

Norton Simon Museum For Immediate Release

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By Day & by Night: Paris in the Belle Époque

October 4, 2019–March 2, 2020

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *By Day & by Night: Paris in the Belle Époque*, an exhibition that surveys the rich range of artistic responses to life in the French capital during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this time, later dubbed the *belle époque*, or “beautiful era,” Paris was at the forefront of urban development and cultural innovation. Its citizens witnessed the construction of the Eiffel Tower, the ascendancy of the Montmartre district as an epicenter for art and entertainment and the brightening of their metropolis under the glow of electric light. For artists like Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Edgar Degas and Pablo Picasso, however, it was often the less triumphant details of modern life that inspired creative expression. The paintings, drawings, prints and photographs in this exhibition demonstrate that these artists participated in the inventive spirit of the age by interpreting the everyday as something extraordinary.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (French, 1864–1901)
At the Cirque Fernando, Rider on a White Horse, 1887–1888
Pastel and drained oil on board
23-5/8 x 31-1/4 in. (60 x 79.5 cm)
Norton Simon Art Foundation

The graphic arts—and color lithography in particular—enjoyed something of a renaissance in the belle époque, and many painters turned to printmaking as a newly compelling medium, one that invited bold aesthetic experimentation while broadening the potential market for avant-garde art. *By Day & by Night* features three of the most groundbreaking suites of lithographs produced in this period: Pierre Bonnard’s *Some Aspects of Life in Paris* (1899), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s *Elles* (1896) and Édouard Vuillard’s *Landscapes and Interiors* (1899).

Some Aspects of Life in Paris summons viewers on a stroll through the city (which, not coincidentally, is how Bonnard derived inspiration for the series). Images of bustling streets, famous monuments and a crowded theater position the spectator as a participant in the action by using abrupt compositional cropping and oblique points of view to situate our visual perspective within the scene. In *House in the Courtyard*, the artist has aligned the margins of his composition with the frame of a window, obliging us to enact the process of peering past the open shutters to glimpse a neighbor across the way. Alongside this dynamic portfolio of prints are photographs by Eugène Atget, who famously captured overlooked oddities in Paris, such as a cluster of strangers viewing a solar eclipse. Working in the medium of oil paint, Camille Pissarro also sought to convey the common urban experience of navigating a crowd. His lively depiction of a poultry market in the Parisian suburb of Pontoise (1882) suggests that the viewer is a potential customer or a fellow *vendeur*, squeezing past a woman in a red head scarf with a basket full of fresh eggs.

Toulouse-Lautrec is best known for colorful interpretations of the performers and personalities associated with the bohemian neighborhood of Montmartre. But in addition to his humorous and exaggerated style of draftsmanship, the artist also perfected a thoughtful and sensitive approach to depicting female subjects, regardless of their station in life. In his lithographic suite *Elles*, a series of images depicting the lifestyle of a kept woman, we are invited into the intimate spaces of bedrooms and the boudoir—yet rather than emphasizing titillating details, Toulouse-Lautrec focuses on the banality and even boredom of the subjects' daily routines. On the other side of the spectrum, the artist's dynamic pastel *At the Cirque Fernando, Rider on a White Horse* (1887–88) dramatizes the sensation of movement by representing a bareback circus performer as she whips by on her mount. This interest in depicting life in Paris as it unfolds was likely inspired by Edgar Degas, whose work Toulouse-Lautrec greatly admired. Degas also depicted the city's many female performers, and *By Day & by Night* features several works that show women in their dressing rooms or onstage, such as his diminutive pastel *Café-Concert Singer* (c. 1877). Other artists, in contrast, turned their attention to those who patronized the concert halls of Paris. A twenty-year-old Pablo Picasso, newly arrived in the city, drew a scene of dressed-up spectators in his *Moulin Rouge* (1901), while the Italian expatriate Giovanni Boldini elegantly captured a man out on the town in his pastel *Portrait of a Dandy* (1880–90).

In addition to making drawings, paintings and limited-edition print portfolios, artists like Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec used lithography to make large-scale, dynamically designed posters, which were plastered throughout Paris to advertise products from champagne and lamp oil to literary journals and famous nightclub entertainers. *By Day & by Night* includes six iconic posters, generously lent by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to demonstrate the pervasiveness of visual art in a city increasingly associated with the ubiquity of printed images.

At the same time, not all of the era's artists were drawn to busy street scenes or the dazzling world of theater. In a departure from these more publicly oriented works, the exhibition also includes Vuillard's vividly patterned series *Landscapes and Interiors*, which demonstrates the artist's fascination with personal subjectivity and ways in which to render it pictorially through texture, color and the articulation of space. One of a group of artists known as the "Nabis," the Hebrew word for prophet or seer, Vuillard was drawn to quiet moments—friends and family playing chess or tidying the house. Even his street scenes convey calm and serenity rather than the frenzied bustle of Bonnard's parks and boulevards. Joining this portfolio of prints are two small paintings by Vuillard, *The Dressmakers under the Lamp* (c. 1891–92) and *Lucie Hessel* (c. 1905), both depicting women who were important to the artist, as well as subdued and even somber works by fellow Nabis Ker-Xavier Roussel and Maurice Denis.

The belle époque is often imagined as a golden age of spectacle and joie de vivre. Yet as the works of art in this exhibition demonstrate, the experience of daily life was as often the impetus for bold artistic expression, as evident in the spellbinding array of scenes and personalities in *By Day & by Night: Paris in the Belle Époque*.

By Day & by Night: Paris in the Belle Époque is organized by Emily Talbot, Acting Chief Curator at the Norton Simon Museum. A series of events will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition, which is on view in the Museum's lower-level exhibition galleries October 4, 2019, through March 2, 2020.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.