.

This reproach made by Denis of Matisse seems in effect paradoxical and incites us to come to a second point, which is the corollary of the analysis made by Lee and Bouillon of the relationship between the two artists. We know, from the notes and diverse accounts of Matisse himself, what an extraordinary “discipline of the real” the painter imposed on himself in his dialogue with the model, a discipline that was never evacuated into a “pure act of painting.”²² If in Denis, as in his adversary, the two poles of Nature and subjectivity are truly present, Matisse is missing, it is true, the third term—transcendence—an element to which he was quite indifferent (at least in its specifically Catholic sense). Isn’t it in the name of a narrow acceptance of the religious that Denis condemns his fellow painter? For Denis, Matisse’s “agnosticism,” a true “sin of pride,” is a sure sign of an “excess of theories” that play themselves out, paradoxically, in the “sensuality” of “individual emotion”—the exact opposite of a confident and naive abandon to the “light” emanating not from the Impressionists’ and Cézanne’s “sun,” but rather from the “kingdom of God.”²³ It is through following this rather tortuous logic that Denis ends up accusing Matisse of “abstraction” by an “excess of theory,” while he himself never ceased justifying his own “transcendental” vision of painting with carefully built-up constructions.²⁴ I wonder in effect if we shouldn’t see here quite simply the faults of the same religiosity that led Denis to assert highly conservative political convictions and to the elaboration of a glacial aesthetic in his numerous church decorations in the 1920s and 1930s. I do not see in these projects—full of good will and “craft”—anything that could authorize a linking of them with the freedom of invention and the luminous irradiant warmth seen, for example, in the chapel decorated by Matisse at Vence. I do not take many risks in sharing the opinion respectfully expressed by the Denis student who did the most for modern French religious art, Father Couturier. The priest ended up admitting his disap-

pointment in the creations of his master, that “man of the old régime.”²⁵ My admiration for Denis as a painter and theoretician does not extend to ignoring certain points of his oeuvre that I feel should rightly continue to raise questions for historians.

This then becomes a third moment for reflection. In his 1994 essay, Bouillon wanted to clarify “Denis’s situation”²⁶ once and for all. In their essays Gamboni and Rinuy explore the consequences of Denis’s religious feelings and the few successes (but also the more numerous failures) of his church decorations or his *Ateliers of Sacred Art* (1919-1947) without much indulgence.²⁷ Their analysis of Denis’s theological sources is most interesting, because it makes the artist’s position appear “modern” by placing it in the highly reactionary context of the Catholicism that was close to the extreme right in interwar France. It seems to me, however, that this critical distance from Denis’s religious feeling (feeling finally expressed in his increasingly rigid aesthetic and ideological posturing), diminishes in the more recent critical texts. Bouillon’s analysis of the 1905 painting *The Virgin at School*,²⁸ if compared to the more severe reading made by the same historian in his monograph of 1993, seems unfortunately representative of this slip-slide toward excessive indulgence.

In order to take a more exact measure of Denis’s personality—his ideas but also his feelings—his correspondence with André Gide makes for instructive reading. Extremely polite, and never going beyond the limits of a friendship that consisted of intellectual exchange and occasional moments of complicity, this relationship always kept within the well-established boundaries that seemed prudently fixed by the writer and by the painter. Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer’s excellent introduction to *Correspondance 1892-1945* reconstructs the conditions of this relationship and its rarefied and cerebral climate, explaining that the distance between Denis and Gide grew wider through the years as a result of personal choices, made without regret, moreover, by one and the other. The merits of this publication are of two kinds. First, the numerous letters exchanged—in a language that is always elegant, sometimes even precious—plunge us into a vividly alive relationship in enlightening us about the common milieu of the two artists. Above all, however, these letters are often the pretext for clarifying the theoretical stakes that Denis mainly took to heart. The painter’s intellectual lucidity and finesse of reflection are at times extraordinary, and complement the important articles he published in journals at that time. These letters thus perfectly clarify the elaboration of concepts that are then put

into a more finished form, but also expressed with more authority in the critical and theoretical texts.

I will leave the last word to Gide, who perhaps understood what, in spite of everything, always keeps us at bay in Denis: “I would have liked a less self-satisfied Denis. But a little bit of worry would have taken away a lot of his health.”²⁹ The critical publications of the last few years try to close this gap; they

almost succeed, without completely convincing us about the totality of Denis’s pictorial and theoretical work.

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NOTES

1. This exhibition was held from October 31, 2006, to January 21, 2007. It was the occasion for the publication of *Maurice Denis* by Françoise Heilbrun and Saski Ooms (Paris: Musée d’Orsay and Editions des 5 Continents).
2. This exhibition shared the same dates as the previous one: “Deux acquisitions récentes: Dessins de Maurice Denis pour ‘Sagesse’ et ‘Fiorretti.’”
3. “Maurice Denis, moderne et anti-moderne,” held on November 17-18, 2006, at the Musée d’Orsay.
4. The catalogue of drawings at the Prieuré by Agnès Delannoy (which sold out very quickly so that I cannot include it in this review) was *Maurice Denis dessinateur, l’oeuvre dévoilée*, exh. cat., Musée Départemental Maurice Denis Le Prieuré, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, October 28, 2006, to January 21, 2007 (Paris, 2006).
5. Cf. Didier Rykner, “Pierre-Victor Galland: Un Tiepolo français aux XIX^e siècle,” *Tribune de l’art* 149 (August 2006): <http://www.latribunedelart.com>, n.p.
6. Jérémy Cerrano, “Pierre-Victor Galland (1822-1892), peintre décorateur” (Ph.D. diss., Université de Lyon II, 2006).
7. Bruno Foucart, *Le renouveau de la peinture religieuse en France, 1800-1860* (Paris, 1987).
8. Paul-Jacques Baudry (1828-1886) was one of the most significant representatives of academic painting during the Second Empire. A graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts and winner of the Prix de Rome in 1850, he was mainly a mural painter. Napoleon III commissioned him to decorate the foyer of the Opéra Garnier, and he also did murals in the Hôtel Fould in 1854, the Hôtel Galliera in 1863, and the Hôtel de la Païva.
9. One cannot distinguish between mural painting and easel painting because the principles for what is “decorative” were the same for the Nabis and for Matisse: flatness, subordination of detail to the whole, etc. It was exactly the novelty sought by the Nabis and Matisse.
10. Marie Noël de Gary, “Botanique et ornement: Dessins de plantes de Pierre-Victor Galland 1822-1892,” in *Festschrift to (sic) Erik Fischer: European Drawings from Six Centuries* (Copenhagen: Royal Museum of Fine Arts, n.d. [c. 1980]), 45-60; reprinted in *Botanique et ornement, dessins de Pierre-Victor Galland* (Paris, 1992).
11. Henry Havard, *La Peinture décorative aux XIX^e siècle. L’oeuvre de P.-V. Galland* (Paris, 1895); *Exposition des oeuvres de P.-V. Galland: Peintures, compositions décoratives, études et dessins exposés au Musée des arts décoratifs du 26 mars au 15 avril 1894* (Paris: Palais de l’Industrie, 1894), viii.
12. Victor Champier, “Pierre-Victor Galland et l’enseignement de l’art décoratif,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 37, 2nd ser. (February 1888): 105-17; and (July 1888): 6-18.
13. Pierre Vaisse, “Architectes et peintres, ou la difficulté de vivre ensemble,” *Monuments historiques* 123 (October-November 1982): 62-71. Neither this article nor the essential book by the same author, *La Troisième République et les peintres* (Paris, 1995), is cited in Cerrano’s truly superficial bibliography.
14. Jean-Paul Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (Geneva, 1993), and *Maurice Denis 1870-1943*, exh. cat. (Lyon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, September 29–December 18, 1994; Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, January 22–April 2, 1995; Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, April 21–June 18, 1995; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, July 7–September 17, 1995 (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994).
15. Maurice Denis, *Le ciel et l’Arcadie*, ed. and annot. Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris, 1993). Denis published a first edition of his *Théories* in 1912, and a second augmented edition in 1922. His *Journal* (vol. 1, 1884-1904, vol. 2, 1905-1920) was first published in Paris in 1957.
16. “Ce qui me manque c’est cette obéissance à la sensibilité, dont Bonnard continue à tirer un parti supérieur à tant de chefs-d’oeuvre avortés.” Cited in Denis, *Le ciel en l’Arcadie*, ed. Bouillon, 185.
17. “Se servir de la nature sans perdre de vue l’objet essentiel de la peinture qui est l’expression, l’émotion, la délectation.” *Ibid.*
18. “Se rappeler qu’un tableau—avant d’être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote—est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées.” *Art et critique* 65 (August 23, 1890), repr. in Denis, *Le ciel et l’Arcadie*, ed. Bouillon, 5.
19. “Système de subordination,” “soumission du visible, contre le désordre des seules sensations de la nature et des émotions”; Bouillon, *Maurice Denis* (1870-1943), 35-36.
20. The term “style châtié” (polished or refined style) that Denis uses is a formula found in Maurice Denis, “Les arts à Rome ou la méthode classique,” published in 1898 or 1899 and reprinted in Denis, *Le ciel et l’Arcadie*, ed. Bouillon, 59.
21. *Ibid.*
22. This expression is found in Maurice Denis, “De Gauguin à Whistler et de l’excès des théories,” in Denis, *Le ciel et l’Arcadie*, ed. Bouillon, 96.
23. All of these citations are from Denis, “De Gauguin à Whistler,” 95-98.
24. *Ibid.*

25. Paul-Louis Rinuy, "Ambitions, doutes et paradoxes d'un peintre catholique à l'âge contemporain," cited in Bouillon, ed., *Maurice Denis (1870-1943)*, 63.
26. Cf. the essays in this catalogue: "Situation de Denis," and "Politique de Denis," in the exh. cat. from the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, cited here in n. 14.
27. The Ateliers d'Art Sacré was an association created by Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières in 1919 (dissolved in 1947) that included a school for students who wished to renew religious decoration and whose chief aim was to fulfill commissions for religious buildings. On the question of Denis's undertaking conservative pathways, and in particular his stance during the Dreyfus Affair, see Katherine Kuenzli, "Aesthetics and Cultural Politics in the Age of Dreyfus: Maurice Denis's *Homage to Cézanne*," *Art History* (September 2007).
28. Jean-Paul Bouillon, "Maurice Denis: La Vierge à l'école (1903), 'espoir de la France actuelle, promesse d'une France future,'" in Bouillon, *Maurice Denis: Six essais*, 143-62, fig. 22.
29. "Je souhaiterais Maurice Denis plus difficilement satisfait de lui-même. Mais un peu d'inquiétude lui enlèverait beaucoup de santé"; André Gide, *Journal*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1996), March 18, 1906, 512, quoted in Gide and Denis, *Correspondance 1892-1945*, ed. Pierre Masson and Carina Schäfer with Claire Denis, intro., 30.