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HYPERION

LAUTREC



MISS MAY BELFORT. 1895. Detail
Bernheim-Jeune Collection

HYPERION MINIATURES

LAUTREC

BY

HENRI DUMONT

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"A LA MIE." MAURICE GUIBERT. 1891
Private Collection

LAUTREC

MORE than any other painter of his time, Lautrec stands out as the embodiment of Paris. At night, the city of hidden and frenzied pleasures, as well as of outdoor games during the day; the city on whose perpetual stage-boards the passing show ceaselessly changes into history has never been better understood or more strikingly expressed on canvas.

However, this denizen of Montmartre was not a Parisian. Born at Albi on November 24th, 1864, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was the son of a count famous for his eccentricity. A "grand seigneur" with numerous carriages and multifarious love-affairs, Count Alphonse de Toulouse-Lautrec gave his son an excellent education, assisted by his wife, an admirably cultured woman. Henri was first brought up at Albi, then in Paris where he went to the Lycée Condorcet. His health was always delicate and unfortunately two falls at the age of fourteen and fifteen broke both his legs. The efforts of medical men and a long convalescence in the south of France effected but little improvement and his legs remained crippled and undeveloped for life. One can imagine the reactions of this active boy, a good horseman to boot, laid up in the most active period of youth. However, his temper did not deteriorate and if he took refuge in the drawing of horses, and later of women, both unattainable henceforth, the part of repression in his work must not be exaggerated, although it did undoubtedly exist.

His first master was Princeteau, a friend of his father's, who specialized in racing and hunting scenes. He directed his young pupil towards the ateliers of Bonnat, and later Cormon, from both of whom Lautrec managed to obtain an adequate instruction in spite of their utter incomprehension of his talent. He remained with them for four years.

The rest of his training was given him by life itself. Montmartre, which attracted him as early as 1884, was then at the beginning of its fame. Some will say it was at its height, because there was nothing artificial about it; publicity had not yet killed the picturesqueness of old Montmartre, tourists were individuals and not herds, while the artists enjoyed their own performances with all their hearts. The contrast between daytime in the quiet streets with their little provincial gardens and nightfall around the famous cabarets which had just then opened was much more striking than nowadays. Some of the dance-halls immortalized by Lautrec, such as the Moulin Rouge, have never ceased to exist. Others—the Chat Noir, the Divan Japonais—have since disappeared, not without leaving a great influence on manners and a legacy of spicy and sentimental songs. Lautrec resorted to all of them; people became used to the ugly little man who was the friend of people as different as Aristide Bruant, the chansonnier who ran the Chat Noir, and Oscar Wilde. For Bruant, Lautrec illustrated songs and Oscar Wilde found him faithful in the days of scandal and disgrace.



COUNTESS A. DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC. 1882. Detail
Albi Museum



HORSEWOMAN AND GROOM. 1880
Albi Museum

He was friendly with everybody, in spite of, and perhaps because of a certain pride which prevented his being approached too closely, but he was particularly the friend of the Montmartre prostitutes. They were unconstrained before him and gave way to their true nature, and he depicted them as they were: human, spineless, slatternly, tipsy or besotted by nights of debauchery, without either criticizing them or moralizing at their expense. Whilst Degas with every incisive line stresses the inferior condition of his models, Lautrec on the contrary often makes us aware in spite of himself of the involuntary grace, the animal nobility of fallen women, in a perfectly impartial manner.

Prostitutes interested him for some time; he even decorated a brothel with portraits of its inmates. But the fauna of Montmartre was not restricted to these girls; there were other specimens who captured his eager brush. La Goulue (The Glutton), a professional dancer at the Moulin Rouge, was extremely dignified and her partner Valentin le Désossé (Boneless Valentine), although an amateur, was a very brilliant performer in the quadrille. A poster painted for La Goulue in 1891 set Lautrec on the road to fame. The nicknames of her



COUNT A. DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC DRIVING HIS MAIL-COACH
IN NICE. 1881. *Musée du Petit Palais, Paris*

companions were just as strange as her own and comparable to present-day "existentialist" sobriquets. There was for instance "Grille d'Egout" (Sewer Grating) who might have aptly presided at the election of "Miss Dustbin" in 1948.

Jane Avril was called "La Mélinite." A gifted solo dancer, she was both original and refined. Lautrec made many sketches and portraits of her. She was the opposite of La Goulue and her fine, sad features are rendered with more concise and more moving brushstrokes.

Another celebrity at the height of her career was the singer Yvette Guilbert. Lautrec made many striking posters of her. Night after night he would return to the same seat in order to observe all these stars and seize some fleeting attitude or expression.

His love of sport equalled his interest in the dance. Tristand Bernard, the writer, who was then sporting manager of the Vélodrome Buffalo, introduced him to the cycling circles whose races then began to be in vogue. This environment proved to be a source of sketches for lithographs and posters.

The circus, also highly popular at the time, was another favourite haunt of Lautrec's. A connoisseur, he knew how to appreciate the prowess of the equestrian performers and the lion-tamers. Tight-rope dancers, stars of the flying-trapeze and performing horses with their daring silhouettes fascinated him during the empty hours of the last years of his life.

He was a friend of all the Impressionists and their successors, the Symbolists, particularly of Van Gogh whose portrait he painted. However he did not unreservedly adopt their method. He did not bother about light effects; his lighting is uniformly cold and revealing. The main interest of a canvas lay, for him, in the expression of a face or the movement of an animated being and everything in his paintings converges to define his characters. There are no landscapes empty of human presence and no still lifes: nothing is static, fixed or immutable.

The creator of the psychological portrait, Lautrec is an Impressionist only in the brightness of his colours and the dislike of finicking. He draws with the brush; his very pure paint is diluted to the utmost which gives the rapid, sketchy effect he strives to obtain. In general, like the Impressionists, he shuns black and neutral tints, but unlike Manet he also avoids contrasting colours. The freedom of his construction is often inspired by Japanese art and in this respect he was certainly influenced by Van Gogh.

Among the masters of the period he particularly liked Degas, who was the only painter he invited to the first exhibition of his works in 1893. The appreciation of the old misanthrope, "Well now, Lautrec, one can see you're in the same line!" is well known. We can imagine the joy of the artist who needed friendship more than any one else. It is true that his mother stood by him all his life; he lived with her and she understood, much better than any wife would have done, his need for living intensely by night in order to live again by day with an even greater intensity in his painting.

It would have been surprising if he did not drink and indeed he was saturated with alcohol. Even so, he accomplished an enormous amount of work, contributing to *Le Rire*, *La Revue Blanche*, *Le Mercure de France*, and illustrating fine books without ever ceasing to visit the haunts of pleasure where he found the living material of his work. But he was generally considered an amateur and, with a few notable exceptions, critics did not greatly appreciate him.



GUNNER AND TWO HORSES. 1879
Albi Museum

Lautrec went to England where he met Whistler and where his work was exhibited in 1898. He also travelled in Belgium, Holland and Spain. But with the exception of English public-houses, music-hall stars such as *Miss May Belfort* and of the *Portrait of Oscar Wilde* painted during the famous trial, his work remains faithful to the underworld of Montmartre. He often went to Le Havre, Bordeaux and Arcachon; he did not bring back seascapes but portraits of pleasant barmaids who welcome seamen. He disliked the coldness of the Dutch and the facile picturesqueness of Spain which suggested only a few unimportant sketches. The best of his work was done at Montmartre in his studio whence he could see the neglected gardens of Père Forest.

The art of Lautrec is filled with a sadness which is none the less deep for being involuntary. He has been taxed with delighting in the depiction of vice, with seeing evil everywhere; he has been censured for his loose women and disjointed dancers; it has been said that by the cruelty he showed in the treatment of his subjects he sought to wreak vengeance on fate for his own infirmity. It would seem, however, that his object was simply to paint what he saw without any moral or immoral intention. It was easy to gain admittance into the casual sphere of Montmartre which abounds in interesting types and psychological attitudes not to be met with elsewhere; moreover this sphere had scarcely ever been dealt with before Lautrec. That is probably why he became attached to it and it would be useless to assert anything else.

The strenuous life he led, his work and above all his drinking excesses had the worst effects on his delicate health. In 1899 his reason was impaired and he was confined to a nursing home at Neuilly. In the calm and silence of the clinic he drew the famous crayon series of *The Circus*. After a year and a half at Neuilly, his health seemed to improve and for a while he went back to normal life. In 1901, however, during the summer vacation at Taussat-les-Bains, he was stricken with paralysis. His mother hastened to his side and took him home with her. On September 9th of the same year, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec died in his ancestral chateau of Malromé, surrounded by his family and friends.

The work of Toulouse-Lautrec bears testimony to a place, a period and several strange spheres of activity; its human value gives it universal scope.

HENRI DUMONT



HORSEMEN EN ROUTE TO THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE
Ad. Lewisohn Collection, New York



THE DOG-CART. 1880. Detail
Albi Museum



THE RIDE. COUNT A. DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC. 1883
G. Séré de Rivières Collection



VINCENT VAN GOGH. 1887
Municipal Museum, Amsterdam



SUZANNE VALADON. 1885
Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen



DEAF BERTHA. 1890
Private Collection



RED-HAIRED WOMAN IN THE GARDEN OF "PÈRE FOREST". 1889
Private Collection [19]



WOMAN PULLING UP HER STOCKING. 1894

Albi Museum



THE HEART-HOOK
French Art Gallery, New York



AT THE "MOULIN DE LA GALETTE". 1889
The Art Institute, Chicago



AT THE "MOULIN ROUGE". THE DANCE. 1890
Henry P. MacIlhenny Collection, Philadelphia



“GUEULE DE BOIS” (THE HANGOVER). 1889
Cargill Collection



RED-HAIRED WOMAN IN A WHITE CARACO. 1888

John T. Spaulding Collection, Boston



GIRL IN FURS. 1891
J. Laroche Collection



"LA PIERREUSE CASQUE D'OR." 1891
Private Collection



A CASUAL CONQUEST. 1893
Musée des Augustins, Toulouse



NUDE WOMAN STANDING AT THE MIRROR. 1897
Madame Dortu's Collection



MONSIEUR BOILEAU AT THE CAFÉ. 1893
[30] The Cleveland Museum of Art. The Hinman B. Hurlbut Coll.



THE ENGLISHMAN AT THE MOULIN ROUGE. 1892
Private Collection



THE TWO FRIENDS
Tate Gallery, Millbank, London



AT THE MOULIN ROUGE. LA GOULUE BETWEEN HER SISTER
AND A DANCER. 1892
Bernheim-Jeune Collection



JANE AVRIL DANCING. 1893
G. Wildenstein Collection



JANE AVRIL, "LA MELINITE." 1892. Detail
G. Wildenstein Collection



JANE AVRIL LEAVING THE MOULIN ROUGE

The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.

George A. Gay Collection



JANE AVRIL AT THE "DIVAN JAPONAIS". 1892
Bourdelle Collection



OSCAR WILDE. 1895

J. Seligmann & Co. Collection, New York

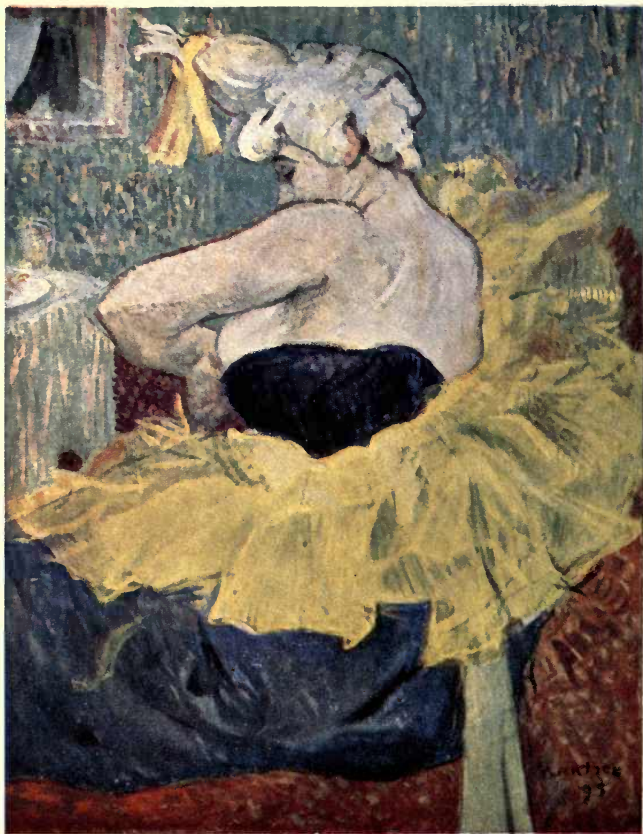


MAXIME DETHOMAS AT THE OPERA BALL. 1896
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Chester Dale Collection. Loan [39]





AT THE CIRCUS. THE FLYING TRAPEZE. 1899
Knödler Collection



AT THE MOULIN ROUGE. CHA-U-KAO THE CLOWN. 1895
[42] Dr. O. Reinhart's Collection, Winterthur



MADemoiselle MARCELLE LENDER IN CHILPERIC. 1896
Private Collection [43]



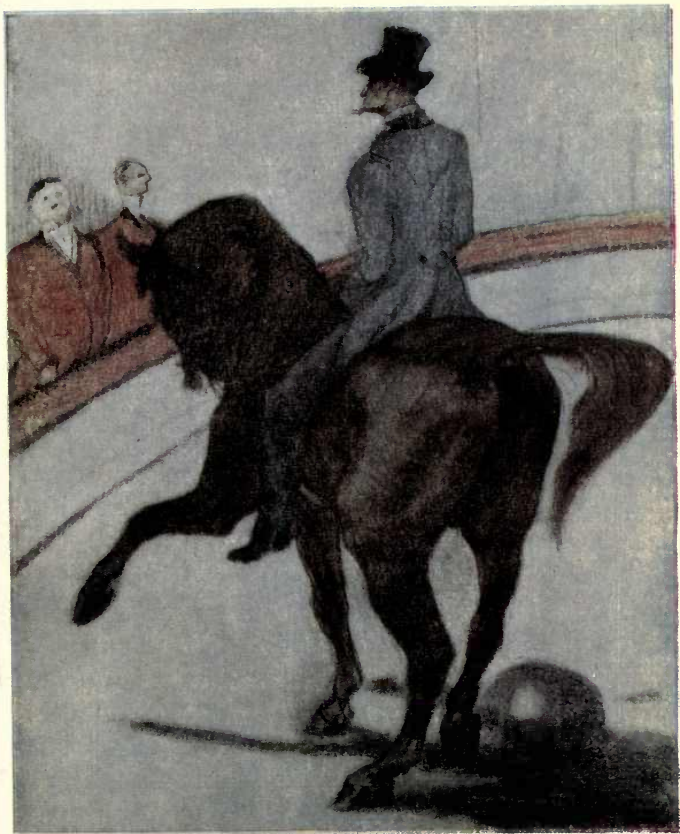
“AU HANNETON” (Lithograph)
Private Collection



MARY BELFORT BOWING (Lithograph)
Private Collection



AT THE CIRCUS. PERFORMING HORSE. 1899
Knoedler Collection



AT THE CIRCUS. THE SPANISH WALK. 1899
Knoedler Collection

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