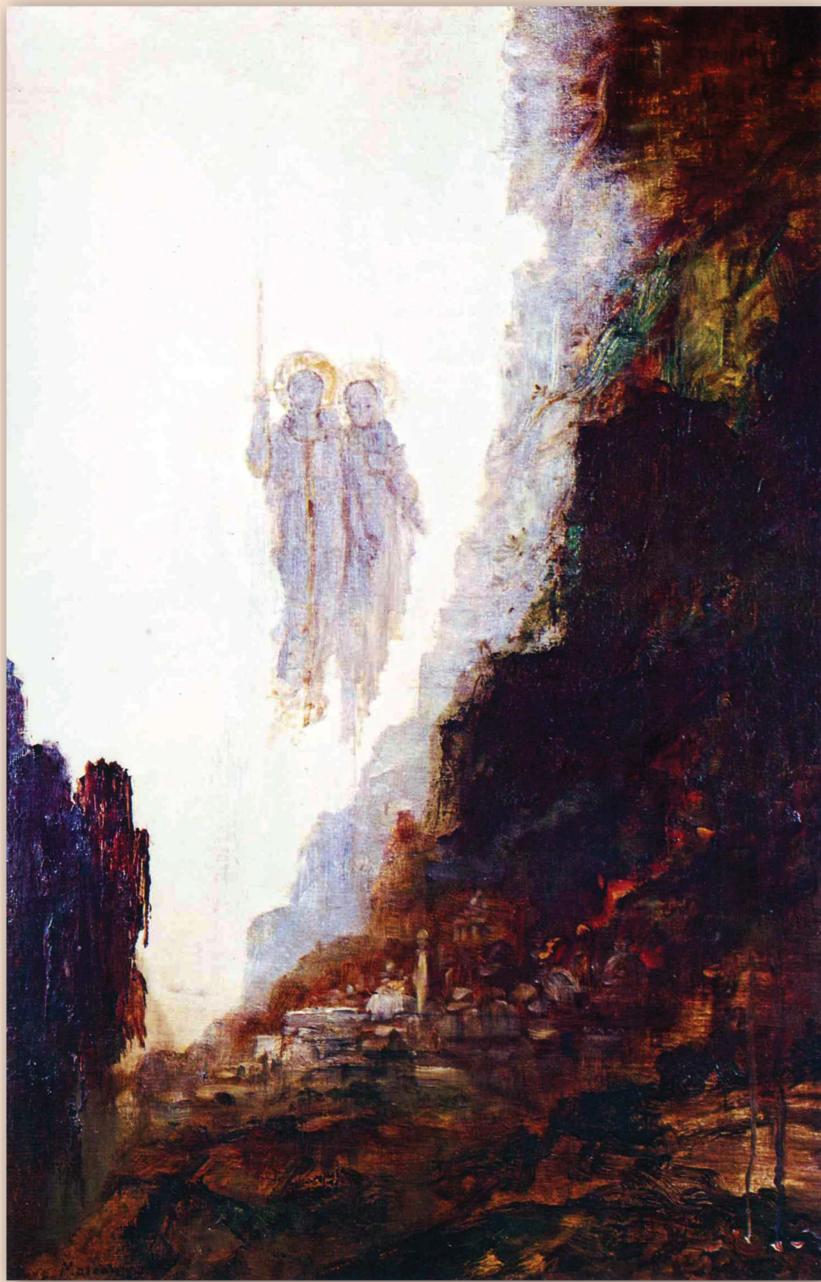


# Moreau's *The Angels of Sodom*

Any artist who wants to depict an angel in graphic form faces a challenge: how to express the true nature of a spiritual being who is invisible and whose presence is mysterious. Bad angel art turns angels into cartoonish, childish, or sentimentalized creatures. Good angel art represents angels in their powerful nature as servants of God and man.



Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) was a Symbolist painter of the 19th century who specialized in mythical and religious themes. He was remarkably prolific: in his lifetime he produced over 15,000 paintings, watercolors, and drawings! His famous painting *The Angels of Sodom* is a remarkable expression of angelic power in the service of divine justice.

## **What to Look For**

When God could not find even ten righteous men the city of Sodom (Genesis 18), He sent angels to destroy it. They are angels of wrath who figure prominently in several other places in the Old Testament (Exodus 12 and 2 Kings 19). They take on a spectral form as they hover over the city, appearing in the same colors as the rising smoke. But we know they are holy angels, not demons, because they have haloes. The dramatic battle between light and darkness divides the canvas diagonally. We meet these frightening beings at the moment they have finished their task of destruction. The raised sword indicates they have faithfully carried out their mission and are returning to God.

## **Arti-Facts**

- Date: c.1890
- Medium: oil on canvas
- Location: Musée National Gustave Moreau, Paris, France.

## **Why This is Good Angel Art**

Moreau's striking scene highlights one of the functions of angels: executing divine judgment. The image communicates, in remarkable imagery, the nature of spiritual beings that are much more powerful than any human being or human force. Angels are ethereal, authoritative, holy, separated from all wickedness, and ministers of God's implacable will.