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Dennis Cate

exhibition review of

De La Caricature à L’Affiche, 1850–1918

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De La Caricature à L’Affiche, 1850–1918

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

February 18–September 4, 2016

Palais Lumière, Évian

November 6, 2016–January 8, 2017

This impressive, instructive, and courageous exhibition of posters presents the essential role played by caricature and humor in the creation of poster art during the second half of the nineteenth century, the first decade of the twentieth century, and to a lesser extent during the First World War (fig. 1). It is impressive because of the nearly 300 works presented and the large scale and dynamic composition of some of its major posters (fig. 2); it is instructive by including posters with a wide range of themes and functions and by presenting works of high quality by relatively unknown artists; it is instructive with its inclusion of poster-related material: illustrated journals, print albums, and caricatural sculptures and for placing in historical context the premise of the exhibition: caricature and humor. It is courageous because it does not include the customary, audience-appealing posters by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Jules Chéret.^[1] However, in my point of view, it would have added to the exhibition’s instructive power if one or two examples of these exciting, but often over exposed, artists were included in order to demonstrate to the average visitor the impact that Chéret and Lautrec had on fin-de-siècle poster art.



Fig. 1, Poster for the exhibition, *De La Caricature à L’Affiche, 1850–1918* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 2, Installation view featuring color lithograph posters by Adrien Barrère.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Organized by the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, under the direction of Réjane Bargiel, chief curator, the exhibition and catalogue demonstrate well the importance of poster art as an active, visible, and popular means to combat academic standards of art which by the mid-nineteenth century had fossilized French art, in particular, and Western art, in general, by dictating formalized rules of art such as the idealized representation of the human figure. The exhibition is thus a fundamental tool for appreciating the diverse artistic influences readily available to avant-garde artists at the turn-of-the-nineteenth century seeking to escape the tenets of academic art and the traditional function of art.

In fact, caricature and humor as found in the sculptures of Dantan-Jeune and Honoré Daumier, in particular, during the first half of the nineteenth century prepared the way for Edgar Degas’ realist sculptural depiction of *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* and Auguste Rodin’s exaggerated, abstract portrait of *Balzac* at the end of the century. It is also evident that caricatures and depictions of distorted physiognomy generally found in fin-de-siècle posters and journal illustrations were, in fact, important precedents for the turn-of-the-century paintings of artists such as Maurice Vlaminck, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

The premise of the exhibition relies on Charles Baudelaire’s statement in his 1857 essay “On the Essence of Laughter,” that caricatures:

Contain a mysterious, lasting, eternal element, which recommends them to the attention of artists. What a curious thing, and one truly worthy of attention, is the introduction of this indefinable element of beauty, even in works which are intended to represent his proper ugliness—both moral and physical—to man! And what is no less mysterious is that this lamentable spectacle excites in him an undying and incorrigible mirth.[2]

The discourse on caricature and humor initiated by Baudelaire was intensified by the illustrated publications on the topic by Jules Chamfleury (1865), John Grand-Carteret (1888), and Arsène Alexandre (1892)[3]; the latter was to go even further by founding in 1894 with Félix Juven the humorist journal *Le Rire* and hiring numerous inventive artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Félix Vallotton, T.A. Steinlen, and Jean-Louis Forain to illustrate its pages (fig. 3). Equally important were Ernest Maindron’s 1886 and 1896 publications documenting poster art and emphasizing the work of the prolific poster artist Chéret whose art beginning in the late 1860s infused the streets of Paris with color images. Thus, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century caricature and humor were not only topics of polemical interest in the air, but also were literally on the walls of Paris and on the pages of its most popular journals, and practiced by numerous avant-garde artists.



Fig. 3, Jules Granjouan, “Question d’art,” *Le Rire*, no. 406, August 16, 1902.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The poster collection at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs is part of the Musée de la Publicité which in 1901 was housed in the current building of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs located on the rue de Rivoli. In 1980 the Musée de la Publicité was moved to the rue Paradis, but in 1990 it moved back to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs where, in 1999, its current approximately

600-square-meter exhibition hall was established. *De La Caricature à L’Affiche* filled the entire space and was divided into ten galleries, one of which presented an extract of a film by Marc Faye on the poster artist Gustave Jossot and on controversial topics of the time such as the Dreyfus Affair, the 1905 law separating church and state, and censorship, all of which are relevant to the production of posters at the turn-of-the-nineteenth century. At the left side of the entrance to the exhibition hall was an introductory gallery entitled “The Press: The Caricature’s Domain,” which presented rare examples of the early collaboration, during the 1840s–70s, between the illustrated journal and caricature (fig. 4). On display here was the work of Grandville (poster for *Métamorphoses du jour*, 1854), Honoré Daumier (poster for *Entrepôt d’Ivry*, 1850), Nadar, Etienne Carjat, Henri Monnier, André Gill (poster for *La Lune rousse*, 1876) and others who initiated in France the symbiotic relationship between the satirical press and caricature and, equally important for the next generation of artists, the press use of illustrated promotional posters (fig. 5). Included within the installation of this section were carved and painted wooden caricatures of politicians and monarchs such as French President Fallières and Nicolas II of Russia by Moloch (Alphonse Hector Colomb, 1849–1909) and Emile Cohl (Émile Courtet, 1857–1938). These small sculptures are in the tradition of the plaster caricatures produced by Dantan-Jeune in the 1830s, and even more directly in the tradition of the series of Daumier’s clay satirical busts of *The Celebrities of the Juste Milieu* (1832–33). While they were created in 1908 (Moloch) and in 1906 (Cohl), the journalistic careers of these two prolific satirical artists began in the late 1860s and late 1870s, respectively and spanned forty years. Cohl, of course, went on to become an influential pioneer in animated films producing over 300 between 1908 and 1923. In gallery 4 of the exhibition one found the humorous plaster caricatures by Adrien Barrère depicting, for example, an overweight, aged “Marianne” i.e., the French Republic, and a series of “Foetus” in glass jars including one of Queen Victoria (figs. 6, 7). Gallery 1 not only offered a brief history of the various types of journalistic caricature, but also simultaneously introduced the themes and formats to be found throughout the exhibition.



Fig. 4, Installation view of introductory gallery. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

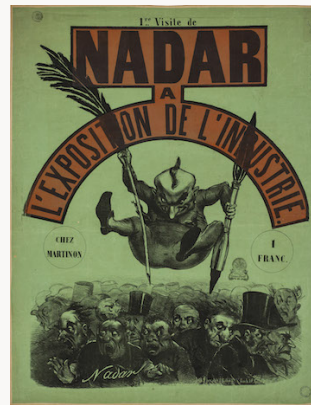


Fig. 5, Nadar, *Nadar à Paris à l'exposition de l'industrie*, 1854. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 6, Adrien Barrère, *Figure of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau as a Foetus Preserved in Formalin*, ca. 1908.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 7, Installation view featuring vitrine with satirical figures by Adrien Barrère including *Marianne* and glass jars with “foetuses” of politicians and rulers.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Gallery 2, entitled “A Favorable Context for Laughter: Caricature and Irreverence are Everywhere,” included a diverse array of fin-de-siècle posters promoting, in particular, the press, politics, and art events. Adolphe Willette, Louis Anquetin, Jules Alexandre Grün, and Théophile Steinlen were represented with their relatively well known posters for *Le Courrier Français* (1886), *Le Rire* (1894), *Le Sourire* (1900), and *La Feuille* (1897), respectively (fig. 8). Willette’s poster (83 x 58 cm) is about half the size of the two large format posters by Anquetin (149 x 108.5 cm) and Grün (124 x 89 cm); all three would have been used for display on Parisian streets, while *La Feuille* is presented in a small format (30 x 42 cm) created for interior window display (fig. 9). Each poster has been stamped with the official notification of the appropriate tax paid based on size and location of its display (exterior versus interior). However, the pleasant surprise for me in this section was the discovery of Eugène Cadel’s oversize poster (158.5 x 319.5 cm) announcing the publication of the satirical, social-political journal *L’Assiette au Beurre* (1901). Further on in the exhibition, Jossot’s 1897 poster *Imprimerie Camis* (253 x 189 cm) demonstrated that the lithographic print shop Camis had recently invented a system to print posters in the largest format to date on one sheet of paper (fig. 10). Indeed, technology was greatly expanding the visual dimension of street publicity. Cadel’s poster, printed on three sheets of paper, is a dramatic, non-humorous declaration of the new journal’s proposed function to attack society’s inequalities and inhumanity; Cadel’s image of an emaciated farmer with pick in hand, standing in front of a crowd of “exploiters” is in the vein of Steinlen’s large, socialist-anarchist posters of 1898 and 1900 for Zola’s *Paris* and for the journal *Petit Sou* which depicts the struggle of the oppressed to liberate themselves from the oppressors, i.e., the military, the church, the bourgeoisie, and the state. All three posters must have been extremely impressive when glued to Paris walls, as well as politically troublesome for the representatives of the Third Republic and the Catholic Church.



Fig. 8, Jules-Alexandre Grün, *Le Sourire*, 1900. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 9, Jules-Alexandre Grün, *Bal Tabarin*, 1904. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 10, Installation view featuring Gustave Jossot's poster of *Imprimerie Camis*, the lithographic print shop that invented a system for producing large-scale posters. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The divisive role religion played in Third Republic politics was presented with Willette's vicious poster for his failed run as an anti-Semitic candidate in the 1889 legislative election, and a number of posters from the time of the Dreyfus Affair (fig. 11); this included Raphaël-Marie Viau's poster for his sarcastic hateful 1898 publication *Ces Bons Juifs*; José Belon's 1898 anti-Dreyfus poster for Henri Rochfort's *L'Intransigeant*; and a selection of V. Lenepveu anti-Dreyfus/anti-Semitic series of posters *Musée des Horreurs* begun in 1899 (figs. 12, 13). Simultaneously with the uproar of the Dreyfus Affair, the battle for separation of church and state reached its height and was played out on the street with Eugène Ogé's 1902 dynamic and inflammatory poster for the anti-clerical journal *La Lanterne* (fig. 14). Today these combative, bigoted posters may not seem humorous to some.



Fig. 11, Installation view featuring political posters related to the Dreyfus Affair.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 12, Raphaël-Marie Viau, *Ces Bons Juifs!* (These Good Jews!), 1898.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

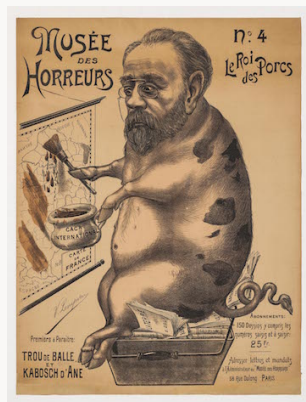


Fig. 13, Victor Lenepveu, *Musée des Horreurs, Le roi des porcs* (Emile Zola) [Museum of Horrors, The King of the Swine (Emile Zola)], no. 4, 1899.

[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 14, Eugène Ogé, *La Lanterne* (The Lantern), 1902. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

Regardless of the serious and sinister side of a few posters in this gallery, humor and laughter was ever present. This was the case with the 1893 poster for *Exposition des arts Incohérents* which is, in fact, a collaborative design by four artists: Émile Cohl, Henri Pile, Henri Grey, and Henri-Patrice Dillon, all of whom were active members of the Incohérents, a proto-Dada, proto-Surrealist group of artists and writers founded in 1881 by Jules Lévy (fig. 15). Jean Veber’s 1911 poster for the weekly publication *Les Humoristes* lists the names of numerous artists such as Steinlen, Forain, Willette, Léandre, Neumont, and others who were highlighted in Adolphe Brisson’s 1900 book *Nos Humoristes* and whose works comprised gallery 8 entitled “Les Humoristes.”



Fig. 15, Installation view featuring poster for *Exposition des arts incohérents*, 1893, back wall.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

One of the principal stated purposes of the exhibition was to demonstrate that contrary to the 1899 opinion of art critic and poster specialist, Ernest de Crauzat, poster art did not die after its golden decade of the 1890s, in which the aesthetics of Chéret, Toulouse-Lautrec, Alphonse Mucha, and Steinlen dominated the field. Rather, the exhibition reveals that the poster designs of Jossot during the golden decade helped to establish caricature and the cult of the ugly as essential aspects of the decorative vocabulary of poster art (figs. 16, 17). And that French poster art was active and innovative during the pre-World War I years with the designs, in particular, of Leonetto Cappiello (1875–1942). The work of Cappiello was favored with a monographic display equal in size to two of the exhibition galleries (figs. 18, 19). Here one found among his posters of dance hall performers *à la* Toulouse-Lautrec and his statuettes of Yvette Guilbert and Jeanne Grenier, two dynamic, large format posters, the 1905 *Fleur des neiges* (375 x 198 cm) and the 1910 *Remington* (200 x 130 cm); indeed, the latter is a tour de force in which the female typist gracefully generates a whirlwind of flying typed pages from her Remington (figs. 20, 21). The abstract design of floating sheets of a paper is reminiscent of that found in Steinlen’s 1897 poster for Zo d’Axa’s *La Feuille*. In fact, Cappiello and the other artists, hardly known by the general public but emphasized in the remaining galleries, owe much to the poster aesthetics of the 1890s. Five galleries including the large space dedicated to the work of Cappiello, presented selected artists such as Jules Grün, Adrien Barrière, Sem, Roubille, O’Galop, and Ogé, each with a number of examples of their work, which permitted a better appreciation of their contributions to poster art. (figs. 22, 23, 24, 25) Caricature, simplicity and humor are the hallmarks of Sem’s *Footit* (1910), O’Galop’s *Le Coup de la Semelle Michelin* (1905), and Barrère’s *Mayol* (1908–09) (figs. 26, 27). Their work and that of their colleagues belies de Crauzat’s 1899 claim that poster art was dead, and the exhibition reveals extremely well that after 1900 until the First World War there was a continuum of the achievements of the artists from a decade earlier.



Fig. 16, Gustave Jossot, *Mince de trognes*, (Thin Faces), 1896.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

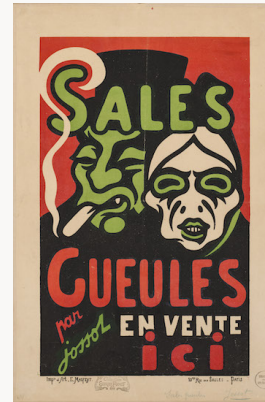


Fig. 17, Gustave Jossot, *Sales Gueules en vente ici* (Filthy Mouths for Sale Here), 1896.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 18, Leonetto Cappiello, *Corset Le Furet*, 1901. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 19, Leonetto Cappiello, *Macaronis Ferrari Opéra Paris*, 1904. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 20, Leonetto Cappiello, *Remington*, 1910.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 21, Installation view featuring *Fleur des neiges* (Flowers of Snow) on left rear wall.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 22, Auguste Roubille, *Bluze Diamonds*, ca.1898. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

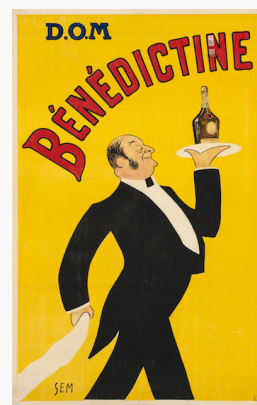


Fig. 23, Serge Coursat (known as SEM), *Bénédictine*, 1911. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)

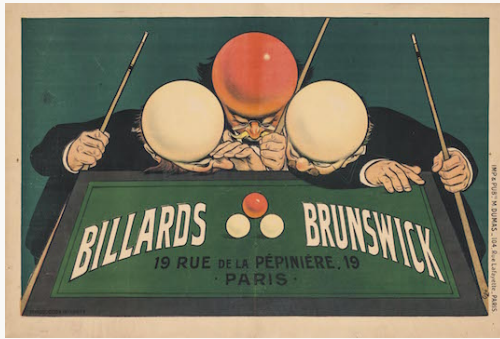


Fig. 24, Eugène Ogé, *Billards Brunswick*, 1910.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 25, Adrien Barrère, *Professeurs de la faculté de médecine* (Professors of the Faculty of Medicine), 1904; color lithograph.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 26, O'Galop, *Le Coup de la Semelle Michelin* (The Kick of the Michelin [tire] Treads), 1905. [\[view image & full caption\]](#)



Fig. 27, Adrien Barrère, *Mayol*, 1908–09.
[\[view image & full caption\]](#)

The final gallery of the exhibition was dedicated to posters created during the war years 1914–18. Humor was present only to a minor degree with issues of the satirical journal *La Baïonnette* and with the posters by Guy Arnoux and Maurice Leroy which announce exhibitions by members of *Les Sociétés des Dessinateurs Humoristes et des Artistes Humoristes* in support of the war effort. As with most propaganda posters created in times of war, caricature, abstraction, and humor are replaced by realism and patriotism. The heroic soldiers in Abel Faivre's posters echo the pose of the allegorical figure of Victory found in François Rude's sculpture for the Arc de Triomphe as they call upon their fellow citizens to purchase war bonds.

In addition to the nine galleries which comprise *De La Caricature à L’Affiche*, there was a supplemental display in the central corridor of the exhibition hall of recent small format posters by artists associated with the notorious, contemporary satirical journal *Charlie Hebdo*. This small but poignant display not only pays homage to the caricaturists murdered in January 2015, but also brings the visitor face to face with the stark reality of the challenges to satirical journalism, and as such, reinforces the historical importance of caricature as practiced in France for nearly two hundred years.

It was a great pleasure for me to view the exhibition and to see familiar images juxtaposed with new discoveries. Except for the guards, I was virtually alone which made it a very private and enjoyable experience, but it is a shame that more visitors were not there to discover the richness of the exhibition. Ironically, with this exhibition the “Musée de Publicité” does not follow the public relations function of its collection. Publicity exists to sell a product, and in this case the product is an exhibition of publicity, which offers much new insight into turn-of-the-century art, and presents some extraordinary posters by relatively unknown artists. So how does one encourage the general public to learn something new? Possibly by attracting their attention with something familiar and admired; something to which the public can relate. A Toulouse-Lautrec poster easily could have been a legitimate element in the exhibition. Just think how many of the thousands of visitors to the museum’s Barbie exhibition on the same floor would have been enticed to cross the hall and discover Jossot, Sem, Cappiello, O’Galop, and all the other innovative poster artists if an image by Toulouse-Lautrec were used to promote the exhibition. This is not selling out to the public or sugar-coating the exhibition. Rather it is just a wise educational and public relations tool.

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Notes

[1] I must admit, I have used the Toulouse-Lautrec ploy for my exhibitions such as *Toulouse-Lautrec and the French Imprint: Fin-de-siècle Posters in Paris, Brussels, and Barcelona*, organized by the Zimmerli Art Museum in 2006, and exhibited in Birmingham, England and Edinburgh, Scotland. The same strategy was used for *Toulouse-Lautrec and La Vie Moderne*, an exhibition circulated in the U.S. by Art Services International, 2013–2014.

[2] Charles Baudelaire, “On the Essence of Laughter, and in General, on the Comic in the Plastic Arts” in Jonathan Mayne, ed., *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon, 1965) 147.

[3] Jules François Félix Fleury-Husson [called Chamfleury], *Histoire de la caricature moderne* (Paris, E. Dentu, 1865); John Grand-Carteret, *Les Mœurs et la Caricature en France* (Paris, La Librairie illustrée, 1888); Arsène Alexandre, *L’Art du rire et de la caricature* (Paris, Quantin, Librairies-Imprimeries Réunies, 1892).

Illustrations

All images courtesy of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. All art works in the collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, unless otherwise noted.



Fig. 1, Poster for the exhibition, *De La Caricature à L’Affiche, 1850–1918* at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Installation view featuring color lithograph posters by Adrien Barrère. Left to right: *Tout Paris à la revue des Folies Bergère*, *Mayol*, and *Professeurs de la faculté de médecine*. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Jules Granjouan, “Question d’art,” *Le Rire*, no. 406, August 16, 1902. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Installation view of introductory gallery. [\[return to text\]](#)

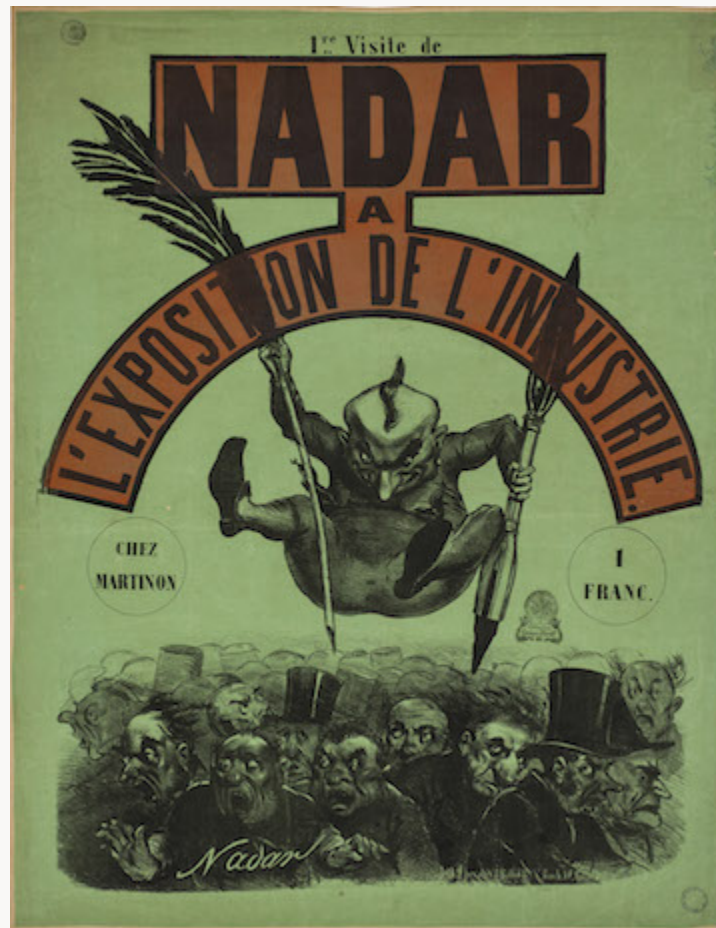


Fig. 5, Nadar, *Nadar à Paris à l'exposition de l'industrie*, 1854. Exhibition poster. Color lithograph.
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Adrien Barrère, *Figure of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau as a Foetus Preserved in Formalin*, ca. 1908. Plaster, glass and cork. Musée d’Histoire Urbaine et Sociale, Suresne. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, Installation view featuring vitrine with satirical figures by Adrien Barrère including *Marianne* and glass jars with “foetuses” of politicians and rulers. [\[return to text\]](#)



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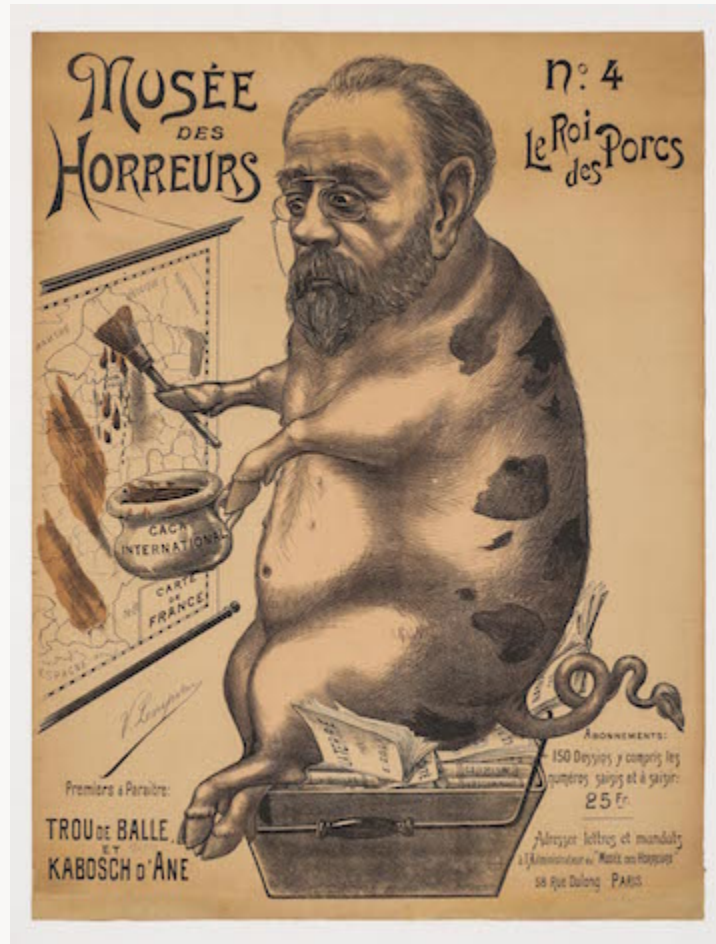


Fig. 13, Victor Lenepveu, *Musée des Horreurs, Le roi des porcs* (Emile Zola) [Museum of Horrors, The King of the Swine (Emile Zola)], no. 4, 1899. Lithographic journal. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 14, Eugène Ogé, *La Lanterne* (The Lantern), 1902. Color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 15, Installation view featuring poster for *Exposition des arts incohérents*, 1893, back wall.
Collaborative design by Émile Cohl, Henri Pile, Henri Grey, and Henri-Patrice Dillon [\[return to text\]](#)



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



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



Fig. 20, Leonetto Cappiello, *Remington*, 1910. Advertising poster; color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 21, Installation view featuring *Fleur des neiges* (Flowers of Snow) on left rear wall. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 22, Auguste Rouville, *Bluze Diamonds*, ca.1898. Advertising poster; color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 23, Serge Coursat (known as SEM), *Bénédictine*, 1911. Advertising poster; color lithograph.
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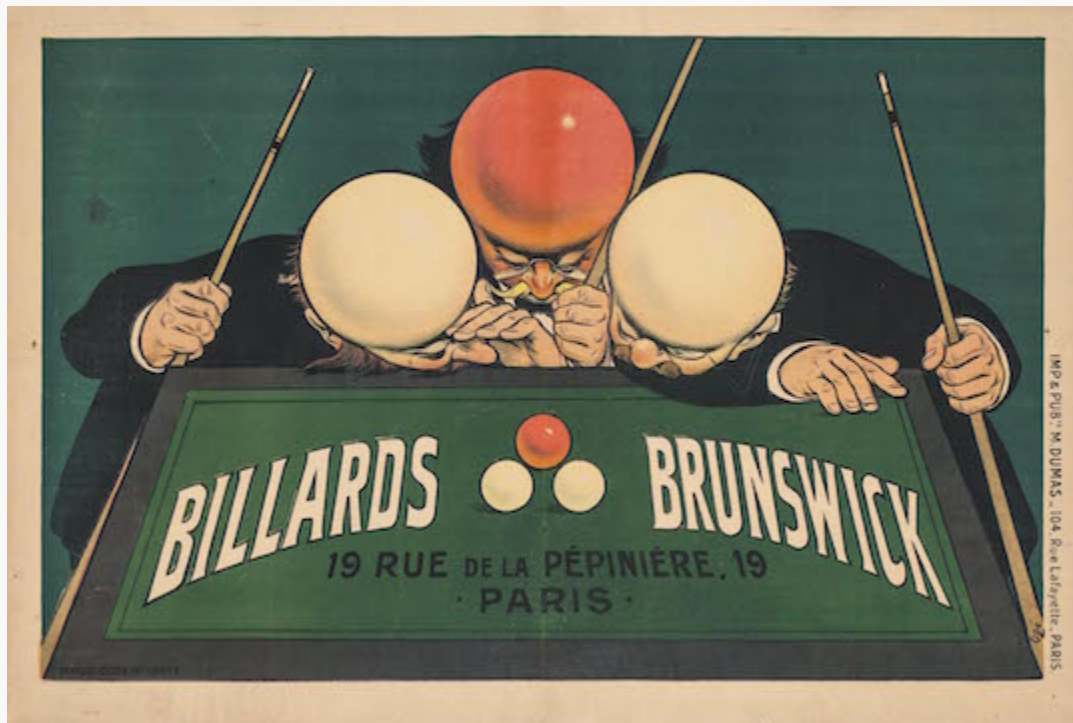


Fig. 24, Eugène Ogé, *Billards Brunswick*, 1910. Advertising poster; color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 25, Adrien Barrère, *Professeurs de la faculté de médecine* (Professors of the Faculty of Medicine), 1904; color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 26, O'Galop, *Le Coup de la Semelle Michelin* (The Kick of the Michelin [tire] Treads), 1905.
Advertising poster. Color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 27, Adrien Barrère, *Mayol*, 1908–09. Color lithograph. [\[return to text\]](#)