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Drawings related to *Les Fleurs du Mal*

CITATION

Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, 'Drawings related to *Les Fleurs du Mal*',
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Drawings related to *Les Fleurs du Mal*

Cats. 14–17

Cat. 14 Odilon Redon, *Profile of a Veiled Woman with Halo*, c. 1871. Graphite on cream wove paper, 12.7 × 12 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (State of the Netherlands), d1078N1996

Cat. 15 Odilon Redon, *Two Female Nudes in an Oriental Temple*, c. 1890. Graphite, with brush and grey wash on cream wove paper, 20.2 × 12 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (State of the Netherlands), d1081N1996

Cat. 16 Odilon Redon, *Pensive Figure with Butterfly Wings*, c. 1871. Graphite on ivory wove paper, 15.7 × 13.1 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (State of the Netherlands), d1080N1996

Cat. 17 Odilon Redon, *Head of a Man Placed in a Bowl*, c. 1888–90. Black lithographic crayon on ivory wove transfer paper, 18.2 × 12 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (State of the Netherlands), d1079N1996

This group of four drawings by Odilon Redon is preserved in the Van Gogh Museum in its original portfolio bearing the inscription ‘Baudelaire. Les Fleurs du Mal. Cinq dessins originaux, inédits, de Odilon Redon’ (fig. 6a). A fifth drawing became separated from the group and is now elsewhere (fig. 6b).¹ Despite this title, Redon seems not to have made these drawings, which date from different periods and are made from different materials, specifically for the famous volume of poetry by Charles Baudelaire. It was their first owner, the Belgian publisher and collector Edmond Deman (1857–1918), who sold them under this header at a sale of his collection in 1903.²

Redon’s early clientele consisted for the most part of writers, publishers and other literary figures. Around 1900, this new group of regular customers also often approached Redon’s oeuvre out of literary interest. In selling these early drawings, Deman was targeting this bibliophile market, which seems to be the reason why he advertised them as five original designs for Baudelaire.³ This also explains the suggestion made in the catalogue to insert the drawings in the luxury bibliophile editions of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, illustrated by the artist Carlos Schwabe (1866–1926) or by Armand Rassenfosse (1862–1934).⁴ Deman did not record his name in the provenance; instead, he called himself an ‘anonymous Paris collector’, undoubtedly with a view to making the works even more desirable to the targeted group. Redon’s loyal collector Andries Bongers saw through this false provenance, but bought the drawings anyway, by his own account in order ‘to gather them in, so you will at least know where they went’.⁵ Bongers complained about the low turnout at the sale and about the young people who paid large sums for ‘little drawings’ by the then popular Félicien Rops but otherwise had no eye for Redon’s art.⁶ In Bongers’s opinion, there were but few collectors like himself, informed intellectuals who could assess the true value of Redon’s art.

Redon, too, experienced a public auction as a vulnerable moment, when his work might suddenly end up in the wrong hands or context. He therefore thanked Bongers for ‘saving’ the sheets, and complimented him on his purchase of the ‘good’ drawings for *Les Fleurs du Mal*.⁷

1 This fifth drawing was sold at Christie’s in 1993 by descendants of Andries Bongers. See Fred Leeman *et al.* (eds.), *Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard: Masterpieces from the Andries Bongers Collection*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), no. 152, *Man with a Chain around his Neck* (W381, whereabouts unknown).

2 Sale Brussels 1903, sold for 30 fl., ‘cinq petits dessins, dans un carton pour illustrer *Les Fleurs du mal*’ (‘five small drawings, in a portfolio, to illustrate *Fleurs du mal*’).

3 See Dario Gamboni, *The Brush and the Pen: Odilon Redon and Literature*, Chicago/London 2011, pp. 184–85, 189; Fred Leeman, *André Bongers, kunstliefhebber en verzamelaar*, unpublished manuscript, June 2007 (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum).

4 Charles Baudelaire and Armand Rassenfosse (ill.), *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris 1899 (edition Les cent bibliophiles); Charles Baudelaire and Charles Emile Martin Schwabe, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris 1900.

5 Letter 108 (28 June 1903), Amsterdam: ‘Je me suis empressé de les recueillir; au moins vous saurez où ils ont passé.’

6 *Ibid.*: ‘Not many people at the sale! Young people who paid high prices for little drawings by Rops, who

is very fashionable here; they barely seemed aware of the presence of your art.’ (‘Peu de monde à cette vente! De jeunes gens qui mettaient des prix élevés à de petits dessins de Rops, bien à la mode ici, ne paraissaient pas se douter de la présence de votre art.’)

7 Letter 109 (20 June 1903), Paris: ‘The drawings of *Les Fleurs du mal* were good ones.’ (‘Ces dessins des *fleurs du Mal* étaient bons.’)



Cat. 14 Odilon Redon, *Profile of a Veiled Woman with Halo*



Cat. 15 Odilon Redon, *Two Female Nudes in an Oriental Temple*



Cat. 16 Odilon Redon, *Pensive Figure with Butterfly Wings*



Cat. 17 Odilon Redon, *Head of a Man Placed in a Bowl*

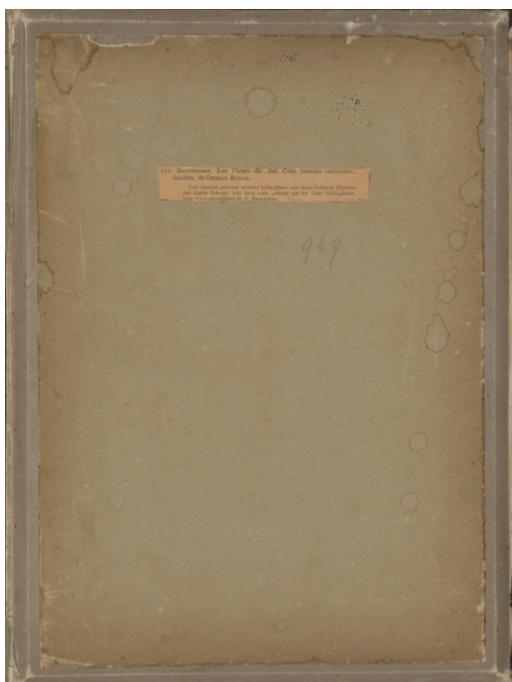


Fig. 6a Portfolio in which the group of drawings was sold in 1903



Fig. 6b Odilon Redon, *Man with a Chain around his Neck*, c. 1875. Black chalk on paper, 13 × 11.7 cm. Whereabouts unknown.

However, these drawings were never used for the edition of Baudelaire's book that Deman published in 1890. That edition contains nine completely different works by Redon's hand, reproduced in photogravure, the process perfected by Léon Evely (1849–1937).⁸ These nine original drawings also belonged to the publisher's collection, and he lent them to the exhibition of *Les XX* in 1890.⁹ It is therefore possible that Redon was thinking about these works when he congratulated Bongier on his purchase.¹⁰

The question remains, then, whether Redon had Deman's illustrated edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in mind when he handed the present drawings over to the publisher, or whether Deman conveniently linked them to this project to make them more interesting to potential customers. While *Les Fleurs du Mal* was in preparation, Redon possibly sent a number of drawings to Deman that did not make it into the final book, including this group. But another course of events is equally plausible, because between 1887 and 1890 the publisher prepared various other publications with frontispieces by Redon, and also bought and traded several individual drawings and prints by the artist.¹¹

The fact that Redon did not believe in the literal illustration of a text, but rather saw his drawings as a world that ran parallel to the realm of words, means that, in any case, these drawings cannot be directly linked to passages in Baudelaire's book of poetry. Redon felt that his drawings corresponded on a higher spiritual level to

editions of Baudelaire. The idea of doing the same thing with these drawings therefore seems to have come from Deman himself.

¹⁰ This emerges from the fact that, in the letter, he connects the drawings directly with Deman's edition; see letter 109.

¹¹ Including *Religion or Mystical Veil* (entry 7, 'Two Noirs with Religious Themes', cat. 18), which Bongier also acquired at the sale.

¹² Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 178–89; Fred Leeman, 'Odilon Redon: The Image and the Text', in *Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams 1840–1916*, exh. cat., Chicago (The Art Institute of Chicago)/Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum)/London (Royal Academy of Arts), 1994–95, pp. 175–94, p. 179.

⁸ See Odilon Redon, *Le livre de raison d'Odilon Redon: Second cahier*, Ms 42 822, nos. 57–64: 'Croquis pour les *Fleurs du Mal* de Baudelaire'; Alec Wildenstein, Agnès Lacau St Guily and Marie-Christine Decroocq, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992–98, vol. 2 (1994): *Mythes et légendes*, nos. 794, 941, 1103, 1190, 2382–86. For the final prints, see André Mellerio, *Odilon Redon:*

Les estampes – The Graphic Work: Catalogue raisonné (1913), Alan Hyman (ed.), San Francisco 2001, nos. 198–206.

⁹ *Catalogue 1890 Les XX*, see Octave Maus, *Les XX, Bruxelles: Catalogue des dix expositions annuelles*, Brussels 1981, p. 208. Deman also published these high-quality reproductions in a smaller format, intended for insertion in the various bibliophile

the ideas and mood of the poet. Following this line of reasoning, Redon justified his decision not to produce illustrations specifically for the book, but to plunder the portfolios containing drawings he had made in the preceding decades. It is precisely their affinity to the subject matter in combination with the discrepancies between the nature of the text and the content of the drawings that intensified the suggestive quality and mystery that Redon sought.¹²

If this was indeed the course of events, the selection of drawings that the artist chose to hand over to Deman was highly arbitrary, for they vary in terms of period, material, support, format and signature. The pensive figure and the female profile were laid down quite precisely in graphite with fine hatching and sharp contours, whereas the two female nudes and the head of a man placed in a bowl were drawn much more sketchily, with loose, exploratory – but also more expressive – lines in graphite and chalk, respectively.¹³ Yet this technical and stylistic diversity connects the group of works all the more to the set of drawings that constitute the final print series *Les Fleurs du Mal*. A number of authors have commented upon the unevenness, to put it mildly, of Redon's selection for Deman.¹⁴

All of these drawings do feature a dark area, applied by Redon to introduce more tone and spatiality and to add a mystical element. As is the case with the drawings that ended up in Deman's album, the works discussed here are characterized by an emphasis on line, presumably to simplify graphic reproduction. *Head of a Man Placed in a Bowl* was drawn with lithographic chalk on transfer paper and thus intended for transfer to lithographic stone. Given that Deman chose a photomechanical process for his edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Redon's use of lithographic chalk in this particular drawing underscores the very tenuous connection that the group of works in its entirety has with the published series of photogravures.

¹³ Technical and stylistic comparisons (note the early signature, for example) have led us to date cat. 14, *Profile of a Veiled Woman with Halo*, to c. 1871.

Technical examinations carried out on 5 November 2018 by Harriet K. Stratis and Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho on the *noirs* and pastels by Odilon Redon in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Richard Hobbs, *Odilon Redon*, New York 1977, p. 71; Gamboni 1989, pp. 184–87.

Owing to the somewhat haphazard compilation and because Redon himself was not involved in the transfer of the images to the copper plates and the printing of the series, this series of photogravures is not so highly regarded. Mellerio even published it as a separate section in his catalogue, to emphasize that he considered the series to be of inferior quality.



Fig. 6c Odilon Redon, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1890. Series of nine photogravures in black on Simili Japon paper, unbound, approx. 43 × 31 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (this work is part of the Netherlands Art Property Collection (Nederlands Kunstbezitcollectie) consisting of works recovered from Germany after the Second World War and held in trust by the Dutch State. The work is on loan to the Van Gogh Museum), p2755N2012

CAT. 14**PROVENANCE**

Acquired from the artist, Paris by Edmond Deman Brussels, probably between 1887 and 1890; probably consigned by Edmond Deman to auction Brussels, Deman, E. (*Livres anciens et modernes, dessins & estampes*), referred to as 'cinq petits dessins, dans un carton pour illustrer les Fleurs du mal', purchased by Andries Bonger, Amsterdam, 13–16 May 1903; after his death on 20 January 1936 inherited by his widow, Françoise W.M. Bonger-van der Borch van Verwolde, Amsterdam; after her death in 1975 bequeathed to her heirs, the Netherlands; sold by these heirs to the State of the Netherlands to be placed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 18 December 1996.

LITERATURE

- Andries Bonger, letter 108 to Odilon Redon, Amsterdam (28 June 1903).
- Odilon Redon, letter 109 to Andries Bonger, Paris (30 June 1903).
- Andries Bonger, letter 110 to Odilon Redon, Zandvoort (15 September 1903).
- Ari Redon and Roseline Bacou (eds.), *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren ... à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, p. 294, n. 3.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, 'Biographie et bibliographie d'Edmond Deman', *Bulletin du bibliophile*, nos. 3, 4 (1986), pp. 309–79, 485–582.
- Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 184–85, 189.
- Alec Wildenstein, Agnès Lacau St Guily and Marie-Christine Decroocq, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992–98, vol. 1 (1992): *Portraits et figures*, no. 185, p. 82. Referred to as 'Femme de profil à gauche'.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, *Edmond Deman éditeur (1857–1918)*, Brussels 1997, pp. 137, 147.

EXHIBITIONS

— Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard: Masterpieces from the Andries Bonger Collection*, 10 April–20 September 2009, no. 151, *Head of a veiled woman in profile to the left, with halo*.

CAT. 15**PROVENANCE**

Acquired from the artist, Paris by Edmond Deman Brussels, probably between 1887 and 1890; probably consigned by Edmond Deman to auction Brussels, Deman, E. (*Livres anciens et modernes, dessins & estampes*), referred to as 'cinq petits dessins, dans un carton pour illustrer les Fleurs du mal', purchased by Andries Bonger, Amsterdam, 13–16 May 1903; after his death on 20 January 1936 inherited by his widow, Françoise W.M. Bonger-van der Borch van Verwolde, Amsterdam; after her death in 1975 bequeathed to her heirs, the Netherlands; sold by these heirs to the State of the Netherlands to be placed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 18 December 1996.

LITERATURE

- Andries Bonger, letter 108 to Odilon Redon, Amsterdam (28 June 1903).
- Odilon Redon, letter 109 to Andries Bonger, Paris (30 June 1903).
- Andries Bonger, letter 110 to Odilon Redon, Zandvoort (15 September 1903).
- Ari Redon and Roseline Bacou (eds.), *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren ... à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, p. 294, n. 3.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, 'Biographie et bibliographie d'Edmond Deman', *Bulletin du bibliophile*, nos. 3, 4 (1986), pp. 309–79, 485–582.
- Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 184–85, 189.

- Alec Wildenstein, Agnès Lacau St Guily and Marie-Christine Decroocq, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992–98, vol. 4 (1998): *Etudes et grandes décorations*, no. 2411, p. 141. Referred to as 'Deux femmes nues dans un temple oriental'.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, *Edmond Deman éditeur (1857–1918)*, Brussels 1997, pp. 137, 147.

EXHIBITIONS

— Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard: Masterpieces from the Andries Bonger Collection*, 10 April–20 September 2009, no. 163, *Two female nudes in an oriental temple*.

CAT. 16**PROVENANCE**

Acquired from the artist, Paris by Edmond Deman Brussels, probably between 1887 and 1890; probably consigned by Edmond Deman to auction Brussels, Deman, E. (*Livres anciens et modernes, dessins & estampes*), referred to as 'cinq petits dessins, dans un carton pour illustrer les Fleurs du mal', purchased by Andries Bonger, Amsterdam, 13–16 May 1903; after his death on 20 January 1936 inherited by his widow, Françoise W.M. Bonger-van der Borch van Verwolde, Amsterdam; after her death in 1975 bequeathed to her heirs, the Netherlands; sold by these heirs to the State of the Netherlands to be placed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 18 December 1996.

LITERATURE

- Andries Bonger, letter 108 to Odilon Redon, Amsterdam (28 June 1903).
- Odilon Redon, letter 109 to Andries Bonger, Paris (30 June 1903).
- Andries Bonger, letter 110 to Odilon Redon, Zandvoort (15 September 1903).
- Ari Redon and Roseline Bacou (eds.), *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren ... à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, p. 294, n. 3.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, 'Biographie et bibliographie d'Edmond Deman', *Bulletin du bibliophile*, nos. 3, 4 (1986), pp. 309–79, 485–582.
- Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 184–85, 189.
- Alec Wildenstein, Agnès Lacau St Guily and Marie-Christine Decroocq, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992–98, vol. 2 (1994): *Mythes et légendes*, no. 911, p. 85. Referred to as 'Le penseur aux ailes de papillon'.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, *Edmond Deman éditeur (1857–1918)*, Brussels 1997, pp. 137, 147.

EXHIBITIONS

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard: Masterpieces from the Andries Bonger Collection*, 10 April–20 September 2009, no. 148, *Pensive figure with butterfly wings*

CAT. 17**PROVENANCE**

Acquired from the artist, Paris by Edmond Deman Brussels, probably between 1887 and 1890; probably consigned by Edmond Deman to auction Brussels, Deman, E. (*Livres anciens et modernes, dessins & estampes*), referred to as 'cinq petits dessins, dans un carton pour illustrer les Fleurs du mal', purchased by Andries Bonger, Amsterdam, 13–16 May 1903; after his death on 20 January 1936 inherited by his widow, Françoise W.M. Bonger-van der Borch van Verwolde, Amsterdam; after her death in 1975 bequeathed to her heirs, the Netherlands; sold by these heirs to the State of the Netherlands to be placed in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 18 December 1996.

LITERATURE

- Andries Bonger, letter 108 to Odilon Redon, Amsterdam (28 June 1903).
- Odilon Redon, letter 109 to Andries Bonger, Paris (30 June 1903).
- Andries Bonger, letter 110 to Odilon Redon, Zandvoort (15 September 1903).
- Ari Redon and Roseline Bacou (eds.), *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren ... à Odilon Redon*, Paris 1960, pp. 293–94, n. 3.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, 'Biographie et bibliographie d'Edmond Deman', *Bulletin du bibliophile*, nos. 3, 4 (1986), pp. 309–79, 485–582.
- Dario Gamboni, *La plume et le pinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature*, Paris 1989, pp. 184–85, 189.
- Alec Wildenstein, Agnès Lacau St Guily and Marie-Christine Decroocq, *Odilon Redon: Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint et dessiné*, 4 vols., Paris 1992–98, vol. 2 (1994): *Mythes et légendes*, no. 1148, p. 207. Referred to as 'Tête d'homme posée sur une coupe'.
- Adrienne Fontainas and Luc Fontainas, *Edmond Deman éditeur (1857–1918)*, Brussels 1997, pp. 137, 147.

EXHIBITIONS

- Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard: Masterpieces from the Andries Bonger Collection*, 10 April–20 September 2009, no. 161, *Head of a man placed in a bowl*.

Fig. 6d Detail of cat. 15

