

The Museum of Modern Art

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JACQUES VILLON CENTENNIAL AT MUSEUM

Celebrating the centennial birth of Jacques Villon, an exhibition of his prints will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from July 8 through September 21. Selected from the Museum's collection by William S. Lieberman, Director of the Museum's Department of Drawings, the 80 prints span seven decades, from 1891 to 1961, and contain his essential graphic work.

Villon, brother of the artists Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Marcel Duchamp, moved from Normandy to Paris in 1895. His early prints offer a vivid and engaging portrait of the city at the turn of the century -- the bohemia of Montmartre and the Quartier Latin, ladies of the demimond, musicians, cabarets, dance halls and street fairs.

By 1910 Villon had completed a body of printed work such as few painters achieve in a lifetime. His popularity can be measured by the success at the same time of the novels of Colette, to which his prints might serve as illustrations. Minne, a nymphet invented by Colette, appears playing with her dolls in a print in the exhibition.

The full impact of the Cubist detonation struck Villon in 1911 and for the next three years while he devoted most of his energies to painting, the illustrative and genre aspects of his art disappeared and he concentrated on the analysis and simplification of form.

A constellation of a dozen prints mirrors the climax of his development as a Cubist painter. "His architectonic, even monumental, treatment of form is enlivened by an interest in movement that to some extent parallels the Futurists," Mr. Lieberman observes. "While the most ambitious of his

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previous prints had been in color, his graphic production as a Cubist is entirely printed in black and white -- a reflection, perhaps of the sobriety and neutralization of color characteristic of Cubist paintings by himself, Braque and Picasso."

During the 1920s Villon was commissioned to etch and engrave reproductions, including a series of architectural renderings. Among these was a view of his brother Duchamp-Villon's sculptured head of Baudelaire. The original bronze is on view in an adjacent gallery at the Museum.

Villon had seldom been a painter of the out-of-doors, but in 1934 he undertook for the first time a series of landscapes, and the next year, during a visit to America, he drew two lithographs of the New York skyline. In 1940 he and his wife fled Paris before the Germans arrived and spent several months near Toulouse. The sun-drenched landscape of the south heightened the brilliancy of his palette and, after many years of printing in black and white, he resumed working in color. "After 1940, his treatment of form recalls an architectonic analysis of structure, first indicated in his work between 1911 and 1914.

"Although his approach sometimes appears schematic, Villon never loses a sense of classic refinement and lyric decoration that seems particularly French. His accustomed subjects -- seated figures, still lifes and interiors, buildings and landscapes -- were seldom complex. Commissions to illustrate books, however, offered opportunities to expand his iconography. His vision was always controlled by balance and reserve."

Villon died in 1963 at the age of 88. His first retrospective in the United States, also of prints and also directed by Mr. Lieberman, was held in New York at The Museum of Modern Art in 1953.

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