

"...The same was true of his Rembrandts, which from time to time he would examine on the quiet; and, indeed, just as the most charming tune in the world becomes vulgar, intolerable, as soon as the general public is humming it, as soon as the street-organs have taken it up, the work to which charlatan art fanciers do not remain indifferent, the work which nitwits do not challenge, which is not satisfied with arousing the enthusiasm of the few, also becomes, by virtue of that very fact, corrupted, banal, almost repellent to the initiated...."



J.-K. HUYSMANS

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# A REBOURS

Il faut que je me réjouisse au dessus du temps....., quoique le monde ait horreur de ma joie, et que sa grossièreté ne sache pas ce que je veux dire.

RUSBROCK l'Admirable.

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PARIS

G. CHARPENTIER ET C<sup>o</sup>, ÉDITEURS

13, RUE DE GRENELLE, 13

1884





Francesca Woodman  
"Rome", 1977-1978



"Royal Hawaiian feather cloak", c. 1750

dupe, the mob, which it had previously unmuzzled and sent flying at the throats of the old castes.

Now it was all over. Once it had done its job, the plebs had been bled white in the interests of public hygiene, while the jovial bourgeois lorded it over the country, putting his trust in the power of his money and the contagiousness of his stupidity. The result of his rise to power had been the suppression of all intelligence, the negation of all honesty, the destruction of all art; in fact, artists and writers in their degradation had fallen on their knees and were covering with ardent kisses the stinking feet of the high-placed jobbers and low-bred satraps on whose charity they depended for a living.

In painting, the result was a deluge of lifeless inanities; in literature, a torrent of hackneyed phrases and conventional ideas – honesty to flatter the shady speculator, integrity to please the swindler who hunted for a dowry for his son while refusing to pay his daughter's, and chastity to satisfy the anti-clerical who accused the clergy of rape and lechery when he himself was forever haunting the local brothel, a stupid hypocrite without even the excuse of deliberate depravity, sniffing at the greasy water in the wash-basins and the hot, spicy smell of dirty petticoats.

This was the vast bagnio of America transported to the continent of Europe; this was the limitless, unfathomable, immeasurable scurviness of the financier and the self-made man, beaming down like a shameful sun on the idolatrous city, which grovelled on its belly, chanting vile songs of praise before the impious tabernacle of the Bank.

'Well, crumble then, society! perish, old world!' cried Des Esseintes, roused to indignation by the ignominious spectacle he had conjured up – and the sound of his voice broke the oppressive spell the nightmare had laid on him.

'Ah!' he groaned, 'To think that all this isn't just a bad dream! To think that I'm about to rejoin the base and servile riff-raff of the age!'

To soothe his wounded spirit he called upon the consoling maxims of Schopenhauer, and repeated to himself Pascal's sorrowful maxim: 'The soul sees nothing that does not distress it



Piotr Uklanski  
"Untitled (Shemale)", 2009

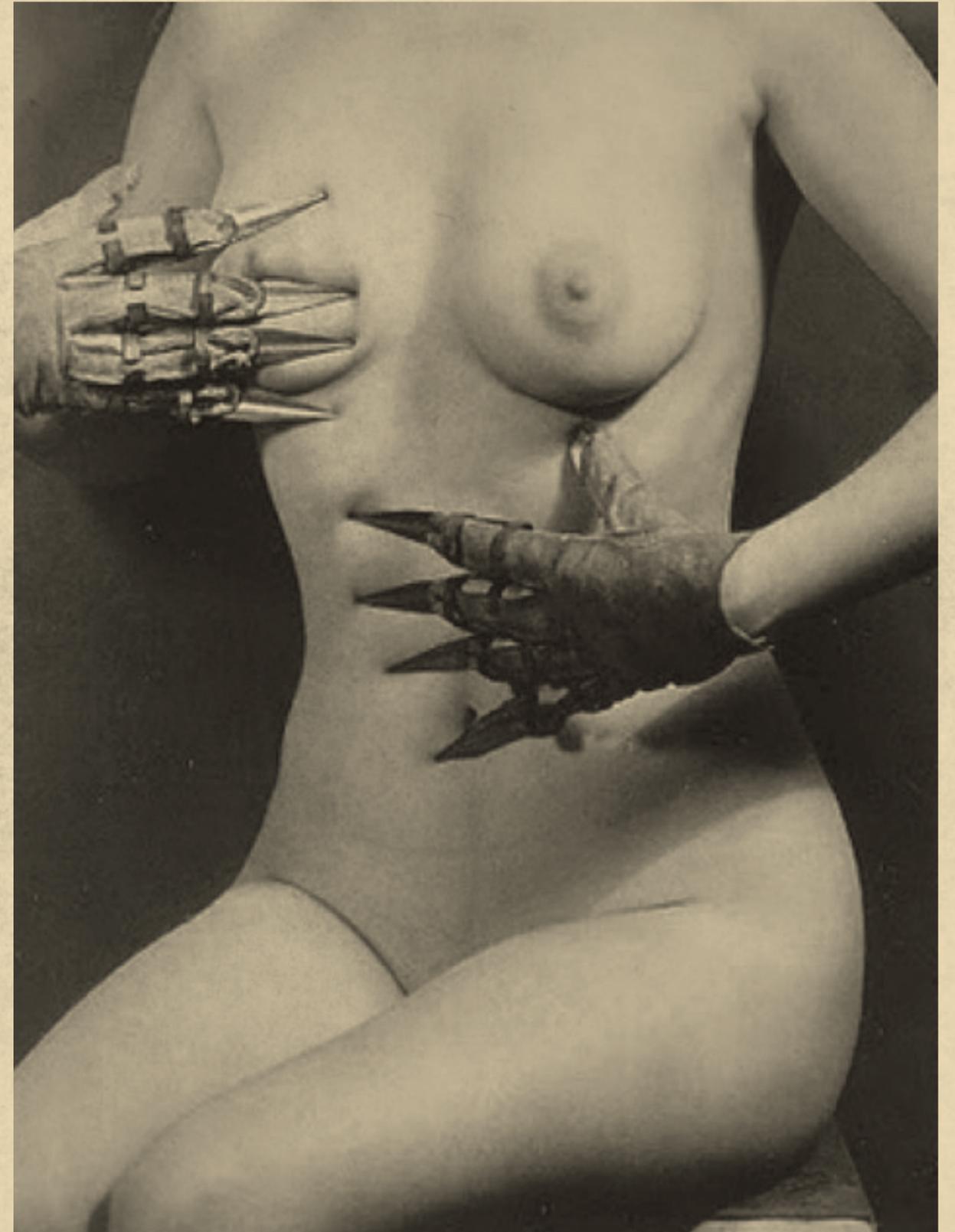


William Copley  
"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof",  
1972-1973

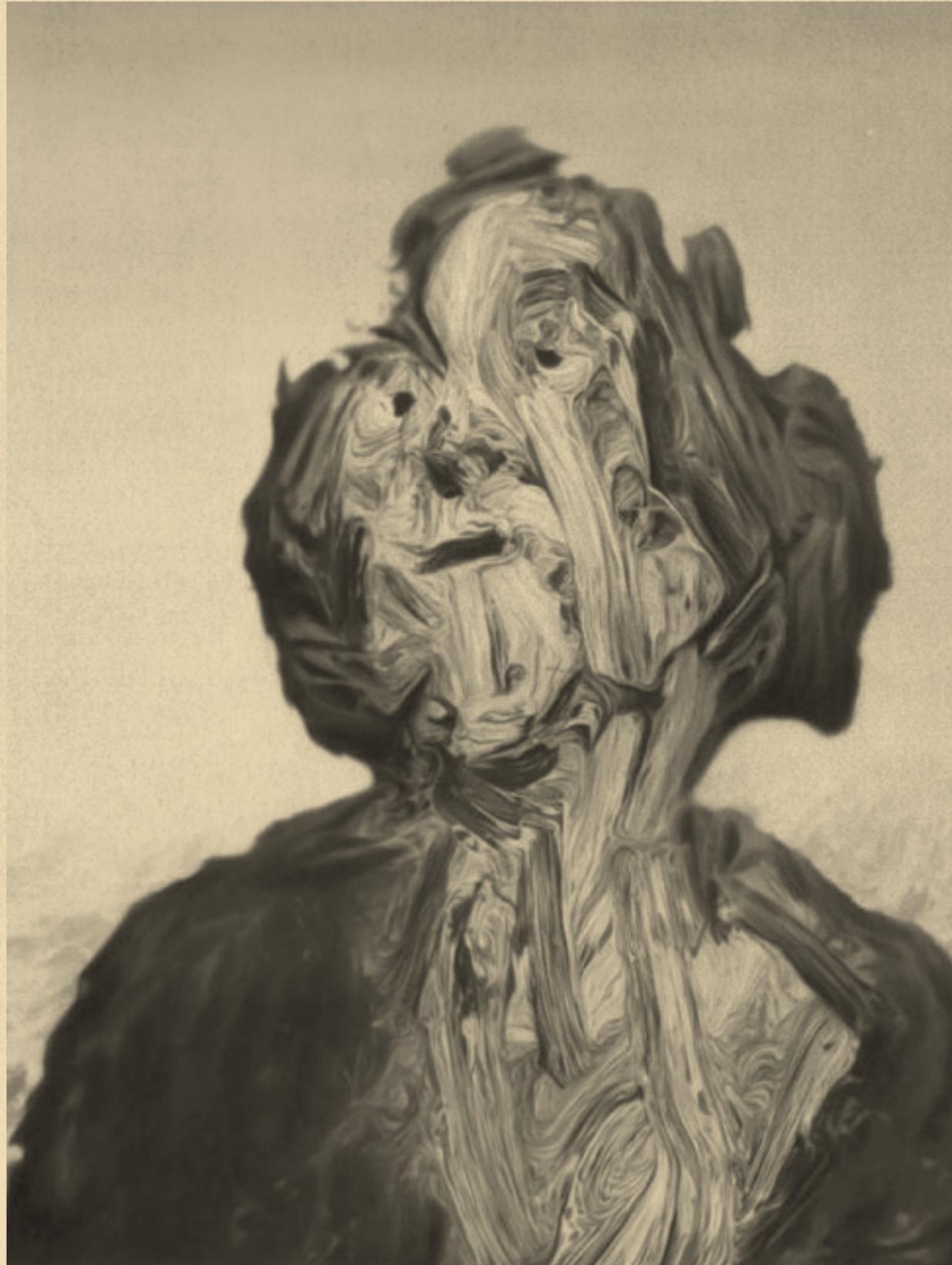


On reaching the library, he found that it was just after five o'clock and that the tea had been already brought up. On a little table of dark perfumed wood thickly incrustated with nacre, a present from Lady Radley, his guardian's wife, a pretty professional invalid who had spent the preceding winter in Cairo, was lying a note from Lord Henry, and beside it was a book bound in yellow paper, the cover slightly torn and the edges soiled.

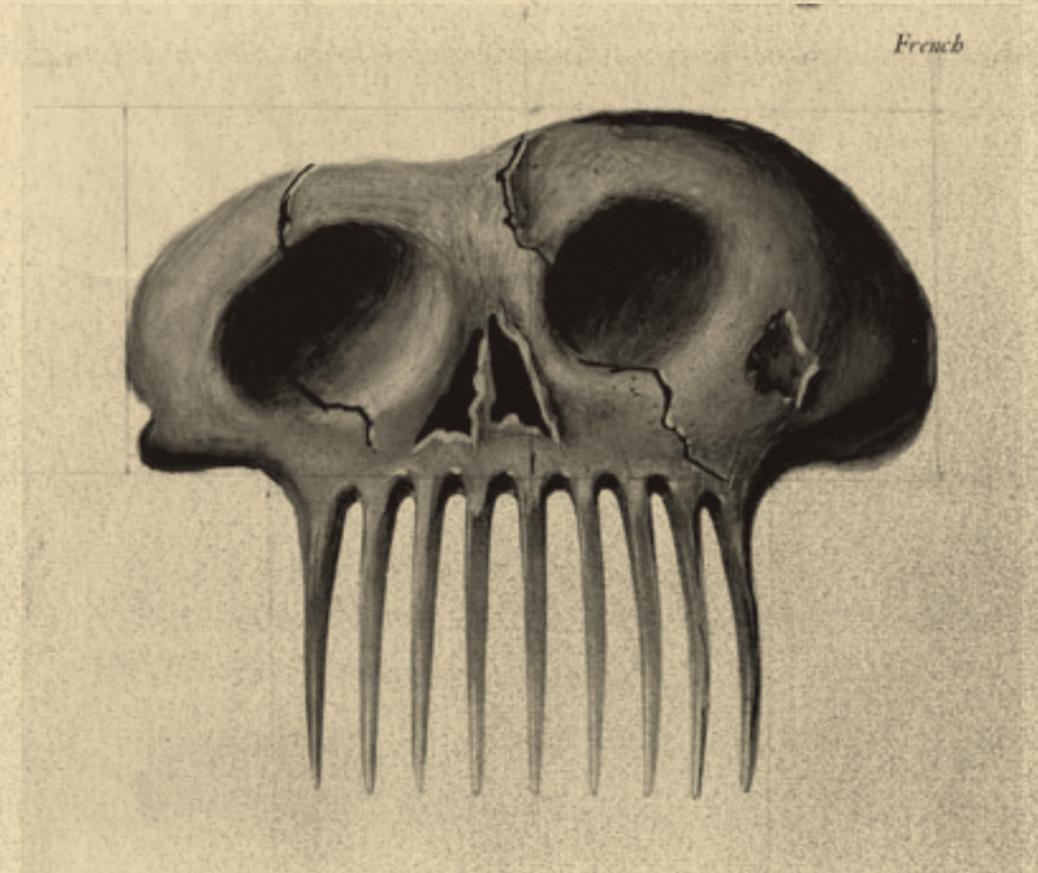
-The Picture of Dorian Gray



Paul Outerbridge  
"Woman with Claws", 1937



Glenn Brown  
"Little Death", 2000



Salvador Dalí  
"Peineta", c. 1949



Bernard Buffet  
"Les clowns musiciens, le tuba", 1991



Carlo Mollino  
"Untitled", early 1960's



Andy Warhol  
"Russell Means", 1976

Jeni Spota  
"Portrait of a Nineteenth Century Frenchman", 2012

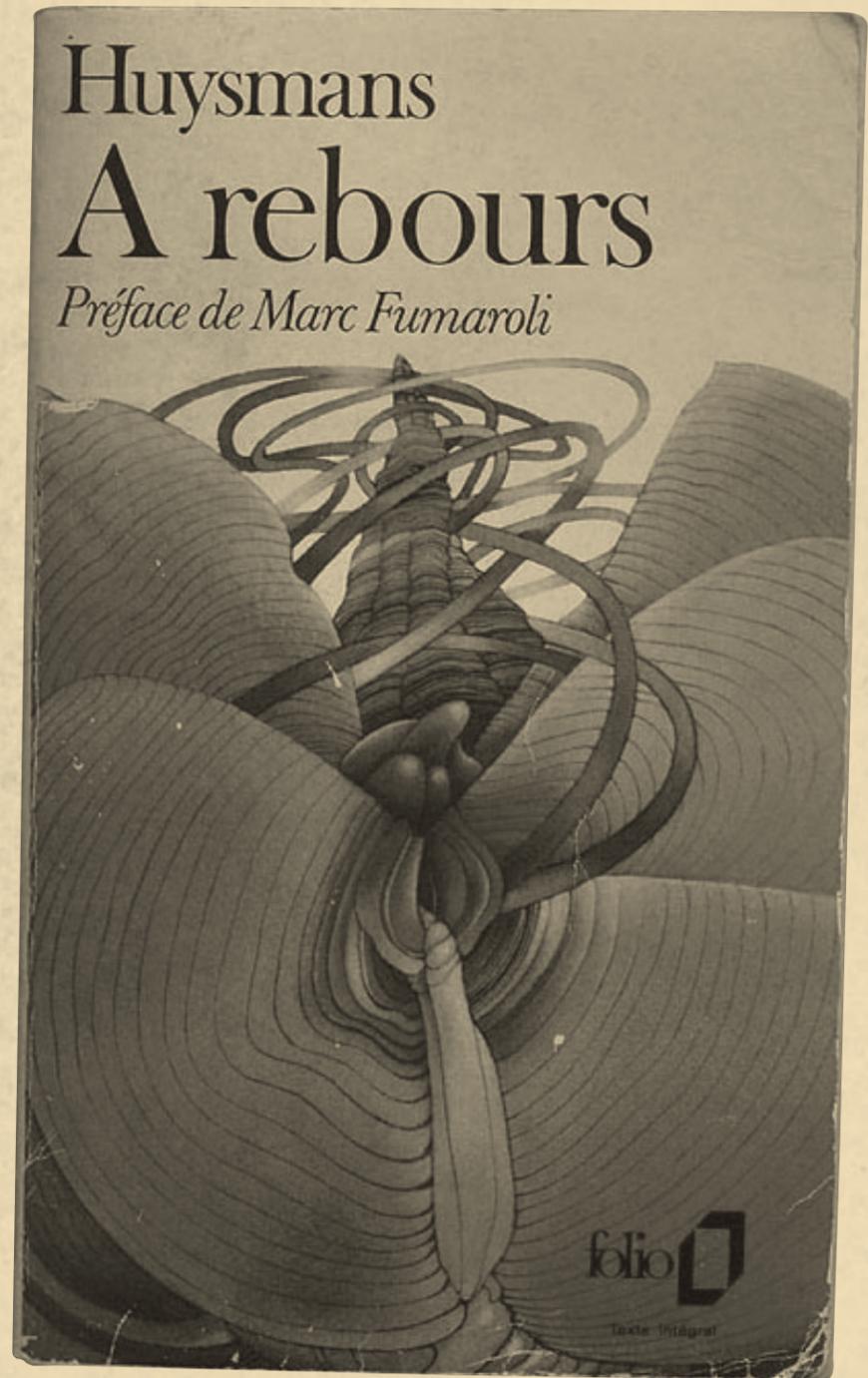




Jonathan Meese  
"Generalissimoz-Monte-Christo", 2007



Walter Dahn  
"Les premiers jours du Printemps", 1986



15.

SPLEEN

by Charles Baudelaire

Had I lived a thousand years I could not remember more.

An enormous chest of drawers could not hold in store,  
Despite that it be crammed with love-letters, verses,  
tales,

Hanks of hair and records of obsolete entails,  
More secrets than I harbour in my wretched mind.  
It is a pyramid, a space by stone confined,  
Where the bodies of the dead are vilely pressed.

- I am a cemetery by the moon unblessed  
Where graveworms carry the slime of dim remorse  
Relentlessly into the heart of cherished corpses.  
I am an ancient bedroom decked with faded blooms,  
Scattered with outdated gowns and tattered plumes,  
Where only faded prints and painted faces,  
Remain to breathe the perfumed airs and graces.

Nothing is as tedious as the limping days,  
When snowdrifts yearly cover all the ways,  
And ennui, sour fruit of incurious gloom,  
Assumes control of fate's immortal loom.

- Henceforth, my living flesh, thou art no more,  
Than a shroud of unease about a stony core,  
Listlessly sunk beneath the desert sand;  
A sphinx forgotten by the innocent and bland,  
Banished from the map that she might gaze  
Silently upon the setting sun's last rays.

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Richard Prince  
"It's All Over", 2008



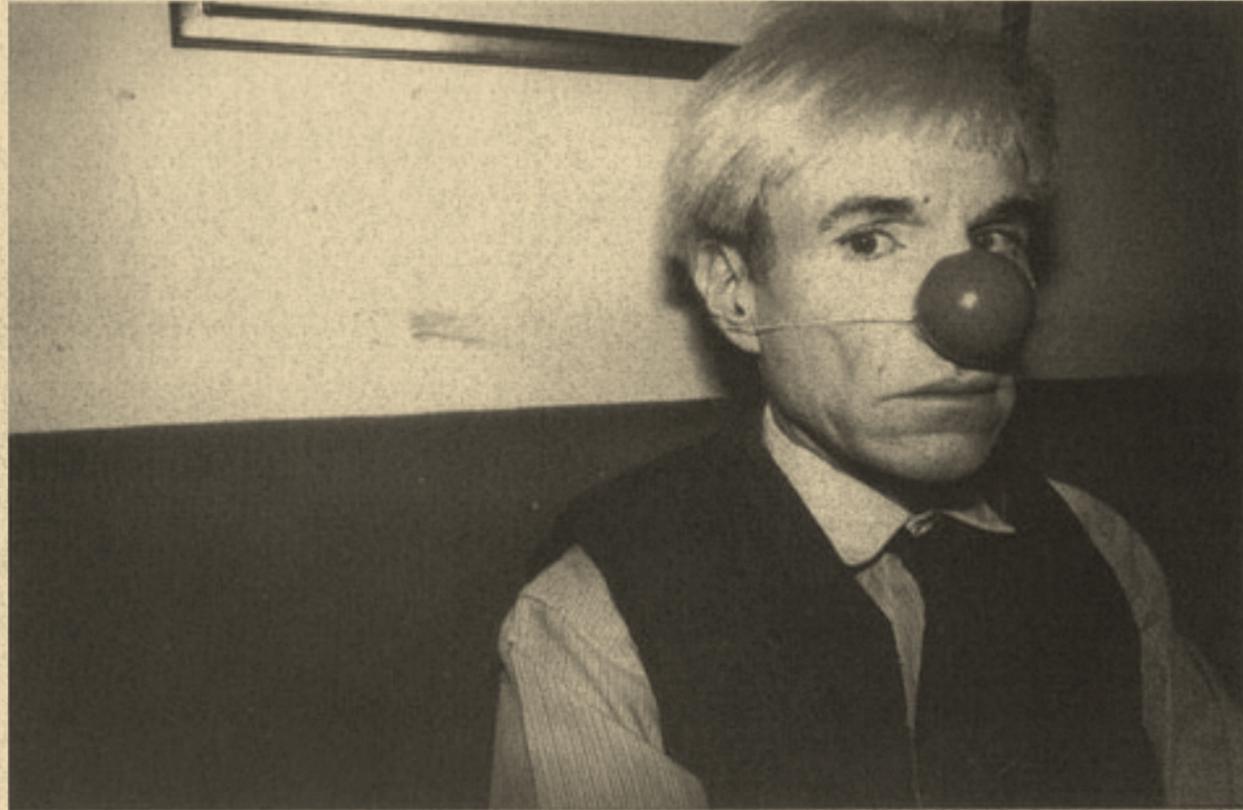
Damien Hirst  
"With Dead Head", 1981/1991



John Chamberlain  
"Murmurous Moto, Maestro", 1991



Odilon Redon  
"Des Esseintes", 1888



Bakongo Nail Fetish  
(Congo/Zaire), 18th Century

29. Une charogne

*Baudelaire*

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,  
Ce beau matin d'été si doux:  
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme  
Sur un lit semé de cailloux,

Les jambes en l'air, comme une femme lubrique,  
Brûlante et suant les poisons,  
Ouvrait d'une façon nonchalante et cynique  
Son ventre plein d'exhalaisons.

Le soleil rayonnait sur cette pourriture,  
Comme afin de la cuire à point,  
Et de rendre au centuple à la grande Nature  
Tout ce qu'ensemble elle avait joint;

Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe  
Comme une fleur s'épanouir.  
La puanteur était si forte, que sur l'herbe  
Vous crûtes vous évanouir.

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,  
D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons  
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide  
Le long de ces vivants haillons.

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague,  
Ou s'élançait en pétillant;  
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,  
Vivait en se multipliant.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,  
Comme l'eau courante et le vent,  
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rythmique  
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve,  
Une ébauche lente à venir,  
Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève  
Seulement par le souvenir.

Derrière les rochers une chienne inquiète  
Nous regardait d'un œil fâché,  
Épiant le moment de reprendre au squelette  
Le morceau qu'elle avait lâché.

— Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,  
A cette horrible infection,  
Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,  
Vous, mon ange et ma passion!

Oui! telle vous serez, ô la reine des grâces,  
Après les derniers sacrements,  
Quand vous irez, sous l'herbe et les floraisons grasses,  
Moisir parmi les ossements.

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine  
Qui vous mangera de baisers,  
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine  
De mes amours décomposés!

29. A Carcass

Remember, my love, the object we saw  
That beautiful morning in June:  
By a bend in the path a carcass reclined  
On a bed sown with pebbles and stones;

Her legs were spread out like a lecherous whore,  
Sweating out poisonous fumes,  
Who opened in slick invitational style  
Her stinking and festering womb.

The sun on this rottenness focused its rays  
To cook the cadaver till done,  
And render to Nature a hundredfold gift  
Of all she'd united in one.

And the sky cast an eye on this marvellous meat  
As over the flowers in bloom.  
The stench was so wretched that there on the grass  
You nearly collapsed in a swoon.

The flies buzzed and droned on these bowels of filth  
Where an army of maggots arose,  
Which flowed with a liquid and thickening stream  
On the animate rags of her clothes.

And it rose and it fell, and pulsed like a wave,  
Rushing and bubbling with health.  
One could say that this carcass, blown with vague breath,  
Lived in increasing itself.

And this whole teeming world made a musical sound  
Like babbling brooks and the breeze,  
Or the grain that a man with a winnowing-fan  
Turns with a rhythmical ease.

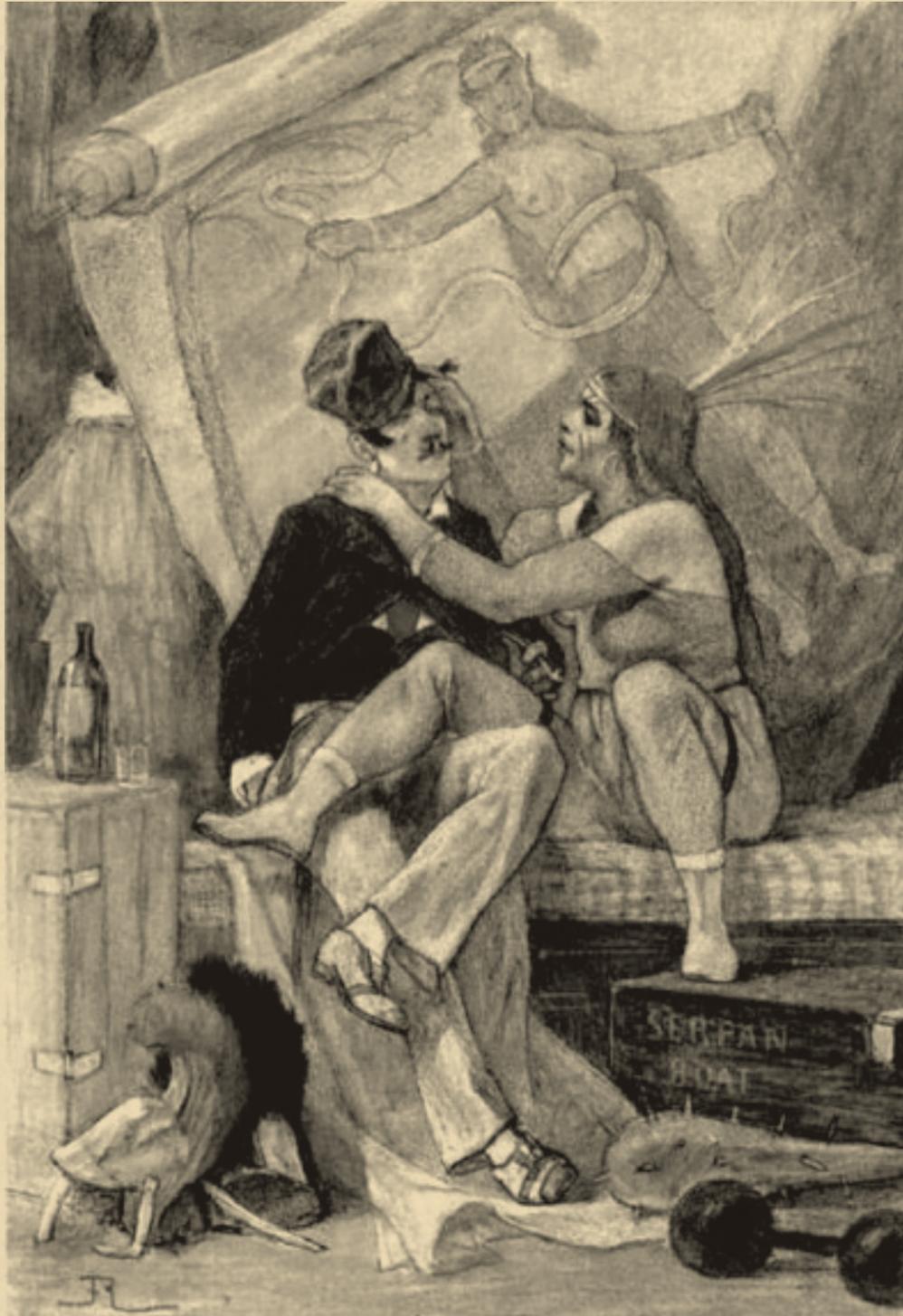
The shapes wore away as if only a dream  
Like a sketch that is left on the page  
Which the artist forgot and can only complete  
On the canvas, with memory's aid.

From back in the rocks, a pitiful bitch  
Eyed us with angry distaste,  
Awaiting the moment to snatch from the bones  
The morsel she'd dropped in her haste.

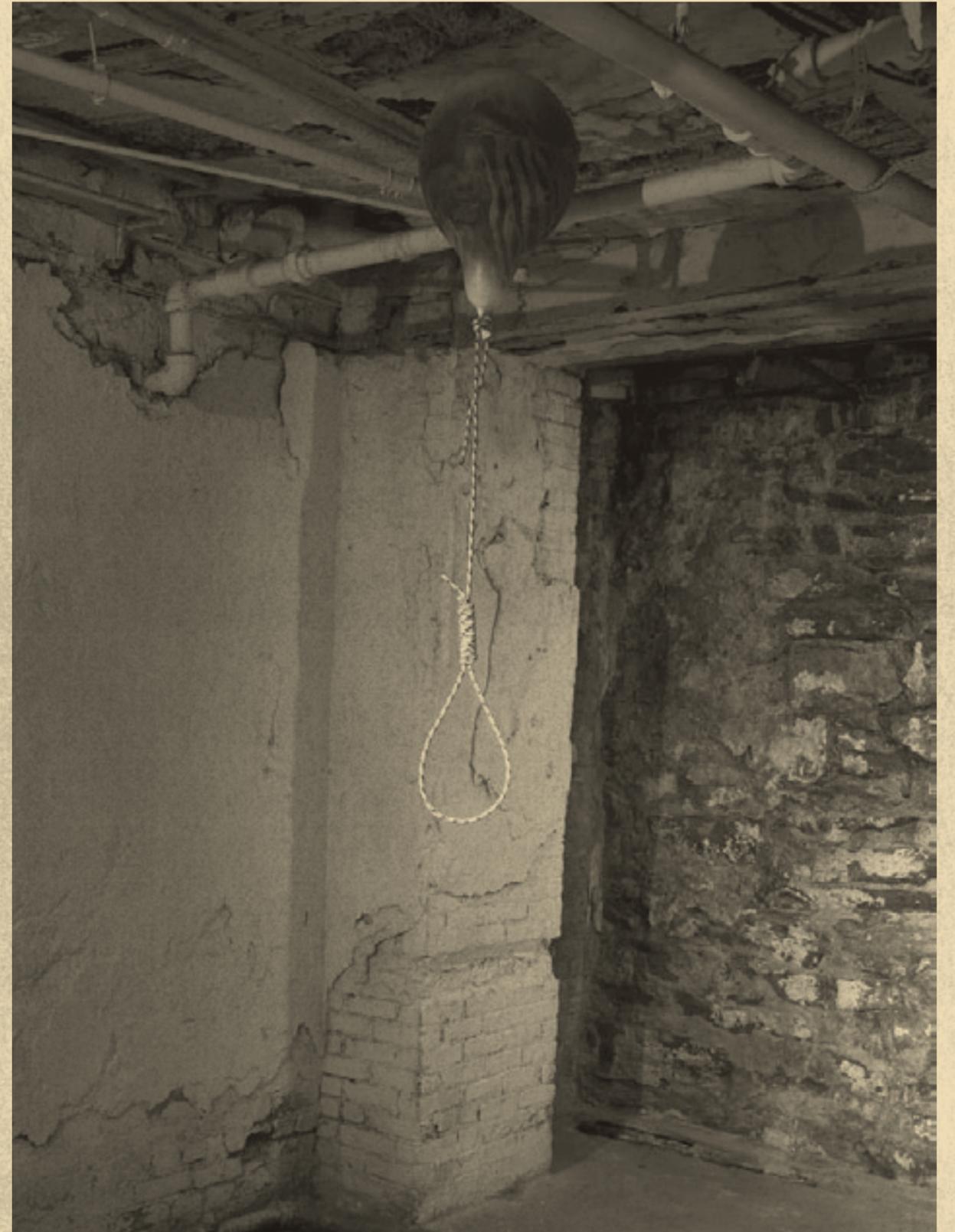
—And you, in your turn, will be rotten as this:  
Horrible, filthy, undone,  
O sun of my nature and star of my eyes,  
My passion, my angel in one!

Yes, such will you be, o regent of grace,  
After the rites have been read,  
Under the weeds, under blossoming grass  
As you moulder with bones of the dead.

Ah then, o my beauty, explain to the worms  
Who cherish your body so fine,  
That I am the keeper for corpses of love  
Of the form, and the essence divine!\*



Felicien Rops  
"L'homme à la femme sauvage", c. 1878-1881



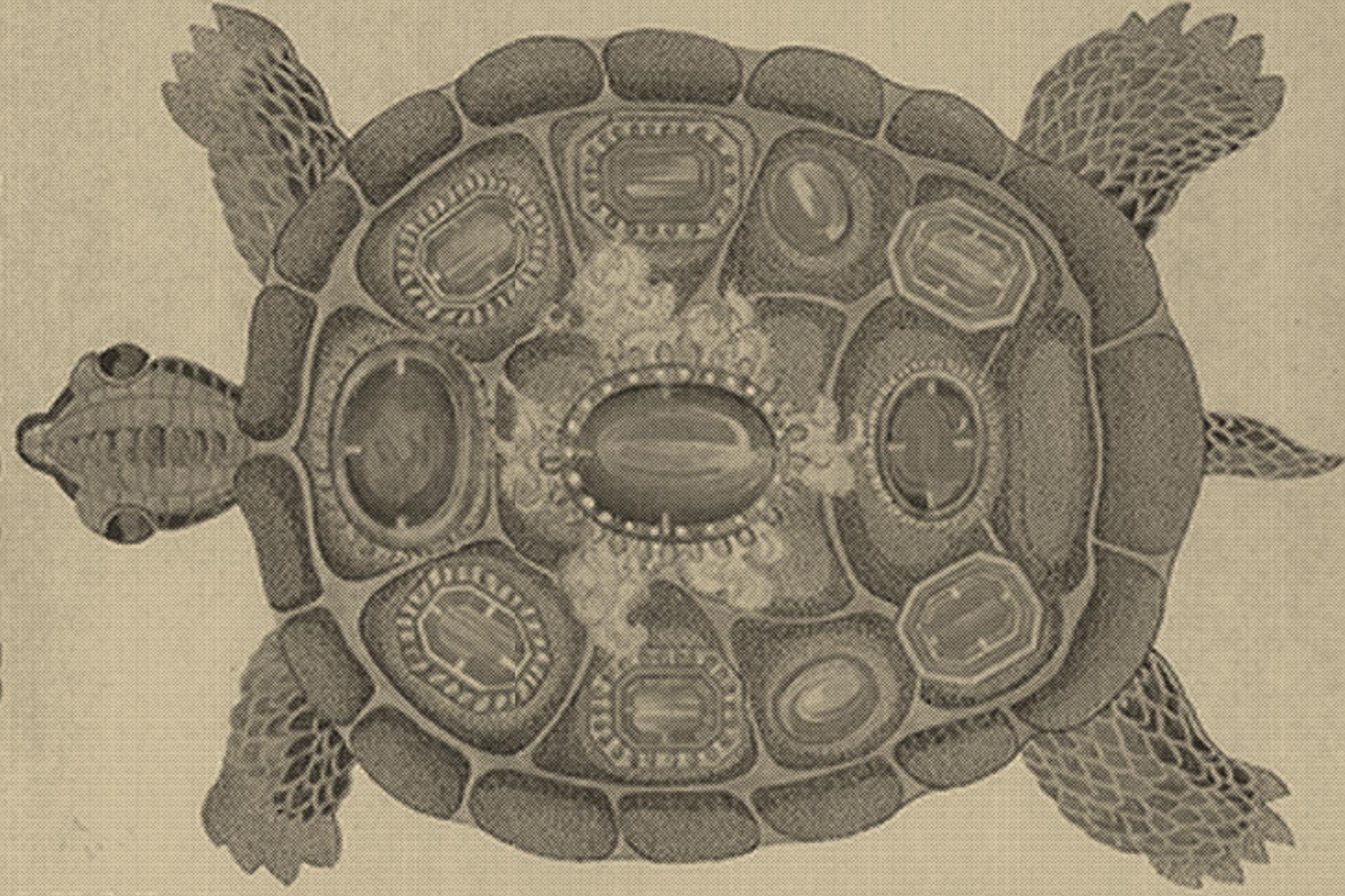
Andra Ursuta  
"Breath Hold (Discipline and Vanish)", 2010

TEXTE INTEGRAL GARNIER FLAMMARION

GARNIER FLAMMARION

# HUYSMANS

à rebours



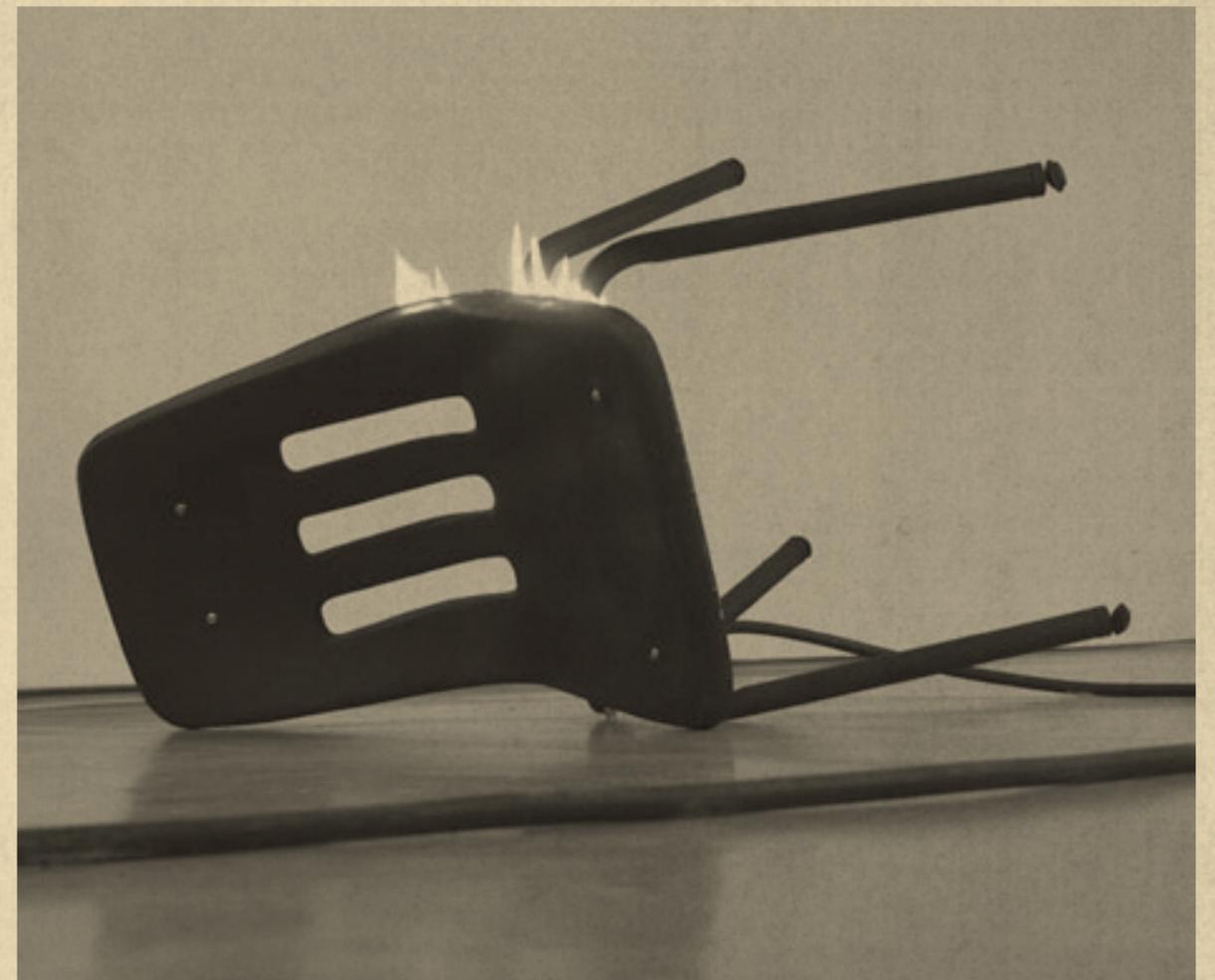
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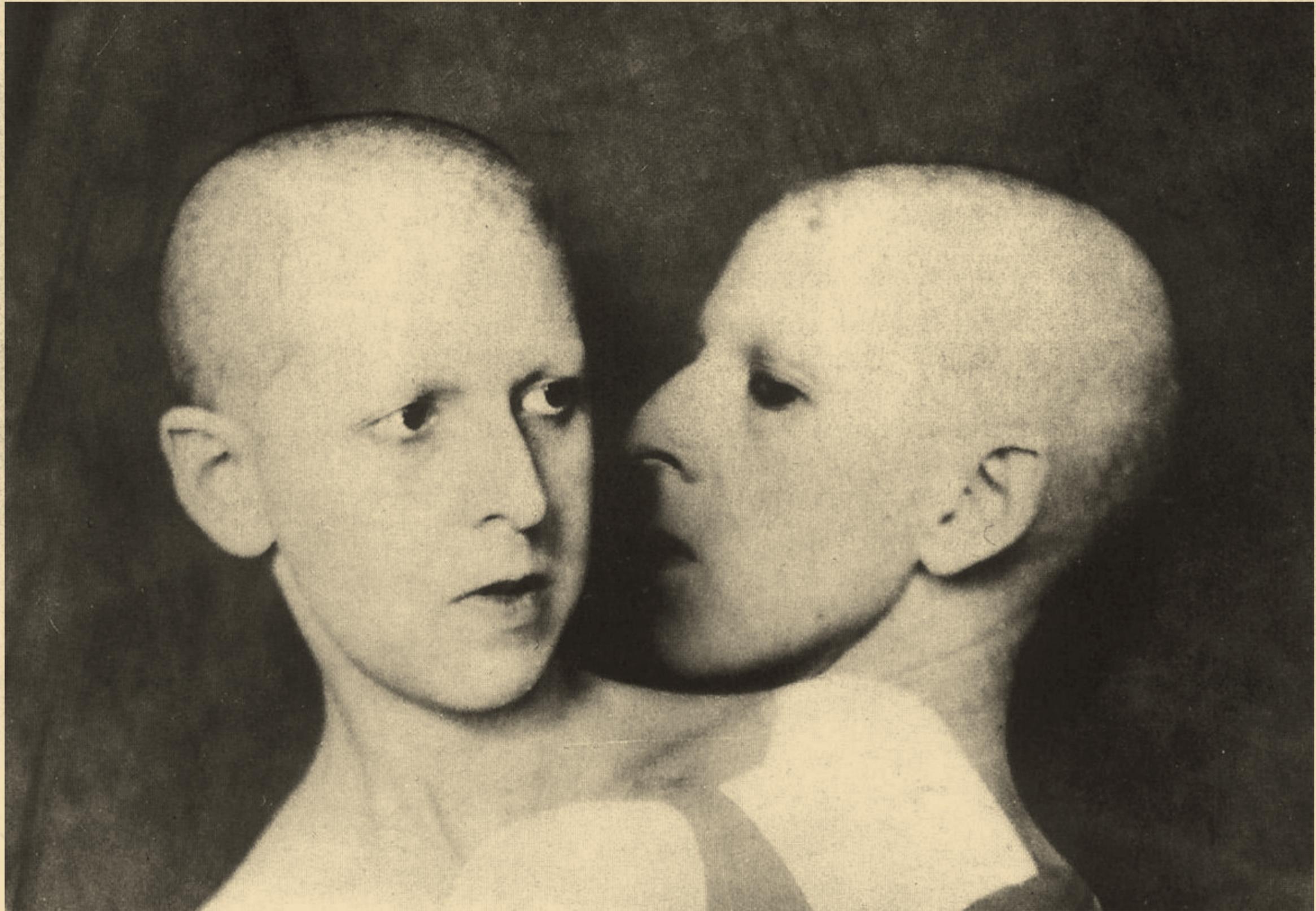
GARNIER FLAMMARION



Olivia Berckemeyer  
"Frozen Endurance", 2010

Banks Violette  
"Untitled (Bergen Chair)", 2006-2007





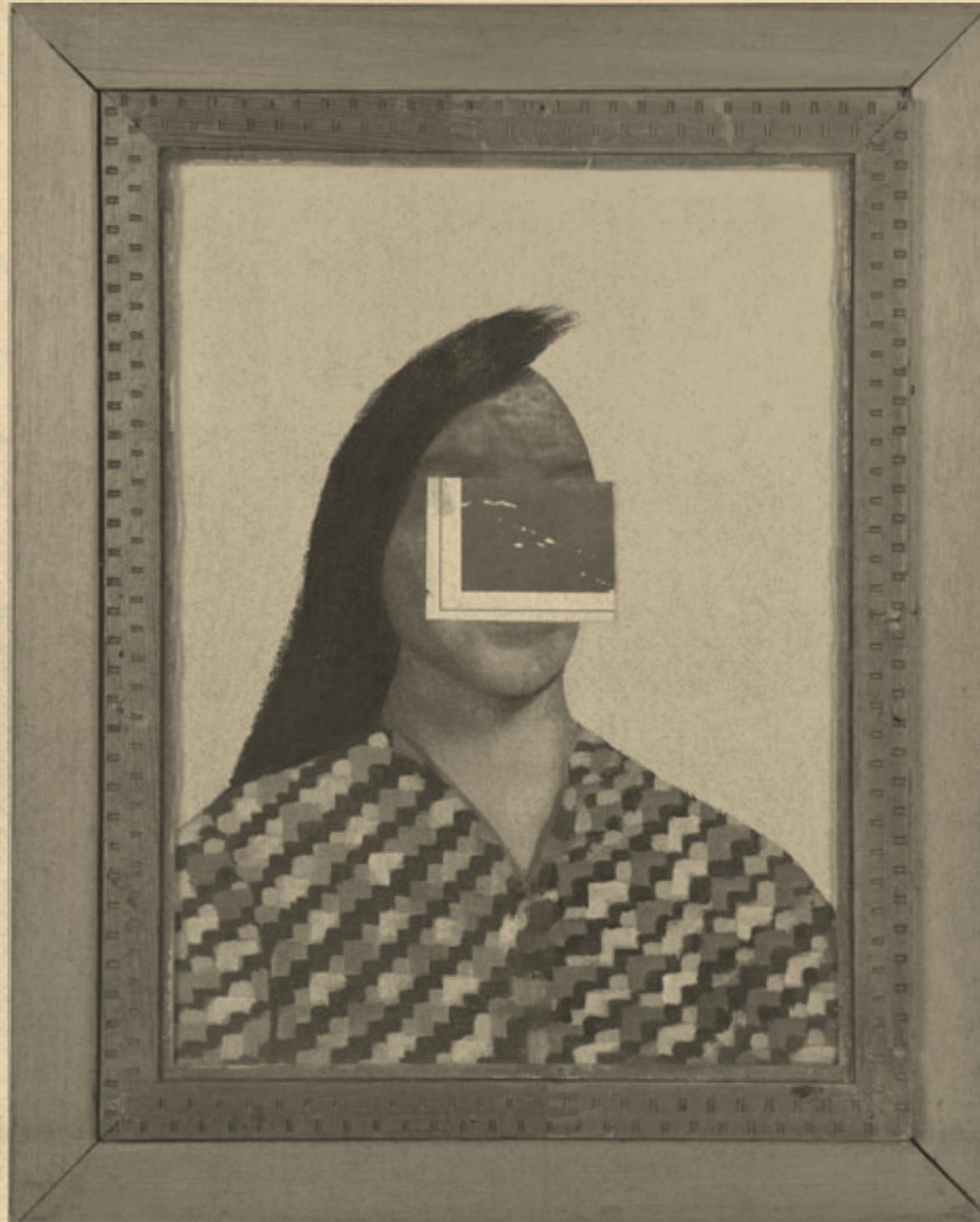
Claude Cahun  
"Que me veux-tu?", 1928

“Baudelaire had gone further; he had descended to the very bottom of the inexhaustible mine, had journeyed along abandoned or uncharted tunnels, eventually reaching those regions of the soul in which the nightmare growths of human thought flourish....”





Balthus  
"Nude with Basin", 1948



Llyn Foulkes  
"I Left My Heart at Wounded Knee", 1975



David Hammons  
"Untitled", 1996

# Introduction

Au lecteur

C. Sandelaine

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,  
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,  
Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,  
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

Nos péchés sont têtus, nos repentirs sont lâches;  
Nous nous faisons payer grassement nos aveux,  
Et nous rentrons gaiement dans le chemin bourbeux,  
Croyant par de vils pleurs laver toutes nos taches.

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste  
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté,  
Et le riche métal de notre volonté  
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

C'est le Diable qui tient les fils qui nous remuent!  
Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas;  
Chaque jour vers l'Enfer nous descendons d'un pas,  
Sans horreur, à travers des ténèbres qui puent.

Ainsi qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange  
Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,  
Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin  
Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes,  
Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons,  
Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons  
Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,  
N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins  
Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,  
C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.



Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn  
"The Abduction of Ganymede", 1635



Jeff Koons  
"Violet Ice (Kama Sutra)", 1991



Andy Hope 1930  
"Reich", 2006



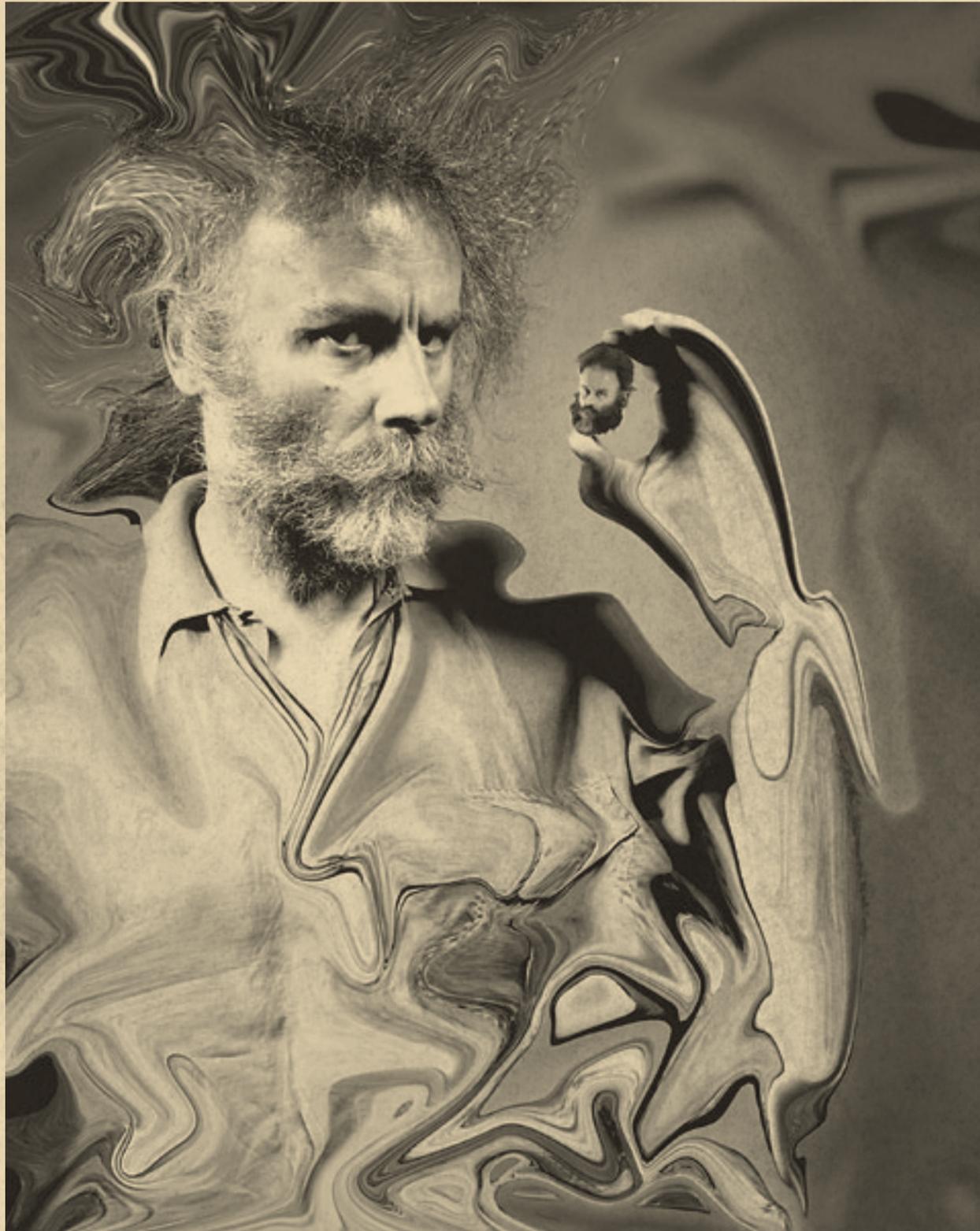
Franz von Stuck  
"Inferno", 1908



Mark Morrisroe  
"Untitled", c. 1979

Big Fat Black Cock Inc.  
"Untitled", 2011





Lucas Samaras  
"Head Chest Liquid", 2002

"... he went so far as to wonder whether he was committing a sacrilege by owning objects consecrated in earlier times: altar cards, chasubles, and custodials; and this thought, of being in a state of sin, filled him with a kind of pride and relief; in it he detected a sacrilegious pleasure, but these sacrileges were debatable, or at any rate not very grave, since in fact he loved those objects and did not debase their function..."



Gavin Kenyon  
"Crumpled", 2010



Odilon Redon  
"Head of Martyr", 1877

## “À rebours”

The exhibition takes its title from Joris-Karl Huysmans' 1884 anti-novel “À rebours” known in English either as “against the grain” or “against nature.” This tale of fin-de-siècle decadence tells the story of the Duc Jean des Esseintes, an eccentric aristocrat who recoils from the manners and values of conservative Parisian society and flees to the countryside to immerse himself in art collecting and exotic fetishism.

“À rebours” at Venus over Manhattan explores the notion of “against the grain” through a selection of more than 50 works including African fetishes and an 18th century royal Hawaiian feather cloak. The artists represented range from Odilon Redon - the favorite of the book's protagonist - to Henri Fuseli, Felicien Rops, Franz von Stuck, Lucas Samaras, William Copley, Jeff Koons, Glenn Brown, Salvador Dali, Walter Dahn, David Hammons, Bernard Buffet as well as Jeni Spota, Andra Ursuta and Gavin Kenyon.

Venus over Manhattan presents exhibitions and projects that expand upon the conventional gallery format through collaborations with artists, dealers, collectors, curators and institutions. The gallery is located at 980 Madison Avenue, between East 76th and 77th Streets, on the third floor. Venus over Manhattan is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10AM to 6PM. For more information, visit [www.venusovermanhattan.com](http://www.venusovermanhattan.com).

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