

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec



Jane Avril, 1899,
lithograph, 22 1/6 x 15 in
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Self-Portrait in front of a Mirror, 1882-83,
oil on cardboard, 40 x 32cm
Musée Toulouse-Lautrec

The Artist

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Born Albi, France, 1864, death, Château Malromé, Langon, France, 1901.

Henri Toulouse-Lautrec was born into the family of wealthy landowners in France. His parents were first cousins and due to a long line of inbreeding, Henri had medical issues that never allowed him recover fully from leg injuries in his youth. The broken femurs in both legs, mixed with his genetic weakness, caused the bones in his legs to stop growing. The rest of his body however, grew into a normally proportioned one. As an adult, Toulouse-Lautrec was barely five feet tall, and used a cane to support the weight of the rest of his body.

His largest influences as a child sketching were his horses. Lautrec's first teacher was René Princeteau, a close family friend and deaf-mute. Toulouse-Lautrec was eighteen when he and his mother moved to Paris. This allowed him to study painting under Léon Bonnat and Fernand Cormon. He began to paint *en plein air* (outside), similar to the impressionists, with models. His favorite model was a prostitute nicknamed La Casque d'Or (Golden Helmet). Lautrec used oil thinned with turpentine, on cardboard, with loose and sketch-like brushwork. He soon became the premier poster artist of Paris. He excelled at capturing people in their working environment using color and movement. Toulouse-Lautrec's most important contribution was the field of graphic arts. During his career, he designed many posters and used the technique of lithography. Bad habits led to his early death at thirty-seven from alcoholism and syphilis. His reported last words were "Le vieux con!" ("Old fool!"). In his wake, he left 737 canvases, 275 watercolors, 363 prints and posters, 5,084 drawings, some ceramic and stained glass work, along with unknown lost works.

Art Movement

Lithography

Toulouse-Lautrec revolutionized the process of Lithography, which is the process of printing from flat surfaces. Lithography soon became the founding of the field of graphic art. Lithography is most important for printing books, magazines, newspapers, and in Toulouse-Lautrec case posters. The artist frequently employed the spattered ink technique known as *crachis*. Although he did not belong to any particular artistic movement, sometimes he is classified as Post-Impressionism.

The Artwork

Jane Avril

Toulouse-Lautrec's work *Jane Avril* was used to advertise her show at the Jardin de Paris (Garden of Paris). Toulouse-Lautrec's posters of Jane Avril helped to make her a big star at dance halls. Jane Avril and Toulouse-Lautrec were close friends for the remainder of his life. The style and content of

Lautrec's posters were heavily influenced by Japanese ukiyo-e prints. Areas of flat color bound by strong outlines, silhouettes, cropped compositions, and oblique angles are all typical of woodblock prints by artists like Katsushika Hokusai and Ando Hiroshige.

Self-Portrait in front of a Mirror

Toulouse-Lautrec rarely did self-portraits, when he did; his face is obscured by shadow and difficult to make out. He shows no sign of his impaired growth in this portrait.

Discussion Suggestions

Talk about what you see in the painting:

- *What colors do you see in this print? Where has the artist repeated colors?*
- *What is the woman doing in the poster? How does the artist make her look like she is singing?*
- *How does the artist let us know what this poster was advertising?*
- *What draws our attention to the lady in the middle of the poster? And who is she?*

Activity Idea

Event Poster! (Located in this folder.):

- Tape or tack the corners of the large sheet of brown crafter paper to the wall. Line newspaper on the floor to catch any drops from the brown paper. Set up the paints in cups on the newspaper by the brown paper.
- Think of a special event to advertise with this large poster. For example, a pet show, parade, puppet show, school play, or birthday party would work well.
- Paint the outline of a person, perhaps someone at a birthday party having a grand time, with white. Then, paint in parts of the person with black and other colors. Leave parts unpainted. For example, paint the hair, face, and hat of a person, but leave the clothes outlined in white.
- Add other sketchy painted bits and parts to the poster. Add words, if desired, such as, Amy's Exciting Party. With a paintbrush, sign the artist's name.
- When the poster is dry, post it in a place where everyone will see it and want to come to the special event.

Materials Needed:

- Large sheet of brown craft paper, torn from a roll, cut to about 3'x5'.
- Tempera paints in cups, especially white, black, and red (as well as other colors).
- Paintbrushes
- Wall
- Tacks or tape
- Newspaper