

The Museum of Modern Art

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50th Anniversary



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Ranging from depictions of high-kicking cabaret dancers to stylish grandes dames to Tahitian vahines, a selection of some 40 works from The Museum of Modern Art's Collection of Prints will be on view in the exhibition WOMEN OF THE NINETIES: FIN-DE-SIECLE PRINTS, now on view through January 28, 1980. The exhibition, in the Museum's third-floor Sachs Galleries, is being directed by Audrey Isselbacher, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books.

The representation of women has long been one of the most appealing means by which artists have sought to portray a culture, to capture a mood or a spirit. The Nineties in Paris--La Belle Epoque--were exciting years indeed, and artists were inspired by the flavor and ferment of the time. "Paris in the Nineties was an exciting city for a woman to live in," notes Ms. Isselbacher. "Its boulevards had just been redesigned by Haussmann; it was recovering from the World's Fair of 1889 and already planning one for 1900, and was quickly becoming the fashion capital of the world. Women were more beautiful and vibrant than ever, whether they were entertainers, society matrons, or petites bourgeoises. They were important and active participants and their sense of style became a symbol of La Belle Epoque. Women of all

classes were highly visible as they kicked up their heels in the dance halls, promenaded the boulevards in their latest ensembles, and scurried up winding cobblestone streets attending to their chores."

At the same time, printmaking was undergoing an historic creative advance. "For the first time painters--encouraged by publishers like Ambroise Vollard and André Marty, aided by expert printers like Auguste Clot, and freed from using the medium for purely reproductive means by the invention of photography--became involved in making prints that would hold their own as valid works of art. Color lithography, with its characteristic ability to create broad, flat areas of color, lent itself to the new interest in and influence exerted by Japanese prints. Etching and aquatint were also subject to experimentation as some artists manipulated the medium in an attempt to attain these effects. In fact, so many artists devoted so much of their time to making prints that it became a major artistic endeavor."

Among the artists featured in the exhibition are Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, perhaps the best-known, and Jacques Villon, both of whom observed the women of the Nineties closely, putting their impressions down on stones or copper plates. A number of Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs from his series Elles are on view, as is his rare 1899 poster of the famed entertainer Jane Avril. Following the lead of the literary Symbolists, artists Maurice Denis and Eugene Carrière sought in their prints to suggest ideal visions of women. A lithograph from Denis' album Amour, dedicated to female figures devoted to pure love, is in the exhibition. Paul Gauguin, represented by a set of woodcuts and a lithograph, took women as his subject matter in his effort to convey a sense of the mystical experiences he had in Tahiti. Other artists, featured in WOMEN OF THE NINETIES include Pierre Bonnard and his fellow member of the Nabis group Edouard Vuillard, Edgar Degas, Aristide Maillol, Odilon Redon, Suzanne Valadon

and the American Mary Cassatt, among others.

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