

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART GIVEN FAMOUS ROUSSEAU PAINTING

The Museum of Modern Art announced today the acquisition of The Dream by Henri Rousseau, one of the most important and valuable paintings ever to enter the Museum Collection. Painted in 1910, the large picture, 7 by 10 feet, is the last painting by the great French artist and was given to the Museum by Nelson A. Rockefeller, trustee and former president of the Museum. It is now on public view on the Museum's first floor, 11 West 53 Street.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Collections of the Museum of Modern Art, characterizes The Dream as "the culminating masterpiece of Rousseau's career and one of the capital achievements of modern French painting."

Mr. Rockefeller purchased the painting from a New York private collector who bought it in 1933, after it had been sold by the original owner, Ambroise Vollard.

When The Dream was first exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1910, it caused a sensation because of the mixture of incongruous elements -- a nude figure of a woman sitting on a red sofa in a luxuriant jungle surrounded by animals and a snake charmer blowing a flute. And although Rousseau's friends and contemporaries such as Picasso, Gertrude Stein and Max Weber believed he was an important artist and although the great art dealer Ambroise Vollard bought this picture, it was generally ridiculed, and Rousseau died in poverty a few months after completing it. Not until well after his death did he achieve popular success and wide critical acclaim as a great artist.

When The Dream was first exhibited, Rousseau, who long before had been in love with a Polish woman named Yawigha, wrote some verses which he attached to the painting. Translated they read:

Yawigha in a lovely dream,
Having most sweetly gone to sleep
Heard the snake-charmer blow his flute,
Breathing his meditation deep.
While on the streams and verdant trees
Gleam the reflections of the moon,
And savage serpents lend their ears
To the gay measures of the tune.

(Translated by Bertha Ten Eyke James)

Because he had been made fun of for so many years and was so anxious about the reception of The Dream at the Salon, Rousseau asked his friend Apollinaire to defend him and "avenge him for all the insults he had received."

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While the picture was still on exhibition, Rousseau wrote to a critic who had asked him why he put the couch in the jungle: "This woman asleep on the couch dreams that she has been transported into the forest, listening to the sounds of the enchanter's instrument. This is the reason the couch is in the picture."

Thirty years after the picture was exhibited, Daniel Catton Rich, Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, wrote:

"The Dream is a summation of all those qualities which make Rousseau inimitable. Its organization of spaces and complex tones (an artist counted over fifty variations of green alone) is equalled by its sentiment. The plane of reality (the figure on the sofa) is inventively joined to the plane of the dream (the jungle). In it appears, in heightened form, every symbol of the last ten years of Rousseau's life, redesigned and related with a free intensity. The nude figure surrounded by enormous lilies is one of Rousseau's most perfect realizations, while the leopards peering from the jungle leaves are full of his expressive mystery."

Rousseau was born in Laval, France, in 1844. He was self-taught because he was too poor to attend art classes and was not even able to devote his full time to painting until he was about 40 years old and could retire on a small pension from his job as a minor customs inspector. Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin were among his early admirers. Later, artists of the cubist circle and their friends followed suit.

It is said that as a young man he served as a musician in the army of Maximilian in Mexico and there received impressions of the tropical jungles which appear in such pictures as The Dream.

The Museum of Modern Art already owns an earlier masterpiece by Rousseau, The Sleeping Gypsy, gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim.

Photographs are available upon request
from
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