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Katherine Brion

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Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde edited by
Starr Figura, Isabelle Cahn, and Phillipe Peltier
Reviewed by Katherine Brion

Starr Figura, Isabelle Cahn, and Phillipe Peltier, eds.,
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Though it may be common for art critics and dealers to figure in portraits painted by one of their favorite artists (even if Paul Signac's "decorative" portrait (fig. 1) is more astonishing than most), how many can boast of being represented almost as often for posterity by their mugshot? Such is the drama, as well as mystery, of the life and career explored in *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde* (which features Signac's portrait on its front cover and the mugshots on its back). Fénéon first made a name for himself in the art world for the inventive, literary character of his writing, with which he attempted to transpose the visual presence of the artworks he admired, especially the work of the Neo-Impressionists, into words. Like so many of those involved in the avant-garde literary and artistic circles of the 1880s and 1890s, he was also an anarchist, but took this commitment more seriously than most, and was swept into the "Trial of the Thirty" for suspected anarchist terrorism. He may or may not have been guilty, but was acquitted, and lived his love for art and his leftist politics in a more retired fashion until his death in 1944.^[1] As this publication demonstrates, however, Fénéon's impact on the art world was arguably as or more significant after this transition, even if he largely preferred to remain behind the scenes in any exchange or transaction.

Fig. 1, Paul Signac, *Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890*, 1890. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller, 1991. Photo by Paige Knight. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde is the catalogue for the New York iteration of three exhibitions dedicated to the wide-ranging activities of this art critic, dealer, and collector. The first two exhibitions relayed this curated account of Fénéon's activities across two Parisian venues. First (May 28–September 28, 2019), the Musée du Quai Branly presented Fénéon's collecting of "*les arts lointains*" (arts from remote places)—Africa, Oceania, and (to a lesser extent) the Americas—alongside that of his contemporaries, and within the broader context of colonialism. Shortly after this exhibition closed, Fénéon's anarchist-inspired involvement in the European avant-garde was explored under the aegis of modernity ("*les temps nouveaux*" rather than "*les arts lointains*") at the Musée de l'Orangerie, in a show that ran from October 16, 2019, to January 27, 2020. Both of these exhibitions preceded the COVID-19 closures; such was not the case for the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, which followed and synthesized these separate facets of Fénéon's career into one show that ran from August 27, 2020, to January 2, 2021, and was at times only available for virtual viewing. Though the subject of my review is the catalogue for MoMA, I was able to visit the pre-COVID French exhibitions, and will evoke them here as they help to illuminate the content of MoMA's publication. Despite their distinct locations and emphases, both Parisian exhibitions shared a single catalogue, *Félix Fénéon: Critique, collectionneur, anarchiste*. [2] There is a certain amount of overlap between this catalogue and that of MoMA, as well as differences that make the consultation of both worthwhile—distinct content that I will indicate in this review.

A preface, "Portraits of Félix Fénéon," by Joan Halperin, the author and editor of works that continue to serve as key references on Fénéon's life and writings, opens the catalogue. [3] She presents the exhibition as a (partial) portrait of Fénéon, one that complements the emphasis on his writing in her own work by foregrounding its material culture and the artworks that it so often celebrated. [4] The initial catalogue essay, co-authored by Starr Figura, Isabelle Cahn, and Philippe Peltier, the curators of the Paris and New York exhibitions, provides an introduction to various facets of Fénéon's life and career (and an indication of where they are addressed in the subsequent catalogue essays): his work as a model civil servant at the

War Ministry, even as he fulfilled his anarchist convictions by championing the Neo-Impressionists and writing subversive, often anti-militaristic texts for various publications; his arrest and acquittal for violent anarchist terrorism; his subsequent editorial role at the avant-garde journal *La Revue blanche*; his final profession as an art dealer for the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune; and the constitution and valorization of his own collection. Following the thread opened up by Halperin's preface, the curators conclude this essay with the observation that, in part due to his desire to efface himself in his work, a portrait of Fénéon ("the elusive F.F." (24)[5]) is best constituted by the art that he celebrated and collected (28–29). In spite of this assertion, the subsequent essays largely focus on broader themes raised by his multi-faceted efforts as a writer, editor, art dealer, or collector, rather than providing detailed analyses of individual artworks. These essays are organized into four categories: "Fénéon and Neo-Impressionism," "Fénéon and Anarchism," "Fénéon and Modern Art," and "Fénéon and 'Arts from Remote Places.'" Each section is followed by color plates of the artworks and other elements of visual culture relevant to each; all but two of the works reproduced in the plates were on display in the exhibition.

The essays grouped under "Fénéon and Neo-Impressionism" address the close relationship between Fénéon as a critic and his subject, whether the artworks or the artists themselves. As highlighted in an essay by Marnin Young, Fénéon's activity as an art critic (aside from the short contributions he would make in later editorial roles) was tightly entwined with Neo-Impressionism, the label he coined in order to signal the movement's reform of Impressionism in favor of more scientific, synthetic, permanent statements. Young follows Halperin in emphasizing Fénéon's use of unusual formal devices and word choices to convey the unique formal properties of the artworks. He sees this approach, along with Fénéon's removal of himself from the text, as an effort to communicate the active, autonomous character of Neo-Impressionist artworks (a conception bolstered by the "scientific aesthetic" of Charles Henry (40)), in which Fénéon identified their capacity to serve as anarchist propaganda by the deed (37). Young suggests that this model ultimately shifted agency too much from the artist and viewer to the artwork, prompting Fénéon to seek an alternative in explicitly anarchist journalism and even anarchist violence. Ironically, in the wake of his arrest and acquittal for these activities, Fénéon seems to have invested his remaining anarchist aspirations entirely in artistic action (or destroyed any evidence to the contrary).[6] As indicated by the other essays in this section, that action included the ongoing support of Neo-Impressionism, accomplished in part by cultivating Georges Seurat's legacy through the organization or facilitation of exhibitions, publications, and acquisitions by public institutions, and by lifelong exchanges with Paul Signac, for whom Fénéon was both a friend and commercial advocate. Figura's essay on Signac's portrait of Fénéon (the only text from this section not included in the catalogue's French counterpart[7]) does not offer new information on or a new interpretation of this painting; it instead serves as an argument for the significance of both the "radically abstract" aesthetic employed in the background and Fénéon, who figures as an impresario of this avant-garde modernity.

The subsequent section, "Fénéon and Anarchism," contains only two essays and a short excerpt of dialogue from Fénéon's trial. A brief essay by Cahn on Fénéon's time as editorial secretary and then editor-in-chief at Thadée and Alexandre Natanson's *La Revue blanche*, where he became closer with the Nabis, appears at the end. It seems to have been included in this section primarily due to the fact that the journal became Fénéon's professional refuge after his anarchist activity cost him his job at the Ministry of War; Cahn also highlights the

anarchist tenor of the journal's content—whether articles on the Paris Commune, Alfred Dreyfus, or the anti-anarchist crackdown known as the *lois scélérates* (villainous laws)—under Fénéon's leadership.^[8] The main focus of this section is Patricia Leighton's contribution, "Fénéon's Anarchist Avant-Gardism." One of the catalogue's longer texts, it provides an overview of anarchist thought and activity in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, including the significant role attributed to art and the artist in the anarchist cause by figures like Peter Kropotkin.^[9] Drawing principally upon the work of Robert and Eugenia Herbert and Robyn Roslak, Leighton highlights Signac's equation of aesthetic and social harmony and artistic and anarchist freedom, which meant that both a work like Signac's *Au temps d'harmonie* (*In the Time of Harmony*, 1893–95)—a fairly literal representation of an anarchist utopia—and a landscape could be understood as a form of anarchist propaganda (96). Even as, leading up to the Trial of the Thirty, Fénéon invested more of his time in political journalism and the material support of anarchism—which may have included the violence rejected by many of his fellow anarchists—he continued to celebrate and support innovative art and literature. His anonymous, slang-filled journalism for the anarchist *Le Père Peinard* included praise for the anarchist import of Charles Angrand's drawings and Toulouse-Lautrec's posters (99–100). Though this kind of activism ended with Fénéon's arrest, Leighton sees in his ongoing support of artistic freedom and avant-garde artists, including anarchists like Kees van Dongen, the political coherence of his diverse activities even after the Trial of the Thirty. Her essay nevertheless ends with something of a paradox, as it reinforces the very division between art and action that artists like Signac refused to countenance: "Though [Fénéon] engaged in direct action for a time in the early 1890s, he made a larger contribution in the cultural arena, where his powerful voice and example both legitimized and influenced avant-gardists from the 1880s well into the 1920s" (104). As several scholars in this catalogue suggest (23, 37), and as I have found in my own research, Signac and other figures considered their works to be harmonious and/or disruptive "deeds" (i.e. actions); Fénéon himself compared posters' "flamboyant" colors to dynamite, even if his later endorsement of terrorist violence (see 104) suggests that he did not consider all anarchist activity equally powerful.^[10] Are we to take the artists' equation of artistic and explosive action seriously, or to consider it merely a provocative analogy? Prior to reading this catalogue, I might have said that Signac was fully convinced of the status of his works as anarchist deeds, but that Fénéon was unwilling to rely upon it. Yet if we are to reconcile his political convictions with his activity as a collector and, especially, as an art dealer, it seems that Fénéon's conception of art may have been even more aligned with that of Signac than was previously apparent.

It is this activity as an art dealer and collector that is the focus of the catalogue's subsequent sections, in which the possible political implications of Fénéon's work largely recedes into the background. Commencing after a few pages of examples taken from Fénéon's brief stint condensing sensationalist *fait-divers* into "News in Three Lines," the section on "Fénéon and Modern Art" addresses his role in the internationalization of the market for these works. In her account of Fénéon's position as a dealer of contemporary art and then artistic director at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune (the professional role, facilitated by the Natansons, that he eventually embraced after financial pressures put an end to *La Revue blanche*), Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel argues for the significance of this relatively unexamined facet of Fénéon's career, to which he brought certain advantages. Fénéon's previous role as an art critic, which had been separate from his job as a civil servant, distinguished him from more evidently commercial gallerists like Eugène Druet (140), and he was able to draw on the work of his

Neo-Impressionist friends and that of the Nabis, in whom the Bernheim brothers had already established an interest. At this point in time, these movements appeared in a less radical light, which enabled Fénéon to take on a riskier venture: the support of Matisse and the Fauves. Joyeux-Prunel's analysis of the competition between Fénéon and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, in which the former monopolized Matisse and many of the Fauves while the latter consolidated his hold on Picasso and the other Cubists, suggests that the dealers' actions were an important factor in the division of the avant-garde into (in Gertrude Stein's words) "the Picassos and the Matisseites" (142). Many of the strategies employed by Fénéon to ensure the success of the gallery and its coterie of artists will sound familiar from studies and exhibitions devoted to art dealers such as Paul Durand-Ruel. They include employing contracts to specialize in and monopolize certain artistic movements; cultivating a growing network

of collectors and leveraging their established interests to promote new movements/investments (Joyeux-Prunel highlights Fénéon's work with German collectors, notably the Count Kessler and the Baron Eberhard von Bodenhause); marketing different types of artworks from the same artists to different regions/publics; and, in an international context of increasing nationalism, presenting artworks and artistic movements in such a way as to ward off xenophobic reactions. The international scope of the market cultivated by Fénéon, along with the near-monopoly he had established on the increasingly popular Fauvist painting, enabled the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune to weather World War I and prosper in its wake. In the face of the challenges posed by newer avant-garde movements like the Purists, Neo-Plasticists, or Dada, Fénéon also introduced a new arm to his arsenal: a journal, *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*, that would address art world news while promoting the gallery's interests. Like Fénéon himself, the publication (which first appeared in 1919) allowed the gallery to situate key elements of its activities—in this case, the circulation of information about its holdings and the cultivation of collectors—in a connoisseurial rather than commercial light. A subsequent essay by Claudine Grammont on Fénéon's management of Matisse at Bernheim-Jeune provides additional insight into the workings of the gallery. The price of Matisse's works was based on their size, and only the following works were exempted from his exclusive contract: portraits and large-scale, site-specific decorations. Exhibitions were deployed to establish Matisse's reputation and (when constituted by artworks that had already been sold) suggest scarce availability. Fénéon preferred to leave potential buyers to contemplate the artworks rather than supply them with his own musings. He also showed his conviction in Matisse's work by acquiring several of his artworks for his own collection.

Despite the need for Fénéon to carefully manage the reception of Matisse and the Fauvists, Joyeux-Prunel emphasizes the relatively safe character of the modern and contemporary art championed by Fénéon in this period. Figura examines the exception to this conservative approach in a short essay on the Futurist Exhibition of 1912 and highlights the allure that the Futurists must have held for Fénéon, thanks to their revolutionary, anti-museal stance, their ties with Symbolism and (through Italian Divisionism) Neo-Impressionism, and the challenge that they posed to Kahnweiler's Cubists (whom the Futurists admired but critiqued for their static work). The well-attended exhibition, despite the negative press coverage of the Futurists as second-rate Cubists, was the high point of the movement, and established its place in modern art. I recall the Futurist works as a high point of the 2019–20 exhibition at the Musée de l'Orangerie (and they may have had a similar impact at MoMA), not only due to the abrupt change of color palette and scale they offered, but above all for the unexpected juxtaposition of this work with that of the Neo-Impressionists, the Nabis, and

Matisse—movements and artists associated with the earlier, more well-known period of Fénéon's career. Fénéon's impact on the reception of modern art continued even after his retirement from the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, as indicated by Megan Fontanella's discussion of his role in the constitution of the Guggenheim Collection (in the final essay of this section). Hilla Rebay, who convinced Solomon R. Guggenheim to collect contemporary, modernist art and then assisted him in doing so, had already been initiated into the Parisian art world by Fénéon himself, and he advised her and supported her in this new curatorial effort. He also sold Guggenheim twenty paintings and drawings from his own collection, which ensured a place for works by Seurat and other artists in the collection and eventual museum.

The final section of the catalogue, "Fénéon and 'Arts from Remote Places,'" focuses on his collection of art from Africa and, to a lesser extent, Oceania, along with a certain number of items from indigenous cultures of the Americas.^[11] By some accounts, Fénéon may have begun collecting art from these regions as early as 1905 (which would make him one of the earliest collectors to do so), though firm evidence only exists for a later period, which would situate it in a broader vogue for, in Fénéon's terms, these "arts from remote places." A longer essay by Peltier, the curator of the iteration of the exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly, outlines this interest on the part of French society, as well as its connection to an earlier fascination with Asian, particularly Japanese, art. He suggests that Fénéon would have been predisposed to art from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas by the anarchist critique of colonialism (including in *La Revue blanche*) and anarchism's search for models appropriate to the utopian societies it envisioned. By 1923, the year of a key exhibition of indigenous art from the French colonies (as well as the Belgian Congo) in Africa and Oceania at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Fénéon was in a position to loan almost as many objects as Paul Guillaume, better known than Fénéon for the valorization of the art of these regions. Based on the objects in Fénéon's collection, and descriptions taken from a catalogue of the collection that he appears to have produced in the early 1930s, Peltier highlights Fénéon's interest in the psychological and sexually suggestive properties of the objects' subject matter (in which facial expressions often played a prominent role) and formal characteristics, and aligns his descriptions with other examples of his "epigrammatic" writing (193).^[12] After the creation of this unpublished catalogue, there seem to have been no new additions to the collection, and Fénéon's activity in this area was confined to loans or images of the artworks for various publications.

I would have loved to hear more about Fénéon's loan of artworks to the Surrealists's 1931 anticolonial exhibition (mentioned by Peltier on page 192); but we do get (appropriately for the venue) an essay by Yaëlle Biro, Léa Saint-Raymond, and Élodie Vaudry on Fénéon's loans to MoMA's 1935 exhibition of "African Negro Art" (the final essay of this section, and of the exhibition catalogue, and exclusive to MoMA's publication). I was particularly intrigued by the mention that the curator of this exhibition, James Johnson Sweeney, had selected "classic" examples of African art from Fénéon's collection rather than any of the weapons, musical instruments, or other, more evidently functional objects that it also contained (202). It seems a curious choice (conscious or otherwise) for an institution that had exhibited propellers and other machine parts the previous year in the 1934 "Machine Art" exhibition, and no doubt indicates the understanding of such items as modern in contrast to the supposedly "traditional" design of practical African objects. It is more surprising to find this distinction implicitly retained by the organization of the catalogue for this 2020–21 exhibition, as suggested by the section titles.^[13]

In addition to collecting art from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, Fénéon arranged for coverage of the subject in *Le Bulletin de la vie artistique*. This coverage included a 1920 survey (a common journalistic genre in this period) on whether these “arts from remote places” would be admitted into the Louvre that is analyzed in a short essay by Cécile Bargues. Though some of the survey’s respondents saw the peoples and art of these regions as “primitive” and perpetually inferior to that of Europeans, most inverted this hierarchy, and the artist Lucie Cousturier insisted that the Louvre would find such art to be its “essence” rather than a mere complement to its current holdings (198).^[14] Bargues also highlights the willfully provocative character of the question: though Paul Guillaume had exhibited sculptures from these regions as artworks rather than ethnographic objects in 1916, the Louvre had in fact removed items of this kind from its collection based on the notion that they were of ethnographic rather than artistic value (a gradual process launched by Jules Ferry in the context of France’s colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century). Some of them were transferred to the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, the location of Picasso’s (in)famous encounter with African masks and other artworks. It was not until 2000 that the Louvre devoted space (the Pavillon des Sessions) to the arts of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, albeit as the kind of complement dismissed by Cousturier. This addition is now described on the Musée du Quai Branly’s website as a “permanent embassy” between the two institutions.^[15]

Overall, the essays that address Fénéon’s engagement with “*les arts lointains*” continue the previous section’s focus on reconstructing the exchanges and market forces that shaped perceptions of the art of the European avant-garde and of the regions of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. I was nevertheless surprised not to see some discussion of the critiques that were already leveled at the Museum of Modern Art over William H. Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe’s 1984–85 exhibition “‘Primitivism’ in 20th-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern.” At the time, scholars highlighted the danger of reinscribing the colonial effacement of non-European artistic practices by celebrating the capacity of their “modernist” forms to transcend their cultures of origin, as well as of using them to gild the reputations of canonical figures.^[16] I cannot speak with any precision to the presentation of the artworks from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas in the recent exhibition, but photographs of its installation suggest that they featured primarily as aesthetic objects that rhymed, but were distinguished from, the European artworks on display: with a few exceptions, they appear to have been presented on isolated pedestals within the exhibition space; in contrast, the other artworks in the exhibition lined or hung on the walls, and were more frequently accompanied by contextualizing elements (figs. 2, 3, 4).^[17] While the Musée du Quai Branly intermingled these works (which constituted the majority of that exhibition) to a greater degree with examples from Europe, I was still struck by the paucity of information provided for them in that exhibition, especially in contrast to the wealth of material on Fénéon.^[18] This disparity is not remediated in either the French or the American catalogue,^[19] nor is there any mention of the pitfalls or the potential benefits of situating “*les arts lointains*” within the parameters defined by Fénéon and his contemporaries, who generally possessed very limited knowledge of these artworks’ original context and function: though further research may shift this picture, Fénéon’s catalogue entries suggest that he approached these artworks as manifestations of the concerns, including “scientific” theories of expression, that preoccupied the European avant-garde. The failure to address

the issues raised by this highly partial viewpoint has the effect of reproducing rather than questioning the unequal relationships established in the context of European colonialism.

Fig. 2, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[larger image\]](#)

Fig. 3, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[larger image\]](#)

Fig. 4, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[larger image\]](#)

In concluding this review, I want to highlight how much I appreciated the way in which this trio of exhibitions, and MoMA's accompanying catalogue, decentered art history's traditional emphasis on canonical artists and movements. By shifting the focus to Fénéon and exploring his entire, multi-faceted career, they provide a different, illuminating view into the inner workings of the Parisian art world in this period. Overall, the catalogue offers a stimulating introduction to Fénéon and his significance for modern art, and its various essays (like the detailed chronology included in the MoMA catalogue) open up a number of compelling avenues for further research, especially in terms of the international art market for both the European avant-garde and the artworks made available by colonial expansion. It also seems that there may be more to be gleaned about the political implications of Fénéon's activities as an art dealer and collector, given his loans to the Surrealists and his apparent desire (perhaps stifled, Figura suggests, by André Gide's critical reporting on the U.S.S.R. and the 1939 German-Soviet pact) to donate his collection to the Russian people (28). However, even in the context of this focus on Fénéon, I would have liked to see the catalogue do more to decenter European modernism.^[20] What knowledge has been gained about the works in Fénéon's collection of "art from remote places" since the time of their acquisition and/or the 1947 sale? What networks facilitated their arrival in France? What traces do we have of the reception of such collections by members of the indigenous cultures colonized by the French? If few are to be found, are there other ways to redress this imbalance?^[21] In other words, what voices might be recuperated alongside that of Fénéon? Judging from the "portrait" of Fénéon presented in this catalogue, he would have been more than happy to efface himself to leave room for such decentering perspectives.

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Notes

[1] In her biography of Fénéon, Joan Halperin suggested that the critic was in fact responsible for the bombing of the Café Foyot, part of a wave of anarchist terrorism that led to the Trial of the Thirty. This claim, which she repeats in the catalogue (15), has been challenged by Philippe Oriol, among others. Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon: Aesthete and Anarchist in Fin-De-Siècle Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 275–76; and Philippe Oriol, *À propos de l'attentat Foyot: Quelques questions et quelques tentatives de réponses* (Paris: Éd. du Fourneau, 1993).

[2] Isabelle Cahn and Philippe Peltier, eds., *Félix Fénéon: Critique, collectionneur, anarchiste*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2019).

[3] See note 1, as well as Joan U. Halperin, *Félix Fénéon and the Language of Art Criticism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); and Félix Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1970).

[4] The importance of Halperin's scholarship (along with that of Jean Paulhan) for the current knowledge and understanding of Fénéon is addressed at the end of a detailed account of Fénéon's life and legacy included only in the French exhibition catalogue. Claire Paulhan, "Histoire vraie," in Cahn and Peltier, *Félix Fénéon*, 38–55.

[5] When not publishing anonymously or under an array of pseudonyms, Fénéon sometimes used the byline "F.F."

[6] Fénéon reportedly destroyed his private papers at the end of his life (28–29).

[7] A short essay from the French exhibition catalogue on the Neo-Impressionist artist Henri-Edmond Cross is not included in MoMA's catalogue. Marina Feretti Bocquillon, "Une vive, violente et juste préférence pour l'art d'Henri-Edmond Cross," in Cahn and Peltier, *Félix Fénéon*, 133–35.

[8] The French exhibition catalogue includes two additional essays on Fénéon as a writer and editor, one focused on his overall activity in the so-called *petites revues* (little reviews), and another (brief) text on *La Revue blanche*. Éric Dussert and Philippe Oriol, "Écrivain à façon," and Pamela A. Genova, "La Revue blanche et l'énigmatique 'F.F.," in Cahn and Peltier, *Félix Fénéon*, 137–49 and 153–55.

[9] A function fulfilled (albeit for a shorter time span) by the following brief text by John Merriman in the French catalogue: "L'anarchisme dans les années 1890," in Cahn and Peltier, *Félix Fénéon*, 83–86.

[10] I analyze the debates over the value of propaganda by the deed (associated with anarchist terror but also, through a discourse of emotion, with art) and theoretical propaganda, as well as Signac's attempt to synthesize emotion and reason in certain key works, in Katherine Brion, "Paul Signac's Decorative Propaganda of the 1890s," Special Issue "New Directions in Neo-Impressionism," *RIHA Journal* (July 2012), <https://doi.org/10.11588/riha.2012.1.69909>. Readers interested in the implications of anarchist thought and terrorism for art in this period should also consult (in addition to the works already cited in Leighton's bibliography) Tania Woloshyn and Fae Brauer's articles in the same special issue of *RIHA Journal*, as well as Howard G. Lay, "'Beau geste!' (On the Readability of Terrorism)," *Yale French Studies*, no. 101 (2001): 79–100, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090607>; and Richard Thomson, "Ruins, Rhetoric and Revolution: Paul Signac's *Le Démolisseur* and Anarchism in the 1890s," *Art History* 36, no. 2 (2013): 366–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12005>. For Fénéon's remark, see "Chez les barbouilleurs: Les affiches en couleur," *Le Père peignard*, April 30, 1893, reproduced in Félix Fénéon, *Œuvres plus que complètes: Chroniques d'Art*, ed. Joan U. Halperin, vol. 1 of 2 (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1970), 230.

[11] A zoomorphic container of the Kwakwaka'wakw, for example, was featured on the cover of the 1947 catalogue of the auction in which this portion of Fénéon's collection was dispersed after his death (see fig. 72 and, for the container, plate 92). This container was also on display in the exhibition.

[12] Currently, the only traces that remain of these catalogue entries are descriptions Fénéon associated with his loan of objects (for example, to the MoMA (2021)), and which were also used in the 1947 auction catalogue for the collection.

[13] It also would have been interesting to put the analysis of this exhibition, and this distinction, in dialogue with Bridget R. Cooks's examination of the historical framing of the work of African American artists in terms of mutually exclusive paradigms of anthropological or aesthetic value, including at the Museum of Modern Art. Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

[14] The French catalogue contains an additional essay focused on Cousturier's connection to Fénéon and her own engagement with the art of Africa, catalyzed by relationships established with colonial troops from Senegal stationed near her home during World War I. Adèle de Lanfranchi, "Lucie Cousturier et Fénéon, l'art au cœur de l'amitié," in Cahn and Peltier, *Félix Fénéon*, 265–69. The French catalogue also includes another, page-long text by Peltier evoking the 1947 dispersion at auction of Fénéon's collection, and the difficulties of reconstituting the entirety of its contents.

[15] Musée du Quai Branly, "Pavillon des Sessions," accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.quaibranly.fr/en/collections/all-collections/pavillon-des-sessions/>.

[16] See a recent evocation of the critiques inspired by this exhibition in Jonathan Hay, "Primitivism reconsidered (Part 1): A question of attitude," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (2017): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1086/693994>.

[17] The Museum of Modern Art, "Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond | MoMA," accessed January 18, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5075>. These installation decisions are obviously driven in part by medium, but that does not change their effect. By contextualizing elements, I mean items such as photographs, sketches, or letters; the object labels appear to be comparable in length.

[18] I found the approach to be quite similar in the Musée du Quai Branly's 2017 "Picasso Primitif" exhibition, which had unearthed a great deal of new information about Picasso and his contemporaries' contact with the art of Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and Asia, but

provided frustratingly little about the objects from those regions on display in the exhibition. To be fair, other exhibitions at the institution do a lot to address such imbalances.

[19] The essay on Lucie Cousturier in the French catalogue (see note 14), like the inclusion in both the exhibition and catalogue of her watercolors of Senegalese soldiers dressed in contemporary clothing, did something to remediate this effacement, but still focused on Cousturier's perspective rather than that of the depicted subjects.

[20] Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48.

[21] Museums have increasingly turned to contemporary artists, especially artists with some kind of connection to the displayed artworks, to find means of decentering Eurocentric narratives.

Illustrations

Fig. 1, Paul Signac, *Opus 217. Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890*, 1890. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Rockefeller, 1991. Photo by Paige Knight. © 2019 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)

Fig. 2, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[return to text\]](#)

Fig. 3, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[return to text\]](#)

Fig. 4, Installation view of *Félix Fénéon: The Anarchist and the Avant-Garde—From Signac to Matisse and Beyond*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, August 27, 2020–January 2, 2021. Digital Image © 2020 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Robert Gerhardt. [\[return to text\]](#)