

LE CHAT NOIR CABARET

In 1880 Georges Fragerolle—composer, Bon Bocker, Hydropathe, and future participant in the Incohérent and Chat Noir activities—defined *fumisme*. It

is to humor what the operetta is to comic opera, satire to caricature, prunes to Hunyadi-Janos water. . . . In order to be considered a wit, sometimes you need only be an ass in a lion's skin; to be a good *fumiste*, it is often absolutely necessary to be a lion in the skin of an ass. In the former case the effect is direct, in the latter it is once, twice, often ten times removed.¹⁹

In theory, *fumisme* was not a quick laugh, nor was it always obvious. A *fumiste* did not rely for self-satisfaction on an audience's response to his actions; rather, *fumisme* was a way of life, an art form that rested on skepticism and humor, of which the latter was often a black variety verging on the morbid and the macabre. As Fragerolle stated, *fumisme* “made art for art's sake” (*fait de l'art pour l'art*). *Fumisme* had no social or humanitarian agenda; in fact, *fumisme* was, if anything, politically incorrect, to use a modern term. Its only goal was to “couper le ciel de prud'homme sous lequel nous vivons” (cut open the smug sky under which we live). In other words, the function of *fumistes* was to counteract the pomposity and hypocrisy they perceived as characterizing so much of society.

Significantly, Fragerolle named Sapeck and Allais as the Hydropathes who were the two leaders of *fumisme*'s “scientific-philosophical” formula: “La philosophie c'est Sapeck, la science c'est Alphonse Allais. L'un plus dandy, l'autre plus chimiste” (Philosophy is Sapeck, science is Alphonse Allais. One is more the dandy, the other more the chemist). Therefore, seven years before the publication of Sapeck's visual parody on the Mona Lisa [Fig. 174] and three years before Allais's first official participation with the Incohérents, their positions as the leaders of *fumisme* were secure.

Goudeau stated in *Dix Ans de Bobème* that *fumisme* was the philosophy behind the creation of the Hydropathes in the fall of 1878.²⁰ Three years later, he reorganized the Hydropathes and was behind the renaming of the group as the Hirsutes. Early in 1882 Jules Lévy attempted to create a group called the Décadents; it foundered, and, as we have seen, the Incohérents were born a few months later. Charles Cros's Zutistes, George Auriol's Nous Autres, and Les Jeunes, all of 1883, and Les Jemenfoutistes of 1884 were other short-lived literary-artistic societies organized along the lines of the original Hydropathes to meet and perform within a Left Bank café environment.²¹ It was, however, the Chat Noir cabaret in Montmartre [Fig. 19], founded by Rodolphe Salis in November 1881, and Lévy's Incohérents that carried on the *fumiste* agenda of Goudeau's Hydropathes and that simultaneously shared many of the same participants.

According to Goudeau, he first encountered Salis at the Cabaret de la Grande Pinte:

One evening I climbed gloomily up the hilly rue des Martyrs on my way to the Grand Pinte cabaret, where I was hoping to recover my peace of

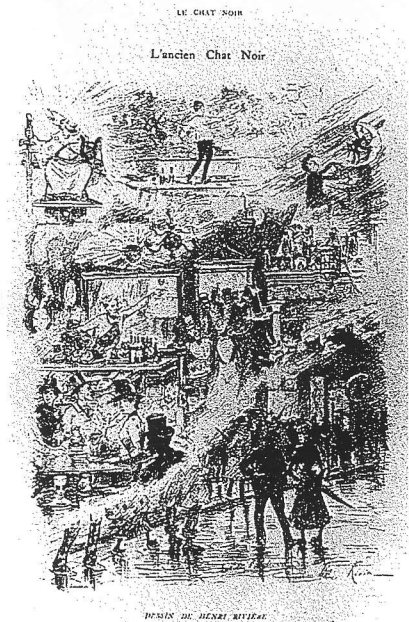


Fig. 19.
Henri Rivière, “L'Ancien Chat noir,”
photo-relief illustration for *Le Chat noir*,
13 June 1885. Schimmel Fund.



Fig. 20. Uzès, "Rodolphe Salis," photo-relief illustration for *Le Chat noir*, 24 November 1883. Schimmel Fund.

mind somewhat by chatting with Manet, Desboutsins, and others. Several minutes after I had sat down, a cheerful bunch entered. They were Montmartre Hydropathes: the painter René Gilbert, the giant Parizel, this person, that person. They sat down near me. Suddenly, pointing out a sturdy, tawny blond young fellow who was with them, Gilbert said to me, "Do you know Rodolphe Salis?"

"No," I answered. "You never came to Hydropathe meetings."

"Never," the blond man answered. "I was painting in Cernay, far from the noise of the city."

And then he added, "I'm founding an artists' cabaret at 84, boulevard Rochechouart. Would you like to come to the opening dinner?"

"I'd be glad to," I said.

That's how I got to know Rodolphe Salis.²²

The alliance of Salis [Fig. 20] and Goudeau at the Chat Noir initiated the full-fledged migration of the Hydropathes from the Left Bank to Montmartre; the literary soirées of the Latin Quarter were soon replaced by the *matinées littéraires* of the Chat Noir. Salis's cabaret soon became "absolument comme aux hydropathes, un mélange—sans doctrine—de gaîté et de sérieux"²³ (absolutely as in the days of the Hydropathes, a mixture of fun and seriousness without doctrine). Within a month of the cabaret's inauguration, Salis founded *Le Chat noir* journal, with Goudeau as its editor in chief. While the purpose of *L'Hydropathe* was to promote itself and its individual members, the strategy adopted by *Le Chat noir* for a similar purpose was far more aggressive and expansive. Immediately, in its first issue of 14 January 1882, a full-page illustration by Salis [Fig. 21] demonstrates the kind of *fumiste* bravado propaganda that would be his standard means of selling the Chat Noir and Montmartre for the subsequent fifteen years: "Ne bougeons plus! Tout le monde y passera" (Freeze! Everyone will have to go through it [Montmartre]). With the Moulin de la Galette in the background representing Montmartre, a black cat, symbolizing both the cabaret and its journal, takes photographs as all the strange creatures of the world pass by. The implication is obvious; according to Salis, the Chat Noir is the center of the universe. This *fumisterie* is echoed in the same issue's front-page article:

It is high time to correct an error that has weighed on more than sixty whole generations We read in Genesis that Noah's Ark dropped anchor on Mount Ararat.

Mount Ararat, what can that mean?

Read: Montmartre! So Montmartre is the cradle of humanity.

I'll say more. Montmartre is a breast. Let me explain.

Two large streams rise in the flanks of this sacred mountain and proceed to form a large river called the Seine So Montmartre is the center of the world.²⁴

Salis's illustration refers directly to Gill's painting *Au Lapin Agile*: Salis's cat has the same pose as Gill's rabbit, and the Moulin de la Galette has the same location and

function in both images. Significantly, the camera replaces Gill's saucepan. For Salis, photography or, rather, the new technology of photomechanical printing is the means by which the Chat Noir communicates with its audience and is able to proclaim its audacious program. Salis's incorporation of readily recognizable visual references to Gill within the inaugural issue of *Le Chat noir* not only pays homage to the much-admired satirist but also helps to set the parodical tone of the new journal. The implication is also that Gill, the rabbit, has been replaced by Salis, the black cat, and that the cabaret Lapin Agile has been replaced by the Chat Noir cabaret.²⁵

Billed as the "cabaret Louis XIII, Fondé par un fumiste" (a Louis XIII-style cabaret, founded by a *fumiste*), the first Chat Noir opened in November 1881 and was located at 84, boulevard Rochechouart, in an old post office. In renovating the building, Salis participated in the growing popular practice in Paris of referring back to medieval or Renaissance France for architectural inspiration, typified, for instance, in the cabaret Grande Pinte's Rabelais-period interior. At the Chat Noir, "des chaises rustiques, des bancs et des tables en bois massif, un vitrail enluminé, une haute cheminée, quelques armures anciennes, de luisantes pièces de dinaderie, constituaient l'établissement Louis XIII"²⁶ (rustic chairs, benches, and tables in solid wood, an illuminated stained-glass window, a large fireplace, some ancient armor, and glowing brass and copperware made up the Louis XIII establishment). For the interior, Eugène Grasset designed iron chandeliers; Willette was responsible for the design of the cabaret's distinctive exterior sign: a black cat on a crescent moon [Fig. 39]. The cabaret was quite small. Its two narrow rooms, one behind the other, together barely

Fig. 21.
Rodolphe Salis, "Ne bougeons plus! Tout le monde y passera" (Freeze! Everyone will have to go through it [Montmartre]), photo-relief illustration for *Le Chat noir*, 14 January 1882. Schimmel Fund.



PREMIERE ANNEE. — N° 12. LE NUMERO 16 CENTIMES. SAMEDI 1^{er} AVRIL 1882.

CHAT NOIR

REDACTEUR EN CHEF: HENRI GOUDEAU
 PROPRIETAIRES: HENRI GOUDEAU, JULES LAFOND
 DIRECTEURS: HENRI GOUDEAU, JULES LAFOND
 ADMINISTRATION: 11, RUE DE LA HARPE, PARIS

PARAISANT LE SAMEDI.

L'ASSAUT DE MONTMARTRE

Aujourd'hui, 1^{er} avril, à quatre heures pour le quart de nuit, nos bataillons d'assaut s'en sont allés contre Montmartre. Au moment de pousser les deux colonnes, Léon Gambetta, à la tête des troupes de la Chambre d'Italie, se précipita dans le pays Montmartrois par les rues Laperle, Goussier et Bonaparte. Les officiers furent par là même: le Maréchal de la Goulette et de la Roche, le colonel de Saint-Cyr, les capitaines de la rue de la Harpe, les sous-officiers d'assaut et les soldats de la rue de la Harpe, malgré les protestations de M. de Freycinet, qui a immédiatement mobilisé l'armée française. Cette armée se composa de nos bataillons d'assaut. Elle fut commandée en chef par l'illustre général Langlois (de Sedan-Guise). Le général Langlois se mit à l'œuvre. L'armée de Montmartre opéra sa jonction avec les divisions parisiennes par les places Pigalle et Blanche, en même temps, les batteries de Moutin encadrèrent la cavalerie ennemie, commandée par 3000.

Officiers, sergents-officiers et soldats. Du 1^{er} Avril 1882. 50 heures matin.

La patrie Montmartroise n'est pas en danger, elle est tout simplement menacée. Les supplices de la tyrannie virent à se lever dans les rues nos bataillons d'assaut.

Haut!
 La rigueur, l'efficacité des manœuvres des bataillons de la montagne des Martyrs ont les garanties des futures victoires de nos armées. Le général en chef de l'armée française est le général Langlois, avec, sous ses ordres, les bataillons d'assaut.

ORDRE DE MOBILISATION

PLACE DE MONTMARTRE
 4^h Avril. 50 heures, pour la démission.

Que par conséquent les hommes généralement exceptés d'appartenir à une classe à peu près quelconque mais compris dans les territoires d'assaut qui se sont à peu près complètement évacués.

On ne se rendra à leur destination sans emprunter le secours des chemins de fer.

Que toutes les voies de fer, les gares littorales ainsi que les halles et les marchés qui leur sont rattachés.

Sont sous le contrôle des hommes des 17^{es}, 21^{es} et 67^{es} Régiments de la classe 1880, les permissions de démission et les permissions de la section, en ce qui concerne leurs indults.

F. O. de la Place
 Le chef d'assaut général
 GOUDEAU

DERNIERES NOUVELLES

Une troupe montmartroise a été mise en état de marche, près de la Gare d'Orléans. L'armée de Montmartre, plus un bataillon d'assaut républicain.

L'armée de Montmartre est arrivée. Elle va prendre le commandement de la ville de Montmartre.

On a vu les bataillons de France se mobiliser dans les temps anciens.

Paris, samedi 1^{er} avril.

Fig. 22.
Le Chat noir, 1 April 1882.
 Schimmel Fund.

held thirty people. At the beginning, the dimly lit, uninspiring rear room attracted few customers. Salis solved this problem in a *fumiste* manner while simultaneously creating a parody on the French Academy's home on the Left Bank by naming the dingy back space the Institut, which from then on was reserved solely for the privileged artistic, literary, and musical habitués of the Chat Noir. *Le Chat noir* of 8 April 1882 bragged:

The Chat Noir is the most extraordinary cabaret in the world. You rub shoulders with the most famous men of Paris, meeting there with foreigners from every corner of the globe. Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Barbey d'Aurevilly, the inseparable Mr. Brisson, and the austere Gambetta talk buddy-to-buddy with Messrs. Gaston Vassy and Gustave Rothschild. People hurry in, people crowd in. It's the greatest success of the age! Come on in!! Come on in!!

The front room served the cabaret's less-illustrious clientele. This system of segregation and snobbism heightened the public appeal of the cabaret. Then, by overcoming an old government statute, Salis was allowed to have a piano in the Chat Noir—a very important victory within the history of cabaret

entertainment music and song were now added to the spoken repertoire of poetry and verse within the Institut Salis's impresario skills, combined with the vigorous, exaggerated promotion of the cabaret in *Le Chat noir* – “Since its founding by Julius Caesar for the vigorous artists of our time, the Chat Noir cabaret has not ceased to be the obligatory meeting place for everyone who is seriously a lover of art”²⁷ – created a self-fulfilling situation

The elite of artistic and literary Paris came to listen to these poems and these songs. Emile Zola, Francisque Sarcey, Jules Vallès, Félicien Rops, Henri Pille, Desbouts, Jules Claretie, Alphonse Daudet, Clovis Hugues, Paul Ginisty, Paul Alexis, and Rochegrosse could be seen at the Chat Noir. The Chat Noir vogue quickly spread to high society, and the cabaret soon became a fashionable place. Friday was the “night” devoted more particularly to literary meetings at which guests from the noble suburb arrived in fancy coupés and were welcomed by Salis with an extravagant eloquence drawn from a wide variety of sources. Montmartre, previously merely an outlying district like Belleville and Ménilmontant, suddenly became a famous center of artistic activity.²⁸

Led by Salis and Goudeau, the cabaret's journal promoted with political spoofs the fantasy of a Montmartre centrism. The *fumiste* headline of the 1 April 1882 issue [Fig. 22] announced the fictitious “assaut de Montmartre” (siege of Montmartre) by Léon Gambetta, the Republican hero of the siege of Paris and the Paris Commune of 1870–71. Six months later, the 28 October issue is an “appel aux armes” (call to arms) by Salis against the “coup d'état du 2 Novembre 1882” by President Jules Grévy, which *Le Chat noir* inexplicably reports in full detail five days in advance. The article must have easily brought to mind President Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état of 1852, which resulted in his almost twenty-year reign as Emperor Napoléon III. The threat of a one-man dictatorship in France was certainly not out of the question in the early 1880s, yet Salis's cry of “vive l'anarchie” (long live anarchy!) within this farcical script of Parisian, bourgeois, political upheaval was probably just as disconcerting to the average Republican whose bitter memories of the Paris Commune were still fresh. The antibourgeois premise and the theatricality of this political spoof predicts Jarry's more universal approach to the theme in *Ubu Roi*. Indeed, the editors of *Le Chat noir* used qualities of the absurd and parody to put the establishment–political, social, or artistic–on edge, part of this *fumiste* process was also the promotion of itself and the Montmartre artistic community as the one true, regenerative force in French culture.

The blood that reddens the gutters of boulevard Rochechouart cries out for vengeance. *Le Chat noir*, still being printed clandestinely, in an untraceable hideout, calls upon all true Republicans, all true Frenchmen:

Our supremacy in the arts, humanities, and science is at stake!
Our honor is at stake!

MONIMARIRI, VENGEANCE!²⁹

ELECTIONS MUNICIPALES DU 4 MAI 1884
 XVIII^e Arrondissement — Quartier Montmartre

ELECTEURS

Qu'est-ce que Montmartre? — Rien!
 Que doit-il être? — Tout!
 Le jour est venu pour Montmartre peut et doit revendiquer ses droits d'autonomie, contre le restant de Paris.
 En effet, dans sa fréquentation avec ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler la capitale, Montmartre n'a rien à gagner que des charges et des humiliations.
 Montmartre est assez riche de bon sens, d'art et d'esprit pour vivre de sa vie propre. Electeurs!

Il n'y a pas d'erreur!
 Faisons chaque au vent de l'indépendance le noble drapeau de Montmartre.
 .. La Bulle, cette mamelle où s'allaitent la fantaisie, la science et tous les Arts vraiment Français, avait déjà son organe "Le Chat Noir". A partir d'aujourd'hui, elle doit avoir son représentant, un représentant digne de ce nom.
 Rodolphe SALIS, qui, depuis trois ans dirige avec l'assiduité que l'on sait, le Journal qui est la joie de Montmartre, nous a parti après cette mission.
 Montmartre mérite d'être mieux qu'un arrondissement.
 Il doit être une cité libre et fière.
 Aussi notre programme sera-t-il court et simple:

- 1- La séparation de Montmartre et de l'ÉGA;
- 2- La nomination par les Montmartrois d'un Conseil Municipal et d'un Maire de la Cité Nouvelle;
- 3- L'abéliation de l'octroi pour l'Arrondissement et le remplacement de cette taxe venale par un impôt sur la Lingerie, réorganisée sous la égie de Montmartre, qui permettrait à notre quartier de subvenir à ses besoins et d'aider les dix-neuf arrondissements mercantiles et misérables de Paris;
- 4- La protection de l'alimentation publique. La protection des ouvriers nationaux.

LE COMITÉ

WILLETTTE (Pierrot), 30, rue Yvrea. POUSSARDIN, P. La Courtois, 24, boulevard Rochechouart. CHOUERRIQUE, rue Rampey, 34. LEFÈVRE, rue Rampey, 54. MARION, 24, rue Leprieux. MARCEL-LEGAY, 23, boulevard de Clugny. GERAULT-RICHARD, 44, rue des Abbesses. DE SIVRY, 27, rue des Martyrs.	P. CATELAIN, 27, rue de Robinson. LARDON, 22, rue des Martyrs. OQUELIN (cadet), 24, boulevard Rochechouart. JEAN SOUY, id. id. ALBERT ALLAIS, id. id. LÉON BLOY, id. id. C. LEROY, homme de lettres, 25, boulevard Barbès. <small>Et si Approuvé! Bonnes SALIS.</small>
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ELECTEURS.
 Ce programme sera défendu avec une énergie farouche. — Je suis de ceux qui meurent plutôt que de se rendre.
 Si je descends dans l'arène vous jugerez si ma devise, **SÉRIEUX QUAND MÊME**, est justifiée.
 Electeurs, pas d'abstention. La postérité nous attend.

Vive Montmartre!

RODOLPHE SALIS

21, Boulevard Rochechouart.
 Candidat des Revendications Littéraires, Artistiques et Sociales.

Fig. 23.
 Rodolphe Salis's notice for the Montmartre municipal election, 1884, 61.7 x 42.6. Morse Fund.

Salis's political-artistic philosophy became fully codified and publicly announced by the spring of 1884 in which he ran (and lost) as a candidate from the eighteenth arrondissement (Montmartre) in that year's municipal elections [Fig. 23]. As "the candidate of literary, artistic, and social demands," Salis's platform was essentially the official separation and independence of Montmartre from the city of Paris. While there may have been a degree of serious expectation on Salis's part in regard to his candidacy, it is exactly on this kind of ambiguity between *fumiste* joke and seriousness that he and his associates played.

For readers not clued in to the antics and personalities of the Chat Noir group, it was, and is, difficult to decipher the distinctions within the articles of *Le Chat noir* between truth and farce, between reports of actual or fabricated events. The childlike tendencies of exaggerating, deceiving, and outright lying were aesthetic tools of the *fumistes*. Goudeau abruptly introduces these elements to the journal in the 22 April 1882 issue with the dramatic and elaborate announcement of Salis's premature death, which was for some readers so real that they appeared at the cabaret at the hour appointed to pay homage to him. *Le Chat noir* attributed Salis's death to his extreme state of depression caused by his belief that Zola had stolen his literary ideas and had published them as the realist novel *Pot-Bouille*.³⁰ Like Orson Welles's radio broad-

cast a half-century later describing Martians landing in New Jersey, this kind of literary joke verged on dangerous deception, as its ultimate success relied on the reactions of a gullible public.

Initially, *Le Chat noir* and its cabaret were closely associated with the members and activities of the Incohérents. The catalogue of Lévy's October Incohérent exhibition is actually a one-page, two-sided, large-format supplement to the 1 October 1882 issue of *Le Chat noir*, listing 159 of the exhibition's entries [Fig. 24]. This is the most complete record of Lévy's revolutionary first salon. Salis and Goudeau are listed among the exhibitors along with a description of their works, as are numerous other habitués of the Chat Noir such as Cabriol, François Coppée, Achille-Albert Mélandri, Monselet, Pille, the young Henri Rivière, Charles de Sivry, Somm, the illustrator Henri de Sta, and others. A week later, an article in the cabaret's journal, signed with the pseudonym "Constant Chanouard"—an obvious pun on "Chat Noir"—summed up the significance of this first formalized Incohérent exhibition and falsely credited the administration of the *Chat noir* with organizing the exhibition by naming Lévy as its agent:

In this highly progressive century in which all outmoded ideas have succumbed under the merciless hammer of powerful innovators, while political revolutions lit up the world with their lightning bolts, parallel literary revolutions were leading to brilliant triumphs, and Art took possession of itself.

What the Impressionists had attempted earlier, namely, the exact vision and rendering in the impossible tenuousness of values and color strokes, the Incohérents were to furnish to a crowd eager to study this essentially innovative form.

On Sunday, 1 October 1882—remember this memorable date—the *Chat noir*, in the person of Mr. Jules Lévy, authorized organizer, opened the door of a modest studio located at 4, rue Antoine-Dubois; and thanks to the magic wand of a powerful idea, thanks to the radiance that emanates from works of genius, for a few hours transformed this dwelling into a temple of Art, a solemn cathedral of the Future.

When incoherence finally triumphs over envy, people will say, That's where they were born.³¹

In addition to the art historically precocious relief painting by Ferdinandus, *Le Facteur rural* (The Rural Postman), one finds clearly described in the catalogue, or may decipher from it, other equally strident anomalies of art for that time. With tongue-in-cheek humor, the Incohérents explored various kinds of off-beat surfaces on which to paint: #5, Porcelain paste (Peinture à la barbotine), for *Assiettes anglaises* [English Plates], by René d'Alisy; #78, a skimmer (peinture sur écumoire), for *Portrait de M. Louis Veuillot*, by Edmé Langlois; #91, "Peinture exécutée sur la monture ordinaire d'une Sorcière de Walpurgis" (painting executed on the common mount of a Walpurgis witch), for *Trois Paysages et deux dames du corps de balai* (Three Landscapes and Two Ladies from the Corps de Ballet/Broom), by Paul l'Heureux; #101,

“Peinture sur pain de 4 livres” (painting on 4-pound bread), for *Duo de Sépyramides*, by G. Livet; and #152, on “cervelas à l’ail” (garlic sausage). Unusual mixed media include #104, “cire molle, drap, poil, bouton, émail, cuir, bois, carton” (soft wax, cloth, hair, button, enamel, leather, wood, cardboard); #98, “Terre non cuite mais peinte” (clay not baked but painted); and #71, “sculpture sur fromage” (sculpture on cheese).

There is even a group painting (#114, “Peinture collectiviste”) à la Surrealism by six Incohérents. The entry has the following annotation: “Le public s’expliquera l’incohérence de cette oeuvre quand il saura que les artistes qui l’ont peinte, n’ont pu, malgré leur union parfaite, arriver à tomber d’accord sur la composition de leur sujet” (The public will comprehend the incoherence of this work when it discovers that the artists who painted it could not, despite their perfect harmony, arrive at an agreement on the composition of their subject). The description of #159, *Le Poulet amoureux* (The Love Chicken/Letter), by Jules Thin, suggests that it may have been an abstract, gestural drawing because it was made by his foot in two seconds (dessin fait avec le pied en 2 secondes). Salis’s entry, *Le Jugement de Paris*, #140, which, based on tradition, one would assume depicted three nudes, is described lasciviously as a “licked painting” (peinture léchée). The title of #126 by Stany [*sic*] Oppenheim creates, apparently for the first time, the official Incohérent pun: *Lézards incohérents* (“Oeuvre d’art”); one assumes the work was a depiction of a lizard.

Finally, however, the most provocative entry, at least in art-historical hindsight, is #15 by the poet Paul Bilhaud, entitled *Combat de nègres dans une cave pendant la nuit* (Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night) [Fig. 25]. This is the first documented monochromatic painting. Before Kazimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt, or the numerous other twentieth-century practitioners of black-on-black painting and its color variants, Bilhaud is the father of a reductive art, although his purpose was hardly related to that of his successors. Alphonse Allais is often credited for this seminal work because of his subsequent monochromatic white and red paintings, exhibited in the 1883 and 1884 Incohérent exhibitions, respectively, and because he ambiguously refers to the black painting in his 1897 publication *Primo-avrilesque* (Pls. I, II) without giving credit to Bilhaud.³²

In the 18 November 1882 issue of *Panurge*, Henri Detouche, a Hydropathe and an exhibitor in the October 1882 Incohérent exhibition, offers the basic rationale for his generation’s radical challenge to traditional art: “Il me semble qu’en face du chef-d’oeuvre de Michel Ange, *Moïse*, le véritable artiste aujourd’hui doit dire: Je voudrais faire tout autre chose” (It seems to me that in front of Michelangelo’s masterpiece, *Moses*, the true artist of today should say: I would like to do something else). In general, the artists and writers involved in the Incohérents and at the Chat Noir had thorough academic training. Yet, as the preface to the 1884 Incohérent exhibition catalogue declares: “L’ennui, voil[à] l’ennemi de l’incohérence” (Boredom, ’tis the enemy of incoherence), and as Henri Gray’s cover illustration [Fig. 26] for the catalogue suggests, these artists and writers had no interest in repeating the aesthetic achievements of the past; rather, they wished to sweep the classical tradition

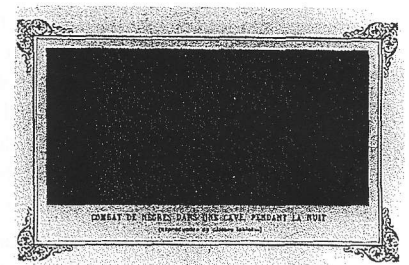


Fig. 25. After Paul Bilhaud, *Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night*, in *Album primo-avrilesque*. (See plates I, II).

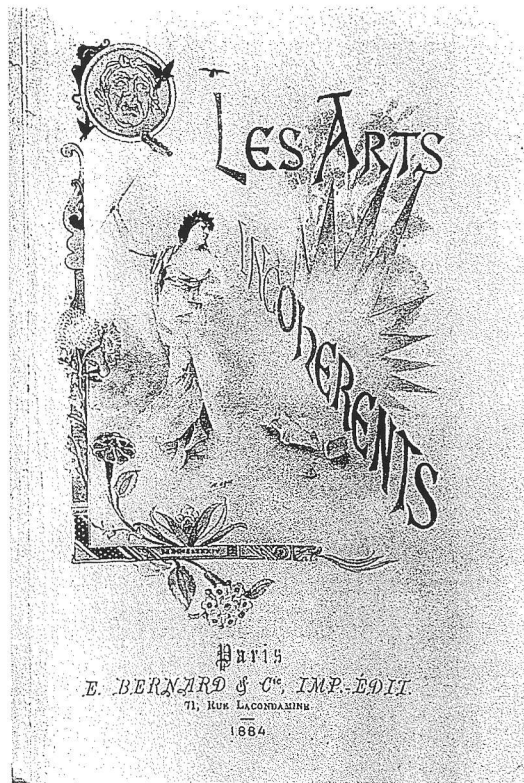


Fig. 26.
Henri Gray, photo-relief cover for
*Catalogue illustré de l'exposition des arts
incobérents* (Paris: E. Bernard et Cie, 1884).
Schimmel Fund.

off its proverbial pedestal. Thus, it seems fair to say that beginning in 1882, the artistic antics of the Incohérents and the Chat Noir circle were the means by which artists and writers counteracted the pomposity and boredom of bourgeois society and of the art-related status quo. As we will see, these kinds of acts multiplied in quantity and complexity throughout the 1880s and 1890s and mark the genesis of essential aspects of twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics.