



Toulouse-Lautrec Resolutely Modern

9 October 2019 – 27 January 2020

Grand Palais
National Galleries
Square Jean Perrin entrance

Exhibition produced by the musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie and the Réunion des musées nationaux - Grand Palais with the exceptional support of the ville Albi city and the Toulouse-Lautrec museum.
Exhibition produced with the exceptional assistance of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, holder of the entire lithographic work of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Three rejections define the established view of Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) : he despised the values of his class, ignored the art market and exploited Parisian nightlife and the sex trade, looking down on it. The liberation of forms and satirical verve of his greatest work are evidence. To this conflictual vision of his modernity, typical of the years 1970-1980, we must substitute another, more positive view. This exhibition – which brings together about 200 works – seeks to reinstate the artist and identify his singularity. The contradiction is in appearance only, as Lautrec himself simultaneously acted as heir and networker, by conquering public space, and as an accomplice to the world that he conveyed with unique force, and at times a fierce fondness, making «the present life» more intense and meaningful without any judgement. Rather than ascribe to a caricature that seeks to hurt or even humiliate, he should be viewed in a very French lineage of expressive realism, abrupt, funny and direct (as Yvette Guilbert would say), which includes such names as: Ingres, Manet and Degas. Like them, too, Lautrec made photography his ally. More than any other 19th century artist, he associated with photographers, amateur or professional, was aware of their power, contributed to their promotion and make use of their effects in his work on movement. Lautrec's photographic archive, moreover, follows the aristocratic games of appearances and identities that are exchanged for pleasure, a way of saying that life and painting do not have to comply to ordinary limits or those of the avant-garde. «Everything delighted him», concludes Thadée Natanson.

Since 1992, the date of the last French retrospective of the artist, countless exhibitions have explored the connections in the works of Toulouse-Lautrec to «Montmartre culture», which he concurrently chronicled and criticised. This sociological approach, pleased by what it tells us of the expectations and anxieties of the time, reduced the scope of an artist whose origins, opinions and open aesthetics protected him from all inquisitorial temptation. Lautrec never positioned himself as an accuser of urban vices and decadent affluence. By his birth, training and life choices, he saw himself rather as a pugnacious and comical interpreter, terribly human in the sense of Daumier or Baudelaire, of a freedom that needs to be better understood by contemporary audiences. By giving too much weight to the context and folklore of the Moulin-Rouge, we have lost sight of the aesthetic, poetic ambition which Lautrec invested in what he learned, in turn, from Princeteau, Bonnat and Cormon. As evidenced by his correspondence, Manet, Degas and Forain allowed him, from the mid-1880s, to transform his powerful naturalism into a more incisive and caustic style. Yet there was no linear, uniform progression, and true continuities are observed on both sides of his short career. One of them is the narrative component from which Lautrec strayed much less than one might think. It is particularly clear in

his approaches to death, around 1900, when his vocation as a historical painter took a desperate turn. The other dimension of the work that must be attached to his training is the desire to represent time, and soon to deploy duration as much as freeze momentum. Encouraged by his photographic passion and the success of Degas, electrified by the world of modern dancers and inventions, Lautrec never ceased to reformulate the space-time of the image.

As soon as his work fell into the striking synthesis of the 1980s, starting with the revolutionary poster for the Moulin Rouge, Lautrec developed a strategy between Paris, Brussels and London, that the exhibition emphasises by distinguishing the public face of his work from the more secretive side. Lautrec turned his back on official exhibitions, shunning both the public arena and the broadsheets. Like Courbet and Manet before him, this proved that his actual goal was to capture history through painting by exploring modern society in its myriad dimensions, often with disregard for proprieties. That he had relished the Montmartre spectacle, celebrating the aristocracy of pleasure and the priestesses of vice in Baudelaire's footsteps, was irrefutable. The brothel offered him a space where women enjoyed unique independence and authority, however paradoxical that may be. An insatiable pleasure-seeker, Lautrec quickly perfected the means of conveying the electricity of the cancan, the glare of the modern lights and the fever of customers accustomed to excesses. The unbridled movement breaks down before our eyes, resulting in his most dynamic posters, such as the prints of Loïe Fuller and panels of La Goulue, equally cinematographic in style. There is both a passion for speed and a pre-futuristic process that blends the gallop of the horse, the racket of the cabaret, the velocipede fever and the motor car. However, even the magic of the machines does not dehumanise his paintings and prints, which continue teem with life. Following his favourite writers and regulars in the *Revue Blanche*, Lautrec successfully married the subjective fragmentation of images and the desire to uplift modern life into a new mythology. Bringing together painting, literature and new media, the exhibition weaves its way into the heart of this involuntary 20th Century trail blazer.

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curators : **Stéphane Guégan**, Scientific adviser to the Presidency of the public institution of the Musées d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie ; **Danièle Devynck**, Chief curator, Director of the musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi

set design : Martin Michel

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opening times:

from Thursday to Monday from 10 am to 8 pm,
Wednesday from 10 am to 10 pm
closed on Tuesdays

price:

€15, concessions €11 (16-25 years, jobseekers and large families).
free for those under 16 years, minimum wage earners

directions:

metro lines 1 and 13 «Champs-Élysées-Clemenceau» or line 9 «Franklin D. Roosevelt»

information and reservations:

www.grandpalais.fr

#ExpoToulouseLautrec

published by Rmn-Grand Palais:

- exhibition catalogue

21.6 x 28.8 cm, 352 pages, 350 illustrations, €45

- exhibition magazine

28.8 x 43.2 cm, 24 pages, 30 illustrations, €6

- l'expo

16,2 x 21,6 cm, 304 pages, 280 illustrations, €18,50

- Un Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

14 x 21 cm, 236 pages, 60 illustrations, €19

- DVD Toulouse-Lautrec, the

uncatchable, 52 min, €14,90

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