

February 1–April 26, 2009

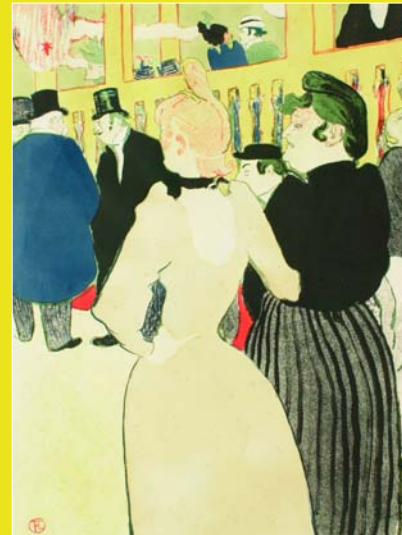
# Toulouse-Lautrec and PARIS

## THE CLARK

## Toulouse-Lautrec and Paris

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) was, in the words of one prominent critic, “the quintessential chronicler of Paris, as it is understood by those who come here seeking bright lights and wild pleasures.” Over the course of twenty years, he produced works in a wide range of media depicting dance halls, theaters, circuses, and the celebrities who performed in them—images that have come to define our vision of the era. *Toulouse-Lautrec and Paris* celebrates the Clark’s extensive collection of the artist’s work, exploring the themes and sites that inspired his imagery.

Toulouse-Lautrec’s earliest works frequently depict members of his aristocratic family; when he began his formal artistic training in 1882, he painted professional models. Outside the art school environment, however, he chose the ordinary people in his Montmartre neighborhood as his subjects. As he became more confident with his



brush, he also became more comfortable within the social networks of bohemian Paris. He began to frequent theaters and dance halls like the Folies Bergères and the Moulin de la Galette, where he met artists, poets, and others attracted by the city’s nightlife. These venues also offered professional opportunities, as cabaret owners often commissioned their artist patrons to design posters to advertise their events and productions. Places of entertainment are the subject of many of the most arresting images

designed by Toulouse-Lautrec during the 1890s. Performance and spectatorship are recurring themes in these works, underlining the importance of both seeing and being seen in the social drama of urban life. By about 1890, Toulouse-Lautrec was a regular visitor to popular dance halls and cabarets like the Moulin Rouge and Le Mirliton, where he soon became friendly with many of the star performers, including Jane Avril, La Goulue, Yvette Guilbert, and the American dancer Loïe Fuller.

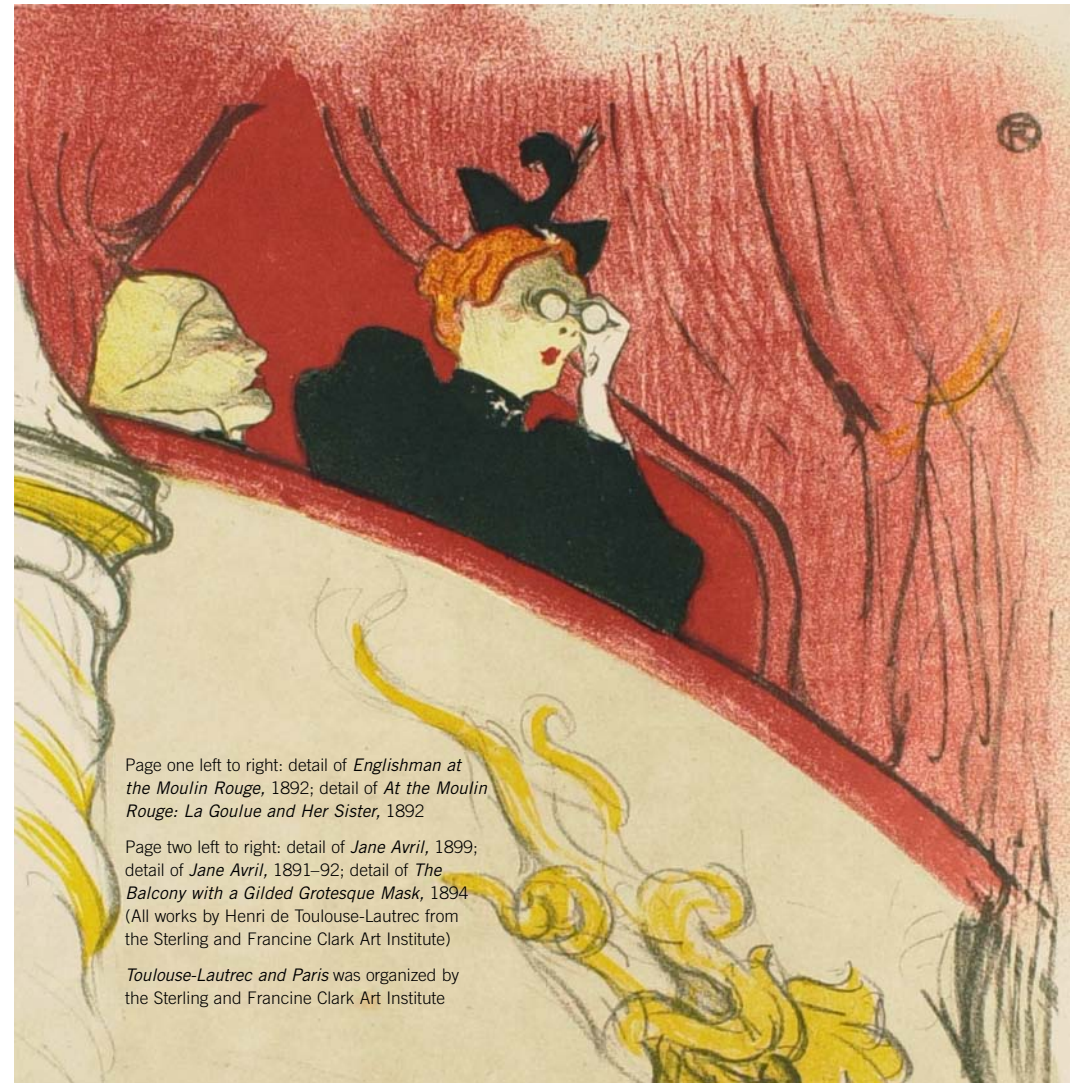


The Parisian street, where the wide variety of the capital's inhabitants necessarily crossed each other's paths, had long been a subject for artists, and street life fascinated Toulouse-Lautrec and his contemporaries. Toulouse-Lautrec frequently focused on interactions between the sexes, particularly those involving young, working-class women and well-to-do men. In this way the street served as an open-air theater, the backdrop to social display, comical encounters, and—potentially—sexual transactions. Private life, too, preoccupied him. Toulouse-Lautrec paid extended visits to the brothels of Montmartre, making candid portraits of the occupants, who were often his friends. Some of these images are drawn with sympathy and tenderness, while others are voyeuristic and almost cruel.

The grand spectacles of the circus and the racecourse also fascinated Toulouse-Lautrec. He had been an avid rider as a youth, and horses on the track and in the ring were the subjects of many of his earliest drawings. He produced exhilarating paintings and prints of acrobats and jockeys intermittently in the 1870s and 1880s, and returned to these themes with renewed vigor during his last years. Toulouse-Lautrec made these late circus drawings entirely from memory, while he was institutionalized as a result of his struggles with alcohol and disease.

## Toulouse-Lautrec and the Clark

Sterling and Francine Clark began collecting Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs in the 1920s, when they lived in Paris. They acquired their first painting by the artist in 1938, adding three more over the next thirteen years. Shortly after the Clark opened in 1955, these works were complemented by the purchase of an exceptional group of prints collected by Dr. Herbert L. Michel of Chicago, including a complete set of Toulouse-Lautrec's series *Elles*. The Clark's holdings thus provide an overview of nearly every aspect of Toulouse-Lautrec's output, and a vibrant picture of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century.



Page one left to right: detail of *Englishman at the Moulin Rouge*, 1892; detail of *At the Moulin Rouge: La Goulue and Her Sister*, 1892

Page two left to right: detail of *Jane Avril*, 1899; detail of *Jane Avril*, 1891–92; detail of *The Balcony with a Gilded Grotesque Mask*, 1894  
(All works by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute)

*Toulouse-Lautrec and Paris* was organized by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute