

# TOULOUSE- LAUTREC

LA BELLE ÉPOQUE

22 OTTOBRE 2016  
5 MARZO 2017

TORINO  
PALAZZO CHIABLESE  
PIAZZETTA REALE

## PRESS RELEASE

Around **170 works** from the collection of the **Herakleidon Museum, Athens**, are at **Palazzo Chiablese, Turin**, from **22 October 2016** to **5 March 2017** in a major retrospective devoted to **Toulouse-Lautrec**, the aristocratic bohemian considered the greatest creator of posters and prints between the 19th and 20th century.

This exhibition organized by the **Ministry of the Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism**, the **Musei Reali in Turin** and **Arthemisia Group**, is under the patronage of the **City of Turin** and is curated by **Stefano Zuffi**.

The works from the Herakleidon Museum in Athens illustrate the eccentric art and sophisticated yet anti-conformist and provocative poetic research – among the most innovative between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century – of one of the most popular and admired artists today. He was a "tormented artist" from his childhood who did not receive the recognition he deserved, though he was extremely optimistic and very aware of the beauty of life. A simple beauty, whose outlines were deliberately blurred, to be enjoyed in dissolute, vivid, wild moments, without embellishments, which he depicted both in his drawings and coloured works. No one since has been able to render so "perfectly" the face of imperfection. That is his style.

The exhibition includes coloured lithographs like *Jane Avril*, 1893, advertising posters like *The Passenger in Cabin 54*, 1895, and *Aristide Bruant, in his Cabaret*, 1893, pencil and pen and ink drawings, promotional graphics and magazine illustrations as in *La Revue blanche*, 1895, that have become the emblems of an era inextricably connected with the images of Count Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Descended from a long-established aristocratic family in the south of France, in 1881 seventeen-year-old Henri decided to defy his father, settle in Paris and become a painter. It had become obvious that he couldn't follow the family traditions and live the life of a country gentleman or embark on a military career. Due to a genetic disorder his legs stopped growing when he was only 4 feet 8 inches tall and he also had a speech impediment. Despite his physical disabilities Henri had no difficulty settling into the free bohemian world of artists and entertainers. The cafés chantants and cabarets, the main venues of fin-de-siècle Parisian night life, became his favourite haunts and provided the main themes of his art. In his daring choices of risqué subjects and his innovative artistic research, Toulouse-Lautrec drew inspiration for the characters in his works mainly from the Paris quarter of Montmartre. He depicted the lively night clubs as well as everyday scenes, always captured with great immediacy.

He soon became one of the illustrators and draughtsmen most in demand in Paris and he received commissions for posters advertising plays, ballets and shows, and illustrations for important journals of the day, like the satirical magazine *Le Rire*.

After the circus and the Moulin Rouge, love and the ephemeral stars of cabaret, the last glass of absinthe and the forced smiles of the showgirls, Count Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec left the stage at the age of thirty-seven, on 9 September 1901, at the dawn of the 20th century. His death marked the end of an era.

The exhibition is recommended by **Sky Arte HD**.

The catalogue is published by **Skira**.

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## THE EXHIBITION AND THE ARTIST

The exhibition is divided into **10 thematic sections** corresponding to the major historical, technological, social and architectural changes taking place in Paris at the end of the 19th century, the glittering belle époque.

**The first four sections are devoted to the Parisian Nights:** the three rooms named after individual protagonists of the night life are followed by a fourth room devoted to the world of entertainment from the Moulin Rouge to the Opéra.

One of the best-known aspects of Toulouse-Lautrec's oeuvre is the posters he made for night clubs. He had the novel idea of focusing on the artists who performed there as an advertising ploy and brilliantly captured the different types and characters. Indeed, he was really and truly the inventor of the star system! He struck up a firm friendship with the French singer-songwriter and cabaret artist Aristide Bruant (1851–1925), and contributed to defining this personality through a series of prints and lithographs. These included *Aristide Bruant, in his Cabaret* (1893), where he is depicted wearing his flowing cape, broad-brimmed hat and red scarf. The modern impact these stylized works make, through their solid colours, brought him immediate and unexpected fame. The figure of Yvette Guilbert (1868–1944), nicknamed *La Diseuse* is unforgettable – on stage her signature was a pair of elbow-length black gloves. Fascinated by the personality of this actress and singer, Toulouse-Lautrec devoted a whole album of lithographs to her – *Album Yvette Guilbert*, 1894, on display in the exhibition – as well as various drawings and engravings.

Toulouse-Lautrec also established a friendship with the famous cabaret star Jane Avril (1868–1943), who was wild and irresistible on stage. He depicts her as a cultured sophisticated lady at a café chantant in the poster *Divan Japonais* (1893), but also dancing the can-can with other dancers in *Mademoiselle Eglantine's Troupe* (1896).

Finally, a large room is devoted to the varied world of entertainment, from popular cabaret scenes to more serious Greek tragedies and concerts at the Opéra. Toulouse-Lautrec would say "It doesn't matter what the show is. I'm always happy at the theatre!" indeed, these works are always fascinating and express joy and pleasure. In his theatrical scenes Toulouse-Lautrec consummately renders the intensity of the dramas and comedies with striking movements and strong contrasts of light and shade, which are inspired by Japanese woodcuts and Honoré Daumier's theatre boxes. The works on display include the series of witty lithographs made in 1893 for the collection *Le café-concert*.

## Section 5 – Horses

Toulouse-Lautrec's publisher friend Thadée Natanson remembers: "*Henri loved animals less than women but more than men. He was mad about horses and he never got over the fact that he couldn't ride them*".

Growing up in an aristocratic family in the provinces, he had a great passion for horses. His father, Count Alphonse, was an excellent horseman, keen on the outdoor life, long rides on horseback and hunting with a falcon. Some drawings in this section date back to when the artist was an adolescent and show his extraordinary early talent. Some years later, in the spring of 1899, the painter was admitted to a mental hospital to be treated for alcoholism and overcome the bad attacks of delirium. In order to obtain a discharge from the sanatorium, Toulouse-Lautrec executed numerous drawings, many depicting his favourite horses. The lithograph *The Jockey*, 1899, was made from one of these works.

Finally the "portrait" *The Pony Philibert*, 1898, deserves a mention. During the last two years of his life, Toulouse-Lautrec's health deteriorated drastically and moving about grew more and more difficult. To

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navigate the streets of Paris he used a buggy pulled by the patient Philibert, the last of the many horses he had known since his early childhood.

## Section 6 – Drawings

The exhibition includes a series of drawings in pencil and pen and ink that are compellingly fresh and incisive.

Drawing was truly an immediate and irreplaceable means of expression for Toulouse-Lautrec throughout his life. His pencil was his faithful companion during the lengthy enforced immobility while he was recovering from his broken legs. It was his means of overcoming the boredom of the spas; the small punishment inflicted by the required exercises during his academic training; the instrument he used to view and interpret the world; his friendly accomplice in finding a way to escape from the mental hospital where he spent about three months, almost echoing the destiny of his friend Van Gogh. The drawings are mainly sketches of people: faces, attitudes, silhouettes, caricatures. There is also a portrait of his father, Count **Alphonse** de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Portrait of H. de Toulouse-Lautrec*, 1895, and the witty self-portrait in the nude (*Toulouse-Lautrec Nude*, 1894).

## Sections 7 and 8 – Collaboration with publishers

After spending the night doing the rounds of the cafés and cabarets of Montmartre, Toulouse-Lautrec set to work with surprising energy and lucidity, and was able to manage several projects simultaneously. This was partly due to the prodigious speed with which he conceived and executed his artworks, but partly to his passion for printing techniques, every step of which he followed closely.

For these reasons, Toulouse-Lautrec's talents were in great demand also in the publishing industry, for widely circulated humour magazines but also prestigious books and covers for musical scores.

*Le Rire* and *Escarmouche* are two of the illustrated periodicals to which Toulouse-Lautrec contributed the satirical illustrations on politics and social mores on display here.

Also in this section Toulouse-Lautrec's cousin, the musician Désiré Dihau, is depicted playing a solo on the bassoon in the lithograph *Pour Toi!...*, 1893, accompanied by the rare lithographic stone from which it was made.

## Section 9 – With his intellectual friends

This part of the exhibition is devoted to the intellectuals Toulouse-Lautrec frequented. His relationships with poets, publishers and wealthy patrons of the arts is the other side of the bohemian artist who would drown his sorrows in glasses of absinthe during the Parisian nights. Much of the Paris social life of the time took place in the office and homes of the directors of the *Revue Blanche* and it was here that Toulouse-Lautrec struck up many friendships with writers and intellectuals. He made a poster for the magazine (*La Revue Blanche*, 1895), depicting Misia Natanson, the charming wife of the director.

He had an important commission for the cover and illustrations for the book *Au Pied du Sinai* (1897), a series of short stories by George Clemenceau set in various Jewish communities.

## Section 10 – Love is another thing

The life of fin de siècle Paris flowed before Toulouse-Lautrec's satirical eye: dances, shows, evening entertainment, lights, theatre, and the laughter and applause inspired by cabaret artists, dancers and chansonniers. But this was only a part of what the painter produced. Perhaps even more intense and personal are his portraits of women, alone and silent, viewed without the slightest intention of creating a

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caricature or newspaper cartoon: moments of reflection, with clouds hanging over their souls and fleeting shadows passing across their faces.

The exhibition comes to a close with the delicate works on this theme. No artist before Toulouse-Lautrec, had captured the repressed passions, loneliness and desire for a better life concealed beneath the forced sensuality and "professional" seductiveness of singers, actresses and prostitutes, observed without irony or a moralistic attitude. As happens in the French literature of the time (from Flaubert's novels to Maupassant's novellas), subjects and characters usually considered scandalous or immoral are redeemed by art. Toulouse-Lautrec liked the frivolous atmosphere of the brothels and between 1892 and 1895 he spent whole weeks in the *maisons closes* near the Opéra and the Stock Exchange in Paris. He would watch the girls for hours while they rested, played cards and put on makeup. He didn't feel ashamed of his appearance in their company. For him their uninhibited spontaneity made them the ideal models.

The most complete series is the colour lithographs in the album *Elles*, 1896, that are masterpieces of late 19th- century engraving. The frontispiece and wonderful lithograph *Woman at the Tub* are on display here.

Toulouse-Lautrec's female images also include the dream of an impossible love, the mysterious lady encountered on board ship, or depicted with great delicacy in the lithograph entitled *The Passenger in Cabin 54*, 1896.

**Images can be downloaded from:**  
[http://bit.ly/TOULOUSE\\_TORINO](http://bit.ly/TOULOUSE_TORINO)

**Information and booking**  
Tel. +39 011.024301  
[www.mostratoulouselautrec.it](http://www.mostratoulouselautrec.it)

**Tickets**  
13 euros  
Reduced 11 euros

**Opening times**  
Monday 14.30 to 19.30 pm  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and  
Sunday 9.30 am to 19.30 pm  
Thursday 9.30 to 22.30  
(ticket office closes one hour earlier)

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