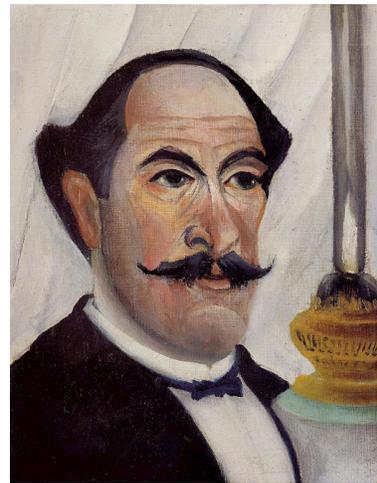


Henri Rousseau



Monkeys and Parrot in the Virgin Forest, 1910
oil on canvas
Barnes Foundation



Portrait of the artist with a lamp, 1900
oil on canvas, 23 cm x 19 cm
Musee Picasso, France

The Artist

Henri Rousseau

Born in Laval, France 1844; died in Paris, France 1910

Henri Rousseau was a self-taught painter who began intensive painting at 40 years old. In his time, art critics belittled Rousseau. Even today, some critics regard his art as something nice to look at, but not serious art. Rousseau's family was made up of plumbers from the working class, this held him back early in life. While Rousseau showed interest in art as a child, his family did not have the funds to send him to an art school and persuaded him to find a more stable job. He worked as a lawyer, joined the French army, and in 1868 took a job at the French Customs department. Rousseau began to paint in his spare time. In 1886, he obtained a permit to make copies and sketches in the National museums of Paris. In 1885, he exhibited two of his paintings at the Salon des Champs-Elysees. From 1886 until his death, he exhibited every year at the Salon des Independants. This was the exhibition play-form of the avant-garde artist in contrast to the Salon de Artists Francias, which represented the "official", classical art. The Salon de Independants had no jury or admission procedure. Any and every artist could exhibit for a fee. He retired at the age of 49 and became a full-time artist. He earned money by giving violin lessons, painting lessons, and by making paintings on commission. The Leitmotif of Rousseau's paintings are scenes of the jungle and wild animals like tigers, monkeys, or buffalos. He had a unique painting technique in which he would use one color at a time and paint from top to bottom. Rousseau's motif of dreams and imaginative worlds developed in his later paintings. The surrealist movement would consider Rousseau one of the forerunners. Rousseau caught the attention of many professional avant-garde artists, some took him seriously, and others thought of him as an exotic amusement. Picasso even organized a banquet in his honor. While Henri Rousseau always considered himself a great artist, but his fame came about a year after his death when a memorial exhibit was organized in his honor.

Art Movement

Post-Impressionism

In the late 1880s, young artists sought to break free from the naturalism of Impressionism. The goal of this movement was to create independent artistic styles for the expressing of emotions. Post-Impressionism is characterized by the use of definitive forms and simplified colors. Artists commonly attributed to being a part of the Post-Impressionism movement worked independently and did not

view themselves as a collective movement. The ideas of the post-Impressionists led the way to the Modern art movement of the 20th century.

The Artwork

Tropical Forest with Monkeys

This painting has a fantastical quality to it, from the red sun, to the overly large flowers. In the middle of the piece, there are a pair of monkeys that appear to almost be hugging one another. The plant life takes up most of the space in the painting.

Discussion Suggestions

The Realistic Discussion:

- *Is the work realistic? Why? Why not? (Are there cactus in the jungle?)*
- *Are the objects in the painting proportionate? (size of the flowers)*
- *Where is the most light in the painting? Can you point it out?*
- *Would you want to visit a place like this?*
- *What all do you notice when you look at the painting? What do you recognize? What seems exotic?*
- *Are more warm colors used, or cool colors?*

Activity Idea

Jungle Prints:

- Place a puddle of green paint on the flat pan and roll it with the brayer. The side of a jar or a small rolling pin can be used instead.
- Hold a leaf by its stem on top of a sheet of scrap paper. Gently roll the paint-covered brayer on top of the leaf. Roll several times in an upward direction until the leaf is covered with a thin coat of paint. Roll the brayer in the pan often to re-color it. Add more paint to the pan as needed.
- Carefully place the leaf, paint side down, on a sheet of white drawing paper. Lay a clean piece of scrap paper on top and pat it gently. Don't let the leaf wiggle. Lift the paper and the leaf stem to see the leaf print made beneath.
- Print several more leaves on the paper using different tones of green (light green with some white paint mixed in, dark green with black mixed in, yellow green, olive green, blue green, or any other greens). Make greens by mixing colors of paint as they are rolled on the pan with the brayer. Print all the leaves growing up from the bottom of the paper, as if they were jungle trees.
- After the leaf prints dry, use a paintbrush to add flowers, fruit, jungle animals, or even people into the leafy scene.
- Dry completely. Hang on the wall, if desired, to view the Rousseau-style jungle print.

Materials Needed:

- Flat leaves and ferns
- Tempera Paint
- Homemade paint roller (brayer)
- Flat pan/cookie sheet
- White drawing paper
- Lots of scrap paper

- Paintbrush