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ABSTRACT

In 1883 a group of Belgian artists wishing to challenge the hegemony of the Brussels Academy founded the organization, Les Vingt, on the principles of egalitarianism and artistic freedom and elected Octave Maus, editor of the self-proclaimed avant-garde journal, L'Art Moderne, as its secretary. Henceforth, Les Vingt assumed the identity of Belgium's leading visual exponent of modernité and L'Art Moderne became its foremost champion. In actuality, the alliance the Vingtistes formed with L'Art Moderne allowed Octave Maus and his co-editor Edmund Picard to gain control of the group's operations. The journal's editors, through their association with the Belgian social reform movement, had formulated an artistic concept they called l'art social and Les Vingt was to become the incarnation of this new doctrine of social art.

During the period of 1887 to 1889, however, while the Belgian workers' movement erupted in a succession of strikes and demonstrations, Maus and Picard radically changed their strategy in marketing Les Vingt to its viewing public. They campaigned for a revised, "depoliticized" avant-garde identity for the group, and the model they chose to represent this new identity was French divisionism. The group's appropriation of divisionism, however, signified a forfeiture of many of the group's original ideals. Furthermore,
it became a point of conflict for those Vingtistes who chose to remain loyal to their own styles.

This conflict is evident in the case of James Ensor, one of the group's important founding members. During this period, he developed his own personal imagery that was a synthesis of Flemish and modern themes and motifs. This imagery made a bold, critical attack upon Les Vingt's capitulation to French divisionism, which signified an acquiescence to the ardently Francophile tastes of the Brussels bourgeoisie.

The focus of this thesis is an analysis of Les Vingt's avant-garde identity as it evolved out of its relationship with L'Art Moderne, and how that relationship led to the importation of divisionism. Ensor's conflict with Les Vingt and his provocative Flemish imagery is also examined as a means of assessing the significance of Les Vingt's adoption of the French art style.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been completed with the support and assistance of many people. I am indebted to my thesis advisors, Dr. David Solkin and Dr. Serge Guilbaut, for their generous contribution of time, scholarly insights and guidance in seeing this work to completion.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Interlibrary Loans Department of the U.B.C. Library for their assistance in obtaining necessary research materials and the staff of the Bibliotheque Royale in Brussels for giving me access to important primary source materials. Finally, my sincere thanks to my friends Judith Ince, Jill Pollack and Peggy Webb-Whittall, my husband Jim, and my daughter Rachel, for their individual contributions to and support of this project.
INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1883 L'Art Moderne, a Belgian art publication which was defined by its editors as the country's leading avant-garde journal, announced the inauguration of the artists' group, Les Vingt.1 With the announcement, the journal issued the statement that the group représentait...en réalité toute la Belgique artistique nouvelle, et sera pour les arts plastiques le centre du magnifique mouvement en avant garde qui dans tous les domaines de l'art, emporte notre pays.2

Henceforth, Les Vingt assumed the identity of being Belgium's leading visual exponent of modernité and L'Art Moderne became its foremost champion. Because Les Vingt was able to secure a strong alliance with this prominent journal, it was to become one of the most important and enduring artistic organizations in Europe in the late nineteenth century.

The group's membership and supporters belonged to the generation of Belgian intellectuals who helped to bring about a renaissance in the Belgian arts. From this generation of intellectuals diverse groups formed alliances with one another, brought together different branches of the arts, adopted various modernist styles and often aligned themselves with the forces of social change. Motivation for this activity stemmed, at least in part, from a desire to establish an international
reputation for Belgian artists rivalling that of their Parisian counterparts. However, this nineteenth century renaissance of the arts in Belgium would have been inconceivable without the enormous generative force of an incendiary social climate.

The 1880's in Belgium were a decade when energetic artistic activity was given direction and impetus from social tensions which at times heightened almost to the point of revolution. Though little was actually accomplished in the way of social reform, the decade witnessed the final erosion of a social fabric unable to accommodate itself to the effects of accelerated industrialization.

In the mid-80's the attempt to establish a cohesive socialist movement in Belgium was consolidated. For the first time, diverse sectors of workers' cooperatives and guilds saw themselves as a politically-motivated social class united in their concern for the issue of universal suffrage. This led to widespread violence, strikes and demonstrations. Modern values and ideas of a proletariat arising within a highly industrialized State clashed with a culture bound up with Catholic traditionalism. Inevitably, these conflicts spilled over into the artistic sphere.

These tensions were manifest in the nature of Les
Vingt's inauguration. The group was largely comprised of defectors from the artists' group, L'Essor, established in 1881. The founding Vingtistes criticized L'Essor for using a jury system and accused it of catering to the tastes of the bourgeoisie.3 L'Art Moderne supported this condemnation by declaring that L'Essor was no more than the "antechamber of the Salons."4 This critical viewpoint served to establish the guidelines upon which the Vingtistes structured their organization. Moreover, this critical stance underscored L'Art Moderne's claims that Les Vingt had the ability to serve as Belgium's unrivalled vanguard.

In contrast with L'Essor, Les Vingt committed itself to the ideals of individualism in artistic expression and egalitarian treatment for all its members. However, the most critical facet of Les Vingt's avant-garde identity came not from within the group itself, but rather from its affiliation with L'Art Moderne, whose editors, through their association with the social reform movement had formulated a doctrine they coined, "l'art social." For the editors of L'Art Moderne Les Vingt was to become the incarnation of their doctrine of social art.

At Les Vingt's first exhibition, Edmund Picard, one of L'Art Moderne's chief editors, served as the
group's principal speaker. In his lecture he set out the ways in which Les Vingt's mandate was equivalent to the ideals contained within the doctrine of l'art social. Furthermore, as the spokesman for the Vingtistes, his words implied a challenge not only to all the representatives of officialism in art, but also to all those who stood for any form of social inequality or injustice:

Notre idée dominante, c'est celle d'affranchissement. Nous représentons l'art nouveau, avec sa liberté absolue d'allures et de tendances, avec ses caractères de modernité. ... Nous voulons l'art libre, c'est pourquoi nous combattrons à outrance ceux qui le veulent esclave.5

Although the ideals of libertarianism and egalitarianism became the basis of Les Vingt's public image, it is significant that the group's commitment to them appears to have diminished considerably by 1887. It was in that year that the group invited Georges Seurat to exhibit his Neo-Impressionist work, La Grande Jatte, at its annual salon. Thereafter, divisionism became the primary aesthetic model associated with Les Vingt for the next several years. This wholesale adoption of a single aesthetic model was in direct contradiction to the group's original pledge to encourage artistic eclecticism. It also implied a devaluation of other more indigenous art forms represented within the membership. As a consequence, divi-
sionism became a point of conflict for some of those Vingtistes who chose to remain loyal to their previous styles.

This conflict was nowhere more evident than in the group's relationship with James Ensor, one of its most important founding members. During the period of Les Vingt's infatuation with French Neo-Impressionism, Ensor's images, particularly his large painting, Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889, represented a resurrection of Flemish aesthetics. His paintings made a bold, critical attack upon the group's capitulation to foreign models and abandonment of its inaugural principles. The discrepancies between Ensor's vision of modernity and that of Les Vingt's Neo-Impressionists ultimately led to the group's withdrawal of support for Ensor and its repudiation of his work. One critical difference between Ensor's and the Neo-Impressionists' aesthetics was that while Ensor's Flemish-derived images contained vivid references to the social disruptions which dominated this period, the utopian imagery of the Belgian Neo-Impressionists was noticeably devoid of any comparable contemporary references.

Les Vingt's appropriation of divisionism and forfeiture of its inaugural principles raises a great many questions about the functioning of the group, partic-
ularly in light of the fact that these events coincided closely with a period of great social disruption in the country. Why was divisionism adopted so readily by so many of the Vingtistes, even though doing so threatened the integrity of the group? How was this utopian image created from a foreign aesthetic relevant to a Belgium that was facing a continuous succession of violent strikes and demonstrations? How was divisionism connected to L'Art Moderne's doctrine of social art? Why were Ensor's images a threat to the utopian model of the Belgian Neo-Impressionists?

Two recent art historical studies have contributed significantly to clarifying certain aspects of Les Vingt's operations. However, neither of these works deal adequately with the historical and political issues relevant to Les Vingt's development. Susan Canning's dissertation, "A History and Critical Review of the Salons of Les Vingt, 1884-1893," deals essentially with the artistic issues of Les Vingt's operations. It provides a highly-detailed, chronological account of the group's annual shows, descriptions of the works that were exhibited and the critical responses of the reviewers.

In her dissertation, "Les XX and Belgian Avant-Gardism, 1868-1894," Jane Block presents an excellent analysis of Les Vingt's activities within the larger scope of late
nineteenth century avant-garde activity in Belgium. In her introduction she states that her dissertation attempts to deal with the political and social milieu as it relates to the group's artistic aims. While Block brings to light some of the important issues regarding Les Vingt's relationship with L'Art Moderne and touches upon some of the political ramifications of the group's avant-garde identity, she fails to address the specific social and political issues that are critical to an understanding of this period. Specifically, she does not attempt to discuss these issues in regard to Les Vingt's involvement with Neo-Impressionism.

The purpose of this thesis is to focus upon an analysis of the development of Les Vingt's avant-garde identity as it evolved out of its relationship with the journal, L'Art Moderne, and specifically, how that relationship may have led to the importation of French Neo-Impressionism. This thesis proposes that divisionism's main attraction was that it offered a means of creating an image for the Vingtistes, amidst serious social upheaval, that appeared at once modern and yet politically neutral; that appeared avant-garde and yet garnered public support. Ensor's conflict with the group serves as an important investigative tool in unravelling these complex questions. Certainly, it reveals the dichotomies and
contradictions that existed between the group's public identity and the actualities of its operations. From this examination it may then be possible to discover why avant-gardism in Belgium was compelled to adopt the model of the Neo-Impressionist utopia in response to the realities of social upheaval.
1 In Susan Marie Canning's, "A History and Critical Review of the Salons of 'Les Vingt', 1884-1893" (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1980), p.27 the formation of the group is described in this way: "at the Taverne Guillaume in Brussels, thirteen artists--Franz Charlet, Guillaume Vogels, Jean Delvin, Paul Dubois, James Ensor, Fernand Khnopff, Pérelès Pantazis, Franz Simons, Gustave Vaniase, Théo Van Rysselberghe, Guillaume Van Strydonck, and Théodore Verstraete--met and signed their names to a folio marked with the double X which was to become their symbol. Willy Finch and Dario de Regoyos sent their acceptance by letter. The group was completed with the addition of Achille Chainaye, Jef Lambeaux, Willy Scholbach, Piet Verhaert, and Rudolf Wystman. Although they had originally asked Lucien Solvay to be their secretary, when they met on January 4 of the following year to sign their official charter, one of the editors of L'Art Moderne, Octave Maus, had assumed the role. . . ."


5 "L'Art jeune," L'Art Moderne IV (March 9, 1884): 74. In this article, signed by Edmund Picard, this quote is cited from the journal L'Art Libre--a defunct avant-garde journal that was viewed as an important antecedent for Les Vingt. In the article that summarized Picard's public lecture, his reference to this quote was presented in such a way that these ideas were meant to relate to the principles of Les Vingt as much as to L'Art Libre.
CHAPTER ONE

THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST

MOVEMENT, L'ART MODERNE'S CONCEPT

OF L'ART SOCIAL AND LES VINGT'S AVANT-GARDE IDENTITY

Even before the establishment of a free independent State in 1830, two parties had dominated Belgian politics: the Liberals, who were strongly anticlerical; and the Catholics, who sought to maintain Belgium's traditionally strong affiliations between Church and State. Together, they shared political control of the country, and drew their supporters from the same classes—those who owned land and paid taxes. As representatives of these same classes, the Catholic and the Liberal parliamentarians had always been in complete agreement on at least one issue—that of social reform. More precisely, the issue of social reform did not exist for them. It was only as the efforts of the socialists picked up momentum during the early years of the 1880's that issues such as poor working conditions, unemployment, and universal suffrage became primary political considerations that could no longer be ignored. As the socially-disruptive events of the eighties unfolded, these pressing social issues had to be reckoned with. The way in which they were faced is evident not only in the political sphere, but also in the specific nature of the cultural avant-garde that prospered in the
fertile grounds of social dissension.

As early as 1881, efforts made by the Belgian intelligentsia towards implementing a revival in the Belgian arts were beginning to polarize into two antithetical philosophical camps. Taking part of its impetus from the socialist movement, *L'Art Moderne* and its contributors fashioned an avant-garde identity from the language of the new political Left. Their aim was to embrace and encourage all art that was nationalistic and social-minded. Their opponents, led by Max Waller, aligned themselves with the journal *La Jeune Belgique* and promoted the Parnassian aesthetic of "art for art's sake" imported from France.

The Belgian historian Henri Pirenne makes note of the significant link between the artistic renaissance of the 1880's in the founding of these two opposing groups and the social reform movement. As Pirenne points out, members of both groups were revolting against their bourgeois backgrounds, and

there existed one of those unconscious correspondences—that history takes note of so often without being able to explain—between their revolt against [the bourgeoisie] and the democratic pressure under which the suffrage system would soon cease.

But this close connection between politics and art was far from being only an "unconscious correspondence." In fact, a concerted effort was made to establish an alliance between the efforts of the cultural vanguard and the
social reform movement.

Two of those involved in this campaign were prominent sons of the bourgeoisie, Edmund Picard and Octave Maus—both lawyers and self-styled critics. In the process of establishing the journal, *L'Art Moderne*, they intentionally infused their revival of the arts with the articulations of the nascent socialist movement. Their inaugural issue of March, 1881, outlined these journalistic biases in a language that would become the basis of their avant-garde ideology:

Nous commençons aujourd'hui ce journal sans aucun parti pris d'école, sans préoccupation aucune de règle, de code ou de symbole. . . . L'art est l'action, éternellement spontanée et libre de l'homme sur son milieu, pour le transformer, le transfigurer, le conformer à une idée toujours nouvelle. Nous voulons aplanir les voies, faciliter les rapports entre les artistes et le public, afin que l'art acquière chaque jour davantage la bienfaisante influence sociale. . . .

This language, which married social moralism and artistic inventiveness, was used to give credence to the journal's claim of leadership for the new cultural avant-garde. It was a discourse couched in lofty ideals and tempered with the palliative of disinterested eclecticism. The editors' insistence on journalistic impartiality was a strategy which would allow them to maneuver through a wide range of aesthetic possibilities "sans aucun parti pris d'école." They wrote:

Nous considérons notre mission comme plus utile et plus haute de flatter les vanités et les intérêts
particuliers. L'art a une portée sociale qui le met au dessus des individualités et de leurs préoccupations fréquemment mesquines.\textsuperscript{7}

The chief theorist responsible for this discourse was Edmund Picard. No matter who signed the articles published in \textit{L'Art Moderne} or claimed editorship of the journal,

\ldots{} the public was not fooled. For everyone it was Picard's review. \ldots{} Picard's band. \ldots{} Picard's trainees in art criticism.\textsuperscript{8}

Picard's efforts to align the activities of his cultural vanguard to those of the socialists was fashioned into a doctrine that he referred to as "\textit{l'art social}." The goal of art, he wrote, should be "to ameliorate, to combat, and to ennable."\textsuperscript{9} It should also be nationalistic and utilitarian.

In 1883 he took the opportunity to secure his position publicly as the leading patron of \textit{l'art social}. The jury charged with awarding the quinquennial prize for Belgian literature had not reached an absolute majority in the vote which would have allowed it to award the prize to Camille Lemonnier, an important leader in the Belgian arts movement. A great furor arose among Lemonnier's supporters in the literary community. In protest against the jurors' decision, \textit{La Jeune Belgique} organized a banquet to honour Lemonnier. Because Picard and his followers were, at the time, still on amicable terms with this journal's supporters, they were invited to participate in the event. More
than two hundred writers and visual artists were present. Picard, one of the main speakers at the ceremony, made a point of coupling his attack against the jurors of l'officialisme with a plea for l'art social, knowing full well that most of those present who were associated with La Jeune Belgique viewed this doctrine as tantamount to "la négation même de l'art." His statement served two purposes: first, it established L'Art Moderne's alignment with the most progressive social efforts of the period; secondly, it served to aggrandize his personal political ambitions. "L'art social" became Picard's cheval de bataille in the elections he participated in as a Liberal candidate during this period. It represented an ideological position which could be tailored to any of the numerous poses he chose to assume—art critic, author, political candidate or editor.

In line with his stance of impartiality, Picard intentionally left the doctrine unspecified, refusing to commit himself to a specific aesthetic programme that would fulfill the requirements for a social art. It is significant, however, that he chose to outline some of the fundamental ideas he held concerning l'art social in the articles he published in L'Art Moderne during the first exhibition of Les Vingt:
Nous crèerons alors un art de nature, primitif, sans affectation d'aucune sorte; un art s'éloignant du pastiche et de la décadence; un art compréhensible au plus grand nombre, me semble-t-il.¹³

He emphasized the necessity of the modern artist's commitment to improving his society:

Depuis longtemps déjà, mon esprit est troublé par cette idée, qu'insensiblement les artistes se retirent et se désintéressent du milieu social où ils vivent. J'ai la crainte qu'ils ne soient pris un jour, par la société, pour un clan d'êtres inutiles, n'ayant plus de contact avec elle, parlant une langue compréhensible d'eux seuls, se renfermant dans une espèce de religion, allant, s'effaçant chaque jour et ne faisant plus que peu de prosélytes.¹⁴

In the opening remarks of his article of March 9, entitled "L'Art jeune," he made an unequivocal correspondence between the goals of social reform and those of modern art. He wrote,

Nous vivons certainement à une époque de transition, dans une société bouleversée, qui a en face d'elle les plus grands et les plus terribles problèmes à résoudre, . . . . Entendons-nous; je ne veux pas que l'art arrive à parler patois afin d'avoir le plus d'auditeurs possible; . . mais que, par la naïveté, la simplicité et l'intensité de l'expression, il attire à lui ce que j'appellerai les déshérités.¹⁵

These ideas which Picard formulated into the notion of social art were the predictable by-product of a period fraught with economic ills and escalating demands for social reform. Ultimately, these broad and complex issues of the eighties were distilled down into the
single, potent cause of universal suffrage. It was a concern which found staunch supporters in every faction of Belgian society. Politically, it resulted in deep and permanent rifts between various factions within the Catholic and Liberal Parties. Their most radical factions devoted their efforts to advancing the cause of the fledgling socialists. As Kossman points out,

... universal franchise was advocated on many different and at times contradictory grounds, but its champions attached such overwhelming significance to it that, in whatever form it was justified or idealized, all regarded it as the main object of their reform programme.16

As universal franchise became the political cause célèbre of the decade, Picard was able to broaden the circle of intellectuals who joined him under the banner of L'art social. It was under this banner that the founding members of Les Vingt found themselves when they made the critical decision to invite L'Art Moderne editor Octave Maus to become the secretary of their newly-organized group in October of 1883. This decision signified a contractual agreement with L'Art Moderne which would determine Les Vingt's organizational and artistic boundaries for the next ten years.

The choice of Maus was not, however, necessarily based on a sympathy for L'Art Moderne's doctrine of social art. Rather, it was calculated to insure the success of
the group's annual salons. His influential position as a lawyer within Brussels high society and his wide circle of friends and associates would guarantee a large, congenial audience for the Vingtistes. As one of the editors of a journal which championed all free-thinking artists, Maus would provide a direct link to a source of continuous support and publicity. More importantly, for Les Vingt to be associated with the leading literary avant-garde almost guaranteed them a similar position among the visual artists of the day.

For L'Art Moderne, the Vingtistes provided an aesthetic programme which would give meaning to what was otherwise a collection of theoretical vagaries. Despite all of Picard's high-minded proselytizing for a new, revolutionary social art, when it came down to what that represented in concrete terms of artistic production, there was little substance behind the discourse. L'Art Moderne's definitions of social art were veiled and poetic. Art, it wrote, was

... une résultante, et lorsque l'Art s'épanouit en un homme de génie, c'est que de nombreuses existences, de grandes forces, des luttes puissantes, des efforts courageux, des qualités précieuses, des études longues et patientes, des convictions élevées, des tendances grandioses se sont fondues, résumées, réunies, concentrées, unifiées dans le cerveau d'un être privilégié.17

According to L'Art Moderne, art in the realm of genius, was ineluctably transformed into a noble, social act when-
ever its sole guiding principle was,

Interpréter l'âme humaine par la nature, de manière à fournir le témoignage le plus complet de toutes ses énergies, de toutes ses forces, latentes ou éclatantes de ses beautés extérieures ou intimes, apparentes ou violées.18

Because Picard's doctrine was so frail and discursive, it took little effort to establish that the ideology of the fledgling organization of Vingtistes was the most perfect example of his doctrine of social art. The nature of the group made it easy for L'Art Moderne to achieve this equivalency.

Les Vingt was founded by a group of artists of very diverse artistic backgrounds who wished to set up a phalanx committed to confronting traditional art forms and freeing artists from control by the Brussels Academy. Many of them had left the artists' group, L'Essor because they were unable to fulfill those goals within the structure of that group. Unlike L'Essor, Les Vingt was to be a non-partisan organization, based on libertarian principles. It had no real manifesto or single aesthetic model. Les Vingt resolved, simply, to organize annual salons for its members and to invite the most innovative artists from all over Europe to participate. There was to be no president or jury. With the help of the secretary, members would take turns organizing the annual exhibition.19

In spite of their resolve to avoid a hierarchical
structure, a great deal of power ultimately fell to the group's secretary. According to Francine-Claire Legrand, the Vingtistes gathered at Octave Maus' home in January of 1884 to sign a charter for the organization and on the verso was the name of Octave Maus and his address: "Rue de berger: the symbol, undoubtedly, directed the destinies of the Vingtistes from the start. . . ."20 Madeline Maus, in her recollection of Maus' election to the position of secretary, cites the duties and responsibilities Les Vingt assigned to his position:

"pour remplir toutes les fonctions afférentes au secrétariat du Cercle des XX, adresser en notre nom les invitations, faire la correspondance, . . . promettant de ratifier tout ce qu'il jugera utile de faire à cet égard et nous portant fort pour les suites qui pourraient en résulter. Et, . . . nous lui donnons procuration pour nous représenter éventuellement en justice, plaider et conclure en notre nom devant les tribunaux, défendre aux actions qui pourraient nous être intentées, . . ."21

With all this power that the Vingtistes conferred upon him, Maus was certain to steer Les Vingt on a course best suited to L'Art Moderne's interests. Les Vingt's egalitarianism and its initial determination to commit itself to no specific aesthetic programme were in accord with Picard's espousal of eclecticism and impartiality. And though it was, indeed, Maus who commanded this new vessel of vanguardism, it was Picard who charted the course they were destined to follow as
a result of this alliance. Together, the two editors established the Vingtistes' position within the constellation of Belgium's new cultural elite.

In the first months of Les Vingt's existence Maus and Picard both proved their usefulness to this group's cause and demonstrated their determination to direct the group's artistic programme. One of Maus' first acts as secretary was to secure exhibition space for the Vingtistes at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Apparently, he had no trouble in carrying out this plan and, in fact, appears to have been on congenial terms with the government officials who would have given sanction to this request.22

Around the same time, he also created the position of group treasurer and appointed his friend, Victor Bernier, a high-level functionary in the government, to the post.23

Predictably, Picard acted as the chief spokesman for the group at their first salon. In a lecture entitled, "L'Art jeune" he established the boundaries of artistic endeavor for this new group and interpreted the meaning of its artistic initiatives—not only for the public, but for the Vingtistes themselves. His speech was meant to codify and regulate their behaviour in accordance with the ideological parameters he had established. Using the vocabulary he had borrowed from Belgium's political Left, Picard shaped the fundamental ideas which gave form
to Les Vingt's artistic identity, whereby the activities of these artists were shown to correspond to the ideals he had affixed to his doctrine of social art. The lecture both circumscribed the way in which the group represented the visual exponent of his theory and formed the foundation for its ideological framework.

First of all, the validity of their efforts was indicated by their role as the rightful heirs to previous Belgian avant-gardes. Picard remarked that

Historiquement ce mouvement s'indiquait. Ceux qui comprennent notre évolution artistique depuis le commencement du siècle, pouvaient presque prédire ce qui allait arriver. . . .

Presenting a brief history of artists and groups who had come and gone in Belgium during the nineteenth century he finally concluded that

Les XX continuent ces initiatives, et de même leur association est la fille de sociétés tombées . . .

The appearance of Les Vingt was, he asserted, part of a natural, evolutionary progression moving perpetually towards "the new", As the inheritors of this tradition the Vingtistes would bring to art:

. . . le néologisme dans les procédés techniques et la contemporanéité dans le choix des sujets.

Picard made a point of deemphasizing Les Vingt's pluralistic nature and instead, stressed the group's unity and collective disposition to radicalism:
Lorsqu'on examine de qui se compose ce petit corps d'armée, on constate sans peine qu'il a été recruté parmi les plus audacieux et les plus indomptés des néo-peintres soit comme art, soit comme caractère. Aussi, dès le début, les a-t-on vus répudier ouvertement toute aide officielle; ...  

He claimed it was this revolutionary temperament which gave credence to their efforts and, at the same time, set up an inevitable antagonistic relationship between them and their public.  

On oublie que tout novateur fut en son temps un révolutionnaire. ... Ceux qui n'ont pas révolutionné l'art, n'ont jamais survécu. En continuant les traditions établies avant eux, ils ont peut-être charmé les bourgeois de leur temps, mais ils on disparu dans l'oubli. Le génie dérange toujours les habitudes et son propre ... .  

In this way, Picard was able to align the goals of these "apporteurs de neuf" with the social reform movement without forsaking the notion that artists of this calibre necessarily held a privileged position in their society. They were the chosen few who were destined to lead and enlighten the masses. He explained that  

Dans une société comme la nôtre, qui tend à l'égalité sociale, l'art devrait subir une transformation, afin de parler une langue plus compréhensible à tous. ... Quel langue faut-il donc parler à la masse pour l'empêcher de s'engourdir dans le matérialisme et lui révéler qu'elle a une âme?  

The answer to this rhetorical question was, of course, the language of the avant-garde as it was revealed in the
efforts of Les Vingt, which, in turn, was the exponent of l'art social. Art, in this case, would remain in the property of this special group stamped with the mark of genius and gifted with the power to speak a language which needed to be made comprehensible to those who were, as Picard intimates, unable to speak a cultural language of their own. In effect, this was an idea that legitimized the efforts of the Vingtistes. The artist may uplift the soul of the worker through his art, but he must also preserve art from being sullied by pedestrianism or utilitarianism.

L'art a plus que jamais, de nos jours, la mission de fortifier l'homme, de l'agrandir par l'émotion en le rendant meilleur. Il faudrait donc, . . . que l'art devint plus compréhensible à ceux qui ne sont pas encore corrompus, par l'art factice, enfiévré mélodramatique en un mot, par l'art appris par cœur. . . . je veux, . . . qu'il conserve religieusement la pureté de la langue. . . .

Picard's commitment to maintain the "purity of language" of art provided a link with Belgium's cultural past and gave a measure of credibility to his discourse on social art. The evolutionary implications of this idea allowed for a more receptive audience which was drawn from those who found themselves faced with the tremendous pressure for social change. The notion of change, as Kossman explains, was irresistible:

. . . the agitation in . . . favour of [universal
suffrage] helped to undermine the self-confidence of the ruling bourgeoisie. Of course they opposed universal franchise but not on grounds of principle. They restricted themselves to slowing down a development the inevitability of which they began almost unconsciously to accept.  

Transposed onto a aesthetic level, the concept of "inevitability" or "evolution;" that is, drawing sustenance from the past while being carried inexorably into the unknown future, was only a different manifestation of the evolutionary concept of social progress. It was this same concept that gradually drew the voting public to support the cause of universal franchise. It was a principle born from bourgeois ideology, and, ultimately, its artistic manifestation would serve to fortify the beliefs of those who belonged to the dominant class. In the same month as Les Vingt's first exhibition the editors of L'Art Moderne reinforced the notion that "social" art had a part to play in the evolution of Belgian society:

Cette mission sociale de consolation, de réparation, de perfectionnement que la religion est impuissante à remplir, c'est l'art qui doit la continuer: ... il doit prendre as place au combat de la vie, revêtir de chairs, de formes et de beauté le dur squelette de la vérité. L'utile n'est pas le contraire du grand et du beau.

It was the force of the reform movement in the second half of the decade that allowed L'Art Moderne to present such a strong case for Les Vingt and for social art to the Brussels viewing public. Indeed, all the agitation of the
1880's became in some way an expression of or a concession to the socialist demands.\textsuperscript{34}

In the political arena, it was the radical Liberals who took up the cause of the socialists. Although these Liberals had little popular backing, they did have strong support from the Press and the official world of government and thus encouraged the dissemination of socialist ideas. As Kossman points out, concerning the strength of the radical Liberals' conviction:

\textit{... so firmly convinced were they that the growth of popular power was imminent and inevitable that they were prepared to serve as the vanguard of the socialists, ...}.\textsuperscript{35}

Similarly, within the Catholic party, a strong progressive faction appeared which tended to be more worldly and more strongly motivated by the reform movement. This change in attitude undermined the power of the conservative Catholics whose views were in line with those expressed by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical of 1878 entitled "On Socialism."\textsuperscript{36} In it, Leo had rejected the socialist movement and decreed that the Church recognized the basic inequality of men. The Christian democratic movement, also known as Social Catholicism, however, attempted a compromise between its traditional doctrines and the demands of a society in transition.
It was the Christian democracy of a Catholicism now called social. Whereas... ultramontanism of the 1860's and 1870's was hostile to everything modern, the social Catholicism of the 1880's and 1890's wanted to use and absorb modern culture. Social Catholicism adopted a slightly dandyish appearance; it was up to date, not only democratic and deeply interested in the social question. . . . 37

Within this increasingly tolerant, democratic climate which was one enamoured with the "new," although still fraught with fears of its more far-reaching implications, the concept of social art was made to appear as an offshoot of a more widespread movement for social reform. At the same time, Picard attempted to place Les Vingt in the public limelight by deliberately trying to antagonize those who represented the most conservative ranks of the press and viewing public. He was aware that any hint of controversy would only serve to draw attention to the Vingtistes' exhibition. In his lecture that was subsequently published in L'Art Moderne, Picard predicted that from the press, "on ne rechercha pas l'appui, . . ." and "Quant au public, pâte molle, toujours disposé à suivre les bavardages . . . il fut sceptique et peu disposé à la bienveillance." 38

As Picard no doubt hoped, those who would have seen Les Vingt as the harbingers of modernity, and therefore a threat to all that the Brussels Academy stood for, . . .
attacked him and the artists he defended. Probably the most virulent attacks came from Gustave Lagye, one of the critics for *La Fédération Artistique*.\(^3^9\)

The protracted battle that ensued between the two men was printed in *L'Art Moderne* and it would appear that, although Lagye had some serious criticisms of the Vingtistes many of his epithets were aimed at Picard directly:

Mais je comprends parfaitement que Maître Picard, désappointé de ne pouvoir vice-présider... le Cercle artistique de Bruxelles, se soit retourné d'un autre côté... Il lui fallait un siège et une nouvelle base d'opération pour le jeu compliqué qu'il joue avec une lucidité césarienne. Les XX sont venus innocemment lui offrir l'un et l'autre... Ce qui devenait ses pions dans la bataille lui important peu.\(^4^0\)

In keeping with this attitude concerning the relationship between Picard and *Les Vingt*, Lagye questioned every statement *L'Art Moderne*'s editor had made on behalf of the Vingtistes. He challenged Picard's rhetoric of defiance and combativeness and pointed out that some of Picard's so-called audacious painters had already successfully exhibited many of the works shown at *Les Vingt*'s first exhibition and some had even won medals.\(^4^1\)

Sitôt que je l'ai pu, je me suis permis de mettre le directeur des XX en contradiction flagrante avec les œuvres mêmes exposées.
par les matadors de son escadrille; . . .
He also attacked Picard's claims concerning the extent to which the Vingtistes were significant innovators:

pour ma part, je n'ai jamais hésité a saluer les véritables novateurs. L'intransigéance fait d'art est chose permise, voire désirable. . . . Mais il y a une légère nuance entre un maître et un écolier, . . .

There were other critics who also were aware of the contradictions between what Picard wrote about Les Vingt and what the group really represented. H. Vigoureux of L'Etudiant also challenged Picard's claim that Les Vingt represented a band of unified radicals. He wrote that "En effet, il y a une extrême gauche; une gauche conservatrice et même une droite aux XX. . . ."

It is evident from these comments that the public was well aware of the important role Picard played in the group's operations. Lagye even refers to Picard as Les Vingt's "director" and to the Vingtistes as "ses Jeunes Belgique." Even without an official role within the group, the power of his journal allowed him to maintain a great deal of control over its operations. And without Picard's abilities as a strategist, Les Vingt might never have gained the important foothold it achieved so quickly. In payment for these favours, Les Vingt tacitly became subsumed under the aegis of L'Art Moderne. Moreover, the journal's alliance
with the artists' group also bolstered Picard's and Maus' reputations as the self-appointed pundits of "modernity" and "social art". The yearly exhibitions were destined to become a forum for the dissemination of their ideas and to strengthen their position within the larger Belgian intellectual community.

It was, indeed, L'Art Moderne that always maintained the dominant role in the relationship that grew between the two groups. Picard and Maus controlled the apparatus which was necessary for the Vingtistes to achieve the success they wanted. Publicly, however, they upheld the myth that the journal maintained a detached, paternalistic relationship with the artists' group. This was achieved by underscoring the idea of libertarianism. Each Vingtiste, they declared, "se laisse aller librement à son tempérament, . . ."45

These declarations of artistic freedom and journalistic impartiality belied the reality of their relationship with Les Vingt. The tenacity with which Maus and Picard wielded their power over Les Vingt is evidenced by the almost systematic removal of certain Vingtistes from the organization. Between 1884 and 1886, five of the most conservative members were ousted. Notably, these were the same artists whose works Lagye
had pointed out as being incongruous with Les Vingt's image of rebellious anti-traditionalism. Apparently, the presence of these artists was a glaring contradiction to the claims L'Art Moderne made for the group, and they either resigned under pressure or were drummed out by the consistent attacks by L'Art Moderne and its friends. These incidents led one of the persecuted artists to write that "une tendance unique et absolue s'est imposé aux XX. Ne la partageant pas, je me retire." This "tendency," born from Maus' and Picard's determination to imbue the efforts of the Vingtistes with the qualities of an art that Picard called "social" would set the tone for all the Vingtistes' enterprises in the years that followed. Without qualification, it was the editors of L'Art Moderne who were in command of Belgium's newest artistic vanguard.
FOOTNOTES—CHAPTER ONE

1 Rene Hislaire, "Political Parties," in Belgium, ed. Jan-Albert Goris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), p.95. In this discussion of the political structure of Belgium in the late nineteenth century the author adds this comment: "The electorate, composed of less than 100,000 out of nearly 4,000,000 inhabitants, represented only the well-to-do classes, nobles, upper bourgeois property owners, industrialists and landed farmers who paid a certain amount of taxes, known as the cens."

2 According to E. H. Kossman, in The Low Countries (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 341-342, the Flemish and Brabant Socialists were founded in 1887 and amalgamated in 1879 as the Belgian Socialist Party. The greatest problem for the Socialists was to unite the workers under one viable organization. It was not successful and gained little public support. However, it did ignite a consciousness towards social issues and paved the way for the establishment of a strong, united organization—the Parti Ouvrier Belge—founded in 1885. The party in power in the early eighties was that of the Catholics. Kossman, p. 315, points out that when the Liberals were defeated in the elections of 1879 after they tried to place education under the control of the government and less by the Catholic Church, Liberalism failed and was replaced by a clerical and conservative countermovement. Thus, the situation at the beginning of the decade was such that a strong, conservative Rightist government was in power, the middle-of-the-road Liberals were powerless and the new political Left was represented by the fledgling Socialist Party.

3 Kossman, p. 330, offers an excellent description of those who were devoted to La Jeune Belgique when he writes: "La Jeune Belgique catered for the intellectual elite. It did not represent a democratic movement. But the vulgarity despised by these men was not that of the masses, rather the vulgarity of the bourgeoisie from which the leaders themselves had come. With their proud exclusiveness they rejected everything ever done, thought, or made by this bourgeoisie as inferior materialism. They sought isolation. . . . They were unreligious and remained outside politics. . . . They were as full of contempt for liberalism as they were indifferent to the Roman Catholic Party."


10 F. Vermeulen, pp. 34-36


12 Vermeulen, p. 36. According to Kossman, pp. 311-313, Picard went through several different political phases in his life. His father was born in Paris, and came from a Walloon family of farmers and his mother was of Dutch origin. He grew up in Brussels where his father was a barrister. In the 1860's Picard was a radical Liberal, in the 1880's he fought for universal franchise, and in 1886 he became a member of the POB. Eventually, his explorations led him to racist doctrines, even to writing anti-semitic monographs. This turn in his writing appears to have hampered his political career after 1897.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 73.

16 Kossman, p. 323.


18 Ibid.

19 See Jane Block, "Les XX and Belgian Avant-Gardism, 1868-1894;" 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1980), p. 104. Block points out that there is no absolute evidence to show if or when the committee of three was abandoned. In my own research, I found no concrete evidence to show there was a committee appointed after the first year's salon.


22 Block, p. 56.

23 See Block, p. 104, and p. 138, for a discussion of Bernier's appointment to the post.

24 "L'Exposition des XX," L'Art Moderne IV (February 10, 1884): 42. Picard's lecture was reproduced in three articles in L'Art Moderne during February and March, 1884.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 41.

27 Ibid.
Picard deliberately stirred up antagonism between Les Vingt and the public. This served to unite the members and set them in a privileged, isolated position. Furthermore, it was a way of downplaying the pluralistic nature of the group.

"L'Exposition des XX," p. 43.

"L'Art jeune," *L'Art Moderne* IV (March 9, 1884): 73.

Ibid.


Kossman, p. 327.

Ibid., p. 328. In terms of the label, "radicalism," Kossman, pp. 336-337, writes, "If a political party needs to express a system, be it a system of ideas or interests, the 'progressive' or 'radical' parties of this period are paradoxes, for radicalism did not have, and did not wish to have, a system. All systems, it was thought, slow down evolution, impede growth rather than direct it." However, Kossman goes on to explain that if the young radical Liberals of the 1880's did not have a system, they were at least committed to the axiom that there is an evolutionary principle leading men towards complete equality. Kossman, p. 337, also adds that the radicals shared a great deal with the Belgian socialists and, gradually, their concept of social reform through legislation was accepted by those liberals who remained loyal to the old party.


Kossman, p. 365.

Picard called attention to the dispute by printing Lagye's articles in *L'Art Moderne*.


Ibid., p. 84.

Ibid.


The five artists who left the group were Gustave Vanaise, Piet Verhaert, Theodore Verstraete, Jef Lambeaux, and Jean Delvin. All were established artists who had enjoyed a certain measure of success prior to their association with *Les Vingt*.

Block, p. 124.

*Le groupe des XX et son temps*, p. 18.
CHAPTER TWO

STYLE AND IDEOLOGY:

IMPRESSIONISM, MODERNITE AND ANARCHISM

From 1884 to 1887 L'Art Moderne's concept of social art was associated stylistically with Belgian Impressionism. It was the artistic legacy which, according to the journal, had evolved out of the work of Les Vingt's precursors, the Belgian Realists and Plein-airists.¹ Realism, and its off-shoot, Impressionism were viewed by Maus and Picard as the most suitable modes for depicting the subject of modern society.²

Amongst the wide variety of artists who had joined together to form Les Vingt, James Ensor was considered the most innovative of the group's Impressionist faction. He not only held an important position within the organization because of his artistic achievements, but also had garnered the admiration of L'Art Moderne for his aggressive attacks on all those who were representatives of official art. The strength of his following, which included Finch, Vogels, Toorop, DeRegoyos, Schlobach, Charlet, Verheyden, Van Strydonck and Van Rysselberghe, insured him of a powerful position within the organization.³

He had acquired his notoriety from several disputes
he had been involved in with the Brussels Salon and the artists' group, *L'Essor*. In the eyes of the public, his reputation perpetuated the notion that the *Vingtistes*, in general, were intractable and defiant. For *L'Art Moderne* he became the model of the intransigent, modern rebel. The journal defended him fervently after his rejection by the Brussels Salon in 1884.

It declared that Ensor was the pre-eminend *Vingtiste* and described him as a serious threat to the forces of officialdom.

For *L'Art Moderne*, this label of "dangerous anarchist" was defined by certain artistic parameters. It was pictorially associated with the Impressionistic style and philosophically with the ideas of libertarianism and anti-traditionalism. Ensor's actions and attitudes, in a sense, provided the raw materials for *Les Vingt*'s avant-garde identity and the ideology behind
the doctrine of *l'art social* as it was manifest within this specific group.

On another level, Ensor and the avant-garde were being swept along by a more encompassing situation. The significance of Ensor's role as the "perfect anarchist" might have remained limited to the sphere of art, had it not been for the political developments in Belgium at this time. Under these circumstances, the idea of "anarchism" took on more far-reaching, complex and problematic associations.

The establishment of a successful Workers' Party had a great deal to do with this phenomenon. After the party had been consolidated in 1885, it drew many of its supporters from those who had been associated with the Belgian Socialist Party since 1879. More importantly, however, formerly apolitical workers' cooperatives and guilds from all sectors of Belgium gave their sanction to the new party. For the first time, they were able to see themselves as belonging to the same class and were ready to fight for class interests.\(^8\)

For a vigorous Labour Party to emerge, the unions and nonpolitical organizations had to agree to a strategy of action and to accept a political programme.\(^9\) The coalition that formed the Parti Ouvrier Belge
(hereafter referred to as the POB) embraced wide-ranging philosophies, directed its efforts towards winning a modicum of social reform legislation and concentrated on the goal of universal suffrage. Because of the persistent Catholic overlay of many of these groups, and because of the extreme diversity of groups represented, the POB leaders avoided the term "socialist" in their discussions and evaded issues that would fuel divisions within the party. It is significant that the very tangible goals of franchise reform and workers' rights were enough to create a very strong, unified party. The POB was controlled by the workers and they did little to accommodate the intellectuals within the group. Whether Marxist or Anarchist, scholars and theorists, as Kossman points out, were respected but left unread by the majority of the party's new membership.

The strength of this new political party was put to the test by the economic situation in Belgium in 1886. Unemployment and poverty were critical problems. Although Belgium had weathered economic depression before, its appearance in this year was greeted by a strong and unified POB whose fervent supporters used the situation to demonstrate their newly-found power. The workers' unity proved to be so strong that many believed the whole country was on the brink of revolution. In
the newspapers, entire pages were devoted to listing incidents involving strikes and demonstrations and the government reprisals that followed them. Henri Pirenne describes the events of this period in the following way:

A comparison is essential to the historian between the uprising of the Iconoclasts in 1566 and the great workers's riots of the month of March in 1886. In both cases, one finds the same suddenness, the same violence, the same surprise of the government, the same absence of organization on the part of the insurgents. The accumulation of longstanding social frustration was unleashed without warning as it had been unleashed by religious fanaticism three hundred years earlier. It was a burst of collective furor, without preconceived plan, without direction, without a specific goal, obeying only the contagion of example manifest within the sickened masses.14

Les Vingt, yoked from the beginning to an ideology fused from the militant language of the political Left and the concept of "social art" was identified by L'Art Moderne as the artistic equivalent of this social phenomenon. This connection between social and artistic activity was reinforced by several articles that had appeared in L'Art Moderne in 1885 during Les Vingt's annual exhibition. Jean François Raffaëlli had been chosen as an invité and principal speaker at the show. His talks were later published under the title of "Le laid dans l'art." His ideas upheld the aesthetic policy of Les Vingt, which was steeped in Picard's polemics
of realism and contemporaneity. Raffaëlli emphasized the necessity for the modern artist to expose and confirm the realities of his social environment. He explained that the Realist

a pour but, d'exprimer, par des oeuvres, l'état de son esprit au moment où il compose ses oeuvres . . . . Il est évident que . . . les artistes qui appartiennent au mouvement réaliste, naturaliste, sont des hommes souffrants, malheureux, agités, et qui possèdent en eux-mêmes les inquiétudes et les tristesses de notre société.15

He wrote that social disquiet was a reflection of the psychological state of modern society. It was inherent in the process of revolution:

. . . la Révolution a définitivement créé des hommes. . . . en brisant des pouvoirs absolus, des idées religieuses, des corporations, des privilèges, elle a construit des individus, séparés entre eux.16

In his preoccupation with the "ugly" the modern artist was not concerned with the depiction

. . . du laid pour le laid, mais. . . à écrire ou à peindre notre tristesse, notre désespoir et notre colère.17

"Modernité" simply served "la vérité" and devotion to it implied an intrinsically moral value system.

. . . le moderne n'est pas seulement dans le sujet . . . On est moderne par la sensation, par l'idée qu'on a de l'atmosphère morale qui nous entoure. . . . les grands génies du passé ont été modernes à leur époque, . . . ils ont réflété les agitations de leur temps. . . .18

The concept of "modernity" had been a reasonably
palatable one to the Brussels bourgeoisie in 1885. The Vingtistes, though criticized by some reviewers for their weak composition, incomprehensible subjects or incorrect colour, were, at the same time, tolerated for their youthfulness, their audacity and the nationalistic character some critics noted in their impressionist works when compared with those of the French invités.19 In 1886, however, the group’s ties with L’Art Moderne and the social reform movement threatened to change the character of their public image. The "agitations of their period," that is, the reality of social turmoil, coupled with modernist ideas from France, transformed their avant-garde identity into one that was now potentially dangerous to their viewing public.

As far as the conservative press were concerned, any manifestation of radicalism carried the connotation of social anarchy. Radicalism signified a wrenching away from paternalistic control by the Church and the dissolution of traditional values. Worst of all, it heralded the advent of social upheaval and political insurrection.

In their papers, the socialists emphasized that the strikes and riots of this period were not part of a planned revolution but a spontaneous outbreak of anger and frustration.20 However, these incidents were followed by the publication of Alfred Defuisseaux’s Le Catéchisme du Peuple
which served to inspire the workers to further revolt. Two hundred and sixty thousand copies were sold within weeks of its publication.21

The pamphlet followed the format of a child's religious catechism, which outlined the basic precepts of religious dogma:

Première Leçon--De la Condition du Peuple et de son Esclavage.

--1. Qui es-tu?
--R. Je suis un esclave.
--2. Tu n'es donc pas un homme?
--R. Au point de vue de l'humanité, je suis un homme; mais par rapport à la societé, je suis un esclave.22

In this manner, Defuisseaux outlined the class system which formed the basis of the Belgian State. Whether one was a "Liberal" or a "Catholic" made no difference. Either one was the enemy of the working class, and "un homme qui cherche ses affaires au detriment de trésor de l'Etat."23 The only solution to this problem, according to Defuisseaux, was universal suffrage.

For Les Vingt, the violence and upheaval that followed the economic depression of 1886 could only threaten to topple the fragile framework of an ideology that depended on a balance between a commitment to social change and the nonpartisan considerations of modern art. In 1886, the qualities of being avant-garde, that is, "intransigent" and "combative," were
beginning to take on dangerous connotations.

Les Vingt's affiliations with L'Art Moderne only served to intensify the dangerous connotations of its identity. Picard continued to champion the cause of social revolution. Inspired by the Anarchist movement in France, he published a long article on art and revolution in L'Art Moderne proclaiming that "L'heure est venue, de tremper la plume dans l'encre rouge."24

He regularly corresponded with Maus, who spent part of 1886 in Paris as L'Art Moderne's French correspondent. Picard was aware that Kropotkin's book Paroles d'un révolté had received strong support from a large number of France's more radically-minded artists. In his book, Kropotkin had made a direct appeal to young artists for a socially-relevant art. He encouraged them to

Narrate for us in your vivid style or in your fervent pictures the titanic struggle of the masses against their oppressors; inflame young hearts with the beautiful breath of revolution.25

He urged artists to "show the people the ugliness of contemporary life and the ignominies of the social order."26

Kropotkin's anarchism appealed to these young artists because it was anti-official, individualistic and revolutionairy.27 These same qualities appealed to Picard.
He wrote a review of Kropotkin's book for *L'Art Moderne* in July, 1886.\(^{28}\) The tone of the critique was laudatory.

Kropotkin's ideas may have further inspired Picard, in the following month, to write another article entitled "L'art dans la rue," based on his participation in a large demonstration in Brussels organized by the POB.\(^{29}\) In the article Picard likened this new social phenomenon to

\[ \ldots \text{la construction d'une oeuvre colossale, mouvante, éblouissante, et, par l'impression qu'il s'agit d'un grand et touchant phénomène social, } \ldots \] \(^{30}\)

He described the scene of the parade in elaborate detail:

\[ \text{le défilé roule avec sa palpitation continue de têtes comme si le cortège entier était un long serpent précipitant sa respiration.} \] \(^{31}\)

and emphasized the power of the crowds and the prevailing socialist spirit:

\[ \text{Le drapeau rouge! sa hampe est formée d'un faisceau de piques. Du milieu sort la hache. Elle porte le bonnet phrygien. Et derrière, les hommes ont tous un ruban, une cocarde, une fleur rouge, rouge, toujours rouge. } \ldots \text{Et constamment des drapeaux rouges succédant aux drapeaux rouges } \ldots \text{Les métiers succèdent aux métiers avec leurs banderoles, leurs gonfanons portant des inscriptions menaçantes ou suppliantes, ironiques ou terribles.} \] \(^{32}\)

It is not surprising that *L'Art Moderne*’s enthusiastic support of the workers' movement in Belgium coupled with its strong endorsement of the Anarchist sympathies of its French counterparts kindled strong attacks against
the magazine's ally, Les Vingt, from the conservative sectors of the press and public. "Vingtisme;" a neologism coined by a critic, now became associated with social anarchism. In February, 1887, L'Art Moderne made the following statement in regard to this attack on Les Vingt:

"Ce MONSTRE qui s'appelle Vingtisme", disait gravement un journal de province, l'an passé. Et à ce terme on a rattaché tout ce qui existe de violent, de tumultueux, de révolutionnaire, d'anarchiste. Vingtisme et pétroleur sont pour certaines gens, termes synonymes.

This statement raises several questions in regard to Les Vingt's public identity at the outset of 1887. Does this statement suggest that the editors of L'Art Moderne were attempting to deny all connections between Les Vingt's ideological stance and the reform movement or were they using this accusation simply to draw attention to the group? How would Les Vingt's viewing audience--those now faced with the threat of the destruction of their property and loss of political power--react if this conjunction between social anarchism and "Vingtisme" continued to be promoted?

As the editors of L'Art Moderne must have realized, Les Vingt's ideological affiliations with the reform movement could, under the present circumstances, jeopardize the survival of the group. The exhibition of 1886--just prior to the first outbreak of violence--had been Les
Vingt's most successful. As Canning points out, the exhibition proved so popular with the Brussels public that the show was extended an extra week. When it finally closed, more than eight thousand people had seen the show. Furthermore, many of the exhibitors, even Ensor and Redon who had received much negative criticism from the press, sold their works.34

In the face of Les Vingt's loss of artistic insularity at the beginning of 1887, Maus and Picard realized that, for the group to survive, they would have to make some significant alterations to its avant-garde identity. This was achieved, in part, by emphasizing a more apolitical definition of the group's activities and by inviting to the exhibitions artists who represented a wide range of pictorial styles. More specifically, they turned to Paris for their solution.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER TWO

1 John David Farmer, in Ensor (New York: Georges Braziller, 1976), pp. 16-17, explains that Belgian realism which was taught in the academies was "an inspirational realism that transcended the problems of a workaday world. Contiguous to the contrivances of this approach, however, there existed a Pleinairism and Naturalism comparable to that of the Barbizon School in France . . . characterized by an impressionistic concern for light and truth to nature, and who placed themselves outside the establishment." Block, pp. 151-152, points out the differences that existed between French and Belgian Impressionism. The Belgians were less scientific in their approach and were not overtly concerned with depicting the kinds of modern subject matter that preoccupied the French, such as cafe life, dance halls and circus scenes. The Belgians did, however, adopt the rapid brushstroke of their French counterparts. Block, p. 152, also adds this commentary on why the Belgians were not more attracted to French Impressionism: "First, there already existed a Belgian tradition of depicting light and atmospheric effects. The School of Tervuren, led by Boulenger, and the S.L.B.A., as shown in Artan's work, stressed painting from nature and a study of light . . . Secondly, for the young artists there was an understandable inclination to emulate their avant-garde predecessors."

2 See "L'Exposition des XX," L'Art Moderne IV (February 17, 1884): 49. The journal writes: "D'abord, l'étude et l'interprétation de la réalité contemporaine. Cette règle, les adeptes du mouvement l'appliquent dans tous les éléments de l'art. Dans le choix du sujet . . . le paysage tel qu'il est là partout autour de nous dans le pays où nous vivons et que nous connaissons. L'homme et la femme tels que nous les voyons vivre et s'agiter. Les scènes de notre existence sociale luxeuse ou pauvre avec l'intérêt constant qu'elles présentent."


4 Block, pp. 36-38, discusses the debt Les Vingt owed to L'Essor. Les Vingt adopted several of its innovations: hanging all the works of one artist together; including musical soirées as part of the show; and sponsoring lectures for the exhibitions. Farmer, p. 21, points out that, in regard to Ensor, L'Essor had refused his
painting, Woman Eating Oysters, for their 1883 salon. Ensor broke off relations with the group after this incident.

5 "Le salon de Bruxelles," L'Art Moderne IV (October 12, 1884): 330.

6 "La jeune école," L'Art Moderne IV (October 12, 1884): 330. This last phrase refers to those who were devoted to French culture as it had been imported during the time of establishing Belgium's constitution.

7 In this essay I have made use of the term, "libertarianism," in its most general sense—that is, to refer to a belief in absolute freedom for the individual. It also seems that L'Art Moderne's use of the concept was in a nonpolitical sense. For more information regarding "anarchism" as a communal attitude based on the idea of individualism, see Eugenia Herbert, The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

8 Kossman, p. 342.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid. Kossman, p. 343, states that 59 workers' cooperatives were represented at the congress. He adds, "As a result of its federated structure, the support it found among the trade unions, and its financial dependence on the cooperatives—which developed more impressively in Belgium than anywhere else in Europe—by 1886 the Workers' Party could act as the political organ of about 40,000 members belonging to 160 workers' associations of widely divergent character."

11 Kossman, p. 342.

12 Ibid. The efforts of the new party were dominated by practical considerations. As Louis Bertrand points out in Histoire de la démocratie et du socialisme en Belgique depuis 1830, Vol. 2 (Bruxelles: Dechenne et Cie., 1907), p. 452, the first decision of the POB was to set a date
for a demonstration in favour of universal suffrage for June of 1886. It directed its efforts towards organizing a strong movement aimed at revising the article in the Belgian constitution which denied voting power to the working class. The means to this end were through the press, conferences, public meetings and demonstrations which would strengthen the power of the movement.

13 The demonstration, strikes and riots of this period served to solidify the workers' commitment to gain their right to vote. It came to be viewed as a panacea for all their ills. Kossman, p. 318, points out that the letters SU (suffrage universal) took on religious overtones and functioned for the illiterate Belgian workers as the ichthys sign had for the early Christian and the cross for the crusaders.

14 Pirenne, p. 303.


16 Ibid., p. 68.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Canning, p. 102.

20 Kossman, p. 318.

21 Bertrand, p. 384.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., pp. 385-386.

24 Edmond Picard, "L'Art et la révolution," L'Art Moderne VI (July 18, 1886): 225. This was the first of three articles devoted to Kropotkin's works.

25 Egbert, p. 226.
26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 It was listed under the title, "L'art et la révolution." See footnote 24.


30 Ibid., p. 266.

31 Ibid., p. 267.

32 Ibid.

33 "Le 'vingtisme,'" L'Art Moderne VII (February 20, 1887): 58. The term, "pétroleur" refers to individuals who participate in fire-bombings and related activities.

34 Canning, p. 123. Maus and Picard often bought works exhibited in the Vingtistes' salons. They encouraged their circle of friends to do so as well.
Despite Les Vingt's adversarial image, by 1887 a large number of the Brussels bourgeoisie were infatuated with its annual exhibitions. They were "le Tout-Bruxelles artiste, les gens qui connaissent les peintres, qui aiment du Wagner et mettent sur leur guéridon le dernier roman de Paris." Evidence of this growing acceptance even extended to the reviews of the annual shows, wherein a growing number of the critics expressed the opinion that, indeed, the group was beginning to show signs of representing a brighter future for Belgian art. Many of these critics were associated with journals and papers that generally took a moderate, and in some cases, conservative stance on most social and artistic issues. Now, as the following comment illustrates, these critics were echoing the same declarations made by L'Art Moderne:

Les Vingtistes avec beaucoup de courage, ont essayé de créer un mouvement, de donner une direction nouvelle à l'art national, une impulsion irrésistible aux idées en enfonçant à coups de poing la porte branlante des préjugés, des poncifs, de tout ce qui est vieux, et abâtardi, encombrait ou tenait en friche le domaine artistique.

The journal availed itself of this increase in
public acceptance for Les Vingt by reminding its readers of its role in helping to bring about this new artistic era in Belgium. In its inaugural article for the year, L'Art Moderne reaffirmed its advocacy of those qualities which dominated Les Vingt's public image:

L'Originalité indépendante! Toujours nous l'avons défendue, toujours nous serons ses plus ardens champions. . . . Et c'est pourquoi on nous a toujours vus, à l'avant-garde, faire le coup de feu pour les plus avancés, pour les plus exposés. C'est dans leurs rangs qu'on recrute les appor- teurs de neuf, . . . .

The editors claimed to facilitate communication between these artists who practiced the principles of modernité and their audience:

Notre rôle devant une œuvre sera avant tout de l'expliquer et de la faire comprendre, afin que le public puisse juger par lui-même.  

Maus and Picard believed they were able to fulfill this responsibility as impartial commentators because of their unqualified commitment to support absolute freedom of expression for all artists:

Nous avouons ingénument que nous commençons aujourd'hui ce journal sans parti-pris d'école, sans préoccupation aucune de règle, de code ou de symbole. Ou si l'on veut absolument que nous indiquions une tendance, nous dirons que l'Art pour nous est le contraire même de toute recette et de toute formule.  

By maintaining this facade of impartiality, L'Art Moderne's editors continued to justify their self-proclaimed authority as the theorists who formalized
the language and defined the precepts of the Belgian avant-garde. But programmatically, the journal's insistent defence of the ideas of freedom and probity also meant that its critical treatment of Les Vingt's activities had to uphold the notion that the artists' group functioned freely and independently from all outside control—even from L'Art Moderne.

"Mais si pour nous le principe de l'Art est la spontanéité, de même nous entendons revendiquer une liberté entière."º

For Maus and Picard openly to admit to the extent of the Vingtistes' dependency on L'Art Moderne would have been seen as an obvious discrepancy in Les Vingt's libertarian, anarchist constitution. At the same time, the journal's esteemed reputation depended almost entirely on the equivocal position it publicly maintained in regard to Les Vingt. Its defence of the group's pursuits and the long articles which outlined its motivations and goals drew a large reading audience from all over the Netherlands and Belgium, especially within artistic circles.º

It is significant, therefore, that in early 1887 L'Art Moderne's tactical approach to publicizing the activities of the artists' group underwent notable revisions. These alterations were calculated to repress the notion of "Vingtisme" being promulgated by antagonistic members of the press. Maus and Picard realized that,
given the current social climate, allowing this notion to prevail would threaten Les Vingt's exhibitions and, ultimately, L'Art Moderne itself. In their campaign against the notion of "Vingtisme," the editors first armed themselves with a revised definition of Belgium's artistic vanguard.

The journal's discussions of Les Vingt noticeably shifted to an emphasis on the idea that its members were concerned only with the defence of artistic freedom and that the group's libertarian, non-partisan character, far from aligning its members with the efforts of Anarchists and radicals, signified political neutrality. The editors presented libertarianism as an apolitical principle which, in fact, insulated its followers from all partisan tendencies but supported the common cause of social progress. In Maus' estimation, the artistic manifestation of evolutionary progress--modernité--was a principle that existed, back to back, with the principle of artistic freedom. In his words,

Qu'on fondant une association les vingt artistes qui se sont tendus les mains ont eu la pensée de créer une exposition qui réalisât, le plus complètement possible, la forme moderne de l'art chacun s'inspirant d'ailleurs, pour l'expression de cet art, de son tempérament. . . .

The journal's discussions now emphasized the artistic aspects of the group's activities. Maus attempted to restructure Les Vingt's identity by focussing on its
libertarian qualities as they related to the production of art and, at the same time, by downplaying the political implications of the group's combative image. The ideas of evolution, modernity and individualism were presented as non-partisan values:

Nous avons dit: Les XX ne constituent pas une ECOLE. Ce ne sont pas les protagonistes d'une DOCTRINE. Et nous avons ajouté: ils n'ont pas la MEME TECHNIQUE. Mais ils existe entre eux une affinité plus étroite et d'un ordre supérieur. . . . C'est, tout simplement, une commune aspiration vers un art sincère, libre, personnel, . . .

In a second strategy, Maus and Picard tried to reduce this tempered avant-garde ideology to an aesthetic formulation which would cancel all previous associations with political extremism. When Maus was in Paris in 1886, he reviewed the Impressionist exhibition where Georges Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* (figure 1) was on view. His first reaction to it reveals a hesitancy and lack of comprehension:

Les figures sont en bois, naïvement sculptées au tour comme les petits soldats qui nous viennent de l'Allemagne. . . .

Yet he also realized that this painting would create a great sensation in Brussels:

La composition a un aspect géométrique. Peinte d'un bout à l'autre à petits coups de pinceaux d'égale dimension, sorte de pointillé minuscule, on la croirait brodée sur canevas au moyen de laines de couleurs, ou tissée ainsi qu'une toile de haute-lice. A Bruxelles, la *Grande-Jatte*
ferait scandale. Il y aurait, si elle était exposée, des cas subits d'alienation mentale et des apoplexies foudroyantes.\textsuperscript{11}

He felt that Seurat's divisionist paintings merited further consideration because they

\ldots révèlent une nature artistique singulièrement apte à décomposer les phénomènes de la lumière, à en pénétrer la prisme, à en exprimer, par des moyens simples mais savamment combinés, les effets les plus compliqués et les plus intenses.\textsuperscript{12}

He even lionized Seurat as a "... messie d'un art nouveau."\textsuperscript{13} Picard quickly wrote back, encouraging Maus to invite him to exhibit at \textit{Les Vingt}.\textsuperscript{14}

While in Paris, Maus also wrote to \textit{Vingtiste} Eugène Boch about his plans for the 1887 exhibition. If Maus was going to invite someone who was bound to create an uproar at the exhibition, he was also going to be sure there were other invités who were certain to appeal to the tastes of the Brussels bourgeoisie:

\begin{quote}
A part Puvis et Degas empêché, tous nos invités ont accepté. Il y a en aura pour tous les goût, des 'serres' et des 'laches', des 'impressionistes' et des 'intentionnistes' et des 'impossibilistes.'\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Furthermore, this eclectic sampling of artistic styles would act as a buffer between the French Neo-Impressionists and \textit{Les Vingt}'s detractors, and would diffuse some of the propaganda aimed at aligning the group with Anarchist activities.

Contrary to their previous tactics, \textit{L'Art Moderne}'s
editors attempted to inspire a positive reception from the Belgian public for the French *invités*. Because Maus and Picard were planning to use Neo-Impressionism to construct a more depoliticized image for *Les Vingt*, it was important that Neo-Impressionism be presented as a palatable item for the Brussels bourgeoisie. Felix Fénéon was asked to review the second Indépendent exhibition for the journal and in it, Fénéon concentrated his discussion on the divisionist works in the show. In the preamble to the 1887 exhibition catalogue Maus devoted a great deal of his discussion to demonstrating the compatibility that existed between divisionism and the goals of the *Vingtistes*. Maus asserted that both the painters of divisionism and the *Vingtistes* shared a primary concern with depicting contemporary reality; but more importantly, both were committed to the idea of individualism.

Que les Signac, les Seurat s'enthousiasment pour les gazomètres, les palissades et les gares, rien de mieux. Mais ce qui est insupportable, ... c'est la fureur d'imitation. ... de voir galoper toute cette meute dans la même direction. Car ce qui les pousse à peindre des gazomètres et des gares, ce n'est point parce que ses monuments, édifiés par la moderne industrie, allument en eux l'étincelle artistique, mais uniquement parce que ce sont des gazomètres et des gares, objets qu'on n'avait guère songé. jusqu'ici à encadrer d'une bordure d'or. En autres termes, parce que c'est la Mode.

Furthermore, the editors of *L'Art Moderne* consciously stripped Neo-Impressionism of its associations with
political Anarchism, thereby providing a visual ideology for *Les Vingt* which was modern and progressive, but also safe.18 "La Mode," as it was defined in the images shown by Signac and Seurat, furnished a new formulation for the journal's artistic doctrine of *modernité*, but now marked in non-political terms. *L'Art Moderne*’s editorials on Neo-Impressionism were detailed expositions of divisionist technique and colour theory which divested the art style of any Anarchist connotations and distracted the viewing public's attention away from the issue of "Vingtisme."

The revered ideals previously associated with the notion of "social art," now forsaken, were replaced with divisionist formulations--harmonious treatment of colour and form, clarity, logic, permanence, beauty, science--all of which might neutralize the concept of "Vingtisme."19

This new, "depoliticized" form of Neo-Impressionism also signified a detachment from nationalist ideals. The preferential treatment Maus and Picard gave to this imported art style signified a break in the important evolutionary link that had bonded *Les Vingt* to its Belgian antecedents. To be truly avant-garde, *L'Art Moderne* intimated, the group had ultimately to rise above national considerations. But in practical terms, this artistic caesura more significantly represented an intentional distancing from their own social milieu.
The publicity *L'Art Moderne* provided for Seurat's appearance in Brussels proved to be enormously successful. According to one critic's description of the opening,

> Une foule en délire se tasse devant la toile du Parisien Seurat: *La Grande Jatte*. Voilà du moins une oeuvre qui n'est pas pessimiste. . . . Ce qui *Seura, Seura*. Et tout le monde boit un coup à *la Grande Jatte.*

Although there were virulent attacks directed at Seurat and his colleagues, the 1887 salon proved to be the best attended of all the shows Maus had organized.

> Une grande première à tapage que l'ouverture du salon des XX. C'était hier à deux heures. Il y avait tout le monde; il n'était pas une de nos jolies femmes qui n'eût tenu a se montrer là.

Part of this success can be attributed to Maus' judicious choice of *invités*. As he had suggested to Boch, the show contained something for everyone. In the antechamber of the salon the works of older established Belgian artists were on view, including works by Louis Artan, Henri de Braekeleer, and Eugene Smits. Besides subscribing to tastes for more traditional Belgian art, the inclusion of these artists was meant to exemplify: first, that *Les Vingt*'s tolerance of artistic freedom went so far as to include obvious academic tendencies; and secondly, that modernity in art had a respectable ancestry which validated even the most radical tendencies.

Although Maus' strategy of including representatives
of traditional art may have helped in some degree to ensure the success of the 1887 salon, it was Seurat's painting that attracted most of the attention of the Brussels bourgeoisie. Signac, who attended the opening of the show, described his experience to Pissarro in a letter:

I have just left the exhibition exhausted. An enormous crowd, a terrible throng, very bourgeois and anti-artist. All in all it is a great success to us. Seurat's canvas was practically invisible, it was impossible to get near it, so dense was the crowd. The exhibition room is a magnificent gallery of the museum, very large, with excellent light. It is impossible to find anything better.23

Scathing attacks made at Seurat's entries by critics representing the more conservative papers only helped to fuel the curiosity of the Brussels salon-goers. In the Catholic newspaper, Journal de Bruxelles, Francis Nautet wrote that, in the case of Seurat's work, he

... n'y vois rien qu'une originalité et une expression fausse. ... M. Seurat voit séchement. Il n'y a ni force, ni grâce, ni chaleur, ni émotion dans sa Grande Jatte.24

Georges Verdavainne attacked Seurat and Signac for what he considered the reactionary character of their work:

Praticiens patients, ils peignent comme on assemble les pièces minuscules d'une mosaïque. ... Cette vue de la Grande Jatte, construite comme un jeu de patience, vous apparaîtra dans toute l'infériorité de son inspiration. La peinture comprise et exécutée ainsi devient plus conventionnelle que la peinture la plus académique. Aussi Seurat n'est-il qu'un réactionnaire forcé, pourvoyeur d'un genre mesquin, art étroit, sans portée, sans valeur.25
Along with this specific attack at the retarda
taire qualities of the French *invités* style, Verdavainne accused the *Vingtistes*, as a group, of not living up to their image of modern art's intransigent radicals. He believed that beneath the rhetoric of combattiveness and originality one found the unimpressive efforts of artists who offered little to distinguish themselves from their predecessors.

Les Vingtistes ne sont pas des révolutionnaires décidément, rien que des évolutionnistes. Ils bataillent comme d'autres pour le succès, avec plus d'habileté, avec moins de conviction . . . ils visent à l'originalité sans se préoccuper autrement des principes.26

He felt that they had little to offer the public in the way of real innovations. Rather, their radical image was based purely on *L'Art Moderne*'s discourse which helped to draw curious crowds, but which had no real substance behind it.

Pendant trois ans la foule attirée par une habile et tapageuse réclame, est venue à eux, leur demandant ce qu'ils voulaient, ce qu'ils enseignaient, en un mot quelle était leur religion artistique. La foule a de ces curiosités puériles! . . . Le public patient et bon enfant ne s'en formalisait pas. 'L'an prochain, disait-il, les tâtonnements inévitables du début . . . paraîtront et l'on sera fixé sur leurs tendances; on n'aura rien perdu pour attendre.' Bon public d'amateurs bienveillants, de critiques indulgents, d'amis crédulents, tu ne fus pas trompé . . . L'an prochain, nous saurons ce qu'il adviendra des XX et s'ils trouvèrent une doctrine; jusqu'ici ils nous montrèrent des peintures évolutionnant sans cesse mais pas l'ombre d'un principe fondamental capable d'éclairer les jeunes qui entrent dans la carrière.27

This ability on the part of Maus and Picard to attract the
crowds to Les Vingt's exhibition was enhanced by another tactical change. They attempted to mollify the public by appealing to its ability to comprehend, and thus share, in this social process called "modernity." The editors complained that Les Vingt was unjustly victimized by certain members of the press who, because they were only enamoured with an outdated academic style, were unable to understand the work of these young artists.

... le public commence à comprendre. En vain, une presse qui n'a plus ni autorité politique, tant elle a fait de palinodies, ni autorité artistique, tant elle a écrit d'âneries, jacasse et crache sa mauvaise humeur. ... On se dégoûte de la vieille sauce des peintures académiques.28

More than twelve thousand people visited the show that year.29 Many artists sold works and, generally, the exhibition was considered a financial success. La Grande Jatte was given the largest credit for this achievement, and therefore, L'Art Moderne continued to campaign for the adoption of divisionism by the Vingtistes. Art, the editors prophesied, had begun a new era.

Within their ideology of modernity was the belief that, in order to fulfill the requirements of this doctrine, it was necessary to evolve constantly from accepted forms to new ones. Neo-Impressionism was, logically, the next step in that evolutionary process. "Revolution" as an ideal had gradually been supplanted by the concept of "evolution,"
which was more compatible with the ideology espoused by their bourgeois audience. Evolution in the arts was, thereby, coterminus with the same logical, inevitable continuum which defined the liberal-capitalist perspective. The editor's stance reaffirmed the notion that it was not by revolution and anarchism, but by gradual reorganization that society would progress into its future.

"Modernity" was a manifestation of the concept of evolutionary change. Les Vingt had based its credibility on its commitment to this idea by continuing the work of its Belgian antecedents. It was a conviction which carried with it the necessity of continually rejecting and surpassing that which had become the status quo. In March of 1887 L'Art Moderne reprinted an article by Camille Lemonnier that supported the idea of the evolutionary nature of modern art. He wrote that the goal of art was

... la modernisation du procédé et de la sensation, reprise après eux par la génération nourrie de leur moelle et, jusqu'en l'actuelle évolution, toujours propulsée vers des solutions graduellement plus radicales.30

In effect, L'Art Moderne was demanding a revision of Les Vingt's public identity based on its adoption of divisionism. The pressure on the Vingtistes to accept this revised definition of their avant-garde identity was enormous. By 1888 almost every Vingtiste had found a com-
fortable niche within L'Art Moderne's structure of the group, or had withdrawn. The journal acknowledged and tolerated the various styles which now coexisted within Les Vingt's ranks--Impressionism, Symbolism, Neo-Impressionism and the first appearance of the Decorative Arts. Although Impressionism was generally considered passé, this faction had to be tolerated under the code of libertarianism. Maus disavowed the attacks by the press that Les Vingt was plagued by a single, restrictive "ism."

... le 'vingtisme' cela n'existe pas, il n'y a que des vingtistes, ... Parce que vingt artistes se réunissent, chacun apportant ses tendances, et ses qualités, et ses défauts, chacun certes, ayant la même haine du 'déjà fait' et 'déjà vu', mais n'ayant nullement la même préoccupation du 'a faire,' ... 31

Symbolism and Art Nouveau were sanctioned because they were already accepted in France and England. Neo-Impressionism, however, was treated as the most important manifestation of modern art to arrive at Belgium's door.

During the 1888 exhibition L'Art Moderne placed even more pressure on the Vingtistes to adopt the divisionist style by publishing an article on the "old" and "new" Impressionism. Although, according to the writer, the work of the Impressionists had once been the most revolutionary and innovative art to be found in Belgium, he felt that

Ces œuvres audacieuses peut-être aux temps lointains de renouveaux, se fixent presque timides aujourd'hui. Elles s'aveulent en des formes lourdes et désagréables. 32
This criticism of the Impressionist style was complemented by stressing that the diminishing importance of Impressionism was the inevitable result of the surge of initiatives being made by the Vingtistes in the area of Neo-Impressionism.

Addressing their comments to the Vingtistes and the critics, the journal's editors contended that Neo-Impressionism was the newest stage in the Belgian artistic evolution. And, indeed, soon after La Grande Jatte's presence in Brussels, this style "spread like a sudden passing epidemic" among the Vingtistes.  

The following commentary by the socialist journal, La Société Nouvelle is representative of the sentiments of those critics who viewed the sudden popularity of divisionism differently. These critics felt that Neo-Impressionism was being deliberately foisted upon the Vingtistes by L'Art Moderne's editors:

La discussion et l'intérêt du Salon se porteront sur le néo-impressionisme, annonçait l'organe officiel des XX. . . . L'Art Moderne nous présente ces néo-impressionnistes comme de recommandables oculistes.  

Indeed, Maus and Picard made every effort to pave the way for Les Vingt's adoption of divisionism. In February, 1888, they announced that Willy Finch as "le premier d'entre les Belges, décisivement, a s'embrigader parmi les néo-impressionnistes." Soon, more of the Vingtistes, including
Anna Boch, Georges Lemmen, Théo van Rysselberghe and Jan Toorop, were experimenting with divisionist techniques. Those Vingtistes who chose to resist the French aesthetic avoided conflict with L'Art Moderne over the issue by tacitly accepting the presence of divisionism and by remaining committed to one of the "acceptable" styles that L'Art Moderne tolerated for the sake of the group's eclectic image. One significant exception, however, was James Ensor.

Ensor's estrangement from Les Vingt was already in evidence by 1886. In the fall of that year an incident had erupted over an adulatory article on Fernand Khnopff's painting, Listening to Schumann, which was published in L'Art Moderne. Ensor claimed the picture was a plagiarism of his own painting, entitled, Russian Music. Khnopff's success, apparently, represented a threat to Ensor's esteemed position within Les Vingt. Ensor responded to that threat by condemning Maus' effusive support of Khnopff and declaring Maus' artistic judgement"superficial." His attack on Maus' ability to judge art, however, was a tactical error. Since this criticism was tantamount to his withdrawal of unquestioning support for Maus' leadership of the group, Ensor would no longer be able to depend on Maus as his ally.

Soon after this, he criticized Maus again, this time for his recommendation that the Vingtistes invite Whistler to join the group. Whistler had been an invité at the 1884
and 1886 exhibitions. According to Legrand, the Vingtistes had been very impressed by his work. Whistler also carried the aura of London and Paris and had acquired a notorious reputation for his public quarrels with Ruskin. Ensor, however, was strongly opposed to admitting him to Les Vingt. He wrote to Maus that,

admettre Whistler aux XX c'est marcher vers la mort . . . . Pourquoi admettre des étrangers? N'y a-t-il plus de jeunes en Belgique? Sommes nous les derniers jeunes? . . . [Whistler's] peintures sent déjà le moisi et le renfermé, il est connu et reconnu, quel art et principe nouveaux peut-il apporter chez nous? . . . Si vous croyez au bon effet pour le public, n'oubliez pas que la réputation de Whistler est, comme la nôtre, détestable dans l'épicerie.

His criticisms struck a blow at the heart of Maus' management of the group. Ensor knew that Maus condoned Whistler's membership because of his established reputation abroad and because Maus believed his presence would benefit the exhibitions. Maus thought he was being pragmatic. He was willing to compromise the group's principles in order to sustain the public's interest in their exhibitions. Ensor, on the other hand, wanted Les Vingt to maintain a strictly Belgian identity and to stand firm in its commitment to radicalism. As far as Ensor was concerned, admitting Whistler would have been a direct violation of the standards that had been set for the group.

Ensor was well aware that a substantial number of his colleagues were seduced by this illustrious personality, and
therefore, he campaigned to block Whistler's membership. But although Ensor was successful in this endeavour, many of his former adherents subsequently withdrew their allegiance to him in favour of the American expatriate.40

Ensor alienated himself further from the rest of the Vingtistes by submitting works for the 1887 exhibition that were considered irreverent and controversial. He had begun experimenting, two years earlier, with images in which he synthesized traditional and modern themes and motifs. These images, with their strong Flemish roots and their overlay of fragments of modern life, were satirical, provocative and, sometimes, offensive. Most importantly, however, they attracted a great deal of negative publicity at Les Vingt's exhibition.

The strained relationship that developed between Ensor and Les Vingt was intensified by Maus and Picard's forceful campaign for the group's adoption of divisionism, especially since the preference for this art style symbolized a bias towards French culture.41 Even though the editors had promoted the artistic style principally in the name of modernity and artistic freedom, Les Vingt's capitulation to divisionism signified an acquiescence to the tastes of the Brussels bourgeoisie which were ardently Francophile. Ensor's new art, in contrast, celebrated Belgium's Flemish heritage and therefore brought every
justification for Les Vingt's adoption of French divisionism into question. As he had shown during the Whistler incident, he wanted Les Vingt to resist all foreign influence and maintain a strong Belgian identity. Herein lay the source of the serious conflicts that arose between Ensor and his group. However, an assessment of how and why Ensor's Flemishness and L'Art Moderne's Francophilism were incompatible requires first a closer look at what Ensor's aesthetic represented.

One of Ensor's early works that best epitomizes his Flemish sensibility was a drawing entitled The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, 1885 (figure 2). Ensor submitted it for the 1887 exhibition as part of a series entitled The Aureoles of Christ or The Sensibilities of Light, and listed it in the catalogue under the category, "Visions."42 The subject of Christ's "Entry" was a common one for Flemish artists, but Ensor has radically altered the theme by infusing it with references to modern Belgium. Ensor presents the spectator with a telescopic view of "The Entry" as seen from above and in front of a city street. Tall buildings flank both sides of the boulevard, while flags, banners and pennants carrying slogans form a canopy above the figure of Christ and the dense procession of people that accompanies him. In the lower right-hand corner a raised platform protrudes into the swirling street
mob. Nearby, a tambour-major in a tall, plumed hat lifts his baton to summon forth a marching band. Christ, in the midst of this confusion, lifts his hand in benediction. Beyond him and continuing deep into the centre foreground, a seemingly endless procession of banners, musicians and supporters is compressed into the long, narrow street.

Its subject matter, its qualities of the traditional Belgian street festival or, kermesse, are insistent reminders of the drawing's Flemish roots. But Ensor has transformed these elements into a unique, personalized aesthetic by combining them with various, disparate symbols from contemporary Belgium. In the centre foreground, for instance, he has pasted in a sketched portrait of Emile Littre, a well-known anti-religious philosopher and contemporary of Ensor's. This figure carries a sceptre, symbol of religious authority, and heads the procession. His presence in this pictorial context is therefore contradictory and ambiguous. These characteristics are intensified by the inclusion of various popular phrases and political slogans. Socialist banners proclaiming "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" and "Vive la Sociale" are juxtaposed with "Salut Jésus, Roi des Juifs" and "Samarie." Other slogans include "Les Impressionistes Belge," "A Bas la Calotte," "Amestie," "Mouvement Flamand, hip, hip, hip, hurrah," "Les XX," and a sign advertising "Colmans Mustard." These
are intermingled with references to traditional aspects of the drawing—"Nazareth" and "Charcutiers de Jérusalem."

What may have otherwise been viewed simply as puerile, confusing or, even, blasphemous, imagery, was given a positive reception by a certain number of the show's reviewers. The most significant quality of this imagery, according to one faction of Ensor's sympathizers, was its Flemishness. Achilles Chainaye, a former Vingtiste who had turned to writing full-time, referred to Ensor during the 1887 exhibition as "le poteau indicateur de la peinture flamande régénérée." Ensor's friend and fellow-Vingtiste, Théo Hannon, echoed this sentiment when he wrote that Ensor and his friend Vogels "tendent à conserver la tradition du coloris flamand et de touch grasse et belle."46 Eugène Demolder, a socialist writer and ardent supporter of Ensor wrote a monograph in 1892 on Ensor's work in which he, perhaps, best sums up the impact related to this particular aesthetic as it was revealed in The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Ensor's Flemishness,

dechainait devant le public des bandes de diables petant, des personnages, d'un mode baroque, d'une sorte de carnaval des enfers. . . . Des pantins issus des rêves de Goya ou de Bosch jaillissaient turbulents, déformés comme en des magiques d'on ne sait quelle affreuse kermesse.47

While these writers commended Ensor for the Flemish character of his work embodied in its coarseness of execution,
fantastic imagery and references to the kermesse, others valued The Entry for its contemporary significance--its expression of modern life, the symbolism of its chaotic vision and the intensity of its impact on the viewer. Jules Destrée was one of those who acknowledged Ensor for the contemporary aspects of his Flemishness:48

Dans ses Visions, ces dessins extraordinaires. ... il y a toute une nouvelle voie ouverte pour lui. L'Entrée à Jerusalem, qui a si fort étonné, est à peu de chose près, superbe; c'est comme un carnaval gigantesque, symbolisant la Rue Moderne.49

The critic A. J. Wauters writing in the liberal paper, La Gazette, was even more incisive in his interpretation of the modern aspects of Ensor's imagery. He noted that in the Visions, Ensor depicted heads "déformées par le travail corporel, convulsionnées par la fatigue de la marche, altérées par la racune, la vengeance et les appétits. . . ." Ensor, he declared, stood for all people "qui veulent améliorer, reformer, renverser, bouleverser, avec ses drapeaux, des étendards, des emblèmes, des symboles des cartels. . . ."50

Wauters suggests that Ensor's impact lay primarily with his ability to act as a political and social commentator. But the strength and credibility of this visual language was also dependent upon its bonds with Ensor's Flemish past. As has been suggested earlier, many Belgian intellectuals of this period were concerned with a
renaissance of Belgian art—one that was separate and yet rivalled that of their French counterparts. During this period, the Flemish movement had begun to play a significant role in Belgium's artistic revival and was related to the widespread Romantic movement of the nineteenth century which glorified the culture and language of the common people. For these Belgian writers, especially those involved with the socialist movement, Ensor's Flemishness symbolically combined the culture and history of the country's working class with its contemporary struggles.

The writings of the socialist Emile Verhaeren, for example, share some of the same qualities of Ensor's imagery. His poems of the 1880's emphasize the dismal effects of Belgium's industrialization and its moral toll on the peasants. In his poem "Les Villes Tentaculaires," the phenomenon of modernity becomes a complex symptom which in his synthetic type of vision amplifies into a spectacular movement; the drift of population from the fields in obedience to the suction of the tentacled towns, and the reward of the captives with automatic employments and degrading stimulations.

"Above all," as Dore Ashton writes, the qualities of Verhaeren's Flemishness were melancholy, darkness, directness and coarseness.

Like Verhaeren's poems, Ensor's visual images represented a critical aesthetic. But if Ensor the Vingtiste
stood for reform, he stood alone; and if his art was meant to disrupt and overthrow, this effort was symbolically directed at the activities of his own vanguard. First of all, Ensor's works were dominated by references to Belgium's social issues, and were, therefore, in conflict with Les Vingt's depoliticized image. Secondly, these works, blatantly anti-French and anti-divisionist, opposed the group's adoption of an avant-garde identity that was formulated to please an audience whose tastes had always been dictated by French fashion.

Les Vingt felt justified in its disapproval of Ensor's images, considering the kind of virulent attacks that were directed at his submission for 1887. The critic of Le Moniteur des Arts wrote that the Auréoles were "élucubrations d'un cerveau malade." Max Sulzberger criticized the same aspects of Ensor's work that others had praised. He wrote that Ensor's

\begin{quote}
manière de peindre lui interdisant de progresser dans le côté métier de son art. . .
M. Ensor est tellement embrouillassé dans sa peinture. . . et tellement vague et indéchiffrable dans ses dessins intitulés Visions. . . . Analyser ces œuvres ce serait tenter l'impossible. Le chaos ne se décrit pas.
\end{quote}

The critic for La Fédération Artistique also directed his criticisms at the Flemish qualities of Ensor's drawings.

\begin{quote}
Dans ses dessins incohérents, visions enfantines, qui ne peuvent revaliser ni
avec les rêves macabres d'Odilon Redon, ni avec les fantastiques croquis de Toorop, dans ses drôleries picturales, en dépit d'une furieuse débauche de couleurs, se lit nettement l'impuissance. . . . L'heure de la victoire factice est passée. . . .

Although Seurat's La Grande Jatte had met with as much criticism as Ensor's entries, the reasons for such censure were very different in each case. It was the ugliness and inconsistencies within Ensor's images and his unorthodox approach to his subjects that offended so many reviewers. The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem broke all the rules of acceptability. Not only did he make a caricature of an important religious theme by infusing the image with humour and grotesqueries, but he also aligned it with social activities that were potentially dangerous and threatening. Christ no longer inhabited the distant past, but rather had been transported into a modern world filled with caricatures of real people, social dissent and bizarre activities.

L'Art Moderne, significantly, made no mention of Ensor's work in their review of the 1887 salon. Their silence suggests a tacit disapproval which was to become more obvious as time passed. His Impressionist works were now considered passé and his new, provocative images were a serious threat to the delicate balance the journal had arrived at in the reformulation of a cohesive, marketable identity for Les Vingt.
Georges Verdavainne noticed that the Vingtistes were less enamoured that year by his "théorie Ensorienne."

Cette année, nos rénovateurs nés malins mais sceptiques laissent l'infortune James seul avec ses illusions.57

Moreover, Ensor's coarse Flemish imagery clashed menacingly with the ordered beauty found in the images of the Belgian Neo-Impressionists. Where the divisionist aesthetic offered the Vingtistes a safe harbour removed from the stormy waters of their contemporary milieu, Ensor's imagery threatened to sweep them into the centre of the turbulence. Where divisionism signified the possibility of a logical, controllable and beautiful world, Ensor's vision signified the estrangement of the individual faced with the modern world. L'Art Moderne, therefore, viewed Ensor's espousal of this new personal aesthetic as an embarrassment and a threat. Ensor, so far as they were concerned, had defiantly turned his back on Neo-Impressionism and its pro-French sentiment and international sensibility that the style typified. The crudeness of his forms, his satirical approach to his subjects and his use of motifs which referred to social issues all served to widen the gap between him and his colleagues.

Ensor prepared his list of submissions for the 1888 show with all the intentions of pursuing his anti-division-
But Maus and Picard, who were now prepared for his opposition, made every attempt to diminish his impact on the exhibition. The conflict continued that year over a work entitled *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1887 (figure 3). The work was considered so offensive by the Ministry of Arts that it demanded Maus have the work removed from the exhibition.58

The work in question is a large drawing that is based on some of the traditional iconography associated with the saint. Ensor has divided the drawing into horizontal planes. At the top, the head of Christ, surrounded by a radiating nimbus, hovers over the scene below. Beneath Christ, a nude, crowned woman stands in a niche-like form. Julius Kaplan has suggested that she is the Diana of Ephesus in Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*.59 Beneath her, St. Anthony is seated, his hands together in prayer. To the right and left of these figures, the space is filled with superimposed layers of macabre, fantastic figures, suggesting the horror vacui of a Romanesque tympanum.

Here again, the dominant qualities of the work are related to Ensor's Flemish sensibility and are not only iconoclastic, but anti-French. Maus was afraid that Ensor's scandalous work would finally give the government the reason it needed to prohibit *Les Vingt*'s use of the
Palais des Beaux-Arts for its exhibitions. Every year Maus had met with resistance to Les Vingt's request for these exhibition rooms. It was only because he had friends in the higher levels of the Ministry that he was finally able to gain permission for the use of the exhibition space every year. It was his responsibility as secretary to maintain this privilege for the Vingtistes. Furthermore, it was an important symbol of the group's credibility with its viewing public that its shows be held in a prestigious location.

When Maus made the decision, under pressure from the Ministry of Arts, to bar Ensor's work from the salon, he forfeited Les Vingt's commitment to defend the artistic license of each of its members. In exchange, he chose to accept the artistic standards set by the government. However pragmatic he made that choice appear to be, it caused a furor in the press and opened up Les Vingt's line of defence to serious critical assaults. Several papers created a major issue out of the incident even before the show opened. Théo Hannon, writing in La Chronique, indicted Les Vingt, and Maus in particular, for this action against Ensor. Accusingly, he referred to the group's members as

... vous qui y avait introduit ainsi dans votre soi-disant intransigeante et révolutionnaire association des détestables errements des jurys officiels tant bafoués!
Maus later defended his decision to bar some of Ensor's works.


This incident over the banning of Ensor's *St. Anthony* was only the beginning of the difficulties the artist faced during the 1888 exhibition. According to his correspondence with Maus before the opening of the exhibition, Ensor was too ill to travel to Brussels in time to have his works hung before the show opened and, therefore, he requested that he be allowed to send his entries in at a later date.

In his letter he reminded Maus that Redon and Maris on other occasions had been allowed to exhibit late and, after all, he was a founding member! He wrote:

Veuillez m'apprendre si vous chargez du déplacement des œuvres de mon voisin M. Toulouse-Lautrec et du placement des miennes.

Apparently, Maus denied him this request, and as a result, none of Ensor's paintings were viewed that year.

This situation provided fuel for the attacks being made against Maus' treatment of Ensor. *La Chronique* stated that "le brave impressioniste James Ensor lui-même a failli voir tout son envoi refusé en bloc. . . ."

Although Ensor was finally permitted to hang a few of his drawings and etchings, including *The Cathedral*, Maus still refused to accept *The Temptation of St. Anthony*.\footnote{This incident over the banning of Ensor's *St. Anthony* was only the beginning of the difficulties the artist faced during the 1888 exhibition. According to his correspondence with Maus before the opening of the exhibition, Ensor was too ill to travel to Brussels in time to have his works hung before the show opened and, therefore, he requested that he be allowed to send his entries in at a later date.\footnote{In his letter he reminded Maus that Redon and Maris on other occasions had been allowed to exhibit late and, after all, he was a founding member! He wrote: \begin{quote} Veuillez m'apprendre si vous chargez du déplacement des œuvres de mon voisin M. Toulouse-Lautrec et du placement des miennes.\end{quote} Apparently, Maus denied him this request, and as a result, none of Ensor's paintings were viewed that year.\footnote{This situation provided fuel for the attacks being made against Maus' treatment of Ensor. *La Chronique* stated that "le brave impressioniste James Ensor lui-même a failli voir tout son envoi refusé en bloc. . . ." Although Ensor was finally permitted to hang a few of his drawings and etchings, including *The Cathedral*, Maus still refused to accept *The Temptation of St. Anthony*.\footnote{This incident over the banning of Ensor's *St. Anthony* was only the beginning of the difficulties the artist faced during the 1888 exhibition. According to his correspondence with Maus before the opening of the exhibition, Ensor was too ill to travel to Brussels in time to have his works hung before the show opened and, therefore, he requested that he be allowed to send his entries in at a later date.\footnote{In his letter he reminded Maus that Redon and Maris on other occasions had been allowed to exhibit late and, after all, he was a founding member! He wrote: \begin{quote} Veuillez m'apprendre si vous chargez du déplacement des œuvres de mon voisin M. Toulouse-Lautrec et du placement des miennes.\end{quote} Apparently, Maus denied him this request, and as a result, none of Ensor's paintings were viewed that year.\footnote{This situation provided fuel for the attacks being made against Maus' treatment of Ensor. *La Chronique* stated that "le brave impressioniste James Ensor lui-même a failli voir tout son envoi refusé en bloc. . . ." Although Ensor was finally permitted to hang a few of his drawings and etchings, including *The Cathedral*, Maus still refused to accept *The Temptation of St. Anthony*.}
L'Art Moderne's review of Ensor's work that year was cool and non-committal. Although it felt that The Cathedral was

... très finement et merveilleusement traitée
... Les dessins séduisent moins, quant aux peintures numérotées au catalogue, elles ne se rencontrent point au Salon.67

One of these drawings that, apparently, was "less seductive" received no mention at all. Entitled The Strike, 1887, (figure 4), it was one of Ensor's few works that documented an actual contemporary event. In August of 1887 an incident took place in Ostend involving a clash between Belgian and English fishermen over fishing rights. Apparently, the Belgians had found the English boats trespassing in their own waters. During the confrontation the Ostendais cut the nets of the English boats and threw their fish overboard. Ostend, subsequently, became the scene of a bloody confrontation between the Ostendais fishermen and the armed militia who were sent there to restore order. During the battle, two fishermen were killed. King Leopold II, who was staying at his villa near Ostend, was forced to leave in order to avoid the conflict. The newspapers tried to cover up the incident because of the deaths of the fishermen and also because the incident had taken place under the Anarchists' "black flag".68 The conservative Globe Illustré ignored the event altogether and instead highlighted Leopold and his wife's summer vacation. In contrast, the
anarchist/socialist media reproduced pictures of the dead fishermen and later, a socialist tract was distributed urging the fishermen to unite.69

In The Strike the actual event occupies only the lower half of the composition. The scene at the Ostend docks is enclosed on either side by inns and other buildings. The confrontation is depicted in caricature--fish hang everywhere, even from the long lances of the gendarmes. People on balconies defecate and vomit onto the puppet-like figures involved in the battle below them. In the upper zone the air is inhabited by grotesque figures who participate in or appear to encourage the battle. Adding to the sense of strife and confusion, swirling banners and flags fill the air and mingle with Ensor's imaginary creatures.

Ensor's provocative social commentary was derived from a merging of Flemish and contemporary motifs that artistically signified a powerful repudiation of Les Vingt's capitulation to France and abandonment of its social ideals. L'Art Moderne's silence in regard to the picture was calculated to avoid further conflict with the press. To show favour towards the drawing would have been interpreted as Les Vingt's recognition of the anarchist/socialist efforts that fueled a reaction to the Ostend incident. To condemn it would have opened them up to the criticism that the journal and the artists' group were becoming "academic"
in their attitudes.

Maus and Picard were determined to uphold a politically neutral identity for the group. This effort, however, had already been challenged by a comment made in regard to the catalogue for the 1888 exhibition by the conservative paper, L'Etoile Belge:

le catalogue est rouge, d'un rouge sang, d'un rouge de combat et de carnage. Il est emblématique de la façon dont on traitera les critiques qui se permettraient de ne pas tout adorer. . . .70

At the same time, Le Courrier Belge denounced the government for sanctioning the group's activities by giving exhibition space to this group of jokers "who made fun of the public, of art, of good taste and morality."71

In response to these attacks L'Art Moderne published a long editorial which was meant to mitigate these criticisms. There were three points the article dealt with: first, a clarification of Les Vingt's role as an avant-garde organization and its relation to the larger social structure; secondly, a justification of its position regarding Ensor's drawing, The Temptation of St. Anthony; thirdly, a defence of Les Vingt's secretary in regard to the accusation made by the critic, Lucien Solvay, that Maus' choice of invités was made only on the basis of a desire to shock Les Vingt's audience.

The article began with a reiteration of the concepts upon which the group was founded. Most of the political
vocabulary used in previous years had disappeared. The organization of Les Vingt was now defined in these terms:

Rien d'officiel. Une association de camarades, aimant chacun l'art à sa manière, le voulant impressioniste, réaliste, symboliste, luministe, qu'importe? mais unis dans le commun dédain du banal, du trivial, du déjà dit, et dans l'horreur de cette 'honnête perfection médiocre'. . .72

These collective goals, the editors added, were accomplished without administrative controls, without statutes, and without "siège social."73

Maus prefaced his discussion of the censorship of Ensor's drawing with a reminder of the scandal created by the exhibition of Félicien Rops' controversial work, Pornocrates. Maus pointed out that

... deux ans après, un artiste [Ensor] voulut exposer un dessin d'un caractère beaucoup plus libre que l'aquarelle en question, et que ne garantissait pas, comme celle-ci, une très haute conception d'art. Avec leur adresse accoutumée, nos paladins de la morale publique annoncèrent complaisamment à l'avance un scandale et firent si bien que le dessin fut refusé, à la demande, paraît-il, du ministre des beaux-arts.74

In making this comment, Maus tried to deny responsibility for the group's act of censorship and, at the same time, suggested that Les Vingt was the victim of the whims of the Minister of Arts. The editors took no responsibility for the omission of Ensor's work and declared that they were being unjustly attacked by Les Vingt's former supporters who were now crying

... l'injustice! à la partialité! certains
Maus realized that *L'Art Moderne* and the Vingtistes had leveled much the same criticism at *L'Essor* five years earlier. The suggestion that a "jury" system had taken over the yearly exhibitions seemed to contradict the libertarian ideals professed by the Vingtistes. Certainly the editors of *L'Art Moderne* would have to take responsibility for this repudiation of the group's founding ideals, since the public was well aware of their dominion over the group. Maus' reply was, simply, that

\[\text{Tout cela ne vaut pas l'honneur d'une réponse, et si nous en parlons, c'est que cette haineuse et déloyale campagne qu'essaient de poursuivre contre des artistes de coeur et de talent quelques basses natures qui mesurent l'art à l'aune de leurs misérables rancunes et de leurs mesquines déceptions, ...} \] 76

Without a reasonable justification for complying to the demands of the Ministry of Arts, Maus, feebly, tried to discredit his critics. Any attempt at a defence of his actions would have placed him on dangerous ground where his entire management of the group could have been called into question. To pursue the matter would have opened up, to the glare of public scrutiny, all the discrepancies and contradictions that *Les Vingt* had accumulated during the divisionist campaign. First, Maus would have had to admit to the fact
that he held autocratic control over the group's policies and operations. Secondly, he would be forced to justify, as the spokesman for the avant-garde, the importance he attached to *Les Vingt*'s use of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Thirdly, even a cursory investigation would have revealed that, indeed, in the case of Ensor, the group's original ideals of egalitarianism and artistic freedom had been discarded.

As an alternative, Maus took evasive action by adopting an aggressive stance in regard to criticisms being leveled at his personal involvement in *Vingtiste* enterprises. The remainder of the article dealt with a comment made by Lucien Solvay in regard to Maus' choice of the *invités*. Maus took the liberty of reprinting part of Solvay's statement:

"Jusqu'à ce jour, le souci d'intéresser le public semblait présider, seul, aux invitations. Cette année, malheureusement, il semble que ce qui a dicté le choix des invités, ce soit bien plutôt le désir 'd'épater le bourgeois.' Cela ressort, à l'évidence, de la physionomie générale de l'exposition actuelle, . . . ."  

Maus interpreted this accusation as a specific attack on his bias towards the Neo-Impressionists. He felt this criticism was unjustified and reacted defensively:

Franchement, sur quinze invités, deux novateurs dont l'audace étonne quelque peu et fait grincer les plumes, ce n'est pas excessif. Et le chiffre ne nous paraît pas suffisant pour donner une 'physionomie générale' à l'Exposition.  

Maus was concerned more about what this accusation implied
than what it actually stated. Even though there were only two invités who represented the divisionist style at the exhibition, it was quite apparent from the reaction of the reviewers that Maus and Picard were focusing a great deal of their publicity on the virtues of divisionism. Solvay was one of those "paladins de la morale publique" who had condemned the secretary's banning of Ensor's work. Now he was also suggesting that Maus, alone, controlled the choice of invités at the exhibitions. This was yet another example of Les Vingt's forfeiture of its original principles.

The editors of L'Art Moderne, rather than abandoning their divisionist campaign after all this scrutiny, merely chose a new tactical approach. They looked for support from those critics who were more representative of the Belgian status quo. In the following month, the journal reprinted an article from what it described as "un journal qui n'a pas coutume de faire le coup de feu aux avant-postes, La Flandre Libérale."79 The article quoted the journal's critic, Albert Michel:

"Les adversaires du néo-impressionnisme, et je dois dire qu'ils sont legion, font surtout état contre lui de ce qu'il fait jouer au procédé un rôle prépondérant. C'est, dit-on, le procédé prenant la place de l'art et voulant s'imposer en maître impérieux, alors que, comme la rime, il ne doit qu'obéir."80

According to Michel, the Neo-Impressionists were achieving
the goals of modernity and if one felt obliged to condemn their methods, he wrote, one would also have to condemn the whole evolution of art, since all art shared the quality of constant transformation

"dans le sens d'une recherche de plus en plus complète de la réalité. . . . très certainement le principal objet de l'évolution artistique."

L'Art Moderne used this critic's support to validate the Neo-Impressionist's rightful place in the hierarchy of modern art and to align their work with the efforts of their predecessors.

"C'est surtout l'école du paysage qui, . . a jeté sur ce siècle un éclat artistique qui rend l'égal des plus grands. Les néo-impressionnistes ne font qu'aller plus en avant dans cette voie. Les clameurs et les railleries dont on les accueille, on les a lancées autrefois à d'autres qui maintenant sont consacrés. Il semble que l'homme ait à la fois faim et dégoût de la vérité: il ne la goûte qu'à condition d'être ancienne; nouvelle, elle lui repugne, mais le temps fait son œuvre. Qui tout en admirant Hobemme et Ruysdael, voudrait encore que l'on peignît comme eux?"

This article gave credence to the editor's campaign to establish Neo-Impressionism on Belgian soil. Michel's argument was exploitable because it provided L'Art Moderne with support from what was otherwise considered a conservative representative of the press. This unqualified acceptance of L'Art Moderne's presentation of Neo-Impressionism by this particular critic provided a strategy to garner greater support for Maus and Picard's campaign.
Michel's discussion of divisionism made no reference to the art style's possible political associations. Rather, the article helped to reinforce the notion of the logic and necessity of evolutionary change that was manifest in this new aesthetic. In addition, Michel encouraged the public's acceptance of this new art. This new strategy on the part of L'Art Moderne was meant to prepare the way for the following year's exhibition, where, to no one's surprise, divisionism was to overshadow every other style represented in the show.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER THREE

1 Georges Rodenbach, "Tête de vingtistes," Les Progrès (February 10, 1887); cited by Block, p. 108.


4 Ibid., p. 2.

5 Ibid., pp. 1-2.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

7 Kossman, p. 331.

8 "Le vingtisme," L'Art Moderne VII (February 20, 1887): 58.

9 Ibid., p. 59.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 In a footnote to Maus' article, Picard's response in regard to the possibility of Seurat's painting creating a scandal was "'Donc, mon cher Maus, il faut l'exposer aux XX, l'an prochain.' Ed. P." This is an indication of Picard's authority to make decisions concerning invités. See "Les vingtistes Parisiens."

15 Octave Maus to Eugène Boch, 29 October 1886, A.A.C. Fons Bouchelle 3914, cited by Canning, p. 170, fn.3.


In all the discussions and critical reviews that L'Art Moderne published in relation to Neo-Impressionism, there is no mention of its associations in France with political Anarchism. The discussions always involved a reiteration of Maus' and Picard's ideas concerning Neo-Impressionism's role in regard to modernity or the formal aspects of the art style. For a discussion of the relationship between political Anarchism and Neo-Impressionism in France, see E. Herbert, The Artist and Social Reform.

Signac described these divisionist parameters when he wrote: "By the elimination of all muddy mixtures, by the exclusive use of the optical mixture of pure colors, by a methodical divisionism and a strict observation of the scientific theory of colours, the neo-impressionist insures a maximum of luminosity, of color intensity, and of harmony—a result that has never been obtained." Cited by Horst de la Croix and Richard G. Tansey in Gardner's Art Through the Ages (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1980), p. 782.


M. O. Maus, p. 53.

Artan worked in a plein-air style similar to the Barbizon painters; de Braekeleer and Smits worked in a realist style sanctioned by the Brussels Academy. All three were established artists representing the previous generation of Belgian painters. The fact that they accepted the invitation to exhibit with Les Vingt shows how well Maus had convinced the culturally conservative Belgians about Les Vingt's apoliticism.

Francis Nautet, *Journal de Bruxelles*, February 23, 1887.

Georges Verdavainne, "L'Exposition des XX," *La Fédération Artistique* (February 12, 1887): 135. This critic's position vis-à-vis *Les Vingt* is an ambiguous one. Although he was often critical of their art and their identity, he often made positive references in regard to the possibility of the group's contribution to Belgian art. His commentary on the Neo-Impressionists was aimed at disputing *L'Art Moderne's* statements which referred to this new art form as being the most modern at that time in Belgium.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp. 135-136.


Eugène Demolder, "Chronique artistique," *La Société Nouvelle* (1888): 182. By this time it was obvious to all the press that *L'Art Moderne* was in control of all Vingtiste decision-making. However, the editors never publicly conceded to that fact.

"L'ancien et le nouvel impressionnisme," p. 42.
See Farmer for examples of these works.


Brussels was a Walloon stronghold. The Walloons traditionally associated themselves with French culture and language, and were either strongly opposed or indifferent to the Flemish movement.

Ensor executed Jesus Shown to the People and The Entry into Jerusalem in 1885. They were the first two drawings of the series entitled, The Aureoles of Christ or the Sensibilities of Light. In his monograph on Ensor's painting, The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889, Walter Vanbeselaere, L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles (Bruxelles: Editions Weissenbruch, 1957), pp. 15-17, hypothesizes that Ensor's preliminary sketch for The Entry into Jerusalem could have been inspired by his witnessing of a street celebration viewed from a balcony. The two houses at the right and left upheld this observation. He also suggests that Ensor took part in the annual procession of Saint Sang at Bruges. The festival included a re-enactment of Christ's "Triumphal Entry" into the city seated on an ass. The procession was attended by the archbishop and clergy, who displayed the relic of the blood of Christ for the crowds. Catholic groups would stage scenes from the Old Testament and Christ's Passion.

Julius Kaplan, "The Religious Subjects of James Ensor," Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art 35 (1975): 184. Kaplan also points out that this portrait
is drawn from a photograph by Nadar, a copy of which is in
the Museum of Modern Art, New York. See also, Le Petit
Larousse, Paris, 1965, p. 1497, for this photograph.

44 See Kaplan, p. 184. This last phrase is sug-
gestive of the mordant humour in Ensor's approach to this
picture. As Kaplan points out, pork would have been a
proscribed meat in a Hebrew community.

45 Achille Chainaye, "Le salon des XX," La Réforme,
February 6, 1887, cited by Block, p. 153.

46 Mécoenas, La Chronique, February 27, 1887, cited
by Canning, p. 157.

47 Eugène Demolder, James Ensor (Bruxelles: 1892),
p. 19.

48 Jules Destrée (1863-1936) was a lawyer who also
wrote reviews for Belgian literary journals. Early in the
1880's he was associated with La Jeune Belgique. He later
became active in the socialist movement.

49 Jules Destrée, "L'Exposition des XX," La Jeune
Belgique (1887): 135.

50 A.-J. Wauters, "Aux XX," La Gazette; February 10,
1887, cited by Block, p. 92.

51 Shepard B. Clough, A History of the Flemish Move-


53 Dore Ashton, "James Ensor's Re-Entries," Arts

54 Le Moniteur des Arts, February 18, 1887, cited by

February 14, 1887.

57 Ibid.

58 See Block, p. 87, for an explanation of Maus' interaction with the Ministry and his role in making these kinds of decisions for Les Vingt.

59 Kaplan, p. 196.

60 Mecoenas, "Le salon des vingt," La Chronique (February 20, 1888), cited by Block, pp. 86-87.


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid. In a letter dated February 6, written from Brussels, Ensor beseeched Maus to allow him to bring in his works to be hung. A few days later, in response to a reply from Maus he explained that he would hang the works on Saturday.

65 Mecoenas, La Chronique, February 20, 1888.


69 Ibid.


73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., p. 67.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.


80 Ibid., p. 84.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.
Les Vingt's 1889 exhibition was a showcase of Neo-Impressionist works. Aside from the paintings by French Neo-Impressionists, including Georges Seurat, the numerous entries by Vingtistes executed in a divisionist technique signified that, indeed, the new aesthetic had become firmly rooted on Belgian soil. With this exhibition, Anna Boch, Henri Van de Velde, Théo van Rysselberghe, Willy Finch, George Lemmen and Jan Toorop joined the ranks of the divisionist exhibitors. The design of the poster for the show, which was covered in divisionist dots, was emblematic of the dominance of this faction of artists.

In the exhibition catalogue Maus reiterated the same ideas that had become the trademarks of all his commentaries on Les Vingt. Three ideas dominated his discussion. First, he argued that the Vingtistes were still being unjustly censured by the Belgian press. He resurrected the same complaints he had leveled at the critics two years before:

... le Vingtisme. Néologisme bizarre, qui a fait fortune grâce à ceux qu'il exaspérait, et désormais si bien enraciné dans la langue qu'il serait difficile de l'en arracher. On l'a considéré comme la qualification d'une doctrine ou d'une école. D'une école! Alors que les XX, comme tous les partisans de l'art
nouveau, proclament que les écoles sont pernicieuses et arrêtent l'essor artistique. . . . À [Vingtisme] on a rattaché tout ce qui existe de violent, de tumultueux, de révolutionnaire, d'anarchiste.2

Maus' excessive protest, given the fact that Les Vingt had already won the support of many of the Brussels critics, appears gratuitous. But by keeping alive the notion that the Vingtistes were the helpless victims of journalistic scapegoating, Maus hoped to arouse the sympathy of the viewing public.

Secondly, he underscored the important role Neo-Impressionism played in the cause of artistic progress and its dominance within the circle of Vingtistes. He explained that

Il existe certaines expressions d'art communes à un groupe de peintres. Celle qui fait, en ce moment, le plus de bruit, est le néo-impressionnisme fondé sur la division des tons, . . . .3

Finally, he insisted that, although the divisionist style currently overshadowed all other work being done by the group, Les Vingt still retained the integrity of its initial commitment to libertarian values.

Jamais, au grand jamais, les XX n'ont songé à constituer un groupe uni par des affinités de vision et de facture. . . . Les XX ont à cœur, au rebours de ce que soutiennent les ignorants et les myopes, de prouver que l'Art n'est pas cantonné dans UNE FORMULE DETERMINEE.4

Reviews of the show were, on the whole, more positive than they had ever been.5 Francis Nautet, writing for La Belgique, was representative of a large number of critics
who had gradually come to accept much of the rhetoric Maus used to discuss the group's identity and its relevance to Belgium's artistic traditions. Nautet described this exhibition as

... la plus brillante, la plus vivante de nos dernières expositions. Il y a là un air de bataille intéressant, une sérieuse fermentation de jeunesse, une émulation très soutenue et beaucoup de foi sincère. ... En tous cas, les XX, c'est de tous nos cercles de peinture celui qui nous paraît suivre et même un peu mener le courant artistique le plus ardent de notre époque.\textsuperscript{6}

Georges Verdavainne, in his article on the exhibition, also acknowledged the claims Maus made on behalf of the group. The Vingtistes, he wrote, say that they

combattent au nom du Progrès contre la Routine, au nom de la Pensée libre contre l'Idée emprisonnée par les règles anciennes et la tradition. Ils sont en d'autres termes l'Avenir en présence du Passé.\textsuperscript{7}

But even though both these critics agreed that the efforts of the Vingtistes were valuable to the cause of modern Belgian art, each of them criticized certain features of the group's ideological basis. Nautet, who was a fervent nationalist, touched on a sensitive issue when he noted in his article that the show represented the unwelcome invasion of French influences into Belgium:

En parcourant le Salon des XX, on serait tenté de penser, à première vue, que notre école flamande et hollandaise, après avoir servi de modèle et d'inspiratrice aux paysagistes français qu'elle a créées, va se trouver réduite à se ravitailler chez nos voisins. L'art impressionniste néo-
impressionniste, ou ce que l'on comprend vulgairement comme tel, est un art d'importation.8

Verdavainne, although accepting Maus' idea of evolutionary progress, noted that in the past,

"... chaque évolution a été apportée et marquée par l'effort d'un peintre ou d'un groupe de peintres, ... dévoués à l'idéal atteint ou à atteindre,"

united in their effort and committed to a single idea

"... jusqu'au jour où la mort a brisé leur palette." The Vingtistes, on the other hand, have gone through "... en cinq ans ... deux ou trois évolutions artistiques."9 This proclivity to change artistic directions, according to this critic, diminished their credibility:

En l'espace d'un lustre ils ont changé trois ou quatre fois d'opinion. Souvenez-vous; M. J. Ensor, que je combattais à cette époque avec acharnement menait les jeunes milices à l'assaut, ... La sixième exposition des XX marque avec son triomphe absolu la défaite irrémédiable de ce pauvre James Ensor, ... Le néo-impressionnisme, l'hérésie artistique colportée par MM. Seurat, Signac, Dubois-Pillet et adoptée par la majorité des XX ... en même valeur artistique mais d'un genre différent, ...10

As Verdavainne suggested in his article, the unqualified success of the Neo-Impressionists only highlighted the demise of Ensor. His position of power which had been so precarious for the past two years was now irretrievably lost with the exhibition of 1889. All the entries sent by the Ostend painter were obscured by the overwhelming ubiquity of Neo-Impressionism.
Ensor's contribution to the show included a number of impressionist works: portraits, landscapes, still-lifes, seascapes and a religious work entitled *Adam and Eve* (1887). He also sent a number of etchings and drawings, which he listed in the catalogue as "Fantasies, grotesques, diableries, grimaces et incoherances." The *Strike* and The *Temptation of St. Anthony* were again listed among Ensor's entries in the catalogue, but it is uncertain whether the two works were actually hung in the show. No mention of them was made by the show's reviewers.

What little reference to his work was made by the critics was largely negative. Even Nautet who counted Ensor as part of ". . . un petit groupe . . [aux XX] qui se distingue par le sentiment à l'action," was perplexed by his latest pictures:

". . . M. James Ensor, peintre embroyonnaire, chas- tique comme son *Adam et Eve*, où l'idée de genèse est si étrangement-exprimée: Tout s'annonce, élé­ ments et choses, dans une confusion voulue; lumière et paysage apparaissent informes, avec leur accent primordial . . . . S'il est parmi ceux qui doivent dire quelque chose—et l'on sait quelle indigence de pensée est aujourd'hui régnante dans le monde des peintres, —il la dira puissamment. —Mais quand?" Here Nautet suggested a qualified acknowledgement of Ensor's ability to become a valuable innovator among Belgian artists. Even though this critic found Ensor's paintings difficult to comprehend, he also felt they were worthy of further consideration. While most of the Vingtistes, by this time, had
succumbed to the influence of foreign styles, Ensor remained committed to his Flemishness. Nautet's attitude, based on this knowledge, was representative of those critics who viewed Ensor's artistic initiatives with hope for the survival of an indigenous art form.

Ensor, however, faced serious obstacles from within his own avant-garde to achieving the results of these initiatives. The most damaging criticisms against Ensor in 1889 came from Les Vingt's most ardent supporter--L'Art Moderne. The journal's verdict on the painting Adam and Eve was that "ces inexactitudes de vision coupent et scindent le tableau et détruisent tout grand effet d'ensemble." the journal concluded its condemnation of the artist's entries with the judgement that there was a "manque de logique en tout les envois du peinture. . . ."14 "Lack of logic" and "inexactitudes of vision," were the attributes of Ensor's Flemishness and his protest against the artifice and exaggerated refinement of the divisionists. Such criticisms, coming from an avant-garde journal, indicated a blatant denouncement of what the aesthetic signified. The conflict between the ideology mediated by Ensor's imagery and that of the Neo-Impressionists was clearly seen by L'Art Moderne as irreconcilable.

In accordance with this fact, it is not surprising that Ensor's major work, The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889, 1888 (figure 5), though listed in the catalogue that year,
was not shown. There are no records which explain its omission. Although the work was not publicly exhibited until 1929, its value to an analysis of Ensor and Les Vingt's relationship during this period is unquestionable. The painting's exclusion from the exhibition is particularly significant, given Maus' attitude towards Ensor and his work during this period. If Ensor had taken the initiative to list the work in the catalogue, then it is probable that its absence was due to a decision made by Maus. It has already been shown that Maus often served as the "juror" of what was to be or not to be shown.

In The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889, all the attributes of Ensor's visual protest crystallize. Conceptually, the painting had its roots in the series of drawings dating from the period of 1885 to 1886, and is thematically related to Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. Ensor did a preliminary sketch for the painting which relates to the imagery of this earlier series of drawings. The most striking change in this sketch is the shift from a vertical to a horizontal format, which de-emphasizes the figure of Christ and brings the foreground into stronger focus. This change in format suggests that Ensor's interest has shifted from the relationship between Christ and the crowd to the crowd itself.

A large, pillar-like device divides the picture into
two sections. To the left of the pillar, Christ, as in the previous sketches, is seen riding on an ass with his arm raised in blessing. To the right of the pillar, however, another figure, radiating light, stands before the crowd, also with an arm raised in blessing, and under another banner. The drum major is present, as before, with his back turned towards Christ. Although few of the figures are sketched in any detail, masked figures are in evidence. The raised platform on the right, and the large banners that enclose the space have also been retained from the earlier drawings. The street, however, has been widened and the arrangement of the crowd, in adjustment to the horizontal format, moves diagonally, from the upper right-hand corner of the sketch to the lower left corner. The point of view is above and in front of the crowd. Another change that is evident in this sketch concerns the nature of the crowd itself. In this sketch, the carnival atmosphere and the cinematic view of the crowd have begun to overshadow the religious aspects of the earlier image. The devotees located on the raised platform in the 1885 drawing, for instance, have now been transformed into clowns.

This impious and unorthodox fusion of motifs from Ensor's contemporary milieu with traditional imagery became more emphatic in its transference to a large, (256.8 x 378.4 cm.), heavily-impastoed oil painting. In the painting all but a few remnants of the traditional theme have been omitted to
make way for the more problematic themes that concerned the artist.

The viewer is positioned just above and in front of a seemingly endless city street that moves, almost without transition, from a broad foreground into a deep background space. The result of this compositional arrangement is such that the foreground scene completely dominates the picture. The city street is congested by throngs of people who line the street and lean out from windows and balconies. The focus of the painting is a festival procession wherein cavalcades of figures accompany Christ along the broad boulevard. People in street clothing are interspersed among a predominance of figures masked and costumed in endless variation. A platform is, again, a dominant fixture of the right foreground. The clown figures that appeared in the preliminary sketch are, in this work, joined by a city official. Together, they survey the crowd below them.

In the extreme foreground, a bishop, wearing a mitre, clothed in red and carrying a sceptre heads the cortege. Behind him is a crowd of figures, most of them wearing masks associated with the Belgian kermesse. Some people are maskless and in street clothing. This group is followed by a marching band that is led by a drum major. Directly behind the band, Christ, who bears a vague resemblance to Ensor, is almost obscured by the crowd. Beyond the figure of Christ,
the street is filled with countless indistinguishable figures.

The air above the crowds is filled with flags of all types and banners carrying popular slogans. Directly above Christ a red banner stretches across the street, proclaiming "Vive la Sociale." Various other banners and placards carry slogans--a placard reading "Fanfares doctrinaires toujours réussi," is borne by one of the band members. This slogan may be a play on words, a common practice of Ensor's. "Fanfares," could refer to the brass band itself, but when coupled with the term "doctrinaire," it may also suggest "trumpeting forth". When added to the words "toujours réussi," it is possible that Ensor is making a reference to the rhetoric of the conservative factions of Belgium's two major political parties. A cross located at the top of the placard may suggest that he is referring specifically to the Catholic party, since the procession is also led by a bishop. Other slogans include, "XX," and "Vive Jesus roi de Bruxlles" (sic). In the centre left of the painting three or four banners appear to have had their slogans painted over. In an etching done by Ensor in 1898 based on this painting, these banners bear slogans.18

The most significant of these phrases that Ensor later removed was written on a placard carried by a man just to the left of the bishop. In the 1898 etching it reads "Vive Anséele et Jesus." The presence of this slogan in the 1888
painting was mentioned by Emile Verhaeren in his monograph on Ensor from 1908.19

Ensor's use of the name of Edouard Anseele, (1856-1938), leader of the working class and director of the large workers' cooperative, Vooruit at Ghent, would have been the same as waving a red flag in front of the eyes of the Brussels bourgeoisie. Given Anseele's reputation as a critic of the Belgian government and agitator for social reform, it is not surprising that Maus and Picard would have wanted to avoid any possible associations with him. His name was synonymous with anarchism and subversion. In 1886, for example, during a period of intense confrontation between workers and militia, Anseele was arrested and charged with inciting riots and maligning the King, whom he called, "the assassin of the people."20 He was tried and sentenced to prison, which only served to fuel his popularity with the workers. The degree of his importance during this period to the workers' movement is suggested by Louis Bertrand's recollection of his release from prison in the following year.

His departure from prison took place at the beginning of February. The Ghent socialists decided to organize a demonstration of sympathy in honour of Anseele for the occasion; but Lippens, the liberal burgomaster, issued a decree forbidding all public demonstrations on that day.21

But, as Bertrand recalls, the edict from the burgomaster did not prevent the workers from gathering at the prison to greet
their leader.

Anseele left the prison on Sunday, February 6, 1887 at six o'clock in the morning. At ten o'clock a great demonstration took place in celebration of this event at the new local of Vooruit on the rue des Chartreux. In spite of the ban of the projected demonstration, there were hardly any incidents, except that in the morning, around eleven o'clock, two workers climbed to the top of the belfry and hung a red flag that remained there for almost an hour.22

Anseele, given his popularity with the workers, would have symbolized all the fears of anarchy and upheaval that Les Vingt's spokesmen wished to suppress, while Ensor, in defiance, had given him a principal role in his apocalyptic vision of Christ's arrival in Brussels.

If Maus and Picard would have been threatened to show Ensor's work because of its reference to Anseele and the socialist movement, they would also have found it difficult to hang the work because of the way it was painted. In contrast to the divisionist entries, which were scrupulously constructed compositions labouriously painted in controlled brushwork and luminescent colours, Ensor's foreboding vision was evoked through rough, crude brushwork and expressionistic use of strong, acrid colour.

Ensor's specific ideology also surfaces in various other aspects of the painting. Walter Vanbeselaere, in his monograph on the work, makes special reference to one of the figures who is robed in yellow, wears a tall pointed hat and bears a vague likeness to Ensor, with his
long hair and beard. Carrying a baton in his right hand and situated somewhat above the foreground crowd to the left, just beneath the flurry of banners, he appears to beckon the crowd forward. Vanbeselaere refers to this figure as a "travesti" who with his baton represents the Mephistophilean counterpart to the figure of Christ. This may suggest, then, that Ensor saw himself, in the role of the artist, as embodying these two opposing forces: the Christ/Antichrist. Brussels, spiritual centre of Modernity, greets its saviour, as well as the devil, who represents the darker side of this new reality.

If Ensor saw himself as the herald of this darker side of modernity, his position in the painting offers a second clue to the meaning of this image. Directly above the point of his hat, printed in red letters on a green balcony, are the letters "XX", referring to his avant-garde group. On one side of the emblem a person is defecating over the balcony, on the other side another figure is vomiting. These images, drawn from Flemish sources, are prevalent in the works belonging to this particular style of Ensor's and can be interpreted as acts of defiance and censure. In the highly charged scene of The Strike, for example, scatological and obscene images are also present and probably relate to Ensor's sentiments concerning the incident. Their presence in this later context makes an obvious reference to his
feelings of personal betrayal and his disapproval of his colleagues' capitulation to French influences.

The conflation of the "Joyful Entry" with the elements of contemporary significance, specifically, the street festival and socialist banners is also an integral part of Ensor's viewpoint. The concept of the "Triumphal Entry" was messianic in both pagan and Christian imagery. It was also associated with ideas of divinity and victory. The ritual of the "Entry" was part of the celebration which marked the arrival of an important king or bishop into a city. But because Ensor's "Entry" is set in the present, in his own city, it would seem to represent a prefiguration of the "Second Coming" of Christ. His painting, therefore, offered a far less than optimistic view of his contemporary world in contrast to the divisionist's version of modernity. Furthermore, Ensor's use of this prefiguration with its specific alignment to present-day Brussels brought a stronger modern emphasis to his Flemish imagery.

Ensor has used the motif of the street festival as an emblem of the conflicts inherent in the reshaping of social structures and values. In the face of the massive industrialization and urbanization that took place during this period, the carnivals and masks were stripped of their archetypal meanings, and took on the character of commercial endeavours. Here, the carnival has become Ensor's emblem of the dissolution
of traditional values, an inextricable part of modernity.

For Maus and Picard, *Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889* would have represented, with good reason, a serious threat. The painting was embedded with images and symbols which would have had tremendous visual and emotional impact on its viewing audience. The real significance of this visual ideology, however, only becomes fully apparent when it is viewed in comparison with the work which inspired it, albeit in a negative way.

Painted just two years apart, Ensor's *Christ's Entry* and Seurat's *Grande Jatte* offered the Brussels viewing public two contradictory views of modernity. It is generally accepted that Ensor began his large painting as a direct response to viewing *La Grande Jatte* in 1887. Even if this were not the case, a comparison reveals the ways in which Ensor's imagery opposed and threatened the divisionists' interpretation of the modern world and the avant-garde identity that was determined by that interpretation. Ensor's unsettling vision of modernity, mixing myth with fact, past with present, religion with politics, in actuality came dangerously close to a true depiction of Belgium's reality.

Maus and Picard had sold *La Grande Jatte* as the model of the utopian vision. They described how colours and forms were labouriously balanced and restrained. Figures and forms were set in a visually-ordered, coherent, space, and the overall
ambience was one of harmony and calm. Just as strongly, as they condemned Ensor for ridiculing his contemporary world, they glorified Seurat for idealizing it. The muted luminous colours of the pointillist technique gave a hazy, timeless quality to this scene of modern leisure life. In Seurat's modern world all classes of people existed together, separate, but in ordered harmony, without sign of conflict or dissent.

On the other hand, Ensor's disruptive scene of the Flemish carnival, with its qualities of confusion and alienation was the symbol he chose to reveal the paradox of modernity. It went beyond a negation of Seurat's image of French leisure life, however, to become a commentary on Les Vingt's adoption of divisionism as a submission to Maus and Picard's campaign to gain the public's approval. For, if Ensor's Flemishness was anti-French, it was also, of necessity, anti-bourgeois, especially if it were to be exhibited in Brussels, bastion of French culture.

Accordingly, L'Art Moderne's attacks on Ensor's Flemishness--his "puerile fantasies" and "inexactitudes of vision"--signified an alignment with the values of the Brussels bourgeoisie. The editor's criticisms were aimed not only at the quality of Ensor's art but the ideology that his art represented in regard to the redefined avant-garde organization. As Maus and Picard struggled to resolve their practical
goals for the group with the ideological structure of avant-gardism, Ensor's provocative images and his reputation as an anarchist increasingly threatened to undermine their efforts. In this situation Ensor's aesthetic was transformed into a strategy of action that collided with the very framework of avant-gardism that originally was to allow for the possibility of its expression. Indeed, the image of Christ's Entry into Brussels would have destroyed the cohesive appearance of the group, ripped away the false mask of its public image and negated the utopian vision of the divisionists' modern world. This, however, did not happen.

The exhibition of 1889 was successful for the Vingtistes because L'Art Moderne's journalistic tactics created a climate which could transform Neo-Impressionism into their own indigenous, depoliticized formulation based upon a collective utopian outlook, and without the threat of Ensor's dangerous painting. The Vingtistes' submissions for this exhibition indicate their dependency on their French models, in terms of composition and technique, in these early divisionist works. For the most part, they adapted divisionist brushwork and colour theory to the subjects they had inherited from their antecedents. For example, Henri Van de Velde's divisionist work, Woman at the Window, 1889 (figure 6), closely follows the subject and format of Henri de Braekeleer's Teniers Square in Antwerp, 1878. Both of these works share a similar
pictorial construction and a poetic, intimate treatment of their subject. In both cases, a woman with her back to the viewer sits at a window, looking out into a quiet, empty street. Van de Velde, whose image harks back to a less turbulent period in Belgium, has simply reduced and simplified the pictorial elements of de Braekeleer's painting and reworked the image using divisionist brushwork and colour. The vision he presents is one of solitude, tranquillity and order—emblems of the Belgian divisionists' utopian world. As well as remaining rooted to this more peaceful past, Van de Velde's view through the window, by virtue of its execution, belongs also to the present. But, it is a present without conflict and upheaval, that is strictly defined by an aesthetic that is French, divisionist and bourgeois.

Other Vingtistes who had worked primarily in landscapes and seascapes, such as Willy Finch, continued to do so using the new divisionist technique of painting. (see figure 7). These early works are highly traditional in theme—formal portraits, landscapes, seascapes and bourgeois interiors. In these, women are depicted sewing, reading or playing music. These paintings also share the same sense of order, serenity and timelessness of Seurat's La Grande Jatte and Van de Velde's Woman at the Window. Divisionism, indeed, had finally taken on its own Belgian identity.

From this examination of divisionism's successful intro-
duction into Belgium, there are several conclusions, both specific and general, that can finally be drawn. Heretofore, scholars have judged Les Vingt by its own discourse and, as has been shown, that language was actually based upon a great many myths and inconsistencies. Exploring how and why divisionism became a part of the group's artistic programme has disclosed the contradictions and caesuras between group identity and group action, between the myths and realities that belong to the phenomenon that is called the "avant-garde." This analysis has been an attempt to look behind this group's self-styled identity and to assess Les Vingt's actual role within its particular period. But although this examination has been restricted to the specific historical framework of the late 1880's in Belgium, it elucidates the ways in which the general notion of avant-gardism is misleading and problematic, both in its use as a self-proclaimed identity by a group of artists and in its use by art historians and critics as a label to describe the activities of a particular artistic group.

As has been suggested, this so-called "avant-garde" operated by its own set of principles. It redefined the past and invented the future, created its own myths about itself and initially drew its vitality from a particular political, and often antagonistic, vocabulary to define itself and defend its activities. It created a priori
concepts out of the ideas of "modernity" and the "new" and made a cult of the values of individualism and freedom. Rather than withdrawing from the society towards which its antagonism was directed, it tried and succeeded in achieving a privileged place within it. In pursuit of that goal avant-gardism became a posture and a strategy which could be altered or manipulated to adapt to the group's changing requirements.

The deep conflict between Ensor's imagery and that of the divisionists articulated the basic struggle on the part of Maus and Picard to maintain the delicate balance they had achieved between the posture of "avant-gardism" and their practical goals. By 1887 Maus and Picard had begun to reshape the Vingtistes' identity in a way that made a break with all the group's previous affiliations with the workers' movement and the doctrine of "l'art social." Ensor's Flemish imagery, however, pierced through the myths of its false identity and challenged the forfeiture of its original ideals. His art was a constant reminder of those conflicts and issues from which Les Vingt, through Maus and Picard's effort, had divorced itself. The organization, in fact, had become the vehicle for Maus and Picard to establish a reputation at home and abroad as Belgium's artistic leaders.

Maus and Picard's personal campaign hinged on their successful introduction of Neo-Impressionism into Belgium. It served as a shield against accusations that Les Vingt
was associated with the threat of social insurrection. The art style also became the basis of the group's new identity. That identity stood for a preference for French culture and, in turn, satisfied two important demands in Maus and Picard's campaign—acceptance by the Brussels bourgeoisie and affiliation with an international vanguard.

From the divisionist aesthetic Maus and Picard shaped an avant-garde image for Les Vingt that was both modern and yet removed from the social strife that dominated the Belgian consciousness during this time. It was acceptable to the viewing public because of its French origins, yet it was also controversial and "new." In effect, divisionism legitimized Maus and Picard's avant-garde and served as a social anesthetic for its viewing audience.

In an attempt to establish themselves as the leaders of Belgium's artistic vanguard, L'Art Moderne's editors had originally based their motivations on the group's commitment to egalitarianism and individual freedom for all its members. The group's eventual appropriation of divisionism represented the abrogation of those ideals as is evidenced so clearly in its dealings with Ensor—the one member of the group whose art so aggressively challenged this new identity and made a mockery of the divisionists' vision of modernity and utopian ideals. Nonetheless, by the exhibition of 1889 Les Vingt had been established as the most important group of artistic lumin-
aries in Belgium, with Maus and Picard as their spiritual leaders. And so the myth of the avant-garde had taken root and flourished under the direction of *L'Art Moderne*. Though *Les Vingt* had not yet won the unanimous support of the Brussels bourgeoisie, Maus and Picard had succeeded in convincing the public that the group was Belgium's indisputable vanguard in the cause of modern art.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

1 Willy Finch was still working in the divisionist style during this period, but did not exhibit in the 1889 exhibition. Henri Van de Velde, who became a member of Les Vingt in 1889, had already been experimenting with divisionism since he had seen Seurat's work at the 1887 exhibition of Les Vingt. He exhibited divisionist works at the 1889 exhibition.


3 Ibid., p. 7.

4 Ibid., p. 8.


6 Francis Nautet, "Chronique artistique," La Belgique (February 10, 1889), cited by Canning, p. 217. This same article also appeared in the Catholic paper, Le Journal de Bruxelles on February 11, 1889. It is interesting that such a favourable review would have been printed in this conservative paper, one which L'Etoile Belge referred to as the "official newspaper of the government."

7 Georges Verdavainne, "Les evolutionnistes--l'exposition des XX," La Fédération Artistique (February 9, 1889): 123.


10 Ibid.

11 For a reproduction of this work, see Farmer, plate 22.

12 Nautet, "Chronique artistique."

13 Ibid.
There are at least two unsubstantiated references to an attempt by Les Vingt to expel Ensor from the group because of this painting. Gregoire Le Roy, in James Ensor (Bruxelles: G. Van Oest et Cie, 1922), p. 35, writes "Au sein même de ce cercle se monta, peu-à-peu, contre lui, une opposition qui s'accentua à mesure que grandirent ses audaces. L'année où il envoya le Foudroiement des Anges Rebelles et L'Entrée du Christ à Bruxelles, ce fut une cabale. On exigea son expulsion. On lui reproachait d'attirer sur les XX les foudres officielles et il fallut l'intervention du directeur des Beaux-Arts d'alors pour calmer, disait-on, les expulser des locaux où se tenaient leurs expositions."

Paul Haerserts in James Ensor, trans, Norbert Guterman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1959), pp. 92-93, describes this event: "In 1888, every one of his entries was rejected. When he submitted his Fall of the Rebellious Angels . . . and The Entry of Christ into Brussels . . . criticism changed to open hostility. The sculptor Achille Chainaye declared that he would resign from the group if Ensor remained. The question was put to the vote. Two ballots were taken, and Ensor barely escaped expulsion, thanks only to his own vote." However, Chainaye had already left the group, on amicable terms in 1888, so that he could devote himself full time to writing. Also, he was one of Ensor's supporters. He felt that Ensor's work remained true to his Flemish heritage. If there was such an incident, I have not found any primary source material that corroborates this. Block, pp. 87-88 concurs with this opinion.

For a reproduction of this drawing see Theodor Kiefer, James Ensor (Aurel Bongers Recklinghausen, 1976), p. 94.

Legrand, in Cet Inconnu, pp. 69-70, presents us with the conservator's report on the painting before it was cleaned in 1950.

This group of slogans that were removed from the banners at the centre left of the painting are similar to those from the 1885 drawing Christ's Entry into Jerusalem: eg., "Les Charcutiers de Jerusalem," "La Samarie Reconnaissante," and "Phalange Wagner Fracassant."


21 Ibid., p. 74.

22 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

23 Vanbesalaere, p. 29.

24 Ibid.

25 Ernst Kantorowicz, "The King's Advent," The Art Bulletin XXVI (December 1944): 211. Kantorowicz presents a thorough explanation of the history and iconography associated with the "Triumphal Entry."

26 Kantorowicz discusses this aspect of the "Joyful Entry." This aspect of the work is also discussed in an article by Diane Lesko, in "Ensor in his Milieu," Art forum 15 (May 1977): 57. She relates Ensor's paintings to the Balzac story, "Jesus in Flanders." The story is about the Second Coming of Christ, who appears on the beaches of Ostend, right after the French Revolution of 1830. As Lesko suggests, the story is probably one of Balzac's most complete religious statements, in which he outlines his attitude toward the Church as an institution. Balzac laments the loss of an age when the Church stood for art, learning and idealism. His symbol for the condition of the Church in the nineteenth century is a withered specter, skeletal, hairless and greenish in complexion who rises out of a cemetery. Certainly, Ensor's painting carries similar commentaries regarding the Church and the state of religion in his period. Lesko suggests other examples of Ensor's paintings that may have also been inspired by Balzac's writings. It is important to note, however, that Ensor's paintings can in no way be classified as "literary." Demolder, p. 23, also mentions Balzac as one of Ensor's favourite authors.

27 Ensor's placement of the "Second Coming" in Brussels may have been made as a political commentary. See Clough, p. 124. Brussels was the stronghold of the Walloon, Liberal bourgeoisie. Anti-Catholic sentiments prevailed, particularly since the Catholic party...
and maintained its power in Parliament since 1884. With the appearance of a strong, unified working class and the inevitability of universal suffrage close at hand, both parties vied for the allegiance of the workers. This served to heighten the animosity the Liberals felt for the Catholics. Since a large number of the working class were members of the Catholic Church, the possibility of many of them extending that affiliation to the Church's party was a possibility the Liberals did not want to face.

Although the "Flemish Issue" was not a strict party issue, the Catholic Party became a supporter of Flemish demands during this particular period because they were aware that the largely-Catholic working class saw this as an important issue. As universal suffrage came closer to becoming a reality, so did the Catholic Party's support of working class issues increase.


29 For an excellent survey of *Vingtistes'* works that belong to this style, see *Belgian Art: 1880-1914*, The Brooklyn Museum.

30 For a reproduction of this work, see *Belgian Art: 1880-1914*.

31 This work, *The Racecourse at Ostend, 1888*, was one of Finch's earliest. For a discussion of the work and Finch's debt to Seurat in painting it, see *Belgian Art: 1880-1914*, The Brooklyn Museum, p. 100.


33 *L'Art Moderne* reported in 1890 that attendance at the Brussels Salon had declined by 43%, from 54,700 to 31,000, while at *Les Vingt*'s salons, attendance had increased by 45% during the same period, from 4,300 to 6,300. During most of these exhibitions they made a profit from the sale of entrance fees and many exhibitors had sold works. See, "Le salon défunct," *L'Art Moderne* XI (November 23, 1890): 369.
Figure 1. Georges Seurat Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1885. Oil on canvas, 190.0 x 283.0 cm. Collection: Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Buch Bartlett Memorial Collection.
Figure 2. James Ensor, The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, 1885. Pencil and charcoal on paper, 207.0 x 152.0 cm., Collection: Ghent Museum.
Figure 3. James Ensor *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1887. Pencil on paper, 170.0 x 150.0 cm. Collection: Frédéric Speth, Kapellen.
Figure 4. James Ensor The Strike, 1887. Coloured pencil and watercolour, 34.0 x 67.5 cm. Collection: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.
Figure 5. James Ensor, Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889, 1888. Oil on canvas, 256.8 x 378.4 cm., Collection: Louis Franck, Esq., C.B.E., Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.
Figure 6. Henry Van de Velde, *Woman at the Window*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 111.0 x 125.0 cm., Collection: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.
Figure 7. Willy Finch, *The Racecourse at Ostend*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 59.0 cm. Collection: The Art Museum of the Ateneum, Helsinki.
i. Books - Art


Maus, M. O. *Trente Années de Lutte Pour L'Art, 1894-1914*. Brussels, 1926.


**ii. Books – History**


iii. Articles


iv. Exhibition Catalogues


v. Periodicals Consulted

L'Art Moderne, 1881-1890.

L'Etoile Belge, 1887-1890.

La Fédération Artistique, 1886-1890.

La Gazette, 1888-1889.

La Jeune Belgique, 1887-1889.

Journal de Bruxelles, 1887-1889.

La Société Nouvelle, 1887-1889.

Le Soir, 1887-1888.