

TOULOUSE- LAUTREC

LA VILLE LUMIÈRE

7 FEBBRAIO
3 GIUGNO 2018

PALAZZO DELLA CULTURA
CATANIA

PRESS RELEASE

Following the success of the Toulouse Lautrec exhibitions in Turin and Verona, our partner Arthemisia in collaboration with the Municipality of Catania, will be returning to the **Palazzo della Cultura in Catania** from **7 February** with an exhibition featuring **150 works** from the **Herakleidon Museum** in Athens and celebrating the artistic career of one of the greatest exponents of the Belle Époque: **Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901)**.

Paris, late 19th century: Bohemian lifestyle, the artists of Montmartre, the Moulin Rouge, theatres, satirical journals and prostitutes. This was the captivating world of Toulouse-Lautrec, a genius who primarily made his name through advertising posters and portraits of figures who characterised an era, making a real impression on the public imagination.

Posters, lithographs, drawings, illustrations and watercolours, together with photos and period furnishings, paint a picture of Bohemian Paris, taking visitors back in time.

Some of the most famous works in the exhibition including colour lithographs (such as *Jane Avril*, 1893), advertising posters (including *The Passenger from Cabin 54*, 1895, and *Aristide Bruant in his Cabaret*, 1893), pencil and pen drawings, promotional graphics and illustrations for journals (such as *La Revue Blanche* in 1895), which became emblems of an epoch indissolubly linked to images by the aristocratic viscount Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Curated by **Stefano Zuffi** and with the patronage of **Regione Sicilia - Assessorato regionale dei Beni Culturali e dell'Identità Siciliana**, *Toulouse Lautrec. La Ville Lumière* is an exhibition promoted by **Comune di Catania**, produced and organized by **Arthemisia** in partnership with the **Comune di Catania** and with the collaboration of **Herakleidon Museum in Athens**.

The initiative is promoted by **Generali Italia** – sponsor of the exhibition – through the **Valore Cultura** programme, a project that sets out to attract families, youths, clients, and employees to the world of art by offering reduced tickets to exhibitions, theatre shows, events, and art and culture related activities.

The exhibition also counts on *special partner* **Ricola** and *hotel partner* **UNA Hotel Palace**.

It is recommended by **Sky Arte HD**.

The exhibition audio-guides are offered by Generali Italia.

The catalogue is published by **Arthemisia Books**.

THE EXHIBITION

After a number of detailed introductions to the artist and his period, the exhibition is divided into **eleven thematic sections**, all relating to the major historical, technological, social and architectural changes taking place in late 19th-century Paris, during the exciting *Belle Époque*.

- 1 **The study of engraving and lithography**
- 2 **Stars of the Parisian night scene: Jane Avril**
- 3 **Stars of the Parisian night scene: Aristide Bruant**
- 4 **Stars of the Parisian night scene: Yvette Guilbert**

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- 5 ***Drawings from adolescence to adulthood***
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Section one – *The study of engraving and lithography*

Section one introduces visitors to Toulouse-Lautrec's greatest artistic passion: engraving, or lithography to be more precise. An exceptional series of works and items (preliminary drawings, lithographic stone, first print without writing, definitive version) make it possible to observe the creative process that led to the production of a famous engraving, destined to form the cover of a musical score: the figure shown in the image is the composer Desiré Dihau, who played the bassoon in the opera house orchestra and was related to Toulouse-Lautrec. We see him performing a bassoon solo in the lithograph *Pour Toi!...* (1893).

This is followed by three sections devoted to the Parisian night scene, with a sequence of rooms focusing on the individual undisputed protagonists of the most famous French scenes of the late 19th century: Jane Avril, Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert.

One of the best-known aspects of Toulouse-Lautrec's work is the advertisements he created for the city's night spots: thanks to an innovative promotional intuition, Henri decided to highlight the names of the artists performing on the stage, setting them in stone in a truly formidable fashion. Ultimately, he can be called the inventor of the star system.

Toulouse-Lautrec developed a friendship with the famous Parisian cabaret star Jane Avril (1868–1943), to the point of immortalizing himself in a famous ironic photograph in which he is dressed in her clothes. The artist portrays her as a sophisticate attending a cafe-concert in the poster *Divan Japonais* (1893), but also shows her uninhibited can-can performance together with other dancers in *La Troupe de Mlle Églantine* (1896).

One of the greatest admirers of Toulouse-Lautrec's posters was the singer-songwriter and cabaret artist Aristide Bruant (1851–1925): Henri portrays the singer in a series of prints and lithographs, including *Aristide Bruant in his Cabaret* (1893), where he shows him wearing a voluminous cloak, broad-brimmed hat and a red scarf around his neck. The modernity of these stylized illustrations, structured into expanses of homogeneous colour, made him an immediate and unexpected celebrity. The figure of Yvette Guilbert (1868–1944), nicknamed La Diseuse (or the reciter), is unforgettable: the most distinctive feature of the scene are the long black gloves worn up to her elbow. Fascinated by the personality of the actress and singer, Toulouse-Lautrec devoted an album of lithographs to her, all of which are included in the exhibition, as well as various drawings and engravings (*Album Yvette Guilbert*, 1894). A very rare recording of a song performed by Guilbert (*A l'hotel du numero trois*) can also be heard in this room.

Section five – *Drawings from adolescence to adulthood*

The central part of the exhibition features a series of pencil and pen drawings, which are strikingly contemporary and cuttngly incisive.

Throughout his life, Toulouse-Lautrec found drawing to be an immediate and irreplaceable means of expression. His pencil was his loyal companion during his prolonged periods of forced bedrest when recovering from fractures, a way to overcome the boredom of visits to spa towns, a small form of censure during compulsory exercises as part of his academic training, a tool for seeing and interpreting the world, an entertaining accomplice in pinpointing the key to escaping the mental health clinic where he was held for around three months, almost sharing the same fate as his friend Van Gogh.

The drawings are primarily sketches of people: faces, poses, silhouettes, caricatures. The exhibition also includes a portrait of his father, Count Adolphe de Toulouse-Lautrec, and the witty sheet on which the painter produced a merciless nude portrait of himself (*Toulouse-Lautrec Nu*, 1894).

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Section six – Satirical journals

Publishing projects represent an important aspect of Toulouse-Lautrec's art. The rapid spread of illustrated journals shows how the Parisians of the Belle Époque had more and more time to devote to reading. The *journaux humoristique*, of which *Le Rire* was probably the most successful, focused on political satire, corruption and military scandals, together with gossip about high-profile figures, including the stars of the Parisian night scene.

In 1893 Toulouse-Lautrec published some cartoons in the weekly *L'Escaramouche* (the skirmish), edited by the somewhat anarchical Georges Darien. They featured theatrical subjects, including the scene of the tragedy involving Sarah Bernhardt, but also images of political and social satire. In one of them, accompanied by the explicit caption "A boor! A real boor!", we see Toulouse-Lautrec's father, Count Alphonse, avidly and coarsely gulping down a sandwich. *Le Rire* (Laughter) was founded by Felix Juven in October 1894. The journal featured colour etchings on both covers and on the central doublespread.

Section seven – The Moulin Rouge and Parisian shows

A section on the world of show business, from the Moulin Rouge to the opera house, devoted to the diverse scene of late 19th-century entertainment, from the popular cabaret to more challenging performances of Greek tragedies or concerts at the opera house. Toulouse-Lautrec said: "It doesn't matter what show it is. I'm always happy at the theatre!", and his works devoted to the world of show business are always fascinating, conveying joy and pleasure. In his theatrical scenes, Lautrec manages to render the intensity of the dramas or the comedies by means of effective movements and dynamic contrasts of light and shadow that draw inspiration from Japanese woodcuts and Daumier's theatre stages. The works on display include the series of witty lithographs produced in 1893 for *Le café-concert* collection.

Section eight – Horses and riders

His friend the publisher Thadée Natanson recalled: "Henri loved animals less than women but more than men. He was crazy about horses and never got over being unable to ride them." Having grown up among the country aristocracy, Toulouse-Lautrec had a great passion for horses. The painter's father, Count Alphonse, was a skilled horseman, a lover of the outdoor life who went out for long rides and hunting expeditions with his falcon. Some of the drawings in this section date to his adolescence, demonstrating the artist's extraordinary precocity.

Several years later, in spring 1899, the painter was admitted to a mental health clinic to detox from alcohol and rid himself of oppressive bouts of delirium. In order to be discharged from the sanatorium, Toulouse-Lautrec produced various drawings, often dedicated to his favourite horses. The lithograph *The Jockey* (1899) is based on one of these works.

It is also worth mentioning his portrait of *The Pony Philibert* (1898). During the final two years of his life, Toulouse-Lautrec's condition deteriorated significantly and he had more and more difficulty moving around. He used a gig to travel around Paris, drawn by the patient Philibert, the last of the many horses Toulouse-Lautrec had known since his early childhood.

Section nine – Books and publishing projects

After spending the night doing the rounds of the cafes and cabarets in Montmartre, Toulouse-Lautrec would get to work with unexpected energy and lucidity, working on several things at the same time. This can partly be attributed to his prodigious inventive and creative speed, but also his passion for printing, supervising all the phases himself. Because of this, as well as because of his advertising posters, the artist's talent was much in demand in the publishing sector, in satirical journals with an extensive readership but also prestigious books and covers for musical scores. A particular publishing project involved Toulouse-Lautrec in the illustrations for *Au Pied du Sinaï*, a collection of tales that describes – sometimes with black humour – life in the Jewish communities in various European countries. The author was Georges Clemenceau, future president of the French Republic. In 1897, Toulouse-Lautrec produced the lithographs for the cover and the illustrations. The luxury edition contained ten lithographs, each printed four times on different paper, and four additional lithographs

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that were rejected for the current edition.

Section ten – *La Revue Blanche*

This part of the exhibition is devoted to Toulouse-Lautrec's intellectual acquaintances: his relationships with poets, publishers and wealthy patrons is, in a certain sense, the other side to the Bohemian artist, lost in the glasses of absinthe of Parisian nights. Much of Paris' social life unfolded in the offices and homes of the editors of *La Revue Blanche* and it was here that Toulouse-Lautrec forged various friendships with writers and scholars. In 1895 he designed a poster for the magazine (*La Revue Blanche*, 1895), featuring the fascinating Misia Natanson, the editor's wife.

Section eleven – Toulouse and women

Parisian life at the turn of the century took place under the satirical eye of Toulouse-Lautrec: dances, performances, evening entertainments, lights, theatres, laughter and applause, thanks to cabaret artists, dancers and chansonniers. But this represents just part of the painter's production. His portraits of single, silent women are perhaps even more intense and personal, observed without the least intention to produce a caricature or a cartoon. They are moments of reflection, clouds blowing across the soul, fleeting shadows passing over a face.

The exhibition concludes with the delicate works dedicated to this theme. No artist, prior to Toulouse-Lautrec, had succeeded in grasping the repressed passions, loneliness and desire for a better life concealed beneath the forced sensuality and "professional" seduction of singers, actresses and prostitutes, observed without irony or moralism. As in the case of contemporary French literature (from the novels of Flaubert to the short stories of Maupassant), subjects and characters usually deemed to be scandalous or immoral are redeemed by art. Toulouse-Lautrec liked the frivolous environment of the brothels and spent entire weeks in the *maison closes* near the opera house and the Paris stock exchange between 1892 and 1895. Here he watched the girls for hours, at rest, playing cards or putting on their make-up. What is more, he did not have to be ashamed of his appearance in their company. The uninhibited spontaneity of these women made them ideal models in his eyes.

The most complete cycle consists of the colour lithographs from the *Elles* (Them) of 1896, masterpieces of French late 19th-century engraving. The exhibition features the frontispieces and the wonderful lithograph *Woman at her Toilette*.

Among the female images evoked by Toulouse-Lautrec we can also observe the dream of an impossible love, the mysterious lady encountered on a ship and evoked with great delicacy in the lithograph entitled *The Passenger in Cabin 54* (1896).

PRESS MATERIAL AT > http://bit.ly/TOULOUSE_CATANIA

Exhibition venue

Palazzo della Cultura
Via Vittorio Emanuele II, 121 - Catania

Opening times

Monday to Sunday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
(the ticket office closes an hour earlier)

Tickets

Full price € 13.00 (audio guide included)
Concessions € 11.00 (audio guide included)

Info and bookings

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PRESS RELEASE (EXTENSION)

The exhibition **Toulouse Lautrec. La Ville Lumière** is exceptionally extended until **September 9th**: at **Palazzo della Cultura** in **Catania**, **150 works** from the **Herakleidon Museum** in **Athens** celebrates the artistic career of one of the greatest exponents of the Belle Époque: **Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec** (1864–1901).

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