

Press Contacts

Michelle Perlin
212.590.0311, mperlin@themorgan.org

Patrick Milliman
212.590.0310, pmilliman@themorgan.org

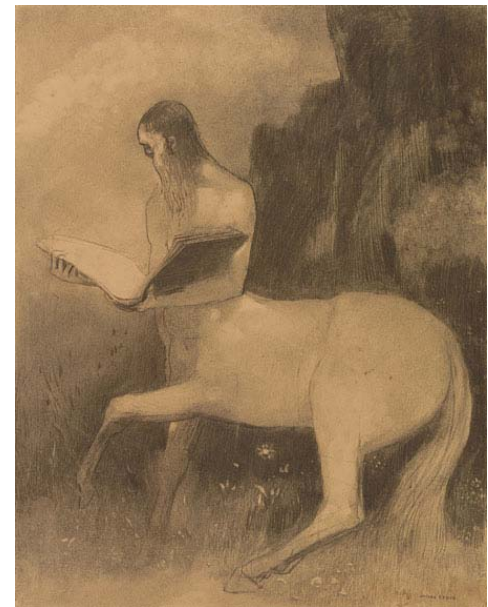
NEW MORGAN EXHIBITION EXPLORES THE CREATIVE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ARTISTS AND WRITERS OF THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book
January 20 through May 14, 2017

New York, NY, December 22, 2016 — *Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book*, opening January 20 at the Morgan Library & Museum, explores creative encounters between Symbolist authors and the artists in their circles. The movement coalesced during the second half of the nineteenth century as writers in France and Belgium sought a new form of art—one that referenced the visible world as symbols that correlate to ideas and states of mind. The Symbolists celebrated subjectivity, expressed through a nuanced language of reverie, delirium, mysticism, and ecstasy. For these writers, literature *suggests* meaning rather than defines it.

The Symbolist movement was a revolt against naturalism, with an emphasis on allusion and self-expression that resonated with contemporary painters, who were in turn inspired to translate these ideas to visual art. Collaborations in print with Symbolist writers presented artists with a paradox: to create illustrations for words deliberately detached from explicit meaning or concrete reality. Divergent attempts to meet this challenge helped to liberate illustration from its purely representational role, introducing an uncharted dialogue between text and image. These developments informed the emergence of the concept of the book-as-art, a tradition that continues today.

“With its renowned collections of printed books, manuscripts, and drawings, the Morgan Library & Museum is an ideal venue for this exhibition,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the museum. “The works in *Delirium*, which are drawn primarily from our own holdings, reveal the innovations and



Odilon Redon (1840-1916), *Centaure lisant*, 19th century, Charcoal on light brown paper. The Morgan Library & Museum, Thaw Collection.



Left: Charles Baudelaire (French, 1821–1867), Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883), *Les fleurs du mal*, Portrait, Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857. The Morgan Library & Museum. Right: Félicien Rops, artist (Belgian, 1833–1898), Charles Baudelaire (French, 1821–1867), *Les épaves*, Amsterdam [i.e., Brussels: Poulet-Malassis], 1866. The Morgan Library & Museum.

all-encompassing aspirations of the Symbolist aesthetic. The movement would have a profound effect on avant-garde literature, artists' books, and modern theories of art."

The exhibition, on through May 14, features works by more than thirty leading figures, including Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), Paul Verlaine (1844–1896), Alfred Jarry (1873–1907), Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), Odilon Redon (1840–1916), Maurice Denis (1870–1943), Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947), Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904), Henry van de Velde (1863–1957), and Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921).

THE EXHIBITION

Delirium opens with an introduction to some of the movement's literary and artistic precursors: works by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) and the painters Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) and Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898). Baudelaire's writings on Delacroix helped shape the foundation of Symbolist poetics. A manuscript of an early poem about Delacroix's *Tasso in the Madhouse* (1839) is juxtaposed with a study for one of the many works championed by the poet: *The Struggle of Jacob with the Angel* (1850). What moved Baudelaire was the painter's ability to convey his interior life through the suggestive use of color, contour, and movement. These effects provoked memories, involuntary associations, and reverie in each viewer. Baudelaire adapted these ideas to poetry in his ground-breaking works: *Fleurs du mal* (1857) and *Les épaves* (1866), illustrated by the Belgian artist Félicien Rops (1833–1898).

There is not a uniform or guiding artistic style connected with the Symbolist movement, which is immediately apparent among the illustrations in the books on view. The writers counted among their friends visual artists associated with many avant-garde groups: Impressionists (Manet), the Decadents (Rops), the Nabis (Vallotton, Rippl-Ronai), post-Impressionists (Denis, Bonnard), Les XX (Khnopff, Minne), and Art nouveau (van de Velde, Rysselberghe). Each artist brought their individual aesthetic styles to the challenge of illustrating Symbolism— a literary movement, which itself lacked coherence.

At the center of the gallery, the first and last artist's book associated with the movement are presented: Stéphane Mallarmé's *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1876), illustrated by Édouard Manet; and Paul Verlaine's *Parallèlement* (1900), illustrated by Pierre Bonnard. With its delicate imagery, oscillating typography, and Japanese-inspired book design, *L'après-midi d'un faune* beautifully conveys Mallarmé's alternating states of reality, dream, and memory. Like several poets and novelists in the exhibition, Mallarmé expressed ambivalence toward illustration, believing that poetry needed no elaboration. Nevertheless, Mallarmé solicited illustrations from his friends throughout his career.



The variations in Bonnard's intimate designs for the deluxe edition of Verlaine's *Parallèlement* present an entirely different aesthetic. This is the result of the artist's personal responses to each poem. His visual plays of association are depictions not necessarily of the subject matter but of whatever thoughts and visions emerged as he was reading. Bonnard's asymmetric and erotic imagery skirts the margins or transgresses the linear order of the book's classic typography. The artist kept pace with his spontaneous impressions of Verlaine's text by sketching some designs directly onto typeset pages.



The artwork within the Symbolist books may be understood as a single artist's interpretation of and reaction to the words on the page. Other artist collaborations on view that exemplify such individual responses to literature include George Minne's

Top: Édouard Manet, artist (French, 1832–1883), Stéphane Mallarmé (French, 1842–1898), *L'après-midi d'un faune*, Paris: A. Derenne, 1876. The Morgan Library & Museum. Bottom: Pierre Bonnard, artist (French, 1867–1947), Paul Verlaine (French, 1844–1896), *Parallèlement*, Paris: Ambroise Vollard, 1900. The Morgan Library & Museum.



Left: Félix Vallotton (Swiss, 1865–1925), Portrait of Paul Verlaine, 1891, In *L'Art et l'Idée* (Paris: Quantin, 1892). The Morgan Library & Museum. Right: Carlos Schwabe, artist (Swiss, 1866–1926), Olive Schreiner (South African, 1855–1920), *Rêves*, Paris: Flammarion, 1912. The Morgan Library & Museum.

melancholy imagery for Maurice Maeterlinck's *Serres chaudes*, Redon's haunting frontispieces for the poet Iwan Gilkin, and Maurice Denis's evocative designs for André Gide's *Le voyage d'Urien*.

While much of the artwork that corresponds with the Symbolist movement is anti-naturalistic, the legacies of some writers associated with the movement are tied to their public image and well-known portraits that were disseminated in print. Félix Vallotton (1865–1925), ubiquitous in periodicals of the 1890s, is known for his many thumbnail portraits of Symbolist writers. One of his first artistic woodcuts, a portrait of Paul Verlaine, is on view, along with images of Arthur Rimbaud by Fantin-Latour and Carjat, Manet's engraved portrait of Baudelaire, and Nadar's photograph of Mallarmé.

Delirium culminates with an examination of cover and title designs. Symbolist publishers, particularly in Belgium, were at the forefront of using cover designs as visual preludes to the literature within. The Pre-Raphaelite influence on Symbolist imagery is apparent in Carlos Schwabe's (1866–1926) aspirant figure on the cover of *Dreams* by Olive Schreiner—a rare example of a Symbolist artist illustrating work by a female author. Also represented are the Belgian artists Théo van Rysselberghe and Henry van de Velde, whose book decorations heralded a new form of non-representational ornament. Their works encompass the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, Seurat's ideas about the affective qualities of line, and the

emergent Art Nouveau. The experimental typography of author and artist Alfred Jarry, whose illegible title design is itself a Symbolist work of art, is also on view.

Translation Feature

Selected translations of poetry associated with objects on view will be made available on a hand-held card in the gallery. For this special feature, the Morgan collaborated with the contemporary poets Ariana Reines, Mark Polizzotti, Barry Schwabsky, Luc Sante, Marcella Durand, and John Godfrey to enrich the public's experience by providing works by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and others in English.

Public Programs

LECTURE **Paris and Other Worlds: Grandville, Daumier, Gavarni, Steinlen**
Luc Sante

Sante's *The Other Paris* (2015) was described by Hilton Als as "a heartbreaking spectacle, immense in intellectual and political scope and emotional reach." The acclaimed writer takes the stage at the Morgan to discuss the personalities and works of four 19th-century French illustrators who figure in his book—J. J. Grandville, Honoré Daumier, Paul Gavarni, and Théophile Steinlen—all of whom illuminated the city with particular genius and flair. Sante is the author of *Low Life* and *The Factory of Facts*, and writes on a range of subjects for *New York Review of Books*, *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *Bookforum*. He is a recipient of an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an American Scholar Award for Best Literary Criticism, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and Cullman Center. He teaches writing and the history of photography at Bard College.

Wednesday, February 15, 6:30 pm*
Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members; free for students with valid ID.

*The exhibition *Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book* will open at 5:30 pm for program attendees

GALLERY TALK ***Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book***
Sheelagh Bevan, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator, Printed Books & Bindings

Friday, February 17, 6 pm
Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

GALLERY TALK ***Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book***
Sheelagh Bevan, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator, Printed Books & Bindings

Friday, March 24, 1 pm
Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

Organization and Sponsorship

This exhibition is organized by Sheelagh Bevan, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator in the Morgan's Department of Printed Books & Bindings.

Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book is made possible by the Charles E. Pierce, Jr. Fund for Exhibitions.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
themorgan.org