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## “ With and Without the Fauves: Perspectives on Prostitution in the 1900s ”

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GABRIELLE HOUBRE

# WITH AND WITHOUT THE FAUVES – PERSPECTIVES ON PROSTITUTION IN THE 1900s

In April 1907, the young Italian artist Umberto Boccioni arrived in Paris after a forty-eight-hour journey from Rome. He discovered a city that was buzzing, “absolutely extraordinary. Something monstrous, strange, marvelous.” Choosing his words carefully, he described to his mother and sister how, no sooner had he taken a room in a modest hotel in the Quartier Latin than he was accosted by “a lady offering her services, telling me that whenever I was in the mood for love, I should remember that she occupied the room next to mine!”<sup>1</sup> Not long afterward, keen to try out the famous nightlife of Montmartre, Boccioni visited the cabarets and found them “bursting with tarts... there are 80,000 on file with the Parisian police!!!!!! And believe me, there is nothing more typical of Paris.” Of course, Boccioni exaggerates the number of sex workers operating in the French capital and seems unaware of the failing regulatory system,<sup>2</sup> but he gives us an idea of the prevalence of sexual solicitation in Paris. All at once ubiquitous, transient, and unremitting, prostitution was both flaunted and hidden in modern Paris—between official and illicit places, bright electric lights and shady corners, social gatherings and anonymous solitude, flashy wealth and wretched precarity.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to his mother and sister, April 17, 1907, quoted by Véronique Serrano and Gwen Garnier-Duguy in “Paris ‘Magic City’: Morceaux choisis 1899–1913”, *Charles Camoin: Un fauve en liberté*, ed. Assia Quesnel and Saskia Ooms, exh. cat. Musée de Montmartre, Paris (2022), pp. 22–25.

<sup>2</sup> The regulatory system was set up under the consulate. Rather than prohibit or attempt to eradicate commercial sex, it sought to prevent and control conduct that was a potential threat to sanitary and social order, notably by placing prostitutes under the authority of the vice squad or “morality police,” making them undergo medical examinations (1802), and legalizing brothels or “tolerance houses” (1804).

<sup>3</sup> According to the figures given by the deputy Paul Meunier in his *Rapport sur le fonctionnement du service des mœurs à Paris* (Melun: Impr. administrative, 1904), pp. 102 and 129.

## CHANGE OF PARADIGMS

Clandestine prostitution, which had been rising uninterrupted since the start of the regulatory regime, reached unheard-of heights in the 1900s. The authorities recorded an average of six to eight “clandestine women” (who rejected all police checks and administrative and sanitary inspections) for every “registered woman” (working in a brothel or on the streets and duly registered with the municipalities or the Paris police department). In 1903, 6,418 sex workers were on file in the city, meaning that there were between 38,000 and 51,000 unregistered women.<sup>3</sup> These figures were increased by the Exposition Universelle of 1900 and its fifty million visitors, though it is difficult to give precise numbers; many women from modest backgrounds practiced prostitution on an irregular basis, alternating periods of employment with periods in which they substituted or supplemented this employment with sex work. The increase, which

4 Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocé: Misère sexuelle et prostitution aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1978).

5 "Je suis de tout côté envahi par la prostitution clandestine... ce serait le cas de dire tout est prostitution ici, excepté moi." The brothel was at 106, boulevard de la Chapelle; letter from Léon Joseph Malebraque to the chief of police, ca. 1910, Archives de la Préfecture de Police (APP), BA/1689.

6 Meunier, *Rapport*, p. 129. In 1843, there had been as many as 235 brothels; see Louis Flaux, *Les Maisons de tolérance* (Paris: Carré, 1892), p. 7.

7 François Buot, *Gay Paris: Une histoire du Paris Interlope entre 1900 et 1940* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), pp. 19–28.

8 The magnitude of the theft prevailed over any scruples the client, Henri Bronner, liquor store salesman, may have had, but he did not press charges. Register of Statements, St. Georges Police Station, APP, CB/33/25.

9 Verdicts of the Seine Criminal Court, November 28 and December 3, 1903, Archives de Paris (AP), D1U6/842–843. The press had a field day with the case. See, for example, *Le Journal*, July 10 and 13, 1903; *Le Matin*, July 12; *Le Rappel*, July 13, and *Le XIXe siècle*, July 15.

10 "[P]édérastes au cours d'une orgie dans un atelier de peintre." Report by the manager of furnished rentals to the chief of police (March, 20, 1904), APP, BA/1690. On May 14, 1904, a dozen of the men were sentenced to between eight and eighteen months' imprisonment for inciting minors to debauchery, but the convictions were overturned on appeal on June 29, 1904 (*Le Droit*, July 21, 1904).

11 *Splendeurs et misères: Images de la prostitution 1850–1910*, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Flammarion, 2015).

12 Nicole G. Albert, *Saphisme et décadence dans Paris fin-de-siècle* (Paris: La Martinière, 2005).

13 "[F]emmes qui le fréquentent et dont beaucoup n'ont d'ailleurs que des amants femelles, à moins qu'elles n'aient besoin d'argent." *Guide complet des plaisirs mondains et des plaisirs secrets à Paris* (Paris: Hall, 1904), p. 74. See too Victor Meusy and Edmond Depas, *Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre* (Paris: se, 1900), p. 58.

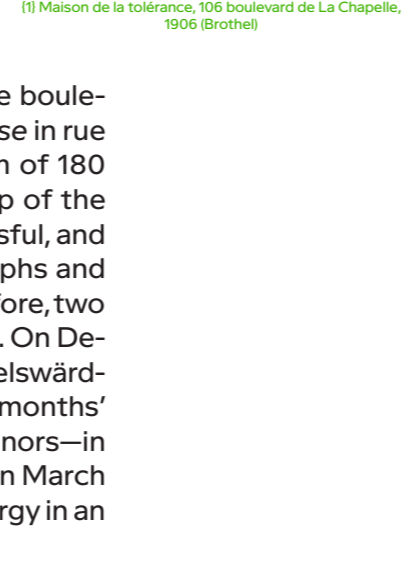
was particularly marked in Montmartre, compromised the regulatory process.<sup>4</sup> The police were powerless to curb the flood of clandestine sex workers in the main tourist sites, provoking a spate of complaints and petitions from residents, but also eliciting the despair of the landlord of one of the rare old-style brothels left in the area. "I am overrun on all sides by clandestine prostitution," he complained to the chief of police, adding wryly, "you could say that everything here is prostitution, except me" (FIG. 1).<sup>5</sup> It is true that the Parisian brothels, once a cornerstone of the regulatory system, were closing one after the other; in 1903, there were only forty-seven still open, employing 387 women, whereas fifteen years earlier there had been sixty-nine with 772 residents.<sup>6</sup> The brothels were superseded by *maisons de rendez-vous*, where the women came only to work—and by a huge number of furnished rooms and *hôtels de passe*, more or less known to the police.

Male prostitution, equally resistant to regulation, also flourished openly, particularly in Montmartre.<sup>7</sup> On September 5, 1905, a middle-class man was solicited on the boulevards by a young boy whom he followed into an *hôtel de passe* in rue Fontaine. When the boy took the opportunity to strip him of 180 francs and his jewels, he did not hesitate to enlist the help of the police in recovering his belongings.<sup>8</sup> The police were successful, and took it upon themselves to submit a report "with photographs and particulars" to the General Security Department. Not long before, two major scandals had pushed male prostitution into the media. On December 3, 1903, two young aristocrats, the poet Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen and Albert Hamelin de Warren, were sentenced to six months' imprisonment for indecent exposure, but also for inciting minors—in their case, young boys—to debauchery.<sup>9</sup> Shortly afterward, on March 20, 1904, the police arrested nineteen "pederasts during an orgy in an artist's studio." The artist in question was Ernest Matthew Boulton; he, too, came from a "good family," as did many of his friends present on the occasion.<sup>10</sup>

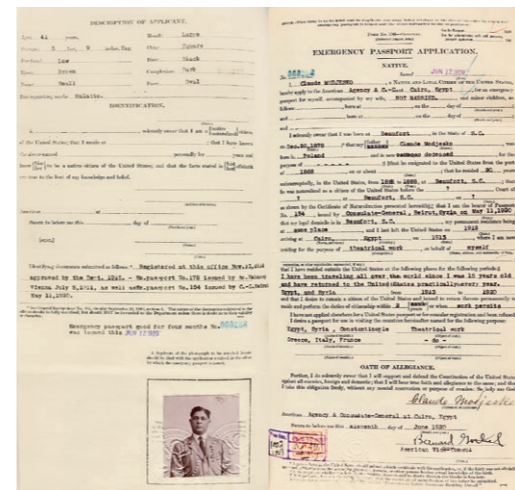
Although homosexuality revived the transgressive charge of the subject of prostitution, which had been in deflation since Manet's *Olympia*, it was of no more interest to the Fauves than it had been to the Impressionists or Naturalists.<sup>11</sup> More surprising was that lesbianism, which had become more visible in fin-de-siècle Paris and was the subject of several paintings by Toulouse-Lautrec, seems to have been equally neglected, at least during the brief period of Fauvism.<sup>12</sup> Places of pleasure such as the Rat Mort, a restaurant on Place Pigalle and an important meeting spot for gentlemen of wealth or leisure and women seeking to profit from them, turned lesbianism into an erotic-commercial argument. The *Complete Guide to the Worldly and Secret Pleasures of Paris* attributed the reputation of that establishment to the "women who frequent it, many of whom have only female lovers, unless they are in need of money."<sup>13</sup>



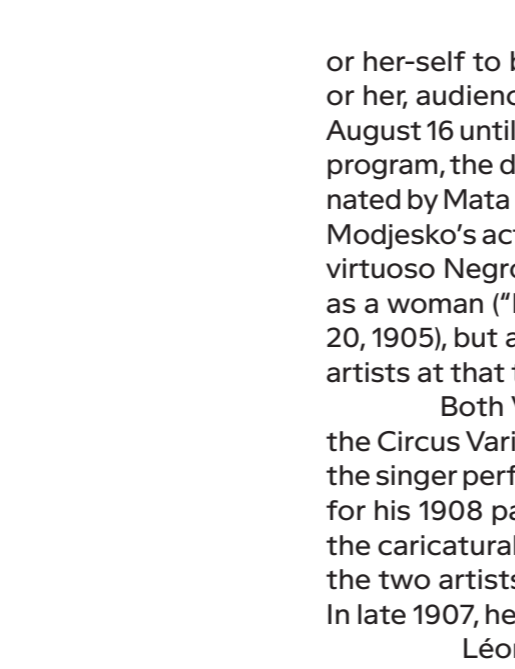
[1] Maison de la tolérance, 106 boulevard de La Chapelle, 1906 (Brothel)



[2] Postcard of Claude Modjesko, ca. 1905



[3] Passport of Claude Modjesko, issued June 11, 1920 by the American Consulate in Cairo



[4] Ludovic-Rodo Pissarro, *Le Chanteur Modjesko* (The Singer Modjesko), 1907 Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm Private collection



*Gai Paris* welcomed many different sexualities and identities onto its stages. The famous Sarah Bernhardt popularized male drag, bringing an age-old theatrical tradition onto the cinema screen.<sup>14</sup> Music halls, meanwhile, featured international artists including drag queens such as the singer Modjesko who was painted by Kees van Dongen (*Modjesko sopranoiste*, 1908 (→ p. 179)), (FIG. 2). Often wrongly described as Romanian, Claude Modjesko was born into a poor family in Beaufort, South Carolina in 1877 or 1878 (FIG. 3).<sup>15</sup> After starting out in minstrel shows at the age of fifteen, he began a career as a drag singer in the European capitals in 1898, never staying put for long.<sup>16</sup> He supplemented his meagre earnings by prostituting himself and fleecing some of his more famous clients. In 1905, he appeared in Paris under the stage name "the Black Patti" or "the Creole Patti," exposing him-

or her-self to both the racist and heteronormative prejudices of his, or her, audience. During his first appearances at the Olympia, from August 16 until September 21, he was overshadowed by the star of the program, the dancer Mata Hari.<sup>17</sup> Audience and press alike were fascinated by Mata Hari and her sophisticated play on nudity and exoticism. Modjesko's act only got a few brief mentions, sometimes as a man ("A virtuoso Negro [man]," *La Petite Presse*, August 21, 1905) sometimes as a woman ("Modjesko, a Black [female] singer," *Le Gaulois*, August 20, 1905), but always, as was common practice when talking of Black artists at that time, with reference to the color of his, or her, skin.<sup>18</sup>

Both Van Dongen and Ludovic Pissarro heard Modjesko at the Circus Variété in Rotterdam in July 1907, and both artists painted the singer performing (FIG. 4).<sup>19</sup> Van Dongen, who made several studies for his 1908 painting in his native city of Rotterdam, refrained from the caricatural effect of Pissarro's painting. It is not known whether the two artists were aware of Modjesko's wild and outrageous life. In late 1907, he was arrested in New York together with French tenor Léon Cazauran for suspicious behavior with twelve to thirteen-year-old boys. He got off with a ten-dollar fine for an "obscene" photograph found in one of his pockets.<sup>20</sup>

Van Dongen, who liked to paint icons of the Parisian stage, displayed a certain audacity in portraying a black transvestite artist.<sup>21</sup> But the artist Émilie Charmy, who was about as emancipated as a woman could be in those days, showed exceptional boldness when she painted herself lying in a lascivious pose with one breast bared (*Autoportrait*, 1906 (→ p. 185)); at a time when a woman's reputation was still largely determined by her modesty, she ran a serious risk of being taken for a debauched woman. We are reminded of the writer Colette, baring her breasts in *La Chair*, a pantomime performed at the Apollo Theater in rue de Clichy, in November 1923.<sup>22</sup> Together with others, Colette contributed to the relative banalization of the female nude on stage, eliciting a complaint from Senator Bérenger about women appearing in public "entirely naked

14 She played in drag in *Hamlet* (on the stage in 1886 and 1899, and in 1900 in Clément Maurice's film *Le Duel d'Hamlet*), in *Lorenzaccio* (1896 and 1912) and, triumphantly, in *L'Algon* in 1900.

15 Several of his passports, held in the National Archives and Records Administrations, Washington, DC, are known to us. One of them, issued in Budapest on November 22, 1899, identifies him as Edward Claude Thompson, born on December 26, 1877. Most of them, however, such as that issued by the US Consulate in Cairo on June 11, 1920 (more detailed than the others and with a photograph), identify him as Claude Modjesko, born on December 26, 1878.

16 He appears to have left the US permanently in 1912; between 1913 and 1920 he lived in Egypt and Syria, where—according to the US Vice Consul of Cairo, who was suspicious of Modjesko's statements—he worked in a "low-class" theater. We lose trace of him after 1920.

17 Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). For Modjesko, see Donyale Bartra's detailed but unreferenced blog, *Black Jazz Artists*, October 13, 2020, accessed March 30, 2023, <https://blackjazzartists.blogspot.com/2019/09/claude-modjesko-creole-patti.html>.

18 Modjesko returned to Olympia from October 6 until November 9, 1905. After that, he was engaged by the Alhambra for a few weeks in 1906, and by La Scala and the Parisiana in 1908, but had no more than a few brief but friendly mentions in the press. ("The Creole Patti, who is baritone and soprano by turns, intrigues and charms her audience," *Le Figaro*, March 4, 1906.)

19 "Un nègre virtuose"; "La Modjesko, chanteuse noire." Nathalie Coulelet, *Histoire des artistes noirs du spectacle français* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012), p. 76.

20 Anita Hopmans, *Van Dongen retrouvé: L'oeuvre sur papier, 1895–1912*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), p. 238.

21 *The New York Times*, November 17, 1907, *Le Journal*, November 18, 1907, and *Le Temps* and *Le Siècle*, both November 19, 1907.

22 *Le Modèle noir: De Géricault à Matisse*, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Flammarion, 2019); Nail Ver-Ndoye and Grégoire Fauconnier, *Noir, entre peinture et histoire* (Mouans-Sartoux: Omniscience, 2018).

23 "Flemmes entièrement nues et sans maillot." Senator René Bérenger, a leading politician in the Third Republic, waged a relentless war on prostitution and pornography, earning himself the nickname "Father Modesty." His complaint was lodged with the attorney general, an examining magistrate was immediately appointed, and an inquiry carried out. See the article "Assez" (Enough) on the front page of *L'Aurore*, April 7, 1908.

24 See the front page of *L'Aurore*, April 8, 1908: "No more nudes in the theater. The police assess. The court prosecutes. Morality is intact." 25 "[P]roduct local." "De quel droit le législateur trouverait-il obscène une exhibition qui n'offusque personne et contre laquelle les gens ne protestent pas?" France made sure to clarify that he himself was "not a regular at the café-concerts, music halls, and other places where one is witness to overly graphic poses."

26 Sylvie Carlier, ed., *Émilie Charmy: 1878–1974*, exh. cat. (Villefranche-sur-Saône: Musée Municipal Paul Dini, 2008); Sylvie Buisson et al., *Suzanne Valadon, Jacqueline Marval, Émilie Charmy, Gerorgette Agutte: Les femmes peintres et l'avant-garde, 1900–1930*, exh. cat. (Paris: Somogy, 2006).

27 The painting does, at least, make use of the codes of prostitution, notably the black stockings; Corine Charles, "Émilie Charmy, une expressionniste française," in Carlier, *Charmy*, p. 22.

28 Patrick Seale, "Émilie Charmy, une artiste renaît," in Carlier, *Charmy*, p. 34. The daily newspaper, *Progrès de la Somme*, among others, reported on the case all through the summer of 1896. D'Hangest (1850–1910) served ten months in prison before being granted parole in May 1897. He went to live in 78, rue des Tenneroles in Saint-Cloud, and the 1906 census shows that he was living with Jean Baptiste Barret (1868–1938).

29 In 1905, d'Hangest signed an insurance policy for 12,500 francs naming Jean Baptiste Barret as his beneficiary and "M[ademoiselle] Émilie Barret, his sister," as the contingent beneficiary. In December 1907, he signed a second policy for 15,000 francs, naming Barret as his sole beneficiary and legatee (AD Hauts-de-Seine, 3Q/SEV/659). When d'Hangest died in 1910, Barret left Saint-Cloud and moved to Paris.

30 Artists like Georges Rouault and Albert Marquet, who worked near Place Clichy in around 1902. See Angela Lampe, *Georges Rouault* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2021), pp. 16 and 30.

31 Maurice de Vlaminck, *Paysages et personnages* (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), p. 34. Hopmans, *Van Dongen*, pp. 41–43.

32 Chrisje Brants, "The Fine Art of Regulated Tolerance: Prostitution in Amsterdam," *Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1998), p. 624.

and without body suits.<sup>23</sup> The police did the rounds of the establishments in question, investigating nudity, transparent gauze, and (opaque) flesh-colored body suits, and the court decided to prosecute nude artists for indecent exposure.<sup>24</sup> Asked for her opinion by the newspaper *L'Aurore*, which sided with Bérenger, Colette said she didn't understand the "local prudishness." Even the respectable Anatole France asked, "With what right does the lawmaker declare obscene a show that offends no one and that no one objects to?" (April 8, 1908).<sup>25</sup>

Like Colette, Émilie Charmy refused to let social conventions in general and men in particular govern the female body and the ways in which it was shown in public. Especially in the 1920s, female nudes were an important part of her work, including a painting of Colette who would soon become a friend (*Colette nue*, ca. 1921).<sup>26</sup> Blurring the gendered boundaries of propriety in her art, Charmy was even bold enough, in 1905, to tackle, as a woman, the indecent subject of prostitution (*Nu allongé aux bas-noirs*).<sup>27</sup> By then, she had already been confronted with the reality of marginal forms of sexuality by her brother Jean Baptiste Barret. This "worldly homosexual," who had come to Saint-Cloud from Lyon with his younger sister, shared his life with Nathalis d'Hangest, a man almost twenty years his senior and the descendant of a famous aristocratic family from Picardy. In 1896, d'Hangest had been sentenced to two years imprisonment for inciting minors to debauchery.<sup>28</sup> According to the 1906 census, Charmy did not live at 78, rue des Tenneroles with the two men, but she clearly knew d'Hangest well.<sup>29</sup>

### PROSTITUTION SEEN FROM BELOW

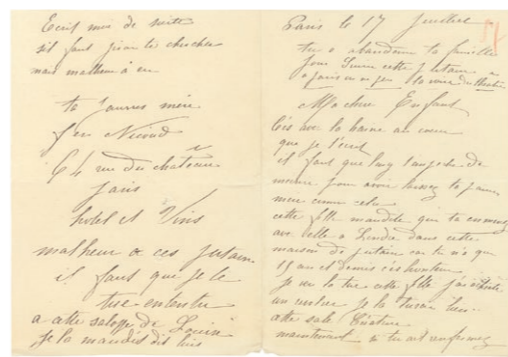
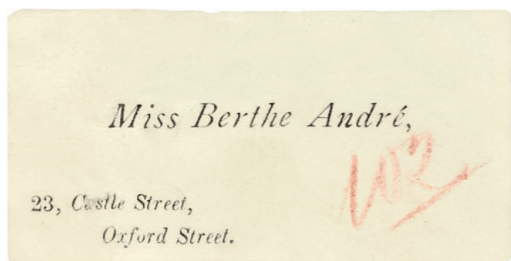
Like her male fellow artists, Charmy could engage prostitutes to sit as models for her in the intimacy of her studio,<sup>30</sup> but only men were really able to draw or paint in public or in the cabarets and brothels to which Van Dongen and Auguste Chabaud devoted so much of their attention. Van Dongen was even regarded by Vlaminck as Toulouse-Lautrec's successor as a painter of prostitution, although his inspiration was firmly rooted in Rotterdam's Zandstraat.<sup>31</sup> At that time, and until 1911, prostitution in the Netherlands was under the influence of the French system, regulated rather than illegalized, with the same pragmatic tolerance.<sup>32</sup> Zandstraat was to Rotterdam what "La Fosse" was to Marseille—an area of a few streets set aside by the city for prostitution and originally intended for sailors and soldiers whom it provided with quick and easy access to affordable sex and equally good-value food and entertainment. In one painting by Van Dongen, we see a hussar arranging a brief encounter outside the popular nightclub Liverpool Lighthouse, while two other women wait for clients in the background (1907).

In Marseille, a mayoral decree was issued on October 30, 1878, making a designated red-light district of the area behind the townhall and close to the port—a cluster of fifteen or so dingy streets



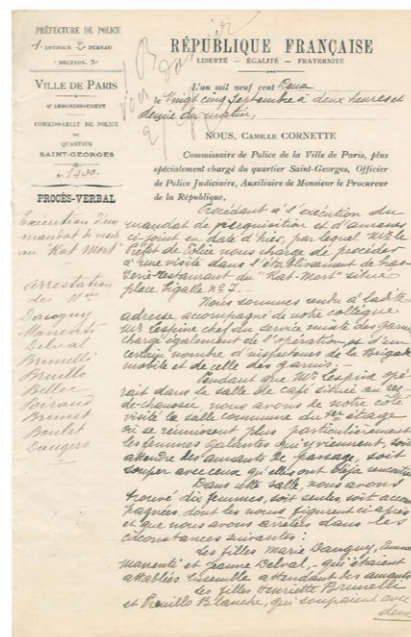
[5] Charles Camoin, *Marseille, rue Bouterie*, 1904  
Oil on canvas, 81 x 64.8 cm  
Private collection

[6] Business card used by Louise Tourneux alias "Miss Berthe André" to solicit customers



[7] Excerpts of the correspondence between Miss Nicoud and her daughter Germaine, July 1902

[8] Excerpt from the protocol "Execution of a visitation order in Le Rat mort," September 25, 1902



and alleys. By 1902 only twelve brothels were left on rue de la Reynarde and rue de Ventomagy, compared with eighty-nine twenty years previously, and only eighty-seven women were employed there, while seven hundred were registered as working independently.<sup>33</sup> More than half of these independent sex workers were foreigners, and the large majority of them were Italian. But the 787 registered women were a drop in the ocean compared with the clandestine sex workers scattered throughout the city whom the municipal government estimated at more than six thousand. A great many of these were in rue Bouterie, the red-light district's main drag, and the poorest and most disreputable street in the area.<sup>34</sup> Many were minors of less than twenty-one years, and the street was the scene of many cases of minors being incited to debauchery.<sup>35</sup> This thoroughfare, which attracted sightseers and clients from outside France, had seen its brothels replaced by fifteen or so *bars meublés* (bistros with rooms) and a slew of hotels and *magasins* (ground-floor rooms opening onto the street). In his 1904 canvas, *Marseille, rue Bouterie*, Charles Camoin depicts a number of idling women, many of them sitting in doorways, one talking to a man in red pants (FIG. 5). The peaceful and colorful atmosphere of this painting contrasts with the sordid account given by journalist Adolphe Brisson: "This is rue Bouterie, the street of these ladies. . . . They all live here. Poor things! There they are, half naked, their feet in the gutter, painted, hideous, reeking of musk, some piteously thin and stalked by consumption, others indecently plump, greasy, paunchy" (*Le Temps*, April 23, 1903).<sup>36</sup> There can be no comparison either between these wretched figures and Camoin's 1904 portrait inspired by a (possibly Italian) prostitute of rue Bouterie, posing in her place of work (*Nu aux bottines noires*, (→ p. 182)). This visual appropriation of

the naked body of a very young woman—a healthy body, unravaged by the stigmata of prostitution—is an example of the "male gaze," in which the female subject conforms to a sexualizing male view that draws on stereotypical images of the brothel with markers such as dressing gown and boots.<sup>37</sup> Assia Quesnel, who has shed light on the important links between nudes and prostitution in the work of Camoin, recalls an episode in the Saint-Tropez *bar meublée* Les Roses involving Camoin's friend Marquet, where painting (*La saltimbanque au repos*, 1905) and sexual consumption were closely interlinked. Marquet left a suggestive sketch of the episode (→ p. 180), and in his correspondence with Matisse he describes how the two friends came away with "some painful memories and a large stock of pharmaceuticals"—in other words, they caught a syphilitic-type infection.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike in France and the Netherlands, regulation in Great Britain was only a brief parenthesis; introduced in 1864, the "French system" was gradually phased out after about twenty years as a result of the battle against a white slave trade fueled largely by minors.<sup>39</sup> London, like all the

33 "Questionnaire on prostitution and the morality police in Marseille," ca. 1902 (AD Bouches-du-Rhône, 4M/891). According to this report, the seven hundred registered prostitutes held in theory have lived within the red-light district, but only 252 actually did; the other 448 lived illegally in furnished rooms or hotels, or as lodgers in private homes.

34 In the 1900s, the press reported regularly on prostitution-related crimes in rue Bouterie—theft, brawls, aggression, and even murder.

35 *La Loi*, July 9, 1903; *Le Petit Provençal*, June 28 and November 12, 1905. Cases of minors being incited to debauchery reached an unprecedented number of readers nationwide in the press of the Belle Époque.

36 "C'est ici la rue Bouterie, la rue des dames. . . . Elles y demeurent toutes. Les malheureuses! Elles sont là, à demi nues, les pieds dans le ruisseau, fardées, hideuses, fleurant le musc; celles-ci maigres à pleurer et guettées par la phthisie, celles-là indécemment bedonnantes, graisseuses, entripaillées."

37 The model's age is open to debate; it is possible she was a minor. For the "male gaze" see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18. Assia Quesnel interprets the painting differently: "Une Quête du vivant par la matière," in Camoin, ed. Quesnel and Ooms, pp. 102–34.

38 "[D]e cuisants souvenirs et une nombreuse pharmacie." Letters from July 15 and August 12, 1905, Claudine Grammont, ed., *Matisse-Marquet Correspondance 1898–1947* (Lausanne: Bibliothèque des Arts, 2008), p. 42.

39 William Thomas Stead, *Pucelles à vendre: Londres 1885* (Paris: Alma, 2013); Luc Keunings, "L'Affaire de la traite des blanches: Un aspect de la prostitution urbaine en Europe occidentale au XIXe siècle," *Du sordide au mythe: L'affaire de la traite des blanches (Bruxelles 1800)* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2009), pp. 17–44.

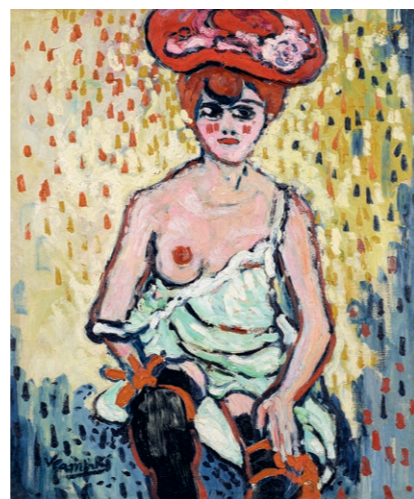
40 Rohan McWilliams, *London's West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 133–34.  
 41 This was the first of two journeys made to London financed by the gallerist Ambroise Vollard. See Cécile Debray, *André Derain: 1904–1914, la décennie radicale*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2017), p. 28.  
 42 Verdicts from January 29 and February 21, 1903 (AP, D1U6/812 and 815).  
 43 Montmartre is the area that features most in the “List of establishments frequented by individuals engaged in the white slave trade” (APP, DB/411).  
 44 The phrase (“proletariat de la galanterie” in the original) is from Meunier, *Rapport*, p. 24.

large urban centers of Europe, saw a rise in opposition to the trafficking of women in the early 1900s. Pimps, in particular, were clamped down on, but not enough to stamp out white slavery. Lower-class sex workers tended to gather in the East End, while the more varied West End prostitutes serviced a more upmarket clientele.<sup>40</sup> In fashionable streets such as Regent Street—painted by Derain in the spring of 1906 (→ p. 173)<sup>41</sup>—women thronged and solicited discreetly. In Derain’s painting, we sense their presence on the right-hand sidewalk behind the woman in red with a blue hat and white stole whose arm is being touched by a man dressed in black (perhaps a client?). It is impossible to know whether the *tricolore* scheme of the woman’s outfit is deliberate, but French women were certainly involved in the London sex trade, whether by choice or coercion. A case concerning the incitement of minors to debauchery which was tried by the criminal court in Paris in 1903 gives us a glimpse of the various trajectories of women managed by a certain Montmartre pimp Émile Dumoutier, known as Louchmick.<sup>42</sup> In business in Castle Street, off Regent Street, since 1901, Dumoutier exploited *filles d’amour*, most of them minors. Fifteen-year-old Louise Tourneux, for example, told the court how she had voluntarily followed him to London, but had then been coerced into soliciting for two years in the streets around Regent Street by handing out visiting cards under an assumed name (FIG. 6). Germaine Nicoud, also fifteen and an extra at Montparnasse Theater, had been promised lucrative work in London; unlike Louise, however, she refused to prostitute herself when she arrived in Castle Street and ran away instead. An exchange of letters with her mother shows shame and despair on her side and resentful anger on the side of her storekeeper mother (FIG. 7).

Dumoutier recruited in Montmartre which was regarded by the police as one of the main hubs of trafficking.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not they were minors, large numbers of women were attracted by the vibrant social life of the area—it was only after the war that Montparnasse took over as the new place to be. Those women who could afford the appropriate attire made their way into the public dance halls (Tabarin, Moulin Rouge, Moulin de la Galette...), café-concerts and music halls (Moulin Rouge, Cabaret du Ciel, Cabaret de l’Enfer, Quat’Z’Arts...), cafés and restaurants (Abbaye de Thélème, Rat Mort, Cyrano...). The others, the mass of the “proletariat of gallantry”<sup>44</sup> were confined to the streets—with their pimp if they had one. They circled the squares and sidewalks in search of clients to take back to a nearby room or hotel. In Chabaud’s 1907 *Le Moulin Rouge, la nuit* (→ p. 184), the women’s presence is elliptical. The symbolic power of the place makes it unnecessary to depict them, but the point of view adopted by Chabaud, opposite the building, places him in their midst. The sex workers were not permitted to stand directly outside the entrance and had to accost their clients from the other side of the boulevard. On November 26, 1903, the manager lodged a complaint against two women who “were per-



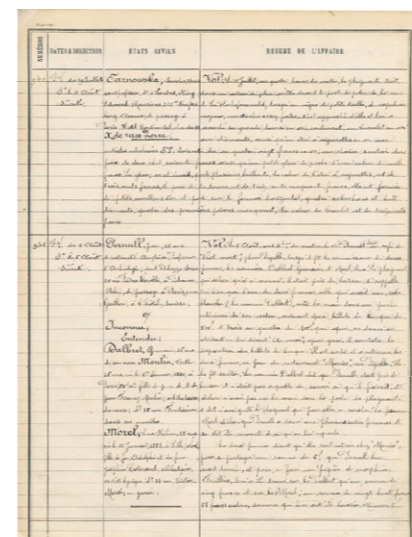
[9] Auguste Chabaud, *Couple entrant au Rat mort (Couple Entering the Rat mort)*, 1907  
 Oil on cardboard, 67.5 x 52.5 cm  
 The Hub of Fine Arts, Mostar



[10] Maurice de Vlaminck, *La Fille du Rat mort (Girl of the Rat mort)*, 1905–06  
 Oil on canvas, 77 x 65.5 cm  
 Collection of Gabriele and Werner Merzbacher, permanent loan at Kunsthäus Zürich, Zurich



[11] Maurice de Vlaminck, *La Danseuse du Rat mort (Dancer of the Rat mort)*, 1906  
 Oil on canvas, 73 x 54 cm  
 Private collection



[12] Protocol of a robbery by prostitutes (*entôlage*) in the Rat mort, August 5, 1906



[13] Auguste Chabaud, *Filles accueillant les spahis (Girls Welcoming the Spahis Guards)*, ca. 1907  
 Oil on cardboard, 78.5 x 50 cm  
 Musée Cantini, Marseille

sistently soliciting passersby” from opposite his establishment. The complaint led to their arrest.<sup>45</sup>

The chief of police Louis Lépine was keen to regulate prostitution—and especially clandestine prostitution—in hotspots such as Montmartre. On the streets, police officers were asked to be severe with “girls who solicit scandalously”; inside establishments, they were urged to organize more raids.<sup>46</sup> On September 25, 1902, for example, the Rat Mort received an unexpected visit from a squad of policemen from the Mobile Brigade and the Service des garnis (responsible for keeping an eye on rented rooms and hotels) under the supervision of two police officers. Nineteen women were arrested for clandestine prostitution; one was a registered prostitute without ID (FIG. 8).<sup>47</sup> The restaurant had been a favorite haunt of artists for many years.<sup>48</sup> Chabaud painted scenes of high life there, showing the mediating figure of the bellboy, a discreet but cheap and effective broker for arranging short-term relationships (*Couple entrant au Rat mort*, ca. 1907 (FIG. 9)). On the second (most fashionable) story were the private rooms and the large supper room where dancers provided the evening’s entertainment accompanied by a Roma orchestra. These dancers inspired Vlaminck on more than one occasion (*Nu couché*, 1905 (→ p. 183); *La Fille du Rat mort*, 1905–06 (FIG. 10)); one of them even sat for him (*La Danseuse du Rat mort*, 1906 (FIG. 11)) and for his friend Derain (*La Femme en chemise*, 1906 (→ p. 178)) in Derain’s studio in rue Tourlaque.<sup>49</sup> Some of these dancers—and some of the women on the lookout for “good clients”—would occasionally fleece the customers, benefiting from the general atmosphere of fun and freedom and the overexcitement of their clients to strip them of cash or objects of value. This was the fate suffered in 1906 by a certain John Pernull, an English professor

of archaeology, who complained to the police of having been robbed of 1,300 francs by the dancer Germaine Dalbret and a friend of hers (FIG. 12).<sup>50</sup> Whether they worked in pairs or alone, the fleecers displayed great agency by unbalancing the usual structures of commercial sex, and turning the power and resources of the wealthy males to their own advantage.<sup>51</sup>

Most artists are not historiographers, and in much art of this time prostitution tended to be a pretext to paint female nudes and bodies, types and characters, rather than a subject matter through which to represent a particular geographical or historical context. There are, however, two important exceptions. In their drawings and paintings of the 1900s, Van Dongen and Chabaud show signs of a real awareness of the realities of sex work and an understanding of the situations created across the social spectrum by the financial transactions involved. Van Dongen was perhaps the only artist to depict the major role played by the police in the workings of regulated prostitution (*Rafle au Z. 12 uur Sluizing*, ca. 1899), while Chabaud gives us a valuable glimpse into colonial prostitution (*Filles accueillant les spahis* (FIG. 13)).<sup>52</sup> Van Dongen’s perspective

of archaeology, who complained to the police of having been robbed of 1,300 francs by the dancer Germaine Dalbret and a friend of hers (FIG. 12).<sup>50</sup> Whether they worked in pairs or alone, the fleecers displayed great agency by unbalancing the usual structures of commercial sex, and turning the power and resources of the wealthy males to their own advantage.<sup>51</sup>

45 These two women of twenty-two and thirty-eight were, however, registered sex workers, in possession of their ID cards and up to date with their health checks (APP, CB/69/25).

46 His instructions concerning “scandalous solicitation” earned him the ridicule of *L’Aurore*: “Il faut que M. Lépine ouvre une école de racoleuses. Il leur apprendra les gestes et les paroles autorisées.” (M. Lépine should open a school for soliciting girls; he could teach them the appropriate words and gestures; August 14, 1900.)

47 The men at table with them, however, had evidence of their identity and were not bothered by the police (APP, JC/58).

48 Manet and Courbet had been regulars; see André de Fouquières, *Mon Paris et ses Parisiens*, vol. 3, *Pigalle 1900* (Paris: Horay, 1955), p. 217.

49 André Derain, *Lettres à Vlaminck* (Paris: Flammarion, 1955), p. 10, and Vlaminck, *Paysages*, pp. 32–33.

50 Statement made at Saint Georges Police Station, August 5, 1906 (APP, CB/33/26).

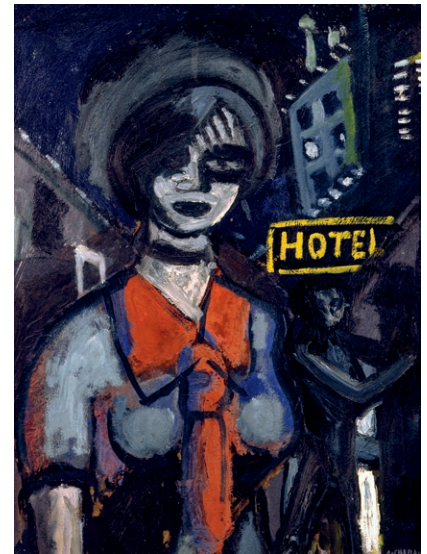
51 Fleecing was often practiced by two prostitutes working together: one would distract the client while the other took care of the theft; this method also provided additional protection from clients inclined to violence. Women did, however, also work alone or accompanied at a distance by their pimps; the police statements of Montmartre provide abundant examples.

52 In late 1903, Chabaud began his three years’ military service as a simple artilleryman in Tunisia. Serge Fauchereau dates this painting and another on the same subject, *The Riflemen*, to after 1907; Auguste Chabaud: *Période fauve* (Marseille: Dimanche, 2002), p. 21.

53 In 1899, Van Dongen was accompanied on his wanderings by investigative journalist Joseph Brusse, author of the famous 1912 *Het rosse leven en sterven van de Zandstraat*, a book about the prostitutes and sailors of the Zandstraat area. See Hopmans, *Van Dongen*, p. 96.

54 None of his paintings connected with prostitution were exhibited before this date. See Maithe Vallès-Bled and Itzhak Goldberg, *Chabaud: Fauve et expressionniste, 1900–1904*, exh. cat. (Souyri: Au fil du temps, 2012); Véronique Serrano, *Auguste Chabaud: La ville de jour comme de nuit, Paris 1907–1912*, exh. cat. (Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux, 2003); Fauchereau, *Auguste Chabaud*.

owes much to his acquaintance with Zandstraat in Rotterdam, a quarter where he often walked and which proved profitable to him; a number of his Zandstraat drawings were printed in the illustrated Parisian press.<sup>53</sup> Chabaud, meanwhile, was influenced by his remarkable love for a modest house prostitute called Yvette, but also by the expression of a troubled masculinity and a complex attitude toward prostitution which he refrained from disclosing until 1952.<sup>54</sup> Of the two artists, Chabaud was without a doubt the more sensitive to the different modes and structures of prostitution in the distinctive time and place that was prewar Paris. He painted brothels, but also dance halls, bistros, restaurants, and of course hotels—from the sordid “hôtels de passe” to the magnificent luxury hotels of the city. By focusing on the latter, which by then were standard sites of commercial sexual consumption, and by portraying “belles de nuit” or streetwalkers with the short hair and ties that would later be appropriated by the flappers of the twenties—Chabaud shows a keen visual understanding of prostitution in Paris as it passed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (*Buste de fille à la frange* (*Belle de nuit*), 1907–08, and *Femme à la cravate rouge*, 1907 (FIG. 14)).



(14) Auguste Chabaud, *Femme à la cravate rouge* (*Woman with a Red Tie*), 1907  
Oil on cardboard, 73 × 56 cm  
Museum unter Tage / Situation Kunst, Bochum