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exhibition review of

1914–1918, Le Patrimoine s'en va-t-en guerre

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1914–1918, Le Patrimoine s'en va-t-en guerre

March 11–July 4, 2016

Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine,
Palais de Chaillot, Paris

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1914–1918, Le Patrimoine s'en va-t-en guerre.

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Hidden in the rear galleries of the cavernous spaces of the Palais de Chaillot was one of the most significant and timely of recent exhibitions in Paris. Dedicated to the exploration of the ways in which objects and locations in Belgium and France were destroyed by the Germans during World War I, the exhibition and its concise catalogue provided ample evidence of how art objects, architectural monuments, and educational institutions such as libraries were systematically destroyed and pillaged; destruction that the Germans eventually denied as their responsibility. Given the recent ruin of monuments by ISIS in both Syria and Iraq, this exhibition sounded a very important note of alarm for the western world that is timely and evocative of what has occurred in the past (fig. 1). Without a firm knowledge of historical events such as those surrounding World War I, this type of devastation could easily be repeated if an outcry is not raised by concerned scholars, collectors, educators, and government officials.



Fig. 1, Introductory panel to the exhibition. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Following the introductory panel, which presented the issues addressed by the exhibition, the show was organized into three very succinct, careful, and well-developed sections. The first section was dedicated to establishing the ways in which art objects, locations, buildings, and images created by artists were used to create a “Guerre des images” (war of images). Starting with the destruction of the ancient library in Louvain, graphically revealed through documentary photographs that showed the original library building (found in a post card of the time) in contrast with its ruined state, the exhibition then moved on to ways in which

artists, often men who served as war reporters at the front, created images that were reproduced in the press (fig. 2). These included works by Georges Scott for the magazine *L'Illustration* of the devastation of the city of Ypres after being bombarded in 1914 and 1915, or one by François Flameng, a work now housed in the Musée de l'Armée, of the destruction of the basilica of Albert in the Somme region (figs. 3, 4). When these works were shown alongside the more propagandistic prints either advocating German KULTUR or fiercely castigating what had happened, the atmosphere of a visual battle between opposing sides was apparent (figs. 5, 6). In the midst of this section, where photographs were included to reinforce the atmosphere of destruction, were documents produced by the Germans, either as books advocating their position or papers signed by some of the leading art intellectuals of the day, arguing that the destruction of artistic monuments was not the responsibility of Germany (fig. 7). Included in this list of deniers were figures such as architect and designer Peter Behrens and Justus Brinckmann, the long standing Director of the Kunst und Gewerbe Museum in Hamburg, among many others (fig. 8). Although what was uppermost in the exhibition was the way in which art was enlisted on both sides, the destruction of great monuments from the past remains a lingering, indelible image throughout this small exhibition.



Fig. 2, View of photograph and postcard showing the library of the University of Louvain, France. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 3, Georges Scott, La Grande Place d'Ypres-la-Silencieuse, *L'Illustration*, no. 3776, July 17, 1915: n.p.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 4, François Flameng, *Albert, August 5, 1916*. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 5, Zygismund Brunner, *Paris Seen From Berlin*, *La Baïonnette*, no. 155, June 20, 1918.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 6, François Clasquin, *Le Dieu Thor la plus barbare d'entre les barbares divinités de la Vieille Germanie* (The God Thor, the Most Barbarous Among the Barbarous Divinities of Ancient Germania) in the series *La Guerre 1914–1915 en images*, September 15, 1915 (Épinal: Pellerin & Cie, 1915): no. 87.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

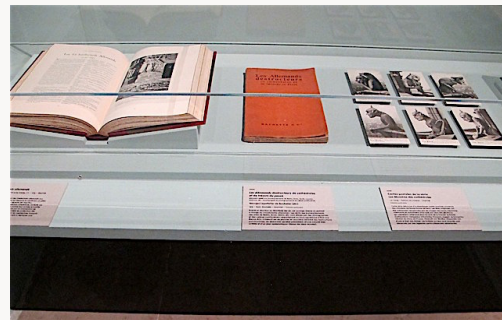


Fig. 7, Documents showing the German intellectuals who denied wrongdoing.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

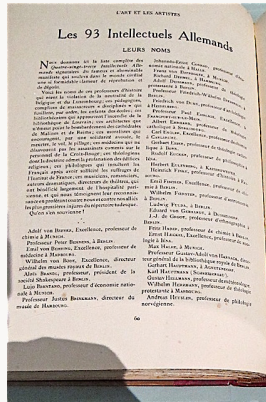


Fig. 8, List of the 93 deniers.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The second section of the exhibition centered on a very significant exhibition held in the Trocadéro in Paris in 1915. As the first exhibition that emphasized Germany's vandalism, this show under the direction of Camille Enlart launched a fierce propaganda campaign against the invaders (figs. 9, 10). Bringing together images of monuments that had been destroyed, Enlart created a startling contrast with the sculptural casts from French art history—from all periods—that were also shown in the exhibition. Among the images that revealed the brutal destruction was the *Smiling Angel* from Reims, a sculpture that had been destroyed by the German bombardment of the cathedral and the city (fig. 11). Almost immediately the fragments from the past were seen as relics that had to be preserved even if the original had been devastated. This section became one of the most moving in the exhibition as it demonstrated that those who cared about these French monuments persevered in mounting a public exhibition to get their message out to the world.

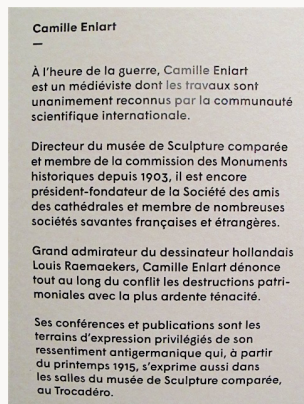


Fig. 9, Wall text dedicated to Camille Enlart.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 10, Paul Graf, *Bust of Camille Enlart in his Academic Dress*, 1928.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 11, View of the installation with photographs of the *Smiling Angel* from the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Reims, and original sculpture head from the north portal, ca. 1260. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The third section of the show emphasized *The Mutilated Works of Art* exhibition held in 1916 at the Petit Palais, which increased the frenzy surrounding the destruction of France's artistic "patrimoine" (patrimony). Paul Ginisty, the organizer of the 1916 exhibition, conceived this show to inflame French anger against Germany while presenting considerable evidence of the mutilation before neutral countries who had not entered the war (fig. 12). Shown in photographs, the fragmented works, such as that of *Saint Tarcisius* by the nineteenth century sculptor Alexandre Falguière, became symbols of a patriotic fervor that continued to fuel the war effort. Aided by efforts in the press, the exhibition became a sort of artistic pilgrimage across France that starkly demonstrated what was happening to French culture (fig. 13). The effectiveness of the show was palpable. Similarly, the ways in which these sections of the exhibition created a tableau of desecration and destruction were used as a warning that the same thing is happening in contemporary society.



Fig. 12, Photograph of Paul Ginisty among the mutilated statues.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 13, View of the installation with head and fragments, Alexandre Falguière, *Saint Tarcisus Christian Martyr*, ca. 1868.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The excellent catalogue and short guide provide stimulating essays that enlarge upon a number of the themes effectively developed in the exhibition at the Palais de Chaillot. Examining the heroes of the moment, those who stood up for what was right, introduces the reader to many individuals whose roles in history have been obliterated by the passage of time. As a model of consistency, the catalogue contributes ample evidence that once the memory of this current exhibition fades away, the record of the various issues posed and discussed so insightfully will remain an educational tool for future generations. Although few visitors to Paris will take the time to see this exhibition, and even those visiting the Cité de l'Architecture might not notice the show, those that do get to see it will find it both rewarding and a model for other exhibitions to follow, especially shows motivated by history and a passion to remember.

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Illustrations

All illustrations courtesy of Yvonne M. L. Weisberg with the authorization of the Palais de Chaillot, Paris.



Fig. 1, Introductory panel to the exhibition. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, View of photograph and postcard showing the library of the University of Louvain, France.

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Fig. 3, Georges Scott, La Grande Place d'Ypres-la-Silencieuse, *L'Illustration*, no. 3776, July 17, 1915: n.p.
Printed photograph, showing the aftermath of the German bombardment. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, François Flameng, *Albert, August 5, 1916*. Watercolor and gouache on vellum paper. Musée de l'Armée, Paris. This image shows the destruction of the basilica of Albert in the Somme region in 1916.

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Fig. 5, Zygismund Brunner, Paris Seen From Berlin, *La Baïonnette*, no. 155, June 20, 1918.
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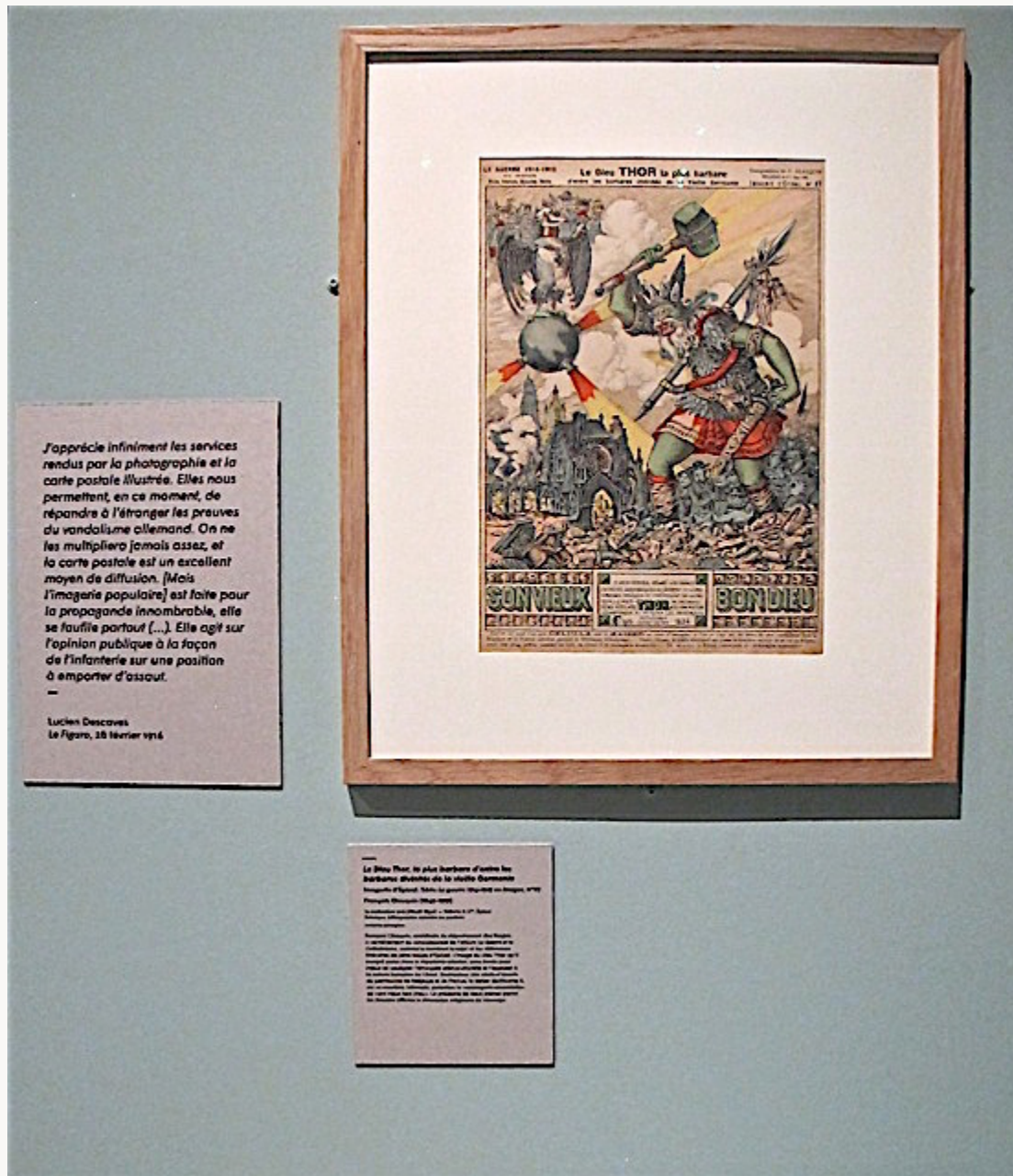


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Lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, Documents showing the German intellectuals who denied wrongdoing. [\[return to text\]](#)

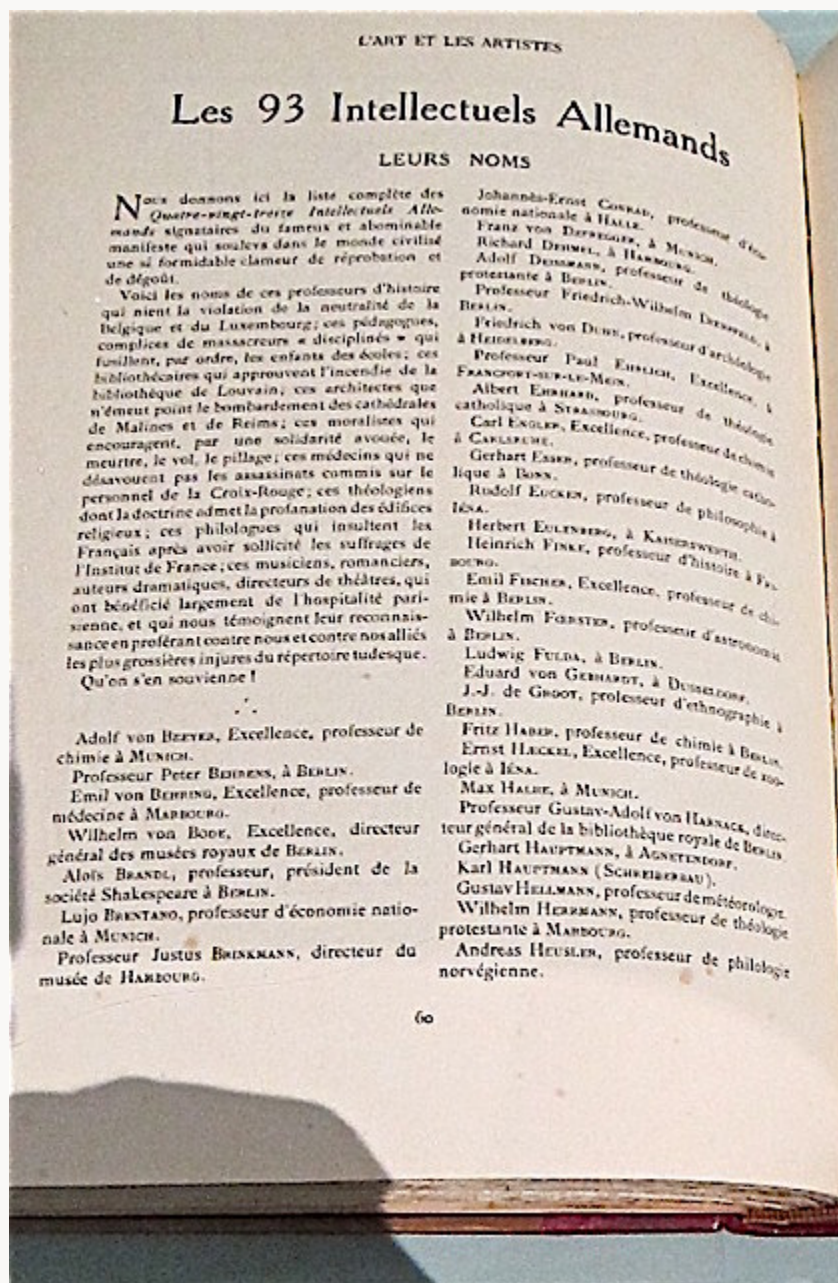


Fig. 8, List of the 93 deniers. [\[return to text\]](#)

Camille Enlart

—

À l'heure de la guerre, Camille Enlart est un médiéviste dont les travaux sont unanimement reconnus par la communauté scientifique internationale.

Directeur du musée de Sculpture comparée et membre de la commission des Monuments historiques depuis 1903, il est encore président-fondateur de la Société des amis des cathédrales et membre de nombreuses sociétés savantes françaises et étrangères.

Grand admirateur du dessinateur hollandais Louis Raemaekers, Camille Enlart dénonce tout au long du conflit les destructions patrimoniales avec la plus ardente ténacité.

Ses conférences et publications sont les terrains d'expression privilégiés de son ressentiment antigermanique qui, à partir du printemps 1915, s'exprime aussi dans les salles du musée de Sculpture comparée, au Trocadéro.

Fig. 9, Wall text dedicated to Camille Enlart. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, Paul Graf, *Bust of Camille Enlart in his Academic Dress*, 1928. Bronze. CAPA/MMF, MOU.09450.

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