

Toulouse Lautrec

The Paris of Toulouse-Lautrec

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is the last great realist painter of the 19th century. Though born into one of the oldest aristocratic families in France his ugliness and short stature made him incompatible for the traditional pursuits of the nobility: marriage and hunting. Instead he trained in Paris as a painter and lived in the Bohemian artistic circles of his day frequenting the night world of Montmartre. He spent most of his evenings in the two great dance halls of the 1890's the Elysée-Montmartre and the Moulin Rouge where he met and befriended the famous can-can dancers and singers, - La Goulue, Jane Avril, Valentin the "Boneless", Yvette Guilbert, Aristide Bruant - of Montmartre and Pigalle but also the night birds, champagne salesmen, musicians, gigolos, prostitutes and their clients.

These are the figures that people his art, painted unsentimentally, often with a cruel humour but also a great empathy. They will also figure in his famous show posters for the Moulin Rouge, the Chat Noir, the Divan Japonais and other cabarets of Montmartre, their vivid colors, stylised contours and playful lettering forever defining the Paris of the "gay nineties."

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