

The Museum of Modern Art

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HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

November 7, 1985 - January 26, 1986

To be great, to be a man of genius, to be famous, to be much loved and much hated...to have a passion for creation and a passion for women; to be descended from one of the oldest French families; to be abnormal and unhuman; to have sardonic humour and intense presence of mind...to squander much of one's substance in riotous living, to have a terribly direct eye and as direct a force of hand...these chosen at random, are certain of the distinguishing qualities of Lautrec--certain of his elemental emotions.

Arthur Symons
English writer, 1929*

The Museum of Modern Art presents a major exhibition revealing the genius of HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC as a graphic artist, beginning November 7, 1985. Although Toulouse-Lautrec's art has received considerable attention in America since the 1890s, there has been more interest in examining his personality and his subjects than his formal ideas and technical prowess. Documenting the last ten years (1891-1901) of his brief life, this exhibition is the most ambitious presentation to date to focus on the French artist's virtuoso printmaking and its influence on modern art.

Made possible by a grant from Mobil, the exhibition is organized by Wolfgang Wittrock, guest curator, and coordinated by Riva Castleman, director, and Audrey Isselbacher, assistant curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art. An indemnity for the exhibition has been provided by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The singular view of life as depicted by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is so well known and so often reproduced that his images have come to symbolize

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a whole era of French life--the fin de siècle--and the colorful nightlife of Montmartre at places like the Moulin Rouge. Consisting of over 300 works, the exhibition presents the artist's memorable themes through his lithographs, many of which are shown alongside related drawings and paintings. The finest examples of prints have been assembled from collectors and museums in Europe and America, including unique handcolored and trial proofs showing various stages in the evolution of the prints. Lautrec's celebrated posters will be shown unframed in a street setting evocative of Paris in the 1890s, and song sheets, memorabilia from singer Yvette Guilbert, and original letters describing Lautrec's printmaking activity offer historical context.

In the introduction to the exhibition catalog,* Ms. Castleman writes, "Not only is it possible to follow the artist's hand as he moves from quickly sketched motif, full-scale cartoon, and lithographed image avant-lettre, to finished poster, but we can examine the variations in color and rhythm that he presents in such works as his...vision of the dancer Loie Fuller. In the light of our understanding of his methods and intentions, Lautrec, the graphic innovator, astute observer of character, and mirror of an era, emerges as an imaginative and sensitive organizer of form, color and space."

Henri Marie Raymond de Toulouse-Lautrec Montfa was born in 1864 in Albi to one of France's oldest and most prestigious families. It is believed that he was born with a rare kind of dwarfism called pyknodysostosis, in which the most radical symptoms appear at adolescence. His childhood was divided between school in Paris and treatment in the care of doctors or at health spas. By age fifteen, after he had fractured both legs, his growth stopped permanently. As a child, Lautrec sketched constantly, drawing everything from caricatures of people to boats in the harbor. He showed a gift for capturing movement and human likeness, the two subjects that would interest him for the rest of

his life. At age seventeen, he began his first formal studies with the academic painter Léon Bonnat and, shortly thereafter, with Fernand Cormon.

Despite his family's disapproval, Lautrec zealously pursued his career as an artist, achieving rapid recognition for his work. By the time he was twenty-six, Lautrec's illustrations in newspapers, on sheet music, and in books were gaining recognition in Paris. When in 1891 he made his first poster for the Moulin Rouge, he became famous overnight. He also became a familiar figure in the dance halls and brothels of Paris, obsessively depicting the excitement and character of the world around him.

Lautrec did a great deal of commissioned work for cabarets and publishers, using as models people he knew, such as the singer Aristide Bruant or the dancers La Goulue and Jane Avril. He frequented the theater and the circus, where he made perceptive portraits of actresses and actors, as well as of bareback riders, clowns, trained animals, and gymnasts. He joined in informal meetings with notable members of the intellectual avant-garde in Paris, all contributors to the highly influential journal La revue blanche. Intensely interested in people, Lautrec moved from subject to subject, captivated by every milieu and by every form of art or sport. In addition to his fascination with the nocturnal world of bars and brothels, he developed a passion for horse and bicycle racing, capturing in prints and posters the jockeys and bicyclists in the excitement of the race.

By 1899 Lautrec had become seriously addicted to alcohol and was committed to a private hospital. After a brief period of recovery, he died in 1901 at his family home Malromé.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Ms. Castleman will moderate a symposium on the artist as printmaker on Tuesday, December 3, 1985, at 8:00 p.m. Panelists will include Douglas Druick, Prince Trust Curator, The Art Institute

of Chicago, and Linda Nochlin, CUNY Distinguished Professor of Art History. Admission to the symposium is \$7 and \$5 for students. For advance tickets send a check payable to The Museum of Modern Art with a coupon and stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Department of Education, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019. Slide talks on the exhibition are also available on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the exhibition.

Tickets are required for admission to the exhibition and are available to the public on a same-day, time-designated basis. Included in the price of Museum admission, they may be obtained at a desk adjacent to the exhibition area.

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- * Catalog: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Images of the 1890s, edited by Riva Castleman and Wolfgang Wittrock. Introduction by Riva Castleman. Essays: "Toulouse-Lautrec and the Art of His Century" by Matthias Arnold, "Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: A Biography of the Artist" by Julia Frey, and "The Popularization of Lautrec" by Phillip Dennis Cate. Annotated catalog of the exhibition by Wolfgang Wittrock. Illustrated chronology of the artist's life and work. 207 black-and-white and 84 color illustrations. 264 pages. Clothbound, \$60; paperbound, \$22.50 (\$27.50 after February 15, 1986). Published by The Museum of Modern Art.

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