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INTRODUCTION

AN APPRECIATION

In less than a decade, *La jeune peinture française* (1912) and *La jeune sculpture française* (1914/1919) will be one hundred years old. Within this first century, both books have served primarily as eyewitness sources on Cubism, from "An Anecdotal History of Cubism" in the first book to the saga of the artisan comb and Picasso's *El Guitare* in the second, earning the poet-critic André Salmon a respectable reputation as a "Cubist critic." However, this limited approach has distorted the author's true intentions. Written as pendants, *La jeune peinture française* and *La jeune sculpture française* were meant to sort out and articulate **individualism** among the avant-garde artists producing work in France during the early twentieth century, rather than to reinforce group identities.

As an introduction to the leading art pioneers – Fauves, Cubists, and various other kindred spirits who were straining to establish signature styles while looking over each other's shoulders for the newest of new creations ("the barbaric cult of the new," Salmon claimed in *La jeune sculpture française*[1]) – these books testify to Salmon's determination to establish each artistic personality within the context of well-known art movements: "I will try to put a bit of order into much confusion, uncover authentic origins, define more precisely certain misunderstood aspirations, reveal some affiliations, and create (through local associations) families of artists, even though, strictly speaking, there are no

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longer any 'schools,'" Salmon wrote at the beginning of his *La jeune peinture française*.[2] Salmon's emphasis on the individual stems from his nominalist view of art and life, and it is this nominalist sensibility that should be recognized as his enduring legacy. Now that these two books are presented here together, it is incumbent on us to heed his lesson and begin to assess each artist mentioned in these pages based upon his or her own merits rather than as exemplars of a particular modernist movement.

Along with describing individual characteristics, Salmon lionized experimental artists who demonstrated a sense of control, sincerity/authenticity, and hard-won innovation. In Salmon's estimation, true freedom and innovation began with self-discipline. In *La jeune sculpture française*, he wrote: "How do we practice self-control? We don't have to practice self-control. Control is the child of freedom. Control is none other than choosing sensible means appropriate for conquering the most extreme freedom."[3] These short sentences, buried in the middle of the second book, may serve as guideposts for most of Salmon's commentary.

Consider, for example, Salmon's analysis of Othon Friesz's strengths in *La jeune peinture française*: "Othon Friesz . . . finally understood Poussin's lesson in order to better comprehend it. . . . The Normand Othon Friesz would have [already] been quite capable of seeing the Andelys [Poussin's native region] in Tahiti, because . . . he knew how to take from Gauguin the only beneficial lesson, which, as a consequence, is not the meager discovery of a bit of foreign exoticism, but – through the honesty of drawing – the purification of planes and the broadening of scenery toward the universal."[4] Here, Salmon clearly articulates his personal ideal for great French art: "honesty of drawing," "purification of planes," and "the broadening of scenery [i.e., injecting life itself] toward the universal."

In *La jeune sculpture française*, Salmon expands on this Poussinist preference that lauds the cerebral over the emotional in his praise of Elie Nadelman's sculpture: "Most often a work of art first reaches our senses then our imagination which, finally, comments on the sensation.

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In front of Elie Nadelman's work we find ourselves, to the contrary, in the presence of an ingenious problem, the solution of which it is impossible for us to postpone. When we have solved this problem, we are very often possessed with the sort of joy felt by mathematicians, who attain sensual efflorescence from intellectual intoxication . . . It seems that we might share in Elie Nadelman's intelligent pride, [which is] better than emotion."[5]

Salmon's celebration of the cerebral, which manifests itself through self-discipline, order, or knowing how to construct (as Salmon would also say) demonstrates the critic's admiration for logical thinking. The most famous sentence from "An Anecdotal History of Cubism" may be Salmon's assessment of Picasso's attitude toward African-Oceanic sculpture: "Polynesian and Dahomeyan images seemed 'rational' [*raisonnable*] to him."[6] Through this characterization of Picasso as one who can perceive logic in this magical African and Oceanic art, Salmon communicated directly to his reader that the essence of great **French** art resides in this superior creative mind – one that can instinctively detect order (the rational) even in this exotic (ergo irrational) art.

Although Salmon's characterization of Picasso as a rational analyst may sound highly idealized, the fact is Picasso spent a long period of time drawing his analysis of the figure over and over again to achieve what is known as "Analytic Cubism." Pepe Karmel's excellent book *Picasso and the Invention of Cubism* maps out this period so clearly and convincingly that it perfectly decodes Salmon's famous cryptic phrase in "An Anecdotal History of Cubism": "They are naked problems: white cyphers on a blackboard. The sober principle of the painting-equation was laid down."[7] No doubt, Salmon witnessed Picasso's reductivist discovery of form that emerged from myriad visual restatements and tried to describe what he observed: "During those long days, and many nights, he drew, concretizing the abstract and reducing the concrete to its essentials. Never was labor compensated with so little joy."[8] These two sentences attempt to impart the intensity of Picasso's working methods during and after the painting of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

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However, once Picasso's numerous drawings disappeared into private collections, Salmon's words lost their specific meaning. Pepe Karmel's book restores Salmon's vivid portrait of Picasso toiling for hours, fueled primarily by his self-discipline, hard work, and cerebralism that the poet-critic greatly admired in other artists too, most notably André Derain, Elie Nadelman, and Manuel Ugué.

Salmon's preference for certain avant-garde artists reflects his search for the next significant trend after Cubism. At the end of *La jeune peinture française*, he expressed confidence in "the rebirth of landscape painting" (or "a regionalist feeling"), which seemed manifest among some Cubists and unaligned artists: "[the regionalist feeling is] an agent of order, of reason and of beauty, capable indeed of provoking a revolution so stupendous that it will have to sweep away the monuments of three [previous] revolutions that were generous but corrupted by false passion."[9] This was a revolution that Salmon believed would ensure the "salvation of France and Art."[10]

However, by 1914, Salmon heralded Picasso's guitar construction as the most important new direction for art, for the object transcended categorization of any kind – movements, types, and genres: "We are freed from painting and sculpture, which already have been liberated from the idiotic tyranny of genres. It is no longer this or that. It is nothing. It's *el guitare*."[11] Although some art historical analyses have viewed *la bande à Picasso* as mainly political anarchists,[12] this joyous announcement defines aesthetic anarchism. Ruled by the artist's innate self-control and constant experimentation, aesthetic anarchism broke the rules of the canon while resisting frivolous and foolish mannerism. Aesthetic anarchism, rather than political anarchism, best describes the goals of Picasso's gang (including Salmon, Apollinaire, and Max Jacob, among others) and expresses itself in Salmon's work through his nominalist sensibility. For, essentially, Salmon believed that art should defy definition as it reinforced individualism. "Art is infinite and indefinite," Salmon concluded on the last page of *La jeune sculpture française*.[13] Herein lies Salmon's credo.

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THE FRENCH TITLES

After years of translating the two texts, I am still reluctant to limit the resonance of the titles with an English equivalent. Salmon himself explained that *jeune* does not refer to the artists' ages, because some artists began their careers late in life. Moreover, most of the painters highlighted in the first book were younger than many sculptors discussed in the second book. Therefore, the word *recent* may be a good translation, although that word does not imply *avant-garde*, another suitable word, and a meaning that Salmon intended to convey as well.

Salmon's sense of *jeune* also implies generational art politics, whetting the readers' appetite for art gossip. Despite his denial ("I may play the role of historian, but by no means according to the modern formula which satisfies the love of gossip and favoritism"[14]), Salmon knew that his audience in 1912 relished the Matisse-Picasso joust. Matisse (born at the end of 1869, before the Franco-Prussian War) was the older, established French bourgeois gentleman, whereas Picasso (born in 1881) was the younger, Spanish bohemian upstart. *Jeune*, in this context, captures Salmon's sense of a generational transition within the French avant-garde art world – from the mature Fauve king, Matisse, to the junior foreign prince, Picasso.[15]

Finally, *jeune* speaks to me of youth, freshness, and liberation from canonical academicism (even though Salmon accused the young Salon Cubists of creating their own academy). Therefore, I have left both titles in French in order to encourage informed and intuitive interpretations, preserving, in effect, the spirit of Salmon's nominalist art criticism.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY[16]

> Salmon was a wonderful storyteller. The more scabrous the story, the more exquisitely was it told. Unlike his friends Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob, Salmon got his effects through a kind of wit which was delicate, subtle, fine, elegant and quick. Caustic though friendly, as a poet he was perhaps more sentimental than the others. A dreamer with an alert sensibility, he was tall, thin, distinguished, with intelligent eyes in a very pale face, and he looked very young. Nor has

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he changed since then. His long fine hands held the wooden pipe, which he always smoked, in a way which was characteristically his. His gestures were a little gauche and clumsy: a mark of his shyness – Fernande Olivier.[17]

André Salmon was born in Paris on October 4, 1881 – twenty-one days before his close friend, Pablo Picasso. He was raised in an artistic and politically engaged milieu – his paternal grandfather, Théodore Frédéric Salmon (1811–1876), was a painter; his father, Émile-Frédéric Salmon (1840–1913), was an engraver and sculptor; and his maternal grandfather was the socialist-anarchist city councilman François-Xavier Cattiaux. Salmon's memories of his youth included meeting men of letters and the arts, family reminisces of the Commune of 1870–1871, and an embrace from the anarchist "Red Virgin" Louise Michel.

Although Salmon benefited directly from his father's friendships (one of his tutors was the Parnassian poet Gaston de Raismes), he was indulged in a female-dominated household presided over by his mother, maternal aunt, and sister Lia. Perhaps similar to Picasso's home life of mainly women, Salmon recalled (or fictionalized) the experience as one not much to his liking: "I was a hideous child loved by old gals."[18] (One wonders how much of this sentiment Salmon shared with Max Jacob, Guilliaume Apollinaire, and Pablo Picasso, who confessed to Françoise Gilot that he left Spain in order to escape from his tyrannical mother.[19] And, one wonders if such talk encouraged the frightful expressions in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.)

From 1897 to 1902 (sixteen to twenty years old), Salmon lived in St. Petersburg, Russia. At first, he moved there with his family for his father's commission. Then he stayed to work at the French embassy as an *attaché auxiliaire* and to keep an eye on his sister Lia, who had accepted a theatrical engagement at the Théâtre Michel in St. Petersburg.[20] This nearly five-year period greatly influenced Salmon's choice of friends in Montmartre and Montparnasse, who were also outsiders like himself: the Spaniards Pablo Picasso and Manuel Ugué, the homosexual Breton Max Jacob, the Polish bastard Guillaume Apollinaire, the Italian Jew Amedeo Modigliani,

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plus numerous Russian and Eastern European (often Jewish) artists: Moïse Kisling, Jules Pascin, Chaim Soutine, Jacques Lipchitz, and Marc Chagall, among others.[21]

In 1901, Salmon returned to Paris to complete his military service, and by late 1902, he was discharged. Salmon settled on the Left Bank at 244 rue Saint-Jacques. In 1907, Salmon moved to the rue Saint Vincent, and in 1908, he joined Picasso and Kees van Dongen in the famous Bateau Lavoir at 13 rue de Ravignan (with Max Jacob nearby at 7 rue de Ravignan[22]). Picasso and Salmon met through the sculptor Manuel Ugué (Manolo) sometime during the fall of 1904.[23]

These especially close relationships influenced the content of his critical writings – not only in the frequent references to these artists in his columns, but also in Salmon's sense of what constituted French for his books on contemporary French painting/sculpture. For, in essence, all the aforementioned artists belonged to Salmon's notion of the School of Paris, regardless of their national origins: "I may also be a geographer and as a consequence, a politician, when it comes to defining or modifying national borders without compensation."[24]

A specialist on this period in French literature, Jacqueline Gojard, characterized the personal side of the School of Paris in her essay entitled "Au rendez-vous des poètes" (the nickname for Picasso's studio in the Bateau-Lavoir):

> ...it is impossible to talk about the painters' lives without thinking of the poets'. In good times or bad, their ties grew closer. Max Jacob asked Picasso to be his godfather for his baptism [into Catholicism]; Apollinaire (with Max Jacob and [Jean] Cocteau) was a witness at Picasso's wedding, and this was reciprocated. As volunteers in the Foreign Legion, Kisling was at Cendrars' side when a shell tore off his right arm. On November 13, 1918, they were [all] at Apollinaire's burial; in January 1920, they were at Modigliani's funeral, arranged by Kisling in the absence of [Modigliani's] family. One morning in July 1930, Salmon and Kisling were urgently called to Pascin's studio – they found his body hanging from a casement window.[25]

In addition, Apollinaire and Marie Laurencin, among other friends at that moment, attended Salmon's marriage to Marie-Jeanne

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Blazy-Escarpette in the Saint-Merri Church on July 13, 1909, taking advantage of the Bastille Day festivities to celebrate the occasion. And more than a decade later, immediately following Modigliani's burial, Salmon, Kisling, their wives, Chana Orloff, Chantal Quenneville, Hanke Zborowski, and Modigliani's dealer, Leopold Zborowski, brought a wreath to the family of Modigliani's common-law wife Jeanne Hébuterne, who committed suicide the night after Modigliani's death on January 24. Nevertheless, Jeanne's parents barred Modigliani's band of friends from their daughter's funeral service.[26]

While Salmon supported his friends in their personal lives, he also supported their careers through his art criticism. His first art commentary (on Picasso) appeared in 1905 with the publication of "Carnet de Paris et d'ailleurs," in *Revue littéraire de Paris et de Champagne*,[27] but his first steady job as an art critic came along in 1908 at *L'Intransigeant*. In 1910, he left *L'Intransigeant* to join *Paris-Journal* (giving his post to Apollinaire). After completing *La jeune peinture française*, Salmon began his stint at *Gil Blas* in May 1912, where he signed his columns La Palette. He left that newspaper in April 1914, whereupon he wrote *La jeune sculpture française*.

From the first decade of the twentieth century until his death in 1969 in Sanary, André Salmon wrote art and literary criticism for numerous newspapers, journals, and magazines in addition to publishing several books on art – surveys and monographs – as well as poetry, novels, and chronicles. Especially valuable are his memoirs, entitled *Souvenirs sans fin*. The first, subtitled *L'air de la Butte*, was published in 1945.[28] Subsequently, a set of three volumes of *Souvenirs sans fin* was published in 1955, 1956, and 1961.[29] All four books recount in vivid detail stories about who knew whom, significant and not-so-significant events, and contemporary opinions about both (most notably his own). Judging from this enormous autobiography, Salmon's "An Anecdotal History of Cubism" presaged the entire enterprise decades in advance by showcasing Salmon's ability to patch together fine art and popular culture, much like a Picasso collage or *papier collé* from the Synthetic Cubist period.

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SALMON AS CRITIC

Although André Salmon was one of the most influential and best-known French art critics during the first half of the twentieth century, he always considered himself a poet who wrote criticism for a living. Ever self-effacing, he wrote in *La jeune peinture française* "... these artists ... are allied with a man of letters who, as everyone knows, does not have the right to lay claim to the role of art critic."[30]

In *La jeune sculpture française*, he denigrated his role as critic/art-seer even more forcefully: "I know why Oracles cannot look at themselves these days without laughing.... Too bad for those who speak awkwardly to false prophets."[31] That is, too bad for the artists who may not appeal to the capricious art critics. Indeed, Salmon tried to keep his job in perspective.

And yet, Salmon took his work very seriously. He campaigned for the *raisonnable* (order) in art much like Diderot campaigned for moral truth in art, and he avowed his passionate partisanship by quoting the poet-critic Baudelaire in his own defense: "However able an eclectic may be, he is a weak man; for he is a man without love. He has then no ideal, no bias – neither compass nor star."[32] That Salmon referred to both critics, and others, testifies to his familiarity with their texts and his sincere appreciation, for we find that Salmon enlisted their insights and wit to prove a point from time to time.[33]

However, Salmon did not view his role as one who educates. Rather, he viewed his role as one who facilitates, somewhat like Michel-Eugène Chevreul, whose color theories led Eugène Delacroix and the Impressionists to more vibrant color effects and a new kind of visuality in late nineteenth-century art: "Is it my fault that one is, at one time or another, merely Chevreul?," Salmon seemed to say defensively.[34] More than just an occasional helpmate, Salmon wanted to be considered a catalyst or partner in the creative process: "So the poet docilely submits to this anxiety, suggesting to the visual artist the materialization of pure and authentic forms. A prisoner of words, he intoxicates himself at the thought of furthering the birth of small universes.... Sometimes the visual artist moves ahead of [the poet]. Then the mission of the poet

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is more expansive and his role quite rewarding: he assures this cruel accomplice of the perfect virtue of his intentions."[35]

With this concept of his multifaceted role as poet and art critic, Salmon sought out reciprocity, mutual support, and a sense of parity with the visual artists he knew so well.[36] "Poetry, you remain mother of the arts, innumerable in your forms, womb of harmonies, the word that makes itself flesh," Salmon concluded at the end of the preface to *La jeune sculpture française*, preparing the reader to consider how some avant-garde artists aimed to interact with each other and with modern daily life. That Salmon expressed his confidence in the fecundity of literature in relation to all of the arts serves as the key to understanding Salmon's poetry and his critical mission.

Salmon's critical mission also involved his strategy. He carefully forged his identity as an advocate for the avant-garde, and sometimes played off of conservative critics (as in the days of writing alongside Louis Vauxcelles for the newspaper *Gil Blas*). He also deliberately published *La jeune peinture française* – an authoritative, permanent record of his thoughts on contemporary art – in a timely fashion, when several noted critics contributed their personal assessments of the current art scene, most notably Cubism. Still, Salmon believed that he should voice his own cautious approach, which in effect belittled his colleagues' attempts at sweeping generalizations: "Therefore, I will not provide you with the entire picture . . . Nor will I try, like others, to define the state of painting today."[37] This subtle barb most likely reflects Salmon's unflattering opinion of the results.

Although Salmon's books remind us about the art critic's power to promote artworks, artists, and the critic himself, they testify to another occurrence: the shift from pithy, erudite art analysis (à la Diderot and Baudelaire) to the superficial art commentary of the late nineteenth century. This development in art criticism, Martha Ward concluded in her article on that topic, mirrored the role of the newspaper in general as it responded to the interests of its readership and the rise of press-clipping services that put a premium on the frequency of publicity for an artist rather than on critical analysis.[38] Thus, the character of

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