

SEURAT

\$6.00

GEORGES SEURAT

BY JOHN REWALD

97 illustrations, including 2 detail photographs.

THIS is the first complete monograph in English or French on Seurat, telling the story of his life, giving a clear exposition of his theories, as well as a history of the whole neo-impressionist movement.

JOHN REWALD, who, in his books on Cézanne, Gauguin and Maillol made an important contribution to our knowledge of these artists, assumes in this work the task of a pioneer, bringing to life a painter of whom little is known.

THE illustrations, arranged chronologically, trace Seurat's artistic development, show the genesis of his major paintings through the numerous preparatory sketches and represent his technique in photographs of details. Reproductions of works by Pissarro, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Signac a.o. show the influence exerted by Seurat.

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GAUGUIN

HYPERION, NEW YORK, 1938

MAILLOL

HYPERION, NEW YORK, 1939

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PAUL GAUGUIN

LETTERS TO A. VOLLARD AND A. FONTAINAS

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CAMILLE PISSARRO, LETTERS TO HIS SON LUCIEN

IN PREPARATION

THE WOODCUTS OF ARISTIDE MAILLOL

A Complete Catalogue

IN PREPARATION

GEORGES SEURAT

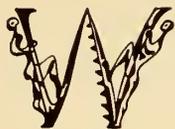


Photograph of Georges Seurat.

JOHN REWALD

GEORGES SEURAT

Hilla Klay
Collection



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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH MANUSCRIPT BY LIONEL ABEL

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. FIRST EDITION.

TO
MY FRIEND
FELIX FENEON
WITH
GRATITUDE AND
ADMIRATION

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ERRATA

- p. xi *No. 8* should be *No. 9* on page 6.
No. 9 should be *No. 8* on page 7.
- p. xiii *No. 50* read: *p. 84* instead of *p. 83*.
No. 55 read: *William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City*, instead of *Stephen C. Clark collection*.
- p. xv *No. 88* read: *p. 110* instead of *p. 111*.
- p. 14 6th line read *Claretie* instead of *Clarétie*.
- p. 74 3rd line read: *March 29* instead of *March 19*.
9th line read: *I believe* instead of *I belief*.
- p. 120 16th line, second column, read: *J. J. Sweeney* instead of *J. J. Sweeny*.
- p. 124 1st line, second column, read *Claretie* instead of *Clarétie*.

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INTRODUCTION

“AN unbiased mind perceives with stupefaction that even in his first productions, even in his youth, he was great. At times he may have been more delicate, at times more singular, at times he may have been more of a painter, but he was always great.” These words, written by Baudelaire about Eugène Delacroix, are surely relevant to Georges Seurat, who was at once the disciple of the painter of the *Massacres of Scio* and of Delacroix’s rival, Ingres. Surely Georges Seurat was great, for he was able to realize unhesitatingly whatever his eye and his intelligence dictated to his brush; the very least of his sketches bears the stamp of an incomparable artistic personality; the unsuspected aspect of beings and of things which he perceived and projected on his canvases is today part of our aesthetic patrimony.

It was the personal element in Seurat’s conception rather than his purely technical discoveries which enabled him to make a decisive contribution to the renewal of the impressionist movement. But Seurat was not the only painter who wanted to give a new impetus to the movement initiated by Manet and his friends, Seurat’s elders by a generation. Vincent van Gogh and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec were then also seeking new paths. Van Gogh, with his explosive color and violent expressiveness, Lautrec with his keenly observant wit and nervous draughtsmanship, and Seurat with his consummate art of precise harmonies, went beyond impressionism. Contemporary art begins with these men, with Cézanne who savagely cooped himself up at Aix, and with Gauguin, dreaming in the distant tropics.

Seurat, van Gogh, Lautrec: three glorious names in the art of the dying nineteenth century, three industrious lives broken at the height of their élan. When van Gogh committed suicide in 1890 he was thirty-seven years old. When in 1891 Seurat suddenly died he was only thirty-one. Lautrec burnt himself out in 1901 at the age of thirty-seven. Despite their youth all three achieved what Cézanne called *realization*, giving their full measure at an age when others are still seeking. As if recognizing that they had only a few years in which to ex-

press themselves, they passed by the halting places without stopping, reached maturity speedily and left us the fully achieved work which bears the ringing message of their genius.

One is justified in calling phenomenal this triple apparition, so brief and so brilliant. But it would be unprofitable to pursue these painters into the future which was denied them. Useless to imagine what they might have done, since, prodigal of their talents, they fully spent their resources. What matters is that their canvases are with us and do not lack a single brush stroke. Whatever their unrealized projects, Seurat, van Gogh and Lautrec appear before posterity with their work achieved.

If Lautrec regarded his contemporaries with a pitiless and ironical eye, if van Gogh consumed himself in fiery solitudes, Seurat, basing himself on scientific research and admirably conscious of his role, hurled himself ardently into the fray. Not bellicose, he feared neither the opinions nor the ridicule of the public. Thus he was less isolated than either Lautrec or van Gogh and soon attached to himself companions who, recognizing him as their teacher and leader, adopted his methods and formed with him the *neo-impressionist* group. Surrounded by young artists and encouraged by the support of the venerated Camille Pissarro, he was able to direct the struggle for a new outlook expressed by a new method. But when he died suddenly there was no one to replace him, for if his disciples shared his vision and technique his genius belonged to him alone.

After his death there were those who did not fail to say that he had not lived long enough to develop fully his aesthetic discovery, his new formula for beauty, that he had left "to men a stammering revelation which dazzled without enlightening them." He has even been saddled with the responsibility for the "pernicious confusion of art and science, the most dangerous error in the history of art." It would be idle to discuss these questions today when the work of Seurat is understood and its fecundity proved. In the artist's lifetime his friends Félix Fénéon and the Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren, tried to point out that his scientific approach was not necessarily contradictory to the ends of art, since the most perfect knowledge of the laws of optics does not make one an artist. Those who believed they had found an infallible recipe for art in the discoveries of Seurat simply forgot that no technique or theory is valid unless applied by a man of genius, and that no method, however subtle, can put a stop to mediocrity.

No attempt will be made here to analyze the views of Seurat. To understand his work and the movement he created, it is less important to search out the validity or invalidity of his ideas than to know the ideas themselves. This study is limited to an account of Seurat's life, of the process by which his ideas — and paralleling them, his works — developed and of the reception accorded them. It proposes to include whatever was said or written about Seurat in his lifetime, citing as often as possible the sources themselves. In this way an attempt is made to reconstitute the intellectual atmosphere in which Seurat worked. It is for others to study Seurat's place in the history of art or to analyze his paintings. The purpose of this study has been to present the main facts, to assemble scrupulously the significant evidence and to retrieve essential documents while such researches are still possible.

I would not have been able to realize these aims without the untiring efforts of Félix Fénéon, the only man who can speak with authority about Georges Seurat. Withdrawn, silent for long years, this man has complete knowledge of the life and work of his great friend. He agreed to verify this study, and his prodigious memory supplied many hitherto unknown details. He permitted me to consult his collection of the reviews which appeared on the occasion of the early exhibitions of Seurat's paintings. Without his friendly collaboration this study could not have been undertaken.

Paul Signac and Maximilien Luce — both now dead — who with Félix Fénéon were asked by Seurat's family to distribute his works among his heirs, were eager to tell me their recollections. Another friend of Seurat, Lucien Pissarro, entrusted me with his father's letters to him. These letters — soon to be published — made it possible for me to clarify various important points.

I am indebted to César M. de Haucke, who in collaboration with Félix Fénéon is preparing the catalogue of Seurat's work and who permitted me to consult the files of his unpublished collection of photographs.

Begun in Paris in 1938, this book was completed in 1942 in New York. Meyer Schapiro made a number of suggestions for the bibliography and sent me David Sutter's articles, the importance of which he proposes to demonstrate himself in a study now in preparation.

In spite of material difficulties of every kind, notably the impossibility of obtaining the photographs already collected in France, I have been able, thanks to the collaboration of George Wittenborn and Heinz Schultz, to reproduce here what amounts to an important and representative section of

Seurat's work. I was also greatly aided by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the College Art Association of America, the Art Foundation, Inc., which put their plates at my disposal, by the Kröller-Müller Foundation and the Courtauld Institute of Art, as well as by many persons who lent me photographs. I am grateful to the collectors who permitted me to reproduce the works in their possession.

New York, December 1942

THE BEGINNING

GEORGES SEURAT was born on December 2, 1859, in the rue de Bondy, Paris. His father was a bailiff in La Villette. The limitations of the pious, somewhat bigoted, petty bourgeois family in which he was brought up, if not wholly favorable to his artistic development, do not on the other hand seem to have seriously interfered with it. Pursuing the customary studies until he was seventeen, Seurat at the same time worked in a municipal school of design, near the church of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul. Here the main emphasis was laid on copying the dusty plaster casts of antique sculpture which cluttered up the studios of the period. The school was run by a sculptor, Justin Lequin, a winner of second honors in the *Grand Prix de Rome*, who — as one of Seurat's colleagues said — taught his pupils the art of screwing up the nose or the ears after lithographic models.¹ It was at this school that Seurat, a serious, disciplined and somewhat reserved young man, made the acquaintance of Aman-Jean. They soon became fast friends, entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts together and studied for four years under Henri Lehmann, a pupil of Ingres.

The alert intelligence of the two young men soon rebelled against the narrowness of the official studios where a degenerate classicism was painfully elaborated by narrow-minded professors who at best were merely competent. So Seurat, his taste for the difficult sharpened by what he had learned, began to seek other pastures for his natural curiosity and was able to resist the academic conceptions which are so often fatal to youthful aspirations. Encouraging his friend to read the books he liked himself — the Goncourt brothers were his gods just then — he engaged him in endless artistic and literary discussions.² For a long time he was completely devoted to Ingres, whose ideas were transmitted to him, considerably coarsened in the process, by the teacher, Henri Lehmann. The influence of Seurat's enthusiasm for Ingres can be seen in his studies from models, most particularly in certain copies from the master, and in compositions which also show the influence of Puvis de Chavannes.

The sketches dating from 1874, mostly copies — copies of illustrations, of a statue of Vercingetorix, of works by Alphonse de Neuville — are competent though not spirited. But the young Seurat soon moved towards choicer models



1. G. SEURAT: Studies from Plaster Casts, about 1874.



2. G. SEURAT: Study of a Leg, about 1875.

and a freer style. He began to make copies of Holbein's drawings, of, for example, the *Portrait of Sir Richard Southwell*; he made a sketch of Poussin's hand, based on the celebrated *Self-Portrait* in the Louvre, a copy in oils of Ingres' *Andromeda on the Rock*, line drawings of the figure of *The Source*, and also of figures from drawings by Raphael. While these drawings were executed with the aim of achieving mastery of line, Seurat was deeply interested in the theory of complementary colors, which irresistibly led him towards Delacroix.

A good student, dutiful, orderly, but not particularly brilliant,³ Seurat went regularly to the museums and spent much of his time in the libraries, where he studied engravings and photographs when he was not poring over such works as Chevreul's treatise *On the Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors*, or the *Grammar of Painting and Engraving* by Charles Blanc. For a long time he turned over in his mind certain passages of these works, for example, the following observation of Charles Blanc:

When the Orientals, who are excellent colorists, have to tint a surface which is smooth in appearance, they make the color vibrate by putting tone upon tone.⁴



3. G. SEURAT: Sir Richard Southwell after Holbein, 1877.



4. G. SEURAT: Detail of Poussin's Self-Portrait, about 1877.

In November 1879, while still absorbed in these studies, Seurat left the studio in the rue de l'Arbalète, which he shared with his friend Aman-Jean, to serve his term at Brest in a regiment of the line. For a year he lived facing the sea and soon came to feel a secret intimacy with the spacious horizons and vast reaches of water. Whenever he could find time free from military routine he filled his notebooks with impromptu sketches, sometimes with colored pencil, catching the pose of a comrade, noting the movements of a passer-by, studying this gesture, that detail.⁵ Returning in November 1880, he went to lodge at 19, rue de Chabrol.

Seurat then began to draw intensively, concentrating on the adjustment of lights and shadows, which so often blur details. He invented outlines which, while wholly new, enclosed familiar forms, purifying them of any accidental quality, and achieving an unsuspected expressiveness whose poetry he knew how to release. Renouncing the line as a means of precision, he composed in masses. On the uneven texture of his drawing paper his pencil blocked in masses of shadow, letting clear forms emerge in the white spaces between. By means of contrasts and shadings whose value was perfectly calculated, he



5. G. SEURAT: Copy from Ingres' "Andromeda on the Rock," about 1878.



6. G. SEURAT: Copy from Ingres' "Source," about 1878.

presented unforeseen perspectives. Subduing lights and colors, he brought them to life again in velvety blacks, in elusive whites, thus creating a new world in which shadows facilitated plastic bodies, transparencies were full of mystery and the greys which moved between black and white revealed an intense life. Harmonic lines swayed and balanced, forms swelled or became precise and lights took on fullness under the dense weaving of his pencil strokes.

Seurat devoted the years 1882 and 1883 almost exclusively to drawings. The first one he exhibited, a portrait of his friend Aman-Jean, was accepted by the Salon of 1883, while the rest of his entries were refused. It won for him a favorable comment by the critic, Roger Marx, who saw in the portrait "an excellent study in chiaroscuro, a drawing of merit, which cannot be the work of a nonentity."⁶

While continuing to draw, Seurat now began to study the art of Eugène Delacroix. He made frequent pilgrimages to the chapel of Saints-Anges in the church of Saint-Sulpice and quickly became conversant with the master's technique. It did not take him long to arrive at conclusions which had already been formulated by Baudelaire:



7. G. SEURAT: The Sleeping Shepherd, about 1878.

The larger the painting, the larger should be the brush strokes, but it is well not to mix them materially; the strokes blend naturally at the distance desired by the sympathetic law which associated them. The color thus obtains more energy and freshness.

And he began to see other relations which had been envisaged by Baudelaire:

Yellow, orange, red, represent and inspire ideas of joy, riches, glory and love; but there are thousands of yellow or red atmospheres, and all the other colors will be affected to a degree logically determined by the dominant atmosphere. The art of the colorist is evidently in some respects related to mathematics and music.⁷

Seurat had already found in the *Grammar of Painting and Engraving* an allusion to the relation of music to color, and this allusion struck him all the more forcibly since his methodical mind saw in it new possibilities.

Charles Blanc had written in his *Grammar*:

Color, which is controlled by fixed laws, can be taught like music. . . . It is because he knew these laws, and studied them profoundly, after having intuitively divined them, that Eugène Delacroix became one of the greatest colorists of modern times.

Charles Blanc also insisted on the effects of *optical mixture*, effects observed



8. G. SEURAT: Studies of Women, 1880.

in Delacroix's paintings by Baudelaire. Analyzing a nude in a ceiling decoration, Charles Blanc noted:

. . . the boldness with which Delacroix slashed this figure with a decided green, so that, partly neutralized by its complement red, it forms with the red in which it is absorbed a mixed and fresh tone apparent only at a distance, in a word, a *resultant* color which is called an optical mixture.⁸

Seurat was too much in love with scientific research not to want to generalize the laws of harmony and color in precise formulas applicable to the visual arts and comparable to theories of music. The theory of complementary and contrasting colors led him to the study of those "mathematical" aspects of painting of which Baudelaire had spoken so prophetically. And now he found the confirmation of these theories in the works of Delacroix. He observed in *Les Femmes d'Alger* orange-reds opposed to blue-greens or greens and yellows which, optically mixed, produced the precise tone of silk. He made a notation, for instance, dated February 23, 1881, of the fact that in *Les Convulsionnaires de Tanger* "the flag is green with a red spot in the center; above, the blue of the sky, the orange-tinted white of the walls, and the orange-grey of the clouds."⁹



9. G. SEURAT: Studies of Hands, 1880.

With these observations held firmly in mind, Seurat also examined the works of other masters in the Louvre, and it was thus that he discovered the division of tones in Murillo and Veronese.¹⁰ Chevreul's law of the simultaneous contrast of colors provided the scientific basis for Seurat's researches. According to this law

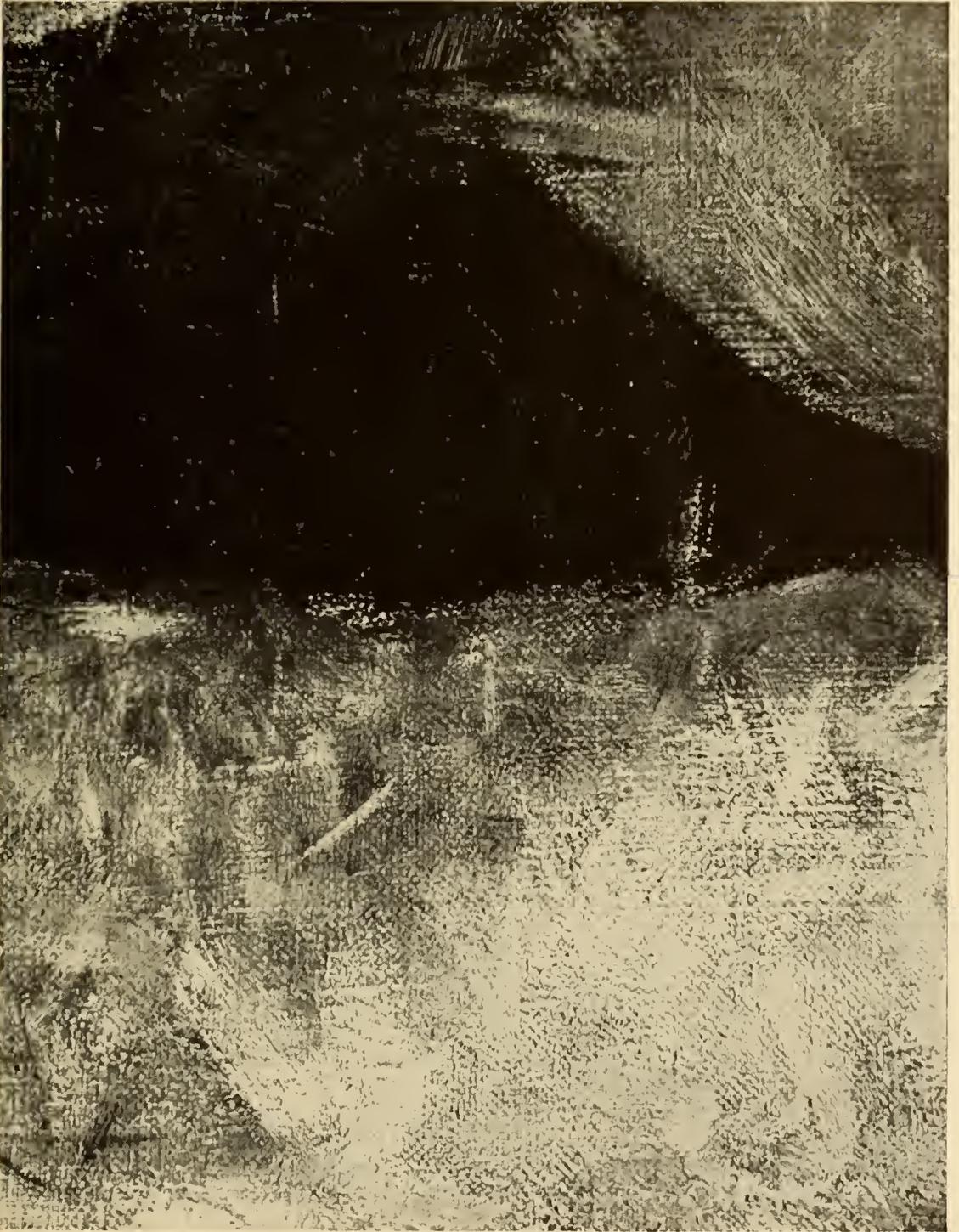
under the *simultaneous contrast of colors* are included all the modifications which differently colored objects appear to undergo in their physical composition, and in the height of tone of their respective colors, when seen simultaneously.¹¹

Chevreul had explained that, if one looks at two objects at once and regards them attentively, each one of them will appear to have not its own color, that is to say, what it would seem to have if it were seen in isolation, but the shade arising from the complementary color of the other colored object. The fact is that in juxtaposition they will appear to be other than they "really" are.

The impressionists, by representing objects together with the air that circulates around them, dissolving them in an atmosphere of light, had already dealt a mortal blow to the old conception of so-called "local color." Against Chevreul's conception they would have argued that it is impossible to define

the “real” color of an object, since it is everywhere exposed to the influence of all that surrounds it. However, in introducing into their paintings the effects produced on each object by others near it and by the enveloping light, the impressionists had merely been faithful to insights based on instinct and observation, insights which they had not even tried to raise to the level of an exact science. But Seurat, for his part, wanted to attempt the reconciliation of art and science; he did not hide his intention of “starting afresh everything they had done,”¹² even as Cézanne had wished to “remake Poussin after nature.” From 1882 on, says Paul Signac, Seurat based himself on the laws of contrast in his use of color and painted each element separately in soft tones. If few paintings made before this period still exist, it is because Seurat seems to have destroyed later on whatever did not bear the mark of his first efforts towards a personal art. For the same reason he never showed canvases painted before *La Baignade*, done in 1883–84.

In 1882 Seurat had begun to compose either with separate touches of the brush which fuse only at a certain distance, as in *A Forest Interior*, done in dots of a single color, or by using the large sweeping strokes that recur in the many canvases of *Reapers*, *Stone Breakers*, etc. These last paintings, extraordinarily luminous, express the subject by means of great masses of light and shadow. The brush strokes strewn in vital profusion in every direction create an atmosphere that seems to vibrate. The critic who remarked in 1884 that Seurat applied “without awkwardness, and even with much accuracy, the method of multi-colored strokes dear to Camille Pissarro,”¹³ forgot to add that the brush strokes of the impressionist master were determined by the forms and facilitated variegation of color, while Seurat used the method at that time in order to give life to dimly indicated planes and to create contrasts without precise contours. However, there are other canvases in which his style is less lively, his color more austere, and in which the drawing appears to be more deliberate, as in certain *Suburban Landscapes*.¹⁴ In these paintings the artist seems to take pleasure in representing in an almost dry manner the rectilinear walls of isolated houses, the monotony of deserted fields, the ridiculous fragility of factory chimneys. Without any sentimentality he records — one might almost say, he accentuates — the sadness of those places in which the town and the country meet in boredom. But the balanced character of his composition, the harmony of light and shade and the softness of Seurat’s color, combine to “ennoble” the site and give an almost monumental image.



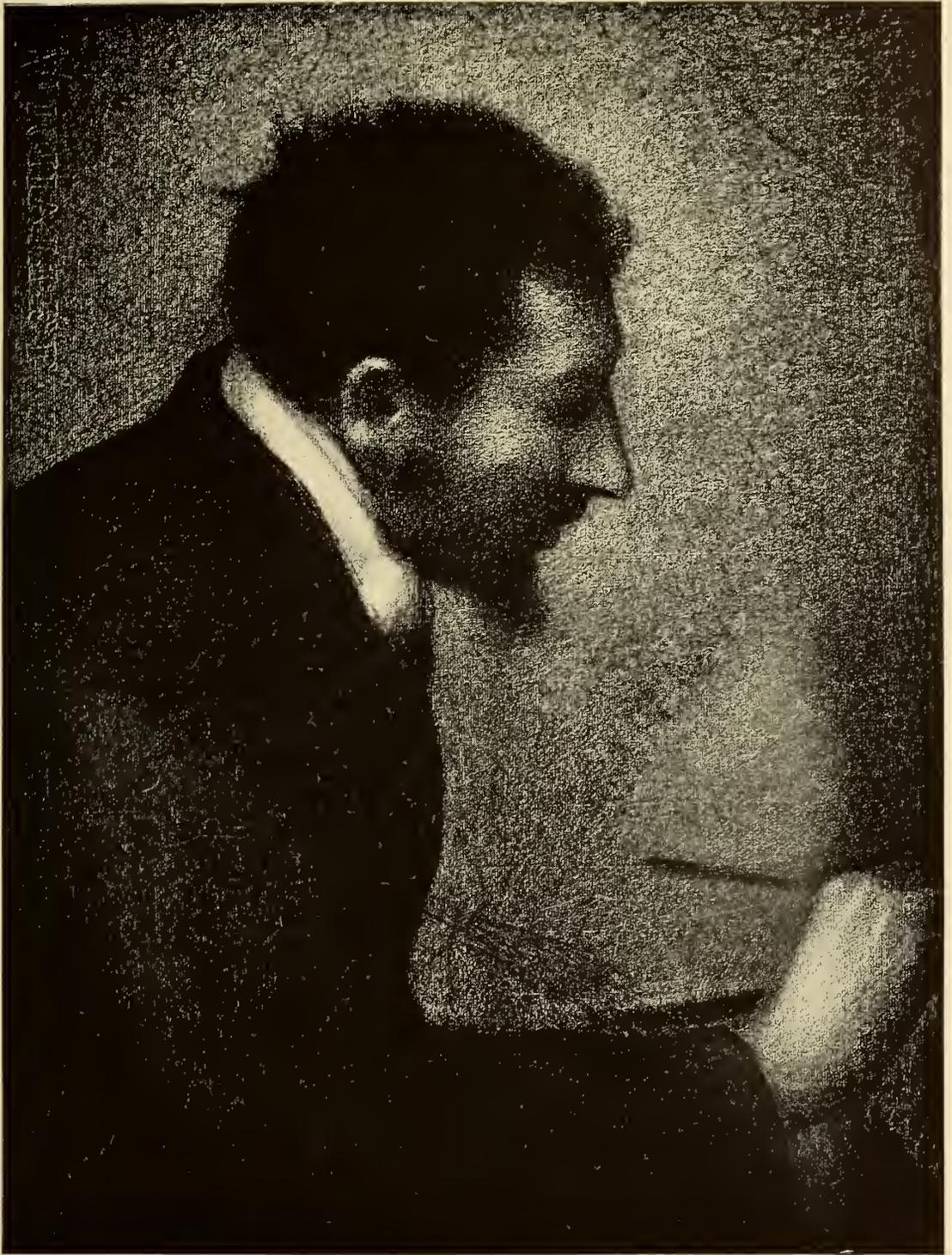
10. G. SEURAT: Detail from a Painting executed in 1882, original size.

As Seurat derived from Delacroix technical conceptions which enabled him to formulate a point of departure for his own efforts, so too he found in the great romantic notions which justified his own inner tendencies, as when Delacroix said:

Nature is just a dictionary, you hunt in it for words . . . you find in it the elements which make a phrase or a story; but nobody would regard a dictionary as a composition in the poetic sense of the term. Besides, nature is far from being always interesting from the point of view of the effect of the whole . . . If each detail is perfect in some way, the union of these details seldom gives an effect equivalent to that which arises, in the work of a great artist, from the total composition.¹⁵

This principle, profoundly opposed to what the impressionist painters were trying to achieve — they were concerned to catch the fugitive aspects of their subject and to reveal faithfully “nature as seen through their temperaments” — this principle, which on the contrary beheld in nature a means rather than an end, found a willing adherent in Seurat. If henceforward he carefully prepared every detail of his pictures by means of drawings and sketches from nature, he was nevertheless intent on subordinating his direct observations to the general composition, each line and mass of which had to correspond to clearly determined purposes. A sensibility continually on the alert was allied in Seurat with a lucid intelligence enamored of clear and fruitful formulas. His reason came into play naturally, effortlessly, as soon as his painter’s instinct had paid its respects to nature; spiritual authentication unfailingly followed the perception of material fact.

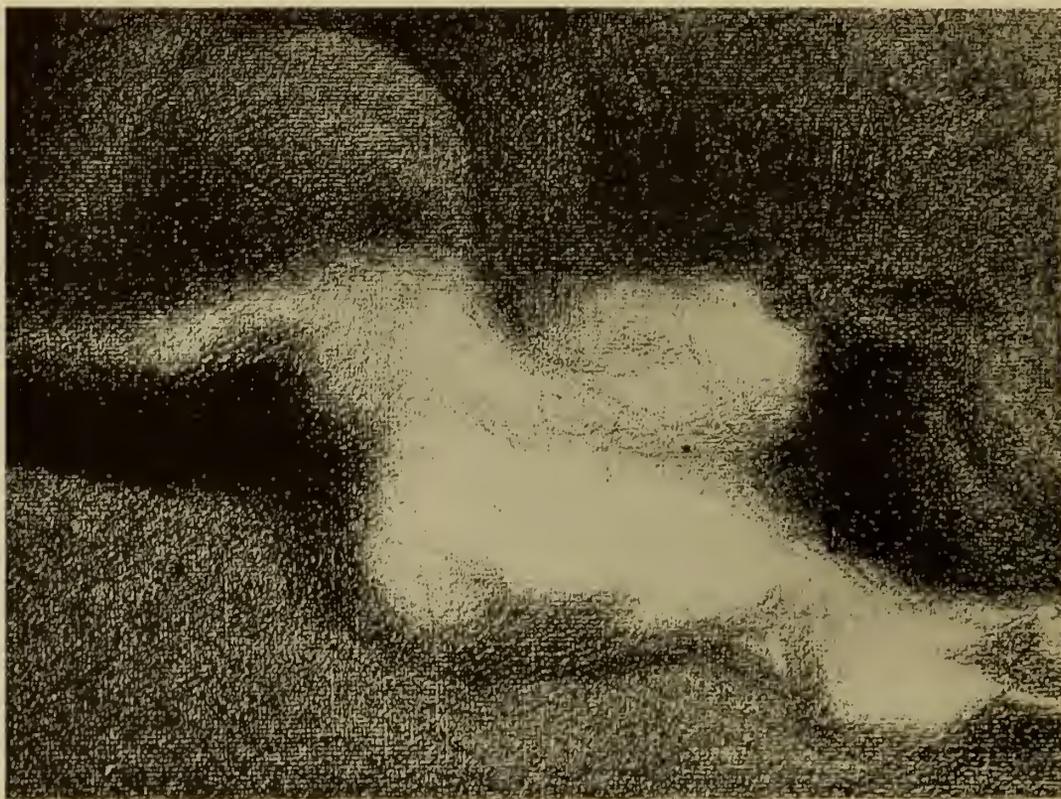
Nothing better illustrates Seurat’s attitude towards nature, and the position he had derived from his direct studies of it, than the way in which he set to work, in 1883, on his first great painting, *La Baignade*, a composition alive with the furious heat of a summer day and all the well-being and lassitude which the sun generates. It was at Asnières, just outside Paris, that the artist first made a number of what he called *croquetons*, sketches from nature brushed very rapidly on the little wooden panels in his painter’s box. He chose the site and familiarized himself with the landscape; then he set human beings in it, apparently random figures, but actually in accord with the subject which his many visits to the place had suggested to him. Thus he assembled all the data for a great canvas. The little panels which he blocked in with such quick and brilliant strokes provided the elements he needed for his composition; he had only to eliminate what was secondary, to suppress what was superfluous



11. G. SEURAT: Portrait of the Painter Aman-Jean, 1882.

and to subtilize his treatment of the details after he had deeply reflected on them. A rough sketch of some horses in the Seine shows in the distance a sailboat which reappears in the final picture; another sketch, a view of a grassy slope, presents the abandoned clothes which later appeared beside a bather; a little panel of persons grouped on the grass reveals the man stretched out on the ground and the bather with dangling legs; another gives us a first view of the boy in the straw hat sitting on the river bank. Then there are the drawings in which Seurat dealt fully with the still life of clothes, the back of the child whose shoulders alone emerge from the water and the posture of the boy hallooing. Some of these drawings were done in his studio from a living model.

Cunningly regulating the play of horizontals and verticals, Seurat carefully composed his picture, here painting the grass with large brush strokes, elsewhere having recourse to little separate points to obtain the desired effect. Then he presented his work to the Salon of 1884. The jury demonstrated once again its total lack of understanding, and even more severe that year than usually, rejected Seurat's canvas, along with numerous other entries.



12. G. SEURAT: Still Life of Clothes, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883-84.

SALON DES INDEPENDANTS

IN a period in which private exhibitions by art dealers were almost unknown, the *Salons* controlled the only opportunity artists had to show their work. Hence to be rejected by the jury meant to be condemned to silence for at least a year, until the next Salon. The painters thus deprived of the single means of bringing their work before the public came together in the spring of 1884 to organize an exhibition of independent artists. It was clearly stipulated that "in principle, works of all members would be accepted," and that each artist would be able to exhibit two paintings. As soon as the Salon was authorized, a few modest posters announced from the walls of Montmartre and Montparnasse:

SALON DES ARTISTES INDEPENDANTS, 1884
autorisé par le ministre des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris
Baraquement B, Cour des Tuileries
du 15 mai au 1er juillet¹⁶

Four hundred and two artists participated in this exhibition, held in a construction which had been set up as the temporary quarters of a Post Office. Most of the exhibitors had been rejected by the Salon, but there were among them painters who had not wanted to appear before its jury. Among the exhibitors — unknown to one another — were Odilon Redon with drawings and lithographs, Dubois-Pillet with the canvas *Dead Child*, Charles Angrand with landscapes, Henri-Edmond Cross with *Corner of a Garden in Monaco*, painted in low key, Paul Signac with *Pont d'Austerlitz* and a view of the *Rue Caulaincourt*, done in the impressionist manner, and Georges Seurat with *Une Baignade*.¹⁷ Seurat's large canvas was hung in the canteen; evidently it was not judged worthy of more prominent display. It was here that the painter first came face to face with the public and the critics. The exhibition was opened on May 15, without the presence of Jules Grévy, President of the Republic, who had announced that he would come.

The truth is that the exhibition did not awake much public interest. Some newspapers did not even mention the event, others were content to ridicule the show, remarking: "Here they are, all of them, row after row, the rejected, the misunderstood, the fearful, the incoherent, the anaemic, the unmasked-for, fops and farceurs of painting," and citing the *Baigneurs* of Monsieur Seurat [sic] among other "curiosities."¹⁸ Jules Clarétie, on the other hand, was quite disappointed and confessed in *Le Temps* that he had "anticipated more eccentricities, more oddities, more bizarre imaginations."¹⁹ Paul Alexis, a friend of Zola and Cézanne, and who under the pseudonym *Trublott* regularly contributed lively reviews written in slang to the *Cri du Peuple*, was extremely interested in painting, although very near-sighted. In his commentary he listed the three paintings which seemed to him most grotesque, and the third of these was:

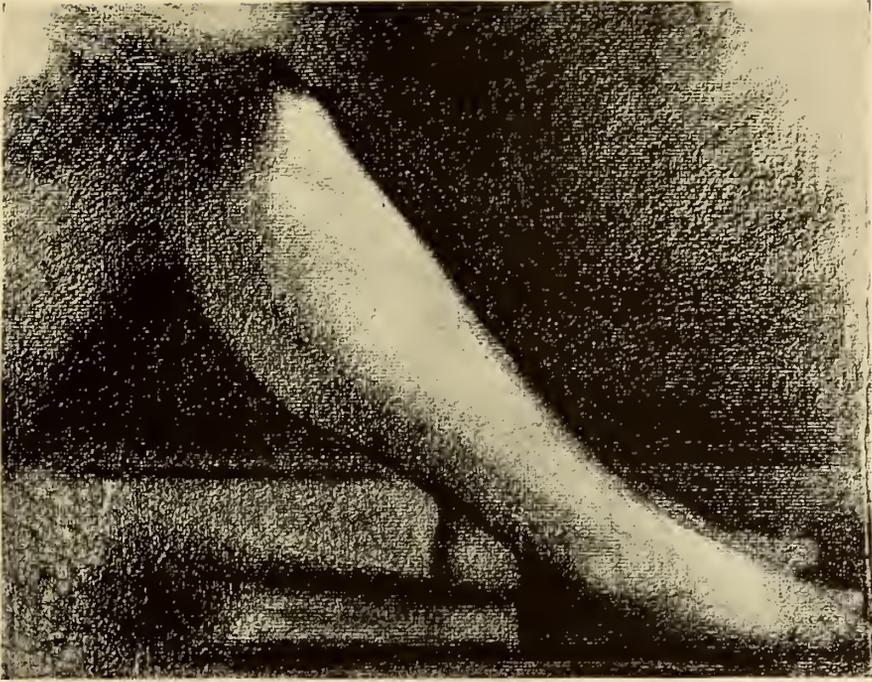
Une Baignade (Asnières) by Monsieur Georges Seurat, Boulevard de Magenta. This one is a fake Puvis de Chavannes. What ridiculous bathers, men and girls [sic]! But painted with such earnestness that it is almost moving, and I am no longer tempted to rib it.²⁰

However, there were critics who were not at all inclined to "rib" the show. Edmond Jacques spoke in *L'Intransigeant* of "Monsieur Seurat, who veils behind prismatic eccentricities the most excellent draughtsmanship, and envelops his bathers, waves and horizons in warm tones."²¹ And Roger Marx said of Seurat in *Le Voltaire*: "I was pleased to discover in his impressionist painting indications of important qualities, the mark of a temperament."²² If not a great triumph, this first test won for Seurat some sympathetic interest and a new friend. The new friend was Paul Signac.

Signac had been struck by Seurat's large canvas despite its unfavorable hanging. He observed that it was painted

in great flat strokes, brushed one over the other, fed by a palette composed, like Delacroix's, of pure and earthy colors. By means of these ochres and browns the picture is deadened, and appears less brilliant than those the impressionists paint with a palette limited to prismatic colors. But the understanding of the laws of contrast, the methodical separation of elements — light, shade, local color, and the interaction of colors — and their proper balance and proportion, give this canvas its perfect harmony.²³

Roger Marx must have dubbed Seurat's entry an "impressionist painting" in order to characterize its free workmanship and clear tones, for Seurat's palette was utterly unlike that of the impressionists, as Signac had grasped at



13. G. SEURAT: Study of a Leg for "Une Baignade," 1883-84.

once. He himself had exhibited paintings in this very show which revealed preoccupations analogous to those of Seurat. But while the latter, in his search for a method, had turned first to Ingres and then to Delacroix, ignoring the impressionists, Signac had chosen Claude Monet and Armand Guillaumin for his masters. In 1880 an exhibition of the works of Claude Monet had, as Signac was to say later, "decided his career," and after his first efforts as an impressionist Signac had ventured to appeal to Monet, writing him:

Frankly, this is my position: I have been painting for two years, and my only models have been your own works; I have been following the wonderful path you broke for us. I have always worked regularly and conscientiously, but without advice or help, for I do not know any impressionist painter who would be able to guide me, living as I am in an environment more or less hostile to what I am doing. And so I fear I may lose my way, and I beg you to let me see you, if only for a short visit. I should be happy to show you five or six studies; perhaps you would tell me what you think of them and give me the advice I need so badly, for the fact is that I have the most horrible doubts, having always worked by myself, without teacher, encouragement, or criticism.²⁴

Whatever advice Monet gave Signac could not have been very definite or precise, for it was Monet's custom to say to those who came to consult him:

I advise you to paint the best way you can, as much as you can, without being afraid to paint bad pictures . . . if your painting does not improve of itself . . . then there is nothing to be done . . . I can't do anything about it.²⁵

Having adopted the impressionists' scale of pure colors based on the spectrum and the little comma-like brush strokes, Paul Signac, still eager to improve his painting, was struck by the methodical working-out of the laws of contrast in the pictures of Seurat. On the other hand, he felt that the latter to develop further would have to abandon the palette of Delacroix for prismatic colors. The related character of their separate approaches soon made the two painters close friends.

Four years younger than Seurat, Signac was exuberant and audacious. He liked conflict and discussions, and he sought the society of other painters to exchange views, able, by his candor and talent, to win their sympathy. Desiring like Seurat to base his experiments on the concepts of science, he went to see Chevreul at Les Gobelins in 1884 to learn the science of color from the theorist himself. Chevreul told him that thirty-four years before then Delacroix had written him, expressing a desire to discuss the science of color and to question him about certain problems which continued to vex him. They had agreed on a rendezvous, but his constant sore throat had forced Delacroix to remain indoors and he had not kept the appointment.²⁶

While Delacroix had not arranged his palette scientifically, Signac was able to derive from his example the following principles for colorists:

Delacroix has proved the advantages of an informed technique; he has shown that logic and method, far from limiting the passion of the painter, strengthen it.

He revealed the secret laws which govern color: the accord of like colors, the analogies between contrasting colors.

He showed how inferior a dull and uniform coloration is to the shades produced by the vibrations of various elements when they are combined.

He indicated the potentialities of optical mixture which makes possible the creation of new tints.

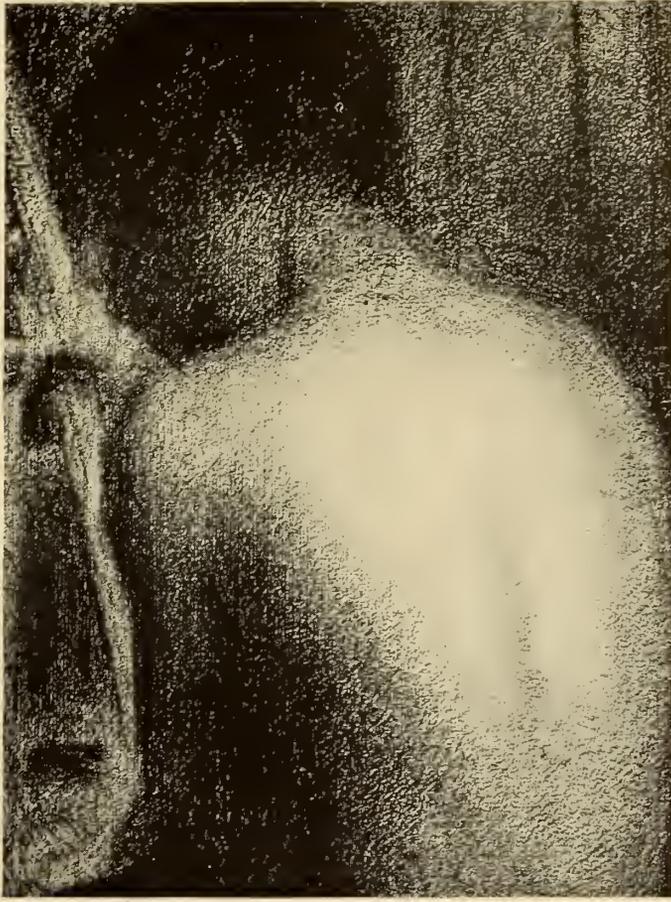
He advised colorists to use as little as possible colors dark, dim or dirty.

He taught that one can modify and tone down a shade without dirtying it by mixing on the palette.

He pointed out the moral influence which color adds to the effect of the picture: he explained the aesthetic language of tints and tones.

He incited painters to dare everything and not to fear that a harmony can be too brightly colored.²⁷

In order to follow these precepts freely one had to abandon all hope of being admitted to the official Salon. It was necessary to lay the basis for repeating



14. G. SEURAT: Torso of a Bather, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883.

regularly the *Salon des Indépendants*. This could not be easily done for as a friend of Seurat remarked:

It happened that the committee was composed of jolly good fellows, escaped from some vaudeville show, who maddened the police commissioner by demanding one another's arrest, and caning each other in the streets. In a few days they disposed of all the funds. On June 9th, 1884, a general meeting of all members which was presided over by Redon, convinced that no orderly account could be expected from the committee, voted to remove them, and agreed to found the *Société des Artistes Indépendants* (headquarters: 19, Quai Saint-Michel, Paris), which second organization was duly constituted on the 11th before a notary. This society, said the preamble, stands for the suppression of juries and proposes to help artists freely present their work before the bar of public opinion.²⁸

During the many stormy meetings which took place before the constitution of the newly created society was drawn up, Signac met Seurat and aligned him-

self with him as well as with Charles Angrand, and Albert Dubois-Pillet who formulated the by-laws of the society. All of these men, together with Henri-Edmond Cross, took a very active part in the formation of the Society of Independent Artists and became, in fact, members of the committee. Linked by mutual aesthetic aims, they came together regularly on Mondays at Signac's studio, met on evenings at the Café d'Orient, rue de Clichy, and participated in the meetings of the Independent Artists who favored the Café Marengo, near the Louvre. Seurat seldom failed to go to these gatherings which he sat through, smoking, mostly silent, always attentive. His chosen friends were Angrand and Signac who familiarized him with the work of the impressionists. Inspired by their mutual studies, Seurat adopted the simplified palette of the impressionists, while Signac saw new possibilities in the methodically balanced separation of elements followed by Seurat. The latter was then dreaming of a large composition which would represent his new palette and technique and he began to make careful studies of the landscape and crowds in the public park on the island of La Grande Jatte, not far from the bank of Asnières where he had made his first sketches for *La Baignade*.

In December 1884 the new Society of Independent Artists organized its first exhibition in the "Pavillon de la Ville de Paris," on the Champs-Élysées. As it was late in the season, a very unfavorable time, few people came to see the exhibition where Seurat once more showed his *Baignade*, as well as nine sketches and a landscape of the island of La Grande Jatte, a first study for his great new picture. His work was again noticed by the critic Roger Marx, who wrote in his review of the show:

Among these independent artists there is one, Monsieur Seurat, who must be singled out. At the time of the Salon of 1882 I praised an excellent portrait of his, done in charcoal, which I was happy to see again. It is accompanied by a series of sketches and a landscape of striking aerial transparency, over which the lively light of a hot summer sun plays freely; all this is done in a sincere and candid style and reveals a depth of conviction which one regrets not to find among certain "converts to impressionism."²⁹

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON THE ISLAND OF LA GRANDE JATTE

IN 1885, while Seurat was painting in Grandcamp, from which he brought back a number of seascapes done in low tones, full of calm and lyricism, Signac, who was working on the bank of the Seine, made the acquaintance of Armand Guillaumin. They often set up their easels side by side. It was in Guillaumin's studio that Signac, much moved, met Camille Pissarro. He interested the impressionist master in his ideas and introduced him to Seurat. The two friends explained to Pissarro why they had resolved not to mix their colors on the palette but had chosen to employ tiny brush strokes of pure colors, permitting the mixture to be accomplished optically. They also told him of their methodical observance of the laws of contrasting and complementary colors. Convinced that their technique would make possible a more rigorous control of his sensations and feeling that it constituted a new stage of impressionism, of which he had been one of the initiators, Camille Pissarro, pupil of Corot, friend of Cézanne, Monet and Renoir, unhesitatingly accepted the audacious "divisionism" of Seurat and Signac. Pissarro's oldest son, Lucien, born like Signac in 1863, was also won over, as was his friend and fellow student, Louis Hayet.

In a letter to his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, Pissarro summed up the new theory which was to determine his practice from then on, stating that what he wanted was

to seek a modern synthesis by methods based on science, that is based on the theory of colors developed by Monsieur Chevreul, on the experiments of Maxwell and the measurements of N. O. Rood; to substitute optical mixture for the mixture of pigments, which means to seek to decompose tones into their constituent elements; for this type of optical mixture stirs up luminosities more intense than those created by mixed pigments.³⁰

Now that the system had been set forth, it remained to produce paintings which by their aesthetic value would show better than any argument advanced



15. People Sitting on a Riverbank near Paris, from an old photograph.

in words the degree to which science could further the art of painting. Seurat, Signac and Pissarro set to work. Seurat began the large composition which he had already meditated on for a long time and which, coming after *La Baignade*, was to represent his completely worked-out technique. The artist made ready for this painting, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, by doing a great number of drawings and sketches in oils, many more in fact than he had done in preparation for *La Baignade*. But while *La Baignade* presented six principal figures in fixed attitudes, the new painting, which was no less than six and one half by ten feet in size, assembled some forty persons, seated or standing, clearly outlined in the full heat of the sun or enveloped by shade, as well as a number of animals and the river itself with its canoes and sailboats. This work occupied Seurat for almost two years, from the time when he completed the landscape of *La Grande Jatte*, already exhibited in December 1884, until the spring of 1886. During this time he not only painted the large canvas itself, but before he had finished it completed some twenty drawings on the spot or from models in his studio and also thirty odd paintings, for the most part rather small and rapidly executed. The exceptions are several



16. G. SEURAT: Study for "La Grande Jatte," Croqueton, about 1884.

large and fairly complete studies which were doubtless done in the studio. An enterprise of such scope is not only very rare in modern art, but was unique in its period, dominated as the time was by the impressionist vision which asked of the artist a spontaneous expression of his sensations. While Monet, for example, taxed his ingenuity to set down the most fugitive effects in a few hours, Seurat, a beginner of twenty-five, conceived and realized a project of an importance almost unknown since the days of David and Ingres.

In attacking this immense project Seurat followed the procedure later outlined by Signac:

It seems that the first consideration of a painter who stands before the white canvas should be to decide what curves and arabesques should cut the surface, what tints and tones should cover it . . . Following the precepts of Delacroix he would not begin a composition until he had first determined its organization. Guided by tradition and by science, he would adjust the composition to his conception, that is to say he would adapt the lines (directions and angles), the chiaroscuro (tones), the colors (tints), to the traits he wished to make dominant.⁹¹

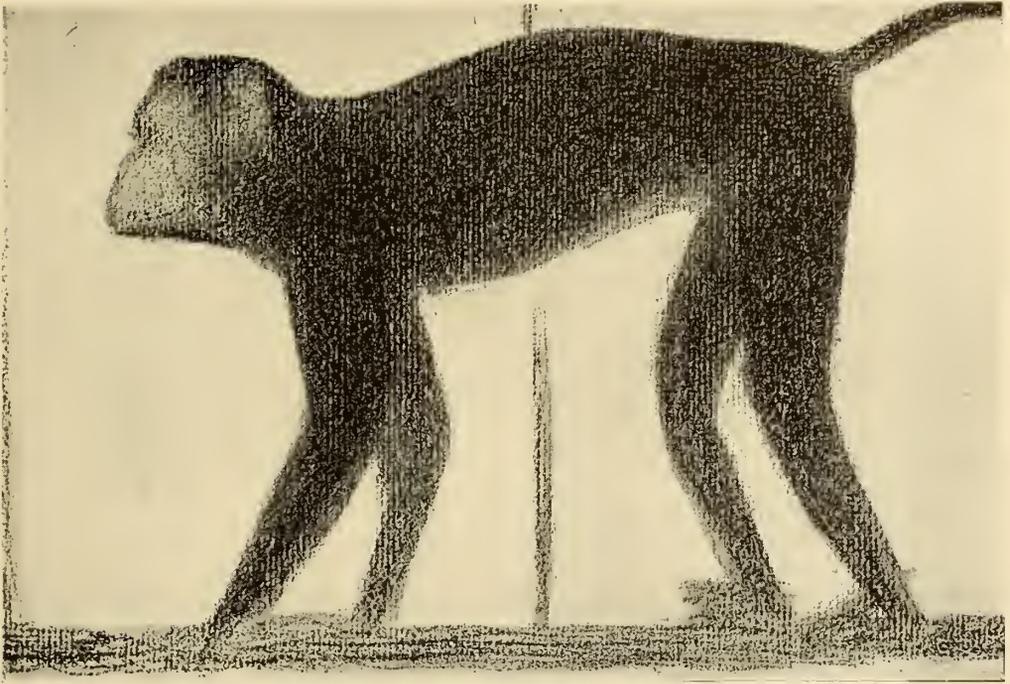
From his studies for the large canvas it would appear that Seurat started with the site itself. He had already painted the landscape, in 1884, and had also



17. G. SEURAT: Dog, Study for "La Grande Jatte," about 1885.

made one important drawing of it. In animating the landscape with human beings and animals, he was no doubt inspired by those he had actually observed, but he subjected his impressions of them to the rigorous requirements of his composition.³² He therefore — his procedure unaltered in this respect since painting *La Baignade* — preserved in more or less developed studies persons seen by chance in those typical costumes and postures which can also be observed in photographs of those days. When necessary, he had models pose in the studio until he had finally determined the attitudes he wanted. Organized on vertical and horizontal planes, his composition of often repeated perpendiculars was enlivened with parasols, bustles, sails and so on. All these lines, these limits of planes, are at the same time the apexes of angles in which light and shade confront each other. The problem was not simply to achieve a certain rhythm of lines, but above all to harmonize the human figures with the landscape. It was a problem which could only be solved by color. In the determination of what colors to select and what roles to assign them Seurat now brought to bear all he had learned from his studies, meditations and experiments.

As Seurat's "divisionism" does not demand a technique of tiny points of



18. G. SEURAT: Monkey, Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1884.

colors, his *croquetons*, done from nature in a few quick brush strokes, are not at all executed in the so-called *pointillist* manner; despite the speed with which they were done, the touch is pure, the elements are balanced and the laws of contrast are observed.³³ Signac relates:

Confronting his subject, Seurat, before touching his little panel with paint, scrutinizes, compares, looks with half shut eyes at the play of light and shadow, observes contrasts, isolates reflections, plays for a long time with the cover of the box which serves as his palette; then, fighting against matter as against nature, he slices from his little heap of colors arranged in the order of the spectrum the various colored elements which form the tint destined best to convey the mystery he has glimpsed. Execution follows on observation, stroke by stroke the panel is covered . . .³⁴

The tints which Seurat used exclusively are those of the disc on which Chevreul brought together all the colors of the rainbow. The fundamental colors, blue, red, yellow and green, according to Chevreul, can be related to one another by a host of intermediate tints in a circular system. Thus: blue, blue-violet, violet, violet-red, red, red-orange, orange, orange-yellow, yellow, yellow-green, green, green-blue and blue again. Besides these, Seurat also used white, which mixed on the palette with these tints permitted him to get an in-

calculable number of tones, from a tint with just a trace of white in it to almost pure white, and he did not hesitate to mix, two by two, tints next to each other on the color scale. Near the thumb hole of his palette he invariably placed several bars of white, each one of which was set aside for mixtures with one of the fundamental colors.³⁵

With this palette Seurat achieved the large composition in his “divisionist” technique. “Divisionism,” according to Paul Signac, means

to assure the benefits of luminosity, color and harmony: by the optical mixture of uniquely pure pigments (all the tints of the prism and all their tones); by the separation of various elements (local color, light, and their interactions); by the balancing of these elements and their proportions (according to the laws of contrast, gradation and irradiation); by the selection of a brush stroke commensurate with the size of the canvas.³⁶

Preparing his composition in accordance with this technique and these new principles, Seurat nevertheless strove not to depart from his direct studies of nature. It was his complete grasp of the subject to the last detail which enabled him to state it in terms of such ordered lines and so complex a technique. A trifling episode, related by his friend Angrand, who in 1885 and 1886 often went to work with Seurat on the island of La Grande Jatte, testifies to the careful precision with which he approached his subject:

As in summer the grass grew high on the bank and prevented Seurat from seeing the boat which he had put in the very forefront — and he complained of this mischance — I helped him by cutting the grass; for I was almost certain that he was going to sacrifice the boat. Although he was not the slave of nature, he was respectful of it, for he was not imaginative. His concern centered most of all on tints, tones and their interactions.³⁷

In the end, Seurat seems to have renounced the boat. But on another occasion, when he observed a woman walking along the bank and holding a monkey on a leash, he did not hesitate to incorporate in his composition the graceful animal with spiral tail. As usual, he first studied the movements of the animal in a number of drawings. In general such drawings merely accentuated the silhouettes of the forms studied, while it was on the little panels of wood which he called *croquetons* that Seurat recorded his observations in colors.

For several months Seurat went every day to the island of La Grande Jatte. The author, Maurice Beaubourg, who used to moor his boat at the island, recalls that in



19. G. SEURAT: Detail from "La Grande Jatte," 1884-86. Reduction scale, 1:3.5.

Coming from Paris, turning to the right, close to the spot where they go bathing on Sundays, on the great arm of the river that goes by Courbevoie and Asnières, one often saw Seurat painting. He told me sadly that the boys who played or bathed in the neighborhood, when they saw his picture, picked up stones . . .³⁸

Seurat was so absorbed by his painting that he sometimes even refused to lunch with his best friends, fearing to weaken his concentration. Painting on the island in the morning, he devoted his afternoons to working on his composition in the studio, hardly pausing to eat a roll or chocolate bar. Standing on his ladder, he patiently covered his canvas with those tiny multi-colored strokes which give it, from a distance, that intense life and luminosity which are the secret of his style. At his task, Seurat always concentrated on a single section of the canvas, having previously determined each stroke and color to be applied. Thus he was able to paint steadily without having to step back from the canvas in order to judge the effect obtained, which is all the more striking when we realize that he intended his pictures to be seen only from a certain distance. His extreme mental concentration also enabled him to keep on working late into the night, despite the treacherous character of artificial lighting. But the type of light in which he painted was unimportant, since his purpose was completely formulated before he took his brush and carefully ordered palette in hand. Nothing was left to chance, to some happily inspired brush stroke. Nevertheless the work seems to have completed itself naturally and is without any evidence of strain; it merged into its final form without flaw or uncertainty. If the figures appear to be frozen in their postures, if the contours are extremely simplified, it is because Seurat summed up in these beings all the natural movements he had observed. He thus achieved such monumental forms that his Sunday promenaders are stripped of whatever is laughable in their dress or conventional in their gestures; they appear, so immobile yet so living, not only as symbols of a season, of a day, of a specific time of the day, as the title has it, but as symbols of an entire epoch.

When his most intimate friends praised his canvas Seurat simply remarked: "They see poetry in what I have done. No, I apply my method and that is all there is to it."³⁹

Replying to Paul Adam, who admired the rigidity of the figures grouped in what seemed to him Pharaonic files, while Moréas saw in the painting Panathenian processions, Seurat, to show how little the subject meant to him, said: "I would have painted equally well in another key, the struggle of the Horatii and the Curiatii."⁴⁰

THE EIGHTH EXHIBITION OF THE IMPRESSIONISTS

FOR several years the relations between the impressionists had been compromised by disagreements of every kind. Since 1877 Cézanne had not appeared in any of the exhibitions of the group, Sisley had not participated in the exhibitions from 1879 to 1881, Monet and Renoir, desirous, “for entirely commercial” reasons, as Renoir explains, of being shown by the official Salon, abstained in 1880 and 1881. Degas had then wanted to break with them, which had led Caillebotte to suggest to Pissarro that they break with Degas. Despite these difficulties, they had all appeared together in 1882. In 1883 their dealer, Durand-Ruel, had held a series of one-man shows of the impressionists. But in 1884 and 1885 there had been no exhibitions at all.

At the start of 1886 Eugène Manet, brother of the painter (who had died three years before), and his wife, Berthe Morisot, went to Pissarro, as well as to Degas, Monet, Sisley, Renoir and others, to urge the preparation of an eighth general exhibition of the impressionist group. Pissarro, who had already introduced Gauguin to his colleagues and had previously insisted that Cézanne be permitted to show his paintings with them, responded by requesting that Signac and Seurat be invited. His request was strongly opposed, and, in the early part of March 1886, Pissarro wrote to his son, Lucien, who was then in England:

Yesterday I had a violent run-in with Monsieur Eugène Manet on the subject of Seurat and Signac. The latter was present, as was Guillaumin. I beg you to believe me when I say that I rated Manet roundly. — Which is not going to please Renoir. — But anyhow, and this is the point, I explained to Monsieur Manet, who probably didn’t understand anything I said, that Seurat had something new to contribute which these gentlemen, despite their talent, couldn’t appreciate, that I was personally convinced of the progressiveness of his art, which would yield, at a given moment, extraordinary results. After all, I am not much concerned with the appreciation of artists, no matter whom; I do not accept the snobbish judgments of the “romantic impressionists” to

whose interest it is to combat new tendencies. I accept the challenge, that's all. But before anything has been done they want to stack the cards, and ruin the exhibition. — Monsieur Manet was beside himself! I didn't calm down.

Degas is a hundred times more loyal. — I told Degas that Seurat's painting [*La Grande Jatte*] was very interesting. "Oh, I would have discovered that for myself, Pissarro, if the painting were not so large!"

Very well — if Degas sees nothing in it, so much the worse for him. It simply means that there is something precious that escapes him. We shall see. Monsieur Manet would also have liked to prevent Seurat from showing his figure painting. I protested against this, telling Manet that in that case we would make no concessions, that we were ready, if space were lacking, *to limit our paintings ourselves*, but that we would fight against anyone who sought to impose his choice on us.

Things will arrange themselves somehow, parbleu!⁴¹

Pissarro was optimistic, but things went badly. The discussions with those he now called "romantic impressionists," in order to distinguish them from "scientific impressionists," were long and vehement. They finally led to a break-up of the former comrades. Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Caillebotte withdrew. Besides Redon and Schuffenecker and a few other newcomers who had been invited, only Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Degas, Gauguin, Guillaumin and, of course, Camille Pissarro, were willing to appear with Seurat and Signac. Pissarro insisted that his paintings, those of his son, Lucien, and of Seurat and Signac, all be shown in the same room so as to stress the common effort of these four, while Degas wanted the word "impressionist" deleted from the announcements. The exhibition, thus announced merely as "*Eighth Exhibition of Paintings*," opened on May 15, 1886, at 1, rue Laffitte, at the corner of the boulevard des Italiens, above the Restaurant Doré, and ran for a month.

To this exhibition Seurat sent five landscapes⁴² among which were several views of Grandcamp, three drawings and his painting of *La Grande Jatte*, listed in the catalogue as "*Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de la Grande Jatte*." Before the exhibit, artists and art-enthusiasts had been rather intrigued by Seurat's large composition which had been talked of in the studios. A painter announced to the Irish author, George Moore, on May 15:

Today is the opening of the exposition of the Impressionists . . . There is a canvas there twenty feet square and in three tints: pale yellow for the sunlight, brown for the shadow, and all the rest is sky-blue. There is, I am told, a lady walking in the foreground with a ring-tailed monkey, and the tail is said to be three yards long.⁴³

George Moore also tells in his *Confessions of a Young Man* how they went in a group to kick up a row before Seurat's painting:

We went insolent with patent leather shoes and bright kid gloves, and armed with all the jargon of the school. “Cette jambe ne porte pas”; “la nature ne se fait pas comme ça”; “on dessine par les masses”; “combien de têtes?”; “sept et demie!”; “si j’avais un morceau de craie je mettrais celle-là dans un bocal, c’est un foetus”; etc., in a word, all that the journals of culture are pleased to term an artistic education. And then the boisterous laughter, exaggerated in the hope of giving as much pain as possible.⁴⁴

And Signac recalls that on the day of the opening the well-known painter, Alfred Stevens,

continually shuttled back and forth between the Maison Doré and the neighboring Café Tortoni to recruit those of his cronies who sipped at the famous terrace, and brought them to look at Seurat’s canvas to show how far his friend Degas had fallen in welcoming such horrors. He threw his money on the turnstile and did not even wait for change, in such a hurry was he to bring in his batches. The monkey held on a leash by the woman in blue seemed particularly to excite the high spirits of these boulevardiers.⁴⁵

“A brilliant opening,” was the comment in *Le Figaro*, “A big crowd, mostly women, and hence many beautiful gowns.”⁴⁶ This was its entire account of an exhibition at which representative works in a new style were shown for the first time.

As it happened, the room in which *La Grande Jatte* was exhibited was too narrow, and the spectators, unable to see Seurat’s painting from the distance he had intended, were much provoked by it. Among the few visitors attracted by Seurat’s large canvas was the Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren, who has recorded his impressions:

It covered a whole panel, flanked by the *Bec du Hoc* and the *Harbor of Grandcamp*. The novelty of this art at once intrigued me. Not for an instant did I doubt its complete sincerity or profound originality; these were patent in the work before me. That evening I spoke of it to artists; they heaped me with laughter and ridicule.⁴⁷

What added to the general confusion was the fact that the public was unable to distinguish between the works of Seurat, Signac and the two Pissarros. This is the less astonishing when it is recalled that the critics themselves had several times confused the paintings of Monet and Sisley and even could not always distinguish between the different art mediums. The novelty of the pictures produced by these painters working with an identical palette and relying on a common method was too striking for the public, which saw them all together for the first time, to take note of subtle differences of personal quality. The fact was that personal quality seemed to be obliterated by *La Grande*

Jatte, which dominated the room. The lyricism of Signac and the naive rigidity of Camille Pissarro were ignored, and the critics were able to claim that the new method had completely destroyed the personalities of the painters who employed it.

Even a connoisseur as informed as George Moore could not at first make out which were the works of Seurat and which were those of Pissarro. Moore writes:

Great as was my wonderment, it was tenfold increased on discovering that only six of these pictures were painted by the new man, Seurat, whose name was unknown to me; the other five were painted by my old friend Pissarro. My first thought went for the printer; my second for some *fumisterie* on the part of the hanging committee, the intention of which escaped me. The pictures were hung low, so I went down on my knees and examined the dotting in the pictures signed Seurat, and the dotting in those that were signed Pissarro. After a strict examination I was able to detect some differences, and I began to recognise the well-known touch even through this most wild and most wonderful transformation. Yes, owing to a long and intimate acquaintance with Pissarro and his work, I could distinguish between him and Seurat, but to the ordinary visitor their pictures were identical.⁴⁸

Criticism with its disinclination for such careful study would have been unfaithful to its traditional role if, confronting this new type of painting, it had shown more understanding than a public composed of irresponsible youngsters, bewildered bourgeois and amateur collectors. Marcel Fouquier wrote in *Le XIXe Siècle*:

Monsieur Seurat, who has been heralded by people with good judgment, exhibits an immense canvas of which the only quality is its complete lack of seriousness. There are a jockey – who obviously lost a leg over the last course of hedges – and a woman leading a monkey on a leash, which are extremely “farcical,” as the merry *Trublot* would say.⁴⁹

There were many who thought the whole thing was a hoax, that the artist was merely “pulling the legs of honest folk,” and who consequently refused to take the canvas seriously. Even the avant-garde critic, Octave Mirbeau, despite the arguments of his friend Pissarro, confessed that the picture disappointed and exasperated him. He wrote:

Monsieur Seurat is certainly very talented, and I have not the courage to laugh at his immense and detestable painting, so like an Egyptian fantasy, and which, in spite of its eccentricities and errors, which I hope are sincere, shows signs of a true painter’s temperament.⁵⁰

The same hesitation between sympathizing with the painter and deprecating his major effort was evidenced by the literary critic, Emile Hennequin, in *La Vie Moderne*:

Monsieur Seurat has startled jaded eyes with a new technique which we are not competent to evaluate. But if we limit our judgment to the general effect of the canvases, we must point out the extreme refinement of tones in his works, notably in the views of Grandcamp. On the other hand, we cannot accept his *Sunday at La Grande Jatte*, for the tones in this painting are *crude* and the figures are set against the light in a way which makes them resemble poorly articulated wax figures.⁵¹

While Mirbeau and Hennequin were unable to explain clearly the discomfort they felt in the presence of Seurat's vast composition, Teodor de Wyzewa was ready to be the first to take a theoretical stand against this new technique, which according to him, lacked the intense life necessary to a work of art. In his aversion to the introduction of scientific methods into art, he did not scruple to question the sincerity of Seurat and his friends:

The impressionist paintings of Manet, Cézanne and Monsieur Degas, express with exemplary sincerity the new sensations, the new world our eyes experience. Now here the successors to these artists are trying to perfect the forms created by them. They found in the notes of Delacroix, in the scientific discoveries of Chevreul and Rood, the suggestion for a type of painting in which color impressions are ordered by the combining of little multi-colored brush strokes. But while they were attentive to such improvement of the means, they forgot the true end of art, the sincere and complete expression of vivid sensations. The works of these painters — Pissarro and Seurat are the most notorious — are interesting only as the exercises of highly mannered virtuosos. Their paintings are lifeless for the painters did not strive for sincerity, being too taken up with external formulas.⁵²

There was only one critic who had the courage to proclaim his unqualified admiration for the new painting. This was Félix Fénéon. Ever since 1884 he had realized the importance of *La Baignade*,⁵³ and now he devoted a long article to Seurat's new canvas in the review, *La Vogue*. But instead of abandoning himself to facile enthusiasm, he attempted to do what no critic had yet done, to define clearly the new qualities and original traits of the canvas and to explain Seurat's new technique by analyzing *La Grande Jatte*. The subject, he pointed out, involved the following elements:

A canicular sky, at four o'clock, summer, boats flowing by to the side, a group of chance Sunday visitors enjoying the fresh air among the trees; and these forty-odd persons are fixed in a hieratic and simplified composition, they are rigorously drawn, of some we see the backs, some we see full-face, some in profile, some are seated at

right angles, some are stretched out horizontally, some are standing up straight. The atmosphere is transparent and singularly vibrant; the surface seems to fluctuate. Perhaps this sensation, which is also experienced in connection with other paintings in the same room, can be explained by the theory of Dove: the retina, expecting distinct rays of light to act on it, perceives in rapid alternation both the disassociated colored elements and their resultant color.

Fénéon also explained the painter's method:

If you consider, for example, a few square inches of uniform tone in Monsieur Seurat's *Grande Jatte*, you will find on each inch of this surface, in a whirling host of tiny spots, all the elements which make up the tone. Take this grass plot in the shadow: most of the strokes render the local value of the grass; others, orange-tinted and thinly scattered, express the hardly-felt action of the sun; bits of purple introduce the complement to green; a cyanine blue, provoked by the proximity of a plot of grass in the sun, accumulates its siftings towards the line of demarcation, and at that point progressively rarefies them. Only two elements come together to produce this grass plot in the sun, green, and orange-tinted light, any interaction being impossible under the furious beat of the sun's rays. Black being a non-light, the black dog is colored by the reactions of the grass; its dominant tint is therefore deep purple; but it is also attacked by the dark blue arising from neighboring spaces of light. The monkey on a leash is speckled with yellow, its personal quality, and dotted with purple and ultramarine.

These colors, isolated on the canvas, recombine on the retina: we have therefore, not a mixture of material colors (pigments), but a mixture of differently colored rays of light. Need we recall that even when the colors are the same, mixed pigments and mixed rays of light do not necessarily produce the same results? It is also generally understood that the luminosity of optical mixture is always superior to that of material mixture, as the many equations worked out by N. O. Rood show. For a violet-carmine and a prussian blue, from which a gray-blue results:

$$\underbrace{50 \text{ carmine} + 50 \text{ blue}}_{\text{mixture of pigments}} = \underbrace{47 \text{ carmine} + 49 \text{ blue} + 4 \text{ black}}_{\text{mixture of rays of light}}$$

for carmine and green:

$$50 \text{ carmine} + 50 \text{ green} = 50 \text{ carmine} + 24 \text{ green} + 26 \text{ black}$$

We can understand why the impressionists, in striving to express extreme luminosities – as did Delacroix before them – wish to substitute optical mixture for mixing on the palette.

Monsieur Georges Seurat is the first to present a complete and systematic paradigm of this new technique. His immense canvas, *La Grande Jatte*, whatever part of it you examine, unrolls, a monotonous and patient tapestry: here in truth the accidents of the brush are futile, trickery is impossible; there is no place for bits of bravura. – let the hand be numb, but let the eye be agile, perspicacious, cunning.⁵⁴

one cabinet
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FELIX FENEON

AND THE NEO-IMPRESSIONISTS

IMPRESSIONIST painting, emerging simultaneously with literary naturalism, had been defended by Zola and Duranty. The “divisionists,” from the moment they appeared, found supporters in the symbolist movement. The year 1886, so important in the history of painting, was equally decisive for the development of symbolist literature. It was in this year that ideas crystallized and groups formed. The first numbers of *La Vogue*, *Le Symboliste* and *La Décadence* appeared in 1886. That year Moréas published a manifesto in favor of symbolism, and Mallarmé, Verlaine, Jules Laforgue, Paul Adam, Gustave Kahn and Félix Fénéon began systematically to propound and propagate the new literary principles. However, these authors, while united in their literary convictions, did not all take the same view of painting. Mallarmé, friend of Manet, was attached to the generation of impressionists, whose marvels Jules Laforgue — he was to die that very year — had just discovered. Some years later, Mallarmé and Moréas made a great favorite of Gauguin, who, the one symbolist painter to emerge from the impressionists, did their portraits. Other members of the group supported Puvis de Chavannes or Gustave Moreau, attracted by the former’s majestic simplicity or the latter’s flowery hieraticism.⁵⁵ But Henri de Régnier, Gustave Kahn, Paul Adam and Félix Fénéon were attached to Seurat and his friends. As Gustave Kahn explains:

We not only felt that we were leading a struggle for new ideas; we were attracted by something that seemed to parallel our own efforts: the kind of equilibrium, the search for an absolute departure which characterized the art of Seurat. We were sensitive to the mathematical element in this art. Perhaps the fire of youth had stirred up in us a number of half-certitudes which seemed strengthened by the fact that his experiments in line and color were in many respects exactly analogous to our theories of verse and phrase. The theory of discontinuity might very well have some relation to the theory of optical mixture. Painters and poets were mutually captivated by the possibility that this was the case.⁵⁶

Of the symbolist authors associated with Seurat and his friends, Félix Fénéon was the one who became most intimate with the painter. And what Zola had formerly done for Manet and his group, Fénéon, less noisily but with no less fervor, undertook for their successors. He had not only the courage of his convictions, but, as Rémy de Gourmont said, "all of the qualities of a critic of art: the eye, the analytical mind, the style which renders visible what the eye has seen and intelligible what the mind has understood."⁵⁷

Fénéon and his friends often met late in the afternoon in the office of *La Revue Indépendante*, edited by Fénéon and Kahn.⁵⁸ Paul Alexis, the merry *Trublot*, who had become a great friend of Signac, reports that one found in this office between five and seven o'clock:

the white beard of Pissarro, the silence of Seurat, the absence of Mallarmé, occupied with other refinements, and sometimes Raffaelli. Verlaine would have been there but for his bad leg, and George Moore if he had not been in England. Jacques-Emile Blanche introduced a note of fashionable brilliance which was countered by the exuberant Signac who addressed himself to the monocle that fled before the beard of Dubois-Pillet . . . Angrand entered, followed by Luce and Christophe. And then there was the strangely appearing Charles Henry,⁵⁹ an inventor, who had dropped in. Félix Fénéon, like the cold diplomat he was, arrived, looked around and told a story that would have made the Baron d'Ange blush; he remarked in a musical and heavenly voice on how painful it was to have to deal with inked sheets. He had just left the ministry [where he was employed] for the art dealers, cold of aspect and with almost dancing gait, wearing a silk top hat, his nose like that of Henry IV, the handle of his umbrella emerging from under his shoulder, its rod pointed at the ground.⁶⁰

All those who have described Félix Fénéon have testified to his reserved manner and skilled politeness. Fénéon then — as now — was very tall and angular; he was always impeccably dressed and looked like an English gentleman. His long face was set with clear and incredulous eyes, a prominent nose, a little pointed beard, a large and vaguely sardonic mouth; in his bearing there was an indescribable nuance of irony. His aristocratic features had a wholly intellectual beauty and seemed to forbid the expression of any emotion. His gestures were calm, polished, almost solemn. He spoke slowly and, without appearing to be aiming at anything, in a negligent and careless manner, got to the heart of whatever was in question. No banality ever crossed his lips; he found a brilliant formulation for whatever idea struck him. It was he who remarked dryly of the Luxembourg Museum where Manet, Degas and Pissarro were still unrepresented:



20. P. SIGNAC: Profile of Félix Fénéon, 1890.



21. H. DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC: Portrait of Félix Fénéon, 1895.

Best ↓

not very like

also Steinleard

painting

several in Revue Bla

We should applaud a conflagration that would cleanse the Luxembourgian stables if there were not in that museum a collection of documents indispensable for future monographs on the stupidity of the XIXth century.⁶¹

The painters who were his friends did not fail to leave us portraits of Fénéon. Signac did a symbolic portrait of him in which he appears with a cyclamen in his hand. The canvas is entitled *On The Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones and Tints, Portrait of Monsieur Félix Fénéon in 1890*, and Toulouse-Lautrec reserved for Fénéon a place of honor near himself among the spectators on one of the two great decorations painted for the booth of *La Goulue*. The yellow and mephistophelian head with little pointed beard, seen in profile, represents the man Lautrec liked to compare with Buddha, doubtless because of Fénéon's manner of speech and impassive face.

A widely curious and immensely cultivated mind, linked with all the avant-garde artists and writers of the late nineteenth century, Fénéon played a role as inconspicuous as it was important. He collaborated with all the little, and sometimes short-lived, magazines that showed some independent spirit. *La Vogue*, *Le Symboliste*, the series of *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, *La Revue In-*



my old old friend since 1911
 Felixele in 1938 without beard in later years he died 1944

dépendante, *L'Art Moderne*, published in Brussels, and *La Revue Blanche* owe him, if not their very existence, at least many pages in his admirably precise style. Everywhere he went, among editors, publishers, in art circles, Félix Fénéon opened the door wide to the young and authentic talents he invariably singled out from the crowd. To countless painters and writers he gave encouragement and advice and also kindly criticism, delicate and ironical at times but always just. The friendship that linked him with Georges Seurat, a friendship which began when Fénéon saw the first great canvases of the unknown artist, was not terminated by Seurat's death and apotheosis; it continues as a cult and an apostleship, nourished by Fénéon's nobility of mind, intellectual courage, rare disinterestedness and affectionate admiration.

The art criticisms which Fénéon published in 1886 in *La Vogue* appeared at the close of the year in a brochure entitled *Les Impressionnistes en 1886*.⁶² He clearly showed in this work that whatever joined Seurat and Signac to their predecessors was too indefinite a linkage for the new painters to be regarded as "impressionists" even though they had participated in the eighth exhibition of the group. It was at this time that the term "neo-impressionist" first appeared, designating the artists who followed Seurat and divided their colors as he did.⁶³ As Signac puts it:

If these painters, better designated by the term *chromo-luminarists* adopted the name *neo-impressionists*, it was not in order to curry favor (the impressionists had still not won their own battle), but to pay homage to the efforts of their predecessors and to emphasize that while procedures varied, the ends were the same: *light* and *color*. It is in this sense that the term *neo-impressionist* should be understood, for the technique employed by these painters is utterly unlike that of the impressionists: to the degree that the technique of the latter is instinctive and instantaneous that of the *neo-impressionists* is deliberate and constant.⁶⁴

NEW EXHIBITIONS

NEW YORK, PARIS, BRUSSELS

FÉNÉON's brochure, *Les Impressionnistes en 1886*, had historical meaning beyond the sense of its title. It not only supplied the first analysis of Seurat's technique, but in emphasizing the triumph of system over intuition presaged the disruption of the impressionist group. The fact is that the impressionists never again organized an exhibition after their eighth show, already so incomplete. Disputes about the "divisionist" technique of Seurat and Pissarro finally brought about the break-up of the old comrades. The first exhibition of the group in which those who called themselves neo-impressionists participated was at the same time the last collective effort of the old-guard impressionists.

At the very moment when the painters were assembling their works for the exhibition at the Maison Doré, Paul Durand-Ruel, whose affairs had taken an almost disastrous turn, was receiving an invitation from the American Art Association. With a courage steeled by desperation he resolved to collect a great number of paintings for an important exhibition in America, the first of its kind. The official dealer of Manet, Renoir, Monet, Sisley and Pissarro, he yielded to the latter's insistence and decided to include certain works by Seurat and Signac. In March of 1886 Durand-Ruel left for New York with 300 canvases, which he planned to place on exhibition in Madison Square Garden, the show to be announced simply as: *Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris*. The *New York Daily Tribune* observed:

The coming of the French Impressionists has been preceded by much violent language regarding their paintings. — Those who have the most to do with such conservative investments as the works of Bouguereau, Cabanel, Meissonier and Gérôme have imparted the information that the paintings of the Impressionists partake the character of a "crazy quilt" being only distinguished by such eccentricities as blue grass, violently green skies and water with the coloring of a rainbow. In short it has been said that the paintings of this school are utterly and absolutely worthless.⁶⁵

In order to soften the shock which the works of these painters,⁶⁶ and of Signac and Seurat (the latter had sent his *Baignade* and several landscapes) were likely to cause the American public, Durand-Ruel included a few academic

paintings with the others. But contrary to expectations, the reaction of the public was not violent at all, and the exhibition achieved a real *succès d'estime*. Durand-Ruel explained it thus:

Since I was almost as famous in America as in France for having been one of the first defenders of the great painters of 1830, they came to examine carefully and without prejudice the works of my new friends. It was presumed that these works had some value since I had continued to support them.⁶⁷

The attitude of the American public also showed that the unceasing attempts of Mary Cassatt to interest her compatriots in impressionist art had borne fruit. Some of her friends had even consented to add canvases from their own collections to the pictures already assembled by Durand-Ruel, thus lending the exhibition the prestige of their names. As a matter of fact, people took so lively an interest in the show that it ran for a month longer than originally planned; it was taken in May to the National Academy of Design. This practically amounted to receiving an official blessing.

While the Parisian press had wrapped its ignorance in facile pleasantries and ridiculous theories, the American critics took a broad view of the paintings. Instead of pretending that the impressionists did not know how to draw, or that their "paint-smears" were indications of impotence, they conceded from the first:

It is distinctly felt that the painters have worked with decided intention, that if they have neglected established rules it is because they have outgrown them, and that if they have ignored lesser truths, it has been in order to dwell more strongly on larger.⁶⁸

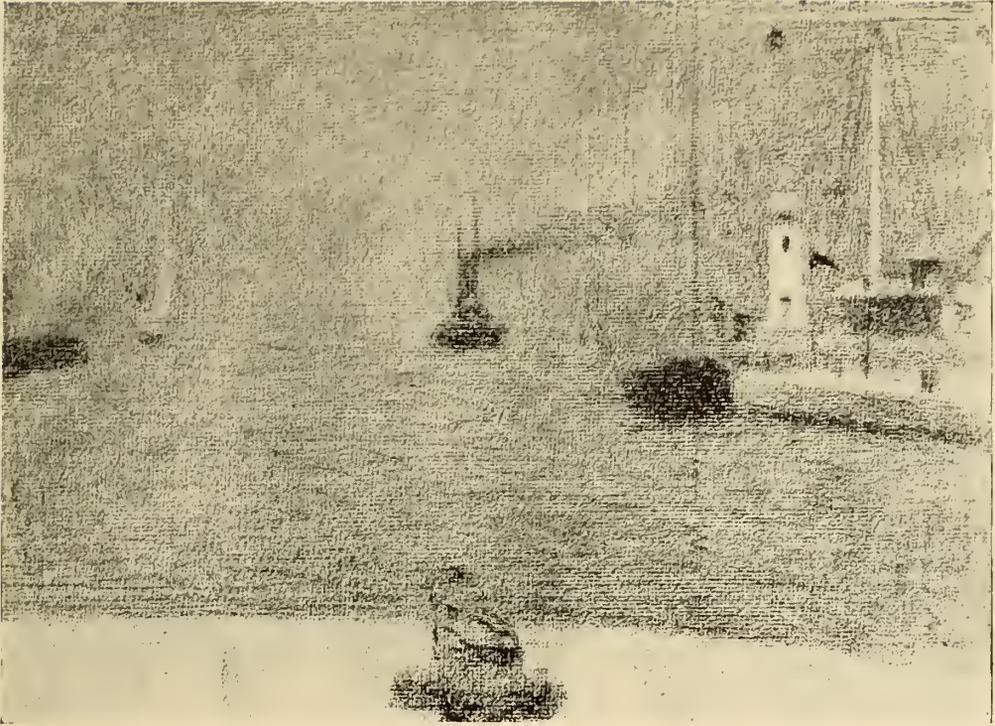
The reviewer of *The Critic* remarked:

Every visitor to the exhibition has brought away with him an impression of strange and unholy splendor, or depraved materialism, according to the depth of his knowledge and experience.

And the writer added:

It is seldom that what is virtually an entire school of art is transported bodily from one country to another; yet this has been done in the case of the impressionists. In this exhibition you may study the school from its superb beginnings in the earlier works of Manet down to the contemporary period, when color and composition have been borrowed from Japan, and the whole solar spectrum is found on a foot of canvas . . .

This allusion to the works of Seurat and his friends was further developed by the observation that in



22. G. SEURAT: L'Entrée du Port de Honfleur, 1886.

Seurat's large and uncouth composition *Bathers* the uncompromising strength of the impressionist school is fully revealed.⁶⁹

Happily for Paul Durand-Ruel the moral success of the exhibition was coupled with a certain number of sales.⁷⁰ However, none of Seurat's works found an American buyer, and Durand-Ruel brought them back to France when he returned in the summer of 1886. Seurat was then at Honfleur where he painted several seascapes, among them *Coin d'un Bassin à Honfleur* which he sent to the exhibition of the *Indépendants*.

The Independent Artists who had not held an exhibition during the previous year showed their works in the Tuileries in August 1886.⁷¹ Besides this canvas of Honfleur and several seascapes done in 1885 at Grandcamp, Seurat showed his *Grande Jatte* again. *Le Figaro* announced the event as:

Not very interesting, this exhibition, from the point of view of art, but to be recommended to people who suffer from disorders of the spleen; we advise those of our friends who like to laugh to visit this exhibition. The room devoted to the "intransigents of painting" is particularly unspeakable.⁷²

Félix Fénéon again devoted an article to Seurat's technique. It appeared in *La Vie Moderne*, a review published in Brussels by Octave Maus, Edmond

Picard and Emile Verhaeren. In this new piece Fénéon made a particular point of various technical problems. Camille Pissarro, who had looked over Fénéon's notes, wrote his son that he feared these questions were "only too well explained in the article, and the painters will take advantage of it."⁷³

Having shown that the art of Seurat and his friends marked a step in advance of impressionism insofar as it made it possible "to construct a painting in a precise and rigorous manner," Fénéon added:

For the originators of this new painting every colored surface sends out colorations of diverse strengths, which tend to grow less; they interpenetrate like circles of waves, and the painting is unified and synthesized in a general sensation of harmony. The first efforts in this direction were made less than two years ago: the period of hesitancy is over: picture by picture these artists have strengthened their style, increased their sum of observations, clarified their science. Points still not elucidated. In the paintings of Monsieur Pissarro, a colored surface acts not only through its complementary color on neighboring surfaces, but reflects on them some of its own color, even when it is not brilliant, even when the eye does not see its reflection clearly. The position of Seurat and Signac appears to be less affirmative. And, for example, the woman in the foreground of *A Sunday at La Grande Jatte* stands in the grass and yet not one spot of green contributes to the formation of the tone of her dress.⁷⁴

Then, insisting on the problems arising from the chemical compositions of different colors which occasion transformations and deteriorations, Fénéon argued for framing paintings under glass, explaining that the application of colors flatwise would prevent the paint from cracking after it dried. Touching the question of the frame itself he remarked:

With the abandonment of the gold frame, destructive of orange tones, Pissarro, Seurat, Dubois-Pillet and Signac temporarily adopt the classic frame of the impressionists, the white frame whose neutrality is friendly to everything near it, if it contains, to attenuate its crudity, clear chrome yellow, vermilion and lac.

Reviewing the works of the various painters, Fénéon concluded with unconcealed satisfaction:

As for the new recruits to impressionism they will take the path of the analyst Camille Pissarro and not that of Claude Monet.⁷⁵

Asked to show his paintings in Nantes in November 1886, Pissarro once again used his influence on behalf of his young friends, and Seurat and Signac were able to show their works with his.⁷⁶ Meantime Seurat and Signac had returned from their "summer campaign." Signac, who had worked at Les Andelys on the bank of the Seine, now made ready to paint some views of Paris, while Seurat, after his return from Honfleur, began in his studio a new large



23. G. SEURAT: Still Life, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.

canvas. *Les Poseuses* (*The Three Models*). It was at this time that he received an invitation from Octave Maus to show his paintings with a group of independent Belgian artists known as *Les Vingt*. Pissarro and Paul Signac were also invited. Seurat sent *La Grande Jatte* and six landscapes of Honfleur and Grandcamp and then, in February 1887, went to Brussels with Signac to be present at the opening of the exhibition.

As was to be expected, *La Grande Jatte*, better displayed than it had been in Paris, was from the first the center of attention and the subject of lively disputes. The press spoke of

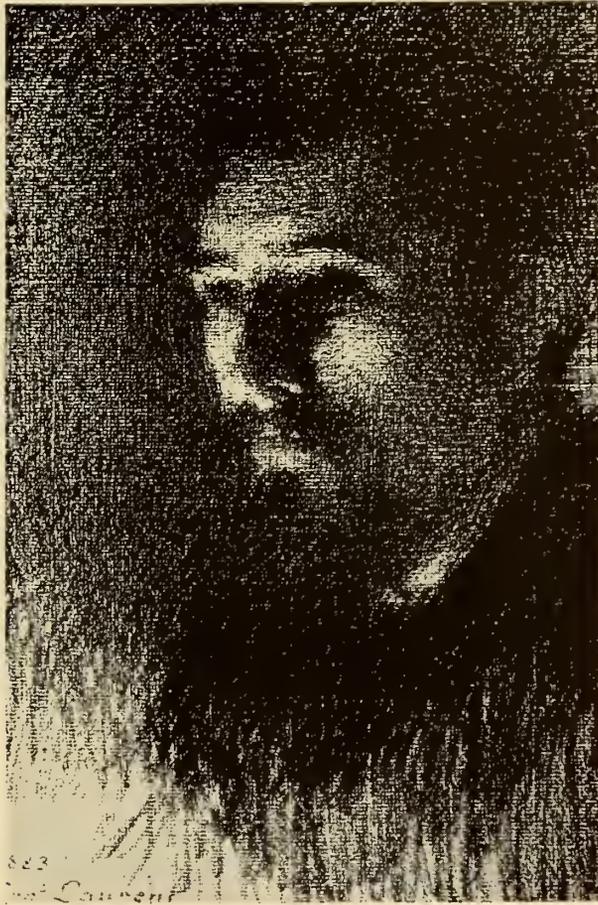
. . . farceurs like Seurat and Pissarro, who are not taken seriously by any artist and do not deserve to be. They can congratulate themselves on being welcomed with nothing worse than ridicule in Brussels.⁷⁷

It would be difficult to be more independent than Seurat or to paint with more disdain for the old stuff called drawing, color, and the organization of the picture.⁷⁸

Emile Verhaeren published in *La Vie Moderne*, the review in which the skeptical study by Hennequin had already appeared, an enthusiastic article on Seurat. He wrote:

In the present show the clarion call is sounded by Monsieur Seurat. *La Grande Jatte!* They press about it, insult it, mock it. The Goncourt brothers were right: "A painting on exhibition hears more nonsense than anything else in the world." *La Grande Jatte* deserves the most careful study. It is luminous, and to such a degree that it is almost impossible to become interested in the other landscapes near it. An atmospheric purity, a total aerial vibration, fills it. The Seine, the green shadow, the golden grass and the sky, influence one another, color one another, interpenetrate and produce a tremendous sensation of life.

Monsieur Seurat is described as a savant, an alchemist, who knows what? However he uses his scientific experiments only for the purpose of controlling his vision. They give him an extra degree of sureness. Where is the harm? *La Grande Jatte* is painted with a primitive naiveness and honesty. Looking at it we are reminded of Gothic art. As the old masters, risking rigidity, arranged their figures in hierarchic order, Monsieur Seurat synthesizes attitudes, postures, gaits. What the masters did to express their time he attempts for his, and with equal care for exactness, concentration and sincerity. He does not do over again what they did. He makes a unique use of their profound method in order to sum up the life of the present. The gestures of these promenaders, the groups they form, their goings and comings, are *essential*. The whole work appears as the result of many occasional observations. It has a great and glorious swing, and that is why enthusiasms are harnessed to it like prancing horses. Even the public, which has rejected the major effort of the painter, was attracted by his smaller paintings: Seascapes and Harbours. Two canvases have been sold . . . Never has anyone achieved grandeur with such precise detail. The *Bec du Hoc* and the *Lighthouse of Honfleur* are at once minutely detailed and immense.⁷⁹



24. E. LAURENT: Portrait of Georges Seurat, 1883.

SEURAT AND HIS FRIENDS

THE little group of neo-impressionists was soon augmented by new adherents in France and also in Belgium where the exhibition of the *Vingt* had made the work of Seurat widely known among artists. One by one, Maximilien Luce, Albert Gausson, Hippolyte Petitjean, Théo van Rysselberghe, Henri Vandervelde and others joined the circle that had been formed around Seurat by Signac, Cross, Angrand, Dubois-Pillet, Hayet, Camille and Lucien Pissarro. Vincent van Gogh for a short time experimented with the pointillist technique,



25. M. LUCE: Portrait of H.-E. Cross, about 1890.



26. M. LUCE: Portrait of Camille Pissarro, 1890.

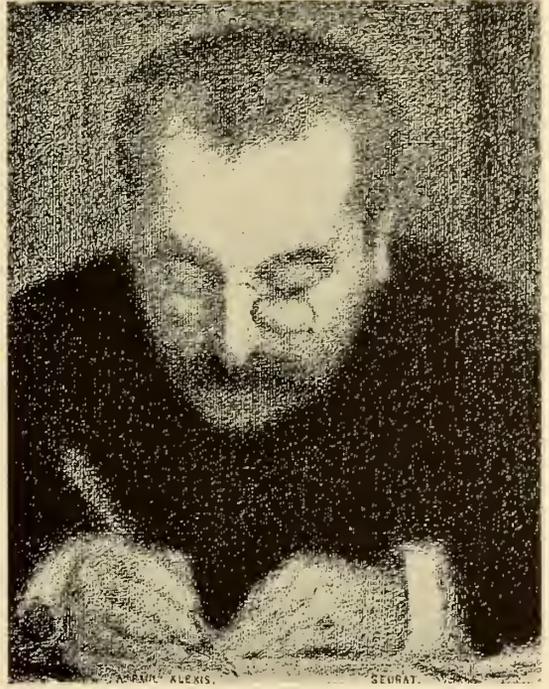
Paul Gauguin and his friend, Emile Schuffenecker, also tried the method, using Seurat's execution but not observing the laws of contrasting colors.⁸⁰ While van Gogh and Gauguin, who did not belong to the neo-impressionist group, quickly abandoned the employment of dots of color, the others were convinced that Seurat's method would enable them to achieve greater harmony, to balance fugitive sensations and produce more luminous effects. Seurat was therefore the uncontested leader of the little group. Even the painters who did not belong to his circle so considered him; van Gogh, for example, wrote his brother, "The leader . . . is undoubtedly Seurat."⁸¹ And according to Emile Verhaeren:

All his friends, the painters and the others, felt that he was the real force in the group . . . He was the most persistent seeker, he had the strongest will and was the one most determined to uncover the unknown. He had complete concentration, he was an integrator of ideas, a savage synthesizer forcing every chance remark to reveal laws, attentive to the least detail that might fill out his system . . . He never regarded his comrades-in-arms as being on the same plane as he.⁸²

If Seurat was the leader of the neo-impressionists, Signac was their best propagandist. He never wearied of proselytizing and was continually arguing



27. G. SEURAT: Portrait of Paul Signac, 1889-90.

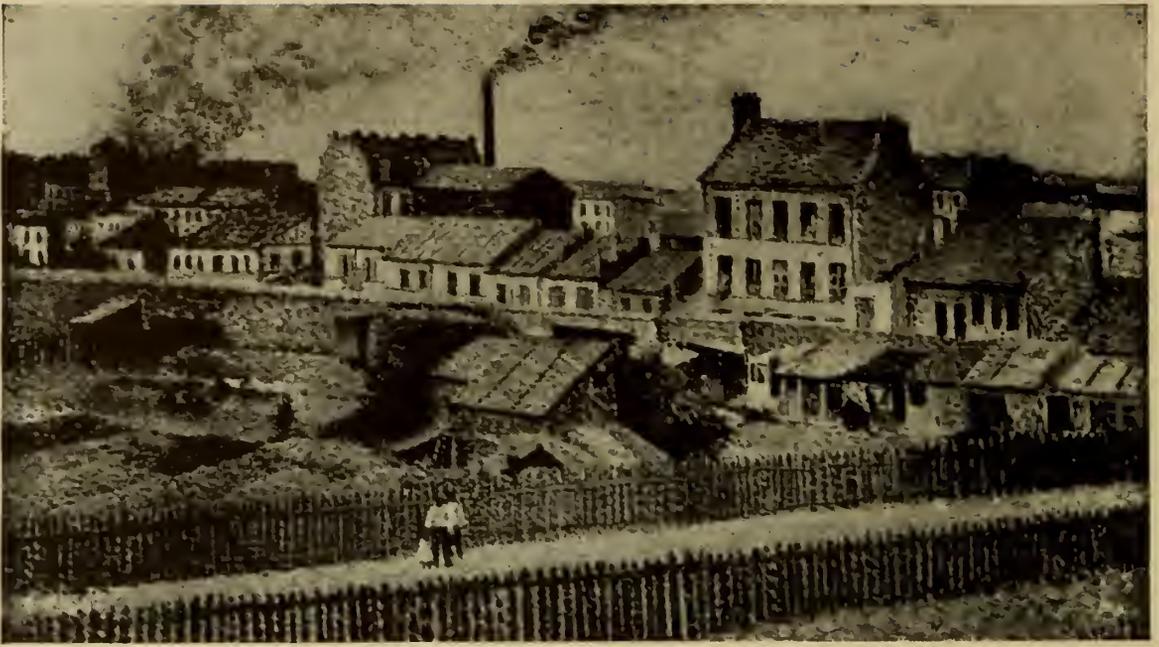


28. G. SEURAT: Portrait of Paul Alexis, 1888.

for the new theory. He never let pass any opportunity to profess his faith, and when, for instance, in Zola's *L'Oeuvre*, which first appeared in serial form in *Le Gil Blas* early in 1886, Signac read the following passage: "The red of the flag turns to violet because it unfurls against the blue of the sky," he immediately wrote the novelist to point out his mistake. And Zola obediently changed the text when the book appeared, substituting the formulation suggested by Signac:

The red of the flag sinks and becomes yellow, because it is unfurled against the sky's blue, whose complementary color, orange, combines with red.⁸³

Seurat himself was much less inclined to propagate his beliefs and even complained of being "too much imitated." Pissarro, explaining in his letter to Durand-Ruel the new theory which henceforth would be his also, was careful to add that it was "Monsieur Seurat, an artist of great ability, who first conceived the idea and applied the scientific theory after profound study. I have only followed him."⁸⁴ Insisting in this way on the authorship of Seurat, Pissarro tried to humor the latter's pride, which was extremely sensitive where questions of artistic merit were concerned. But even the candor and modesty of

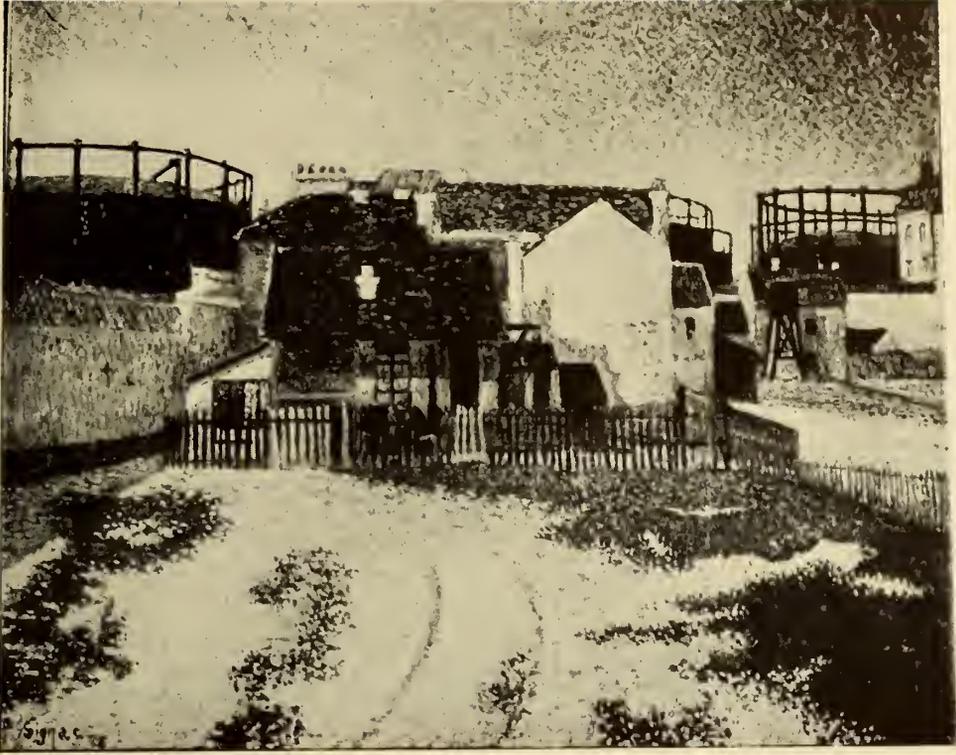


29. M. LUCE: View of Montmartre, 1887.

Pissarro could not prevent some unfortunate episodes. For example, in 1890 Georges Lecomte in an article on Pissarro,⁸⁵ while not attributing the new method to the old painter, neglected to say *who* had initiated it, and Seurat did not conceal his anger and chagrin.⁸⁶

Jealous of his theories to the point of suspiciousness, Seurat at one time, it appears, even hesitated to exhibit his works, fearing that other painters would avail themselves of his discoveries. All those who knew him during this period report that he was extremely reserved and seldom participated in the discussions of his colleagues. He listened without saying a word except when directly questioned or when the problems of painting were touched on, most particularly when *his* method was discussed.⁸⁷

Taciturn and versatile, Seurat was perfectly aware of his role as leader, but at no time unduly emphasized his position. He seems to have accepted the place he occupied as a natural consequence of his intellect and efforts. When he met his friends of evenings at *La Nouvelle Athènes*, where Degas, Gauguin, Guillaumin, Pissarro held forth, or at *La Taverne Anglaise* on the rue d'Amster-



30. P. SIGNAC: Gas-meters at Clichy, 1886.

dam, where the collaborators on the review, *La Vogue*, held their meetings, it was as a silent witness to their debates.

Seurat's friends discussed, in the main, problems of literature, painting and politics. The period was marked by the violent actions and manifestoes of the anarchists and by vigorous agitation among working-class groups and intellectuals. Fénéon, Pissarro, Luce and Signac did not conceal their sympathy for the extremists, but Seurat did not openly profess his political beliefs. It may be presumed, however, that he shared the views of his friends, for, as Fénéon puts it,

his literary and artistic friends and those who supported his work in the press belonged to anarchist circles, and if his opinions had differed radically from theirs, the fact would have been remarked.⁸⁸

Participating only in those discussions which dealt with the problems of art, Seurat, at such moments, was heard with respect. He was completely serious and never lapsed into fantasy. His reserved attitude and extreme lucidity gave weight to his words. And after all, there were his canvases, the luminous proofs



31. C. PISSARRO: The Railroad to Dieppe, 1886.

of the theories he sustained. For although Seurat seldom brought his friends to his studio to show them the progress of his work, at exhibitions he enjoyed elucidating his paintings to them. Verhaeren says:

To hear Seurat making his confession before his year's work was to feel his sincerity and to be conquered by his eloquence. Calmly, with careful gestures, his eye never leaving you, and his slow and unemphatic tones seeking rather didactic formulas, he showed you the results obtained, what was clearly proved, what he called the *base*. Then he asked your opinion, took you as a witness, awaited the word which would indicate that you had understood. He was very modest, almost timid, even though you felt all the time his unspoken pride of accomplishment. He was hardly ever violent in his criticisms of others, and even pretended certain admirations which at bottom he did not feel, but at such times you sensed that he was condescending and without jealousy. He never raged against the success of others even when such success was rightfully his due.⁸⁹

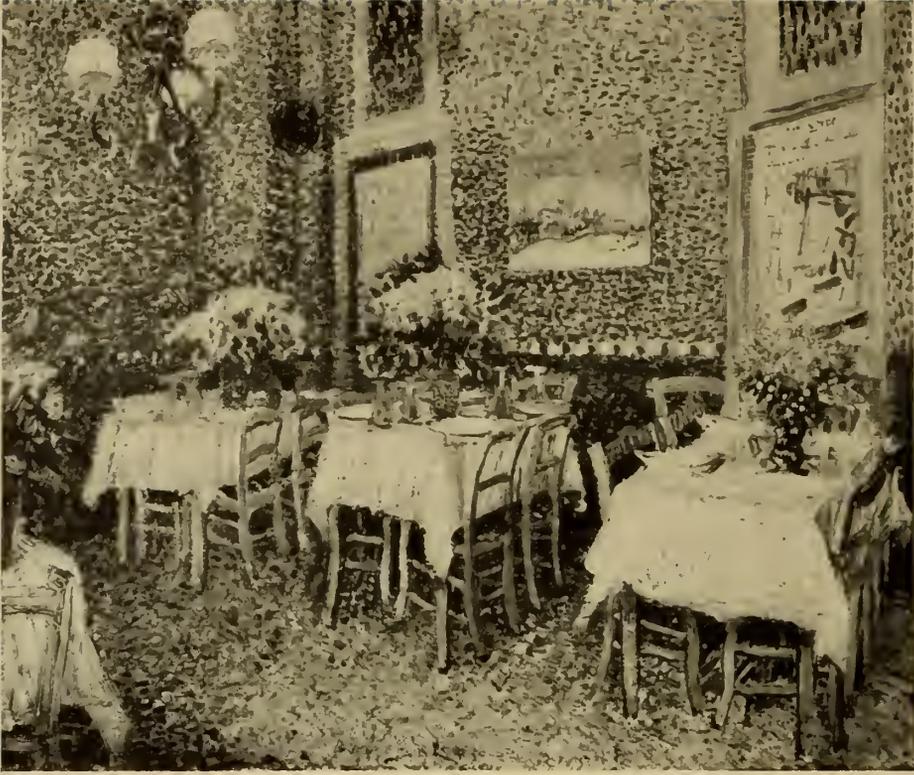
While often indulgent towards his colleagues, Seurat idolized few of the great masters. According to Gustave Kahn:



32. T. VAN RYSSELBERGHE: *The Reading* (Verhaeren and his Friends), 1903.

The affection he felt for former works of art was bestowed on such stylized works as those of the Egyptians and the primitives. But he was much moved by more flexible works, like Greek frescoes and statues of Phidias. He admired many of the romantic masters and landscapists, but only Delacroix did he love passionately. As for the first impressionists, he said frankly that the three important leaders in terms of their own work and their influence on others, were Degas, Renoir and Pissarro.⁹⁰

When Seurat became interested in another painter's work he would carefully analyze it. Had he not, as a beginner, looked for signs of divisionism in the great works at the Louvre? He was attracted to Monet, whose paintings he had been made acquainted with by Signac, and he went with Pissarro to the shop of *père* Tanguy, the old dealer in pictures and paints, to see canvases of Cézanne, whose qualities Pissarro never left off praising. At Pissarro's suggestion, Signac even bought a Cézanne landscape, executed with square strokes. And Seurat too began to wish for an important exhibition of the works of the solitary of Aix.⁹¹ For his part, Seurat, in order to help Camille Pissarro, who



33. V. VAN GOGH: Interior of a Restaurant in Paris, about 1887.

had lost his buyers since adopting the new technique, persuaded his mother to buy a painting by the old master.

Seurat's interest in his contemporaries was not restricted to the members of his own group or those they thought of as precursors. He responded to the works of Gauguin and was sensitive to their definite technique and sculptural quality. Seurat is supposed to have owned a copy of a manuscript of Gauguin, an extract from an oriental text on the coloring of rugs, in which there were many shrewd observations on the gradations of tones; however, according to Seurat, the text was inadequate.⁹²

Seurat had been charmed by the gaiety of the posters of Chéret, whom Fénelon called "the Tiepolo of the billboards," and he studied Chéret's drawings to discover the aesthetic secrets of the poster-maker's means of expression.⁹³ In every work he saw, in every article he read, Seurat looked for evidence that might confirm his theories.

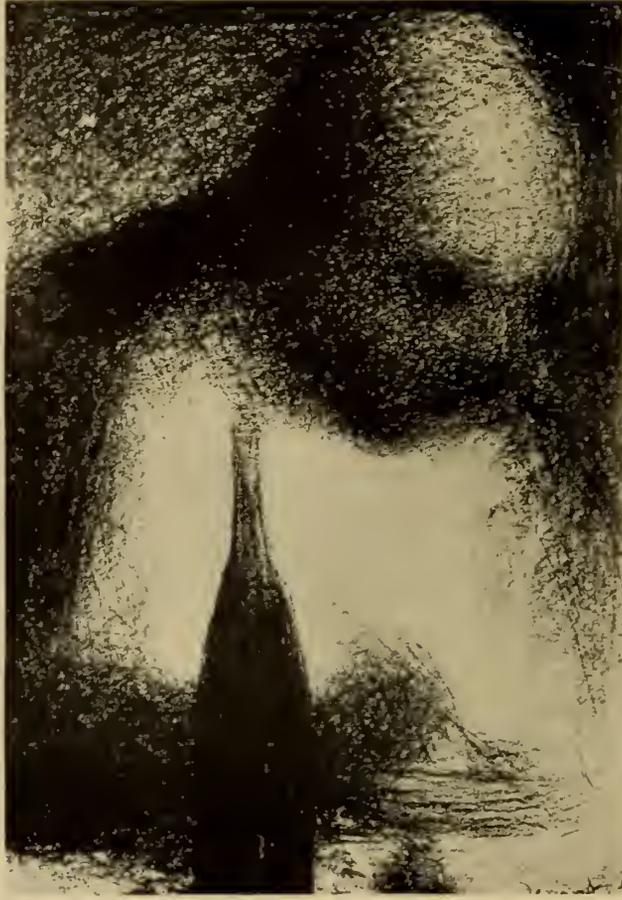
Present at the meetings of the group, talking occasionally, working hard



34. P. GAUGUIN: Still Life, Ripipoint, 1889.

with the others to organize the successive exhibitions of the *Indépendants*, Seurat remained nonetheless a mystery to most of his associates. Among his friends he went his own ardent, solitary way, and even those most intimate knew little of him. Rarely communicative, he achieved a perfect separation of the man and the artist. His life was almost totally absorbed by his art, but the little which remained he appropriated to himself. Only after his death did his best friends learn of the mistress with whom he spent his last years and who bore his son.

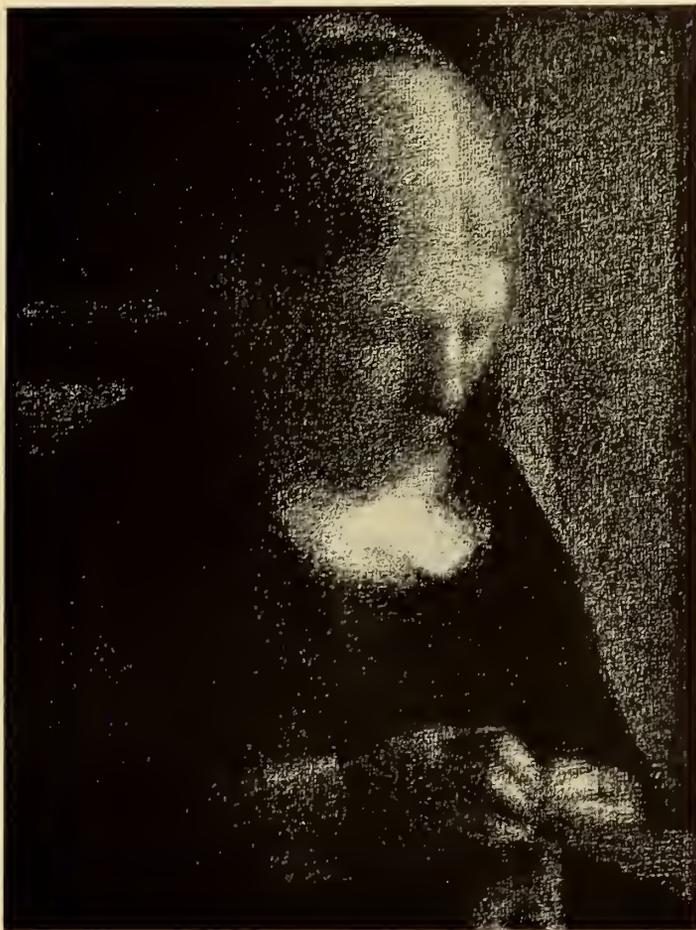
Seurat's friends do not seem to agree about the painter's physical appearance. Aman-Jean maintains that Seurat was very beautiful and resembled the *St. George* of Donatello, Lucie Cousturier says he looked like an "executive," his fellow-scholar, de Carabin, speaks of his "Christ-like" head, while Gustave Kahn was reminded by his "delicate yet massive profile, of Assyrian kings," Teodor de Wyzewa, struck by Seurat's high stature, beard and candid glance, thought he was most like some Italian master of the Renaissance, and if Degas



35. G. SEURAT: Man Dining, the Artist's Father, about 1884.

dubbed Seurat *the notary* because of his always impeccable appearance. Signac on the other hand, asserts that he was robust and strongly built, like an *infantryman*. And Camille Pissarro said more than once that he was “colder, more logical and more self-controlled” than any of the others in the group.⁹⁴ According to Lucie Cousturier’s more complete description:

Seurat’s physical appearance was what one would have anticipated from seeing the finely shaped, rigid and calm figures he created. It was in strict attitudes which hardened his full and lofty forms that he tempered the passionate impulses of his soul. No sudden movements shook his comely head, so firmly set on his shoulders, and no troubled expression disturbed his regular and impassive features, framed in brown. But to engage him in even a brief discussion of painting was to be at once made aware that his glance could take fire and his voice waver humanly, impatient to affirm his beliefs. Seurat, absorbing the tenderness of light from nature, was as gentle as the velvet of his eyes and dark brows proclaimed him to be, but he became suspicious and reserved if one probed the interior self which he cultivated in secret. Ordinarily



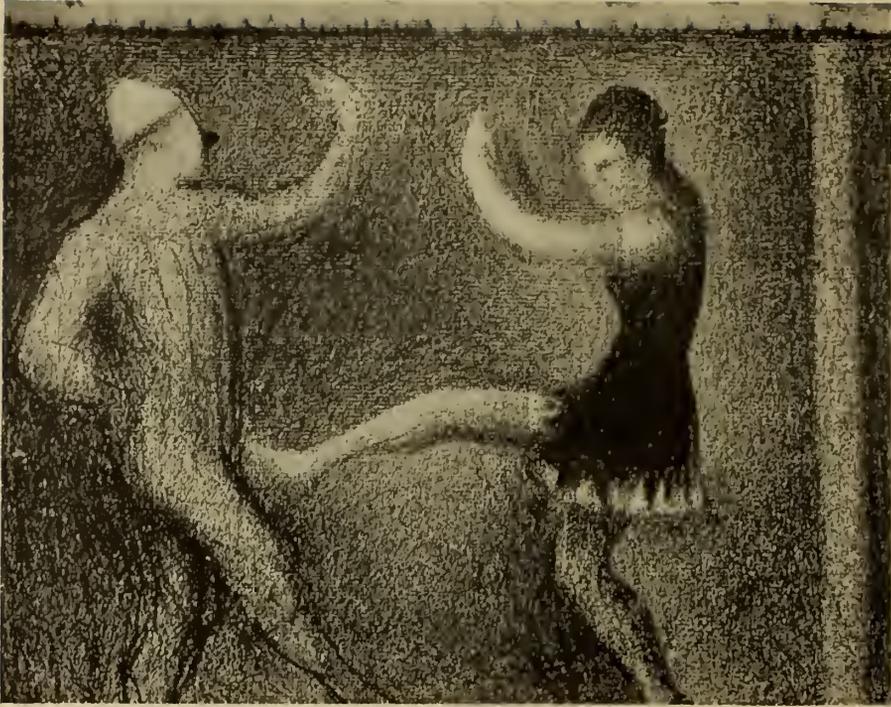
36. G. SEURAT: *Woman Sewing, the Artist's Mother*, about 1884.

not inclined to play a leading conversational role, he took complete charge of any discussion in which important aspects of painting were involved. At such times he swept from his inner life like a she-wolf on the scent, but no one could follow him to his lair.⁹⁵

Seurat's "lair" was his studio. Here he painted in total solitude. When the weather made work outdoors impossible, he remained in his studio, going out to lunch

in a great hurry, to the nearest restaurant, wearing a narrow-brimmed felt hat far back on his head and a short jacket; no one could have been more casual, but his height, the severe regularity of his features and the contemplative calm of his glance, gave him as ever an appearance of gravity.⁹⁶

But when, at the day's end, Seurat, always punctual, left the studio on the Boulevard de Clichy, near Signac's, to dine with his family, he was faultlessly



37. G. SEURAT: Saltimbanques, Couple Dancing, about 1886.

attired. Hating negligence and eccentricity, he dressed with the same meticulous care he brought to everything he undertook. Those who saw him at the committee meetings and openings of the *Indépendants*, which he attended with religious regularity, never knew him except in black with stylish top hat, as were his friends, Fénéon and Signac. He was always in black or dark blue when his friends saw him walking along the line of outside boulevards between the Place Clichy and the Boulevard Magenta where his mother lived.

Seurat's work did not end when he joined his friends at *La Nouvelle Athènes* or at *La Taverne Anglaise*, since he was able to paint by gas light. When Mallarmé in 1888 published a translation of Whistler's *Ten O'Clock* address in *La Revue Indépendante*, Seurat was the only one not surprised by Whistler's remark that the painter's work could begin at the very moment the artificial lights are turned on. And he said to Gustave Kahn: "That is the aperçu of a great painter. Whistler is right."⁹⁷

When an unfinished canvas did not keep him in the studio, Seurat liked to spend his evenings at the fairs, circuses and music-halls. The fairs at Neuilly, at the Place du Trône or at St. Cloud, and the Cirque Fernando, one of the five



38. G. SEURAT: *The Artist in his Studio*, about 1884.



39. M. LUCE: *Portrait of Georges Seurat*, 1890.

great circuses of Paris (to which Renoir and Degas came to make drawings), were his favorites, at least when he was not at the music-halls, *La Gaieté Rochecouart*, *Le Divan Japonais* (later favored by Lautrec) or *Le Concert Européen*. Seurat observed these boisterous and colorful spectacles with an eye more interested than amused. From the fairs, circuses and cabarets he brought back many drawings, sometimes livened with color, drawings vibrant with the verve and mystery of these worlds apparently outside reality, or rather belonging to a reality strange to us. All the grace and destitution, the false gaiety and the real joyousness of those beings who sometimes distract themselves and sometimes suffer while they distract others, are reflected in the drawings and paintings they inspired Seurat to make. But his treatment avoided sentimentality as well as exuberance; only occasionally does his brush betray the slightest irony. Far from pitying, like van Gogh, or emphasizing as Lautrec would, the grotesqueness of these human puppets, Seurat, a sober although intense observer, sought only pretexts for masterful experiments in line and composition when he looked at the swarming throngs in the sideshows and fairs.

Late in the night he returned not to his mother's place, but to his scantily

furnished studio. His relations with his family could hardly have been very sentimental. Aman-Jean, who shared Seurat's studio after they left the *École des Beaux-Arts*, relates that he saw Seurat's mother once, his father sometimes. This man of peculiar habits was most of the time at his house in Le Raincy, just outside Paris, where he gave himself to strange religious practices. Only Paul Signac seems to have been admitted to Seurat's family, and in a letter to Félix Fénéon, in which he discussed the drawing *Man Dining*, Signac wrote:

You know the man dining is Georges' father. I had dinner with him and Georges many times at Madame Seurat's, on Tuesdays, the day this husband had chosen for discharging his conjugal duties. — You also know that he had an artificial arm, not from birth — although his personality was eccentric enough to make such originality plausible — but as a result of some accident, while hunting, I believe. At the table he screwed knives and forks to the end of this arm and proceeded to carve with speed and even transport, muttons, filets, small game and fowl. He positively juggled these sharp steel-edged weapons, and when I sat near him I feared for my eyes. — Georges paid no attention to these music-hall feats.⁹⁸

Seurat seems to have made several drawings of his father and mother; there is a drawing of a little boy for which his brother may have posed; but is it not significant that (except for the drawing *Man Dining*) one cannot be sure of the identity of his models? Seurat would make drawings of his parents just as he would draw a woman crossing the street or a plasterer at work on a wall. Nothing in his life had meaning except insofar as it was relevant to his art.

If his relations with his family were limited to dining at his mother's home, if his participation in the discussions of his friends centered on problems of art, if his dress was simple, correct and impersonal, his studio furnishings were also restricted to the indispensable. Gustave Kahn relates that his

little monkish room contained a low narrow bed, facing old canvases turned to the wall, *La Baignade* and seascapes. In the studio on the white walls hung drawings done in the *École des Beaux-Arts*, a little painting by Guillaumin, a Constantin Guys, several Forains, canvases and drawings become habitual and for him simply familiar colorations, part of his wall; there were a red divan, a few chairs, a little table heaped with magazines edited by friends, books by young writers, brushes, paints and a tobacco pouch. Covering an entire panel was *La Grande Jatte*.⁹⁹

In addition to these furnishings there were several easels, a ladder, a little stove hardly adequate against severe cold, as well as several studies by Seurat himself and a poster by Jules Chéret. A corner of this studio with the studies and *La Grande Jatte*, the stove and the red seat, appears in the canvas *Les Poseuses*, done in 1887.



40. G. SEURAT: The Stove in Seurat's Studio, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.

SEURAT'S THEORIES

IN a conversation with Gustave Kahn, Seurat once defined painting as *the art of hollowing a surface*. At the same time he explained that while the science of aesthetics was not the whole story, since there were intimate elements in art, even in its technique, which only the painter himself could recognize and deal with, for his part he was convinced of the absolute need to base his theories on scientific truths.¹⁰⁰

While Seurat the painter was indivisible from Seurat the theorist, there are certain sayings of his that may be considered to spring from the one rather than the other. It was Seurat the painter who said that he could only paint what he saw before his eyes¹⁰¹ and declared that the drawing was the fundamental element in painting, and also that harmony of color should flow from harmony of line. But it was Seurat the theorist who attempted to generalize the laws of color and line.

The art of hollowing a surface became for Seurat the theorist a *science* to be studied by reading mathematical writings and to be developed by painting pictures. During the years which followed the completion of *La Grande Jatte* Seurat systematically attacked every one of the problems of painting. Only still lifes are lacking in his work, and even these can be located in sections of his large canvases. Having studied in *La Grande Jatte* the movements of people outdoors and reproduced in landscapes nature in repose, Seurat painted, in turn, immobile nudes in the studio (*Les Poseuses*), the portrait (*Jeune Femme se poudrant*), immobile figures outdoors under artificial lighting (*La Parade*) and moving figures indoors, also under artificial lighting (*Le Chahut* and *Le Cirque*). The figures in these paintings are dominated by monotony or joy (there is no sadness in the pictures of Seurat) and are, of course, governed by strict rules, being controlled by that play of line and color whose laws Seurat had studied. In these canvases Seurat, without yielding in any way to the literary or the picturesque, rehabilitated the *subject* which had been relinquished by the impressionists. His works are “exemplary specimens of a highly developed decorative art, which sacrifices the anecdote to the arabesque, nomenclature to synthesis, the fugitive to the permanent, and confers on nature—wary at last of its precarious reality—an authentic reality,” wrote Fénéon.¹⁰²

If Seurat never let himself be caught in the “charming traps” set by nature, if he had the strength to renounce all details that would detract from the simplicity of the whole, it was because he had a cold reasonableness which, prompted by his lack of imagination, thrust him towards the essential. “When he wanted to feel in a certain way,” says Paul Adam, “he modified nature in accordance with his will.”¹⁰³ And will, often literary with Gauguin, bent mainly on observation of the model with Cézanne, with Seurat was directed towards line and ornament, livened by tints and tones. Signac says: “It is by the harmony of lines and colors which he can manipulate in accordance with his needs and will, and not by his subject that the painter should move.”¹⁰⁴

While Gauguin said disdainfully, “In art we have just passed through a period of bewildered wandering, caused by physics, chemistry, mechanics and the study of nature,”¹⁰⁵ and while Cézanne complained that “the ignorance of harmony is being revealed more and more in the discordance of the coloring and, what is even worse, in the deadness of the tone,”¹⁰⁶ Seurat continued to work for a new organization of painting based on science. Hence he kept up with all the new theories of color and perspective. He studied *The Scientific Theory*

of *Color and Its Relation to Art and Industry* by N. O. Rood, he became extremely interested in the researches of Charles Henry (Signac collaborated with Henry for a time), who published in 1888 *Le cercle chromatique présentant tous les compléments et toutes les harmonies de couleurs* and also *Le rapporteur esthétique permettant l'étude et la rectification esthétique de toute forme*.¹⁰⁷ And Seurat collected David Sutter's articles on visual phenomena which appeared in the review *L'Art* in 1880.

Seurat was interested in the laws Sutter arrived at (Sutter summed them up in 167 rules) and also in the more general import of Sutter's conclusions. Indeed, Sutter's point of departure was a principle dear to Seurat:

One must look at nature with the eyes of the mind and not merely with the eyes of the body, like beings without reason . . . There are colorists' eyes as there are tenor voices, but these gifts of nature have to be stimulated by science to develop to the full . . . Despite their absolute character, rules do not hamper the spontaneity of invention or execution. Science delivers us from every form of uncertainty and enables us to move freely within a wide circle; it would be an injury both to art and science to believe that one necessarily excludes the other. Since all rules are derived from the laws of nature, nothing is easier to learn or more necessary to know. In art everything should be willed.¹⁰⁸

Seurat also found in Sutter's writings the answer to a problem which had always occupied him: the relation between the laws of optics and of music. Many times he had asked his friends whether they thought the innovations in painting had any technical similarity to, or at least any intuitive kinship with, the new music of Wagner,¹⁰⁹ and he found in Sutter this categorical assertion which could not but confirm his own convictions:

The laws of the aesthetic harmony of colors can be taught as the rules of musical harmony are taught.¹¹⁰

The 167 rules formulated by Sutter contained many propositions, or rather, precepts, which also confirmed the results of Seurat's experiments. These are some of Sutter's assertions:

Perspective is the primary element in the composition of a painting; for the gradation of light and colors is proportional to the perspective gradation of lines.

The unity of the picture is comprised by the unity of aesthetic lines, masses, disjunctions, chiaroscuro, colors and the moral traits of the given subject.

There are two characteristic dispositions in which the subject is held: the vertical and the horizontal.

The mass of light should exceed or be less than the mass of shadow.

A mass appears to be greater to the degree that it includes in itself fewer small details.

That plane is most luminous on which the light falls most perpendicularly.

The more intense the light, the more color the shadows will reflect.

The dominant color of the picture should be supported by analogous tones which constitute the unity of colors.

The complementary colors: red and green, orange and blue, yellow and violet, have the property of reproducing white light.

There are three warm colors: red, orange, yellow.

There are three cold colors: green, blue, violet.

When the light is warm, the shadows are cold.

When the light is cold, the shadows are warm.

The intensity of reflections is proportional to the quantity of light.

A color is always modified by the proximity of another color.

The best ordered form is that which most completely imprisons the intelligence.

Science can be learned, sentiment can perfect, genius comes from God.¹¹¹

And David Sutter concluded:

Instinct does not change, but reason progresses without pause, man takes advantage of his own experience and of the experiences of other men. Reason is one of the most beautiful faculties of the human mind, and he who does not passionately seek to extend his knowledge by that fact alone renounces his greatest privilege.¹¹²

Seurat, far from renouncing this privilege, had resolved, after examining his own experience and that of others, to sum up in clear formulas the principles which had inspired his work. He expressed himself not as a painter but as a savant; that he had perused the scientific works of Chevreul and Sutter is betrayed by the impeccable logic and precision with which Seurat set down his artistic theories. He who had shown himself to be so jealous of his ideas as expressed in his works now seemed to feel a certain satisfaction in the unambiguous formulation of the laws of his aesthetic and technique. He was only too willing to explain these laws to his friends, Jules Christophe and Maurice Beaubourg. After Jules Christophe, in an article on Seurat, restated in an unclear form theories which the painter had explained to him, Seurat, dissatisfied, sent his friend Beaubourg a letter dated August 28. [1890], in which he gave a complete exposition of his aesthetic:¹¹³

AESTHETIC

Art is harmony. Harmony is in the analogy of contrary and in the analogy of similar elements of *tone*, *tint* and *line*, considered according to their dominants and under the influence of light, in gay, calm or sad combinations.

The contraries are:

For *tone*, a more { luminous for a more dark.
 { clear

For *tint*, the complementaries, that is to say a certain red opposed to its complementary, and so on (red-green; orange-blue; yellow-violet).

For *line*, those forming a right angle.

Gayety of *tone* is given by the luminous dominant; of *tint*, by the warm dominant; of *line*, by lines above the horizontal:



Calm of *tone* is the equality of dark and light; of *tint*, equality of warm and cold; calm of *line* is given by the horizontal.

Sadness of *tone* is given by the dark dominant; of *tint* by the cold dominant; of *line* by descending directions:



TECHNIQUE

Taking for granted the phenomena of the duration of a light-impression on the retina —

Synthesis necessarily follows as a result. The means of expression is the optical mixture of the tones, the tints (local color and that resulting from illumination by the sun, an oil lamp, gas, and so on), that is to say, of lights and their effects (shadows), in accordance with the laws of contrast, gradation and irradiation.

The frame is in the harmony opposed to that of the tones, tints and lines of the picture:



To give more unity to his pictures, Seurat, in his studies for *La Grande Jatte*, had begun to cover the borders of his canvases with a fringe of little touches of color, clearly separated from the subject. These, varying in accordance with the tints near them, softened the otherwise abrupt break between the picture and the always white frame. In order to suppress entirely anything that might negate the cunningly calculated harmonies in his paintings, he decided, towards 1888, to dot the frame itself, and bring it into accord with the painting the colors of which would thus be at once prolonged and limited. Emile Verhaeren claims that having

thought that at Bayreuth the hall is darkened in order to present the stage dowered with light as the single point of attention, this contrast of great lights and shadows caused him to adopt dark frames, although now too, as in the past, he observed the laws of complementaries.¹¹⁴

PRAISE AND DISPRAISE

THE theories which Seurat expressed in his works were not allowed to pass uncontested. Seurat's ideas were opposed even by artists and writers who could not be characterized as reactionary, some of whom did not hesitate to hail Seurat's talent. While they admitted being moved by his paintings, by his landscapes in particular, they continued to object to "the pernicious confusion of art and science," as Julien Leclerq, friend of Gauguin, put it. They were disturbed by the evidence in Seurat's compositions of a will to *prove*, which was less apparent in his landscapes. It was not so much the *lack* of imagination in his works that baffled them, as the presence of a cold will to exclude it. As early as 1886 Emile Hennequin, devoting a long article to Seurat in *La Vie Moderne*, had taken the following position:

His method is a device like other methods of painting, and on this score he should be judged solely for his capacity to represent nature more truly than others have. But, strangely enough, for anyone not convinced in advance, the pictures of Monsieur Seurat, like those of the artists who follow him, are completely lacking in luminosity. In total contrast to what his theories would lead one to expect, his seascapes excel precisely because they are grey; but one could hardly imagine anything dustier or more lustreless¹¹⁵ than his *Grande Jatte*, which presents promenaders glimpsed in the half-shadow cast by a full sun . . . Monsieur Seurat's failure at precisely the point where in his own terms it is his duty to go ahead of anyone else, shows clearly that aesthetics can expect little from preliminary theorizing, that it has its own laws, which it must derive from observation, and not predict on the basis of physical experiments.

The talent of Monsieur Seurat, and of the painters who follow his example, is something else again; but it cannot be said too often that one technique more or less contributes little to art, to the beauty of art works, that is, to their capacity to move.¹¹⁶

While Seurat could have answered this criticism by pointing out that the too small room in which *La Grande Jatte* was shown accounted for the seeming lack of luminosity of the canvas, which required being seen from a greater distance, an even more vehement attack of J. K. Huysmans, left no room for reply. At the start of 1887 this famous critic wrote of the third exhibition of the *Indépendants*, in which Seurat showed eight paintings and a dozen drawings:¹¹⁷

Last year, Monsieur Seurat exhibited, in addition to *La Grande Jatte*, a number of really beautiful seascapes, quiet seas under calm skies; these clear canvases, enveloped

in a grey dust of light, reveal a very personal yet accurate approach to nature . . . The views of the sea he exhibited this year, the views of Honfleur, in particular, his *Lighthouse*, affirm the very real talent which he has already proved beyond argument. These, too, rely on his vision of a nature more drowsy than melancholy, a nature which is nonchalantly at ease under wrathless skies, sheltered from the wind . . . Strange indeed! This painter of nature whose seascapes can induce tender and monotonous dreams, becomes superficial and unsuggestive when he paints human figures; and it is at this point that the technique he employs – the pianoing of little dots, the mesh of tiny stitches, the mosaics of colored points – ensnares him . . .

Strip his figures of the colored fleas that cover them, underneath you will find nothing, no thought, no soul; nothing. Nothingness in bodies whose contours alone exist. At the same time in his painting *La Grande Jatte* the structure of the human figure becomes hard and rigid; everything is immobile and congealed. I very much fear that there have been too many techniques, too many systems; there are not enough sparks of fire, there is not enough life!¹¹⁸

While Huysmans, the poet, condemned Seurat's technique because in his opinion it did not make up for lack of fire, thought and spirituality, the painters opposed to divisionism were content to condemn the method out of hand, along with all methods. Gauguin, who was himself partial to theories of color and symbols, spoke with scorn of the "little green chemists who pile up tiny dots";¹¹⁹ he advised his friend Sérusier: "Avoid complementary colors; they clash instead of harmonizing," and he even went as far as to say that neo-impressionism, since it was based on science, would "lead straight to color photography."¹²⁰

Renoir, Monet and Sisley, who had refused to exhibit with Seurat, took an equally unambiguous stand against him. Their opposition was purely instinctive, for none of them had particularly studied the divisionist theory. For example, Pissarro, in a conversation with Renoir, was surprised to find that the latter based his aversion to these theories on complete ignorance of them. Renoir made no bones about his disinclination to encumber himself with scientific ideas, since, as he said:

There is something more in painting which cannot be explained, which is the essential. You approach nature with theories, nature knocks them to the ground . . . The truth is that in painting, as in the other arts, there is not a single method, no matter how unimportant, which can be put into a formula.¹²¹

Monet, whom Fénéon accused of "brilliant vulgarity," continued to investigate nature without reliance on a theory he found obsessive, and he dismissed the whole question with this remark: "One cannot make pictures with doctrines – methods change, but art remains the same."¹²² Sisley, for his part, re-

plied with some heat to a critic who had used the word *pointillist* in connection with his technique of little comma-like strokes:

To say of a painter that he is a *pointillist* is not to evaluate him, but to state a fact: *pointillism* being a method, one might almost say a mechanical method, so well known that it should be impossible to mistake it, but insofar as my work is concerned, the description is false.¹²³

If Seurat seldom answered attacks of this kind, it was because Fénéon from the beginning had taken up the task of refuting them. As early as 1886 he had written of Seurat and his friends:

These painters are accused of subordinating art to science. They only employ scientific data to govern and perfect the education of their eyes and to control the exactness of their vision . . . But if Monsieur X spent an eternity studying treatises on optics he would never paint *La Grande Jatte* . . . The truth is that the neo-impressionist method demands an exceptionally delicate eye: its dangerous strictness will frighten off all the clever fellows who mask their visual incapacity beneath digital subtleties. This type of painting is accessible only to *painters*.¹²⁴

But even so loyal a friend as Fénéon could not hide his disapproval when in 1888 at the *Salon des Indépendants*,¹²⁵ Seurat and Dubois-Pillet introduced colored frames. Camille Pissarro and Fénéon were much opposed to this innovation, and the latter wrote in his review of the exhibition:

The canvas [of Dubois-Pillet] is encased in an oval frame circled with bold violet variations. The frame is no longer neutral, it exists in its own right. Is it colored to give more emphasis to the painting, or vice-versa? A question somewhat damaging to this multichromatic renovation of less systematic efforts already old with Gauguin and Mary Cassatt. What Monsieur Seurat has done is, with some qualifications, more allowable. The advantages of the white frame are all too evident. So Monsieur Seurat, instead of adopting the *colored* frame, simply notes on the white one the reactions of nearby colors. So far so good. But sometimes, the frame, which up to this point has remained philosophically *white* and *abstract*, is influenced by the picture, and Seurat thinks of it as circumscribing the landscape *in reality*, and pursuing the logic of this worthless hypothesis, he dots it orange or blue in accordance with whether the sun is behind or before the observer, that is, with whether the frame is in the light or in the shadow; and the frame, while it remains white, acquires, as in the system of Monsieur Dubois-Pillet, an absurd reality.¹²⁶

Praise and criticism, however, had almost no effect on the incessant labor of Seurat. "To look at life, to have sensations and to arrange them, is enough of joy and torment,"¹²⁷ he thought with his friend, Henri-Edmond Cross. Despite the objections of his seniors to introducing science into art, for him, as Ver-

haeren points out, his works were truly significant only insofar as they proved a law or concept, only insofar as they were a conquest of the unknown.¹²⁸

While Seurat's landscapes were respected even by his adversaries, he was met with outright ridicule, insensitiveness and stupidity when he exhibited a large canvas. To the objections of the critics who held that the stumbling block to his pointillist method would be the human figure, Seurat replied with his large canvas *Les Poseuses*. He sent this painting, the fruit of more than a year's work, to the *Salon des Indépendants* of 1888, at which for the first time he did not exhibit any landscapes. *Les Poseuses* only multiplied the barbs aimed at him. This description of it appeared, for example, in *L'Echo du Nord*:

A studio with three nude women who are painted in the pointillist manner, and who expose lamentable rachitic skeletons smeared with all the colors of the rainbow.¹²⁹

And an American critic sent his newspaper this comment:

Mr. Seurat, a hardened offender, contributes ten startling compositions, the least incoherent of which is perhaps a trio of *Poseuses* innocent of raiment — unless a pair of stockings counts as raiment.¹³⁰

It was Paul Adam who undertook to defend Seurat's new work. He wrote:

Les Poseuses achieves perfection. Three nude women, one standing, two others seated one at each side, before the gray wall of the studio, which is suddenly cut at an angle by *La Grande Jatte*, that much commented on work. Now the figures in rigid dominical postures are the same size as the models. One of the models can be discovered in *La Grande Jatte* fully dressed and escorted by a superb gentleman; she passes through the deep perspective of the leafy island which the gray perspective of the studio prolongs. Here are beings in all their natural simplicity, the smiling feminine secrets on their lips, beings with elegant curves, breasts slender as those of young girls, with pearly and delicate skins. And here are beings in holiday attire, stiff and stilted, solemn in the soft luxuriance of summer; their bearing and presence like that of Egyptians filing in pious procession before steles or sarcophagi.

The synthesis of these two types of life sealed by the painter's eye, is achieved with a magnificent harmony of tones in which the three splendors of woman's body shine. In these models the flesh keeps its roundness, the red or white tints, and the shadows sleeping in the hollows of the form. Even more commanding than the understanding of dermal tones, is the unity of structure, the unity of each exactly proportioned figure, encased in its flesh. These lithe, supple, agile figures, one feels even when seeing them in repose, are ready to live, to leap, to laugh, to will.¹³¹

When in 1889 Seurat sent this canvas with eight landscapes and three drawings to the exhibition of the *Vingt* in Brussels, his paintings were no longer the main targets of the ignorant public. This time it was the work of Gauguin — who had been invited along with Pissarro, Luce, Cross and Monet — which re-

ceived the guffaws. Next to “the scientific impressionism of Seurat, Gauguin represented barbarism, revolution, fever,” says Maurice Denis, and he explains that Gauguin’s new formula consisted of “no longer *reproducing* nature and life by approximate forms or improvisations of *trompe-l’oeil*, but on the contrary, by reproducing his dreams and emotions, *symbolizing* them by forms and harmonious colors.”¹³²

Seurat’s *Poseuses* and one of his drawings found a prospective buyer. Octave Maus, president of the *Vingt*, wrote to the artist to determine the price of his canvas, and Seurat replied to him in a letter dated February 17, 1889:

I should have liked to know the collector’s name. I would be satisfied if you could get 60 francs for my drawing. As for my *Poseuses*, I find it hard to set a price. I calculate that it cost me 7 francs a day for one year: you see where that leads. To sum up, let me add that the personality of the collector might make up the difference between his price and mine.¹³³

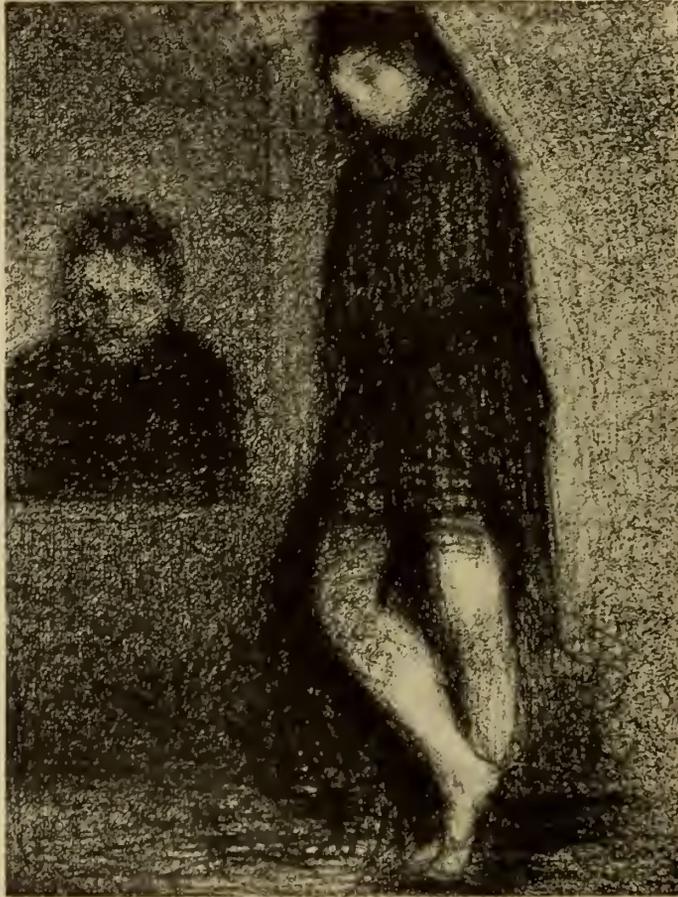
Despite these terms, the collector could not come to a decision. Seurat went again to Brussels to appear at a banquet tendered by the *Vingt* and brought back his large painting, for which he had executed some precious studies and replicas, including three panels, one for each of the three models. All in all, there were hardly more than a dozen such studies. After *La Grande Jatte*, Seurat never again made a great number of drawings and paintings when preparing for a large canvas.

Brought back to Paris by the painter, *Les Poseuses* had to drowse beside *La Grande Jatte* in Seurat’s new studio — also his last — on the passage de l’Elysée des Beaux-Arts. The exhibition in Brussels was to be the last time when a work of Seurat would hang beside new works of Pissarro. After this exhibition the old master deserted his young friends, not, however, without explaining his reasons for doing so. And of all the artists who disagreed with Seurat, Camille Pissarro, who from the first had been his adherent, expressed himself with perhaps the most severity. It is true that since 1887 Pissarro had begun to mitigate the rigid execution of divisionism, but he had not wished to abandon the main features of the method. However, he soon recognized, as with his usual frankness he admitted, that he had been deluding himself in following these young innovators, since his paintings no longer fully satisfied him.¹³⁴ For Pissarro a theory was not good in *itself*. It was good if it enabled him to get results; the moment these did not meet his exactions, no reasoning, no scientific proofs could keep him from abandoning a theory and seeking salvation elsewhere.

Pissarro wrote Henri Van de Velde:

I believe that it is my duty to write you frankly and tell you how I now regard the attempt I made to be a systematic divisionist, following our friend Seurat. Having tried this theory for four years and having now abandoned it, not without painful and obstinate struggles to regain what I had lost and not to lose what I had learned, I can no longer consider myself one of the neo-impressionists who abandon movement and life for a diametrically opposed aesthetic which, perhaps, is the right thing for the man with the right temperament but is not right for me, anxious as I am to avoid all narrow, so-called scientific theories. Having found after many attempts (I speak for myself), having found that it was impossible to be true to my sensations and consequently to render life and movement, impossible to be faithful to the so random and so admirable effects of nature, impossible to give an individual character to my drawing, I had to give up. And none too soon!¹³⁵

After this, Pissarro was to re-work totally a good many of the paintings he had executed in Seurat's manner.



42. G. SEURAT: Saltimbanques, the Dancer and the Cashier, about 1886.

THE LAST WORKS

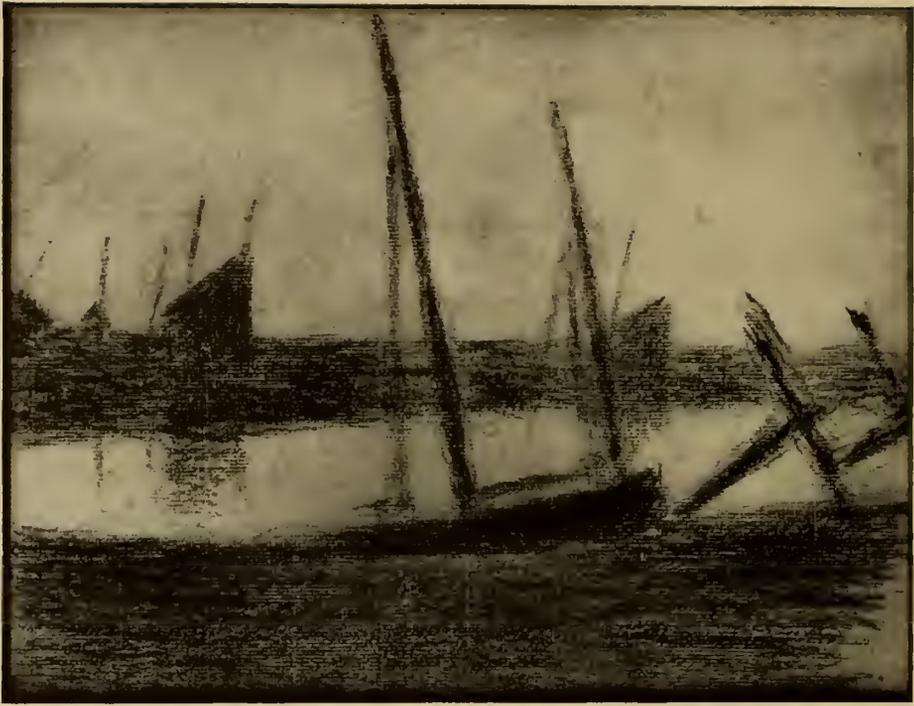
IN the spring of 1889 Seurat left Paris for Le Crotoy, to paint some of those seascapes which prompted his friend Charles Angrand to say in a letter to Cross, "He is the first to render the feeling which the sea inspires on a calm day." The year before Seurat had brought back from his sojourn at Port-en-Bessin several of those views of the sea which poets found poetical, which painters admired for their unexampled mastery and in which even hostile critics saw a serene and moving beauty.

Seurat explained to Emile Verhaeren that landscapes were his summer's work, undertaken regularly each year at the seashore or just outside Paris, while each winter he completed a large canvas, one representing much research and possibly some discoveries. Verhaeren wanted to call these winter paintings *canvases with a thesis*, but Seurat disapproved and simply reiterated that during the summer his objective was "to wash the studio light from his eyes and to transcribe more exactly the vivid outdoor clarity in all its nuance."¹³⁶

In the autumn of 1889, Seurat sent the landscapes done at Port-en-Bessin and Le Crotoy to the exhibition of the *Indépendants*,¹³⁷ and Camille Pissarro, in a letter to his son, Lucien, wrote:

At first view the neo-impressionists appeared to me to be barren, mean, colorless, particularly Seurat and Signac. But after a while I regarded them more favorably, although there is something stilted in their work which I feel is disagreeable.¹³⁸

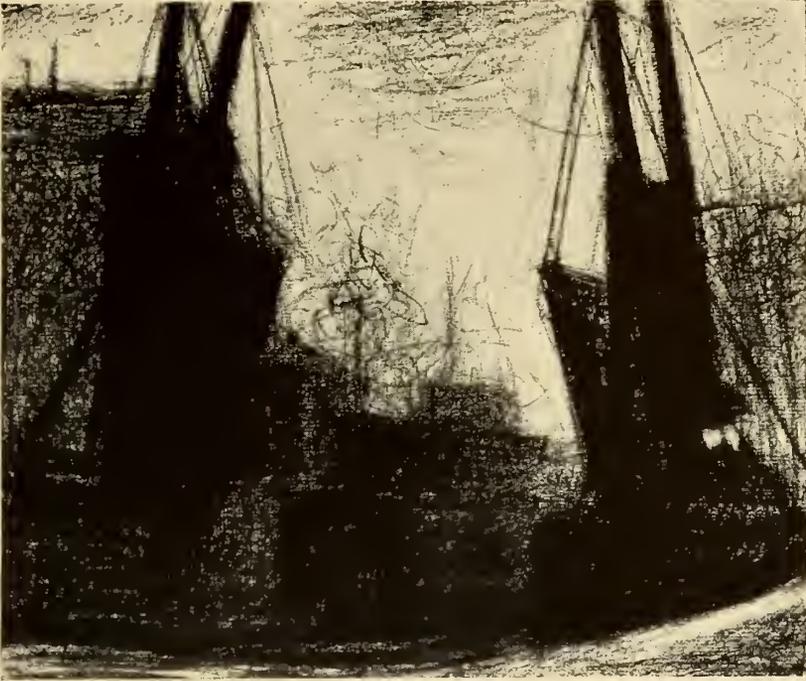
The accusation "stilted" was often hurled at Seurat's large compositions and particularly at his *Jeune femme se poudrant* which the artist began in 1889. This is a painting — not until the artist's death was this known to his most intimate friends — of Seurat's mistress, Madeleine Knobloch. The picture presents a robust young woman of southern beauty preparing her make-up at an old-fashioned dressing table. Her gesture and bearing have that strange solemnity which is so often found in the works of Seurat. The severe lines of her chemise emphasize the contrast between the dark corset and the clear



43. G. SEURAT: *The Harbor of Gravelines*, 1890.

plump skin, while the background lights up like an aureole about her dark hair. Originally the painting showed Seurat's own head reflected in a mirror hanging on the wall — the only self-portrait the artist ever made; one of his friends, not knowing the intimate relations of the artist and his model, remarked to Seurat that his image in the painting might give rise to objectionable pleasantries. Whereupon Seurat replaced his image with a flower-pot.¹³⁹ The painting was shown at the exhibition of the *Indépendants* in 1890, along with *Le Chahut*, and it was against this last composition rather than *La jeune femme se poudrant*, that the critics leveled their fire.¹⁴⁰ *Le Salut Public* found that *Le Chahut* “deals with the choreographic sports which the clients of L'Elysée-Montmartre go in for. You begin to think you are looking at the colored rug patterns which housekeepers use for slippers.”¹⁴¹

While *La Parade*, exhibited in 1888, presents a row of cornet and trombone players in somber formation under the unreal evening lights of a fair and is dominated by a monotony of horizontals and colors without brilliance, *Le Chahut* (bought by Gustave Kahn) conceals under its verticals and diagonals



44. G. SEURAT: The Drawbridge, about 1890.

an extremely complicated machinery of lines. Robert Rey has shown how rigorous and mathematically precise is the arrangement of these straight lines and curves. It would appear, from his analysis, that the *gold section* played an important role in this composition and that here too the artist observed one of the principles of Delacroix:

If you add to a composition already interesting because of its subject, an ordering of the lines that will augment the impression, a chiaroscuro that strikes the imagination and a color adapted to the character, you get the harmony and its proper combinations in a unique song . . .¹⁴²

Seurat's *Le Cirque* was more freely and more directly conceived. Seurat told his friend, Cross, that his first view of an ensemble was invariably in terms of masses and the interplay of values. The ensemble in *Le Cirque* is presented without the geometric scaffolding so important structurally in *Le Chahut*. Without abandoning his characteristic ideas or qualities, Seurat, in *Le Cirque*, achieved an exceptionally happy effect because the figures in this painting, caught in their natural setting, do not appear to have been subordinated to a

schematic design. While he continued to favor the profile, full-face or back view in presenting his figures, arranging the planes of his landscapes in horizontal rows, Seurat introduced into his compositions diagonals which create a new sensation of space and rhythm. Likewise, while maintaining his characteristic repetitions of lines and colors, he wove these echoes of forms into more complex and freer designs. After the pure horizontals of *La Parade* came the pyramid-like organizations of *Le Chahut* and *Le Cirque*. This last painting, which Seurat did not consider a finished work but which he felt was complete enough to be exhibited,¹⁴³ shows a new element, an element which might be called dynamic, in his art.

In 1890 the sea again attracted Seurat in the summer months. Once more the sun on the piers, the solitary lighthouses, the boats with clear sails, called to him, who so well transcribed their poetic isolation. At Grandcamp in 1885 and Honfleur in 1886, at Port-en-Bessin in 1888 and Le Crotoy the following year, Seurat went to Gravelines in 1890 to spy on the strange atmospheres that float between land and sea: fogs, winds, twilights and salt air. The canvases he brought back had to wait in the studio until the completion of *Le Cirque* in order to appear with it at the exhibition of the *Indépendants*. That year Seurat was again invited to show with the *Vingt* in Brussels. Among others invited were Pissarro, Gauguin, Guillaumin, Sisley and Chéret. A retrospective show was devoted to van Gogh, who had committed suicide in the summer of 1890.

Early in 1891, on the 3rd of February to be exact, Seurat spent an evening with many of the men for whom the epoch is remembered. At a banquet given in honor of Moréas, a banquet which, presided over by Mallarmé, was a sort of apotheosis of symbolism. Seurat rubbed elbows with Anatole France, André Gide, Jules Renard, Octave Mirbeau, Maurice Barrès, Henri de Régnier, Félix Fénéon, Paul Gauguin, Odilon Redon, Paul Signac and many others. Some of the guests were already famous; for some, fame was waiting. Among these last was Georges Seurat. Only a year before Jules Christophe had devoted an issue of the popular *Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* series to Seurat, in which he related the painter's life, described his works and summed up Seurat's theories. Painters and writers in Seurat's circle unanimously hailed his genius and admired his art. They knew the role which this man, hardly thirty-one years old, had played; they knew that his name was to be identified with a new vision; and they divined the place he was destined to occupy in the history of art.

In the early part of March 1891 Seurat helped arrange the exhibition of the



45. G. SEURAT: Study for "Le Cirque," 1890.

Indépendants, which was again held at the Pavillon de la Ville de Paris, on the Champs-Élysées, and which devoted space to works of van Gogh and also of Dubois-Pillet, who had died a short time before. Seurat, as usual, inspected the entries and supervised the hanging of the paintings. He showed at this Salon *Le Cirque* and four views of the *Chanel de Gravelines*. He hardly noticed an ordinary sore throat which followed a cold. The opening of the exhibition was set for March 10. A sudden fever sent Seurat to bed at his mother's place on the boulevard Magenta. He died in a few days. His infant son, who had contracted his illness, followed him to the grave.

In his short period of agony Seurat may have recalled the words of Delacroix, which he had once carefully copied:

Sterility is not only a misfortune for art, but a blemish on the talent of the artist. All the work of a man whose resources are meager must necessarily bear the mark of fatigue. A school can be created only by presenting great and numerous works as models.¹⁴⁴

During his ten years of artistic activity, Seurat had been abundantly creative. He had produced great works and propagated ideas which will withstand time and fate. But when he died on March 19, 1891, only his intimate friends understood humanity's loss. And Jules Christophe exclaimed sadly:

A sudden stupid sickness carried him off in a few hours when he was about to triumph: I curse providence and death!¹⁴⁵

On April 1, 1891, Camille Pissarro wrote from Paris to his son Lucien: "Yesterday I went to Seurat's funeral. I saw Signac who was much affected by this great misfortune. I believe you are right, pointillism is finished, but I think it will give rise to other effects which later will have great artistic significance. Seurat really brought something."

NOTES

1. See letter of Aman-Jean cited by Coquiote: *Seurat*, p. 22.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 27 and 29.
3. The archives of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts show that Seurat entered in February 1878. Of the 80 best students admitted to the class in painting on March 19, 1878, Seurat was rated 67th. At the end of the summer semester he dropped to 73rd on the list. However, on the report for March 18, 1879, Seurat occupies the 47th place. See R. Rey, *La Renaissance du sentiment classique*, p. 101.
4. Ch. Blanc: *Grammaire des arts du dessin* — translated by K. Newell Doggett: *The Grammar of Painting and Engraving*, New York, 1874, p. 164.
5. The lyrical descriptions of boats found in one of Seurat's notebooks and published by Coquiote, op. cit., pp. 122–125, are not, according to Fénéon, the painter's own impressions, but were copied by him from some publication.
6. R. Marx in *Le Progrès Artistique*, June 15, 1883.
7. Baudelaire: *L'Œuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix. Variétés critiques*, III.
8. Ch. Blanc, op. cit., pp. 146, 156 and 162.
9. Notes inédites de Seurat sur Delacroix, *Bulletin de la Vie Artistique*, April, 1922.
10. G. Kahn in *L'Art Moderne*, April 5, 1891.
11. Chevreul: *La Loi du contraste simultané des couleurs* — translated by Charles Martel: *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Colors*, London 1855, second edition. Statement 78.
12. Signac in *Encyclopédie Française*, vol. XVI, chap. II.
13. R. Marx in *Le Voltaire*, May 16, 1884.
14. J. E. Blanche, three years younger than Seurat, who studied painting under Gervex and at the Académie Julian, relates that at that time "they used to go and make sketches near the fortifications outside Paris, near the factories of Suresnes, and on the island of La Grande Jatte." See J. E. Blanche: *De Gauguin à la revue nègre*, p. 37.
15. Delacroix, cited by Signac: *D'Eugène Delacroix au Néo-impressionnisme*, chap. I.
16. Exhibition of Independent Artists, 1884, authorized by the Director of Fine Arts of Paris, B. Baracks, Cour des Tuileries, from May 15 to July 1.
17. Signac: *Le Néo-impressionnisme*, documents.
18. de Katow in *Gil Blas*, May 17, 1884.
19. Clarétie in *Le Temps*, May, 1884.
20. Alexis in *Cri du Peuple*, May, 1884.
21. E. Jacques in *L'Intransigeant*, May 24, 1884.
22. R. Marx in *Le Voltaire*, May 16, 1884.
23. Signac, op. cit., chap. IV.
24. Letter of Signac to Monet quoted by Gefroy: *Claude Monet*, vol. I, p. 175.
25. Gefroy, op. cit., vol. II, p. 166; see also vol. I, p. 215.
26. Signac, op. cit., chap. II.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Fénéon in *L'Art Moderne*, Sept. 19, 1886. See the application to the Municipal Council of July 2, 1885, reproduced by Coquiote, op. cit., pp. 142–148. Also Coquiote's *Les Indépendants*, pp. 9–10.
29. R. Marx in *Le Voltaire*, December 10, 1884.
30. Letter of C. Pissarro to P. Durand-Ruel, November 6, 1886, cited by L. Venturi: *Les Archives de l'Impressionnisme*, vol. II, p. 24.
31. Signac, op. cit., chap. III.
32. See D. Catton Rich: *Seurat and the Evolution of "La Grande Jatte."*
33. Signac, op. cit., chap. III.
34. Signac in *Encyclopédie Française*, vol. XVI, chap. II.
35. See the letter of Angrand cited by Coquiote, op. cit., p. 40.

36. Signac, op. cit., chap. I. See the color scales in A. Pope: *The Painter's Terms*, plates II–V.
37. Letter of Angrand cited by Coquiot, op. cit., p. 39.
38. Letter of Beaubourg cited by Coquiot, op. cit., p. 45. The complete quotation reads: "picked up stones and split his canvases." But as Seurat hardly ever painted on canvas on the island of La Grande Jatte, Fénéon is rightly skeptical of this anecdote.
39. Letter of Angrand cited by Coquiot, op. cit., p. 14.
40. Signac in *Encyclopédie Française*, vol. XVI, chap. II. This remark should perhaps be understood less as an expression of Seurat's real attitude, than as a sally intended to put a stop to literary interpretations of his pictures. All the artist's later work shows that he could "paint only what he saw before him," as he said himself. see G. Kahn, *Les Dessins de Seurat*, Introduction.
41. Unpublished letter of Pissarro to his son Lucien, March, 1886.
42. These landscapes were: *Le Bec du Hoc (Grandcamp)*, *Le Fort Samson*, *La Seine à Courbevoie*, *Le Fort Lamsac*.
43. G. Moore: *Confessions of a Young Man*, p. 28.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.
45. Signac: *Le Néo-impressionnisme*, documents.
46. Notice in *Le Figaro*, May 16, 1886.
47. Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 196.
48. G. Moore: *Modern Painting*, new edition, 1898, p. 89.
49. Fouquier in *Vingtième Siècle*, May 16, 1886.
50. Mirbeau in *La France*, May 21, 1886.
51. Hennequin in *La Vie Moderne*, June, 1886.
52. Wyzewa in *La Revue Indépendante*, Nov.–Dec. 1886.
53. Fénéon wrote the author: "I had been in Paris for three years, I had been to all the museums, to Durand-Ruel's gallery and to all the last exhibitions of the old guard impressionists, when Seurat's art was revealed to me by *Une Baignade (Asnières)*, which I saw in the canteen of the Salon des Artistes Indépendants. Although I did not commit myself in writing, I then completely realized the importance of this painting; the masterpieces which were the logical consequences of it followed without bringing me again the spice of surprise. I think it was at the famous 'Eighth Exhibition of Paintings' in the rue Lafitte that I first saw and became acquainted with Seurat and the painters he influenced."
54. Fénéon: *Les Impressionnistes en 1886*.
55. See G. Kahn, *Les Dessins de Seurat*, Introduction.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Quotation from R. de Gourmont in the catalogue of the *Cinquantenaire du Symbolisme* at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 1936, p. 115.
58. Wilenski asserts in his book: *Modern French Painters* (p. 85): "The critic Félix Fénéon, then twenty-two, saw what Seurat was after and founded *La Revue Indépendante* to help the new Classical Renaissance." The fact is that the founding of *La Revue Indépendante* — the first issue appeared in May 1884, edited by Georges Chevrier and Félix Fénéon — had no connection with Seurat whom Fénéon did not write about until 1886 (see note 53), and then not in *La Revue Indépendante* but in *La Vogue*. The collaborators to *La Revue Indépendante* were recruited, according to Fénéon, from "the declining naturalists and the rising symbolists." The first articles on Seurat published in *La Revue Indépendante* appeared in 1886 and 1887, written by Wyzewa and Huysmans, and were clearly antagonistic to divisionism. The facts about *La Revue Indépendante* and *La Vogue* can be found in the catalogue of the Symbolist Exhibition, op. cit., pp. 53–54.
59. Charles Henry, who was the same age as Seurat, had published at twenty-five a remarkable theoretical work on rhythm and measure.
60. P. Alexis in *Cri du Peuple*, April 14, 1888.
61. Fénéon in *Le Symboliste*, 1886.
62. That very year Fénéon also published, in collaboration with Paul Adam, Jean Moréas and Oscar Méténier a *Petit Bottin des lettres et des arts [Who's Who in Literature and Art]*, issued anonymously. This book contains remarks about Huysmans, Monet, Pissarro, Redon, Renoir, Verlaine, Zola and so on. The comment on Seurat reads: "He brushes flowing waters, plastic grasses and the air which synthesizes all this."
63. According to R. Rey: *La Renaissance du sentiment classique*, p. 122, the term "neo-impressionnisme" was first used by Arsène Alexandre in his review of Fénéon's brochure which appeared in December 1886. But prior to this the term had already been employed by Fénéon in an article in *L'Art Moderne*, Sept. 19, 1886. There is little doubt that the term was first used by Fénéon who may have gotten it from the painters themselves.
64. Signac, op. cit., chap. III.
65. Unsigned article in *The New York Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1886.
66. Durand-Ruel showed works by Millet, Manet, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro, Degas, Whistler, Morisot, Boudin, Guillaumin, Forain, and so on.

67. P. Durand-Ruel, *Mémoires*, published by L. Venturi, op. cit., vol. II, p. 216.

68. Unsigned article in *The Critic*, New York, April 17, 1886. Another anonymous article in *Art Age*, April 1886, said: "The impressionists are highly trained and fully developed technicians who have experienced reactionary desires in favor of truth and simplicity, as they understand those attributes."

69. Unsigned article in *The Critic*, April 17, 1886. The author of this article went as far as to say: "New York has never seen a more interesting exhibition than this." On the other hand the *Sun* was as hostile as the French papers had been: "The great master, from his own point of view, must surely be Seurat whose monstrous picture of *The Bathers* [*La Baignade*] consumes so large a part of Gallery D. This is a picture conceived in a coarse, vulgar, and commonplace mind, the work of a man seeking distinction by the vulgar qualification and expedient of size. It is bad from every point of view, including his own." (April 11, 1886.)

It is interesting to note that following this exhibition a certain Celen Sabbrin published a brochure entitled: "Science and Philosophy in Art" (Philadelphia, 1886). This study is however principally devoted to the works of Monet and does not even mention Seurat.

70. As early as April 26 the *New York Daily Tribune* announced that 7 to 8 pictures had been sold.

71. At the second exhibition of the *Indépendants* (August 21–Sept. 21, 1886) Seurat, 110 Boulevard Magenta, was represented by: *Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de La Grande Jatte*; *Le Bec du Hoc* (*Grandcamp*); *La Rade de Grandcamp*; *La Seine à Courbevoie*; *Coin d'un bassin à Honfleur*; *Grandcamp (soir)*; *La Luzerne* (*St. Denis*); *Bateaux* (*Courbevoie*), croqueton; *Bords de Seine*, croqueton.

72. Notice in *Le Figaro*, May 16, 1886.

73. Unpublished letter of C. Pissarro to his son Lucien.

74. Fénéon in *L'Art Moderne*, Sept. 19, 1886.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Seurat exhibited in Nantes *Le Phare et l'Hospice à Honfleur* and *La Grève du Bas Butin*.

77. Tyrtée in *Le Moniteur des Arts*, February 18, 1887.

78. Notice in *Le Matin*, February 7, 1887.

79. Verhaeren in *La Vie Moderne*, February 26, 1887. *Le Bec du Hoc* was sold in Brussels for 300 francs. This was the first painting Seurat sold. It seems that exactly one year later, in March 1888, Théo van Gogh either purchased a painting of Seurat or exchanged some painting

for one of his canvases. (Van Gogh's letters to his brother, 468.)

80. Gauguin did a landscape of Pont-Aven and a still life which he ironically called *Ripipoint* (see reproduction 34) in the pointillist manner. These were hung in the lobby of the inn at Le Pouldu. *Ripipoint* was much admired, and even inspired verses. See Ch. Chassé: *Gauguin et le groupe de Pont-Aven*, p. 39.

81. Van Gogh's letter to his brother, number 500. Seurat said of van Gogh in a letter to Beaubourg, August 28, [1890] (quoted by R. Rey, op. cit.): "In 1887 I spoke to him for the first time in a cheap restaurant near *La Fourche*, Avenue de Clichy, now closed. An immense skylighted hall was decorated with his canvases. He exhibited with the *Indépendants* in 1888, 1889, 1890." According to van Gogh himself, he paid a visit to Seurat's studio to "see his beautiful great canvases" (letter 553). In 1888 van Gogh wrote to his brother from Arles: "Painting as it is now promises to become more subtle—more like music and less like sculpture—and above all it promises *color*. If only it keeps this promise. . . . As for stippling and making haloes and other things, I think they are real discoveries, but we must see to it already that this technique does not become a universal dogma any more than any other. That is another reason why Seurat's *Grande Jatte* . . . will become in time still more individual and still more original" (letter 528).

82. Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 201.

83. Information given by Paul Signac.

84. Letter of C. Pissarro to P. Durand-Ruel, Nov. 6, 1886, published by L. Venturi, op. cit., vol. II, p. 24.

85. G. Lecomte: *Camille Pissarro, Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, Number 366, 1890.

86. See Angrand's letter quoted by Coquiote, op. cit., p. 44.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Letter from Fénéon to the author.

89. Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 200.

90. G. Kahn in *L'Art Moderne*, April 5, 1891.

91. Information given by Paul Signac.

92. See G. Kahn in *Mercure de France*, May 1924.

93. See Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 200.

94. Aman-Jean quoted by Coquiote, op. cit., p. 25; Cousturier, see G. Kahn in *Mercure de France*, May 1924; Carabin quoted by Coquiote, op. cit., p. 48; Kahn, *Mercure de France*, May 1924; Wyzewa, *L'Art dans des Deux Mondes*, April 18, 1891; Degas, see G. Kahn in *Mercure de France*, May 1924; Signac quoted by Coquiote, op. cit., p. 30; Pissarro, unpublished letter to his son Lucien, May 15, 1887.

Asked about these varying descriptions of Seurat, Fénéon wrote the author: "Henri de Régnier, in his book of poems, *Vestigia Flammae*, has, in my opinion, given the most adequate portrait of Seurat. I don't see what could be added to it." This is the poem:

Seurat, une âme ardente et haute était en vous . . .
 Je me souviens. Vous étiez grave, calme et doux
 Taciturne, sachant tout ce que la parole
 Gaspille de nous-mêmes en sa rumeur frivole.
 Vous écoutiez sans répondre, silencieux
 D'un silence voulu que démentaient vos yeux
 Mais si votre art était sujet de la querelle
 Un éclair animait votre regard rebelle,
 Car vous aviez en vous, conçue avec lenteur,
 Seurat, votre obstination de novateur
 Auprès de quoi rien ne prévaut et rien n'existe,
 Cette obstination qui fait le grand artiste.

95. L. Cousturier: *Seurat*, p. 8.
96. G. Kahn: *Les Dessins de Seurat*, Introduction.
97. Ibid.
98. Unpublished letter of Signac to Fénéon.
99. G. Kahn in *La Vie Moderne*, April 5, 1891.
100. See G. Kahn: *Les Dessins de Seurat*, Introduction.
101. Ibid.
102. Fénéon: *Les Impressionnistes en 1886*.
103. P. Adam in *La Vie Moderne*, April 15, 1888.
104. Signac in *Encyclopédie Française*, vol. XVI, chap. II.
105. Letter of Gauguin to Morice, April 1903, quoted by Ch. Morice: *Paul Gauguin*, p. 132.
106. Letter of Cézanne to Zola, November 27, 1884, published in Paul Cézanne, *Letters*, p. 173.
107. "The Chromatic Circle giving all the Complementaries and Harmonies of Colors" and "The Aesthetic Table, in Accordance with which all Forms may be studied and perfected."
108. D. Sutter, *Les Phénomènes de la vision*. Six articles published in 1880 in *L'Art*.
109. See G. Kahn: *Les Dessins de Seurat*, Introduction.
110. D. Sutter, op. cit., XCIX.
111. D. Sutter, op. cit., V, XIV, XXVIII, XXXIX, XL, XLIX, L, LXXIII, LXXIV, LXXVIII, LXXIX, LXXX, LXXXI, LXXXIX, XC, CXXIV, CLXVII.
112. D. Sutter, op. cit.
113. Letter of Seurat to Beaubourg, August 28 [1890], published by R. Rey, op. cit.
114. Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 199.
115. It may be interesting to note here what J. E. Blanche (op. cit., p. 37) wrote about Seurat's

colors: "Many of Seurat's canvases are faded, are already a dirty grey, the color harmonies being lost. *La Baignade* has lost much of its light and resonance."

116. Hennequin in *La Vie Moderne*, Sept. 11, 1886. This article concludes as follows: "When Monsieur Seurat employs his method to paint seascapes of Normandy, especially when he describes the coming of evening on a grey day, as in that marvellous canvas *Grandcamp*, he is an excellent painter. But when he tries to represent the full sun and moving figures as in *La Grande Jatte*, his failure is evident, not only in the lack of light, but in the even greater lack of life in figures whose outlines have been painfully colored with little dots as in a tapestry. These painted tapestries are as unpleasant as real tapestries. . . . These painters [Seurat, Signac, etc.] try to render reality, modifying it in a style based not on forms but on colors. However they fail to see truly as a result of trying to see things objectively as the eye receives them; that is to say that ruining the whole education of this organ, all the treasured experiences stored in this sense which today enable our minds to perceive the forms of things in truer images than those furnished by the eye alone. These painters try to render objects in colored dots without any other contours than the vague boundaries they project on the retina; so that in limiting the sensibility of the eye to colored reactions, habituating themselves to perceiving colored shadows at will, to decomposing tones, to observing the play of complementaries, they end up by no longer feeling pure tones, they disrupt them in their paintings and thus rob their works of light. Both by their backwardness in respect to forms and their progressiveness in respect to colors, they give an inexact picture of the image the human race has of nature."

117. Seurat, 128bis Boulevard de Clichy, sent to the third exhibition of the *Indépendants* (March 26–May 3, 1887) the following works: *Le Phare et l'Hospice à Honfleur* (belonging to Emile Verhaeren), *La Grève du Bas Butin*, *Embouchure de la Seine*, *Le Pont de Courbevoie* (belonging to A. Alexandre), *Entrée du port d'Honfleur* (belonging to F. Fénéon), *La "Maria" à Honfleur*, *Bout de la jetée d'Honfleur*, *Poseuse* (debout), *Eden Concert*, drawing, twelve sketches.

118. Huysmans in *La Revue Indépendante*, April 1887.

119. Letter of Gauguin to his wife, quoted by Dorsenne: *La Vie sentimentale de Paul Gauguin*, p. 87.

120. Gauguin: *Raconteurs d'un rapin*, published by Rotonchamp: *Paul Gauguin*, p. 240. Daniel de Monfreid tells that Gauguin had also warned van Gogh against all systems of painting: against division of tones, optical mixture of colors and so on. See Ch. Chassé, op. cit., p. 38.

121. Renoir to Vollard. See Vollard: *En écoutant Cézanne, Degas, Renoir*, p. 211.

122. Monet to F. Fels, quoted by J. E. Blanche, op. cit., p. 25. To these words Monet however added a remark truly surprising coming from an impressionist and which one would expect rather from a painter like Seurat: "One is not an artist if one does not carry the picture to be painted in the imagination before executing it, and if one was not entirely certain of one's craft, of one's composition. . . ."

123. Unpublished letter of Sisley (probably to Bergerat), April 21, 1898.

124. Fénéon in *L'Art Moderne*, Sept. 19, 1886.

125. Seurat exhibited at the fourth Salon of the *Indépendants* (March 22–May 3, 1888) two canvases and eight drawings: *Les Poseuses, Parade de Cirque*, and *Au Concert Européen, A la Gaité-Rochecouart, Au Divan Japonais, Forte chanteuse, Dîneur, Lecture, Balayeur, Jeune fille*.

126. Fénéon in *L'Art Moderne*, April 15, 1888. With regard to Seurat's frames it is only proper to add that not all the dotted frames in which his works appear today were made by the artist himself. In their forthcoming catalogue F. Fénéon and C. M. de Haucke will indicate the original frames and those made after Seurat's death, most often not in harmony with his paintings.

127. Unpublished letter of H. E. Cross to Fénéon.

128. See Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 202.

129. Notice in *L'Echo du Nord* (Lille), March 29, 1888.

130. Notice in *The New York Herald*, Paris, March 23, 1888.

131. P. Adam in *La Vie Moderne*, April 15, 1888.

132. M. Denis: *Théories*, pp. 257 and 263. For a comparison of Seurat's and Gauguin's tendencies see R. Goldwater, "Some Aspects of the Development of Seurat's Style." *The Art Bulletin*, June 1941.

133. Letter of Seurat to O. Maus, February 27, 1889, published by M. O. Maus: *Trente années de lutte pour l'art*, p. 87. Seurat's price amounting to 2555 francs would have been very low even for the period, if one judges by what van Gogh wrote his brother in 1888: "In my opinion we must at the lowest reckon his big pictures of the *Models* and the *Grande Jatte* well, say, at 5000 francs apiece" (letter 551).

134. C. Pissarro wrote Fénéon on February 21, 1889: "At the moment I am trying to make myself master of this technique which inhibits me and which hinders the development of spontaneity of sensation." Signac later tried to explain

Pissarro's desertion in his book, op. cit., chap. IV, thus: "Pissarro wants to achieve delicacy by means of adjustments of nearly like tones; he keeps from juxtaposing two distant tones and does without the vibrant note which such contrast gives, but strives on the contrary to diminish the distance between two tints by introducing into each one of them intermediate elements which he calls *paths*. But the neo-impressionist technique is based precisely on this type of contrast, for which he feels no need, and on the violent purity of tints which hurts his eye. He has kept of *divisionism* only the technique, the *little dot*, whose *raison d'être* is exactly that it enables the transcription of this contrast and the conservation of this purity. So it is easy to understand why he gave up this means, insufficient as it is by itself."

135. Letter of C. Pissarro to H. Vandevelde quoted from the original draft found among Pissarro's papers. The letter actually sent to Vandevelde on March 27, 1896, was a protest against the inclusion of Pissarro's name in a list of neo-impressionists.

136. Verhaeren: *Sensations*, p. 199.

137. At the fifth exhibition of the *Indépendants* (Sept. 3–Oct. 4, 1889) Seurat showed only three paintings: *Le Crotoy, (aval), Le Crotoy, (amont), Port-en-Bessin*.

138. Unpublished letter of C. Pissarro to his son Lucien, Sept. 9, 1889.

139. See R. Rey, op. cit., p. 129.

140. At the sixth Salon of the *Indépendants* (March 20–April 17, 1890) Seurat, 39, passage de l'Elysée des Beaux-Arts, exhibited nine paintings and two drawings: *Le Chahut; Jeune femme se poudrant; Port-en-Bessin, un dimanche; Port-en-Bessin; Port-en-Bessin; Port-en-Bessin; Les grues et la percée; Temps gris (Grande Jatte); Printemps (Grande Jatte); Paul Alexis*, drawing; *Paul Signac*, drawing.

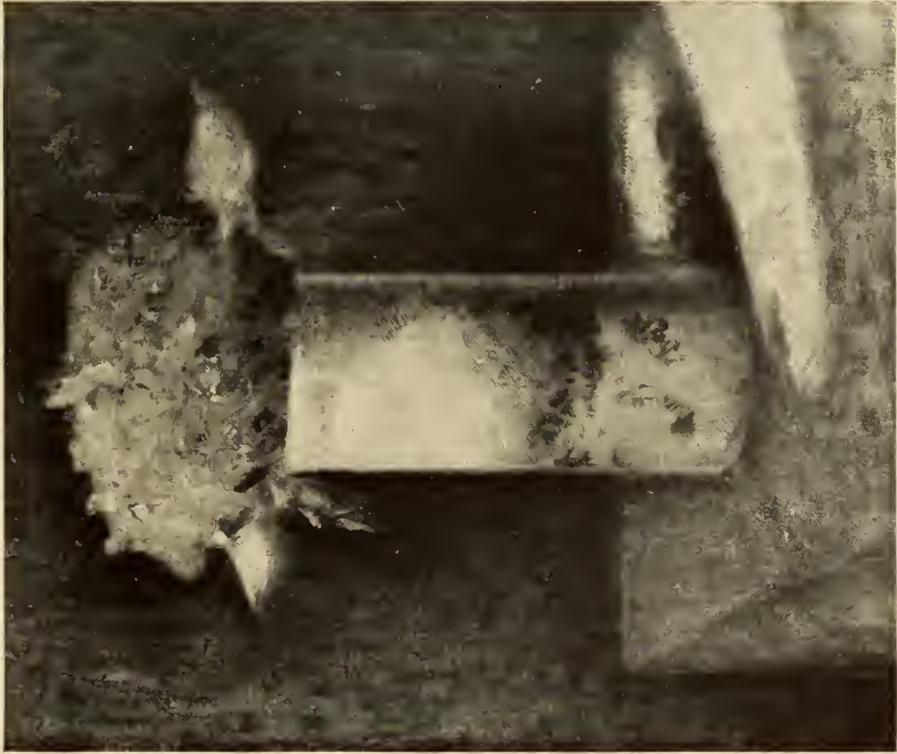
141. M. de la Montagne in *Le Salut Public* (Lyon), March 27, 1890.

142. Delacroix quoted by Signac, op. cit., chap. I.

143. Angrand, in a letter quoted by Coquiou, op. cit., p. 166, relates: "We were at the Pavillon de Paris sitting on a bench in the last hall when Puvis de Chavannes entered with a woman. He looked at the drawings by Denis near the door, and slowly made the rounds. — He will see, Seurat said to me, the mistake I made in the drawing of my horse. — But Puvis passed without stopping. This was a cruel blow for Seurat."

144. Notes of Seurat published in *Bulletin de la Vie Artistique*, April 1922.

145. J. Christophe in *La Plume*, September 1, 1891.



46. Flowers in a Vase, about 1880.



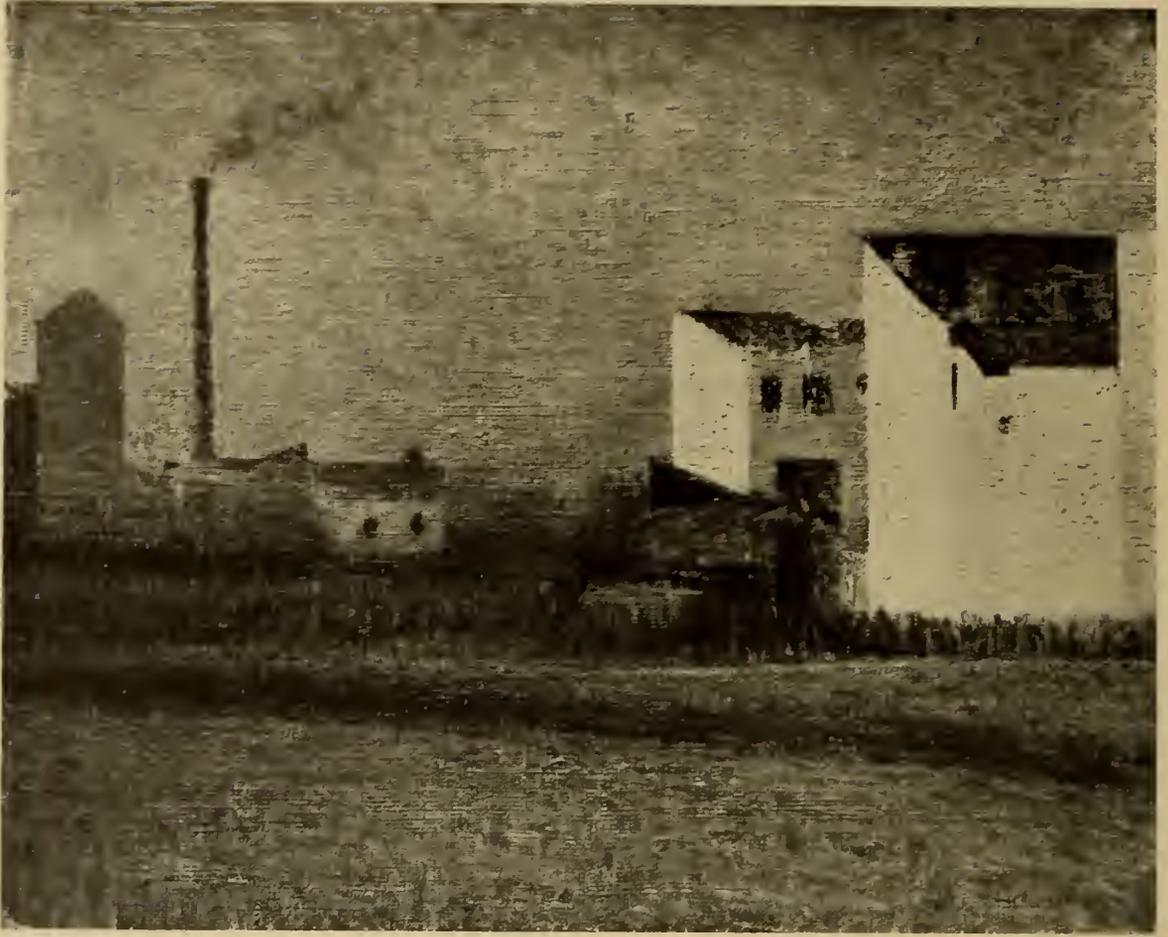
47. Head of a Young Girl, about 1879.



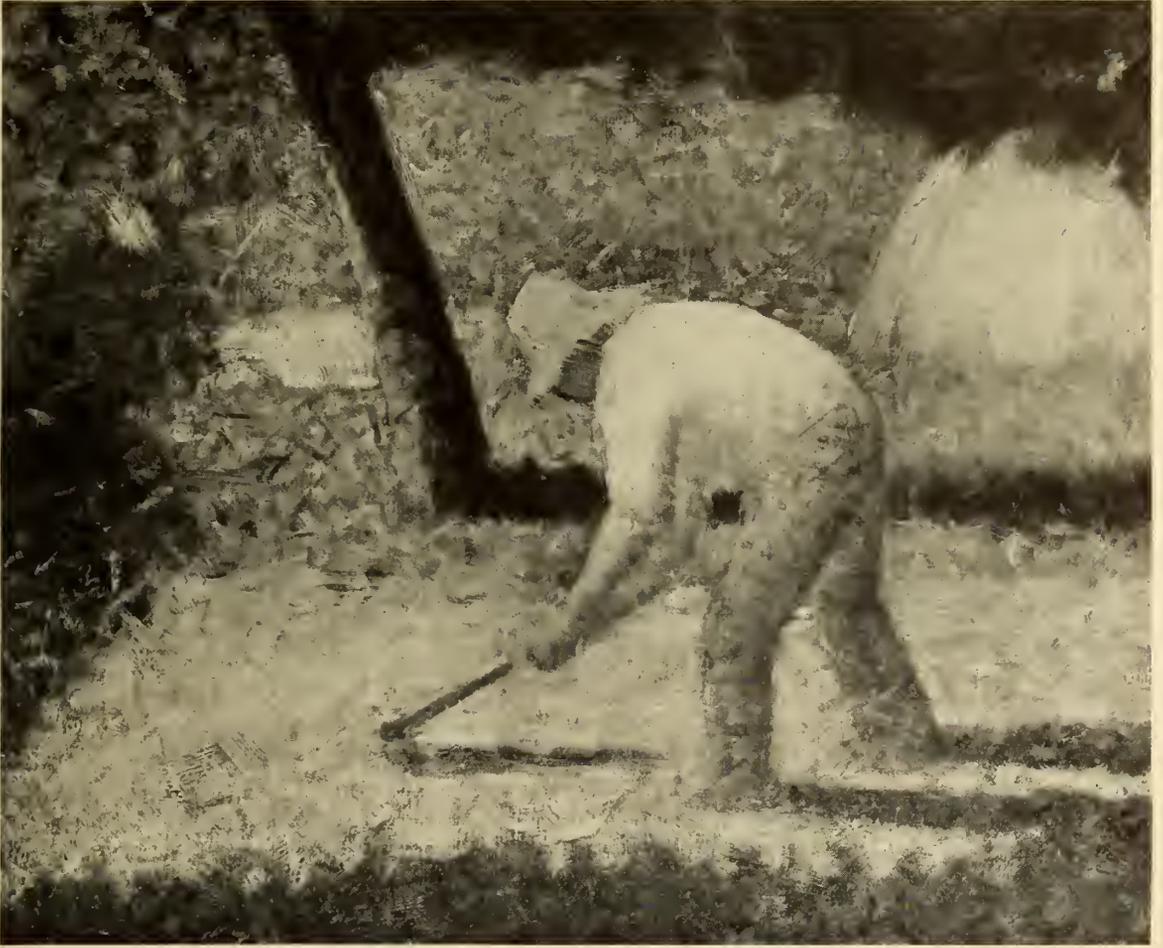
48. The Mower, about 1879.



49. Landscape, about 1882.



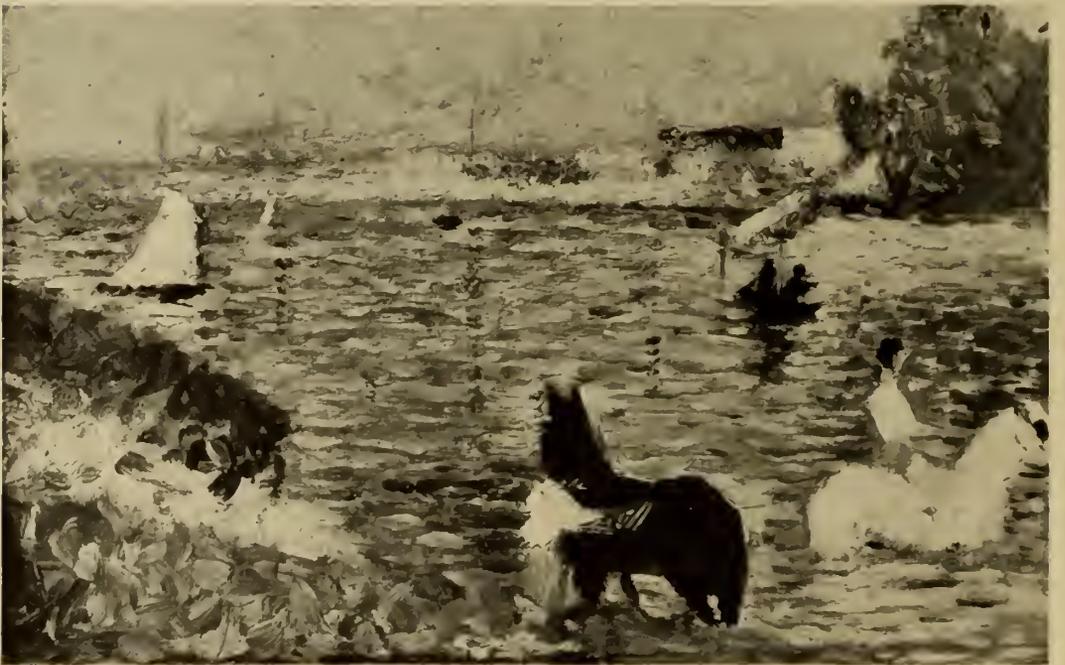
50. Suburb, 1883.



51. Peasant Hoeing, about 1884.



52. The Two Banks, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883.



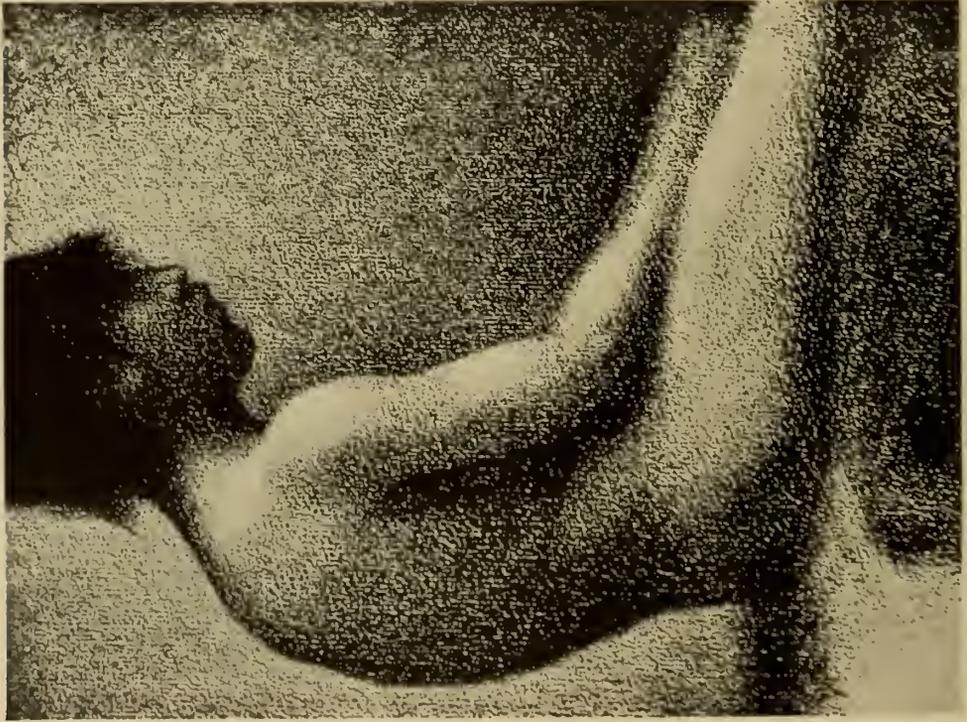
53. Horses in the Seine, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883.



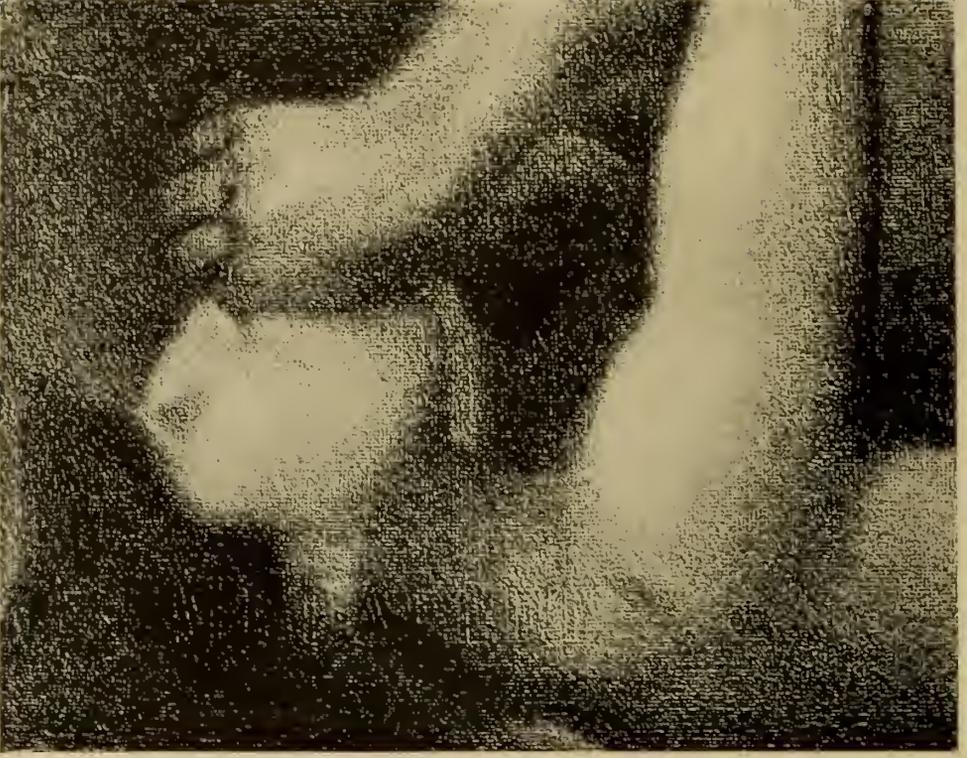
54. People Sitting in the Grass, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883.



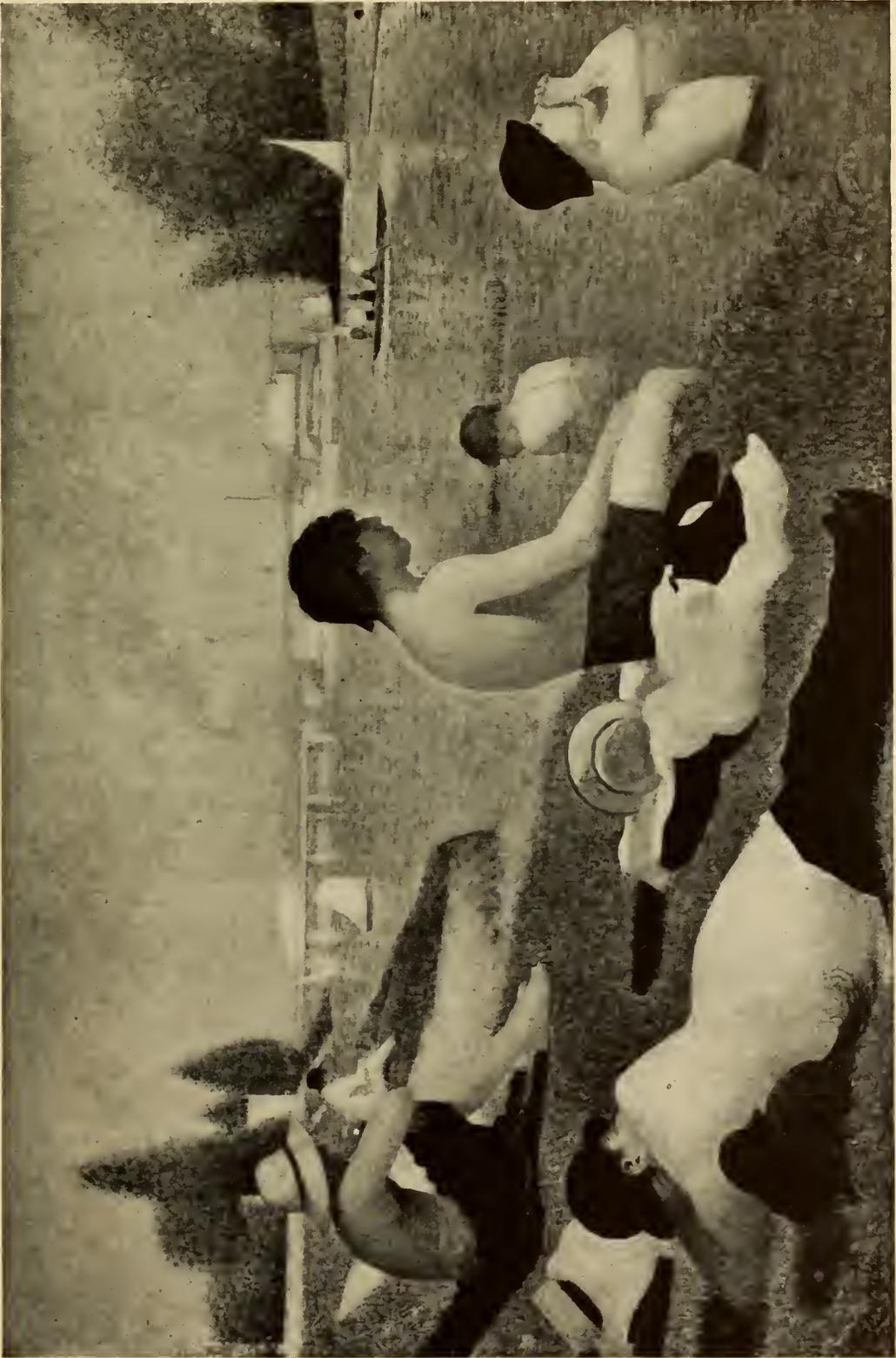
55. The Bank of the Seine, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883.



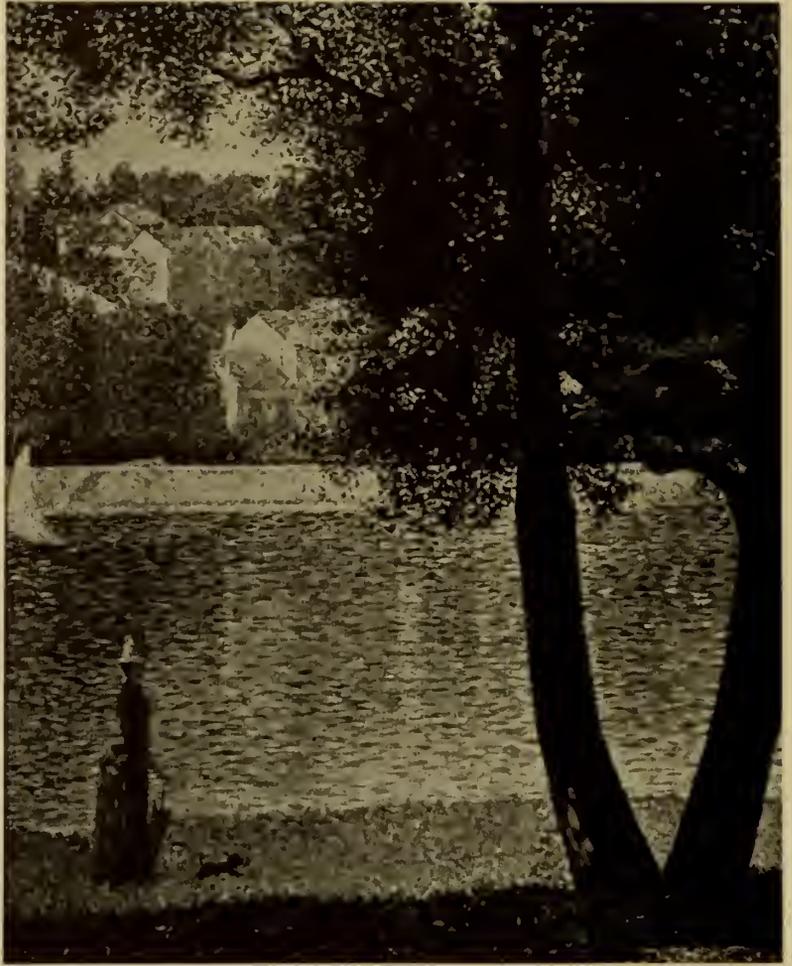
56. Seated Nude, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883-84.



57. Echo, Study for "Une Baignade," 1883-84.



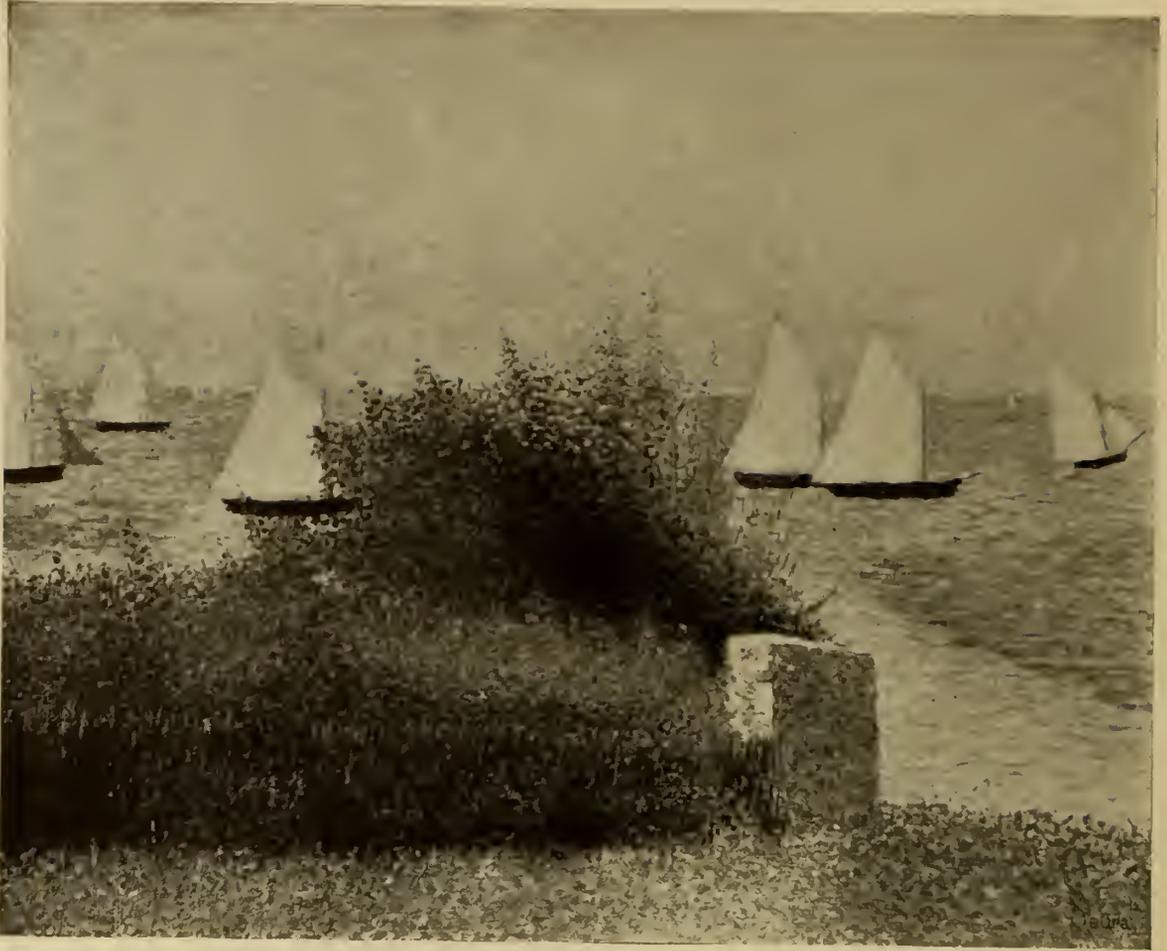
58. Une Baignade, Asnières, 1883-84.



59. The Seine at Courbevoie, 1885.



60. Setting Sun, Grandcamp, 1885.



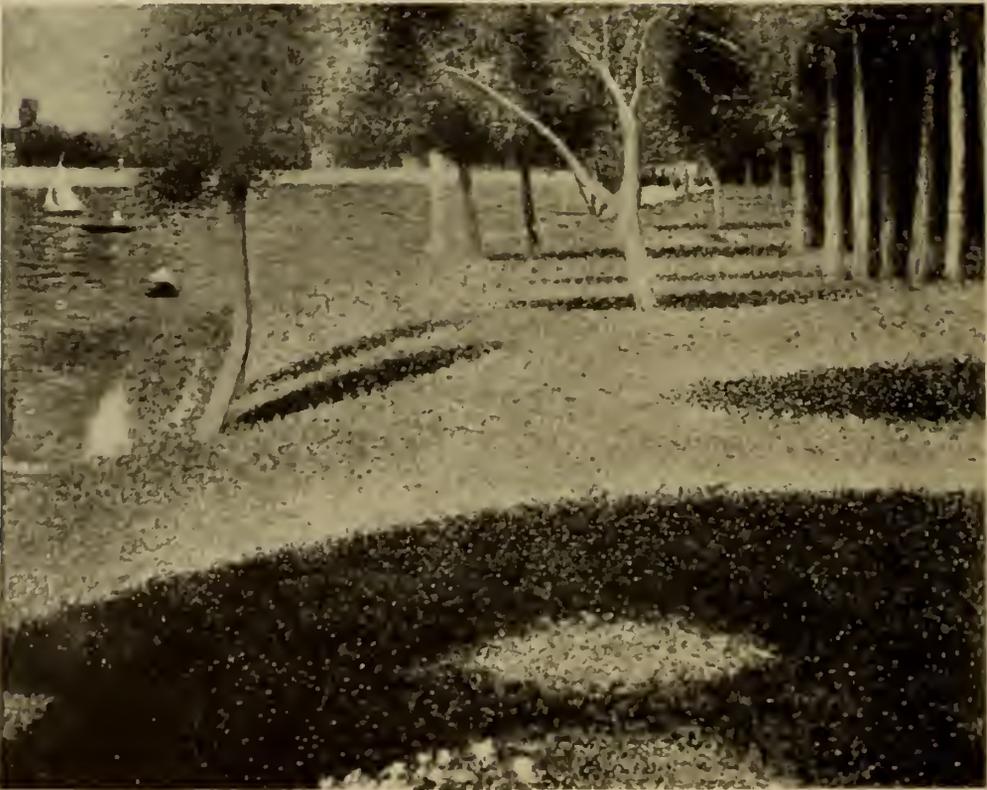
61. The Harbor of Grandcamp, 1885.



62. Le Bec du Hoc, Grandcamp, 1885.



63. L'Île de la Grande Jatte, 1885.



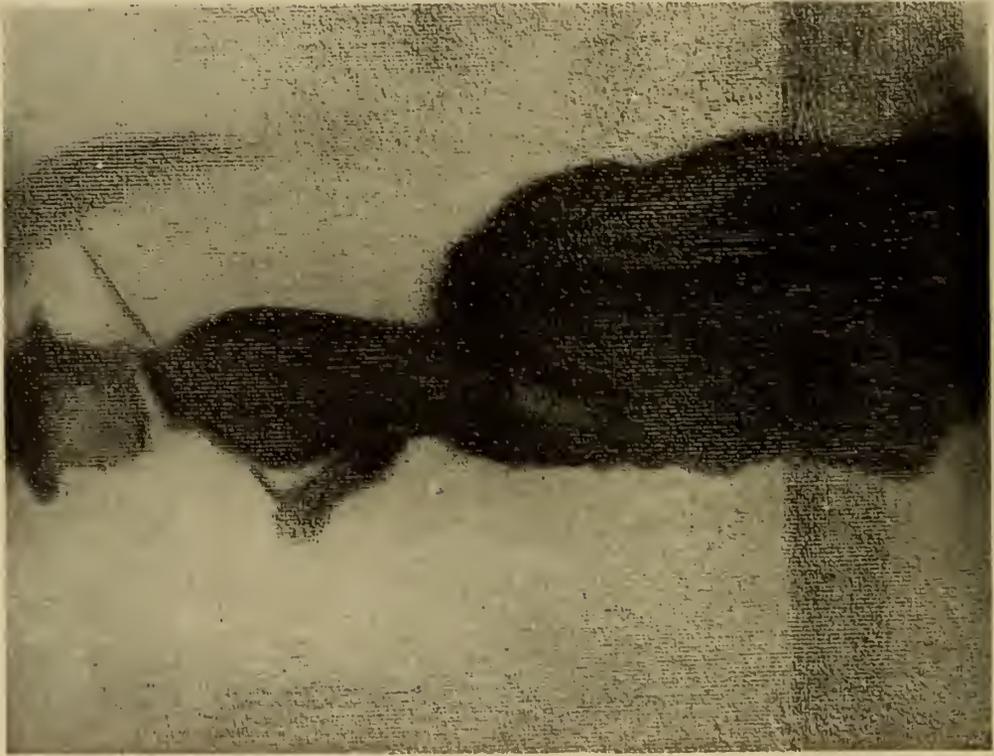
64. L'Île de la Grande Jatte, 1884.



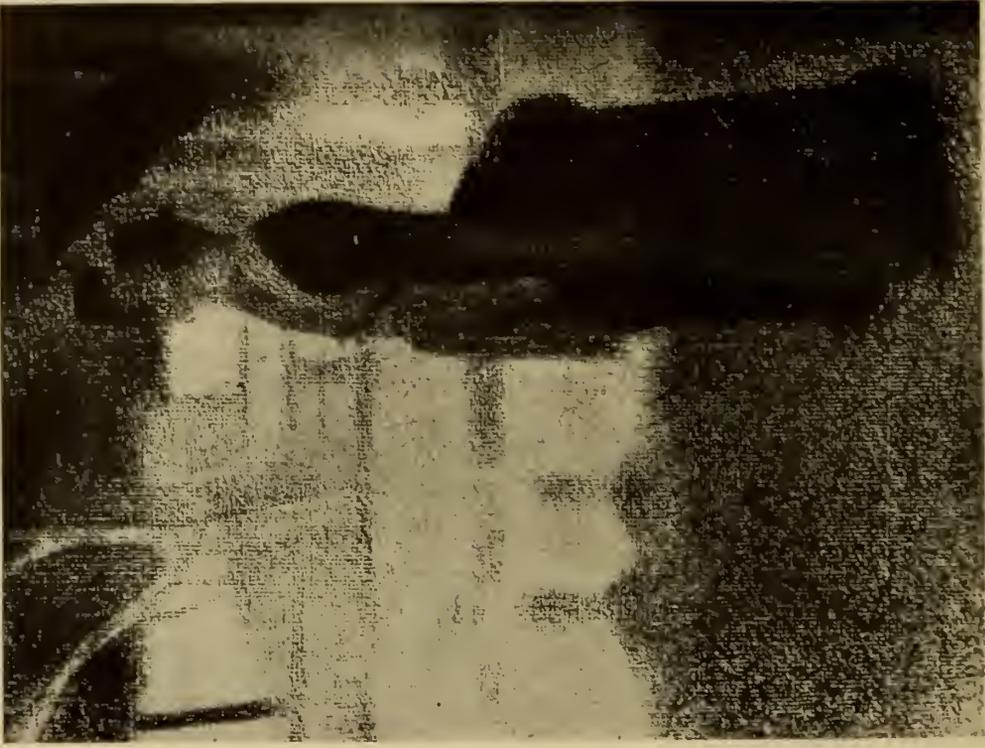
65. Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1885.



66. Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1885.



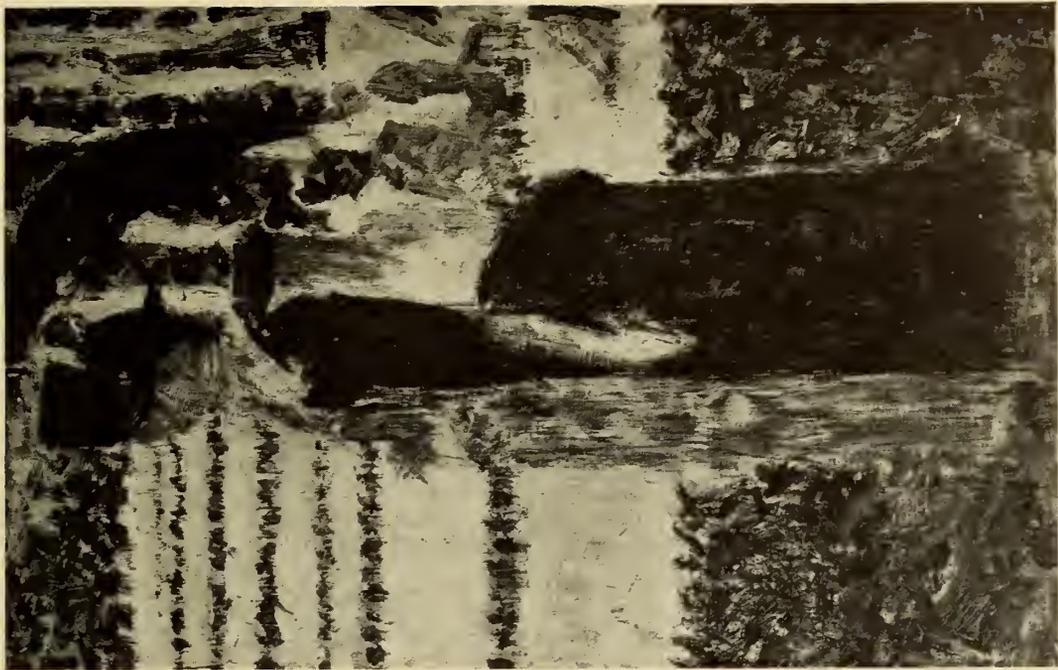
67. Woman with Parasol, Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1885.



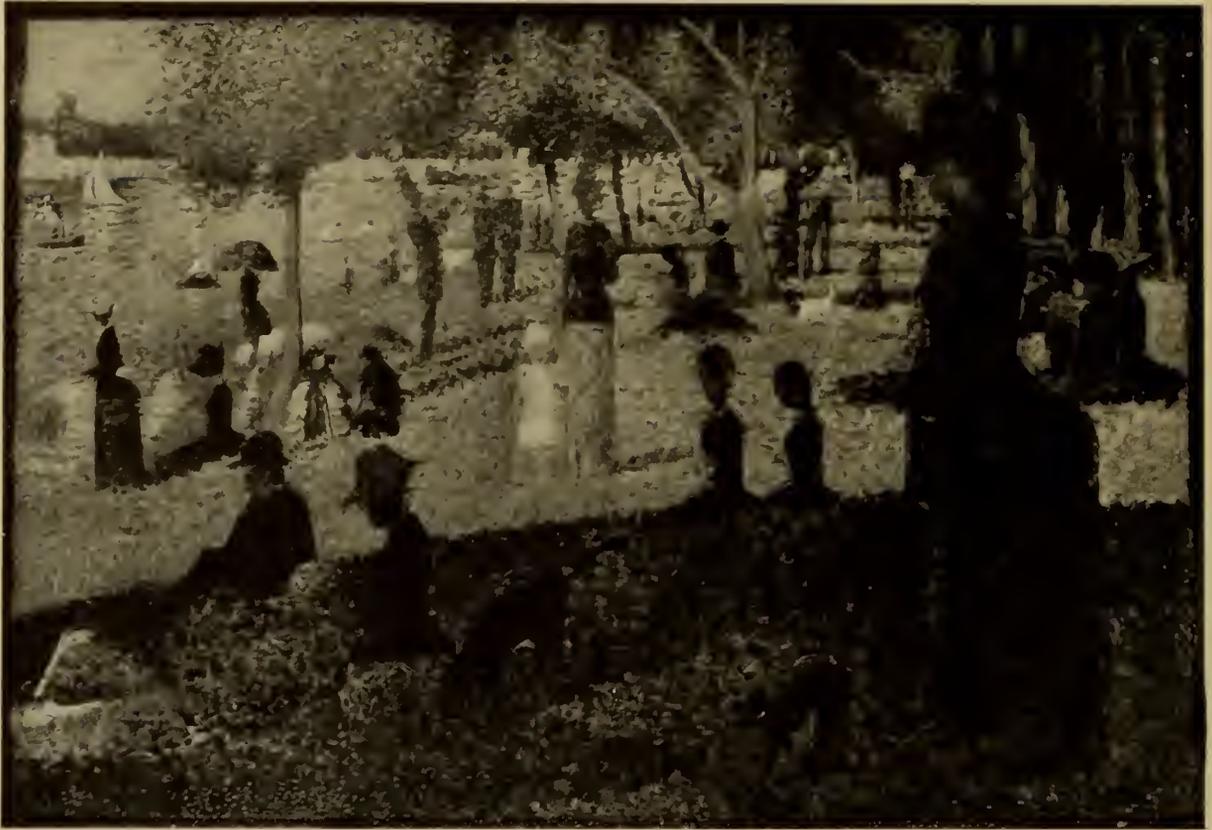
68. The Couple, Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1885.



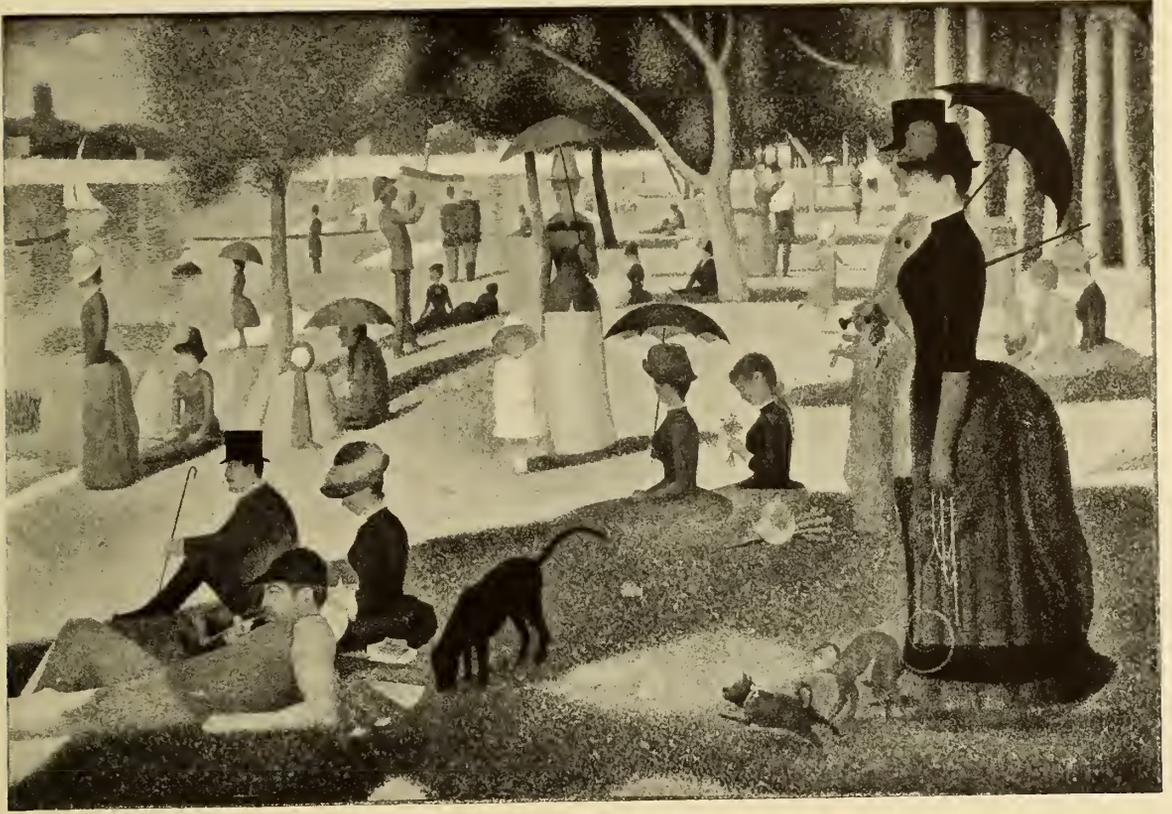
69. Woman with Monkey, Study for "La Grande Jatte," about 1885.



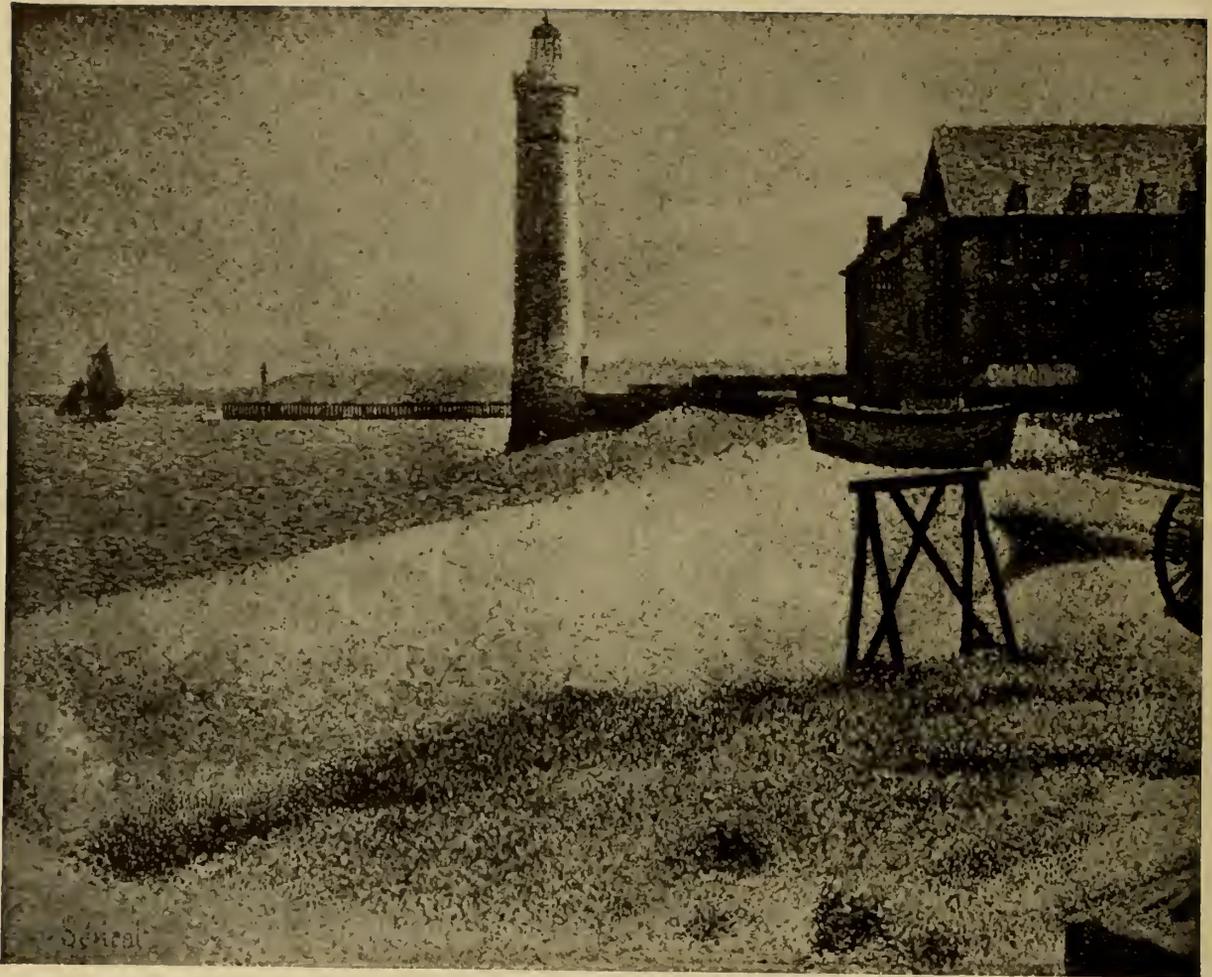
70. The Couple, Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1884-85.



71. Study for "La Grande Jatte," 1884-85.



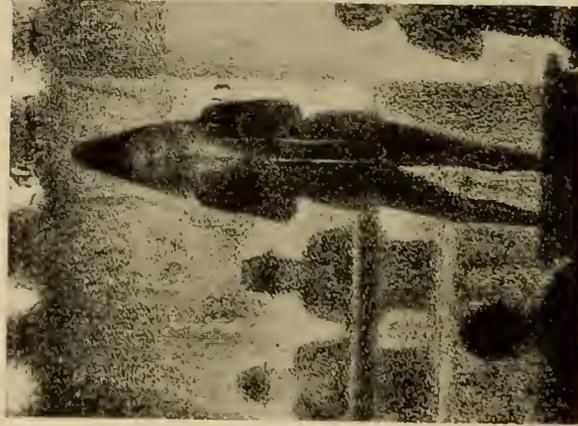
72. A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, 1884-86.



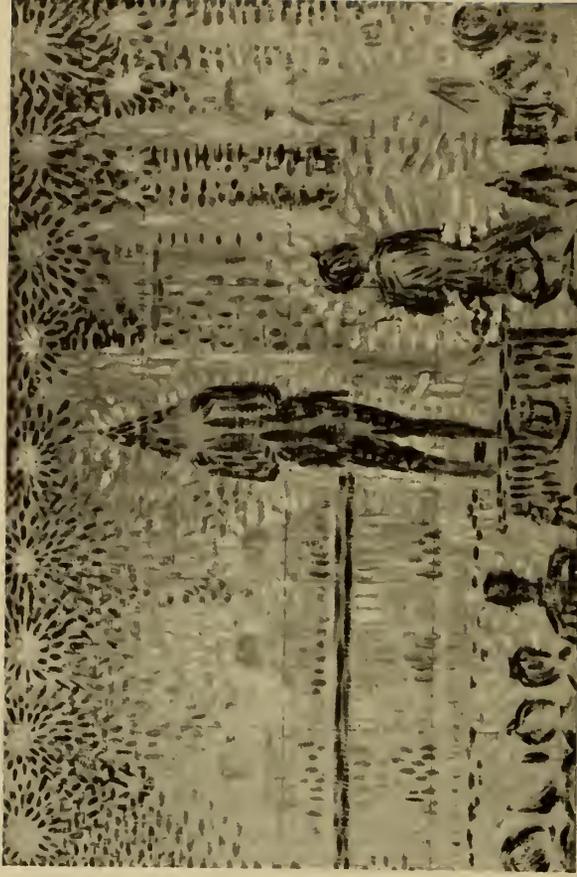
73. The Hospice and the Lighthouse of Honfleur, 1886.



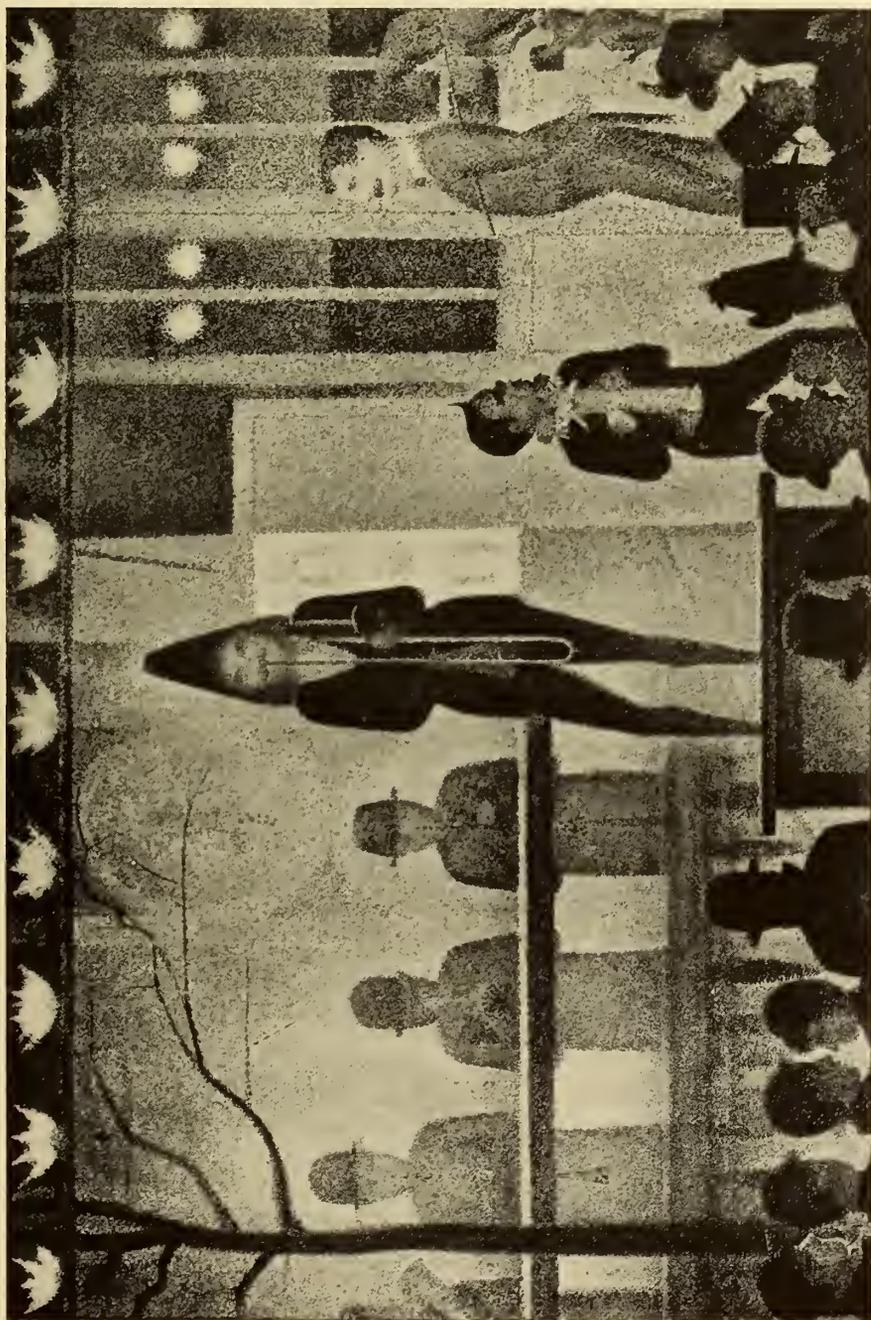
74. The Bridge of Courbevoie, 1886-87.



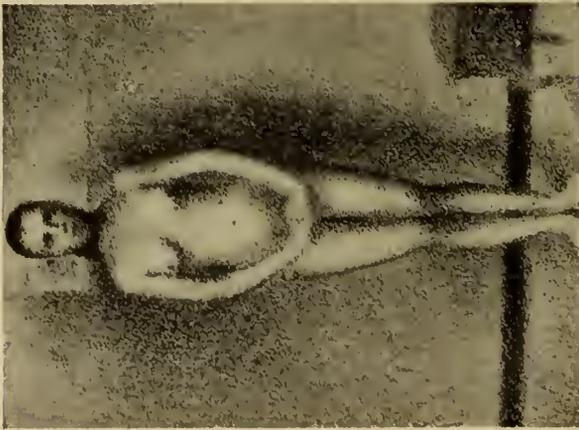
75. Trombone Player, Study for "La Parade," 1887.



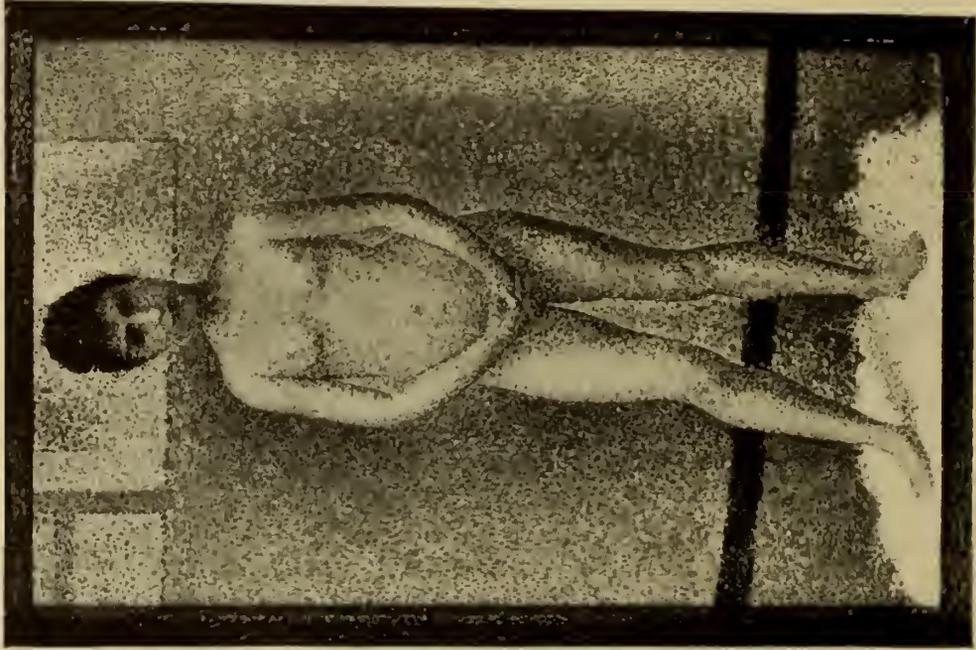
76. Study for "La Parade," 1887.



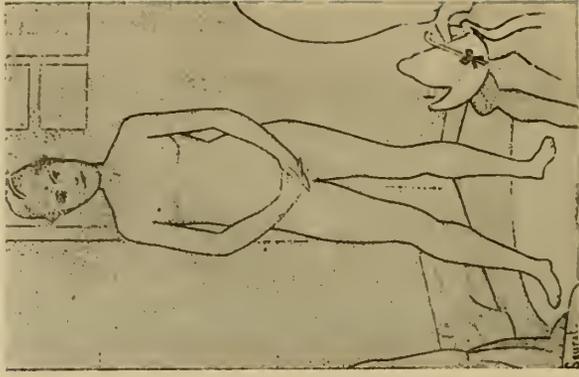
77. La Parade, 1887-88.



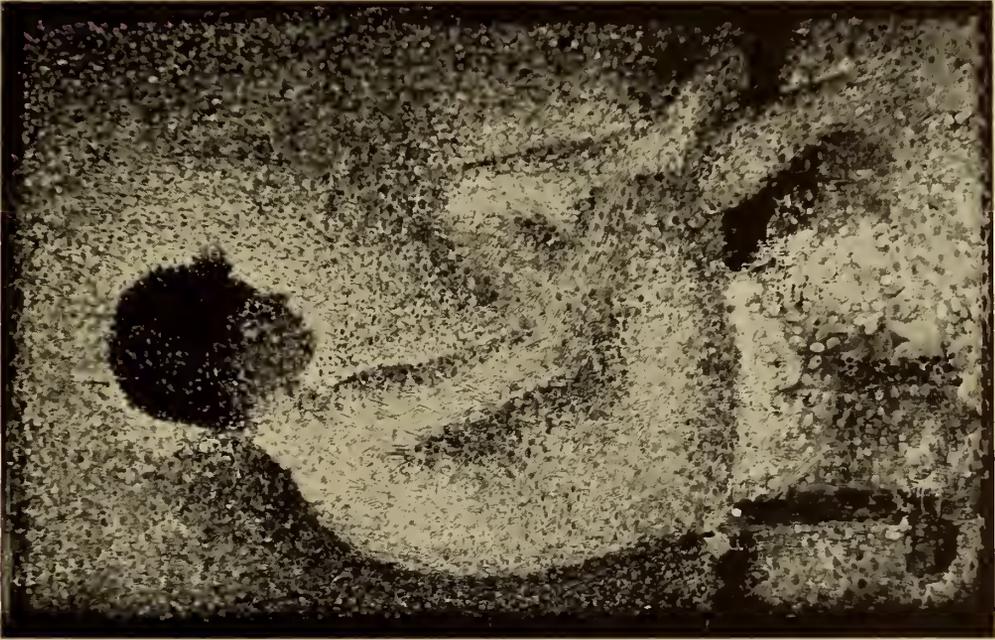
78. Model Standing, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.



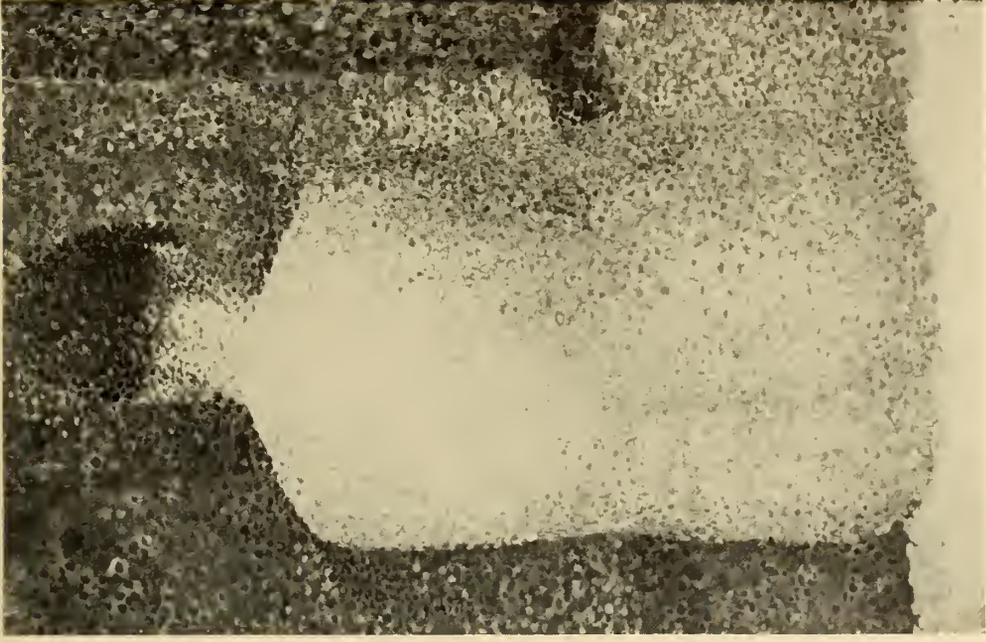
79. Model Standing, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.



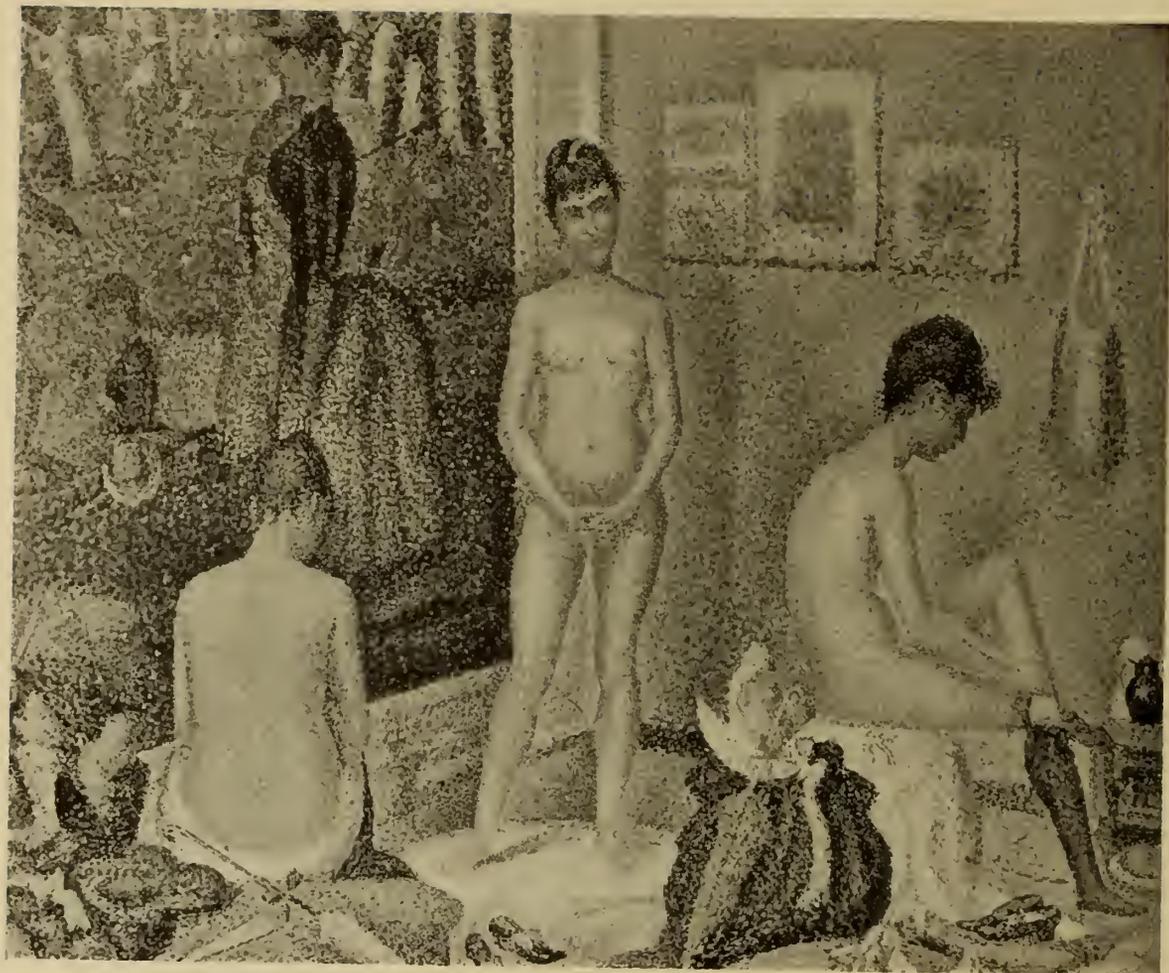
80. Model Standing, 1888.



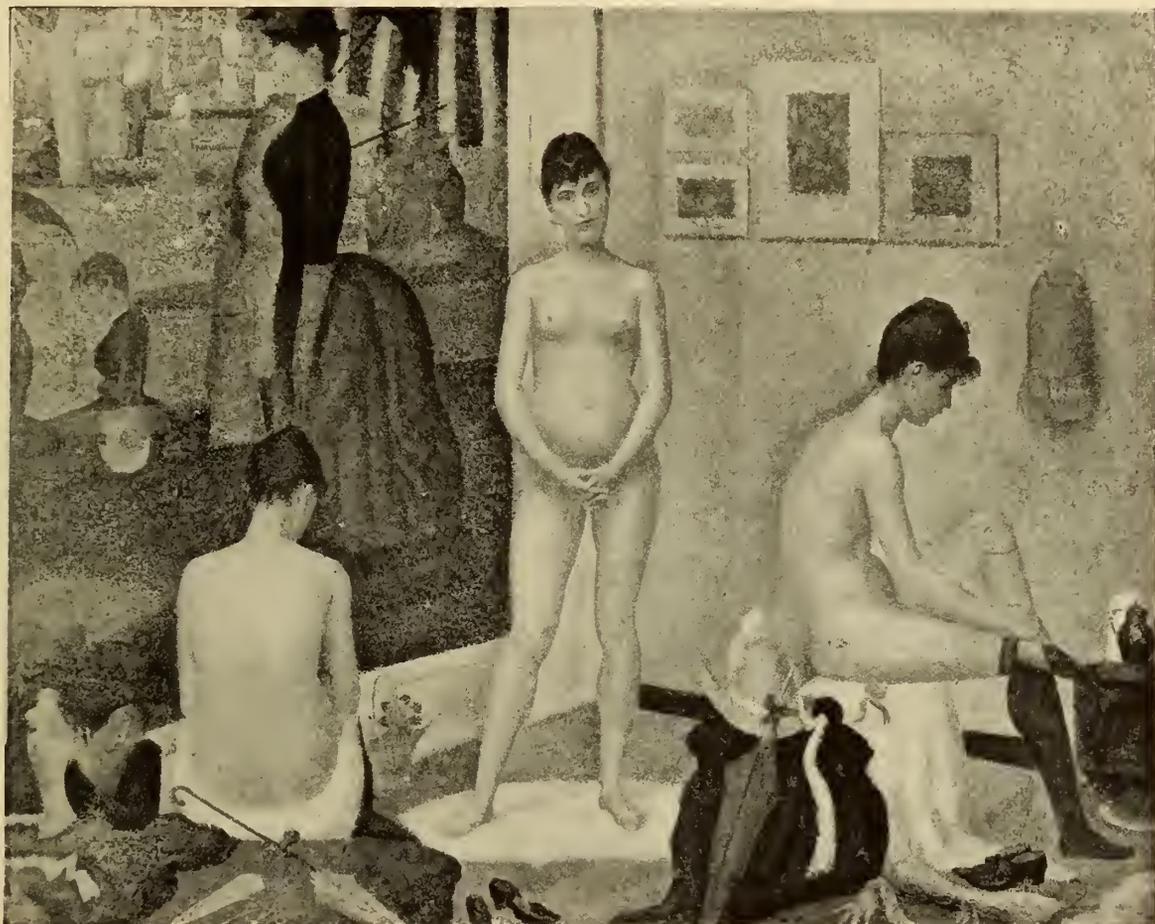
81. Model in Profile, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.



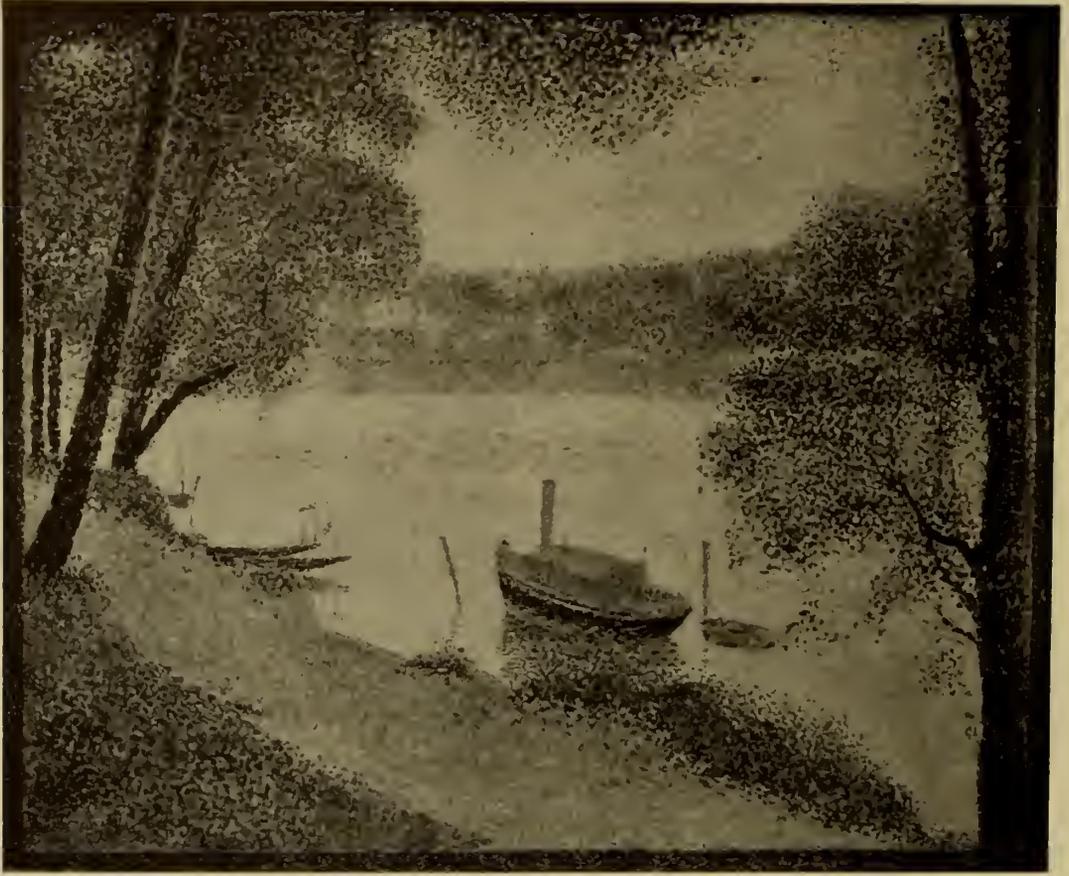
82. Model Seen from the Back, Study for "Les Poseuses," 1887.



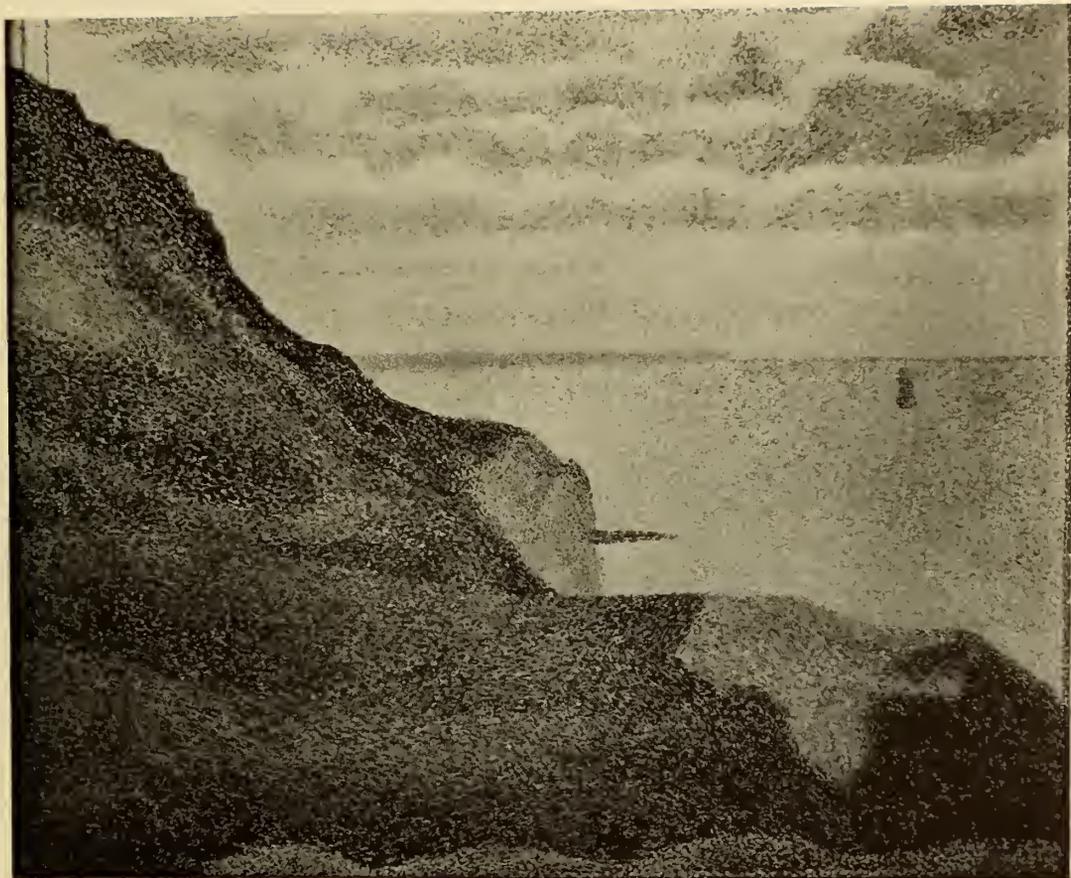
83. *Les Poseuses, Smaller Version, 1888.*



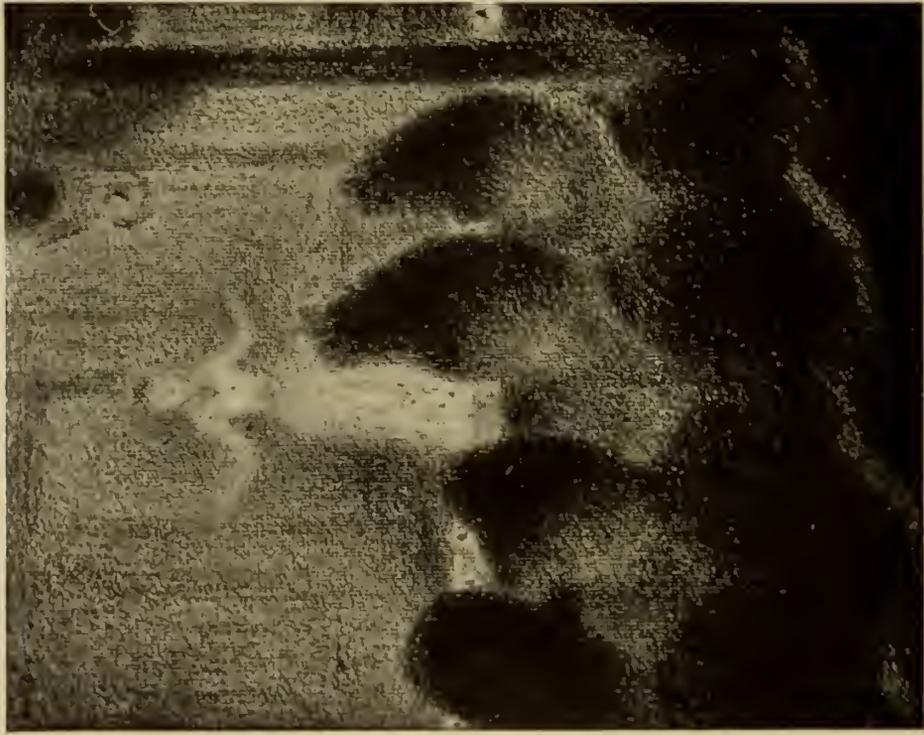
84. Les Poseuses, 1887-88.



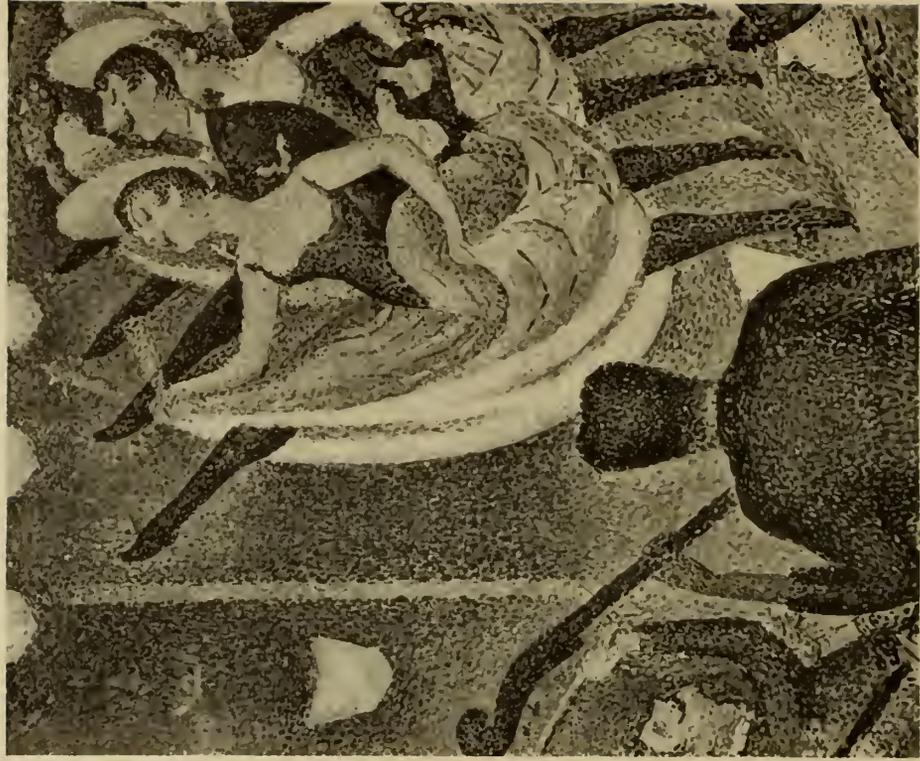
85. Grey Weather, Grande Jatte, about 1887.



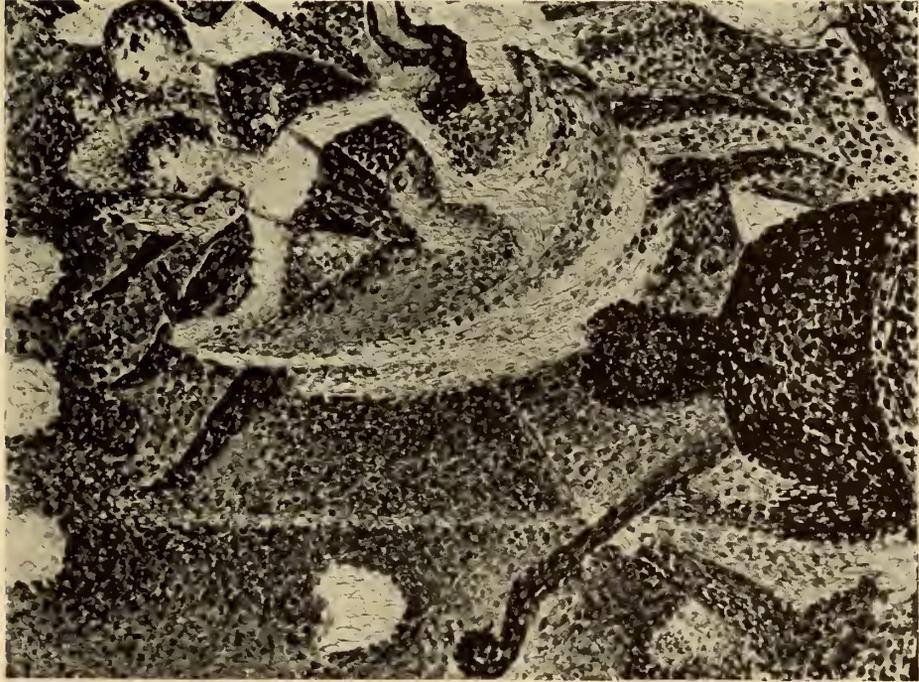
86. Les Grues et la Percée, Port-en-Bessin, 1888.



87. At the "Concert Européen," about 1887.



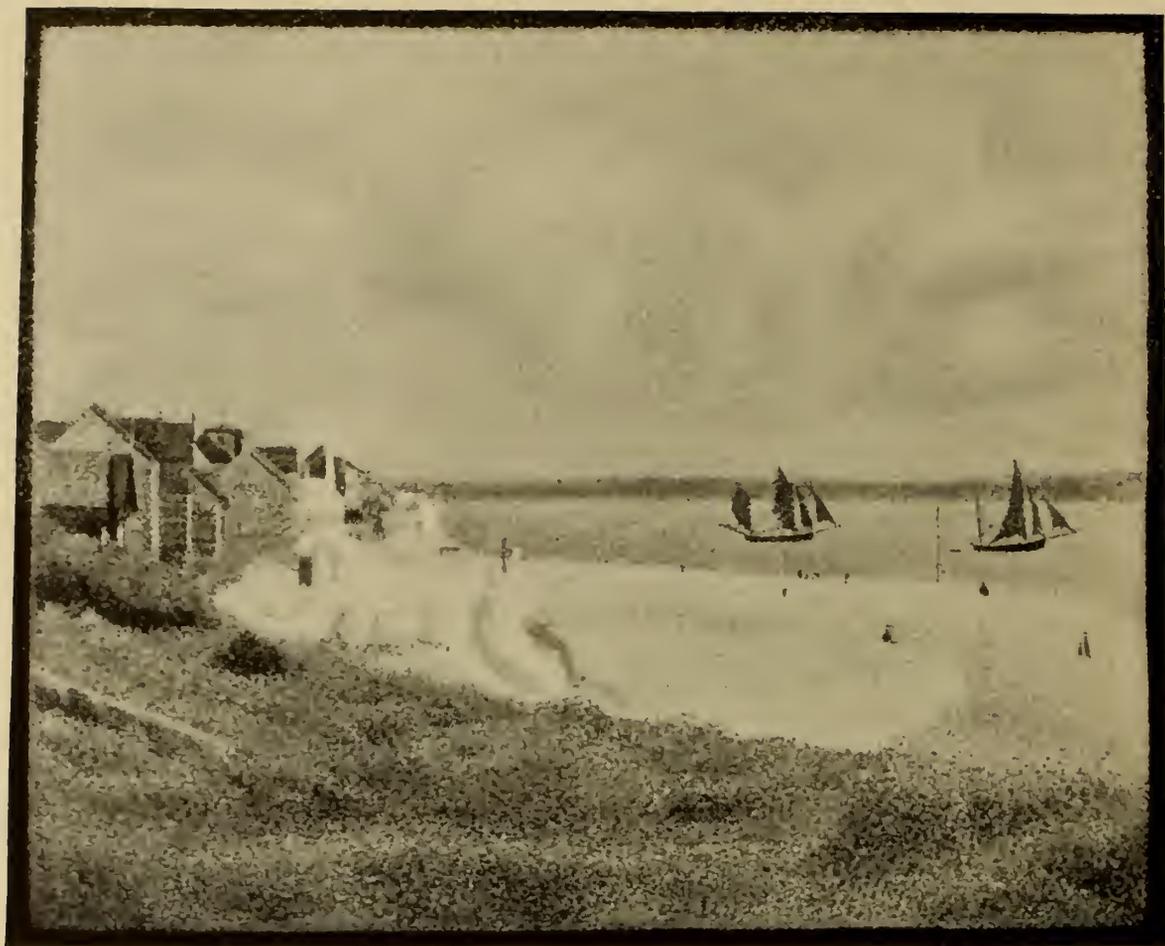
88. Study for "Le Chahut," 1889.



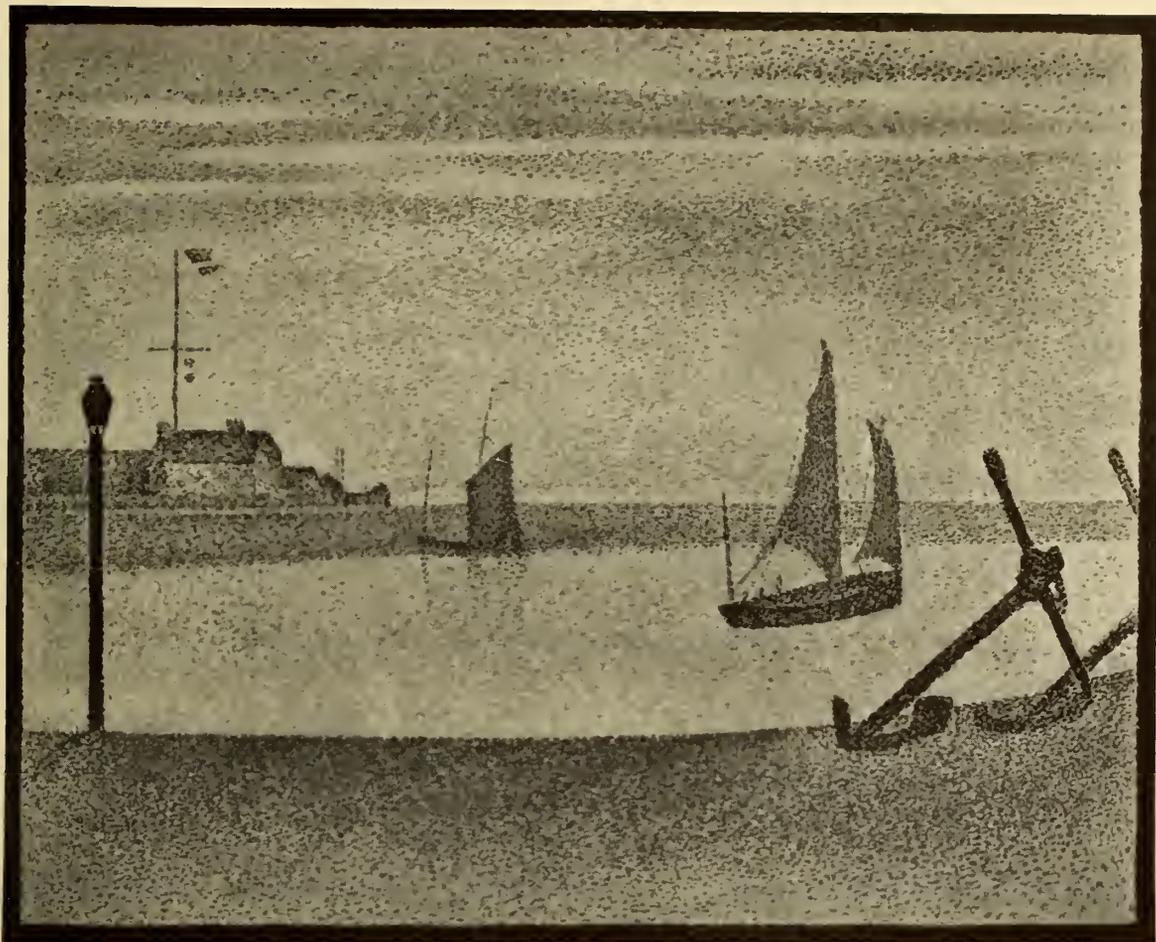
89. Study for "Le Chahut," 1889.



90. Le Chahut, 1889-90.



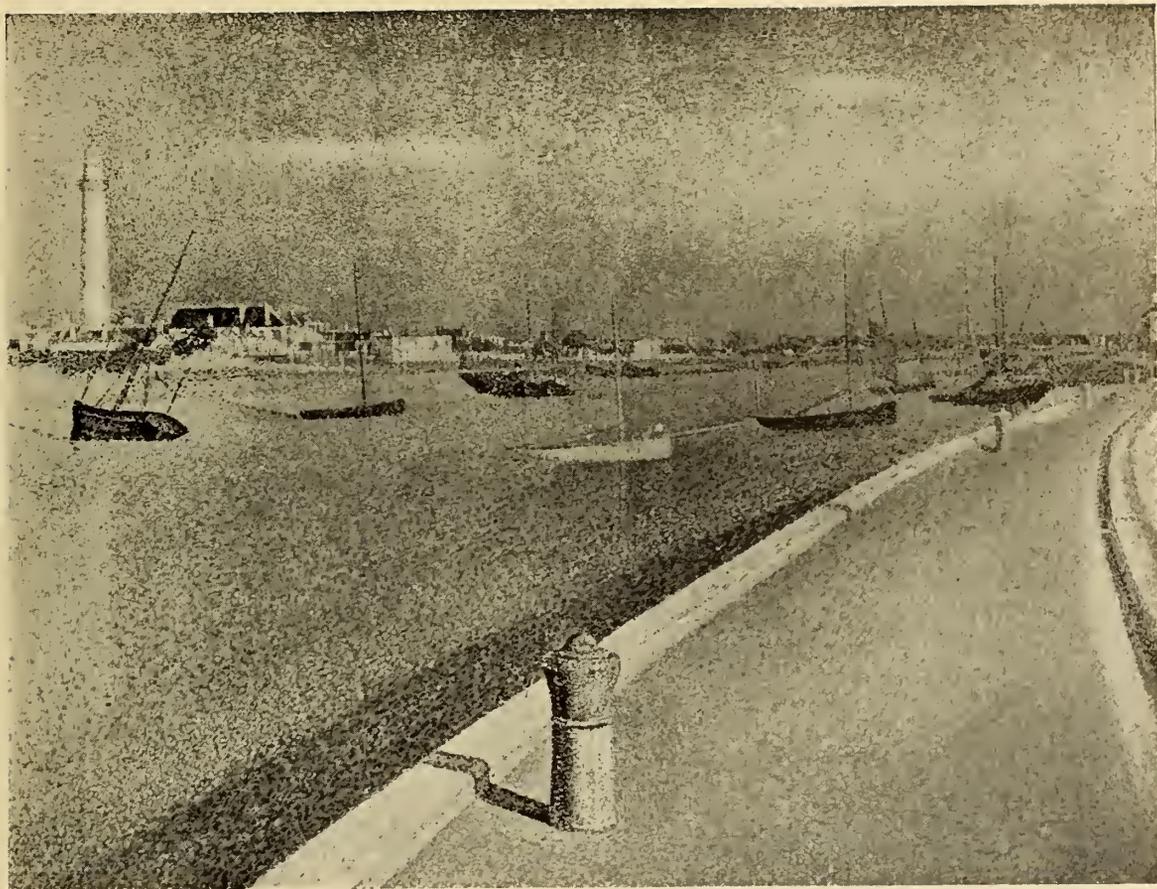
91. Le Crotoy, Seaside, 1889.



92. The Chenal de Gravelines, An Evening, 1890.



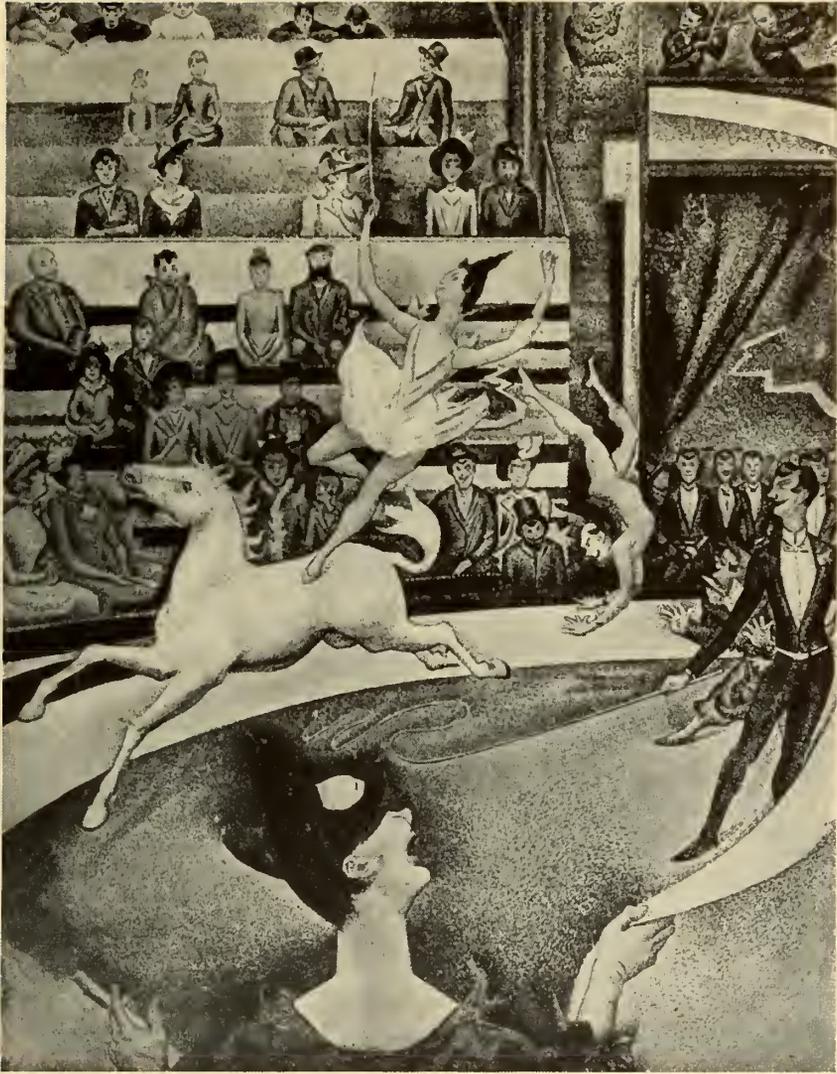
93. The Chenal de Gravelines, Grand Fort Philippe, 1890.



94. The Chenal de Gravelines, Petit Fort Philippe, 1890.



95. Jeune femme se poudrant, 1889-90.



96. Le Cirque, 1890-91.

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