

The Museum of Modern Art

THE PRINTS OF ODILON REDON
October 3, 1986 - February 3, 1987
The Paul J. Sachs Galleries

"The essence of mystery is to remain perpetually ambiguous, to have two or three aspects or possible aspects."

"It is nature also who orders us to obey the gifts she has given us. Mine have led me to dreams; I submitted to the torments of imagination and the surprises that she gave me under my pencil; but I directed and led those surprises...with the single goal of producing in the spectator, by sudden attraction, the whole evocation, and the whole enticement of the uncertain within the confines of thought."

Odilon Redon

Opening at The Museum of Modern Art on October 3, 1986, the exhibition THE PRINTS OF ODILON REDON coincides with the publication of the English edition of the artist's journal, A Soi Même, and celebrates the centennial of Un Manifeste Littéraire: Le Symbolisme (A Literary Manifesto: Symbolism). These and other events throughout the country commemorate the publication of the Manifesto in Le Figaro in Paris on September 18, 1886.

The Manifesto proclaimed that objective art was merely a "very scanty point of departure." Participants in the Symbolist movement were primarily writers such as Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine who sought to evoke sublimity and transcendence in their literature. Many of the Symbolists referred to themselves as "Decadents" and indulged in emotional excesses in their attempts to achieve a unity with the supernatural world. In their quest for extreme forms of experience, Symbolists often flirted with the occult. Although Odilon Redon did not embrace the Symbolists' way of life or entire philosophy, he shared their intense fascination with the mysterious, mystical, and magical aspects of life.

It has been over two decades since the Museum has presented a comprehensive range of Redon's work. In 1961 Odilon Redon, Gustave Moreau, Rodolph Bresdin, which was organized in conjunction with The Art Institute

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of Chicago, included twenty-six works from the Museum's print collection. For the first time now, many rare and famous works, including frontspieces and book illustrations, are being presented. Among the highlights are important works such as Spider (1887), Captive Pegasus (1889), Parsifal and Tree (1892), and Light (1893), as well as over thirty prints illustrating Gustave Flaubert's Temptation of St. Anthony (1888 and 1896), a group of lithographs from the marvelous portfolio Dreams (1891), and examples from the series Hommage to Goya (1885).

Riva Castleman, director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, has organized THE PRINTS OF ODILON REDON based on selections from the Museum's collection of over 100 Redon prints. She writes, "The symbolism that permeates nearly every print elevates even the simplest representation of a tree or a profile to a plane beyond reality....Most often...seemingly infinite spaces are filled with eerie forms and people in hypnotic or reverent states, evoking the marvelous or the terrible."

Odilon Redon was fifteen when he began to study drawing, and he later became a student of Rodolph Bresdin. He began his printmaking career around 1865 as an etcher, but is predominantly known for his lithographs. He was influenced by many of the Old Masters, particularly by Rembrandt's development of the effects of light and shadow. He was a timid and rather aloof person, yet he was adored by the most avid members of the Symbolist movement, ranging from mature poets to young painters, despite his independence. Unlike the decadent dreamers who were his contemporaries, Redon was a disciplined dreamer who used precise observation and sheer inspiration as a springboard to the sublime. Maurice Denis conveyed the brilliance of Redon's reputation when he wrote, "He was the Mallarmé of painting."

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