

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
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MRS. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR. GIFT OF TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

PRINT COLLECTION EXHIBITED BY MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The most important accession to its Print Collection in recent years has been given the Museum of Modern Art by Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. It consists of a group of 61 lithographs by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and constitutes probably the third largest collection of prints by that artist owned by any American museum. Mrs. Rockefeller has also given the Print Collection one of the greatest illustrated books of modern times, the Histoire naturelle by the Comte de Buffon, with 31 aquatints by Pablo Picasso. An exhibition of both gifts will open in the auditorium galleries of the Museum November 20 and continue on view through January 12.

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the Museum's Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture, comments on the gift of Toulouse-Lautrec prints as follows:

"The fifty-six lithographs in the gift (not counting duplicates) handsomely represent almost the entire range of Lautrec's lithography. Here are vignettes of the boulevards, the begoggled automobilist, the black-stockinged little girl, glimpses of the race course, the courtroom, and the salon. And here are the fin-de-siècle music hall and cabaret scenes at the Moulin-Rouge and Folies-Bergère; the famous chanteuses and comédiennes such as May Belfort (who used to sing with a little black cat in her arms), the great Yvette Guilbert, the serpentine Jane Avril gowned in a serpent, and the sinister La Goulue waltzing with her eccentric, top-hatted dancing partner Valentin le Désossé.

"Among the single lithographs in the gift, two works of exceptional quality and rarity may be singled out: Au Moulin-Rouge of 1892, the artist's first color-lithograph, and La Clownesse au Moulin-Rouge. These were designed and published primarily for print collectors. More utilitarian were the book jacket for the novel Babylone d'Allemagne; the color lithograph of the Irish and American Bar, designed as a poster for the Chap Book, an American magazine; and the cover for Les vieilles histoires, an album of songs by Lautrec's friend, the bassoonist, Desiré Dihau, seen leading by the nose the writer of the lyrics, Jean Goudezki, whom Lautrec has transformed into a bear.

"The collection boasts two of the most important series of Lautrec's lithographs. Portraits d'acteurs et d'actrices includes characterizations of the great people of the Paris stage during the 'nineties, among them Cleo de Mérode, Coquelin, Marcelle Lender, Lucien Guitry, Sarah Bernhardt. The album of eleven lithographs entitled Elles (The Girls) is as remarkable for ingenious composition as for its delicate, merciless observation of the human animal. It is surely one of Lautrec's greatest works in any medium."

Commenting on the gift of the thirty-one aquatints by Picasso

which illustrate the Buffon book, Mr. Barr said:

"Picasso is rarely thought of as an artist interested in animals. Yet he has always been surrounded by pets: cats and kittens, a monkey, pigeons, and a succession of remarkable dogs of whom the Afghan Kazbek is the present favorite. Many of these have appeared from time to time in his painting and sculpture together with circus horses and, of course, the animals of the bull ring. Indeed it is the bull and the horse who as protagonist and antagonist dominate Picasso's greatest canvas, the Guernica of 1937.

"It was during the year following the Guernica that Picasso began the series of etchings illustrating Buffon's Histoire naturelle. Some of the Buffon illustrations reveal a latent facet of Picasso's art, a concern with descriptive realism; others, more abstract, present only the essential character and action of the animal. The crayfish is drawn with the most delicate naturalism; the horse with a rather conventional romantic dash; the ostrich with spectacular, bouncing humor; the ass with a rough affection which well supports Buffon's eloquent 18th century defense of this animal's dignity and virtue. Certain creatures Picasso fumbles badly: the ponderous butterfly, for instance, and the lion, which he reduces to a mild puma; but the ram is masterly and so is the gray wolf fading into the gray night.

"In technique the etchings vary almost as much as they do in style and spirit. Two simply bitten areas of aquatint suffice for The Vulture. Subtly graded tones give the leaves in The Pigeon the character of Japanese brush-and-ink painting; the roses in The Butterfly suggest finger painting; The Ram shows a variety of delicately etched lines weighted by tones smudged in with thumbprints.

"This sumptuous Buffon was originally undertaken in 1937 by the publisher and friend of Picasso, Ambroise Vollard, who in 1931 had published Balzac's Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu, with Picasso's illustrations. Vollard died in 1939. Three years later the Buffon was published by Martin Fabiani, but it remains Vollard's conception. The Buffon and the Balzac volumes together form a monument to the collaboration of two men who are often considered the greatest living artist and the greatest publisher of illustrated books in our time."