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The Stylistic Development of Jean Despujols (1886-1965)

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THE STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF JEAN DESPUJOLS (1886-1965)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Art History

in

The School of Art

by
Kelly Marli Ward
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Abstract

This thesis is the first comprehensive scholarly analysis of the life and most extant works by Jean Despujols. The French and later naturalized American painter, writer, poet, philosopher, deep-thinker, and mystic was best known for his Neoclassical and academic style. This thesis briefly discusses the artist’s beginnings as a young painter at the School of Fine Arts in Bordeaux and in Paris, his sketches in the trenches of the First World War, his time at the Villa Medici after winning the distinguished Rome Prize, and his paintings and thoughts as a philosopher and political writer throughout his life. An outstanding aspect of this thesis emphasizes Despujols’s time with his fellow Bordeaux School artists during the interwar years which included Jean Dupas, Raphaël Delorme, and Robert Pougheon; his nearly two-year journey through French Indochina; and also the later years of his life when he worked as a well-known portrait painter for affluent families in Shreveport, Louisiana. Periods and subjects of art history embraced in this thesis are French Academic painting, Neo-Mannerism, the Art Deco style, impressions of Chinese landscape painting and Asian art, as well as the Neo-Rococo style.
Chapter 1. A Biographical Sketch of Jean Despujols

Jean Despujols was a prolific twentieth-century French painter, draughtsman, writer, designer, composer, philosopher, and adventurer. He was born on March 19, 1886, son of Bernard Pierre Despujols and Jeanne Lintilhac, in the town of Salles, in the Gironde region of France, which is located southwest of Bordeaux. The artist had no middle name and was the oldest of three; he had a brother, Pierre, and a sister, Lucienne. Despujols was born into a family of teachers, and his first artistic learning experience was with a local lithographer. Soon thereafter, the artist studied under the direction of Paul Quinsac at the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux. In 1910, he received his first award of his lifetime, the Prix de la Ville [of Bordeaux]. Quinsac, a Bordelais painter who studied under the direction of the well-known academic artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, encouraged young Despujols to enroll at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. While at the School of Fine Arts at the capital, Despujols studied painting with Gabriel Ferrier, a French portrait painter and orientalist. The register of the École (Figure 1) shows that dozens of other aspiring artists entered the École des Beaux-Arts together with

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4 Ibid.

5 Kress, “Jean Despujols,” 64 Parishes.


Despujols whose full name is shown on the seventh line from the top, along with the artist’s hometown. This thesis is the story of how Despujols distinguished himself from his peers and forged a career based on a style as eccentric as it was uniquely his own. By another unusual twist of fate, Despujols would eventually settle in Shreveport, Louisiana, where he would die, widely forgotten, in 1965. The anachronistic nature of his style and his geographical remoteness from America’s large metropolitan (art) centers made him an outsider on more than one account in the post-World War II art scene defined by Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

Just four years after Despujols’s winning of the Prix de la Ville, the artist won the Prix de Rome award for painting on July 18, 1914, the highest distinction the French Academy offered for art students. The prize this year was tied with two other painters, Jean-Blaise Giraud and Robert Eugène Pougheon. The theme for the Prix de Rome in 1914 was La Passion de la Vierge, so all three artists entered canvases of the well-known Pietà iconography for the prize. Pougheon’s version (Figure 2) is distinctively different than that of Despujols and Giraud. The most notable difference is that Pougheon rendered the typical Justinian gold halo surrounding the heads of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, while Despujols and Giraud did not. Also, Pougheon’s version has fewer figures portrayed around the central figures of Mary and Jesus. Giraud’s version (Figure 3) has the most figures in the foreground and added plush beige clouds in the background. The rendering by Despujols (Figure 4) features a well-known pyramidal composition seen in many Renaissance paintings. Also, the tonalities of the painting are much more vivid than those of Pougheon or Giraud. More importantly still, Despujols deliberately

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9 Ibid.
painted the face of the fallen Jesus as a portrait of himself, foreshadowing some of his later narcissistic preoccupations.

The outbreak of World War I closed the Villa Medicis, which prevented all three Prix de Rome prizewinners from spending time in Italy until after the war was over. In early August 1914, just a month after Despujols was awarded the Prix de Rome, he was deployed by the French government to serve in la Grande Guerre. Despujols became a machine gunner for the next four years, surviving deadly battles like the one at Verdun. He spent time with fellow French army men in the trenches, where he handled both weapons of war as well as his beloved sketches (Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9). Due to the horrible conditions at the front and a serious shortage of paper, Despujols wrote and drew on whatever he could get his hands on—whether that be on the backs of letters or other random scraps of paper. The artist documented some of the most horrific battles like Verdun, the Chemin des Dames, the Belgian campaign, and the battle of the Marne—sketching the carnage around him and registering daily life and death in the trenches.

After the war, the Villa Medicis reopened, and Jean Despujols was finally able to spend time in Rome for his study-residency from 1919 to 1923. While in Rome, Despujols married a young Italian woman named Caterina Donata Vanutelli-Despujols who was a writer, painter, actress, and even a motorcyclist. Together they had one daughter named Marcella who is still

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10 Kress, “Jean Despujols,” 64 Parishes.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Kress, “Jean Despujols,” 64 Parishes.
alive today. At this time, he also became close with painters Jean Dupas and Robert Pougheon, both of whom could also finally enjoy the benefits of their Rome prizes.\(^\text{16}\) Together with them he founded the French Neoclassical interwar style.\(^\text{17}\) As a student in Rome, Despujols was required to paint a self-portrait (Figure 10).\(^\text{18}\) This painting depicts the bust of the artist in a white-collared shirt. His expression is serious and focused, and he has painted himself with his notable dark mustache. He also seems tired and worn for only being 28 here, likely a consequence of war. The background is simple: a dark navy sky and also the multi-story Roman building of the Villa Medici is depicted to his right, rendered in shades of light orange or terracotta.

In 1924, Despujols returned to France after he was hired by Jacques Carlu as a professor of painting at the School of Fine Arts in Fontainebleau.\(^\text{19}\) This art school was intended for Americans and WWI veteran artists in France, conceived as thanks for help in war. As a professor, Despujols focused on portraiture as well as mural painting.\(^\text{20}\) It was during his time as a professor at Fontainebleau when Despujols painted most of his compositions in the Art Deco/neo-mannerist style, along with his fellow Bordeaux painters whom he had met in Rome. The School of Bordeaux and neo-mannerist artworks will be discussed in a following chapter. It is also important to note that from 1924 to 1936, Despujols exhibited artworks at various Salons, including the Salon des Tuileries and the Salon des Artistes Indépendants.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{19}\) Arwas, *Art Deco*, 296.
\(^\text{20}\) Dana Kress, *French Colonial Realism: Indochina in the Camera’s Eye* Exhibition Brochure (Shreveport, Louisiana: Centenary College of Louisiana at the Meadows Museum of Art, 1997).
While at Fontainebleau and after going through a divorce, Jean Despujols met and soon married Millicent Katherine Louise Jordan, an American concert pianist originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Millicent was born in 1907 and grew up in a very religious Episcopal family. Her grandson, Trey, recalls her having played on the church basketball team to be able to meet boys. He also stated that she was “very petite, feisty, and loved wine and socializing.” Despujols loved to hear Millicent play the piano and was “very proud of her technical skill at the keyboard.” The couple had four children together. Jeanne Melisande, named after each of her parents, was the oldest daughter and was born in Paris in 1933. Jack Bruno Despujols was the second oldest, the only son, and was born in Fontainebleau, France, in 1936. The third born child was Paulette Eugenie. The youngest is Anne Lenore Despujols Gibson, who is the only surviving child of Jean and Millicent.

In the spring of 1936, Jean Despujols won the Prix de l’Indochine for his painting titled *Maternité Bleue*, or *Blue Maternity* (Figure 11). The Prix de l’Indochine (Indochina Prize) was a French colonial art prize awarded in 1914 and 1920 through 1938. The woman depicted in Despujols’ award-winning composition is actually the painter’s second wife (his permanent long-term partner) Millicent. The child in the foreground was their oldest daughter as an infant, Jeanne. This composition is different from many others of Despujols’s—the background is filled with mountains, a river, small houses to the left, and a train to the right. The train is

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23 Ibid.
likely an homage to Millicent’s family who was in the train business. Millicent is wearing a
distinct silver and blue ring on her left ring finger, defining her role as a wife. This painting also
documentds Despujols’ classical training, evidenced by the folds of the drapery seen on
Millicent’s dress and also on the folds of the infant’s blanket seen at the lowest register of the
composition. The bizarre features such as the strangely short fingers for a long hand and fleshy
putti-like infant are all Mannerist characteristics. The blue satin dress and satin border on the
baby’s blanket are both Art Deco inspired with the emphasis of white brushstrokes which reflect
a silvery light. *Blue Maternity* also has a matching red portrait with the exact same sitters
completed just two years before called *Maternité Rouge, or Red Maternity* (Figure 12).

Despujols departed from the port of Marseilles in late November 1936 and arrived in
Indochina a month later.28 The artist is best known in the United States for his oil paintings,
watercolors, drawings, and photographs from this two-year adventure in southeast Asia. The
French government asked Despujols to travel around Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam until August
1938 to depict the native peoples of these colonies’ villages.29 “At the end of the mission, in
accordance with the terms of the prize, Despujols was obligated to exhibit the fruits of his
endeavors in Hanoi, Saigon, and Paris; and also was required to submit a written account of his
travels to the Société des Artistes Coloniaux.”30 The exhibitions in Hanoi and Saigon were not
taken seriously by Europeans, but to Indochinese artists, they were considered successful.31

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28 Christie’s *Un Autre XXe siècle*..., 112.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
before meeting Millicent back in her hometown of Minneapolis. Artworks from the prolific Indochina Collection will be discussed and analyzed in a following chapter.

In July 1939, Despujols returned to France to finish what was left of his Indochina mission. The Minister of Colonies at the time, Georges Mandel, scheduled an exhibition of his Indochina artworks at the famous Pavillon de l’Orangerie of the Tuileries Gardens in Paris, but unfortunately the show was never seen by the public due to its cancellation occasioned by the invasion of the Nazis. Shortly after the second World War began, Despujols moved to the United States, never to return to his home country. He joined Millicent and family in Shreveport, Louisiana, at the invitation of one of his former students, Theo Rendell. In 1945, Jean Despujols became a naturalized American citizen, but he was still able to keep his French citizenship.

Three years after he became American, the artist paid to have his entire Indochina Collection shipped from his family residence in the Bordeaux countryside to his new home in Shreveport. The only reason that all of the artworks survived the second World War is because Despujols hid them all in a chimney. The teakwood crate which held his entire collection mysteriously disappeared during the shipping process, and his cherished collection was apparently lost forever. Despujols sued the shipping company and surprisingly the crate was

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32 Kress, *French Colonial Realism: Indochina in the Camera’s Eye*.
33 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
38 Dana Kress, Interview by Kelly M. Ward, April 1, 2021.
found seven months later although several paintings were stolen.\textsuperscript{40} A Shreveport Times photographer went to the Despujols home located on 503 Broadmoor (Figure 13) and took photos of the artist seeing his precious artworks from Indochina for the first time in nearly a decade (Figure 14). In February 1951, artworks from the Indochina Collection went on exhibit at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{41} The future King of Laos actually visited Despujols while the artist was living in Shreveport (Figure 15).

During the remainder of Despujols’s life spent in Louisiana, he made a living as a portrait painter, mainly producing portraits of wealthy northwestern Louisiana families, who had old family money or newer profits from the rise of the oil and gas industry.\textsuperscript{42} These portraits will be analyzed in the final chapter of this thesis. Jean Despujols also painted a satirical collection on Americans at this time (mainly those in the South who he was surrounded by) called the “Taboo Collection.” Canvases such as Figure 16 were only seen by Despujols himself before his death, as the artist “hid them underneath his bed” knowing that it would have offended anyone who saw the artworks, especially his posh clients from whom he received portrait commissions.\textsuperscript{43}

Jean Despujols died on January 26, 1965 in Shreveport after suffering from a second heart attack at the age of 78.\textsuperscript{44} Other than having been famous for his paintings and drawings during his lifetime, Despujols also composed music and wrote poetry and essays on philosophy and metaphysics.\textsuperscript{45} On the year of his death, a millionaire in the Texas oil industry named Algur Hurtle Meadows purchased the entire Indochina Collection for $200,000 and gifted it to

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Kress, \textit{French Colonial Realism: Indochina in the Camera’s Eye}.
\textsuperscript{42} Kress, “Discovering Despujols,” 19.
\textsuperscript{43} Dana Kress, Interview by Kelly M. Ward, July 22, 2019.
\textsuperscript{44} Kress, “Jean Despujols,” \textit{Curator}, 17.
\textsuperscript{45} Arwas, \textit{Art Deco}, 296.
Centenary College of Louisiana—a small liberal arts college in Shreveport where Meadows received his law degree.\textsuperscript{46} “The Meadows Museum of Art at Centenary College opened its doors in 1975, originally to house [over] 350 paintings, watercolors, and drawings of Indochina by the French Academic artist Jean Despujols.”\textsuperscript{47} Many of Despujols’s greatest life’s accomplishments are written on his tombstone in Shreveport’s Greenwood Cemetery (Figure 17) on Stoner Avenue. Awards listed appear in this order: “Prix de la Ville [of Bordeaux]; Medaille d’Or de Paris; Premier Grand Prix de Rome de Peinture; Prix de l’Indochine; Croix de Guerre, avec six citations; Medaille Militaire, Legion d’Honneur.” These awards emphasize how Despujols was not only a profound artist and intellectual, but also a brave and honorable soldier during the first World War.

Jean Despujols was known for the variety of artistic styles that he utilized over his lifetime. He is most famous for his depiction of figures and nudes in the Neoclassical style, in which he was originally trained at the École des Beaux-Arts. This thesis will discuss the various styles he embraced, including, but not limited to, the interwar Neoclassical style, Far Eastern subjects, and perhaps most importantly, his enigmatic Neo-Mannerist style.

\textsuperscript{47} “About the Collection,” The Meadows Museum of Art at Centenary College, accessed August 31, 2019, \url{https://www.themeadowsmuseum.com/collection}. 
Figure 1. Roll of all students in Jean Despujols’s class in Paris at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts.

Figure 2. Robert Pougheon, *La Passion de la Vierge*, c.1919. Oil on canvas. Paris, École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts.
Illustrations


Illustrations

Figure 5. Jean Despujols, Soldier in the Trenches, c. 1914 - 1918. Sketch. Private collection.

Figure 6. Jean Despujols, Battlefield Scene, c. 1914 - 1918. Sketch. Private collection.
Illustrations

Figure 7. Jean Despujols, Church at Verneuil, c. 1914 - 1918. Sketch. Private collection.

Illustrations

Figure 9. Jean Despujols, Grim Reaper, c. 1914 - 1918. Sketch.
Illustrations

Figure 10. Jean Despujols, *Self-Portrait*, c.1919. Oil on board, 22 x 32 cm. Académie de France in Rome.
Illustrations


Figure 12. Jean Despujols, *Maternité Rouge*, c.1934. Oil on canvas. Unknown location.
Illustrations

Figure 13. 503 Broadmoor Boulevard, Jean Despujols’ permanent residence during his time in Shreveport, Louisiana.
Figure 14. Langston McEachern, Jean Despujols at his residence with his Indochina Collection, c.1948. Photograph. Unknown location.
Figure 15. Unknown photographer, Jean Despujols with Prince Tiao Savang, future King of Laos, c.1950. Photograph. Unknown location.
Illustrations

Figure 16. Janjol, *Birthday Cake*, c.1951. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.
Illustrations

Figure 17. The tombstone of Jean Despujols, c.1965. Greenwood Cemetery in Shreveport, Louisiana.
Chapter 2. The Stylistic Precedence of Despujols’ Art: Academicism, Mannerism, Neoclassicism

The Neoclassical style, for which Jean Despujols was known, became popular in the late eighteenth century and remained so through much of the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was epitomized especially by the artworks of Jacques-Louis David and Jean-August-Dominique Ingres. When defining Neoclassicism in painting, it is essential to recall the vital role of the French Academy and the importance of academic training among artists. “History painting dominated the canvases of Neoclassical artists, whose subject matter ranged widely from the distant classical past to events occurring in their own lifetime.”¹ Neoclassical art emphasized not only references to Classical Antiquity, but also a heavy focus on the line, perspective, preliminary drawings, folds of drapery, proper depiction of shadows, as well as the muscles and overall movement of the human body. There is not much mention of Despujols directly in this section like in the other chapters. This chapter will be used more-so as reference to the next in order to better understand the ideas and stylistic interpretations of Neoclassical and Mannerist art in relation to Jean Despujols and the other School of Bordeaux artists’ Neo-Mannerist works.

Jacques-Louis David was born on August 30, 1748 in Paris and died in Brussels on December 29, 1825.² David’s artistic career spanned a period of time where there was significant change in French society and government: the rise of the Enlightenment and the politically intense decade of the French Revolution (1789 - 1799), as well as the abolition of the French monarchy, the rise of the Napoleonic era, and the return of the Bourbon kings in France.³

In his twenties, David worked in the studio of Joseph-Marie Vien (who embraced the classical style), as suggested by Rococo painter François Boucher.\textsuperscript{4} David and Vien were avid admirers of Classical Antiquity. One cannot discuss Jacques-Louis David without mentioning his most well-known work, and likely the most famous work of all of Neoclassical art, \textit{The Oath of the Horatii} (Figure 1).

In \textit{The Oath of the Horatii}, David accurately depicts the emotion and heroism of the Horatii triplets as they go and fight or die for Rome. David also shows his academic training through the exceptional line work seen on the figures’ anatomy (portrayed through their skin, muscle, and movement) and also the attention to detail in each figure’s clothing. As a prolific painter and draughtsman, David was known for his studio in which nineteenth-century artists practiced academic techniques under his supervision. The Davidian studio attracted students from all across Europe, but those who became his most well-known students in art history were Jean Germain Drouais, Antoine-Jean Gros, and most famously, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

Ingres was a French artist and cultural conservative, who was heavily inspired by the High Renaissance painter Raphael as well as his mentor, Jacques-Louis David. It is essential to discuss David and Ingres for their influential mark on Neoclassical painting, thus inspiring the also academically trained Jean Despujols in the twentieth century. Best known for his history paintings and portraiture, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres was born in August 1780 in the southern French town of Montauban.\textsuperscript{5} He lived all throughout Europe, mostly between Italy and Paris, until he died in 1867.\textsuperscript{6} In his late teenage years, Ingres’s father helped the young painter

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., Vol. 7: 555.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
by getting him a residence in Paris and, most importantly, a spot in Jacques-Louis David’s studio.\(^7\)

After just three years as a pupil of David, in 1800, Ingres competed for the Prix de Rome.\(^8\) This year the artist “gained only second place after Jean Pierre Granger, though the following year Ingres [finally] won with his 1801 work *The Ambassadors of Agamemnon Visiting Achilles* (Figure 2).’’\(^9\) The painting was a hallmark Neoclassicist work by Ingres, depicting a scene from *The Iliad*. The award-winning 1801 canvas was painted in the best Davidian tradition, both in style and iconography. Also, it is important to consider the great resemblance of classicism in Ingres’s winning 1801 Prix de Rome painting to David’s *Oath of the Horatii*. Notable Neoclassical characteristics shared by both the Ingres and the David canvas are the Classical bellicose subject matter, idealized male bodies depicted with anatomical correctness, and lastly, an emphasis on the use of red on parts of the drapery.

Ingres’ time spent in Italy (thanks to the Prix de Rome) and his heavy focus on High Renaissance artists, such as Raphael, certainly informs many of his paintings. Most of Ingres’ artworks betray an interest in the Neoclassical and High/Late Renaissance/Mannerist styles. Of the three, the last challenged anatomical correctness in new and unanticipated ways. “Mannerism marked a revolution in the history of art and created entirely new stylistic standards; and the revolution lay in the fact that for the first time art deliberately diverged from nature.”\(^10\) Art that embraces classical antiquity is known for its idealized bodies and emphasis on line and proportion, while Mannerism deliberately distorts these elements. Mannerism cannot be

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\(^7\) Ibid., 556.
mentioned without discussing the most famous artworks of the movement, Parmigianino’s
*Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 3) and Bronzino’s *Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time* (Figure 4).

Francesco Parmigianino was born in 1503 in Parma and died in 1540 in Casalmaggiore. Although he only lived for about thirty-seven years, his role in Mannerism is significant. Like most Italian painters of the sixteenth century, almost all of his commissions were from the Catholic Church. His painting *Madonna with the Long Neck*, originally painted to be an altarpiece, is likely the most well-known painting in all of Late Renaissance or Mannerist Art.

Of course, the most obviously Mannerist element is what the painting was named after: the elongated neck of the Virgin Mary. Although they seem peripheral, there are many other Mannerist qualities to address. Baby Jesus is portrayed at the size of a small child rather than an infant, about half the size of the “normal-sized” angels seen to the left. The Madonna herself is extremely large, taking up almost the entire panel of the painting and she appears to be even larger than the Doric column seen in the background. The heads of the four distinct angels seem to be pushed against each other. The only angel with a full body is seen in the foreground. The painting also lacks a true vanishing point, which is a violation of the conventions governing academic or Classical art.

After mentioning the Mannerist elements in the *Madonna with the Long Neck*, there are features from Classical Antiquity also depicted in the same painting. The folds and shadows of the Madonna’s drapery are typically Classical and executed beautifully by Parmigianino in the style of the High Renaissance. The random Classical elements in the painting include the angel in the foreground holding a Greek amphora vase and also a miniature Greek or Roman male

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figure to the far right holding a scroll. The Doric column in the background at first seems to be just one column from the frontal view, but when looking at the base of the column, it seems to depict multiple column bases directly behind the first. These Classical qualities of the work are recast in a way that is really quite Mannerist.

Agnolo Bronzino was also born in the year 1503, just as his fellow Mannerist painter Parmigianino. Although he grew up in a poor Italian town called Monticelli, his father insisted that young Bronzino join an apprenticeship with a painter who remains unknown. When considering most of Bronzino’s published artworks, it is clear that the artist was best known to be a portrait painter. His most famous painting, *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* (Figure 4), is distinctly Mannerist in style.

The figure placement in Bronzino’s most famous work is notably allegorical, bizarre, and Mannerist. All of the figures painted are in the nude. In the foreground is “Venus” depicted with a jeweled crown and a gold sphere in her left hand and a gold arrow in her right as she is embraced by a distorted “Cupid.” The figure of “Folly” is seen to the right of the composition, depicted as a putto, about to throw light pink flower petals on Venus and Cupid as they seem to be kissing in the embrace. Although Venus is actually depicted with correct proportions when considering her body, the oddly shaped Cupid is curved around Venus in a way that is anatomically incorrect. “Time” is depicted in the right background of the painting as an older male figure that is bald, with gray facial hair.

What is peculiar about *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* is the range of random figures throughout the composition, distracting from the four protagonists mentioned in the title. None

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13 Ibid., 4.
of these figures have full bodies, and their faces all range from expressionless to the intense emotionalism of the screaming figure in the far left background. It must be noted that there are two theatrical masks on the bottom right of the composition and a white bird at the bottom left. This white bird is similar to the Art Deco doves seen in the artworks by the twentieth-century Bordeaux painters as discussed in the next chapter. Another important aspect when discussing Mannerism in this painting is that Bronzino identifies no distinct vanishing point, an element that is central in Academic training and in nineteenth-century renderings of Classical Antiquity. Although this composition by Bronzino is Mannerist, the blue drapery throughout embraces the Classical stylistic models.

After having defined Mannerism through the famous panel paintings by Parmigianino and Bronzino, we must come back to its importance in nineteenth-century paintings, particularly in Ingres’ work. His 1811 painting of Jupiter and Thetis (Figure 5) is a prime example of Ingres’ working in the Mannerist style and challenging anatomical correctness. Thetis rests over Jupiter’s oversized legs and seems to have an oddly elongated back, like many of Ingres’ famous Odalisques. Thetis’s neck is also over-stretched, almost like in the quintessentially Mannerist painting previously mentioned by Parmigianino, Madonna with the Long Neck. Also, in true Mannerist fashion, Jupiter seems to be nearly twice the size of the half-nude nymph Thetis. In Ingres and His Critics, Andrew Shelton affirms that Ingres’s compositions depict distinguishable Mannerist elements, like their anatomical distortions and spatial irregularities, their sometimes bizarre linear stylizations and alternatively dull and crude colorations, their seemingly whole-sale dependence on art historical precedence and startling archaisms—registered most immediately as mistakes to be avoided rather than qualities to emulate.14

14 Andrew Carrington Shelton, Ingres and His Critics (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 170.
Exploring Ingres’ view on proportion, distortion, anatomical correctness, and form as a dedicated lover of female beauty is essential when discussing the stylistic development of Jean Despujols. Although Ingres was best known as a Neoclassical artist who worked mainly on history paintings and portraiture, he also tended to embrace the Mannerist style and Orientalist subject matter—this is also true of Despujols, as discussed in following chapters. Ingres’s Orientalist paintings focus on his Odalisques, as seen for instance in *The Valpiçon Bather* (1808) and his 1814 painting of *La Grande Odalisque* (Figure 6), among others.

First and foremost, *La Grande Odalisque*, or simply just *Odalisque*, obviously depicts Ingres’s classically trained hand, which is evidenced in how he handles the detailed folds of the drapery and cloth. Second, perhaps the most controversial part of the painting, is the distorted back of the nude, rendered anatomically incorrect like so many Mannerist works. Critics were appalled as Andrew Carrington Shelton revealed:

> This painting elicited outrage from critics, who ridiculed its radically attenuated modeling as well as Ingres’s habitual anatomical distortions of the female nude… The outrageous elongation of her back—one critic famously quipped that she had three vertebrae too many—together with her wildly expanded buttocks and rubbery, boneless arm constitutes a being that could only exist in the erotic imagination of the artist.15

In the *Odalisque* iconography, the female nude is reinterpreted as some sort of affluent Middle Eastern Orientalist woman in a harem. Features that bolster this assumption are the satin cloths and the peacock fan. Another Orientalist element includes the hookah, a pipe used particularly in Middle Eastern and Asian countries to smoke hashish. As two contemporary critics concurred the “sexual subjugation of the Odalisques was not simply dirtying, but

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15 Ibid., 168.
dehumanizing… the Grande Odalisque as the representation of a worn-out body and over-worked prostitute."\(^{16}\)

The impact which La Grande Odalisque made on art history was groundbreaking. A critic said that “La Grande Odalisque is beautiful, elegant, a distinguished nature. Yet she is so deprived of life—of the fire that makes paintings breathe—that she appears to us to be more the representation of a beautiful marble than the supple and seductive image of a beautiful women.”\(^{17}\) No matter the criticism, the subject held qualities that fit with both the Neoclassical and the Orientalism movements. The biggest difference between Jean Despujols and Ingres when considering their takes on Orientalism, was that Despujols was actually sent by the French government to document its Indochina colonies, while Ingres’s Orientalist works are all figments of his imagination. The following chapters discuss Jean Despujols’ fellow twentieth-century Bordeaux painters’ canvases of Neo-Mannerist depictions and also his Orientalist paintings, drawings, and watercolors from his time in Indochina between the First and Second World War.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 180.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 170.
Illustrations

Figure 1. Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, c. 1784. Oil on canvas, 330 x 425 cm. Musée du Louvre.

Figure 2. Jean-Auguste-Dominique-Ingres, *The Ambassadors of Agamemnon*, c. 1801. Oil on canvas, 110 x 155 cm. École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris.
Illustrations

Figure 3. Parmigianino, *Madonna with the Long Neck*, c. 1530s. Oil on panel, 219 x 135 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Figure 4. Bronzino, *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*, c. 1545. Oil on panel, 146 x 116 cm. The National Gallery, London.
Illustrations

Figure 5. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Jupiter and Thetis*, c. 1811. Oil on canvas, 327 x 260 cm. Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence.

Chapter 3. Neo-Mannerism and the School of Bordeaux

Jean Despujols was not only a neoclassical painter, but also a Neo-Mannerist stylist, as his artworks from the interwar period demonstrate. This time period, particularly the 1920s and 30s, engendered artworks which are considered the quintessence of the Art Deco movement. “In addition to his Indochina work, Despujols was a singularly important contributor to the Art Deco movement; he became only recently recognized nationally and internationally for his extraordinary gifts as an illustrator.”¹ His years spent at the French Academy in Rome from 1919 to 1923 are essential to the definition of the Art Deco style. Despujols’ work and that of many of his peers, including Robert Pougheon and Jean Dupas, constitute the Bordeaux School of painting, a subset of the Art Deco style.² “These artists, who seem to be developing a new form of classicism through their mastery of drawing and the pure line, embody a modernity based on the adaptation of academic art to the society of the twentieth century and express it through the choice subjects that mix elements of the contemporary world with the classical repertoire of myth and allegory.”³

The city of Bordeaux was responsible for nurturing a whole group of Art Deco painters.⁴ These painters included Jean Despujols, Jean Dupas, Raphaël Delorme. Although Robert Pougheon is not Bordelais, he was still a distinct part of this group. The artists were part of a group that embraced classicism and dismissed the avant-garde, in which Despujols, Dupas, and

³ Ibid.
Pougheon took a leadership position. Their images revalidated nude figures (particularly women), and specific animals such as horses, parakeets, and especially white doves.

In the 1922 painting by Despujols, *Life Passes the Cup to Good, Evil, Pain, Joy, Beauty, and Ugliness* (Figure 1), we see an allegorical group of figures that is both neoclassical and neo-mannerist at once. First, the allegorical title provides hints as to how we should read this painting. “Life” is the large androgynous central figure holding what looks like a glass of red wine, an obvious reference to both classical culture and Bordeaux as a center for viniculture. “Good” is represented by the most identifiable character in the composition, Charlie Chaplin—who was known for his comical roles in silent film, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. “Evil” is the statuesque bronze figure to the right, whose bulging forehead is a recurring element that we see in Bordeaux Art Deco artists of this chapter. “Pain” is represented in the foreground: she is a female figure with an elongated neck (another recurring element of this time period) who is turning her gaze downward. The blonde female figure to the far-left embodies “Joy,” while “Beauty” is depicted on the opposite side as a Botticelli-like Venus figure. “Ugliness,” hidden in the skirts of “Life,” reveals only the skeletal fingers that express its shame.

*Life Passes the Cup*… is a painting that depicts an impeccable understanding of the neoclassical style by Despujols—and yet it is also its opposite, a distorting parody. What is notably neoclassical about the composition is the rendering of the perspective and the exquisite folds of drapery seen on the figures of “Life,” “Joy,” “Pain,” and “Evil.” The dark red garment worn by “Life” looks very similar to a Classical dress worn by ancient Greek women, called a peplos. In opposition to the neoclassical elements are those that are neo-mannerist. Neo-mannerist elements are reflected in the anatomical distortions of the figures—such as the

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5 Christie’s *Un Autre XXe siècle*…, 112.
extremely elongated neck of “Pain,” the twisted right arm of “Joy,” the exceptionally large quadriceps of “Beauty,” the protruding forehead of “Evil,” and the massive arms and hands of “Life.” Characteristics of modernity are embodied by the heels “Beauty” is wearing and also in the background which depicts an industrial, futuristic American city.

*Nude to the Doves* (Figure 2), another painting from the same year by Despujols, is likely the artist’s most Neoclassical work mentioned yet. The nude female figure is depicted with correct anatomical proportions. She is pale and brunette, and she seems to be relaxing by the ocean side with three white doves keeping her company. In this painting, we see the hallmark Art Deco doves that are seen in many other artworks by the Bordeaux school painters of this time period. The dove is likely a symbol for the wish for peace that came about as reaction to the previous World War. Despujols beautifully renders the red drapery on which the female nude reclines, as well as the fruit in her left hand—these details emphasize the academic training received by Despujols. The pile of fruit is made up of apples and purple grapes, while one bunch of grapes is held by the female figure in her right hand which she is feeding to one of the doves above her.

Jean Dupas was born in 1882 (only four years before Despujols) and also attended the École des Beaux-Arts in both Bordeaux and Paris. In Rome, he studied at the Académie française under Carolus Duran and then with Albert Besnard. He met Robert Pougheon and Jean Despujols while in Rome, and the three became close friends and shared many similar views politically and artistically. Partly under Besnard’s influence, the three men developed an

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7 Ibid.
idiosyncratic neoclassical style of painting, each one in his own distinct way. At the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, Dupas supplied large decorative compositions for several pavilions, most notably the large panel Les Perruches for the Ruhlmann Salon of the model home of a collector. Dupas’ painting Les Perruches (The Parakeets) (Figure 3) is a quintessential Art Deco work. Like many other Art Deco compositions, the composition is crammed with idealized female figures.

There are five female figures depicted in this canvas, three of whom are clothed, and the other two figures are rendered in the nude. The two women to the left are making eye contact with the viewer, but the woman depicted in the black dress is the figure which marks the vanishing point. The vanishing point is suggested by the other females in the image, who point at the woman in her black dress. “Dupas in particular tended to dehumanize his characters, turning them into pretty, sharp-featured but expressionless mannequins.” The epithet of “expressionless mannequins” is true of most of the figures depicted, except for the figure in the black dress.

The rendering of the female nude emphasizes Dupas’ academic training in an exemplary fashion, although the linework and drapery are not as clearly accentuated as those of Despujols. The nude figure on the left facing the viewer is arguably depicted in a neo-mannerist style, given that her left leg is nearly the size of her entire torso. Of course, the title of the painting holds importance: nearly seventeen green and yellow parakeets are in the center of the image, sitting on the stylized branches of a red-leafed tree. Also, like in many Art Deco illustrations, we again

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9 Arwas, Art Deco, 186.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
see white doves make an appearance: three to the far left and one in the hands of the standing nude figure to the right.

Another key painter of the neo-mannerist style of Bordeaux who should be mentioned in this context is Raphaël Delorme. Delorme was born in 1886 and died in 1962. Like Dupas and Despujols, he studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux (under Gustave Lauriol and Pierre-Gustave Artus). Under their combined influence, Delorme became a stage designer in Paris, specializing in effects of perspective. “Working in a neoclassical, frozen style similar to Dupas and Despujols, Delorme nevertheless injected a deadpan form of humor into his compositions, indulging in outrageous visual puns, combining his love of exercises in perspective with his experiences with the stage and circus.” His painting, Cleopatra (Figure 4) also features both the Art Deco white doves and parakeets, like in Dupas’ work.

Although Cleopatra was an Egyptian ruler, she had ties with Ancient Rome. The choice of subject matter, the use of perspective, and the column in the background are characteristics that are inherently neoclassical. The highly dramatic perspective is a hallmark of Delorme. Victor Arwas, in his book on Art Deco, described the work of Delorme as defined by “[d]etailed bits of architectural constructions [which] are combined with mythological creations and well-fleshed, well-muscled women in odd, irrational conjunctions, some compositions being built up like a collage of disparate images snipped from a color supplement.”

Cleopatra’s gold throne and her Cubist-inspired silver head piece are references to the Art Deco style, as are the geometric jewelry that is worn by the woman in the foreground. Cleopatra

12 Ibid., 189.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
is surrounded by three female figures, and only one of the four women is clothed. The woman closest to the foreground, yet facing her back towards the frontal view, is depicted in a black dress. This woman is also holding a fruit platter which she presents to Cleopatra. Two yellow, green, and dark blue parakeets are seen in the foreground. Two white doves are seen in the background of the painting while another white dove seems to be reaching for the palm of Cleopatra. The background seems to feature two or three sailboat masts and numerous sails, which are quite random when considering the rest of the composition.

Although it does not feature doves or parakeets like previous artworks mentioned, *The Fishing Party* (Figure 5) by Jean Despujols, today preserved in the Musée des années trente in Boulogne-Billancourt, is important to discuss when considering Bordeaux Art Deco paintings. The 1925 painting depicts two men and two women on a rural shoreside during a joyous outing to the Landes region, a resort area south of Bordeaux, where they are depicted fishing. All of the figures are muscular and tanned and their clothing reflect the warm climate. One man is seen reclining in the foreground while he holds and casts a wooden fishing rod into a body of water. This man has been tentatively identified as Despujols’ cousin named Paul, while the man in the background is unknown to us. The unknown man holds a fishing spear and also wears a wide-brimmed straw hat, particularly reminiscent of that of an Asian working in rice fields. It is interesting that Despujols included this hat because he would not travel to Indochina for another ten years.

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17 Ibid.
The two women in the painting are depicted to the right of the composition, closer to the water. The figure in the foreground wearing the blue dress is Despujols’ sister named Lucienne Lintilhac.\textsuperscript{18} Her thin and fitted light blue dress is clinging to her body almost like wet drapery from ancient Greek sculpture. Behind his sister is Despujols’ first wife, Caterina Donata Vanutelli Despujols.\textsuperscript{19} Both women have their right hands on Paul’s fishing rod and their left hands on the fishing line. All four figures focus their attraction on a fish, which was just caught, as they are trying to bring it towards the shore. A small wooden pier behind the women emphasizes their large neo-mannerist bodies. Both women strangely appear much larger than the pier and also larger than the two men depicted. Lucienne has an elongated neo-mannerist neck and downward gaze, which was also seen in Despujols’ 1922 painting of \textit{Life Passes the Cup}…

The overall tonalities are different shades of sandy hues, and also shades of blue from the woman’s dress, the water below, and also of the sky. The light and upbeat colors of the composition reflect the “joie de vivre” or the pleasures during summer in the countryside.\textsuperscript{20}

In the same year, four Bordeaux artists were commissioned to paint frescoes representing the wine pavilion of the Gironde region at the 1925 exhibition in Paris.\textsuperscript{21} François Roganeau dealt with the products of the forest, Marius de Buzon with the port, Dupas with wine, and Despujols with agriculture.\textsuperscript{22} “The human figure was treated in a volumetric fashion, attitudes were frequently heroic (as were some proportions) and the highly decorative detail, allied with often rich colors, made these artists ideal exponents of large, often allegorical frescoes.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{21} Arwas, \textit{Art Deco}, 186.  
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Dupas’ and Despujols’ iconographic program, abounding with nude and semi-nude women, caused a storm of self-righteous attacks which they eventually weathered.24 The murals are now on view in the Aquitaine Museum in Bordeaux. In Despujols’ canvas, *Agriculture* (Figure 6), we see one recurring element that is evident in many Art Deco artworks in particular: the multiplication of figures. The neoclassical training is obvious in the central grisaille figures which are embracing each other, but there is a clear separation of the figure frieze in the foreground and the landscape scenery in the background.

In *Agriculture*, the emphasis on the fertility of land and people is an obvious subtext. It is particularly obvious in the two central male and female figures, and also, in the far right, which features a woman breastfeeding her child. The overall colors of the painting are shades of gray (or grisaille), accentuated by highlights in brown, red, orange, and yellow. The central figure group contains a modern Adam and Eve, flanked by women harvesting olives and processing olive oil. The background depicts the rolling hills of the region and distinct rows of tilled farmland. There are numerous farm animals scattered throughout the scene, such as a sheep, a turkey, ducks, geese, a rooster, a horse, a lamb, a bull, and a cow. Two strong men frame the image on either side, embodying the agricultural laborers who raise and breed these animals and also work the land for crops. The linework that details the musculature of both the human and animal figures is notably both neoclassical and Cubist in the rendering. One of the women picking olives from the tree has the notable neo-mannerist protruding forehead that is also seen in the “Evil” figure from *Life Passes the Cup*... Overall, Jean Despujols executes a mesmerizing panel, both neoclassical and neo-mannerist, exemplifying what “agriculture” means to the people of Bordeaux.

24 Ibid., 189.
Jean Dupas’ composition for the same 1925 exhibition, *The Vineyard and the Wine* (Figure 7), is much more difficult to interpret. His panel certainly is of the Art Deco style as well. It features an abundance of figures and again we see the appearance of white doves. At first glance, few elements in this painting would remind anyone directly of a vineyard or of wine. The two central female figures are holding an oversized wine flask. The round container has a small hole near the top, and from this opening red wine is pouring forth. The “wine” is received by three extended hands that belong to the figure group at the bottom of the image. To the far right of the canvas are two female figures who hold large containers used during wine harvest. In a neo-mannerist fashion, one of these containers is the size of the entire figure’s body. All of the nearly fifteen mannequin-like figures, which were Dupas’ hallmark, crowd the canvas and are all intertwining within each other. The painting’s palette is very dark: the main colors used are black, various shades of gray, and dark red; all the figures are painted in grisaille.

In the same year that Despujols executed his Bordeaux fresco, *Agriculture*, he painted a portrait of Venus (Figure 8), the Roman goddess of love and beauty. She is depicted as a half-length portrait with a rural, mountainous setting in the background. She is modest and naive in the way she presents herself. Her gaze is downward, and she is partially clothed from the waist down. Her midriff and bare chest are revealed, as she uses her right hand to cover her left breast, while her right breast remains exposed. She is extremely pale and delicate, and her cheeks are covered in an intense blush which nearly matches the color of her highly pigmented red lips. Porcelain white skin color is often associated with Mannerist art.

Unlike most Venus figures which are usually depicted with long blonde hair, this Venus has very short blonde hair. Her hair is still wavy like the Venus depicted in Despujols’ Botticelli-like Venus in *Life Passes the Cup*… There is a defoliated tree to the left of her and a
cherry blossom tree on the right, perhaps signifying that it is winter in this setting. Despujols’ background in academic painting is evident in this composition—perspectival rendering was obviously a concern as well as Venus’s beautifully rendered anatomical correctness. Also, the creases and folds of the drapery shown near her waist, likely a two-toned dress, is impeccably painted in the way of the neoclassical style. The portrait also has a touch of Italian Renaissance influence.

Robert Pougheon was another Art Deco artist who was born in Paris in 1886 and joined the Académie de France in Rome after the first World War to study under Albert Besard.25 While in Rome, Pougheon became very close to two other Rome prizewinners, Jean Dupas and Jean Despujols.26 The three developed a glacial neoclassical stylistic vocabulary which each, however, interpreted with different symbols.27 Pougheon was known for the plethora of preliminary drawings he left behind, as well as for his neoclassically inspired French banknotes of the immediate postwar years (Figure 9). This particular banknote is an example of a French billet from Djibouti worth ten francs. Although the male figure has tight curls and is likely a man from the east African country, the rendering of his head shape and facial features are inherently neoclassical. He is part of the nomadic Afar peoples who are an ethnic group that inhabit the Horn of Africa.

Pougheon also created many paintings of what he called his “Amazon” women, one example being his 1926 painting titled Amazons [The Blue Ribbon] (Figure 10). In this painting, there is a central female nude standing with her legs crossed in a powerful stance. She stands in front of a white spotted horse. Her head is turned toward her left, while her neck is elongated,

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25 Arwas, Art Deco, 303.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
and her forehead is protruding—two Neo-Mannerist elements that are recurrent in the Bordeaux school and, in particular, Pougheon’s oeuvre. There is a blue ribbon that encircles both the horse and the central female figure, while inspiring the name of the painting. Two female figures are in the foreground: one, on the right, is half-nude and wears a black bowler hat; she is accompanied by another woman, on the left, who is leaning over and covering her face. The woman wearing the bowler hat is holding a harness for a horse. A rocky and barren landscape provides the background of the two foreground females. There is a large black cloth which covers the legs of the woman in the bowler hat and it also covers the entire body of the sleeping female figure on the left, who has her face hidden.

The same year that Pougheon painted the Amazons [The Blue Ribbon], he completed a series of preliminary drawings for the painting. The Detail Study for the Amazons [Blue Ribbon]: Woman’s Head in Profile for the Central Figure (Figure 11) is an important sketch to discuss when considering the neo-mannerist style of Jean Despujols. This sketch by Pougheon is distinctively neo-mannerist and can be compared to the protruding forehead which is depicted in the “Evil” figure in Despujols’s Life Passes the Cup..., in Pougheon’s Amazons [The Blue Ribbon], and also in Despujols’ likely most famous painting, La Pensée (Thought) (Figure 12).

La Pensée, completed by Despujols before 1929, is the culmination of the neo-mannerist portrait with of a protruding forehead discussed in this chapter. The female figure “represents the allegory of thought” and holds “one of the two volumes of the treatise on philosophy written a year earlier by Despujols.” According to the artist-philosopher, “the act of thinking is the source of existence: it does not result from the will of each individual, but from his belonging to

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humanity and from a universal and supreme knowledge.”\textsuperscript{29} Her left hand is pressed against her head and her right hand points to the second paragraph in the philosophy book \textit{L’Epitinkaire}, published under Despujols’ pseudonym, Janjol. The opening page is “illustrated with a diagram explaining the links between the soul (A), the life (V), the body (C), and the reason (R).”\textsuperscript{30} This diagram and the description that follows “is the synthesis that each person operates between knowledge (‘static knowledge’) and feeling (‘dynamic feeling’) in order to flourish within humanity.”\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{La Pensée} is depicted as a seated young woman with fair skin and short dark brown hair. Despujols painted this woman after his first wife, whom we previously saw in \textit{The Fishing Party}, Caterina Donata Vanutelli Despujols. She stares intently at the viewer and ponders Janjol’s existentialist words, in which she immerses herself. Her orange and brown dress and also her headband are elements taken from court portraits of the Italian Renaissance, such as Leonardo’s \textit{Lady with an Ermine} (Figure 13).\textsuperscript{32} The setting is again a reference to the Tuscan countryside, with a mountainous landscape lined with notable Italian Cypress trees and bushes. The background also features distinctly Italian villas topped with their terracotta roofs; even a church is rendered, with its tall steeple looming above all of the buildings in the rural town.

Executed in the same style and mood as \textit{La Pensée} is Despujols’ version of da Vinci’s \textit{Lady with an Ermine}, entitled \textit{La Femme au Lapin (The Rabbit Woman)} (Figure 14). \textit{The Rabbit Woman} also depicts a seated young female, who features this time much fairer skin and pinned blonde hair. There is a likelihood that this woman is Despujols’ second and long-term American

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} “Jean Despujols, Thought, before 1929,” La Piscine.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
wife, Millicent, who was depicted in his award-winning painting Blue Maternity that was discussed in an earlier chapter. Like in Leonardo’s Lady with an Ermine, the figure wears a typical Renaissance dress with wide sleeves, and she has a small, white-furred animal by her side. The Rabbit Woman is petting a white rabbit with her right hand and in her left hand she holds a small stem of white flowers. Although her dress imitates Renaissance fashion, the fabric itself is rendered in the Cubist-inspired Art Deco style, which can also be found, for instance, in the art of Tamara de Lempicka (Figure 15). The viewer is intrigued by spiral forms and shades of pink, dark green, blue, black, and gold. In this painting, as seen in other Despujols’ works, one discovers again the abnormal elongation of the neck, which qualifies this composition as neo-mannerist.

The School of Bordeaux was a tight group that loved their satire and parody. Jean Despujols, Jean Depas, Raphaël Delorme, and Robert Pougheon filled their artworks of this interwar period with elements which were described in this chapter: white doves, protruding foreheads, elongated necks, mannequin-like figures, disproportionate anatomies, and so much more. This, along with their beliefs and ideas, made these artists pioneers of neo-mannerist Art Deco art of the 1920s.
Figure 1. Jean Despujols, *La Vie passe la coupe au Bien, au Mal, à la Douleur, à la Joie, à la Beauté, à la Laideur* (The Life passes the cup to Good, Evil, Pain, Joy, Beauty, and Ugliness), c. 1922. Oil on canvas, 135.4 x 193.7 cm. Galerie L’Horizon chimérique in Bordeaux, France.
Illustrations

Figure 2. Jean Despujols, *Nu aux Colombes (Nude to the Doves)*, c. 1922. Oil on canvas, 114 x 162.5 cm. Private collection.
Figure 3. Jean Dupas, *Les Purruches (The Parakeets)*, 1925. Oil on canvas. Unknown location.
Figure 4. Raphaël Delorme, *Cléopatre*, ~1920s. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Figure 5. Jean Despujols, *La Partie de Pêche (The Fishing Party)*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 200 x 290 cm. Musée des Années Trente in Boulogne-Billancourt, France.
Illustrations

Figure 6. Jean Despujols, *Agriculture*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 306 x 840 cm. Musée d’Aquitaine in Bordeaux, France.

Figure 7. Jean Dupas, *The Vineyard and the Wine*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 314 x 810 cm. Musée d’Aquitaine in Bordeaux, France.
Illustrations

Figure 8. Jean Despujols, *Vénus*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas. Collection Barry Humphries, Sydney.
Illustrations

Figure 9. Robert Pougheon, Djibouti Billet of Dix Francs, c. 1946. Banknote. Private Collection.

Figure 10. Robert Pougheon, Amazones [au ruban bleu] (Amazons [The Blue Ribbon]), c. 1926. Oil on canvas. Unknown location.
Illustrations

Figure 11. Robert Pougheon, *Étude de detail pour les Amazones [au ruban bleu]: tête de femme de profil pour la figure centrale*, (Detail study for the Amazons [blue ribbon]: woman’s head in profile for the central figure), c. 1926. Graphite pencil, charcoal, heightened white chalk with composition lines on paper, 45 x 28 cm. Unknown location.
Figure 12. Jean Despujols, *La Pensée (Thought)*, c. ~1929. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. La Piscine – Musée d’Art et d’Industrie André Diligent in Roubaix, France.
Illustrations


Figure 14. Jean Despujols, *La Femme au Lapin (The Rabbit Woman)*, c. 1920s – 1930s. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Figure 15. Tamara de Lempicka, Amethyst, c. 1946. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Chapter 4. Paintings and Drawings from French Indochina

Whereas Despujols is best remembered for his Art Deco and Neo-Mannerist artworks in France, in the United States, the artist’s reputation is based on his Indochina Collection which is preserved in Shreveport, Louisiana, at Centenary College’s Meadows Museum of Art.¹ Although the Indochina Collection is located in America, it is “nevertheless a profoundly French work born out of the Third Republic’s need to shape public opinion about her colonies if she hoped to keep them.”² This chapter will discuss some typical examples of the artworks that make up the Despujols Indochina Collection, which includes over 350 oil paintings, watercolors, and sketches, as well as almost 1,000 photographs by Jean Despujols.

Despujols won the *Prix de l’Indochine en peinture*, or the Indochina Prize in painting, in the spring of 1936.³ The French Academy gave out a number of such prizes, and the Indochina Prize was a newly founded one, giving artists an all-expenses paid trip to the French colonies in what is today Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The prize was instituted in 1910 and awarded biennially.⁴ A fellow painter named Charles Fouqueray, who won the first ever Indochina Prize, suggested that Despujols compete for the *Prix de l’Indochine* and that he “will win it on [his] first try.”⁵ Jean Despujols indeed won the award after he submitted *Blue Maternity*. The prize

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⁴ Panivong Norindr, Jean Despujols: Indochina Odyssey exhibition brochure, “Jean Despujols in Indochina.”
was funded by the Great Economic Council of the French Indochina in an effort to promote the Third Republic’s colonial goals and territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{6} Already fifty years of age, a tired and frustrated Despujols was grateful to have been chosen for the colonial prize after surviving the first World War. He rightly feared that the political and social climate would lead to yet another war in Europe.

The award allowed the artist to travel to the pre-World War II French Indochina colonies. Each of the three countries was culturally and historically dramatically different. Vietnam was made up of three regions: Tonkin in the north, Annam in central Vietnam, and Cochinchina located in the south.\textsuperscript{7} These three areas made Vietnam the largest of the three countries, which was heavily influenced by Chinese culture in terms of language, religion, dress, architecture, and political structure.\textsuperscript{8} Cambodia and Laos, on the other hand, were much more historically and culturally influenced by India and Thailand (formerly called Siam).\textsuperscript{9}

Despujols’s task for about twenty months was to document the land and the native peoples, which he did by avoiding cosmopolitan areas and visiting remote villages of the regions.\textsuperscript{10} The trip was originally set to last about six months, but Despujols fell in love with the land and peoples of French Indochina and decided to stay much longer. One needs to remember that Despujols left behind a three-year-old daughter and a two-month-old son when he embarked from Marseille for Indochina on November 27, 1936. While on his travels, the artist kept a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[8] \textit{Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols}, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
\item[9] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
journal that grew to be eight volumes, made up of nearly 2,500 pages (Figure 1). The original journal is with the Despujols family to the present day and could not be consulted for further research. However, a 39-page translated typescript with key excerpts exists in the holdings at the Northwest Louisiana Archives at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. The passages from the Indochina journal quoted throughout this chapter come from this unpublished typescript manuscript, which is fully reproduced in the appendix of this thesis.

In his journal, Despujols eloquently wrote in elaborate detail and colorful language what he saw and encountered during his journey. In the original journal, the text is abundantly illustrated with sketches (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4), making the Indochina journal comparable to similar traveling artists’ manuscripts, such as Eugène Delacroix’s Moroccan notebook from north Africa. Here, Despujols discussed everything from the weather conditions to the people he met and with whom he had relationships. He arrived in Cambodia two days before Christmas Day in 1936 and embarked at Haiphong, Vietnam, on August 25, 1938. These are just some of the very few dates mentioned in this chapter, because the nature of how Despujols organized the journal and described his excursions make it challenging to establish the exact chronology with any precision. The artist “criss-crossed the mountains and valleys of French Indochina, preserving the timeless beauty of its untamed rivers, chaotic peaks, wild forests, ridden deltas, and oceanic beaches.” The route Despujols took along Indochina was marked on a map in his

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12 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
possession (Figure 5). Iconographically, the artworks can be categorized into landscapes, portraits, still lifes, and archeological sites, and they will be discussed in this order.

**Landscapes**

In the painting *Cascades in the Giant Ferns* (Figure 6), the viewer can experience some of the Monsoon-like weather conditions Despujols encountered in Laos, as shown here, and also in other parts of Indochina. The oil painting is covered in small diagonal strokes which suggest tropical rainfall. Gorgeous, lush ferns fill the composition, which shows waterfalls below and behind the tropical foliage. A light purple and blue heron can be observed in the foreground of the scene.

Many of the landscape paintings by Despujols from Indochina depict rectilinear plots of land, usually used as rice fields. Two primary examples are the artworks *Reefs in the Vicinity of Cao-Bằng* (Figure 7) and also *The Mountain of the Ninety-Nine Hills* (Figure 8). Cao-Bằng is a province in northern Vietnam, or, at the time, the Upper Tonkin region. Rendered in the *Reefs in the Vicinity of Cao-Bằng* depicts a steep mountainside with its sectioned plots of green and brown land in the valley. Despujols also painted more lush vegetation in the foreground, as if the painter were hiding inside the foliage himself to document this exquisite sight. The lightly shaded mountain ranges in the left background of the watercolor mirror those seen in the ink drawing which will be analyzed next.

*The Mountain of the Ninety-Nine Hills* is arguably Despujols’s hallmark landscape from the Indochina period, rivaled only perhaps by the *Evening Halt on the Nam-Te* (Figure 9). In *The Mountain of the Ninety-Nine Hills*, the artist painted a rice field typical of low-land Vietnam. Grown entirely through manual, agricultural labor, the rice here was in an early stage of
The Ink drawing washed with color features eleven figures scattered throughout the composition. Each figure is tending to the land in one way or another, with all but two of them wearing a conical hat that is typically used in rice farming. There are also seven water buffalo depicted, the ideal animal to help in such a task. In his journal, Jean Despujols explains his feelings towards what he sees:

The spectacle is truly grandiose. And it consists of only two elements: the rice field and the mountain; three if you count the sky. The rice field is a calm sea of a rich green uninterrupted even by the Song Day [river], which remains completely hidden. And above the rice field the fantastic wall of the ninety-nine hills, jagged like the backbone of the dragon. This wall is made of isolated peaks of a gorgeous purplish blue, behind which appear other, paler peaks, and others shading directly into pink against a yellowing sky, nocturnal at the zenith.

In The Evening Halt on the Nam-Te, which Despujols beautifully painted in ink wash, the artist relied on a photograph which he captured (Figure 10). Despujols only sometimes took photographs of the subjects he painted, but when he did, the artist gave us a means of comparing the photo with the artistic interpretation of the same scene. The ink wash of the Nam-Te River, better known as the Black River, depicts a calm setting on the water’s banks, where Despujols and his crew made a stop. The river flows in China and northwestern Vietnam, at this time known as the Tonkin region. The figures are small and hardly noticeable in comparison to the

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13 Ibid.
14 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1582-1583.
15 Dana Kress, French Colonial Realism: Indochina in the Camera’s Eye exhibition brochure. (Shreveport, Louisiana, Meadows Museum of Art at Centenary College of Louisiana, 1997).
glistening of the river and the dark and flora-filled mountainside. The *sampan*, a flat-bottom Chinese and Malay wooden boat, is the most recognizable element of the scene at the shore.

Like in some Chinese landscape painting, there are three distinct areas in this composition: the riverbank or shore, the river itself, and the mountains which seemingly blend into the sky. The most distinguishable part of this ink and wash drawing are the evident atmospheric effects, which are also reminiscent of Chinese landscape painting. These effects and the hazy tonal features are emphasized by the smoke coming from one of the figures on the riverbank who is potentially cooking a meal or simply just sitting by a fire. Despujols writes of this time on the Nam-Te:

We landed at twilight on a virgin beach, sloping, and marked horizontally due to the successive stages of the falling river. Fires were lit. And white smoke rose vertically in an atmosphere as immobile as the deep water. I had gone downstream and settled on a rock. And for the first time, I looked with new eyes on the piled-up mountains outlined in the sky to the northwest. These extraordinary mountains—known in Europe from Chinese prints and judged unreal—these extraordinary mountains combining empyrean calm and abyssal falls, lofty spires and voluptuous domes, told me of my dead happiness, the distant treasures now abandoned forever…¹⁶

Another moment in time when Jean Despujols was traveling along the Nam-Te River is illustrated in *The Artist’s Pirogue* (Figure 11). There are six male figures on the pirogue, or *sampan*, which is traveling away from the viewer down the river. Four of the men are steering the wooden boat, three darker-skinned shirtless males at the front and one man with a white long-sleeved shirt at the rear closest to Despujols. The artist is wearing his notable, white tropical helmet, which we will revisit later again in this chapter. In the middle of the *sampan*

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¹⁶ Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1098.
there is a canopy for sun shelter and rest. Despujols and another male figure, who is also wearing a hat, are touching the canopy to hold their balance while the other four men steer. The unidentified male with a hat on is the only figure facing the viewer. Despujols rendered this painting in a way that makes the mountains on the sides of the river seem massive in comparison to the *sampan*, while dense foliage is seen along the mountainside. The semi-cylindrical cage at the tail of the *sampan* was used to hold chickens as a food provision.\(^{17}\)

In *Shooting a Rapid on the Nam-Te* (Figure 12), Jean Despujols paints the dynamism and energy that arises from a high rapid along the river. There are two *sampans* spaced out across the water. The *sampan* on the left, which holds six people and flies a French flag, is going the opposite direction of the *sampan* on the right, which only has one figure steering at the rear of the boat. The *sampan* on the right has a rope tied to the front with four figures on the rocky shoreside seemingly pulling the boat to land. On the same rocky shoreside, in the right foreground of the painting, sits a woman next to various packages and belongings which were likely transported on the *sampan* that is being pulled in. This woman is of the White Thai peoples, and we know this because of her distinct white long-sleeved top. Despujols describes in detail the water levels of the Nam-Te River:

The Nam-Te, like all the rivers of the [p]enisula, has three stages: high, middle, and low water. High water accelerates and regularizes the current, whose unevenness is especially obvious in low water (almost absolute stagnation in the deep reaches, as opposed to fast-moving currents and rapids that remain lively). The most unfavorable stage is that of middle water because of rocks which are barely submerged and the changes in the rapids [where the waves and whirlpools are violent].\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1077-1079.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
Another river, which the artist identified as the “Nam-Na,” is the subject of a beautiful oil painting rendered from the perspective of the boat rider. *Going Down the Nam-Na* (Figure 13) features jagged rocky cliffs on both sides of the river, with the right coastline covered in foliage and the left coastline lacking vegetation. The occluded sky references atmospheric effects from Chinese landscape painting. The most distinct part of the composition is the leafless gnarly tree which protrudes from a cliff in the upper right corner.

The last landscape we will studying is the *Arec Tree and Noria on the Stung* (Figure 14). Most of the watercolor is filled with palm trees and other luxuriant flora, while the bottom of the composition features a wooden dock or dam on water, as well as a noria, or hydropowered water wheel. Despujols wrote that “norias, huge water wheels, made entirely of bamboo, … lift the precious liquid and water their respective groves.”19 The artist recorded his first impression of the noria in preliminary sketches of his journal (Figure 15). During his time in Indochina, Despujols also composed his own music, and some of his compositions incorporated the sounds of the soothing bamboo water wheels.20

**Portraits**

Now that the landscape settings have been discussed, the reader is ready to discover the peoples who were living in these lush, vibrant lands. Because Despujols focused on the rural areas of Indochina, he encountered Indochinese from both the highlands and lowlands, as well as many different cultures and ethnic groups. These groups, or tribes, included, but were not

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20 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
limited to: the Malay, the Chams, the White and Black Thai peoples, the Annamese, the
Tonkinese, the Meo, the Wouni, the Muong, the Lao, and many others. Most of them were
divided geographically by the Annamese mountains, which cut through all three different
regions. Rendered according to the artistic conventions of a French academic style, Despujols’
Indochinese portraits focus mostly on female subjects. The only male portraits executed by the
artist were usually focused on politically or spiritually important figures, such as the King of
Laos (Figure 16) and Bonzes, or Buddhist monks (Figure 17). In the female portraits, Jean
Despujols sought to capture the beauty, purity, nobility, and grace of his sitters.

When visiting a remote Muslim village in Cambodia, Jean Despujols painted Portrait of
Tega (Figure 18). Tega was a 15-year-old Malay who was the daughter of the “mekron,” or
mayor.21 Out of respect for the Muslim customs, the artist and Tega were at her uncle’s house
during the two portrait sittings, while both artist and model were under the watchful eye of
“assembled villagers.”22 Despujols wrote, “the young girl, jealously guarded, can come in
contact with a foreigner only within sight and knowledge of everyone.”23 He described her as
timid, confused, and simply beautiful. In his frontal-view portrait, Tega wears a dark green
scooped-neck blouse with a narrow cut down the middle. The olive-skinned girl also wears a
headdress, a symbol of her religion, and a long, gold-beaded necklace. The artist remarked on
the beauty of his model:

Her eyes are huge and black, her forehead rounded, her nose straight, her lips full but not
excessively so, her face oval without heaviness. In sum, almost a Caucasian beauty. As
for her character, freshness, sweetness, innocence. And her innocent simplicity is
revealed almost immediately. Tega wears the narrow headdress of a virgin. In order to fill

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21 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 318-319.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
the space, I substitute an orange scarf with the ends hanging down. A scene! Tega bursts into prolonged sobs. The cause of all this emotion? Anticipation; the headdress I chose is worn by married women. Tears flow. Then they cease. Then her brow clears. Tega smiles at me. … [She] gets up and, modestly, disappears.24

Despujols acknowledged that he had learned his lesson; he arrived as a different man than he left, and this experience with Tega emphasizes that point. He picked up on the importance of the purity and nobility of the Indochinese peoples, and he turned into an anti-colonist after his nearly two-year trip in Indochina.

In another portrait where the sitter also wears a headdress is Meo Girl of Ma-Xao-Phing (Figure 19). This girl was part of the Meo tribe, which lived in the highlands of northern Laos.25 The women of the Meo tribe displayed their love of jewelry and bright costuming by wearing vivid colors and interesting designs.26 They utilized silver not only as an adornment, but also as an indication of family wealth.27 The Meo were unique in their ability to live on arid mountaintops at great elevation, but this setting made access to drinking water costly and challenging.28 Despujols wrote about what the Meo people experienced and his encounter with the sitter:

[The Meo people] live on the arid mountaintops and are waiting for a second deluge before they bathe. With the price of water being what it is they had been content to dilute the dirt in my honor; the dirt that streaked their relatively light skin… I chose [this girl], dirty but pretty with a certain style (due to [the] rhythmic relationship between the slant of her very slit eyes and her smiling mouth). This Meo is also very nice and approachable; very playful. Although she is quite young (17), she is not afraid of

24 Ibid.
25 Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 997-998.
anything. I painted her as she looked. And for once it’s too bad. For a good wash and a touch of makeup would have brought out her innate distinction.\(^{29}\)

The artist illustrated the necessity of bathing in natural settings, as seen in the gorgeous group portraits of *The Bathing Women of Muong-Lai* (Figure 20) and *The Women of the Post at their Toilet* (Figure 21). Muong-Lai was a town in the Tonkin region, and still exists today in what is now northwest Vietnam. Both group portraits feature many similarities. For instance, they both depict eight female figures in the nude, bathing, washing their very long black hair, and relaxing on the shore. It is possible that these paintings captured the same group of women twice, but the viewer is unsure on how to exactly identify each woman due to their features being somewhat generic. Jean Despujols was a classically trained painter, and the French Academy has a long history of the study of nudes as a means to render and celebrate the human form.

An example of a close-up studio portrait is Despujols’ *Khmer Peasant Woman* (Figure 22). The sitter is rendered topless due to the intimacy of the studio setting.\(^{30}\) In everyday life, Khmer women would cover themselves completely in a burgundy silk, Cambodian *sampot* of the type seen here. These *sampots* make frequent appearances in Despujols’s Indochina portraits.

“[The] *[s]ampot* is a Khmer term for what is sometimes called a 'hip-wrapper’ and refers to a rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around the hips and knotted in the front.”\(^{31}\) The Cambodian national garment was worn by both men and women.\(^{32}\) The *sampot* was once banned during the

\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) Artwork label from “The Odyssey of Jean Despujols” exhibition at the Meadows Museum of Art, Spring 2006.
\(^{31}\) Ibid.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.

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brutal Communist Khmer Rouge regime of the late 1970s, but it has once again come into fashion thereafter and is again widely worn by Khmer women today.\textsuperscript{33}

The clothing and textiles worn by the Indochinese native peoples occupy an important place in Despujols’ art. For example, the Thai “Valero” top worn by the women was clasped by silver hooks and was either black or white according to the name of her tribe, the White Thai and Black Thai.\textsuperscript{34} In the northern regions of Vietnam and Laos, near the Nam-Te River, the upland Thai tribes lived along upland valleys rather than near the mountaintops.\textsuperscript{35} Despujols painted \textit{Me-Hin, White Thai of Chin Neua} (Figure 23) as part of his portrait series. In this particular portrait, Me-Hin wears her traditional White Thai outfit made up of her distinguishable white Valero top, a long black skirt, and a rose, jade, and dark blue floral wrap along her waist. She wears rounded silver earrings and a thin silver bracelet on her right wrist; all of her jewelry matches her silver hooked buttons.

Despujols also illustrated an example of a Black Thai, as seen in \textit{Black Thai Girl Near Son-La} (Figure 24). Like in the previous portrait mentioned, the sitter wears her traditional tribal garb. As the artist explained:

Executed in six hours the portrait of a young Thai girl, a rare performance for me. The girl—age 15—is not perhaps the one I would have picked had I had a choice. She is the daughter of some rich peasant that the quan-dao wanted to do a favor for and represents a fairly common type of her race. She wears a long-sleeved bolero which compresses her bosom, and a \textit{sinh} bound with a sash of mauve silk. Between the sash and the bolero her torso is bare.\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
    \item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols}, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
    \item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
    \item \textsuperscript{36} Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 934.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Located close to the White and Black Thai tribes, also in northern Vietnam, is the Hoa Binh province. In this area Despujols encountered many groups of highlanders, including the Muong. In the portrait *Two Noble Girls from the Province of Hoa Binh* (Figure 25), the viewer encounters two Muong women in their traditional dress. The artist also took a photograph of the girls (Figure 26). The two of them wear long, dark sarong-like skirts, fastened at the bosom often with short colorful blouses. Their black hair is pulled back into a knot, and arranged in a simple headdress, made of a square of cloth tied to the back. Despujols wrote unflatteringly in his journal about the taller of the two figures:

As a mark of distinction and nobility, these Muongs wear over their sinh, white bolero and mauve belt, a kind of black robe open in front. One of them, the taller, presents some curious peculiarities: a highly bred face, a neck too thin for the volume of her head and the width of her shoulders, a masculine build, feet that must take a size 44!

Despujols’ exotic female nudes do not come from nowhere. The *Muong Girl in the Nude* (Figure 27) is a vertical canvas in which the female nude is framed by vegetation, from grass to banana trees. As Despujols explained, “I love the banana tree and its immense umbrella—like leaves which in all their colors and conditions never lose their decorative value.” The woman stands shy and awkwardly, hiding her face with her arms. Her stance strongly resembles that of the central figure in Paul Gauguin’s *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (Figure 28). Gauguin was another French artist rejecting civilization, who also spent a

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37 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
38 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1140.
39 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 360-362.
prolonged period of time in a tropical French colony, in this case Tahiti. Gauguin’s famous body of South Pacific works predates Despujols’ tour through Indochina by fifty-five years. Given that Gauguin’s reputation grew considerably by the early twentieth century, we can assume that Despujols was influenced by Gauguin’s vision of exotic beatitude. In fact, both Gauguin and Despujols had native long-term romantic companions during their times in the French colonies. The final Indochinese portraits discussed therefore will be of Jean Despujols’s cau, his native companions.

While Despujols travelled, he tended to be always accompanied by some sort of romantic companion. The English translator of Despujols’ journal in the LSUS archives used the expression “native wife” for cau. However, the term “wife” is certainly inaccurate here when understood in the context of Western social conventions and marriage traditions. Furthermore, there was certainly a considerable amount of inequality inherent in the power structures of these relationships.40 The artist seems to have carried on relationships with multiple women who also posed in his art, but, in particular, his three identified native partners, Xuan, Bouddhi, and Hieu. Despujols acknowledges these relationships with surprising frankness in his journal.

For instance, the artist described Xuan as a “true Nhaqué” or a true countryside or peasant woman.41 She posed for Despujols in the portrait entitled Xuan, Nhaqué of Bien-Xa (Figure 29), for which he prepared a preliminary sketch (Figure 30) featuring the same outfit, hair style, and overall look. Although the sketch does not have the vivid colors of the painting, Despujols elaborated some very recognizable details, such as the copper tone of her complexion or the darkening of her hair and eyes. In the painting, Xuan wears a burnt orange top with a high

40 Dana Kress, interview by Kelly M. Ward, April 1, 2021.
41 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1212 - 1213.
collar and a white hat which still exposes most of her black, pinned hair. The background consists of patches of grass, water, and sky. The setting was most likely the village of Bien-Xa, from which Xuan hailed. The sketch of Xuan is even more powerful due to the sitter’s deep-set, dark eyes. The viewer empathizes with Xuan’s hardships through her eyes and facial expression. Despujols wrote about Xuan and her people’s harsh lifestyle:

[Xuan] shows, in spite of her age—17—the fatigues, privations, and trials of her race which has been bent over the same fields for 2,000 years. I could have wished for a more coquettish and sophisticated companion, more at ease and happy in her life, something like the decorative Tonkinese girls who fill Inguimberti’s grand compositions; more like the playthings of frivolous love. I have accepted Xuan, burned by the sun, her hair piled in a crown, her loose-fitting, black cai-ao, her undeveloped breasts, small and hard like green fruit. … Xuan quickly made herself at home. She brings nothing but her immense willingness to satisfy me. … Everything about her is noble, noble and resigned; and reveals a discipline lived not by her but by her ancestors. … She carries the stigmata of unrewarding labor and fierce determination. Beauty has a history, and it is this history that has given her character. And the love that beauty inspires is affected by its character.42

Bouddhi was another of Despujols’s native companions. The young Laotian woman sat for the artist to paint her in both Bouddhi with the Yellow Scarf (Figure 31) and Bouddhi with the Blue Scarf (Figure 32). The scarves are the most distinguishable features of both paintings, for they symbolize Bouddhi’s tribe and culture. The yellow scarf, which conservatively wraps around Bouddhi’s torso, has shades of dandelion yellow as the base with royal blue, dark orange, red, and deep pink as the complementary colors. The patterns include a combination of thin and thick stripes, dots, and an argyle-like design. The blue scarf sports the exact same patterns and designs but with shades of deep blue and red, gold, teal, and purple. Bouddhi with the Blue Scarf

42 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1224-1225.
is a three-quarter length portrait and has a much busier background than that of the yellow-scarf portrait which is rendered in shades of gray. In the blue scarf portrait, the background is illustrated as an indoor space with all of the distinct elements to Bouddhi’s right, which include a wooden doorway and side table and, most notably, an aloe vera plant which sits in a dark blue and white ceramic pot adorned with cranes, egrets, or herons. While the artist painted Bouddhi with the Yellow Scarf, he elaborated on her striking charm:

How beautiful my Bouddhi is like this! Certainly not because of the decorative scarf whose lemon color brings out the waxed wood color of her skin, but because of her own beauty and her expression. Her high rounded forehead, her slanted eyes, and wild-beast cheekbones, her little nose with its delicate nostrils, her curved mouth, more provocative than sensual, her narrow, square, and decided chin… A real tigress!\(^4^3\)

Bouddhi and Hieu were two other native companions that Jean Despujols sustained at around the same time. The artist painted and sketched 15-year-old Hieu on multiple occasions—one in a slumber, another time in a wash portrait of her and her brother, and most importantly, in her solo bust portrait. Hieu, Congai of Phu-Vang (Figure 33) is the last portrait discussed and the quintessential portrait of the entire Despujols Indochina Collection. This alluring portrait known as the “Peasant Madonna” epitomizes the key element of the artist’s view on the people of Indochina’s purity. Jean Despujols wrote in length about Hieu:

Hieu in white against the white wall; which exalts her complexion of reddish almond and the black of her hair worn in maidenly fashion. On her own initiative Hieu tilts her head toward the left and slightly forward. Submission. But the lips—slightly apart and curving sweetly (there is nothing sweeter than curving lips) let pass a breath of air… So that one might think that Hieu is pouting, if the dimple in the corner of her mouth did not correct this expression. Thus, the sentiment of submission is not restrictive, imposed from the outside. It comes from within; it reveals willing surrender… Yes, everything is

\(^4^3\) Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 730.
captivating in the face of my little cau, and all the more captivating because the fineness of the ovate shape and the prettiness of her features serves only to emphasize the soul revealed in her eyes. Her eyes are the most beautiful and melancholy in the world, set wide apart, long, of a tawny and velvety black, and set back far enough under the soaring line of the arching eyebrows to banish any idea of frivolity from this still childish face. It’s because Hieu has come to know life before she has reached maturity of soul and body. It is from this that her eyes have deepened.44

Still-Lifes and Archeological Sites

While portraits were the principle focus of Despujols’ work while in Indochina, he also completed at least two still-lifes, Cambodian Fruit (Figure 34) and Hunting Trophy (Figure 35). In Cambodian Fruit, all of the fruits but the bananas are resting on an aesthetically neutral background of a wooden surface contrasting with a light gray wall. The green, unripe bananas hang over the fruits, and the pineapple on the surface is displayed upside down. The artist wrote colorfully of each fruit:

At the studio I composed a still-life of the fruits that appear at my meals. Here are the most familiar: The mango, which grows like chestnuts do on a tree resembling a chestnut tree but more bushy. A flattish fruit about the weight of a pear. It is cut in two lengthwise; and the pit having been removed with a knife, is eaten with a spoon. Very delicate orange flesh. The papaya. Looks like a little melon. More watery, less delicate than the mango. Grows on the trunk of the papaya tree just where the foliage begins to open out. The custard-apple. Grows on the branches of a shrub. Looks like a battered gorga and is covered with harmless prickles. It is sliced before eating. The flesh is white, milky, smooth. To me it is the most delicious of tropical fruits. The [durian]. Brown. Weighs about 2 kg. Well defended by nature. Grows high up. Covered with prickles. Stinks like shit and seems very unattractive. Very sought-after. For once rid of its nauseating armor, its creamy flesh is also a delight. The [jackfruit]. Big, 5 kg. Is sold for up to 60 cents at the Kampot market. The cinnamon apple. Divided like a grenade. Succulent. Also delicious when cooked. The [lychee]. Like a bunch of cherries with large pits. Acid. The [mangosteen]. Purple and pitted. White flesh like that of the custard apple. Pineapples, bananas, avocados, grapefruit—all very common and well known. But it’s another thing to pick them yourself at full ripeness. What joy! What flavor! What taste!45

44 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 1539-1540.
45 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 360-362.
The *Hunting Trophy* is composed of elements Despujols found in the dining room which include “elephant tusks and teeth, skull and skin of a tiger, a butchered Bantang ox, and a young swamp crocodile.”

All of the objects lie on a tiger skin against the same light gray wall as the *Cambodian Fruit*. There is also a small dark leather satchel, perhaps for binoculars, and a dark brown bolt action rifle behind all of the organic elements.

At last, we will look at the archeological sites Jean Despujols visited and illustrated while in Indochina. The artist visited historical temples like Preah-Khan in Cambodia (Figure 36), the Mausoleum of Tu-Duc in Vietnam (Figure 37), Vat Xien Thong in Laos (Figure 38 and Figure 39), and most importantly, Angkor Wat. Although all of these places are significant sites in southeast Asia with their own complex histories, this thesis will only study the archeological site of Angkor Wat, and the activities in which Jean Despujols engaged while there.

Angkor Wat is a massive religious structure originally built by the Khmer peoples and is located in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where it serves as a Buddhist temple today. Still under the influence of his first impressions, Despujols wrote “It leaves me breathless. For nothing that has been said about it equals my estimation. Angkor Wat, first wonder of the world.”

The artist then goes on to first thank Suryavarman II, who he calls “the great Vishnuistic king who built it,” and then he thanks the “thousands of hands, workers, artisans, and artists who [likely] died making it.”

It was built in 1113 and it was later sacked in the twelfth century by the Chams, then by the Siamese in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and finally abandoned in 1432.

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46 Ibid.
47 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 8.
48 Ibid.
49 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
The lush, concealing jungle, wars, and disuse have not dimmed its glory; through an almost 1,000-year cycle of creation, destruction, decay, and rebirth, the majestic structure guarded by fierce lions at its entrance still stands proudly. Jean Despujols wrote in elaborate detail about the intricate architectural design of the temple, such as the “play of horizontal and vertical lines” and “wavy roofs.” He studied these designs through many of his preliminary sketches (Figure 40).

Despujols illustrated Angkor Wat on multiple occasions, including Angkor-Wat at the Rising Sun (Figure 41) and The Angkor Wat Pirogue (Figure 42). In Angkor-Wat at the Rising Sun, the artist does a study of the religious temple at early morning hours before the full sun clearly defines the elaborate, pierced stonework of the temple facade against the sky. The foreground of the painting is covered in light brown and green vegetation, while the iconic, undulating columns of the temple loom in the background. About ten palm trees are in front of the temple by the moat. Depicted in The Angkor Wat Pirogue is another angle of the temple, more like the ones found in Despujols’s preliminary sketches. In the foreground is a body of water and a pirogue, or a long canoe, with one dark-skinned figure climbing on it. Two other unidentifiable native figures stand and lean over in the water. The figures seem to be children playing. The most distinct feature of the painting, other than the boat and temple, are the abundance of white lotus flowers which spread out across the water.

Jean Despujols was captivated by the hypnotically beautiful environment at Angkor Wat. The Khmer peoples were still quite prevalent in the Angkor region and some of their customs

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50 Ibid.
51 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 8.
included the ancient dances that would take place at the temple’s grounds. *The Khmer Dancers at Angkor Wat* (Figure 43) is a painting by Despujols that depicted an eye-catching spectacle which was the spiritual and elegant dances by the Royal Cambodian Ballet.53 The composition illustrates a plethora of vibrant colors and figures, which include the dancers and their audience. The temple in the background has a fiery glow. The dancers stand on a royal blue and red carpet, which is shared by some of the members of the crowd. The torchbearers at the sides add to the energy of the scene. A nude child stands in the foreground looking at the dancers with his back turned to the viewer. The glittering, handmade costumes of the female dancers include a fitted top and flowy skirt and cape with gold accessories, such as the pointed headpiece and pointed jewelry on the fingertips. An example of the costume worn was shown in the 1984 film *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols* (Figure 44).

The performance of the Khmer dancers intrigued Despujols. During these dances, he claimed to be as “de-Europeanized as possible” and that he had “eyes and ears only for that which is Khmer.”54 The dancers portrayed stories through stylized elaborate movements which were expressions of joy, sorrow, or other strong emotions generally taken from ancient Hindu and Thai legends.55 “Each partial attitude is a word, a word expressing an idea by means of beauty, the words together form sentences and the sentences form poems.”56

Providing one of the last links of old Cambodia with the present-day country, the dances of Angkor have changed little over the intervening years. Like the ancient dances preserved

53 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
54 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 198-203.
55 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
56 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, 198-203.
tradition, Jean Despujols preserved and immortalized an ancient world that was French Indochina. This nearly two-year period was one of the most prolific, creative, and formative experiences of Despujols’s career. The artist (Figure 45, Figure 46, and Figure 47) fell deeply and sincerely in love with the pure and noble peoples and land of Indochina, which he thought to be superior to the Western civilization from which he originated. He became an anti-colonialist in his own right after developing a deep respect and admiration for the native peoples of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Despujols took great pride in his Indochina Collection, and even provided sketched instructions how his artworks would have to be displayed in museum galleries (Figure 48). When the artist was in his early 70s, he casually mentioned to his daughter, Anne, the desire to move to the south Pacific and perhaps reminisce of his days in southeast Asia, but he felt as if he was too old. Despite the many self-contradictory aspects of his own behavior, Jean Despujols wrote in his journal, “If Indochina has a soul, I am wedded to that soul.”

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57 *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, Executively Produced by Judy O’Neal Williams and Directed by Phillip Thomas (1984; Shreveport, LA), mp4.
59 Jean Despujols, private journal from French Indochina, volume unknown, page unknown.
Illustrations

Figure 1. Jean Despujols’s trunk from Indochina including his eight-volume journal, from *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, c. 1984. Computer screenshot from mp4 film. Meadows Museum of Art.

Illustrations

Figure 3. Writing and geometrical and figure sketches in Jean Despujols’s Indochina journal, from *Indochina Revisited: A Portrait by Jean Despujols*, c. 1984. Computer screenshot from mp4 film. Meadows Museum of Art.

Figure 5. Map of Jean Despujols’s route through Indochina, c.1936 - 1938. Map. Meadows Museum of Art.
Illustrations


Illustrations


Illustrations


Illustrations

Figure 16. Jean Despujols, *King of Laos*. c. 1936 - 1938. Oil on canvas.
Meadows Museum of Art.
Illustrations


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Illustrations


Figure 28. Paul Gauguin, Detail from *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* c. 1897 - 1898. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Illustrations

Figure 29. Jean Despujols, Xuan, Nhaqué of Bien-Xa. c. 1936 - 1938. Oil on canvas. Meadows Museum of Art.

Figure 30. Jean Despujols, Xuan. c. 1938. Sketch. Meadows Museum of Art.
Illustrations


Figure 32. Jean Despujols, *Bouddhi with the Blue Scarf*. c. 1936 - 1938. Oil on canvas. Meadows Museum of Art.
Illustrations

Illustrations

Figure 34. Jean Despujols, *Cambodian Fruit*. c. 1936 - 1938. Oil on canvas. Meadows Museum of Art.

Illustrations


Illustrations


Illustrations

Figure 41. Jean Despujols, *Angkor Wat at the Rising Sun*. c. 1937. Oil on canvas. Meadows Museum of Art.

Illustrations


Illustrations

Illustrations


Figure 47. The Artist Painting at Vat-Aram, Cambodia. c. November 17, 1937. Photograph. Private Collection.
Chapter 5. The Elegant Despujols Shreveport Portraits

During his time in Shreveport from late 1939 until his death in 1965, Jean Despujols made a living as a dedicated and successful portrait painter. Affluent Shreveporters, usually those who were prominent members of the booming oil and gas industry, commissioned portraits of adults and children in their family. Despujols painted these portraits in his studio in Shreveport, located in the backyard of his home on 503 Broadmoor Boulevard. Subjects would have sittings with the painter on multiple occasions, sometimes up to nearly twenty hours-long sittings, until the painting was deemed finished by the artist. It is unknown exactly how many Shreveport portraits Despujols painted since they are all in private collections. The portraits range in size, but most of the ones mentioned here are large-scale at around three feet in height, or even larger. Their monumental size allows for the viewer to be captivated by the subject, and to focus on details throughout each portrait. His academic training and Neoclassical style is evident in each portrait mentioned, and there will be nine Shreveport portraits discussed in this chapter.

The Portrait of Camille Despot (Figure 1) is one of two portraits mentioned in this section which features a pet dog. Camille Conrad Despot was a lifelong Shreveport resident: he was born in the northwest Louisiana city on November 2, 1929, and died there on September 3, 2018.1 His parents immigrated from Trpanj, Croatia, just ten years before he was born.2 He attended St. John’s High School, formerly known as Jesuit High School of Shreveport and now

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2 Ibid.
Loyola College Preparatory School. Despot graduated with undergraduate and graduate degrees in Geology from the University of Oklahoma.

Camille was the youngest of three brothers, George and Gregory Despot. He first started out his career as an independent geologist and later went into the oil and gas business with his brothers, starting Despot Exploration as well as other various entities. In 1965, Camille discovered the Manchac Field in south Louisiana near Baton Rouge, a major discovery that is still producing as of 2018. Camille’s brother George was a chairman for the Louisiana Republican Party for a number of years and helped find the organization. Their father, also named George, opened a restaurant in downtown Shreveport with his brother Mike named The Columbia. This restaurant, which was open 24 hours a day, became a place where prominent businessmen and those in the oil and gas industry would frequent. Although Camille’s brother was heavily involved in the Louisiana Republican Party, Camille was fairly apolitical. Camille married Raynelle S. Despot in 1954 and together they raised six children on Cross Lake with “boats, horses, donkeys, chickens, turkeys, snakes, and other wildlife.” Camille’s daughter and five sons now live in four Southern states and remember him as a “very hard-working man, that did not back down, ever, for anyone or anything.”

Despujols’s portrait depicts Camille Despot as a young boy, around age ten, sitting with his legs crossed on a perfectly cut tree stump. Camille is wearing a white collared short-sleeved

3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Camille Despot Obituary.
8 Tom Arceneaux interview, March 22, 2021.
9 Ibid.
10 Camille Despot Obituary.
11 Ibid.
shirt, chocolate rolled up pants, and is painted barefoot. On the ground is a wooden fishing pole and an opened aluminum can, likely where worms or other bait for fish were held. Perhaps the bare feet is Despujols implying Camille’s child-like “rebellion” and love for experiencing the outdoors in his most vulnerable form. On the other hand, it was more common at this time to go fishing barefoot. Camille was very close with his dog which was a chihuahua mix, and wanted the dog included in his portrait. The dog’s name is unknown. The background of the portrait is muted tones of browns, blacks, dark greens, and yellows. The painting truly embraces Camille’s child-like innocence. His eyes are particularly round and somewhat enlarged. In Camille's portrait and the other Shreveport portraits mentioned, the artist’s academic training is evident especially in the intricate folds of the drapery and the meticulously executed hands and facial features.

Completed around 20 years after Camille Despot’s portrait, *The Portrait of Elizabeth “Libby” Lagerson* (Figure 2) was one Jean Despujols considered “eternal innocence and femininity.” The oil painting was done when Libby was seven-years-old in 1960, just five years before the artist passed. Her mother and father were friends of Anne Despujols, the artist’s youngest daughter. Libby stated that Despujols, whom she referred to as “Monsieur,” was concerned that the child would not be able to sit still for hour long sessions, but the very shy seven-year-old nodded affirmative that she could do it. During the sittings in Despujols’s backyard studio, Libby’s mother would read her English translations of French fairytales to try and keep the young girl occupied. Libby remembers the studio smelling strongly of oil paint and

cigarette smoke, since the artist often smoked as he painted. She also remembers the artist being a “rather foreboding character to a seven-year-old,” and that he had a strong accent.  

The painting of young Libby Lagerson took around six weeks of sittings. Her mother insisted that Libby sit on the ground without her legs showing because “she had seen other portraits that [Despujols] had done and thought little girls’ legs were not very attractive.” In the painting, the seven-year-old is wearing a white dress with light pink frills and ribbons with puffed sleeves. Libby’s mother gave Despujols the option of three dresses for Libby to wear: a white, pale yellow, and pale blue dress. “Monsieur” picked the white because he felt the other two dresses made Libby’s skin look “dirty.” It should be noted that this is the only Shreveport portrait in this section where the subject’s eyes or face are not directly toward the viewer. Her hair is pinned to the left side and perfectly parted, after Libby’s grandmother complained about the original crooked part Despujols painted showing Libby’s mother’s “carelessness.” The artist fixed it but Libby always wished the part remained crooked as it was intended to be, for her hair was never perfectly parted. The cream-colored fan held by the young girl was one that was purchased by Libby's grandmother on a foreign trip. Libby Lagerson Latham is currently 67-years-old and retired. She lives in Oregon with her husband after a successful career working as a certified public accountant, financial analyst, and a loving stay-at-home mother.

Another painting of a young girl in Shreveport is that of Sybil Tyrrell Patten, who was just four-years-old in the first of two portraits she had done by Jean Despujols. Sybil Tyrrell was born on April 8, 1937 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her mother was from Shreveport, and

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
Sybil attended C.E. Byrd High School. While there, she wrote a paper on Despujols for class. She graduated in 1954. Coincidentally enough, Jack Despujols, the artist’s only son, was a classmate of hers at Byrd. Sybil remembers Jack as not one for superfluous talk and somewhat reclusive, similar to how his father was during his time in Shreveport. After high school, Sybil attended Hollins University for two years, a private all-girls college, and spent the remaining two years at Tulane University where she graduated with a degree in psychology. Sybil has always been interested in the arts: she took many art history courses throughout her time at university and also has spent time collecting art throughout her life.\textsuperscript{18}

Sybil Tyrrell married an Englishman who she had two sons with.\textsuperscript{19} The boys attended a French-American school in San Francisco, where she lived for about 21 years. While in the Bay Area, Sybil did academic research and also took education courses at the University of California. When Sybil and her first husband from England would travel back to Shreveport to visit family and friends, the couple would call Despujols for a visit and speak with him in French since her husband was fluent in the language. After about 20 years of marriage, Sybil divorced and moved back to Shreveport. She soon reconnected with a friend named Fred Patten who she later married. Reverend John Frederick Patten, a retired businessman and Episcopal minister, and Sybil Tyrrell Patten were happily married for 33 years before he passed in the fall of 2013.\textsuperscript{20}

In the \textit{Portrait of Sybil Tyrrell, age 4} (Figure 3), the young girl wears a light blue dress over a white collared blouse with puffed sleeves and frilled embellishments. She has a bow on her right side of her hair that matches the rest of her outfit. The four-year-old is holding a book in her right hand and her fingers are grasping a page, as if it is about to be turned to the next.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Patten does not remember what book was in her lap, but she does recall Despujols saying that she was “the worst little girl he ever painted.”

Sybil’s big, beaming brown eyes capture the attention of the viewer.

Twelve years later, Sybil sat for the artist to paint her once more. The Portrait of Sybil Tyrrell, age 16 (Figure 4) is nearly two or three times the size of the first portrait and is hung in the same private residence where viewers can see them together. As an upperclassman at Byrd High, Sybil took French courses and would practice speaking with Despujols during sittings, where he would also treat her to glasses of red wine. In the portrait, she wears a pink off-the-shoulder dress with floral elements along the shoulders and bosom as well as a matching ring on her right hand ring finger. The artist was intentional with the background of this painting, unlike any of the other portraits mentioned in this section. The background has trees and hills which are of a typical Virginian landscape, which Despujols sourced from a National Geographic magazine to find out what Virginia looked like since he had never been there. Sybil knew at this time that she wanted to attend Hollins which is located in Roanoke, Virginia. Mrs. Sybil Tyrrell Patten is still alive and well at 83-years-old and resides in Shreveport. She is deeply involved in the community and is quite the socialite. She often hosts piano concerts and other parties in her beautiful home filled with art that she has collected over the years by local, national, and international artists.

The oil paintings of the Jacobs and O’Brien families will conclude the analysis of the Shreveport Portraits. The Jacobs family were once the largest land owners in Shreveport, and known to be a family of bankers. The grandfather of Walter B. Jacobs, Jr., whose Despujols

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
portrait will be discussed, Edward Jacobs, started E&B Jacobs Banking House with his brother, Benjamin. The banking company eventually changed names to the Walter B. Jacobs Banking House, then First National Bank, finally to now be a merger with the well-known national JPMorgan Chase Bank. The Jacobs family at one point was involved in the cotton industry, owned a transportation company, and even an opera house. The O’Brien family was heavily involved in Louisiana’s booming oil and gas industry. The Jacobs and O’Brien families were undoubtedly prominent in the American South and this section will focus on five portraits in their family painted by Jean Despujols.

Walter Byron Jacobs, Jr. was born in Shreveport on January 30, 1920 and died in the same city in the same month in 1974 at the young age of 53. He, like Despujols, died from a heart attack. He started his career with the First National Bank in 1937, “continuing a family banking tradition spanning 95 years.” Jacobs was elected chief executive officer of the bank ten years before his death and succeeded his father in that position. Impressively enough, he was elected president of the Northwest Clearing House Association and also director, vice president, and president of the Louisiana Bankers Association. The oldest of three, Walter B. Jacobs, Jr. had a younger brother named Nielson Scott Jacobs and sister named Mary Nielson.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Jacobs. Before his time serving in the U.S. Army, Jacobs went to Culver Military Academy and then to the University of Pennsylvania.33

The Portrait of Walter Byron Jacobs, Jr. (Figure 5) was painted by Jean Despujols around 1940 just before Jacobs went off to serve America in the second World War. One of his four daughters, Sally Jacobs Walker, stated that it was common to have a portrait done of a soldier before he went off to war, for obvious reasons.34 The soldier served four years in the Army, serving in the North African Campaign with the Allied Forces and later on liaison duty with the French forces.35 He spent more than half of his duty overseas and was one of the youngest captains ever.36 In the bust portrait, Jacobs is wearing his army uniform and has a very serious facial expression. When he returned to the States from duty, his father wanted him to stay home and help the family business get back on their feet after the war.37 He eventually graduated from Centenary College of Louisiana, where Despujols’ Indochina Collection would later be housed, and remained a lifelong resident of Shreveport working at the First National Bank.

Walter Byron Jacobs, Jr.’s first cousin was Martha Elizabeth “Tudder” Jacobs O’Brien.38 Tudder was born on March 23, 1929 to Ed Jacobs and Grace Etchison and was the youngest of three girls.39 Tudder got her nickname from her older sisters trying to say “sister” when they were very young. She was 16 when Jean Despujols painted her portrait (Figure 6). The portrait

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
is truly a hallmark example of Despujols’s talent with painting textiles: the excellent folds in the white ballgown dress and the shimmer of the satin (or silk) from the hat’s blue ribbon Tudder holds in her right hand are impeccable. One of her four daughters mentioned that she was “certainly curvaceous.” It is hardly noticeable in the virtual copy of the painting, but in person the white dress is seemingly transparent in certain areas, and Mrs. Grace Etchison Jacobs did not like that and made it known to Despujols. The artist emphasized, “I paint what I see.” Shades of blue are scattered throughout the painting in the ribbon previously mentioned, in the muted background, and most importantly in the delicate locket necklace which Tudder plays with in her left hand. She married Raymond John O’Brien, Jr. and together they had five children, one son and four daughters. She was known for being a wonderful homemaker and stay-at-home mother to her children.

Tudder had two older sisters, one of them also sat for Despujols while the other did not. The one who was fortunate enough to receive a portrait was the oldest sister who was named Florence Ann Jacobs (Figure 7). Florence was born on May 31, 1923 and died at the young age of 48 on October 16, 1971. Florence was a quiet woman and read incessantly, which is why Despujols included an unidentifiable olive colored book in her portrait. She started reading at a very young age and never stopped; it was said that the nanny her and her sisters had thought that Florence was the easiest child to take care of since she would always keep to herself and read all the time. She had large eyes from the Jacobs side and the artist illustrated her beaming pupils in the portrait. Florence has her nails painted red in the painting to match the flattering unlined red

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
velvet dress she wears. Florence married her first husband, Earl Younker, at the age of 19 and the couple had four children during the 1940s. She remarried twice after her first marriage ended but did not have any more children.

Together with her husband Earl, Florence owned a small farm and a goat dairy. She loved horses and animals and her daughter Gay remembers her always wearing blue jeans. At one point in her life while she was raising her young children, she was very influenced by conservationist Rachel Carson’s famous book *Silent Spring*, which talks about the adverse environmental effects of harmful pesticides. This led Florence to have her own bees and goats (she believed cows had too much fat) on their family farm. Florence also did not allow her children to consume much salt or sugar at this time. Gay claims that her mother was a literary person, an interesting woman who “went her own way.”

Florence’s brother-in-law and Tudder’s husband, Raymond John O’Brien, Jr., also had a portrait done by Jean Despujols (Figure 8). Like Tudder and Florence’s cousin, Walter B. Jacobs, Jr., it is a military bust portrait just before serving in World War II. O’Brien was born in Shreveport on October 27, 1925. He was a graduate of The Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and he also attended Georgetown University in Washington D.C. He was in the Marine Corps from 1943 until the end of the second World War and saw service on Guam and in China. After school and his time in the Marines, Raymond moved back to his hometown of Shreveport and went into the oil and gas business with his father. He was an independent oil

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45 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
operator in Jones-O’Brien, Inc., and the Oakland Corporation.\textsuperscript{50} O’Brien was also a member of the Independent Petroleum Association of America, the Shreveport Club, and the Shreveport Country Club.

In his Despujols portrait, Raymond John O’Brien, Jr., is depicted wearing a marine uniform. His mother stated that she would sign the papers for him to enlist a little early if he agreed to pose for the portrait.\textsuperscript{51} He was only 18 in the portrait which was done in 1943. His youth is prevalent in the way Despujols painted his pink-undertoned skin. The most distinct and attractive feature of the oil on canvas is Raymond’s almost Hellenistic curls.

Raymond O’Brien, Jr., was one of three— he had two younger sisters. His youngest sister, Patsy, also had a portrait done by Jean Despujols just a year before he did in 1942. Patricia “Patsy” Anne O’Brien was born and raised in Shreveport on August 2, 1933.\textsuperscript{52} She went to St. Vincent’s Academy for grade school, Byrd High School for 8th and 9th grades, and then to a private covenant school in St. Louis, Missouri, for high school.

In her Despujols portrait (Figure 9), Patsy was nine-years-old and is depicted as the epitome of innocence and child-like grace. Patsy recalled the artist's wife, Millicent, reading her French fairytales, likely the same fairytales Libby Lagerson listened to, so that Patsy would stay interested and most importantly, awake. She described Millicent as a “lovely person.” Patsy wears a burgundy velvet dress with six buttons and white frilled detailing on the edges as well as black loafers with white socks to match the frilled detailing of the dress. Her beautiful brown hair is parted in the middle and perfectly curled. Like in the Portrait of Camille Despot,

\textsuperscript{50} Raymond John O’Brien, Jr. obituary, February 6, 1972.
Despujols included a pet dog. The dog which is lying down behind Patsy’s legs was a wire-haired terrier named Duchess.53

The Shreveport Portraits painted by Jean Despujols truly form an impressive collection in their own right. These Academic paintings are the French painter’s last coherent body of work, clearly different from his previous styles throughout his life. The portraits are somewhat formulaic. There is a remarkable consistency within the portraits in terms of style, props, dress, and the social milieu of the sitters. The dress is revealing: the skirts of the women and girls are evocative of a neo-Rococo style; for the men, there is an emphasis on military uniforms, which is also typical for the eighteenth century. Overall, there is an aristocratic demeanor to the sitters, which is consistent with them being members of a small-town upper class. These portraits of important individuals and the prominent families they hailed from add more depth to Jean Despujols’s end of an incredibly prolific career in fine art.

Illustrations

Figure 1. Jean Despujols, *Portrait of Camille Conrad Despot*, c. ~1940. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

Illustrations

Figure 3. Jean Despujols, *Portrait of Sybil Tyrrell, age 4*, c. 1941. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

Figure 4. Jean Despujols, *Portrait of Sybil Tyrrell, age 16*, c. 1953. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Illustrations

Figure 5. Jean Despujols, *Portrait of Walter Byron Jacobs, Jr.*, c. ~1940. Oil on canvas. Private collection.


Figure 8. Jean Despujols, *Portrait of Raymond John O’Brien, Jr.*, c. 1943. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Illustrations

Figure 9. Jean Despujols, Portrait of Patricia “Patsy” John O’Brien, Jr., c. 1943. Oil on canvas. Private collection.
Conclusion

On May 30, 1947, Jean Despujols wrote a letter to Albert Einstein in which he laid out the major ideas of his philosophies and world view. In this letter (Figure 1), Despujols wrote directly to Einstein after the physicist wrote a mass letter in which he denounced the use of his theories in relation to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despujols wrote in a bizarre French prose and we see in this letter how much of a mystic the artist really was. Although the prose is obscure, the information within this letter is fully based on logic and meaning and is in no way nonsensical. The artist laid out his convictions and stressed the blame of the horrific acts of the dropping of the atomic bombs on the west’s “Christian leaders of a Christian people.”¹ He expressed his distance, if not distance than pure rejection, of the Christian superiority. He disagreed with Einstein’s hope for a “one world view,” and argued that western civilization is defined by “destructive economic and cultural expansionism” at the expense of another civilization. Jean Despujols was obviously sick and tired of Western culture almost to a point where he despises it. He was opposed to capitalism, colonialism, authoritarianism, and considered himself an anti-racist.

The artist seemingly despised Christianity (and most organized religions) as well as politicians, which he emphasized in many of his Taboo works which were not discussed in detail in this thesis. The Taboo Collection is, in fact, a “series of painted illustrations which recount a chilling story of colonial abuse; while each painting stands alone, together they form a powerful commentary on the colonial system.” The paintings include many different important subjects,

¹ Letter by Jean Despujols to Dr. Albert Einstein and the emergency committee of atomic scientists, May 30, 1947, special collections at archives research center at Oregon State University, 2.5.10.
including clergyman. While in Shreveport, the artist did happen to invite members of the clergy to his home on 503 Broadmoor to discuss the world’s problems. Though he had these well-maintained relationships, he also “abhored the use of religion to rationalize injustice and wrongdoing in the world.”

It is interesting to consider Despujols’ artworks from the French Indochina colonies themselves. If one did not know Despujols’ views and beliefs on his time there, one would think that these artworks were created out of the service of colonialism, but that was not the artist’s intention. We also see the same with Paul Gauguin, among other anti-colonialist artists. Though Despujols considered himself an anti-colonialist, of course he still took advantage of the colonial system in order to produce his art from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. He upheld the spirituality of the far East. Aesthetically what drove him was an interest in the craftsmanship of academic training and art.

Jean Despujols was a very contradictory person who was difficult to classify. His life—including his political beliefs, all that he stood for, and who he was—was quite the evolution. He was self-contradictory in the sense that he went back and forth on radical left- and right-wing positions throughout his life. He flirted with communism and socialism at one point. Perhaps in the philosophy book Despujols wrote under the alias “Janjol,” L’Epitinikaire, he describes more of his political theories and philosophies. Unfortunately, this book, which heavily focuses on the idea of existentialism, was not accessible.

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3 Ibid.
From his achievements early on in life, his intellectual ability, his prolific time in Indochina, and during his later years in America, it is obvious that Despujols was an underrated artist that did not easily fit into the mainstream narrative of twentieth century modern art. The academically trained, Neoclassical, and Neo-Mannerist artist was disillusioned with the “Picassos” in the world and thought it was a fad type of art. Jean Despujols was an important artist who was unjustly forgotten.

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Illustrations

Figure 1. Letter by Jean Despujols to Dr. Albert Einstein and the emergency committee of atomic scientists, May 30, 1947, special collections at archives research center at Oregon State University, 2.5.10.
Appendix. Despujols Journal – “Travels of a Rebel”

In this appendix are the excerpts from the original Despujols Journal – “Travels of a Rebel.” This is a translated copy of an unpublished personal and private journal that Jean Despujols wrote while in French Indochina, which is part of multiple volumes. What is included in this appendix can be found at the Northwest Louisiana Archives at the Noel Memorial Library on the campus of Louisiana State University in Shreveport.
Despujols decided to leave Europe. His friend Fougueray suggested that he compete for the "prix de l'Indochine." "You will win it on your first try." "This prize, amounting to 60,000 F (at the time), did not come from France. It was created and paid for by the Indochinese."

(Preparrations for the voyage)

"My purchases are kept to a minimum. Here is how I organize my baggage.

A steamer trunk containing my city clothes; a set of colors, brushes, flasks, paper, canvas, etc.; and in case of need, a portfolio, a landscape artist's sunshade, and an outdoor easel. This trunk is to be shipped separately, to remain in storage in various easy-to-reach towns.

A footlocker containing my paintbox, my watercolors and tempera colors, my flasks, pencils, charcoal, erasers and inks, my sketchbooks, a folding stool, collapsible stretchers, and a medicine kit."

A knapsack containing my toilet kit, two pairs of shorts, two short-sleeved shirts, a raincoat, rope sandals, socks, my pistol, my hunting knife, my camera (and film), my two Madrolle guides (a gift from my father), a blanket, and a mosquito net.

The footlocker and the knapsack are to accompany me everywhere.

I'm so absorbed by the preparations for the journey that I no longer read the newspapers. But all that is Asia is mine. The Asia that I had seen only through the Near East, illustrated magazines, and the Exposition of 1930; the Asia whose pressure on the West (the Yellow Peril) had appeared to me largely exaggerated; the Asia whose stagnant or dead civilization was summed up by the "chinoiseries" of the eighteenth century; this Asia now presented itself as a profound reality... And all the while the word "Asiatic" had a pejorative sound to my ears. Whoever says "Asiatic" says Armenian, Afghan, Tibetan, Mongol; that is, invading, cheating, cruel, dirty, and superstitious (prayer wheels). And as for beauty, having been nourished by the Greek canon!... Certainly, there is India and its rajaha. But it's no longer Asia. India is Aryan. And it's Alexander the Great. Agreed. But Asia is not Europe. And isn't that the essential thing to me?"

(Arrival in Indochina)

"20, 21 December .... (1937)

"The afternoon of the 21st we leave behind to the east the Poulo-Condore Islands,* the oldest French territory (1787) in the Far East. And at 8 p.m. we anchor at the foot of Cape St. Jacques,* to await the pilot. The mouth of the Dong-nai is 25 miles to the west.

When the Chenonceaux enters the river, the passengers gather on deck, breathing deeply the odors of the vegetation of the Cochinchinese night. The moon in its last quarter, belly in the air, has already passed the meridian. And looking fore or aft, to port or starboard—along the direction of the bend in the river—she shines on an immobile sheet of water. One can divine nothing about the banks, except that they are low. Like the moon, the light of the capitol shines out in all directions. But as it grows, this light loses its brilliancy, as lights are extinguished due to the lateness of the hour.

The ship moors at midnight.

(Despujols reembarks on the 22nd of December for Haiphong on the Claude Chappe. The ship is forced to seek shelter from a typhoon near Qui Nhon (about one quarter of the way up the coast to Haiphong). Despujols disembarks, and after a night in a hotel, takes the train for Haiphong.)

* Con Son Islands - V.N.G.
** Vung Tau - V.N.G.
"23 December...Finally, the journey continues. And unless I say nothing at all about it, I must take up the disjointed and monotonous tale following its chronology. Less description, however, of what I can render by brush or pencil. Writing will be only a complement or a diversion. I don't think I need to note what I am seeing for the first time when I'm sure of seeing it better the second time."

"The next day (noon), the endless, green carpet of the Tonkinese ricefields, bristling with blue teeth under a pink sky. The islets of straw planted with palms, surrounded with bamboo. On the dikes or in the yellow water, water buffaloes with huge flat horns. And the Mandarin road, and its strings of male and female porters trotting in single file. And Hanoi."

"And I record my first two sketches (op. 4 & 5) executed with Bamère at the Hotel Morin: the congai (girls) Ti-heu and Ti-hai. They're not virgins... They're not streetwalkers. They are two ravishing hetairae to whom one would give the good Lord without confession."

"Painted in watercolor the Porte of the Citadel (op. 6) and the tower called Confucius (op. 7); and in oils the canal of Phucum (op. 8) and the pavilion of Tu-duc (op. 9)."

"Tu-duc, emperor of Annam, died in 1883. But his youngest concubine (70 years old now) is still there watching over (the grave)? What artists, what poets were these emperors of old Annam! Served during life by 500 beauties, in death they inhabit the place of their dreams; a dwelling place so perfect, so conformed to their refined desires, that its enclosure is less a privation than a defense, and their soul takes pleasure there for eternity."

The Fingapani trees have scattered their large, pointed leaves on the terrace with its ramps of polished tiles. The sky is clouding over, warning of future showers. A crow perches on the wing of a rooftop dragon. The countryside is autumnal. It speaks of dead things with the most penetrating sweetness. Why leave?..."

10-17 January..... (Arrival at) Dalat. Before us, directly toward the north, the two peaks of Lang Bian (2200 and 2400 meters of altitude. On this side of the mountain, vast ochre-colored undulations (dry thanh) from the hollow of which emerge the old pines with their white trunks that have have been spared from brushfires.

Three watercolors (op. 10, 11, and 12).

10 January.....Saigon, a beautiful French city. But I care little about it for now. A watercolor: the Chinese canal (op. 13).

20 January.... (journey by rail from Saigon to Phnom Penh) And the plain begins anew, limitless, covered with grassy marshes where water buffalo graze; rice paddies, dried up, lined with dikes on which grow tufts of palm trees.

The Mekong. An immense yellow river—one travels along it at the base of a levee and one crosses it on a ferry, pulled by a towboat. On both banks there are busy shelters for ferry passengers. Among those who come on board are walnut-colored women, less friendly, dressed in black smocks with red cotton headdresses. They are Muslim Chams."

"21 January..... Excursion to the Malay village. Crossing by boat of the Tonlé Sap (600 m.) and on foot (1 km) of the tongue of land that separates the Mekong from its overflow channel. Happened on a rustic pagoda and its banyan. Calm and isolation. Crouched on their boards, Buddhist priests spell out the sacred name of the master... The Malay huts are spread along the riverbank. To the south, the old Norodon lighthouse emerging from the tall trees. The heat is so intense that I take refuge within its walls; from where I paint (op. 14) a forest scene of banana and papaya trees."
Chapter V. The Park of Angkor.
23 January - 1 February

The huge bungalow has one story with three courtyards and two recessed wings. It faces the Great Portico of Angkor Wat (Angkor the Temple) from which it is separated by the moat and an esplanade which has been cleared of undergrowth and which has kept its most beautiful trees (drawing op. 15).

It goes without saying that our first movement was toward the temple; just as the first movement of a Christian entering a church is to go and kneel before the altar. But as our stay in the Park of Angkor promises to last six or eight weeks—I postpone description of its principal object.

For Barrière, a landscape painter, nothing could surpass the enchantment of the river (stung) of Siem Reap. We are also obligated to go there to make two urgent visits, one to the Resident Nicolas, and one to the curator Craize.

But just let me talk about the river. We reach it at Siem Reap, to which we return by ricksha-tricycle. It is in fact an ideal, lovely little river whose banks seem to preen themselves. It winds gently, half-dressed by the tropical vegetation. Over its moving mirror lean bamboos of bamboo with their blurred silhouettes, coconut palms with their long pink trunks striped horizontally, kapok trees, mango trees, mangrove trees. At their feet, at the level of the water, the light-colored reeds grow in tangles, the dark thorn bushes spread out fanlike, and the fers de lance, broad as shields, line up for the parade or arrange themselves in dome shapes of a bright Veronese green. Also clinging to the banks are rippling carpets of lilies, beds of mauve water hyacinths. In the middle of this invading but disciplined greenery the slowly moving water finds a passage over bronze-colored sand. At their feet, at the level of the water, the light-colored reeds grow in tangles, the dark thorn bushes spread out fanlike, and the fers de lance, broad as shields, line up for the parade or arrange themselves in dome shapes of a bright Veronese green. Also clinging to the banks are rippling carpets of lilies, beds of mauve water hyacinths. In the middle of this invading but disciplined greenery the slowly moving water finds a passage over bronze-colored sand. An' dok, the flat turtle, may be seen zig-zagging from one hiding place to another, like a disc of bronze.

The shady trail that we are following parallels the river and passes, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, Khmer huts concealed in their groves of areca palms, banana trees, kapok trees, orange trees, and climbing betel. But while the banana tree, a leguminous plant, spreads its draperies of stained-glass green at the height of tall grass, the areca palm thrusts up into the sky, at the end of a slim trunk, white and perfectly perpendicular, a little dark tuft. As for the kapok tree, leafless—probably because of the season—it's a beautiful, decorative tree of jade green, spreading out its horizontal arms like a telegraph pole. Under the verandas of the straw huts—reached by a wide stair-ladder—the beautiful brown bodies of young men are swaying in their hammocks. Cambodian laziness, they say. Why not Cambodian wisdom?

One strange thing: the closer we come to its mouth (in the great lake) the narrower the river becomes. To such a degree that at the place where we cross on a culvert to go back up on the other bank—there is no more than a thread of water. The reason?.... The norias, huge waterwheels, made entirely of bamboo, which lift the precious liquid and water their respective groves. They turn slowly with the help of a partial dam which is covered with banana leaves. And they sing their monotonous song, the only singing beings in the peace of the scene. In order to taste the charm of these paradise riverbanks, stretch out like me, elbow on the sand, in the shade of the palms and not far from one of the slowly rotating norias. Three watery sounds in the torrid air penetrate you deliciously. First the squeaking of the hub on its supports; discontinuous, accelerando and diminuendo. Then the sound of the cascades of water in the raised bucket: a bamboo tube, passing from the diagonal to the horizontal, begins to empty; water is shooting out of the preceding one; the third, upside down, is dripping. Finally, the gurgle of water filling

Over a distance of 6 km, the output of about a hundred norias is around 50 liters/second. Now the output of the river at the conservation appears to be ½ cubic meter per second. Thus there appears to be ten times more loss by absorption and evaporation than by irrigation.
the submerged tube; the satisfied plop of the preceding tube, and the sound of the water streaming off the discs. Now nothing is geometrically exact in this apparatus, the tubes being of unequal diameter and depth, unevenly spaced and tilted, and so the gurgle of the water varies in speed and tonality. With the result that the smallest period of time in which the same sequence of sounds is repeated is that of one turn of the noria, 30 to 40 seconds. What modern machine could give me such an aquatic ritornelle?..."

Two watercolors (op. 16 and 17)...

Glaize takes us around the two circuits of the Park of Angkor in the moonlight. The air is delicious, and this is not due to the reversal of the temperature, to the contrast with the light and tomid heat of the daytime. What subtle emanations seize on us? The road cut through the forest leads between two great dark walls striped with fireflies. And the temples—unless we turn into the transverse paths—are seen only as fragments of silhouettes, for they are more or less recessed. Except for the Bayon, the astonishing, the fantastic Bayon, cleared of brush and encircled by the road. The dark mass of the monument, the lacy pyramid of pyramids, mounts up to the sky. "We are," says Glaize, "at the center of Angkor-thom, the ancient Khmer city. The Bayon is the royal seal dedicated to Buddha Lok^epvara, then to Siva, whose lingham was found in the central tower. A double enclosure of sculpted galleries (1200 meters of frieze) and 51 towers. Let us approach. Each cruciform tower shows a crowned face at each of the four points of the compass." I was familiar with the pictures of it. But the reality! Or rather the spectral and lunar unreality in black and white! Here—and then there; and there again, and everywhere! Obsession with the idea. Ten centuries of smiling condescendingly at the suffering world. The face is rectangular, with cubic surfaces; lowered eyes, flat nose, thick lips. The materialization of eternal beatitude; or perhaps, the eternal beatitude of materialization. Who knows? The secret of the Sphinx is the secret of Brahma. What grandeur! And what simplicity in the expression! And yet the mask is more than human. It is Khmer. It is racial. Thus the archetypal man, or god, remains to be found....

There is nothing like moonlight, or the moving beam of a flashlight for judging a bas-relief; for the inscriptions are not drowned out by an overwhelming light. This is what Glaize shows us in an exterior gallery. The revelation of a great art, extinct and carried to the point of perfection."

A caravan of Americans is expected—by way of Aranha, coming from Bangkok—Father Meaner has come from Saigon to welcome them at the Hotel Royal and to prepare the Spectacle of the Dances. After 5 p.m., at the bungalow, Princess Soysangvan is worn out. Little and plump, light-skinned, she is a princess by marriage, but was queen in her youth, having belonged to the ballet troupe of the late king. Thus, after 5 o'clock, her young pupils are getting dressed and made up. The costumes of princes and princesses are enamelled heraldically with fine gold; for some the costume extends up from the middle of the calf to the neck (sampoq and jerkin) and covering the arms to the wrists; for others it is a sleeveless bolero over which is knotted a sarong of shot silk. Add to this the wings or spikes pointing up from the shoulders and on the hips, and the langotii hanging between the thighs of the principal dancers; the gold breastplate, the collar, the belt and its gemstone, and the cape of the supporting dancers; the tiara, finally, of gilded metal for everyone, a miniature that or stupa whose tall spire amplifies each movement of the head. Now these costumes—the male ones—are neither laced nor buttoned; they are sewn so that they appear to be molded to the body.

The makeup consists of a chalk white paste spread over the exposed parts of the body: arms, legs, hands, feet, neck, and face. A black line on the eyebrows, vermillion on the lips. Rugs and reed chairs are brought to the foot of the central gopura of the Great Portico, at the end of the causeway that crosses the moat. Some of these rugs cover the steps leading to the gopura; and the largest of them, red and blue—on which the dances are to take place—is spread out on the parvis. In front are the chairs for paying spectators—among whom, thanks to our status, BarriSr^-without paying.* In the back, the musical instruments: a dulcimer made of thin blades of wood in the shape of a sea leman; big circular cymbals with copper discs; two drums of buffalo skin;...

* The price of a chair is $1.00 (30 F at the time). The Americans think this is high. They should have had to pay at least $5.00.
a gong, and a small bagpipe. Finally, along the rear edge of
the large rug, a bench for the actors; characters of royal
blood, and aristocrats. The spectators have hardly gotten out
of their cars at the other end of the causeway when each one is
already in place: the dancers sitting on the steps of the go-
pura, the musicians crouched behind their instruments, the prince
and the princess on their bench, the accompanists on either side
of the rug, and the people framing the scene behind the ac-
companists. The people: naked children, mothers wearing a sam-
pot and a colored shawl, men dressed in tunics and leaning or
sitting on the body of the nine-headed naga (cobra).

But the spectacle, being nocturnal, requires artificial
lighting. Fifty almost naked boys, carrying torches made of
palm fibers soaked in iao oil, are charged with this important
task. They are backed up by a cluster of electric lights pro-
jected from a pylon above the moat.

It is nine o'clock. The tourists cross the causeway (watch
your step) between two rows of bronze statuettes holding torches.
The air is perfumed with the odor of sizzling resin. I am as
"de-Europeanized" as possible. I have eyes and ears only for
that which is Khmer.

The dances generally include two presentations: one is tra-
ditional, taken more or less from Brahmanic legends, and the
other is lively and light, a sort of unpretentious ballet.

In these circumstances it's like a fairy play. A court of
love, a battle of giants; abduction; flight and recapture. Ten
in the chorus, five of each sex—figuratively speaking—mime the
feelings of the characters. Nothing changed, certainly, since
Jaya-Varman II! But, to digress, one may go farther back and
generalize. Oriental dances were conceived in honor of Siva
in order to distract the gods from the paradise of Indra. Corre-
latively, they have become the appanage of earthly beings, sons
of the Emperor of Heaven or his representatives. And the troupe
of Soysangvan, although it has broken off from the place troupe,
is no less royal in its traditions. Another legend recounts
that the Apsaras, the dancers of Heaven, were once sent to earth
to tempt the bonzes. The latter had become a social menace be-
cause of their extreme piety and their defense of celibacy. The
Apsaras prevailed over them without violence. It is even sup-
posed that they succeeded so well that the jealous gods forced
them to veil their charms. Thus the complicated nature of their
costume.

Whatever their origin, the dances of Cambodia are neither
fantasy nor children's games. Although they appear to us to be
isolated remnants of a metaphysical and cosmological system which
is alien to the Occident, they still require the same training and
the same submission to formal rules, each of which has its raison
d'être. Each partial attitude is a word, a word expressing an
idea by means of beauty. The words are many; they have a syntax.
Thus the words together form sentences, and the sentences, poems.

And the poems are the most directly symbolic image of the mode of
emanation of things. What modern civilization could rival it in
this order of creation? And I have seen many dances. I have seen
opera ballet; I've seen the Loie Fuller; I've seen Isadora Duncan;
I've seen the Russian ballet; I've seen the Dalcroze school at
Dresden; I've seen voodoo dances. And none of these comes anywhere
near what one sees at Angkor; which, alas—if I can believe certain
predictions—is near extinction. For the crown prince of Cambodia
doesn't give a damn about it. Like his Annamite cousin, the emperor
Ba-S-Dai, he comes out of a French school in France. Would France
ever fail in her mission?.....

As has been seen, the orchestra is very simple. It is dis-
tinctive less because of the strangeness of the timbres than because
of its scale, geometrically fixed in the wood of the dulcimer, and
its rhythm. This rhythm is not superposed on a base of homogeneous
duration. It does not unfold in measures, and the measure cannot
be broken down into white, black, quaver, etc. It slows or speeds
up. And sometimes it dies out languorously in a decreasing pro-
gression (lengthening of time); or in with a sudden feverishness
in an increasing progression (contraction of time), as if it were
trying to express the infinite sequence of hours in a necessarily
limited and hurried number of beats. The orchestra is supplemented
by the accompanists, singers, and beaters (stick striking a wooden roller).* These middle-aged women are also guardians or teachers. As a Frenchman would have within reach his pipe or cigarettes, they keep nearby their box of betel, lime, and areca nuts with which they make a quid which they then pass from mouth to mouth.

The dance involves the whole body. No entrechats, no toe-dancing, no crawl, those western discoveries which correspond to nothing. But starting from the fingertips (or ending there) a transversal undulation which rolls across the shoulders, laterally displaces the neck, bends down the head and its headdress, and descends to the shaking loins. The arms are serpents; and the arched thighs carry the torso like a mobile column whose axis is flexibly joined to the axis of the head and tiara. All is a play of lines against each other, together or in equilibrium. The entire body is a binary whose lower, moving part represents the earth, and whose higher, receptive part, the sky. It is flux. But sometimes it happens that the influx descends by way of the toes; and it's the torso that moves the lower part of the body and takes it wherever it pleases the spirit to go. The dancer neither walks nor runs. She pivots on her hips, the arms in the form of a cross, a hook, or a tendril; or one foot, crossing her pointed feet and cork-screwing herself around in a tour de force of slowness. In each of her attitudes she realizes the maximum of balanced assymetry, in all angles and from all points of view. And each of these attitudes, which is in itself a value, is connected to the preceding one and leads into the next; and creates this new value: the evolution of harmony; or still better, it manifests beauty a phase of space-time. And thus our delight. In the course of her evolutions the dancer’s matte-white face remains impassive. Not a contraction, not a trace of effort, not a feeling, not a smile, except for the imperceptible curling of the lips of a Buddha. And this chalk-white is really the only fleshtone that could sustain the glitter of the gold trimmings under the lights. To add to the difficulty, the harmony is not only an individual matter, it involves the whole troupe, from subject to subject, from group to group, from row to row; not excluding the interlaced figures, as varied as basketwork. When the choreographic commentary is over, the dancers retire to the steps of the gopura or crouch along the large carpet in front of the accompanists, while the actors of the drama come forward: the king and his fools—a little white ape and a little black ape, all three wearing masks; the prince, the princess and the two giants. But the fact that the chorus dancers are crouching down doesn’t excuse them from taking part in the action. All is dance. And the dance of the torso or the seated dance—is it not traditional in the Indies and the Pacific islands?

On the bench, the princess is half-reclining in Roman fashion. And the moment comes for an infinitely graceful scene: that of the prince abducting his beloved. On the one hand, arms seeking, caressing, enveloping; on the other, arms on the defensive, mistrustful, evasive. At the hottest point of the action, a little cry: "ho, ho!" and falling backwards. But there has been no contact. There is never contact. The most convincing and revelatory example of this idealizing spirit is the battle of the giants. The scene is played by two strong girls wearing yak masks and armed with sticks as thick as one’s thumb. An admirable duel during which a stick never strikes the other stick, still less the enemy. And yet there is a battle as there had been love. But on what level? On the level of synthesis beyond thesis and antithesis, on the dialectical level, on the level of the absolute, father of the accidental and conciliator of opposites. And the impression is truly that, in fact, of a magic world, of a world of ideas dressed in brocade and scintillating with precious stones. For the brutal reality that we live is substituted the image, the archetype. And this archetype is obverse and reverse. It joins together in the beauty of its expression masked horrors and elaborate beauty. The great art of choreography is the divine intuition of manifesting modes. It is essentially Brahmanic. And the Cambodian dances are the last living expression of it.*

* xylophone
Pilgrimage - Get up with the sun. Straight to the moat. Directly across, 200 meters away, the Great Portico with the light behind it; a streak of Van Dyke brown 250 meters long against a lemon sky. To the left, the laterite causeway over the moat (194 m.) and leading to the central gopura (site of the dances); carmine under the growing light of the dawn. Broad yellow spots—monks going out to beg. Five meters down, the moat. Grass green of the marshes. Pearly sapphire blue of the flowing lotus. Orange trails of aquatic blooms. In the open water, the other sky verging on mauve; the madder-red reflection of the causeway and the purple reflection of the Great Portico. And passing from the morning scene to the morning activity: noisy flights and dives. Individual and collective revelry. Kingfishers (blue wings, scarlet breasts), rails, cormorants, and marsh-hens (black). Battalions of India ducks and white egrets. Finally, two elephants forcing their way like ships through the mauve-spotted water hyacinths. At my feet, a pirogue carved from a single piece of wood and three walnut-colored little Khmers dragging for edible seaweed.

In sum, an enchanted scene (op. 18, 19, and 20).

Three hundred steps to the left (the esplanade of the moats is 1500 m. wide) and we enter the causeway between two Khmer lions (op. 66) and two decapitated nagas, having stooped below a bearded banyan (op. 67). Let us follow the causeway which ends in a T in front of the steps of the central gopura, and enter under the portico without exploring the lateral galleries. Before us, the interior perspective of the Sacred Way (480 m.), paved with sandstone (width, 9 m 50), flanked by nagas and overlooking the park from the height of a buffalo; the imposing mass of the nine-towered temple, Angkor Wat. In the park of reddish grass and returning jungle growth, a few giant forest trees and sugar palms, some thnots with their ball-shaped foliage. And then, on the right and on the left, two elegant ruins with entrance steps. Turn around. The Great Portico appears pink on its molded base, with its false barred windows, its roof like a serpent’s back, and its three gopuras with their ruined summits. A glance at the park. The subfoundation of the Sacred Way is molded, sculpted along its entire length. Let us continue. We pass between two vast basins with rectangular sides, one to the left for the use of a monastery, still full of water, the other, to the right, barely wet. And then it is the great transverse naga of the interior esplanade and the high terrace in the form of a cross. Let’s go up. A hundred steps and we reach the central stairway of the second level, first enclosure (187 m. of façade, 215 in the east-west direction). Let’s ignore the exterior gallery and go through the gopura, holding our nose, for the monks are sweeping up bat droppings—nothing is as nauseating. Two galleries forming a cross separate four basins; one can guess from the remaining ochre, red, and blue stucco-work that they must have been splendidly decorated. A brief stop. Look at the steps that face us. Not one which is not molded, chiselled. Look at the walls. Not a square centimeter that is not covered by floral arabesques. Look at the bas-reliefs. They are Apsaras, Tevadas. There are 300 of them scattered nearly everywhere. Perfection. And no two alike. We will come back to them. A glance at the first courtyard and its corner edifices.

Second enclosure (3rd level). Fourteen stairways (like the first). Take the central stairway of the west gopura. Thirty-five curved steps. Cross the gallery. Second courtyard. Third enclosure (4th level), 13 meters higher. Very abrupt. Vertigo. The image of the last veil lifted. 60 meters of façade. Four corner towers. Four small courtyards and two galleries forming a cross. In the center the great tower (34 m.), former sanctuary of Vishnu. From the top of this terrace (the Bakan) we see the two galleries. In the park, the lateral porticos, the great rectangles of the moats and the forest.

Let’s go back down. 3rd level. 2nd level. First gallery (from which one may reach the park). Let’s go around the monument. 800 meters of sculpted frieze. 30,000 figures. The whole Brahmanic pantheon and its legends; and especially those relating to
the second god of the Trimurti, to Vishnu protector of the universe, to Ramayana and to the Churning of the Sea of Milk. Observe the wall that carries the frieze. Enormous asymmetrical blocks of sandstone, trapeziform, their joining hardly visible. No mortar. One force alone used in the assembly: weight.

Let's go back down the Sacred Way. As we go back, look at the mitered towers. Seven set in geometrical progression whose notches and spikes form an elegant palmette.

755 meters of causeway (80 + 475 + 200) back to the Khmer lions. The temple has disappeared behind the gopura of the Great Portico.

It leaves me breathless. For nothing that has been said about it equals my estimation. Angkor Wat, first wonder of the world.

I thank first Suryavarman II, the great Vishnuistic king who built it.

And I thank the thousands of slaves, workers, artisans, and artists who died(?), they say, making it.

Such an enterprise is, in certain respects, inhuman. On the other hand, it is not profitable. Although today, because of it, the Hotel Royal at Siem Reap is profitable. It is thus in formal opposition to anything that can be imagined or accomplished by our liberal democracies.

Reflections on the technical aspect.—Everything in the monument, except the curve of the roofs and the towers, is a play of horizontal and vertical lines. But unlike Christian churches which are tall or squat, the great size spreads out instead of crushing. For we are meant to walk and run, not to climb. For we enjoy space in its breadth (horizontal dimensions) and not its height (vertical dimension). The vertical dimension is a wall, and you run smack into it. The horizontal dimension has no limits; and it invites the traveler. From this happy arrangement of the architectural elements there results, in spite of the five enclosures, an impression of majesty in freedom.

In its reduced scale and for the same reason, the ideal habitation is the Roman house with its atrium.

In order to break the monotony, the horizontal lines overlap around the gopuras, and the vertical lines are displaced and broken beneath the towers. Thus the complexity of the construction viewed in its axial dimensions. Another remarkable peculiarity of this right-angled architecture: the wavy roofs with two vertically grooved levels separated by plain molding, as opposed to the high, horizontally-molded subfoundations. These subfoundations, being vertical, isolate the galleries, which one can only reach by means of stairs and projecting doorways that are surmounted by lintels and pediments.

In spite of its unity and its colossal dimensions, the monument is still on a human scale, its sanctuary bringing us only 30 meters above its esplanade and inviting us to rectilinear promenades in its open galleries. These galleries, placed end to end, would stretch out 2800 meters. As, in principle, each visible stone is concealed in such a surface totally consecrated to decoration. The bas-reliefs of the Apsaras—the ammonement of the god—which could have been carved on a flat surface, are carved on a surface reticulated in a thousand directions, but so delicately that it does not lose its impression of smoothness.

The Apsara or Tavada, a creature of delight clothed only in an embroidered sarong, is presented naked to the hips with pendant earrings, triple bracelets (under the armpits and on the wrists), and a necklace in the form of back-to-back parentheses with four rows of stones fringed with gold beads that emphasize the uplifting of the bosom. She holds in one hand the lotus flower and sketches with the other a movement of the dance, or leans her hand on the shoulder of a friend, toward whom, lovingly, she inclines herself. Her hair is lifted up in pyramids or spread out in tresses; and her forehead is often barred with a diadem or a crown. But nothing equals in grace or purity her long tapering arms and her juvenile torso carrying high the offering of the two rounded breasts....
Excursion to Phnom-Koulen with Barrière and the Lingats in Gleize’s van. Looking for the archeologist Parmentier who is living with the Sam-Te (not of the region).

We go through a Cambodian village. Straw huts on pilings. Beautiful nude torsos of women who are busy pounding rice. Brush. Many peacocks. A great forest. The Phnom-Koulen (sacred mountain) is a sandstone massif where the Siem Reap River originates. It was once inhabited by hermits. Its approaches remind one of certain wild spots in the Forest of Fontainebleau. After having crossed the swamp, the trail divides, skirts a hamlet surrounded by a palisade to protect it from deer, climes, divides again, and peters out. The van, unable to go farther, unloads its passengers. About 100 meters away, another palisaded hamlet whose thatched roofs are barely visible among the trees. Men, women, children. Some covered with sores, all filthy. For when there is water, the native is in the water; but when there is no water, he lives in filth. And coming down from a newly constructed shelter is Parmentier. Parmentier, a handsome old man of 72 with a white goatee and fiery glance. He has been living there, all alone, for two months; with his maps, his books, and his passion: to discover and inventory the treasures still jealously guarded by the forest. We take him along.

The picnic takes place on the bank of the river, upstream from the beautiful cascade of Amlong Thom. Among our provisions are a few good bottles of wine that I put in a spring to cool. But Parmentier also immerses two bottles, of cider, he informs us.... Excellent! Origin? his hut. A keg of water, rice, and bananas. I'm giving the recipe, but I'd beware of it.

Shower on the first level of the falls (watercolor op. 21), and descent to below the second (a sheer drop of 25 m.) by a circuitous path. "It smells like a wild animal," says Mme Lingat. We make a lot of noise. No animal. At the bottom a natural pool; a sandy bottom enclosed by fallen rocks. Diana's bath. A hundred steps away the great waterfall with its noise, raindrops, and mist. The air is humid and cool. An extremely wild scene. Above, a patch of sky picked at by vines, which suspend their torn coat at the level of the trees. Drawn along by the current, clinging lianas form a parabolic curve. Others plunge into the abyss among mosses and lacy ferns. From top to bottom, a play of vertical lines.

When we take Parmentier home, he shows us his own discoveries: a little sanctuary of sculpted brick totally invaded by vegetation. A Cham tower 15 meters high, in front of which, on the cleared ground, a large cross is drawn in chalk (point of reference for the aerial photographic service). I enter the tower through an embrasure with a lintel. Looking up, I see the sky. And from the ruined summit swoop down a dozen large birds with transparent wings. Bats.

And we leave the scientist to his solitude.

15-28 February

Afternoon spent at Preah-Khan. A northwesterly tour by the Phnom-Sakeng; Baksei Chamkrong, the southern gate of Angkor Thom with the giant symbol of its head of Buddha; the Bayon, which we go around, the Baphuon; the Terrace of the Leper King and the Elephants facing the Prasat Khleang and the Preah Pithu; the Tep Pranam, the Preah Palilay and the north gate of Angkor-Thom.

I don't give these names as a point of information, but for the sake of their phonetic value. They create an atmosphere.

Preah-Khan, the Brahmanic temple of the "Sacred Sword." A protective enclosure of 800 by 740 meters. Drowned in the forest. We approach it by the east door whose gopura with five entrances is a rampart of stones, roots, and vegetation. In front, a terrace flanked by Khmer lions. A bed of dead leaves and pink trunks. It deserves a watercolor (op. 23).

The interior of the temple.... But here is Parmentier measuring the intercolumniations; and Jeanne Leuba, his wife, taking notes at his dictation. Two personalities whom life unites, separates, reunites. Jeanne Leuba, an disheveled sort of colonial George Sand. Too gifted for domestic life and too serious to neglect her duties. Poet and writer. Somewhat touchy, it is said, on the subject of native women. Very understandable when we see the still sparkling eyes of the master. "Don't linger," they say as they leave, "there seems to be a wild animal around."

The interior of the temple is a labyrinth in a mass of ruins; and even more of a labyrinth because it contains 24 edifices, all ruined. Here and there, small courts, galleries, doors on whose
Lintels is inscribed the frieze of the dancing Tevadas, thighs bare. And monster trees, ficus, with triangular roots like stays or props, climbing to the height of one story and flat as walls. I go out by the south door.

Coming back toward the temple, another motif. A gallery on the left is collapsing under the weight of two enormous fig trees (improperly called silk-cotton trees). Roots collapsing marshmallow-like. These trees have a habit of growing on old buildings which they break apart and sometimes support (one can see inside the temple a pilar knocked over by one of their roots and the same root then serving as a support). The sight is so curious that I begin a wash. I'm sitting on my folding stool, facing my easel, to the left, sunshade and knapsack, to the right, my pistol loaded and ready. I'm about two-thirds of the way through my work when a frightening roar is heard from about a hundred steps behind the gopura. It goes on, starts again, and lasts 10 more seconds... Doubtless the awakening and greeting of Sir Tiger in the twilight. But it's so nice, the forest is so calm, and I'm so absorbed in the most peaceful of occupations that for an instant I'm unconscious of the danger I'm in. And then, to leave would be to betray myself. I look at my gun, really an inoffensive weapon; my sunshade... One can frighten a tiger by opening a parasol in his face. Yes, but this parasol only opens when it feels like it. And to realize that I just went through the dark galleries whose bends and niches serve as caves for the beasts and reptiles during the day! For--this is not a myth--the most dangerous inhabitants of the forest have their lairs in these necropolises... having finished my wash (op. 24) and silently packed up, I tiptoe away on the Great Way, not caring to provide a meal for Sir Tiger.

...having finished my wash (op. 24) and silently packed up, I tiptoe away on the Great Way, not caring to provide a meal for Sir Tiger.

(Description of Ta Prohm)

I will spare myself another description--it would be almost impossible because of the ruined state of the temple. Its five enclosures on one level (the outermost measures 1000 meters on a side) prevent one from getting a clear idea of its geometry. Brahma, Siva, and Buddha disputed over it in turn. According to the chronicles, it was a world. 2800 priests! 1200 servants! 600 dancing girls!... The first photographs show it in its most romantic light; like an illustration of a Tale of Hoffmann by Gustave Doré. A perfect collaboration of architecture and the vegetable kingdom. Never have been seen so many facades buried under lianas, so many sculptural blocks embraced by roots; so many stems, propped on to many trunks and green masses perched on the tops of towers. A true acrobatic feat of nature. In spite of the efforts of the "Conservation" to clear all this, there remains enough of it to create a mood.

I install myself to the right of the causeway, in front of the second enclosure, facing the cruciform gopura and the transverse gallery, both seen with the light behind them. Impressive. Shades of green, black, and red ochre. Behind the gopura, a tower still crowned with vegetation. A tangled forest penetrated by an oblique ray of sunlight. The composition is crossed by the causeway supporting the naga. Ground covered with broken rocks and dead leaves. Colossal ficus trees framing the whole. One of their roots, as thick as a small barrel, winds along for 25 steps. Watercolor (op. 31). From this document I take the elements of a large color wash that I do back at the bungalow. The feeling of it is reinforced by the presence of a tiger crossing from left to right on the reddish leaves. (op. 32).

28 February - 15 March

Excursion with Glaize to the fishing grounds of the Tonle Sap. Departure, 6 a.m. We follow the always enchanting banks of the Siem Reap to Kompong-Phtal, the extreme point reached by the annual floods. The river is lost in scattered undergrowth. To the right the Phnom-Krom Savanna. Muddy sand spotted with moss and rank weeds. Then an astatic stretch where waders and web-footed birds are playing: cranes, herons, egrets, ducks... A canal lined by banks where pirogues and sampans are moored. And the yellow surface of the great lake, seemingly without banks and without horizon.

The Tonle-Sap--100 km long and 30 wide--an amazing hydrographic phenomenon, fills and empties once a year, ranging from 1 meter to 30 meters.
9 meters in depth. We are in the dry season and the water is still going down. But when the floodwaters of the Mekong, swollen by the same torrential rains that every summer fill the Hwang Ho, the Yangtse, the Menam, the Sulouen, and the Irrawadi, reach Phnom Penh, the chalky waters flow through their natural outlet to the vast depression whose edges they nourish. It's the time of floating rice and the multiplication of fish. But in December the current is reversed. And when, in February, the 50 billion cubic meters of water leave no more than a thin sheet of water, the boats come out of the estuaries, the lakedwellers venture out into the open lake, and the cham-cor abound in the nets.

It's one of these lake villages that we are going to see. In the east we see the black line of its spread nets and its huts built on pilings. A half hour of rowing and we're there.

Platforms built shoulder high on a forest of bamboo driven haphazardly into the mud. But the elements which from afar seem united, separate; and we can row around each of them. On their random pilings, an elastic floor of crushed and woven bamboo; on the edge a straw hut and its utensils: big basins for pickling fish; all the gear of the fisherman, including the large black net spread out on bamboo stakes. Here and there, perched between the sky and the sea, sated crows meditating. In an elevated shelter, the offering to Buddha. Finally, on the platform, cham-cor split in two drying in the sun in close-set rows; and crossing bamboo runs, and touching them up. Beautiful girls with strong limbs, the color of waxed mahogany. Below the platforms, boats both large and small; the large ones having a deckhouse for fishing far from shore and prolonged absences. All are flat-bottomed.

It is eight o'clock. And the sparkling water and the burning sun make our position very uncomfortable; more uncomfortable, it appears, than at high noon. I like to believe that, the season over, fishermen and fisherwomen take a well-earned rest; over there, in the cool shade of the banana trees, in sight of the gurgling norias.

Glaize drops me off at Van (watercolor op. 33 and 34), from where I go back up the left bank of the stung

Big preparations at Siem Reap. A tall structure rises over the feasting grounds, already decorated with immense veils. Around it, a sort of quadrangular gallery. Stakes are driven into the ground and platforms are raised. What's it all about? The new cremation of a bonze. **An idyll**

A stop at the litter 200 m on the bank of the river, in front of Mlle Michel's tiger cage; two beautiful tigers of 2 years of age given 22 months ago by the huntswoman (sketch op. 37); in front of the cage of Antigone crane and in front of the owls (sketch op. 38).

I had not yet seen the Phnom Sakhong, neighbor of Angkor Wat, on the road to the Bayon. An elephant as nonchalant as a bureaucrat takes me there. He climbs effortlessly up a zig-zagging path and lets me off at the foot of the first terrace. The summit (60 meters high of altitude) is a tiled platform from which one enjoys a beautiful view of Angkor Wat; a view extending northward to Phnom Kulen and southward to Phnom Krom. The temple is dedicated to Siva. Its sanctuary, open to the four cardinal points, occupies the center of this platform, bare of any other construction. An edifice of a very beautiful style, covered with ornamentation and passing from ocher to purple by way of vermillion and golden pinks. Large Apsaras decorate the corner pillars, most moving in their interpretation and relief. For a long time I stay contemplating the one on the east-northeast. And the setting sun shining like a footlight, makes these vestiges of an extinct religion seem ever more Sivaistic and sensual.

It is 10 a.m. and in spite of the sunshade, huge drops of sweat are dripping down my neck. I've been working on this tempera for two days: the stung Siem Reap at the Conservation (op. 41). A pink sky into which blends the airy foliage of the Cambodian women's coconut trees raise their long trunks and open out at different heights; Paul and Virginia! Some areca trees. A shivering dam. A noria. And

* An idyllic eighteenth century romance about young lovers on a tropical island. V.N.G.
the tawny translucent water. The noria sings nearby. And at each plunge of the bamboo tubes, the kindly, soothing, refreshing gurgle; and the plop emphasizing like a hiccup the height of satisfaction.

Meanwhile Angkor Wat has recaptured us. From one o'clock on, having had the courage to cross the 750 meters of burning causeway, Barrière and I sit under the west portico of the second level gallery, in the shade of an overhanging door—without stairs, for the unloading of elephants. We have before us the interior park, of a golden ochre color, the perspective of the Sacred Way, the miniature temple—libraries and two thnots with the light behind them (painting op. 42).

Toward 4 o'clock, when the sun's angle of incidence grows, we enter an interior gallery where we may choose among the most beautiful Apsaras.

I am at first tempted by the Apsara with the diadem (tempera, op. 43). In her left hand she holds against her belly the lotus fruit; and in her right, gracefully following the curve of the breast, the flexible stem of a lotus flower. The stone is smooth and purple.

I then station myself in front of two friends who smile while confiding to me their secrets. The sculptured details are still so perfect that they could have been chiselled yesterday. Exquisite feeling (tempera op. 44).

Finally, there is a celestial group of dancers—there are four of them—to be seen on the left, having crossed the porch. Their torsos and their arms are more relaxed and their grace is almost morbid. Enveloping curves of extreme simplicity and linked together like a musical canon. A delicious relief modeling of the flesh, as far removed as possible from sculpture in the round. The tone is red-ocher with incrustations of Veronese green in the chiselling; and the surface is as smooth as polished marble. This last characteristic is surprising for sandstone. A young Khmer explains it to me. I surprised him caressing the breasts of one of these visionary creatures. It's not that he's depraved. He's imitating his sisters; who do the same thing in the hope of being fertile. (the red Apsaras, tempera op. 45).

I note a propos of Angkor Wat two little paintings of morning scenes: the temple in the rising sun (op. 46); a compact mass with the light behind it—bluish gray on a lemon background; supported on the left by the purple of a ruined portico. The portico of the southwest angle of the temple flanked by two coconut palms (op. 47).

Finally, a last and more important study (drawing and painting op. 48) which is one of the first I began: the causeway and the north library-pavilion seen from the south pavilion. Tall thnots with their ball-shaped foliage decorate the sky.

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Barrière and I go to Siem Reap to see the Cambodian "men" built in honor of the monk (bonze) who is to be cremated. An exceptional chance. For only saints are cremated, eighteen months after their death.

Although the ceremony does not take place until two weeks from now, the area set aside for the spectators is already crowded. The crowd can sleep and eat there, sleeping on bamboo platforms and dipping into big black cauldrons for rice. They can also buy drinks and fruit: mangos, guavas, sapodillas, litchi nuts, cinnamon apples, "dragon eyes," bananas, etc., and some substantial food: fried chicken, duck eggs, fish, dried, smoked, and salted; also yams, eggplants, cardamoms, cucumbers, etc. Rows of women food vendors in the sun; red cotton cloth piled high on their heads, crouching near their baskets, waiting for the arrival of the pilgrims. The latter come from the entire region, having travelled a long way barefoot, in order to gain indulgences. But the most common color is still the saffron yellow of the bonzes and their novices. For this celebration is for them, the feast of their patron. They have built this cloister with the Angkorian roof, starred with yellow, decorated with comic scenes, and pierced by windows with red curtains. Four doors with crudely colored pediments mark the entrances at the cardinal points. These entrances are also marked by poles to which are attached multi-colored parasols. At the four angles are towers composed of graduated tiers, capped by a raised dome, a golden teardrop, and a white spire.

But this is nothing compared to the cruciform central monument which is to hold the catafalque. This monument lifts its tapering...
spire 150 feet into the blue sky. The spire rises from a mass of silver bubbles, the lowest and flattest of which rests on a white octagonal dome with red groins. Next come the five stories that extend out from the central tower, separated by a gray fringe, and bristling with spikes on their ridges and their median line. The base of the tower is pink ochre crisscrossed by diagonal lines. And in each little square is fixed a silver leaf, shining like fish scales. All these moving leaves make the walls appear to shimmer. Below the second floor of the tower, half as high as the edifice, four white naves are inserted at right angles. They have Norman rooflines and are criss-crossed with blue lines, with a red stripe around the peak. The pediments, with their wavy Cambodian outline, project silver dragon tails from their four summits. Like all pagoda pediments, they are richly colored. At the base of these pediments and along their rooflines, a lacy blue stripe marks the beginning of the façades and walls. The façades are very high and always divided. Each of them is pierced by an immense bay like the arch of a bridge from whose summit hang down to the ground two veils of ecru cloth, open from top to bottom like window curtains. From the top of the arch there also hang two bright red banners. In the half-light of the inner sanctuary may be seen a group of supporting poles painted blue. This edifice is so high that from the exterior—outside of the cloister—one may see almost the whole of the cruciform nave as well as its high bays, open to the shady side. As if such a display of light and color were deemed insufficient, gigantic bamboos with hanging banners sprout from the enclosure within the cloister. These banners are unbelievably long; and they are decorated with cascading lateral elements. But the strangest and most attractive thing about them is the very soft musical sound they make—caused by the quivering of the thousand horizontal bands of which they are made. For these narrow bands, opening like blinds, vibrate individually at the least little breeze. This aeolian sound forms a background for the religious chant repeated in turn by two invisible Cambodian orchestras, seated on woven bamboo floors, behind the wall of yellow cloth.

My description cannot do justice to this enchanted scene, against the blue sky, with the colorfully dressed people moving in the bright sunshine. But it is not simply a feast for the eyes. The whole soul is saturated with a serene joy, floating in the seventh heaven, under the sign of an annunciation.

I can hardly believe that all this is nothing more than bamboo, cloth, paper, and pots of paint. There is nothing more to it. What confidence in the weather! A thunderstorm and all this labor and genius would be reduced to nothing. What faith! I have painted only a little watercolor (op. 54). I am using it as the basis for a larger tempera wash. (op. 55).

March 15-28 essay. I'm painting at the Bayon, on the third terrace, back against a tower, with two towers in view and three Buddhist masks, two of which are seen in profile. I am in a narrow space in front of a cave-in, across which I've placed the central leg of my easel. The leg slips and crash! easel and sketch disappear. I go down to get them. The vertical fissure gives on to a dark interior gallery lined with bas-reliefs; I'll probably never see them—not because it's impossible, but because I lack the time. (tempera, op. 61).

There is a stone Buddha to the north of Tep Franam, which I call "Buddha in the Forest." I'm there at 7 a.m. for that is the hour when the Buddha smiles at the rising sun. I paint him in profile: a giant sitting on his throne (height 7 to 8 meters). A giant of brown stone weathered by the rain and spotted by moss, defying time (tempera, op. 62).
The Gulf of Siam

March
30 March – 5 April

In front of me, the Tonle Sap and its wharves; and on my right the "Epastrouillante" promenade of the Notrodon wharf (Barrière's word). It's the wharf of the port, of the great river port; with its intense activity, the comings and goings of rickshaws, crudely-colored carriages (for dolls); its crowd of pure-blooded Khmers, of pure yellow blood and of mixed blood; its bales of merchandise (castor-oil plant, rice, corn, coffee, tung); its pyramids of coconuts, bunches of bananas, yams, pots, jars, baskets of all shapes and sizes; and the unbelievable diversity of its shipping: pirogues, lighters, decked boats, merchant boats, houseboats, hulls converted to terraces with gardens, houses floating on bamboo, outmoded vessels, tugboats, paddlewheel ferries, etc., etc.

That's where I spend most of my time in the morning and at twilight; and where I can most easily try to distract my mind from painful thoughts. (watercolor op. 37).

7-30 April. One thing to see at Ha Tien, early in the morning: the market and specifically the fish market. The market for its Malayan girls, all dressed in the black smock with its scooped neckline, wound over a red skirt, their heads covered with a red shawl, raised and then falling to the shoulders Egyptian fashion, extremely elegant. The fish market for its fish: mackerel, tuna, rays, salmon, munges, pike, monkfish. How many beautiful still-lifes!

I begin my boat excursion at the market, either in a pirogue with shoppers and their provisions, or on the ferry crossing the channel. The ferry, hand-powered, glides between two steel cables before landing at the Ta Chau jetty. There is Polynesian enchantment. A path runs along under the coconut trees between the shore and the mountain. The mountain is virgin forest. But at its base there is enough room for banana trees, papaya trees, cinnamon apples, and mango trees. On the lagoon side there are straw huts at water level or on piers two feet above the flat surface of the sea. Here and there a shaky bridge perpendicular to the bank leads to the canal...Crossing the path in every direction are pink, black, or piebald pigs, and children of both sexes, naked or wearing shorts and a black sarong. But the charm of the scene is due to the tall, slender coconut palms, whose trunks curve gracefully in all directions holding their bouquet of palms against the sky. (watercolor op. 89 and oils op. 90 and 91).

A more interesting model is the old bonze whom I discovered myself at the marketplace. He's a pure-blooded Khmer; and he is 73 years old. The typical old ascetic, bald, with a hairless face. No wrinkles. Lines and depressions under the skin. He holds himself erect, supporting himself with his right hand on his stick. He accepts tea and cigarettes. He amuses himself mainly by catching flies. A premeditated action; for, hearing one buzz nearby, he first props his stick against the wall, then he watches the fly and at the right moment: clap! between his hands. This sage has come to the bungalow four times. I finally noticed that the Annames houseboy didn’t particularly like to serve him. Racial hostility. And the victor’s undisguised contempt for the vanquished. ("the old bonze," drawing op. 93).

Picnic excursion to Cape de la Table (35 km)...

Hon Chong (35 km). A delightful amphitheatre of lush green growth open to the northwest, within a bay sheltered by uninhabited islands. A trail follows along the bay, crosses a forest and ends at the foot of a belvedere—a resthouse perched on a cliff. A magnificent, long (2 km), crescent-shaped beach with filaos growing along it, and the other end, the rock of Cape de la Table. We go up the back side and enter a little grotto fixed up as a sanctuary. A primitive Buddha looms out of the shadows, lit providentially by a ray of sunlight on the left shoulder—which reflects up on the face. The beam of light enters by a slit in the rock. And it strikes the Buddha only for a few minutes around 10 a.m. and then only in April and August. The grotto leads back into a long corridor; and the corridor opens out to the most ravishing spot: a little shell of golden sand at the foot of a horseshoe-shaped
rock, shaded by coconut palms. Two hundred yards away, a craggy islet with vegetation hanging from every cranny. To the left, out to sea, an isolated rock looks ready to fall. Two gaps in the hazy horizon. And in this refuge for Malada the light green waves leave a silver trail on the smooth sand. (watercolor op. 94 and 95).

On the way back, a stop not far from Ha Tien at the mouth of a rach, across from a spit of sand with a scattering of straw huts and coconut palms. A boat rocks at its mooring. Pink and green harmony. (wash op. 96).

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I have finished Mui-Nai, the bay of the coconut palms (oil op. 97), with Hay's hut, the beach, the old boats—one of which is very elegant, prov in the air. In the other direction, I paint a dilapidated straw hut, surrounded by palm trees, without an opening to the sky. Green and ochre. Pirogue in the foreground.

p. 314

1-5 May

The meetings with the Resident are beginning to pay off. Two girls (kramon) have come with their parents. One, Bou (drawing op. 105) is a Negroid type; the other, Kêam (drawing op. 106) a pronounced Khmer type. They pose in my room, at the left end of the building with a balcony all the way around it. From my open door, I look out over a vast grassy square.

pp. 318-319

I cannot get a rickshaw to go so far, especially on such a rough trail. So I rent one of those little carriages with pneumatic tires that can be found parked around the marketplace, and we're off! But it's not that simple. I have to make a detour in the middle of a rice field to pick up the Cambodian governor who is awaiting me at the town hall of the Khet. He tells me in French how difficult the negotiations have been. For Tega—that's the name of the young Malay—is the daughter of the mekron (mayor). And in the circumstances it's her uncle who must take responsibility for the sitting, at his house and in the presence of the assembled villagers. Muslim customs. The young girl, jealously guarded, can come in contact with a foreigner only within sight and knowledge of everyone.

While following the Prek (river) we cross an emerald green rach, and suddenly arrive below the houses. They are perched high and surrounded by banana trees. One of them is the house of the protector-uncle. The driver unhitches. And my negotiation day begins... A beautiful house, built of planks, erected on squared beams. They are well off; great landowners. They are making preparations. Finally, after a quarter of an hour's wait amid quite a crowd, I am allowed to climb up. There are almost as many onlookers inside as outside. Men wearing a sarong and a fez; the old men with mustaches, the young men cleanshaven. The kids, naked as mangoes. The little girls, wearing a heart-shaped piece of metal covering the pubic area and tied on with a string. The women—some of whom carry a child on their hip—are those of the Kampot market. They chat and smile. Finally, here is Tega, presented by her family, timid, confused, and simply a beautiful fifteen-year-old. Her eyes are huge and black, her forehead rounded, her nose straight, her lips full but not excessively so, her face oval without heaviness. In sum, almost a Caucasian beauty. As for her character, freshness, sweetness, innocence. And her innocent simplicity is revealed almost immediately. Tega wears the headdress of a virgin. In order to fill the space I substitute an orange scarf with the ends hanging down. A scene! Tega bursts into prolonged sobs. The cause of all this emotion? Anticipation; the headdress I chose is worn by married women. Tears flow. Then they cease. Then her brow clears. Tega smiles at me. Oh, so nicely!... I paint under a veranda from which one may descend by a makeshift ladder. Behind my back there are continual relays of onlookers. We take a break. Tega gets up and, modestly, disappears. I go over the railing and descend. Bunches
of people, like clusters of grapes, standing on the steps of the ladder, move apart to let me pass. When the sitting is over, I take a piaster out of my pocket. But Tega does not accept her fee too readily. She enters an alcove where she is separated from me by a lattice-work gate, and seizes the bill through the barrier. I see only the tips of her fingers and two big black eyes.

Thus it was that in two sittings I painted Tega, the young Malayan beauty of Kompong Prek. (op. 197)

pp. 330-331

8–24 May

It's going to be hard, I can tell. For I've seen Knem working. And posing is not her strong point. Ask her to carry a load, to cover long distances through the brush barefoot, to wash, to cook, to do any rude task. Fine. But to hold herself immobile in front of a pencil squeaking across the paper! So I'm tactful with her. I don't insist. I get her used to seeing me. I try to enter her life little by little. And I occupy myself painting a few watercolors: "The Abandoned Boat" (op. 109), an old customs boat stranded on the beach; "The Old Filaos" (op. 110, lost) more to the east, and from the wharves, a view of the islands and the coast ("The Ream Channel") (op. 111).

Finally, we have to make a decision. What a face! You'd think I was leading her to the final sacrifice.

Ti-hay had to accompany her and stay with her. To make it easier for her, I have her lie down, her head at the foot of the bed, and I dress her up (op. 112), her right hand resting on her breast. In fact, she does go to sleep. The room is huge and dark (walnut-stained woodwork). Since the doors to the balcony don't let in much light because of the porch roof and the filaos trees. I use the large back window which looks out on the sky and a marshy field.

The second sitting was better. Knem came alone. But she's still not getting used to it. My least movement makes her jump. And God knows I'm trying not to make her nervous.

I am very happy now about Knem. Like my girlfriends at Angkor, she calls me "papa." And this name, which is both sweet and painful to my heart, has also been adopted by Ti-tine. And we kiss. Knem comes on time and trusts me now. I dress her up. I adjust the scarf like a sarong, in the traditional fashion; fitting the undergarment just at the edge of the swelling of the breasts. The breast is thus covered, the arms and the shoulders are bare. And the bright colors of the material complement the matte skintones. The hair parted in a maidenly fashion is dampened down over the ears and ends in little spitcurls two inches from the corners of the mouth. This arabesque continues in the line of the upper lip. With her steel helmet, Knem looks like a priestess, and this is accentuated by the movement of the right hand—the hand holding an orange lily. Her eyes are magnificent and of a devouring black. And her lips are open just enough to let pass her breath. The color of her flesh is a copper bronze. All is fire, ardent yet contained. And Knem is all the more beautiful because she is not pretty. How can one not love her? (Knem, oil, op. 115)

pp. 360-362

25 May – 16 June

...I love the banana tree and its immense umbrella—like leaves which in all their colors and conditions never lose their decorative value. First, they are rolled up, then they unfold like a tent only to be torn into little streamers. Dried out, broken and sticking to the trunk, they end up looking like giant fisshbones. The fruit-bearing stem shoots up out of the heart of the plant like a column of water, and falls in a parabola ringed six times with a crown of fruit. The leaves have many uses, the most common of which is for plates and dishes. The juicy, tender stem is given to the pigs, who adore it. ("The Banana Tree; oil, op. 124). At the studio I composed a still-life of the fruits that appear at my meals (Cambodian fruits," oil, op. 125). Here are the most familiar:

The mango, which grows like chestnuts do on a tree resembling a chestnut tree but more bushy. A flattish fruit about the size of a pear. It is cut in two lengthwise; and the pit having been removed with a knife, is eaten with a spoon. Very delicate orange flesh.

The papaya. Looks like a little melon. More watery, less delicate than the mango. Grows on the trunk of the papaya tree just where the foliage begins to open out.

The custard-apple. Grows on the branches of a shrub. Looks
like a battered gorge and is covered with harmless prickles. It is sliced before eating. The flesh is white, milky, smooth. To me it is the most delicious of tropical fruits.


The jacquier. A big (5 kg). Is sold for up to 60 cents at the Kampot market.

The cinnamon apple. Divided like a grenade. Succulent. Also delicious when cooked.

The litchee. Like a bunch of cherries with large pits. Acid. The mangoustan. Purple and pitted. White flesh like that of the custard apple.

Pineapples, bananas, avocados, grapefruit—all very common and well known. But it's another thing to pick them yourself at full ripeness. What joy! What flavor! What taste!

Second still life: "Hunting Trophy" (oil op. 126), composed of the elements found in the dining room: elephant tusks and teeth, skull and skin of a tiger, a butchered Bantang ox and a young swamp crocodile.

Finally I sketch a tiger drinking in a stream of the Bok Kor. (oil op. 127).

On the occasion of the Buddhist feast of the dead I accompany my pious friends to the shrine of Kamchhay, near the stream of that name, 5 km higher on the edge of the road. There are porticoes of bamboo decorated for the occasion with flowers and garlands made of colored papers; altars covered with flowers and pierced with sticks of an electric red, a flimsy enclosure and a rustic roof surrounded by the crowd of devout women, their hands joined. Under the roof, two rows of novices sitting Buddha-fashion, immobile on their mats. In front of them, the offerings that have been brought; some uncovered, others protected by large cones of straw, finely woven and colored. Food offerings but most carefully and lovingly decorated for presentation. Perhaps they're not worth much. They look like they mean a lot, for so much love has gone into them. May Buddha grant the simple prayers of the poor Cambodians. After Ti-hay, Ti-tine, Knem, and Sen had said their prayers and chanted in unison the holy names of Gautama, I approached two young monks whose yellow robes and shaven heads would make a good addition to my collection. And Ti-hay persuaded them to stop at the plantation.

I painted only the head of the first (op. 128). Lots of character; beautiful structure. The fact of being shaven (including the eyebrows) makes the volumes more sculptural and concentrates life in the glance.

The second (op. 129) is represented seated, in the classic pose, the fan in his hand. Both, although they are serious and meditative, appear animated above all by the desire to do nothing. Hair grows in their hands* if nowhere else. The hina-yana school is a school of idleness.

Not only are these young men taught to be content with little, but the little that they have comes from others. It is certain that, educated in this way, they are more inclined to wisdom than to reconquer their empire of Tchen-la. On the one hand I approve of them; and on the other, I deplore it....

*The French expression "avoir un poil dans la main" (hair growing in the palm) means to be extremely lazy. (VNG)
[On June 26 at 9 a.m. Despujols left Cambodia by boat on the Mekong, arriving at Saigon on June 27. He left there on June 30, arriving at Ban Methuot on July 3.]

3-17 July Ban-Methuot

...I get all my information from the Radé secretary, Y-Sai, a judge in the native court and a shrewd businessman. Y-Sai was educated by the Resident Sabatier of glorious memory. Short, with a sharp eye and a sharp wit, he knows what he's talking about....

Having invited me to both his homes, the obliging secretary invites me to accompany him soon to Ban Don where he has a café-grocery store and living quarters.

...The Radé hut of woven bamboo is raised on high pilings. Its average length is 50 meters, although it is sometimes as long as 200 meters. Thus it can shelter a whole tribe, that is, one person per meter (including children). The huts are grouped by fives and are oriented north and south. A matriarchal society. The man takes his mother's name, then his wife's, then his eldest daughter's. The girl buys her husband. She marries before puberty. The man makes her ready, but a fortuitous event impregnates her: a clap of thunder, the song or passage of a certain bird. So the man is superfluous in the family line. His superiority is uncontested in everything else. The hut contains as many fires (squares of ashes) as the queen mothers have of married daughters. You climb up to the hut by means of a notched tree-trunk. There's a platform at either end (men's and women's entrances). On the men's side, the communal room with its gongs, its drums, its symbolic jar. A central corridor leads to the conjugal apartments. The construction of a new hut used to include the sacrifice of a young girl buried alive under each of the corner posts. This custom has disappeared. The woman carries a basket on her back, the man carries a lance and a machete. The baby is carried in a blanket hung on the mother's back, and often the father's. Near the hut is a pool, a spring, a river. The women go there early in the morning. They scrub their gourds, get their supply of water, and wash from head to foot. They are very clean under their sarongs which touch water only when it rains. Both men and women have filed incisors. No religion. Two great sorcerors: the fire "sadet" and the water "sadet" are remnants of a belief in the eternal opposition of the elements. A hatred of civilization. The pioneers who built the roads were assassinated. When the road was finished, the village packed up and moved deeper into the forest. Lack of intelligence? Certainly not. Gogue assures me that his Annamese teacher teaches French to Radé children within a few years. (I visited the school. They use the conditional, the present tense, the imperfect subjunctive. They solve problems and they tell me the principal rivers of France.) No, it's excessive feeling. The Radé nourishes a vengeance that goes back for several generations. But you can count on his loyalty, fidelity, honesty.

It is strange to come into contact with human beings who have no history, or whose history ended centuries ago, when the China Sea rose between Malaya and the continent. The Moi could adopt our civilization if they wanted to. Y-Sai is an example. Their opposition is a deliberate choice. They prefer extermination to submission or to a change in their habits. Primitives? Certainly not. Some of them appear farther removed from Pithecanthropus than we are. I've just seen two magnificent warriors, erect as the Apollo Belvedere, beardless, their hair rolled in a chignon, amber necklaces around their necks, and silver bracelets on their wrists; effeminate according to these attributes, but how masculine in their bearing. And I just passed a Moi woman, as finely made as her cousins of Kam-pot, with hands as delicate as Sarang's or Hoi's; fairy hands. She passed by, haughty, without looking back, without the least curiosity about the stranger. She is pursuing the dream of her race; the same for 10,000 years!

(at Ban Don)

...I am received by two young women, one of whom is a H'nomg, breasts bare and hair dishevelled. And I'm enthusiastic enough to kiss them effusively...which they accept without demur. One more reason to send for the rest of my baggage. Y-Sai then got up, and pointing to the prettier of the two: "She is called Kho. She is rich. And her husband, who left several months ago, is not back yet. I'm taking her tonight to Ban Methuot where she has a case in court...the session of
the first Monday in July. She won't come alone either. I have other matrimonial cases; three husbands who went in the wrong rooms when they came back one night to the common hut. It's so hard to clear up!" Y-Sai likes to joke. Nevertheless, his words make me revise my initial plans, without giving up the hope of spending a few weeks here.

...Kho has come to pose (drawing op. 133). Contrary to what one might think, I did not insist on obtaining more than she had granted the day before. For I understood that Kho wanted to have nothing to reproach herself with. She especially wants to remain pure for her appearance before the tribunal which knows all and judges accordingly.

This morning, July 6, I am awakened by an unusual commotion on the lawn in front of the veranda. I wonder if it's a market day, a review of the partisans, or a gathering for receiving allocations; what can it be? And what's more, what does it matter? The conversations go on, and when I open my door 20 minutes later, I stand amazed. For I see fifty or so Radés squatting on their heels suddenly rise in my honor. I understand....and to think I was ignoring them! A kindness on the part of Y-Sai. On one side the warriors lined up, lance and crossbow at their feet. On the other, the troop of married women and the maidens—among whom were two young ones with their baskets (wash op. 134), wearing their big leaf hats, convex like shields. And Y-Sai's nephew comes forward. I go down. Like the commandant of a company, I pass them in review and take names: Y'... for the men and H'... for the women. And I have them maneuver the crossbow which is drawn while standing upright, one foot on the thigh and the cross on the belly; and I have them maneuver the lance, which is brandished like a javelin.

Thanks to one and all. The troop disbands; and I begin immediately with Y'Muk, a handsome young fellow of 20, an ex-soldier discharged for laziness. Y'Muk, idler of idlers, poses nevertheless as the "Man with the Crossbow" (drawing op. 135) and the sketches op. 136, 137, and 138. He's an athlete, almost like an anatomical model; and when he moves, the lines of the intersecting layers of muscles move over his body like stretched wires. I learn from Y-Muk how the langoût is put on. This long blue loincloth is knotted around the hips, letting a knot hang down on the right, goes down between the buttocks, wraps the genitals, comes back up over the belly, and after slipping under the first wrapping, falls down in front and ends in a fringe. One cannot imagine a more elegant way of preserving decency while covering so little. Much superior to shorts, to the shortest of shorts whose "fashionable" triangle cannot be used in a painting.

After Y'Muk it's H'Brock (drawing op. 138), a pretty Radé child of eleven, wild-eyed, completely bewildered. A complete little savage. If my stool creaks, if I move by chance, she is terrified and heads for the door. I didn't have time to tame her.

H'Moch, a Radé woman with a basket (drawing op. 139). She wore her festival sarong, printed black silk with a carmine edge. Noted the size of her nipples, made for the hungry mouths of Moi babies.

The Radé chiefs Y'gor. Sketch (handling the lance, op. 140) and portrait drawing (op. 141). He wears a turban and a big sun-hat; the hat tied on by two strings, one under the chin and one at the nape, ornamented with four lateral pompoms. A three-strand, amber necklace. Festival tunic.

A very athletic young man (I forget his name). Profile, lance in hand; and back. (sketch op. 142 and 142 bis). Handsome head (sketch op. 143), well-shaped and typical in the extension of the buccal sphincter.

And H'Yia, wife of a Jarai soldier, sent by Des Essarts. Astonishment and purity. Ravishing; and a ravishing expression of the lips. The breast is carried high with upturned nipple—a racial characteristic caused by suckling from above, the baby being carried in a blanket passed over the shoulder. (drawing op. 144).
Back to work with H'Drak, the wife of corporal 194. Not pretty, but with a very marked character, which I emphasize by drawing her profile. Her head is carried forward and her mouth is offered, like Saem; and the weight of her heavy hair rolled at the back of the head makes her neck sway. Very beautiful bust, opulent and firm and of an earth-red color. (H'Drak, Radé woman," 145 and oil op. 146).

Mid-July. The sun only appears once in a while in the mornings. By 11 o'clock the sky has already spread out its gray mantle. In the valley, at the bridge of the Ban Tur trail, the Ea Tam's yellow waters roll over submerged rocks. It plunges under the moving, dripping vault of the trees and shrubs pounded by the rain. It disappears in the semi-darkness. And it pleases me. Less blinding light... ("the Ea Tam at Ban Methouët," watercolor and oil op. 151 and 152).  

At the Lake Post

18-27 July

...From the post I paint the big Radé hut whose lower level shelters the households of the Native Guard. The half-naked wives do their cooking below it. One can see a bit of the lake edged by the trail, and a little hill invaded by the new jungle. Two red cows on the grass and a few canas planted by Mme Moulini (the Hut of the Soldiers, oil op. 153).

This same bit of the lakeside tempts me in spite of the downpour. Heavy white clouds standing out from a gray sky straddle the summits beyond the sheet of water. To the left, the thicket hiding the cabins of Sao-si. A pirogue and a pelican pass each other at right angles. Banks of lotuses which are drowned a little more each day of the rising water of the lake. (The Melancholy Lake," oil op. 154).  

24-26 July

...From my sheltered balcony, I paint a panorama of the lake. A view of the season. Ragged clouds streaming over the mountain. White tufts of cloud halfway up, the residence of the downpours. The lake is gray. It is swollen. And its ring of lotuses is getting thinner (oil op. 155).

Also from my balcony I enjoy in answer to a morning prayer—a sight unique in its grace and its antique character. A larger and more distant re-edition of the "toilette" at the Ea Tam. A Radé pirogue leaves the shore, poled by a Moi woman with a long piece of bamboo. The pirogue is so narrow that the six women on board kneel in single file, with their water gourds between them. They are the wives of the soldiers at the post. I follow the skiff with binoculars. It fills the field of vision. And only the false perspective created by foreshortening shows the real distance (150 m). Will you believe me if I say that the six passengers are six beauties: and that one of them, with the proud breasts, is the Moi woman of the "Melancholy Lake:" They are beautiful. And there are good reasons for this selection. 1) They are beautiful because their husbands, soldiers of 18 to 22, could have only young wives, 2) They are beautiful because, receiving pay, the soldiers of the Native Guard are an elite in the country; and they profit by appropriating the flower of the opposite sex. As at the Ea Tam, these Moi women take care of their household duties before thinking of themselves. But the gourds are soon rinsed and filled; and then they take off their midnight blue sarongs and appear, hair down, some crouching, others standing, in their innocent nakedness. Oh primitive and true humanity! A chaste apparition in the perfect order of things. Perhaps it has been noticed that the tonal relationships seen through binoculars are much more delicate than those seen by the naked eye. This is due to the fact that the difference between black and white is diminished by distance, giving priority to color values. From the height where I am, I cannot see the horizon, but instead the gray-blue mirror of the water from which rises the ocher of skin and the velvet black spot of the pirogue and the hair. And that is all. What style and harmony! The Moi women do not dive into the lake. They pour water over their entire body with a bowl. No wrinkles, no heaviness, no protruding bones mar
their anatomy. Their bodies are as small-boned as those of children, but their proportions are womanly. One must give in to the evidence. Alongside them, white women would appear masculine, or formed by the juxtaposition of parts; and the more Nordic the type the more this is so. A phenomenon that can be seen without leaving Europe; without even leaving home, by comparing the modeling of Rubens with that of Raphael. He who confuses these different esthetic values understands nothing about beauty. Here all is one smooth flow, like a jasmine flower opening. The Egyptian understood this better than the sculptor of the Venus de Milo.

After having combed their hair and washed in all innocence and simplicity, these daughters of another age—that I take to be the golden age—put on the square of cloth woven with their own hands and which leaves bare their beautiful breasts; and they pole their pirogue to shore. The enchantment is over.

Court in session today. The Moi have come to the post to plead their cases; some draped in their blue blankets striped with red—one who appears to be very important—in a red blanket with both ends draped behind over his shoulders. (The Old Moi Chief," wash op. 156).

It's an idea of Captain des Essarts that I'm going to use. I had already mentioned to the captain my idea for a decorative composition entitled "Tiger Hunt at Dar Lak." The actors were to be Rada or Jarai, and the weapons to be used—lances. Des Essarts, very proud of the athletic condition of his soldiers, puts at my disposal the best-looking of them, wearing the langouti and carrying the lance, to act out a tiger hunt...

Des Essarts has assembled his handsome soldiers in his quarters. Lighter-skinned than the Radas. Only one objection: the langouti is a ceremonial garment. Not appropriate for a tiger hunt. Oh well, what's the difference? I toss my jacket on the ground. It is the tiger. And the Jarai surround it at a distance and approach it with all the movements of attack, joint, defense. I take eight snapshots. With the "true-to-life" documentation, my composition will not smell of the studio.

It's not necessary to go far to find interesting motifs. From the bridge I see the Krong Buk's rolling yellow water, swollen by the rain. Thick foliage overshadows it on the left bank (watercolor op. 158). Downstream I see it disappear under a row of newly planted trees (watercolor op. 159). And from the trail I see the planter's house, high on the embankment, flanked by beautiful trees, the one on the right enveloped in vines. Below, the streambed (watercolor, op. 160). In the grove I paint leaf by leaf, mold by mold, patiently, a group of young banana trees; a symphony of colors containing all the tints of the palette (op. 161). Rossi receives me smiling. He has found me a model. He introduces her to me. It's H'Mouk, his coffee sorter; a Rada girl of 18. Splendid. A polished block of wood. Jaws strong enough to grind buckshot and hands delicate enough to handle lace. Breasts like two little cymbals...

And I painted H'Mouk in three sittings. Almost outdoors. Against the background of greenery growing along the Krong Buk. We were sitting under a roof, near the veranda; frequently obliged to interrupt the posing because of the rain coming in at a slant. H'Mouk is in a sarong, the bust free, lightly holding the edge of her basket. She is very active; getting up every five minutes to come and burst out laughing behind my shoulder, showing her black, filed teeth. H'Mouk is from Me Yak...

I offer H'Mouk three one-piaster bills; three dirty, wrinkled little objects. She accepts them with disgust, making a face, having asked Ti Hay about their value. For her it's a little fortune. But three silver pieces of 10 cents would please her better. Shd. could pierce them, hang one in each ear and make the other jingle in a bamboo tube. Oh, the good old days of piasters that tipped the scales!
They've gone to China, the good piasters. What could the White Man not obtain for that shining metal? What can he get with the present trash? And I blush. For I feel that I'm robbing the poor. For I know that this paper money (abuse of trust) is worth exactly nothing; that tied to the franc, it follows the franc's ruinous fluctuations, and the unfortunate native is twice cheated. What an obscenity, H'Mouk, is my civilization! ("H'Mouk, Coffee Sorter," oil op. 162).

August 6 - Eve of departure. I've been at DarLak for more than a month. The rainy season does not permit me to stay longer, unless I stay inside all the time. And, with nothing to do, it's not amusing. My harvest is respectable. I've added after the event:
"Tiger Hunt at Dar Lak," sepia (op. 163). Same subject, color wash (op. 164). Following the indications given on location and the poses taken at the soldiers' camp. The drama takes place during the dry season in a dry stream bed. The Radés or Jarais actors are armed with lances and crossbows. The presence of women is justified by the cabins on the cliff. The vegetation, in which one can count 10 species, is that of tropical ravines. One beast has already been killed. The other is about to be run through with lances. A decorative outline for a mural painting that I won't have a chance to execute. "Young Mother," (wash op. 165). Found in front of Father Marry's shop. Note the superbly erect breast due to the position of the baby. "Elephantforing the Stream," (wash op. 166). "The Show," (drawing op. 167). According to documentation done at the militia post of Kilometer 50, Plei-ku trail. Interesting for the variety of expressions showing age and character.


p. 478
[Despujols left the DarLak region on August 7 for Nha-Trang. He left Nha Trang on August 10 for Quang Ngui and Gi Lang. He went to Hue on August 17.]

Annam Coast (Viet Nam)

p. 485
August 7 (Nha Trang)...
I follow the path that skirts the rocky spur and paint the Bay of Nha Trang, resplendent in its color and clarity. In the distance, the pink mountains of the Champa. To the right, the golden yellow islet of Hon Long. A choppy sea of the most transparent green (watercolor and oil, op. 171 and 171 bis).

A little further on facing west, is Whale Creek with the light behind it. An opalescent sea. The mountains in the background tinted in mauves and reds (watercolor, op. 172).

p. 511
(at the Gi Lang post) 12-14 August--I have painted the chosen models: "Young Darak" (op. 173) and "Darak Girl" (op. 174) of Gi Lang. The young man appears to me more Malay- related to the Radés, the Jarais, the Chams—than Indo- nesian. He wears a multicolored turban and a mirror fixed Spanish- fashion at the back of his head...

With her protruding jaw and pointed skull with its judiciously combed hair (two vertical lines that make it seem longer and narrower), the young Moi woman is more characteristic than her Radé sister H'Mouk. A good little girl, without malice. Her glance tells me only one thing: formed to obey.

p. 553-555
[Despujols is staying at the country house of Le Quang Tuc, an Annamese gentleman] August 19 - New introductions. The eldest son of royal blood, future guardian of the funerary tablets of the house of Le.

Voui and Moun, aged 18 and 19. Naïveté, gentleness, and beauty. Tall and slim—wearing flat heels—which explains their posture: arched thighs, abdomen thrust forward, spinal column stretched, chin tucked in. Two medieval Madonnas. Moun in a black Cai-ao, Voui in a straw pink one. Two El Grecos. Ocher complexion, matte and relatively dark. Magnificent eyes, almost Aryan. Breasts visible only when they breathe. No shoulders: one wavy line from the tip of the ear to the tips of the fingers. Aerial grace. Nothing earthy except the split pulp of their lips and...
M. Tuc talks about his family as a well-informed man: "The ancient race of Hué, to which we belong, is somewhat different from the Annamese you have met on your travels. We are proud of having kept the imprint of the Chams. For the Chams are our ancestors along with the Chinese of Sang Tao Cheng and the Annamese of Ley. And that is why our eyes are wide open, horizontal, and our skin tinted with bistre...."

I finally decided on Voui. Oh, it's nothing big: a canvas of eight fig. Voui poses under the kiosk. Background of a cretonne screen with little red and green flowers. Her beautiful blackish-brown hair is parted in a virginal style. She is extremely pretty and one could not imagine a more aristocratic character. Regal forehead, straight nose, lips just a bit disdainful, ultra-feminine chin, rounded and slightly retreating...Voui wears the traditional necklace of massive gold. She is wearing her straw pink cai-ao. Alas, from her disdainful lips I cannot gain a word, even an indifferent one. The sitting is mute due to the lack of a common language and also because of an understandable reserve on my part.

...Le Quang Nam, M. Tuc's brother, arrives in a rickshaw. The type of a bespectacled mandarin; grey goatee and mustache. Nice, although he talks as little as his nieces. Exclusively learned in Chinese literature and skillful in forming beautiful characters. On top of the large classic table (or bed) with curved legs, a little low table of the same style, furnished with rag paper, a brush and a goblet of Chinese ink. Le Quang Nam, barefoot, crouched on the larger table, writes. His flattened left hand holds the paper; and the right holding the brush upright, covers the sheet from top to bottom and from right to left with mysterious signs.

I draw him full-length.

20 August. 6 a.m. Overcast skies. I'm going to paint in watercolors an abandoned tomb (op. 175). From a distance it's a black spot amid the greenery. From close up, it's an antique gate over which a shrub is growing. The vaulted gate with oblique sides opens on a little enclosure, partly ruined and now no more than a thicket. After two hours of working in the open, wiping my aluminum palette that I hold on my knees, I'm burning up!...On the dike, a beaming Le Quang Tuc comes to meet me. "I saw you leave," he says, "and stop in front of this tomb of an unknown lady. And suddenly I was inspired to create a poem. For, you know, I'm a poet, and a great one...At least, I'm known as one." And he recites his poem to me, first in Annamese, then in French. Here it is:

"Years and multiples of years
Pass over me, poor abandoned tomb.
And no one.
My stones crumble, shifted by roots.
And disappear under the wild grass;
No one.
But birds, rats, snakes.
Cursed be she who has no son.
Or son of her son!

Yet a stranger has not feared to cross the sea.
He has landed on our shores.
He has come to the Plain of Tombs,
And he has found me.
Why me among so many?
And he has sat down;
And he has brought me out of oblivion.
Peace be upon thee, oh stranger, my son!
And may T'ien (Heaven) grant thee good fortune and long life!"
Huế-Dong Ha, 70 km by train; Dong Ha-Savannakhet, 327 km by road; Savannakhet-Vientiane, 468 km by river; Vientiane-Luang Phra Bang, 426 km by river. In all 1282 km. And no departure from Dong Ha before September 1. And I still need to make sure the road is clear. So I have to wait six days at Hue, six days of intermission during which I promise myself to do nothing except finish my notes. Six days to relax.

pp. 599-

There are many things I have yet to see in Huế. But I prefer to revisit the royal tombs: Tu-Duc, Minh-Mang, Tien-tri, Gia-long. The first two on the right bank, the others upstream on the left bank of the River of Perfumes.

Each tomb is a park surrounded by a high wall. Inside, pines, ban-yans, flame trees, frangipani trees, a pool and waterways covered with lotuses; terraces, tiled courtyards, stone statues, pylons, bridges, porticoes, and figures symbolizing the Dragon of Annam. The order may change, the elements are the same: the pavilion where the sovereign came to meditate, the pavilion sheltering the granite stele on which are engraved the virtues and actions worthy of being recorded for posterity; the temple dedicated to the tablet of the spirit where the familiar possessions of the deceased are preserved; finally, the vast mound, uncultivated and wooded, covering the body and across from which rises, mysteriously, a bronze door barred by a heavy bronze chain.

Tu-Duc with a severe beauty; Minh-Mang and Tien-tri with a classical beauty; Gia-Long of a tragic beauty....Three different types of the same strange, always fascinating beauty.

I will not take the reader on a guided tour, sparing him descriptions whose picturesqueness would hide the essential. The essential is the style, or spirit, presiding over the building of these ensembles. How far we are from Versailles, and from the grandeur of rectilinear design! Already the temple of Li in Hanoi had revealed the absence of vertical lines (doors opening out or narrowing depending on whether they are opened or closed from above). The monument itself has the form of a truncated pyramid. There is also the absence of horizontal lines in the elegantly curved roofs upturned at the corners. But the same observation could be applied to the foundations and terraces whose surfaces are slightly curved and whose ridges are slightly arched. If one considers the Euclidean frame of reference which underlies European architecture, one realizes that the system is replaced here by the coupling of the two geometries used by modern science to determine the physical makeup of the universe: one of dispersion (pseudo-horizontal dimensions), the other of concentration (pseudo-vertical dimensions). But one corresponds to the ying and the other to the yang, the two fundamental elements, feminine and masculine, of Chinese cosmogony.

It is probable that the general principles that played such a large role in antiquity and guided man in his free creations have given their ambiguous and inextensive character to the decorative works of the Far East, as they have given their analytic and extensive character to the works of the West. In its science, Europe has now caught up with Asia. But Asia is far ahead in its spirit. Thus, it is clear why a static system of reference (the Euclidean) tangent to the cosmic order gives rise to nothing belonging to that order; while the dynamic system of reference (with its double action) gives rise to works of a higher meaning, in perfect accord with the ultimate nature of things.

But what I demonstrate by force of argument, is justified by sensibility from the start. For having amused myself by reconstructing on a rectangular framework the stele of Tu Duc and its three superposed terraces, I obtained a geometric figure of the most meaningless aridity.

Annamese architecture (derived from the Chinese) is the image of creation. The yang, whose lines of force taper together around the vertical axis, rises out of the ying two dispersive fields whose lines are oriented perpendicularly to the yang. These dispersive
fields symbolize the two faces of the feminine: one terrestrial, orgiastic, sensual, impure; the other idealized, absolutely pure. Astarte the temptress and Aither the sidereal virgin, earthly matter and the light of Genesis. Between these two extremes the converging field of the monument symbolizes the unitary element, which is unitary only because it is inclusive. The union of the ying and the yang also expresses the association of the one and the many; neither the di-vision of unity in the Platonic sense nor the multiplication of unity, since the one appears to be one only with regard to the many. This corresponds to the Aristotelian definition of beauty: unity is diversity.

And the color!
If form speaks to the intelligence, color speaks to the emotions. Unfortunately, in the West we are unused to color allied with form in architecture. We are shocked to learn that the Parthenon was multi-colored. And we judge according to Notre Dame, which is covered with soot, and according to the courtyard of the Louvre, which is a coalbox, and according to the Milan Cathedral, which is an iceberg. Monochrome architecture is only an arabesque of the intelligence, a drama of the will, good fortune and ill, a struggle between light and darkness. But color! it is the joy of the eyes and the transport of the soul.

I've praised the color of this region with regard to the “men” of Siem Reap and the Cambodian pagodas and the little pagoda near Quang Ngai. Color is, or was, the universal decoration of these monuments. Here against an ochre background are gray panels edged with blue and red. These panels carry alternating bands of worked enamel: pale blue, reddish ochre, and sea-green. The round, varnished tile of the roofs descends in green sausage shapes to meet a double row of rings on the frontal beam with its pirogue-like profile. Brightly colored pinnacles, spires, acroteria, lift their lacy carving against the sky. The season of flowers is over. And the sea-green of the pines is relieved only by the truer green of the flame trees and the lighter green of the frangipanis. But at one time the frangipanis were snowy bouquets and the flame trees domes of vermilion. There is melancholy only because of the loneliness and grandeur only because of the silence—disturbed here and there by the cooing of doves. And the waters sleeping in their prison proclaim the soul's peace in its jewel box of a tomb. And for whom is all this beauty? For whom these avenues, these stairways with their undulating ramps representing a dragon's body, these bridges arched over a liquid mirror, these pavilions open to the light, these parterres engraved with the seal of the empire? For the visitor? But the visitor comes here only against the wishes of the master. All this is for him, the master who is no more; it is for his afterlife; it is for the wandering spirit of the dead emperor. All this is as necessary to the spirit as the cult of the funerary tablets kept by the monks in the pagoda of the spirit. The spirit has kept its earthly habits and tastes; and it insisted, when incarnate, that its last resting place be on the scale of its physical body and of its double or astral body. Thus, nothing is out of proportion; nothing is made to seem too small because of perspective. And the work of man does not overwhelm the natural nor does nature overwhelm the work of man, but rather both, man and nature, made for each other, have united their grace to create the most pleasing setting for the sovereign who was enamored of perfection. Down through the centuries, however, nature's share in this once-equal union has become greater than man's. Colors fade, the stucco begins to rot away, moss invades the parapets; the pools—especially at Gia Long—are no more than fields of lotus; and the trees, mingling their branches, also block the path with their knotty roots. But who would not be willing to forgive nature? And along with the melancholy of the deserted park, there is the melancholy of fading memories. Spirits of Gia Long, Minh Mang, Tu Duc, and Tien Tri, what do you think of it all? And how futile they must appear to you now, the precautions you took to preserve your grandeur in the empire of the shades! But I am grateful to you for having involuntarily associated me with your poetic, aesthetic, and philosophical preoccupations, since it is I, the unexpected passerby, who today enjoys your resting place for deceased kings. Alas, why can I not—as I dreamed at the house of my friend Le Quang Tuc—give my hand to Voui, to the Grace of Graces, to a Voui speaking French while remaining entirely Annamese....The Vouis were numerous at the palace.
of "Absolute Concord," and their visit to the tomb must have been a spectacular event—without spectators. One of them, at the mausoleum of Tu Duc, has been serving the ritual meal to the spirit of her royal husband for 54 years. She was 16 when she first cloistered herself at Kien Lang. I greeted her with emotion. At Thieu Tho, Gia Long rests beside Queen Thu Thi Cao (stela of supernatural merits and transcendant virtue—how pretty it is!). The second wife and the queen mother are buried at the end of the pool; and each has her pagoda of love and filial piety.

**Toward Laos**

[Despujols traveled by train and bus (with several breakdowns) from Hue to Savannakhet, where he took a boat upstream on the Mekong for Luang Phra Bang; the last scheduled boat of the season.]

p. 633 5 September—It rains and rains and rains. And on the right we are passing a forest that blends into a low cloud cover. The ribbon of water over which we glide is sea green. We are doubtless approaching a tributary from a forested region—yellow water indicates cleared land. This tributary, the Nam Ca Dinh, flows into the Mekong unexpectedly, between two hills. But it seems to flow like a lake. The slow current barely encroaches on the chocolate masses of the larger river. At the north point of the bank—where the line of demarcation between the two colors begins—a straw hut and two pirogues are caught under the branches. Each tributary we pass is an invitation to discovery. We go on and I feel a twinge of regret. What a chain of regrets is a human life!

p. 658 14 September—Artigas takes me to the riverbank near the landing stage, to his headquarters at the "Fluviale" where he has lived for thirty years (he's 65). There, built on the taboo foundation of an ancient pagoda, is a typical colonial house with its enclosing gallery.

In the Kingdom of the Lan Xang

p. 666 15 September—I have touched neither pencil nor colors for twenty days. It's time to get back to work. I am attracted first by the Nam Khan. A unique morning spectacle. White sky, blue mountain, river of melted gold, mauve pirogue. An orgy of greens with the light behind it. Oh fecundity of the water, the sun, and the earth! This mud of fire from which spring the banana tree, giant, juicy, and leguminous, and the coconut tree, perched high in the sky. (The Nam Khan at Luang Phrabang (watercolor and oil, op. 182 and 182bis).

p. 678 (At Luang Phra Bang)...In a little abandoned pagoda, between Vat Xieng-thong and Vat Mai, a gilded Buddha—except for his black and white eyes. Geometric volumes and consecrated expression. His traja pierces an awning stretched under the ceiling. A beam of sunlight hitting the ground makes the gold shine with all the colors of the rainbow. Two little round holes in the horizontal surface of the nose that I can see by looking up under it. The heavy sensuality of the lips is camouflaged by the glitter of the whole and only the subtle smile remains... (watercolor and oil, op. 185 and 185bis).

p. 679 17 September—After the pagodan, the pagoda (painting op. 187); and after the pagoda, the school of the pagoda (painting op. 188). Meanwhile near the landing stage, a watercolor (op. 189) of the Mekong seen through the foliage of the embankment. Behind the motorized pirogue, blue shadows on the orangish water, the hut of a "bonzes" (nun) on the slopes (this priestess belongs to a delicious pagoda hidden among the palms, banana trees, and flame trees). From the "Fluviale" one sees the idle monks seated on the stonework along the road.

pp. 689-690 23 September—The terrace of Vat Xieng Thong is twelve steps up from the Boulevard. It is more than 100 meters square; and the pagoda is beside the river—separated from it by a line of trees. Just beyond the line of trees one sees the trees of Xieng Men Mountain, not suspecting that the luminous surface of the Mekong lies between them. I painted the venerable pagoda, its three elegant juxtaposed rooflines, and its portico whitened with the lime. Today I'm painting from the pagoda itself the low building of the school, its entrance
steps and two novices heading for their hut. For this purpose, I’m sitting outside a little side door, while inside the vihara a religious service is going on. I hear the bonze pronounce the word “Buddha” in a liturgical quaver. And the faithful (some novices and a few women) repeat on a lower note, giving each syllable equal length: “Buddha.” And the litany continues:

"Gau-ta-mâ"  
"Gautama"  
"May-trê -ya"  
"May-trê -ya"  
"A-mî-ta-ba"  
"A-mî-ta-ba"  
"Sa-man-ta-bha-dra"  
"Sa-man-ta-bha-dra"  
"A-va-lo-ki-teç-va-ra"  
"A-va-lo-ki-teç-va-ra"

in an atmosphere of touching piety.

Painted at Artigas’ studio "Bouddhi with the Blue Scarf" (op. 193, canvas of 25 Fig.)...But Bouddhi does not pose in the studio. She is seated on the parapet, with the background of the ocher wall of the studio with the open door. A harmony of ocher (skin) on ocher, garnet (sinh, rustic table and scarf) and blue (vase and scarf). As Bouddhi is seen from the left her coiffure is seen only as a crown on her right side. The scarf passes under the left arm and crosses over the right shoulder. Rounded shoulder; and round arm that keeps its grace at both the elbow and the wrist. A typically Laotian face.

9 Ocotber  
Bouddhi poses at the window for a little portrait (canvas of 6). She is draped in my yellow scarf embroidered with blue. Thus I’ve called this portrait "Bouddhi with the Yellow Scarf" (oil op. 198). How beautiful my Bouddhi is like this! Certainly not because of the decorative scarf whose lemon color brings out the waxed wood color of her skin, but because of her own beauty and her expression. Her high rounded forehead, her slanted eyes, and wild-beast cheekbones, her little nose with its delicate nostrils, her curved mouth, more provocative than sensual, her narrow, square, and decided chin...A real tigress!

Bouen Khai, on the left bank. A delicious pagoda with a lacy golden façade on a blue background, and columns with gold motifs on a black background. A raked entrance court, flanked by clumps of hibiscus. Mango trees, latanias, and a few full-grown trees. A dream, (watercolor op. 199).

Vat That is on a natural terrace; and the huts of the bonzesses are built on the southeast edge of this terrace. I paint one of these huts between a palm tree on the right and a young latania on the left. The hut, on pilings, consists of one room, a veranda below, and a platform (lower still) giving access to the veranda. The bonzea is draped in white and her head is shaved. She passes her time of meditation and rest crouched under the veranda (watercolor op. 203).

I go back to the sala. How empty it seems! What about doing some work? Right away. This background of bluish countryside. The thread stretched between the pink Mekong and the ocher Nam U. The thin horizontal lines of the pirogues. The fawn reflection of the forest in the chalky water; and on the jagged crest of the dark forest wall the brilliant yellow volutes of the tall bamboos. For the sun is in the west and the foreground is beginning to get dark. Theme: the rich, warm, humid earth, life and pleasure through all its pores (watercolor and oil op. 206 and 206bis).
30 October - Saturday - Finished the cliff of Paku. (watercolor and oil op. 210 and 210 bis). Did well to wait. The river has gone down and its water is a beautiful sea green. As for the cliff, shining in the sun, it has the effect of an enormous stained-glass window, and given the landscape the depth of a cathedral; a sight which is made even more strange by the complete reflection of the vertical dimension on the surface of the water. A pirogue passes; and you wonder if it's floating on air.

Sunday - Loafed. Came back to the motif of the hut of the poor woman. But the weather is overcast. And I’m afraid of losing the effect (op. 212 unfinished).

Monday - Day of departure. I say farewell to the Nai-Kueng, and thank him for his extreme helpfulness. The bill for my accommodations for these eight days is a total of 3 piastres!....The chest and the knapsack are on the bank, below the gate. I outline a watercolor of the Nam U, looking upstream. Morning light. In the background the pink river; and to the left an immense clump of bamboos spreading out in volutes. And below a pirogue getting smaller and smaller... A large scale scene (op. 213 unfinished). A pirogue emerges silently below me. I guess that it's the mail boat, pack up my things, and run to catch it.

Au revoi, Pak U, perhaps adieu!

I've never had a taste for verbal description when it could be advantageously replaced by a sketch or a map. For such a description is no only indigestible, but also massacres reality. By contrast, how correctly and eloquently evocative are maps! I've always loved them. They are so beautiful, even in black and white; and they enable us to make such wonderful journeys in our imagination. So I offer to the reader the attached schematic map. Marked with a cross above the camp is the position of my easel on a rock, from where I painted the Keng Luong (op. 219). The painting, supplemented by the map, permits a partial recreation of the sites. I do not claim to have discovered there a unique spectacle. Scenes of this quality abound in Indochina. But there is more than the scenery. There's the fact that I have communed in it. There is the personal fact of my soul taking pleasure in it. And, by delegation of feeling, the fact that the soul of the reader can also take pleasure in it. An exception to my low opinion of modern man. Even if he be a Christian, I do not always take my reader to be absolutely insensitive to what he condemns in another. For divergences of opinion are grafted on a common base.

I've already talked about scenes or landscapes as being boxed in or open. The traveler is tempted to go up into the first and to descend into the second. But although the temptation is greater to climb than to descend, there is more being and joy in perspective when one is below rather than on high. One is isolated and bored on uninhabitable summits, facing immensity. Nietzsche at Siles Marfa went crazy. He needed an oasis. Whatever may be the aspiration of the soul, its best oasis is the prison of the body; and the best oasis of the incarnate soul is a picturesque corner of nature. The soul liberated by death haunts the world. It returns to its old loves. It knows that there is life for it only in the domain of limitations and conditions. God himself could only be manifest by sacrificing to the law, bringing necessity and liberty out of the indeterminate.

My horizontal dimension includes the torrent and its immediate surroundings. Sparkling, swirling water at the level of the beach; tumultuous water with its immobile architecture, rolling from wave to wave in the narrow channel. A fall of barely two meters, on an incline and primed by a hat. At this spot—the noisiest—a little branch of the Nam Khan rejoins the main river. A flat island separates them, an island of pebbles and bushes that are covered with water during the rainy season.

Ninth day - At dawn I went to the pier (where the boatmen had set up
their tent; and while the rice was cooking and the water was heating for coffee, I painted the watercolor "Awakening on the Nam Khan" (op. 221). The scene at this early hour was moving in its beauty. The calm water in a very wide bay, reflecting the dark forest; with the exception of a few silvery trails due to an outcrop of gravel. The mountain and the rugged outlines of its surfaces where humid blue blends into green. And up above, the vapors that enclose it and the small opaline clouds that linger and play in the treetops—an effect that is found in the temperate zone only at high altitudes. It reminds me of my impression of the Malayan coast before arriving at Singapore.

pp. 859-886

Despujols traveled from Luang Phra Bang to Hanoi by way of Xiang-Khuang and Vinh. "Four days journey. 980 Kilometers." Arrived Hanoi on Dec. 18. Left on an excursion to Cao Bang (north of Hanoi) by way of Bac Giang and Lang Son. Then traveled 45 km west to a native guard post at Nguyen Binh. Inspector Farandin, the French commandant there, found some models.

pp. 887-888

27-31 December

This new model is pictorially delightful with her silver necklaces and bracelets and her blouse covered with tinkling piastres. She has her hair shaved in front like all the Man, and her lips are bloodred from chewing betel. But our Man is no less delightful in character. She arrived completely bewildered under the care of a guardian, but she soon saw the funny side of the situation and turned out to be quite a salty character. The funny thing is not at all—as one might think—the fact of having her features transcribed on a flat surface; although this too makes her burst out laughing. The funny part concerns the native soldiers working nearby. If I may judge by the faces, the gibes, the attacks and ripostes, the chortles, the laughter, sometimes smothered and sometimes explosive, it was an exchange of words that would have made a sailor blush. (Pan-cu-kl, Man Tien Girl of Nguyen Binh, drawing op. 226 and oil op. 227).

The third subject was a stodgy and apathetic Man Coc girl (oil op. 228). Her role didn't surprise her at all, for she had been displayed at Saigon for the celebration of the Indo-chinese. A beautiful, strong girl, although it was difficult to guess her shape under the quantity of ornaments. A cap with an embroidered red hem; a navy blue coat with wide sleeves and light blue turned-up cuffs, decorated with two vertical rows of enormous red pompoms; a high collar with horizontal white, red, and black stripes, and a white frill embroidered in red with black spots; a red scarf worn military-fashion, with a ball-fringe in front; a plaid skirt and leggings. How could such a complex costume evolve, come into general use, and become fixed?

p. 883

25 December (Excursion from Cao Bang to an outpost at Tra Linh, near the Chinese border)

On the way back we crossed over a massif from which we could see the grandiose panorama of the limestone reefs planted on the plain like pawns on a chessboard. As one looks toward the horizon, the outline of the reefs against the sky seems to be the silhouette of a mythical dragon's back. (Return to Hanoi January 2, 1938. Arrival at Haiphong January 4 --Took a boat for Hon Gai where he arrived January 5)

Ha Long Bay

pp. 903-904

January 7 - I ended up by renting a sampan, with a crew of two, a man and a woman. It's a variety of the "loveboat" of the River of Perfumes. [cf. hx] The boat has a deck with a deckhouse and one mast. The passenger has access to the deckhouse and the deck. The crew stays below, where they have just enough room to crouch. Although I could have obtained one on demand, I don't have a girl with me. I'm going to paint. And my ambition in this respect is modest enough. I'm bringing only my watercolors. With its fantastic scenery and the magic effects of its light, Ha Long Bay could tempt an impressionist or an expressionist painter. It cannot inspire a classical painter. Useless to go out too far, the scenery being pretty much the same wherever you go. So we row out to the closest reefs, about two miles from Na Chai, not far from the Annamese port of Hon Gai. There, in uncertain weather, within an enclosed bay, where the lack of an outlet isolates, encloses and forces the mind to turn in on itself, I paint "Among the Reefs of the Blue Sea" (op. 230) and "Rock in the Bay of Ha Long" (op. 231). A safe harbor,
but how melancholy. Not a single bird. The least strip of sand where coconuts grow and gulls fly over is more attractive. On the shore, a timid lapping of the waves. A marine background of sienna passing into sea green, then the reflection of the rocks, broken into a thousand shining spots. The sea uncovers a mauve line of madrepores. I am glad to get out of there and arrive at the little fishing port of Hon Gai, one mile to the north.

8 January - Stroll on the beach. Take a snapshot of a long barge with a load of rocks. The red straw sail with five antennas is a skimmer. (wash op. 233 done later; "Junks in the Bay of Ha Long" op. 234, belongs to the same series.)

Climbed two thirds of the way up Hon Gai Rock. From the shore a path leads up a grassy hillock with limestone needles sticking up. The view encompasses the entrance to the Annamese port, takes in a part of the reefs where I was the day before and looks beyond toward the south. Toward 5 p.m. under a clear sky warmed by the slanting rays of the setting sun, the scene is worth retaining; just for its magnificence, and also because of a certain shadow cast by my rock, a shadow that has five different shades: its own, the shade on the waves reflecting the rock in the shadow, the shade on the waves reflecting the sky, the shade on the sunlit rock of a nearby reef, and the shade of its vegetation. ("Shadows," watercolor op. 235).

[Returned to Hanoi January 13, 1939. Departure for the Thai country on January 18. Travel along the Black River to Son La.]

21, 22 January - Executed in six hours the portrait of a young Thai girl ("Black Thai Girl Near Son-La," oil op. 239), a rare performance for me. The girl—age 15—is not perhaps the one I would have picked had I had a choice. She is the daughter of some rich peasant that the quan-dao wanted to do a favor for and represents a fairly common type of her race. She wears a long-sleeved bolero which compresses her bosom, and a sinh bound with a sash of mauve silk. Between the sash and the bolero her torso is bare.

23 January - Excursion to Hai Son (21 km), a Thai village with neat rows of houses, very clean. A few beautiful fan-palms. Flowers on the quan-dao's terrace; a stone house of agreeable proportions. The quan-dao: the attractive, fine-featured face of a mandarin. The Resident asks him courteously if I may see the "dances."

The dancers usually number ten. Since they've had no warning, they have to be sent for individually. The operation is successful, except for Me Finh, the youngest (a beauty of 14), who's in the ricefield. She is replaced by a former member.

Here they are then, preceded by their musicians, two Thais wearing black blouses, one carrying a viola, the other a kind of clarinet. All are barefoot, and one senses their nude bodies under the sinh, so thin it seems immaterial. Their hair is simply drawn back and twisted in a knot. They first form a line, a colored scarf stretched between their hands at the level of the hips and trailing down on either side. And they intone a very gentle song. Then the first dance, called the dance "of the scarves." This unpretentious dance reminds one of our quadrille, where two sets of partners cross each other, come together and break apart, dissolving and reforming by exchanging their elements. The resemblance ends there, however. For each dancer carries herself as a unit conscious of her plastic value, displaying all the grace of her body, slipping barefoot along the ground without trying to rival leaping animals or the birds of the air. The fact that she waves her scarf of yellow or mauve, green or red, blue or orange, like a flame running after other flames is to me only a superfluous embellishment. And the sound of the drums rustling like leaves in the wind or sparrows taking flight, and the play of the fans opening and closing in rhythm, are attractive enough in spite of their lack of originality. How can one not remember here the finale of the dances at Angkor? No comparison, really.

During a short absence of M. Valmary I draw the portrait of Cam Thi Dzan, dancer of Hai Son, op. 240.
24-26 January. Thanks to the kindness of M. Valmary (who offers me a car and a driver), I arrived at Thuan Chan on the morning of the 23rd. The 33 kilometers had been covered the day before by a rider carrying a letter of introduction. Loss of time thus reduced to a minimum. My camp bed is ready in the guestroom of the quan dao's house; and a dozen Thai girls await me on the veranda. The choice is quickly made. I unfasten my box and begin a canvas of 15 Fig.

Thuan Chau, called in Thai Ban Xleng Ly, was always a small domain with its own master. And my host, who has at his disposal a squad of the Native Guard, has a sentinel in front of his door. In the village an immense bamboo hut with a pointed roof, housing an entire tribe (75 people). This hut, surrounded by a high palisade, is only half visible from the alley that runs beside it. From my position—on the second floor of a house on a small hill—I can see even the piling that supports it. And I mention it because my little Thai model is its jewel. Although it is of stone, the quan dao's house follows the traditional design of native houses. No conjugal bedroom. The quan dao is bigamous. And he was willing to introduce me to his wives. Each has her own key. But the quan dao has three keys. I've seen his room; it's a real bachelor's den.

Since I love the native cuisine. I accept with pleasure the invitation to dine with the master and his two clerks. As you know, the woman's role here is to serve, not to be served.

And now let me speak a little of my model. Since I don't recall her name, I'll call her Me Teor. She is a perfect beauty. The daughter of a chief, her looks are worthy of her social class. A creamy complexion, velvety eyes, a small nose, and her mouth... a rose petal stretched horizontally by two strings; the opposite of the full lips that suppose this kind. And I mention it because my little Thai model is its jewel. Although the oval is imperfect, it is suitable enough for Western faces. The term "ovate" or ellipsoidal curve is more correct; and I could have used it already with regard to Voul. In short, inexpressible charm that I'm trying to describe; and I don't know why I'm wasting time trying to rival my professional language, which is eloquent in another way. The little Thai bolero is fastened in front by a series of closely spaced hooks of chased silver. Rolled around the waist and leaving a handsbreadth of bare flesh under the breasts, a mauve silk scarf, the only touch of color relieving the severity of the costume. Fastened to the scarf like charms are a bunch of little keys and two tiger claws mounted in silver—the more keys, the more chests, and the more chests one has, the richer one is.

I finished Me Teor on the morning of the third day. Since I couldn't take the wet canvas with me, I tacked it up in the quan dao's room. It has been agreed that M. Valmary will pick it up in about a week.

[Despujols then traveled northwest to Lai Chau on the Black River and visited a nearby Thai village, Muong Lai, the former capital of the White Thais.

A steep path partly cut in the rock leads us to the edge of the village. From there we look out over the clear waters of the Nam Na; and we discover below us, on the sand, a group of naked young women playing and drying themselves after bathing. They see us and are not the least bit disturbed. Their apricot-colored bodies are flawless. They are not disturbed because they are at a distance (50 meters) which they think respectable; and because we are only looking at them without seeming about to descend. How can I tear myself away from this sight being the man and artist that I am?...]

Went down to the French cemetery (see map) and drew a leafless frangipani. The frangipani loses its leaves in winter (sepia, op. 244). Why are these two trees planted on the deserted slope of our resting place? Is it in memory of those seen on the Plain of Tombs at the mausoleum of Tu Duc, in the gardens of Minh Mang?... And I dedicate too a pious thought to those who are buried there, far from their families, and who are visited by no one after their burial. Not that their spirits care; but because I cannot ignore a sacrifice from which
I profit so greatly today.

1 February. I've discovered the ballet mistress, whose beauty equals her talent. Her name is Me Heu. The triphu, prepared by Commandant Barle, lets me have her as a model. But I have to go to her, since professional dancers are not allowed to leave their quarters (what a joke; everything can be bought).

2-4 February
The triphu's house is not unworthy of its occupant. A sentinel at the door. A monumental door and a wall enclosing the courtyard. A lookout tower. An imposing stone building in the center. Another in the rear. Wood and bamboo outbuildings on the sides. I paint from 3 to 5 p.m. under the southeast veranda; my model is profiled by a doorway (central building). And the daylight is no less coming to her charming Thai face than was the electric light of the Residence. The flesh tone is simply warmer and set off by the contrast of the white blouse. But more than the eyes of liquid black and the tempting mouth, the modeling of the nape of the neck behind the ear passing imperceptibly from black to fawn only to break against the ridge of the spine, requires my expert skill. Every half hour, I let Me Heu rest for a few minutes. And Me Heu gets up and goes out. Just to see her go out and come back in and to enjoy the swaying of her nymphlike body beneath her immobile shoulders, I would be tempted to give her more rest periods. . . .("Me Heu, dancing mistress at Lai Chan," oil op. 245).

[On February 7, Despujols arrived at Tsinh Ho, to the north of Lai Chau near the Chinese border.]

7-15 February. I have just spent nine days at Tsinh Ho. And I can say that these nine days have been the most productive of my career—in Indochina. Eight portraits, including three sketches, a drawing, three canvases of 8 Fig. and one canvas of 20. And in conditions as unfavorable as those of Nguyen Ninh,...

While I waited for my models to arrive, the adjutant Paolacci sent for a young Yao woman who was separated from her husband and known to have had a liaison with a soldier. And I did a pencil drawing of her ("Yao Woman of Tsinh Ho," op. 248). Her costume resembles that of the man rien. A heavy and complicated hairstyle. Black on black. Little embroidery. Although this Yao had a nose of average width, the wings of her nostrils spread out beyond her tiny mouth. Extremely primitive. Showed trepidation when I made the least movement. As if I looked like a pirate!

The first to answer the command/invitation were two Meos of the region of Mao Xiao Phing...They live on the arid mountaintops and are waiting for a second deluge before they bathe. With the price of water being what it is, they had been content to dilute the dirt in my honor; the dirt that streaked their relatively light skin....I chose the friend, just as dirty but prettier and with a certain style (due to rhythmic relationship between the slant of her very slit eyes and her smiling mouth). This Meo is also very nice and approachable; very playful. Although she's quite young (17), she is not afraid of anything. I painted her as she looked. And for once it's too bad. For a good wash and a touch of makeup would have brought out her innate distinction. ("Meo Girl of Mao Xiao Phing," op. 249).

...We have seen the ban-tam. He is a Deo, a cousin of the tri phu. Too restless in the valley, he was relegated to the plateau. He has the duty of welcoming, housing, sheltering my models. Six messengers have been sent in six different directions. And Caro thinks that about a dozen will show up. The most distant subjects have a two-days' walk. But the distance is no hardship for them. They are not worried about shelter or cover. And they travel empty-handed, the brush being more hospitable to the traveler with few needs than a big city would be. Besides, this kind of requisition is nothing new. Each time a high official comes through, they ask the beauties of the area to exhibit themselves in their most original costumes. They do this willingly; women everywhere ask nothing better than to dress up and show off.

After the Meo, there arrived four Lolos and two Lus. I paid off and dismissed the Lolos—I can't paint everything—and began with one of the Lu (12 years old and seemed terrified). Impossible to leave out the details of her ornaments: embroidery, necklaces, pendants, and trinkets
of all sorts. "You either have it," as they say, "or you don't."

While the child posed under the veranda, her girlfriend and her
guardian strolled on the terrace, keeping warm in the sun. Each
of these little portraits takes me on the average a day and a half,

My painting was two thirds completed when three Wounis (including
the guide) arrived.

[Lieutenant] Caro has left. And unfortunately for him and for me,
bad weather escorted him. Already the temperature had fallen per-
ceptibly, with fog lasting till a late hour of the morning. Even
at noon the sun appeared pale. Then came the wind and with the
wind the rain, real March showers. To the east in the gap in the
mountains, the horizon was always clouded. And one could see rising
from this dark abyss, ragged clouds that were scattered in the sky
by rising currents of air. I was working in the veranda with one of
the two Wounis. But this became so uncomfortable because of the sprays
of rain that whipped my back and wetted my palette that I retreated
into the doorway of my room, bringing the model along. This little
Wouni (age 15) was a real beauty; and with a charming personality. She
came from the north, on the border, and must have lived at a high al-
titude, judging from her clothes. Her costume was thick dark-blue
home spun, divided into two parts: a skirt or sinh, and a tunic (with
long wide sleeves) well-closed at the neck. The well-clad at the necker
of her face looked more Berber than Mongolian. Classic horizontal eyes,
short straight nose, tempting mouth and small chin. The total result
was so pretty that she was irresistibly attractive to me. On her head,
a sort of policeman's cap and five closely-spaced rows of pearls forming
a crown. Other rows of pearls mixed with pompoms and tassels of red
cotton framed her face, and others decorated her neckline and wrists.
She was short, with strong limbs and small hands and feet. Her move-
ments were lively, guileless or childlike, and she seemed to pay no at-
tention at all to her finery. She posed with coquetry and, on her own
initiative, with her wide-open eyes turned toward the sky; which gave
her the touching air of a madonna, which I did not intend to exploit
but which I nevertheless faithfully represented (a commonplace air Is
what pleases the blafs world most; it's less "pompous"). More than
I would have wanted to, I became attached to this. Without having re-
ceived the least imprint of my civilization, she had all the qualities
that I love in a young girl—and thanks to which, in spite of the dif-
ference of race, language, milieu, nationality, there is no exile
painful to me: an innocent soul and a tender heart joined with beauty.

From my room, and looking over the wall of the terrace, I could see
the hut where the two young Wounis and their guide prepared their meals
and spent the night. Thus, as the hour of the sitting drew near, I would
watch for the moment when my little madonna would run down the slope
of the ditch—afraid of being late—followed at a distance by the other
two members of her tribe. And when she arrived first, a little out of
breath, I never failed to kiss her cool cheeks before sitting down to
work. ("Wouni Girl of Na Lu Thuang," oil op. 251).

Now two beautiful and strong girls had just arrived. They were from
Lang San. Sisters wearing the tricolor; in blue, white and red, of the
same height and girth; their faces round, highly colored, indifferent—
not to say hostile—reminding me of the man-coc of Nguyen Binh. These
Meo must have been brought up to feel profound contempt for that which
doesn't concern them and their villages, scattered on the mountainsides.
Why had we disturbed them? to mock or to admire? Thus they showed a
mixture of mistrust and self-assurance. They wore their finery as a
distinctive mark of their sex and race, not as an addition to their
personal beauty. The man who accompanied them wore a simple black shirt
and cal quam. Men's costumes are always insipid.

I chose, I believe, the youngest; the one whose costume differed
the most from what I had seen before. Over a striped bandeau
around her forehead and temples, flowed a coiffure imprisoned in
the rough hairs of a horsetail. The navy blue bodice or coat
had pale blue facings edged in black. This coat, held tightly
to the waist by a bolt of red cotton, opened over a dickey of
white pongee whose light effect was repeated on the embroidered
sleeves. Dangling silver earrings. Chains and a massive neck-
lace opening in the front—a necklace worn by all the mountain
tribes. Pleated skirt and leggings. I found this costume to
be so decorative against the sienna background of my room that
I got out my stretching frame and stretched a canvas of 20.

During the two and a half days that the sittings lasted, my
Meo never departed from her silence or her dazed air; and she never gratified me with a smile. It is true that I was too busy myself to try for a rapprochement that—to judge by the huge gap separating us—would have taken days and days. She was so afraid of having fallen into a trap that she was in a state of continual alarm. Like the Yao woman, she jumped whenever I moved a little on my seat. Once I got up suddenly to look at the work in progress from a distance. She jumped back with a cry of fear. I burst out laughing. Such nervousness could only have come from stories they had told in order to frighten her. ("Meo Girl of Lang San" oil op. 252).

[Back at Lai Chau]

18 February - 17 March

For a while I worked mostly at the guesthouse. There I drew, then painted my portrait wearing a sun helmet. "On the Trail from Tsinh Ho" (op. 258-259)...I finished "Me Hin, White Thai of Chin Neua" (op. 256), added a sketch and little study in oils of "Me Hin Sleeping" (op. 260 and 260bis), and a lascivious wash ("Me Hin the Immodest" op. 261). I was so happy that I was becoming a real stay-at-home; and since I could not always bother my cau [native wife], I put into service the trees of my garden: "Study of an Arec Tree" (watercolor op. 262) and "Group of Banana Trees" (watercolor op. 263).

[An evening at Guelfucci's]

While we were chatting, the cau got comfortable, letting down their hair ("Me-Ien with the Long Hair," drawing and oil op. 270 and 270bis), sang in low voices and sewed...The presence of the cau gave a peculiar and exotic charm to these meetings. Grace, sweetness, discretion, unctuosity, if not sacred oil, that, unbeknownst to us, penetrated our tissues and our nerves. They were the spiritual offering of this hospitable earth whose spiritual perfume intoxicated my soul...

Going Down the Black River

[Despujols left Lai Chau by pirogue on March 25, along with his friend Guelfucci, soldier who was returning to France on leave.]

pp. 1077-1079

It was by no means a small consolation to me to have Guelfucci as a traveling companion. Besides his moral qualities, the sergeant was extremely sensitive to beauty. He had tried drawing and was a successful photographer. Finally and above all, he had loved a White Thai girl. This solidarity in joy and sorrow, which had added to my joy (evenings at Guelfucci's) now soothed my pain. The best remedy for obsessive thoughts is a distraction from solitude.

We were carrying enough supplies for eight days: canned goods, bread, wine. The boatman in charge of our own food had provided rice and chickens. The five chickens (plus three belonging to the crew) were kept in a semi-cylindrical cage attached high up aft in the boat. Extras to be purchased en route: eggs and fish.

The distance by river from Lai Chan to Cho Bo is 344 km (250 as the bird flies). Forty to fifty rapids to cross, twelve of which are considered dangerous. Little or no river valley; rather a narrow bed in the hollow of the mountains. And if you know the mountains of Indochina, you know what that means. The Nam Te, like all the rivers of the Peninsula, has three stages: high, middle, and low water. High water accelerates and regularizes the current, whose uneveness is especially obvious in low water (almost absolute stagnation in the deep reaches, as opposed to fast-moving currents and rapids that remain lively). The most unfavorable stage is that of middle water because of rocks which are barely submerged and the changes in the rapids. The present stage—low water—is both the most picturesque and the least dangerous. The most picturesque because the part of the riverbed that is uncovered shows between the current and the forest all the varied aspects of washed and jagged rocks, banks of pebbles, and banks of sand deposited willy-nilly according to the caprices of the last flood. The least dangerous because the water is clear, the waves and whirlpools less violent; and because the boatmen know best the peculiarities of a river voyage that they usually make during the dry season.

I had hardly lost sight of the Nam Lai gap when I felt like closing my eyes and retreating into that area of my inner self where the dead past lives on. But the spectacle did not permit this. With the suddenness of a cloudcover engulfing a sunlit road, the gorges of the Nam Te had
engulfed us. The abrupt descents with no apparent cause reminded me at first of the Nam Khan. Among the leaves, in the high hollows of the adjacent ravines, the white spot of the cascades and their noise like that of rustling leaves. A strong current. A few rapids. But after the confluence of the Nam Ho'k the spectacle changes, becomes even more grandiose and wild. The Nam Te, slanting toward the north, is squeezed between the massifs of Ta Ping (Tsinh Ho) and Sin Tlai. Its rate of flow slows and from its inhospitable banks rise vertical escarpments (200 to 1000 meters high). The line of the crests is everywhere so high that it is hard to understand how the river can find a passage without entering a tunnel. An impression of imprisonment; and accentuated by the fact that the sharp peaks do not form the background, but rather are overshadowed by more distant transverse massifs. These massifs interpose their progressively paler screens against the sky. If the air were pure, not dirtied by the smoke of brushfires, these massifs would seem crushing.

When a rapid was approaching, the chief boatman and coxswain scrutinized the horizon of the water and identified the best route. Little by little the boatmen accentuated their rhythm, then speeded it up while giving shouts that drowned out the noise of the water. The pirogue shot like an arrow along the side of the wet rocks, plunged into the narrowes rebounded in the foam, rooked in the eddies, and drifted in the whirlpools. Then it would forge ahead through the frothing water. The boatmen would let go of the oars and swallow a fistful of sticky rice. The technique, powerful and delicate, consisted of brushing against one rock in order to avoid another, leaving one current upstream from its falls to take another, of meeting the waves head-on in order to avoid fatiguing the pirogue in the overhangs or having it roll over like a log...

A day of excitement—the rapids were so numerous. I counted 18 after Ta Bu; and in series of 2, 3, and 4. Here are some names: Hat Pe, Song Put, Nhe Koham, Hat Po, Kin Long, Kin Noi, Ta Cham, Hat Pun, Hat Ho, Hat Van, Hat Noi, Chung Quam. (Hat in Laotian means "race." By extension it also means "rapid" for the Thai of the Black River. Certain of these hat are situated on the edge of a calm sheet of water dotted with flat rocks. They are crossed in a zigzag, passing where the uninitiate would never think of going, but where the coxswain, remembering unhappy experiences, launches his skiff with a sure hand...

Caught between Mount Sa Phin (2900 m.) and the Son La plateau, the bed of the Nam Te is carved out of black rock. Or else the bed of black rock rises of itself, and the river disappears into a canyon. From the height of the bank—we made a brief rest stop for one of the boatmen—I could see only a succession of dark tiers, a cracked pavement for giants. At the bottom of the cracks, invisible, lay the Nam Te.

But from below, a dike of black walls ten feet high imprisoning a tortuous space.

Similar (this space) to the space between the jaws of a grinning crocodile;

Perhaps the jaws of the celebrated dragon who carries on his back the land of Annam.

If the dragon were to wake!
Poor us!
Foundations of the world:
Bare rock and bare water.
At present the rock is master and lord, and none dare disturb his heavy sleep.
Water herself moves only with caution, on tiptoe.
"Just so," she says, "my brother doesn't notice that I'm slipping by."
"If he were to wake!"
And it's there that we were slipping by ourselves, nervously, between the jaws of the monster. 
Hugging the black tiers, 
With malaise and a religious agony. 
We were silent. 
The amplified noise of the oars was the only sound that disturbed the silence of those gloomy gorges. 
Nam Te. In the Thai language: Black River.

[Despujols arrived downriver at Cho Bo on April 1.]

p. 1098
We landed at twilight on a virgin beach, sloping, and marked horizontally due to the successive stages of the falling river. Fires were lit. And white smoke rose vertically in an atmosphere as immobile as the deep water. I had gone downstream and settled on a rock. And for the first time, I looked with new eyes on the piled-up mountains outlined in the sky to the northwest. These extraordinary mountains—known in Europe from Chinese prints and judged unreal—these extraordinary mountains combining empyrean calm and abyssal falls, lofty spires and voluptuous domes, told me of my dead happiness, the distant treasures now abandoned forever...

(Large ink wash "Evening Halt on the Nam Te," op. 279).

p. 1115
3 April - My second Man: remarkable for her high coiffure which falls shining to her shoulders on either side. I thought that this hairstyle was fixed to a detachable cap. The cap is an illusion caused by the finely plaited hair which is coated with black wax. ("Ban Tu Ki, Young Man Woman from Som Soum," drawing, op. 285).

p. 1118

A magic landscape, all in pale blue at twilight, except for the pink river and the pink sky. Isolated heights piled like cups or inverted glasses against the blue background (blue on blue) of the mountain of Moc. Absolute calm. A dream landscape. An unreal landscape. The river is a mirror, lightly misted; no less fantastic and unreal than the shapes reflected in it. Only one harsh note: the high grass along the road outlined in black against the pink and the pale blue. ("The Nam Te at Twilight," blue wash op. 287).

pp. 1121-1122
5 April - The best view of the dam is certainly the one I am sketching from a sandbar downstream, right in the middle of the river. It looks like a Wagnerian setting. A junk rests at the foot of the biggest rock—whose silhouette evokes a ruined castle. To the right, the big tree whose long branches reach down toward the moving current. Background of mountains over which play vapors lifted by ascending air currents...

p. 1124
Finished by ink wash: "The Dam (Barrage) of the Nam Te at Cho Bo" (op. 290).

[On April 7, Despujols traveled to Hoa Binh, 25 km downstream from Cho Bo]

p. 1129
7 April...Lallemand [the chief of police] takes me to Bandon, inspector of the Native Guard, a hard-boiled type who refuses to grow old or to retire. And Bandon presents me to Tza, the wife of one of his linh, at the hour when the Muong women bring lunch—a bowl of rice—to their husbands. So my first afternoon pays off in a drawing. The terrace serves as a studio in the part sheltered by the overhanging roof of the game room. ("Tza, Muong Women of Hoa Binh," op. 291).

pp. 1132-1134
9 April - This morning I saw pass by on the road a superb Muong woman, straight and proud; a Venus. I immediately hurried to Bandon's. Bandon lives as a bachelor. He has the twinkling eyes of an old trooper. He will understand. Through his men he may know many things that the police chief doesn't know. My description is no novelty to him. What he hasn't been able to obtain for himself, he'll obtain for me.

A soldier summons me to the post an hour later. The Muong with the bearing of a queen has been found. She is so submissive that she makes no resistance when I undress her. Naked, she is the beautiful piece of sculpture I expected: a royal morsel topped by a beautifully balanced face. Her name is Nguyen Ti Loc. She promises to come to the club after lunch, and I slip away...

Nguyen Ti Loc arrived about two o'clock, and I began her portrait. I am delighted, for she's a type. She wears a dirty white bolero cinched
at the waist by a wide belt of blue cords, and on her head a funny little white cap. Round face, sensual lips, small nose, a slightly whorish look with her half-closed eyes; primitive soul and appetizing body. In sum, she's a true Muong. She is 18 years old.

Lallemand [the adjutant Resident], who drops by, has plenty of information. He knows the life of Nguyen Ti Loc. Nguyen Ti Loc is known in Hoa Binh for her beauty and her extremely loose morals. She would be called a whore if she made a profit from her trade, and if she were not so young. She offers herself to all comers in the ditches for 5 cents (2 sous). You will admit that that's nothing. She probably thinks that the pleasure being mutual, it would be dishonest to ask for more. She also has a weakness for uniforms and has attracted the animosity of the soldiers' wives...This update by Lallemand does nothing to augment the value of my prize. But one is a painter or one is not. What do I care about the morals of my model, provided her face inspires me? Nguyen Ti Loc lives in a hamlet in the ricefield, 2 kilometers downstream, between the river and the road.

p. 1139

12 April...Tza has reappeared, having recruited a Muong model from among her Muong friends. And I reopen my album...Dinh Ti Dao, the friend in question, is a very proper young girl. She even looks a little square. To put her at ease, I kiss her on both cheeks. Catastrophe! For Dinh Ti Dao is so upset that she bursts out in sobs. What a fuss! You'd think that I had beaten her. Tza consoles her as best she can. The tears cease. Then they begin again, as fast as ever. It's an intermittent spring of water. Oh feminine sensibility! The Mouk's and the Nguyen-Ti-Doc's aren't the only types to be found in the Muong country. ("Dinh Ti Dao, Muong Girl of Hoa Binh," drawing, op. 293).

p. 1140
13 April. On the eve of my departure, the quan lang—whose hut I visited with the huyen and Lallemand—sends me two girls accompanied by a clerk. As a mark of distinction and nobility, these Muongs wear over their sinh, white bolero and mauve belt, a kind of black robe open in front. One of them, the taller, presents some curious peculiarities: a highly bred face, a neck too thin for the volume of her head and the width of her shoulders, a masculine build, feet that must take a size 44! I sketch a canvas of 25 fig., in the vague hope of returning to Hoa Binh to finish it ("Two Noble Girls From the Province of the Hoa Binh," op. 294). These young Muongs leave me around 5 p.m. They must be back at their village before nightfall.

p. 1141
14 April - Left Hoa Binh after lunch en route for Hanoi. Passed the last ferry. The Black River turns north and I'm riding toward the east. On January 18 I was riding in the opposite direction, planning a short visit....The short visit lasted four days short of three months. "To see, to understand, to love" - I had put that on my agenda. I think that I have not failed.
2 April - 2 June
....a Tonkinese woman of respectable appearance brought to me

Xuan

If Nam was a false NhaquS, full and replete with the pleasures of the city, Xuan is a true NhaquS, newly arrived from her village 50 km to the south, in the middle of the delta, and who shows, in spite of her age—17—the fatigues, privations, and trials of her race which has been bent over the same fields for 2000 years. I could have wished for a more coquettish and sophisticated companion, more at ease and happy in her life, something like the decorative Tonkinese girls who fill Inguimbert's grand compositions; more like the playthings of frivolous love. I have accepted Xuan, burned by the sun, her hair piled in a crown, her loose-fitting, black cai-no, her undeveloped breasts, small and hard like green fruit. Xuan quickly made herself at home. She brings nothing but her immense willingness to satisfy me.

....I discover Xuan; the pointed oval of her face; her low forehead, her long eyes, forced to close by the dazzling sky of the delta; her nose, flat but not heavy; and the eminence of the buccal area in which is inserted rather than superimposed a small mouth, bitter at the corners, a mouth which retracts while breathing—like the funeral masks of the Maoris. Long neck and noble carriage. Everything about her is noble, noble and resigned; and reveals a discipline lived not by her but by her ancestors. She is the daughter of the Giao chi who built the 2400 kilometers of the great dikes by moving the earth in their little baskets. It appears that nature was hostile to her growth. She carries the stigmata of unrewarding labor and fierce determination. Beauty has a history, and it is this history that has given her her character. And the love that beauty inspires is affected by its character. I don't love Xuan as I would love Ve...

I finished Xuan soon enough so that she could figure in the large Tonkinese panel, which is a source of no little pride to her.

Besides, I have never had a model who was more patient and courageous, nor have I ever worked in as beautiful a light—the vast light falling from high up recommended by Leonardo da Vinci in his Treatise in Painting. ("Duong Thi Xuan, Young Tonkinese of Tien Xa," drawing in two tones, op. 297).
A sail appears on the horizon, then another. They are little bamboo rafts running before the wind—the simplest nautical construction imaginable and the most practical for this flat coastline. The raft, carried far by the wave, is stranded in the middle of the waiting group. Two men bring in the sails, two fishermen. The catch is taken off, the net spread out on the sand and the raft propped up on a stake. "Return of a Fishing Craft at Sam Son," tempera, op. 296.

[Arrived back in Hanoi around April 25]

[While at Hue, Despujols took a 15-year-old cau (native wife) named Hieu]

Hieu in white against the white wall; which exalts her complexion of reddish almond and the black of her hair worn in maidishly fashion. On her own initiative Hieu tilts her head toward the left (Nam had tilted it to the right) and slightly forward. Submission. But the lips—slightly apart and curving sweetly (there is nothing sweeter than curving lips) let pass a breath of air, an exhalation; an exhalation that augments their natural swelling. So that one might think that Hieu is pouting, if the corner of her mouth did not correct this expression. Thus the sentiment of submission is not restrictive, imposed from the outside. It comes from within; it reveals willing surrender...Yes, everything is captivating in the face of my little cau, and all the more captivating because the fineness of the ovate shape (centered on the temples) and the prettiness of her features (including the nose) serves only to emphasize the soul revealed in her eyes. Her eyes are the most beautiful and melancholy in the world, of a tawny and velvety black, and set back far enough under the soaring line of the arching eyebrows to banish any idea of frivolity from this still childish face. It's because Hieu has come to know life before she has reached maturity of soul and body. It is from this that her eyes, still clouded with dreams like those of Ve, have deepened. And while the precociously forced body awakens, and the questioned heart speaks, the soul, that mysterious sentinel, has retreated to its sentry-box and wonders what all this means. If Hieu had had the lighter complexion of Nam, her Tonkinese sister, she could have passed for an aristocrat. To tell the truth, she only looks "bhaquê" [her province] because of her reddish color; and because she lacks the gold ring worn around the neck by well-born girls. Khoa Than [a Vietnamese friend] is too sensitive to feminine distinction not recognize it in this daughter of the common people. He has his own explanation—the same as the one the Italians give to explain the beauty of the ragazze of the Roman Campagna—"It's because," he says, "of our emperors and our Ton Doc's who have for centuries drained from around their capitals thousands and thousands of pretty congai, among whom they choose their concubines. It's not surprising that the beauty of the population is concentrated at Hue."

Khou Than stays for dinner.

[Two weeks before his departure for Japan on August 25, 1939, Despujols traveled by train and rickshaw from Hanoi to the village of Dien Xa to visit his cau (native wife) Xuan, who was very ill with malaria. Near the village he saw the scene of the ninety-nine hills. This description is from the return journey.]

Nevertheless I kept looking back, no longer because of Xuan, but for the spectacle...The spectacle is truly grandiose. And it consists of only two elements: the ricefield and the mountain; three if you count the sky. The ricefield is a calm sea of a rich green uninterrupted even by the Song Day [river], which remains completely hidden. And above the ricefield the fantastic wall of the 99 hills, jagged like the backbone of the dragon. This wall is made of isolated peaks of a gorgeous purplish blue, behind which appear other, paler peaks, and others shading directly into pink against a yellowing sky, nocturnal at the zenith. A scene like Ha Long Bay, but on land. I've already made note of these resemblances. In the middle distance a rounded hillock thrusts forward, forming a burning violet spot amid the green. The enchantment which was beginning to show on my way to the village, has reached its high point in twenty minutes. Then a short agony and death. I have engraved it well on my memory in order to do a color wash (the last of Indochina, probably).
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References

Archival Sources

Letter from Jean Despujols to Dr. Albert Einstein and the emergency committee of atomic scientists, May 30, 1947, special collections at archives research center at Oregon State University, 2.5.10.


Interviews


Print Sources


Online Sources


Vita

Kelly Marli Ward was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela to a Brazilian mother and American father. She spent time in Venezuela, Rio de Janeiro, and a brief period in Villahermosa, Mexico, before moving to Bossier City, Louisiana, at the age of five. In 2006, Kelly moved across the Red River with her family to Shreveport, Louisiana. She attended magnet schools for middle and high school and owes a lot of who she is to the magnet curriculum and to Caddo Magnet High School. At Caddo Magnet, Kelly learned to throw pots and found her true passion for art history through an advanced placement course. Magnet High also granted her the opportunities to spend irreplaceable quality time in museums like the Kimbell and The Modern in Fort Worth, Texas, as well as the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where she fell deeper in love with fine art.

In the fall of 2014, Kelly went on to continue her education at Louisiana State University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication with a concentration in Public Relations and a minor in Art History. Upon graduation, she was awarded a teaching assistantship at the LSU School of Art, where she pursued a Master of Arts degree. Kelly first wanted to enter a career in museum communications, but after an internship at the LSU Museum of Art, she was exposed to the essential world of museum collections, registrar work, and art conservation which deeply interests her. She decided to write her master’s thesis on an important but widely unknown artist who died in her hometown of Shreveport and whose work she believes is thought-provoking, controversial, and beautiful. In August 2021, Kelly will receive another degree from Louisiana State University, a Master of Arts in Art History.