

# The Museum of Modern Art

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For Immediate Release

## FACT SHEET

**EXHIBITION** HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC

**DATES** November 7, 1985 - January 26, 1986

**ORGANIZATION** Organized by Wolfgang Wittrock, Guest Curator; coordinated by Riva Castleman, Director, and Audrey Isselbacher, Assistant Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art

**SPONSORSHIP** Made possible by a grant from Mobil

**CONTENTS** The singular view of Paris life as depicted by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is so well known and so often reproduced that his images have come to symbolize the final decade of the nineteenth century. While Lautrec's art has received considerable attention in America since the 1890s, serious examination of his personality and his subjects has taken precedence over that of his formal and technical prowess. Documenting the last ten years (1891-1901) of his brief life, this is the most ambitious presentation of Lautrec's work to focus upon his genius as a graphic artist.

Consisting of over 300 works, the exhibition presents the artist's 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 memorable posters will be shown unframed in a street setting evocative of Paris in the 1890s, along with song sheets, memorabilia from singer Yvette Guilbert, and original letters about his printmaking activity. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec documents the development of the artist's virtuoso printmaking, from quickly sketched motif and full-scale cartoon to lithographed image or finished poster.

**THE ARTIST** 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. Lautrec was sent to school for the first time in Paris when he was eight years old. One year later, his mother placed him in a home outside of Paris for treatment of growth problems. This was followed by an endless round of visits to health spas. He eventually fractured both legs, and by age fifteen his growth had stopped permanently. During his long confinement, 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

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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, where he made perceptive portraits of actresses and actors. 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.

PUBLICATION

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.

PRESS PREVIEW

Wednesday, October 30, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

No. 64

For further information or photographic materials contact Jeanne Collins or Jessica Schwartz, Department of Public Information 212/708-9750.