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Henri ROUSSEAU

February 21–June 4, 1985

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019 (212) 708-9400

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LANDMARK SURVEY OF THE PAINTINGS OF HENRI ROUSSEAU
TO BE EXHIBITED AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A first-ever comprehensive retrospective of the paintings of Henri Rousseau will open at The Museum of Modern Art in New York on Thursday, February 21. Organized jointly by the Museum and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux de France, HENRI ROUSSEAU features approximately 60 works by the artist, dating from the beginning of his documented career in 1886 through his last completed painting, The Dream of 1910. Included will be almost all of Rousseau's acknowledged masterpieces as well as several key works from foreign collections that have never before been on view in the United States. The exhibition will run through June 4.

HENRI ROUSSEAU and its accompanying publication were made possible by a generous grant from PaineWebber Group Inc. The exhibition has received additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, and an indemnity has been provided by the Federal Council on the Arts.

Carolyn Lanchner, Curator in The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Painting and Sculpture, and William Rubin, Director of the Department, have developed the exhibition together with Michel Hoog, Curator of the

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Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. The exhibition was first shown this past fall at the Grand Palais in Paris.

The core of the retrospective is formed by the unrivaled Rousseau collections of the two organizing institutions. The Museum of Modern Art holds what many consider to be the two most important paintings of the artist's career, The Sleeping Gypsy of 1897 and The Dream of 1910.

The Réunion has long held such major works as War (1894) and The Snake Charmer (1907). Its impressive collections were further enhanced by the paintings that came to it recently from the estate of Pablo Picasso and from the Walter-Guillaume bequest. Among the works from these sources that will be on view in the exhibition are a large, austere portrait of a woman (c. 1895) that Picasso acquired in 1908 and kept in his studio until the end of his life. Works from the Walter-Guillaume holdings include The Wedding (1904-05), Old Junier's Cart (1908), and Child with a Doll (c. 1906). Most of these paintings have never before been seen in this country.

The events of Henri Rousseau's life have come down to contemporary critics and art historians in a tangle of myth and suspect anecdote. Even his famous sobriquet, "douanier," was a misnomer. Rousseau was not a customs inspector, but an employee of Paris' municipal toll service, a "gabelou."

Among the facts known about Rousseau are that he was born in 1844 in Laval in northwest France, spent several years in the army stationed in France (not in "tropical" Mexico as the writer Apollinaire would claim), and began his artistic career in the 1870s in Paris as a "Sunday painter."

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Despite an often negative critical reaction to Rousseau's work during the early years of the Salon des Indépendants, where he exhibited regularly, it was not at this initial juncture ridiculed as relentlessly as many romanticized versions of his life have claimed. Indeed, it was noticed and admired by a number of artists, such as Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Signac.

In 1893, the "douanier" retired from the municipal service to devote himself full-time to his art. Over the next two decades until his death in Paris in 1910, the critical reception of his work tended to be increasingly sharp, even as his paintings attracted more and more attention from the new generation of artists, notably Picasso, Delaunay, and Léger.

If separating fact from fiction in Rousseau's life can be troublesome, a similar problem exists in the assessment of his work. The actual extent of his output has been difficult to ascertain, and a large number of works often attributed to him have come under question.

The contents of the Museum's HENRI ROUSSEAU retrospective have been intentionally restricted to works of unquestioned authorship. By establishing this qualification and by including with the artist's most ambitious endeavors his more modest ones, a clearer image of the real, demonstrable Rousseau--the accomplished master--should emerge. Many of the paintings in the exhibition are on loan from lesser known public and private collections in Switzerland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Japan. A key work to understanding Rousseau is Myself-Portrait-Landscape (1890), which is being lent by the National Gallery of Prague and has never before been on view outside Europe.

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In conjunction with the exhibition, Henri Rousseau has been published in separate English and French editions by The Museum of Modern Art and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux de France. The approximately 300-page book includes 66 color plates with detailed commentaries, 167 black and white illustrations, and essays by the directors of the exhibition and Roger Shattuck and Henri Béhar.

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For further information, please contact the Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019 (212) 708-9750.
