

Henri Rousseau (French, 1844–1910)

*Exotic Landscape*, 1910

Oil on canvas

A low-level bureaucrat in the toll collector’s office of the Paris city government, Rousseau received no formal training as an artist. Frankly naive, richly imagined dreamscapes like this scene of humanoid monkeys at play earned him the affection of avant-garde artists and writers, including Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire, who nicknamed him “Le Douanier” (the Customs Officer). Rousseau referred to his jungle landscapes as “my Mexican pictures,” claiming they were inspired by his military service in Mexico. But in fact Le Douanier had most likely never left France. His compositions packed with exotic flora and fauna were based on a careful study of picture books and animals at the Paris zoo.

The Norton Simon Foundation, F.1971.3.P