

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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## JACQUES VILLON IN FIRST RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

### IN NEW YORK: SIXTY YEARS OF WORK

A print exhibition, the first N.Y. retrospective of work by the French artist Jacques Villon (born 1875), will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from September 9 through November 15. The 100 prints in the show include color etchings and lithographs from 1891 through 1951 as well as posters and book illustrations. Villon, who received the first prize at the Carnegie International Exhibition in 1950, is one of the leading masters of the School of Paris. His career as a printmaker parallels the renaissance of graphic art during the 20th century when, as never before, painters and sculptors have devoted much of their best energies to printmaking.

The exhibition has been assembled by William S. Lieberman, Associate Curator in charge of Prints at the Museum. In the 24-page illustrated catalog which will accompany the exhibition, Mr. Lieberman says, "Like his contemporary Georges Rouault, Villon's reputation will rest as firmly upon his accomplishment as a printmaker as upon his achievement as a painter. The extent of his graphic oeuvre, more than 600 engravings and lithographs, exceeds in number that of Braque, Matisse, Picasso or Rouault. Today, six decades after his first etchings of 1891, Villon can look back upon a production of printed work which in variety, inspiration and technique is surpassed by no other living artist."

The early color lithographs in the exhibition include Villon's striking art nouveau poster "Le Grillon: American Bar," done in 1899 eight years after Toulouse-Lautrec's first poster and at the time when many painters such as Bonnard, Signac and Vuillard were reviving color lithography as a creative medium.

The largest single section of the exhibition consists of prints done between 1899 and 1910 when Villon worked primarily as a graphic artist and did little painting in oils. These early color etchings and aquatints - he was one of the first painters to concentrate on

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intaglio (etching, aquatint, drypoint and engraving on metal) - reveal a little known aspect of his career. These prints capture the gaiety and elegance of Paris at the turn of the century: ladies of society and of the demi-monde, the bohemia of Montmartre and the Latin Quarter, dance halls, parks and street fairs.

A constellation of prints in the exhibition reflects the abrupt redirection of his art under the impact of cubism. Between 1911 and 1914 the illustrative aspect of his art disappears and his analysis of form increasingly stresses structure and simplification.

(With his younger brothers Duchamp-Villon and Marcel Duchamp, Villon was extremely active in the cubist movement. Villon contributed to the first cubist group exhibition, the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1911 and in the next year was instrumental in organizing those cubist painters who exhibited as the Section d'Or. Duchamp-Villon is generally recognized as the first cubist sculptor and Marcel Duchamp painted the famous "Nude Descending the Staircase," the scandal of the 1913 Armory Show which introduced the work of all three brothers to America.)

Villon devoted the decade following the First World War to print-making. He engraved a series of about 40 large plates in color after paintings by modern artists. Although these prints are essentially reproductive in their inspiration, they are masterpieces of the engraver's art. The copper plates for the entire series are now owned by the Louvre Museum and four of the engravings are included in the exhibition.

Between 1920 and 1940, Villon's creative engravings after his own compositions are printed in black and white. Mr. Lieberman says, "His later etchings and engravings are remarkably consistent in style. Although they may lack the austerity of his cubist prints, the interplay of light and shade is restrained and controlled. Villon's line is sometimes vibrant, sometimes mathematical in its precision. Space flows easily through gossamer webs of crosshatching, movement is suggested by contrasting planes of parallel lines, More than Braque or Picasso (his juniors), Villon remains faithful to the cubist tradition. However schematic his approach, he never loses a classic sense of refinement and decoration that is particularly French."

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In 1940 Villon and his wife fled Paris before the Germans and stayed near Toulouse. As with so many painters, the sun-drenched landscape of the south of France heightened the intensity of his colors. His most recent work in the exhibition, printed in color, reflects the brilliancy of his palette as a painter.

Mr. Lieberman met Villon in 1948 and studied all of his graphic work. The Museum now owns over 100 prints by Villon and the exhibition partially reveals the extent of the Museum's Collection.

Mr. Ludwig Charell, whose comprehensive Toulouse-Lautrec collection was a stellar attraction at the Venice Biennale in 1951, has lent 36 prints to the exhibition. Other lenders include the Yale University Art Gallery, the Boston Public Library and private collectors in New York and Los Angeles.

#### Biographical Note

Born Gaston Duchamp in Normandy (Damville, Eure) in 1875. Grandfather Emile Nicolle an etcher of architectural views. Apprenticed to a law office in Rouen. Decided to become an artist at the age of 19; went to Paris and took the name of Jacques Villon.

In 1895 attended briefly Fernand Cormon's studio in Paris. Worked as an illustrator and humorous cartoonist, in particular for Le Courrier Français, until 1910.

In 1899, after working for several years in lithography, began etching and engraving with the master printer, Eugène Delâtre. Completed 175 intaglio plates by 1910.

In 1911 joined the cubists and contributed to the first cubist group exhibition. Active as a painter.

1914-1919, served in the First World War, first at the front and then as a camouflage artist. In 1920 returned to Paris. Reproductive color engravings for the dealer and publisher, Bernheim-Jeune until 1930. Little time for his own printmaking or painting.

In 1930 resumed painting and continued to produce several original prints each year. First landscapes and visit to America in 1935.

In 1940 leaves Paris for south of France. After the armistice returned to Puteaux, a suburb of Paris, where he has lived for many years.

Older brother of Duchamp-Villon (1876-1918) and Marcel Duchamp (born 1887).