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The Museum of Modern Art

PARIS IN THE 1890S IS THE SUBJECT OF AN EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Celebrated Prints are on View at MoMA for the First Time in Twenty Years

ParisThe 1890s

June 19September 2, 1997

The first exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in twenty years to present some of the most celebrated prints created during the 1890s in Paris by such artists as Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Signac, Théophile Steinlen, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Edouard Vuillard opens on June 19, 1997. *ParisThe 1890s* features prints, illustrated books, and a variety of ephemeral works such as advertising posters, political journals, theater programs, and sheet music. Organized around the theme of prints for public and private realms, the exhibition not only provides a vivid portrait of fin-de-siècle Paris but also demonstrates how the aesthetics of these printed works entered the everyday world. Including some 200 works by 26 artists, the exhibition is organized by Deborah Wye, Chief Curator, and Audrey Isselbacher, Associate Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art.

The 1890s in Paris, popularly perceived as the time of the cabaret and cancan, was also a period of unparalleled activity in printmaking. A variety of contemporary artistic trends—such as the visual explorations of Pointillism, the decorative impulses of the Nabis, the compositional structures fostered by Japanese woodblock prints, the sinuousness of Art Nouveau, and the subjectivity and spirituality found in Symbolist modes, joined with technical innovations occurring in color lithography to contribute to what could be characterized as a "print boom." According to Ms. Wye and Ms. Isselbacher, "The proliferation of different kinds of printed art, the wide range of publishers and collectors, and even specialized exhibitions and art and literary journals, gave the medium an extraordinary energy and a level of creativity which marks the period as a high point."

In the public arena, walls and kiosks were filled with lively posters advertising consumer products, performances like those staged at the Moulin Rouge, and the latest literary publications. One of Bonnard's earliest works was a poster for "France-Champagne." Such commissions were desirable to young artists as they provided both income and an opportunity to gain public recognition. Toulouse-Lautrec's posters of entertainers of the day, like Jane Avril, have given these figures lasting celebrity. Establishing what has been called the "visual signature of the epoch—an image of verve and excitement—posters had a profound impact on the way Paris looked in the 1890s.

Sites for printed art abounded. Even social and political events of the day, such as strikes and riots, as well as the infamous Dreyfus Affair, gave rise to illustrations in newspapers and broadsides. "It is

remarkable to see artistic concerns that preoccupied the avant-garde put to use in formats that functioned in the everyday world," note the exhibition's curators.

Prints were also created as objects of private contemplation for the homes of a new generation of bourgeois collectors. Portfolios were published and sold by subscription. Vuillard's *Paysage et Intérieures* (Landscape and Interiors), for example, was a portfolio containing a series of prints that focused on a specific theme. In an effort to integrate fine art with daily life at home, Denis created a lithographed design for wallpaper.

Literary works embellished with original prints and periodicals devoted to printmaking also flourished. *La Revue Blanche*, an influential art and literary journal, encouraged the printed work of such artists as Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, Félix Vallotton, and Vuillard.

"As prints entered not only the world of the private collector but also the public world of the street, they began to affect the sensibilities of a broad public. In so doing, printmaking in all its manifestations contributed in a fundamental way to the vitality of modern life at the dawn of the twentieth century," Ms. Wye and Ms. Isselbacher conclude.

This exhibition is supported in part by funding from the Estate of Mr. and Mrs. Edmund J. Kahn.

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