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ENIGMATIC WORLD OF HENRI ROUSSEAU PREMIERES TO U.S. AUDIENCES AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON JULY 16–OCTOBER 15, 2006



Henri Rousseau (1844 - 1910)

Tropical Forest with Monkeys, 1910

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, John Hay Whitney Collection, 1982.76.7

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Washington, DC –The late-blooming career of Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), a self-taught French artist and savvy connoisseur of popular culture in the late 19th century, will be showcased in the first major American retrospective of the artist's work in 20 years. **Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris**, on view at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, July 16 through October 15, 2006—the only U.S. venue—celebrates the broad range of his work: landscapes of Paris

and environs, allegories, portraits, as well as the largest grouping ever assembled of his iconic jungle paintings. An extensive display of more than 100 documents, popular ephemera, and other source material will shed light on Rousseau's artistic ambitions, working method, and the world he inhabited. The exhibition was on view at Tate Modern, November 3, 2005 through February 5, 2006, and the Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, March 15 through June 19, 2006.

"Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris presents a rare opportunity to explore the work of this intriguing artist and to understand how it set the stage for some of the groundbreaking innovations of modernism," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are proud to present this dynamic exhibition with loans from public and private collections worldwide to the American public."

The exhibition was organized by Tate Modern, London, and Réunion des musées nationaux and Musée d'Orsay, Paris, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Exhibition Support and Organization

Major support for this exhibition was provided by the George Andreas Foundation.

The exhibition is sponsored in part by the National Automobile Dealers Association.

"The National Automobile Dealers Association is pleased to be part of the Henri Rousseau exhibition. Our partnership with the National Gallery of Art is but one way auto retailers are continuing their generous support of the arts," said Phillip D. Brady, president, National Automobile Dealers Association.

The exhibition is sponsored by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Henri Rousseau (1844-1910)

Born in the market town of Laval, France, Henri Rousseau moved to Paris in 1868 and remained there for the rest of his life. He served as a customs clerk on the outskirts of the city, a post which earned him

the nickname “Le Douanier” (the customs agent). A self-taught artist, Rousseau was unable to paint full time until his early retirement in 1893. Despite these unfavorable circumstances, Rousseau had grand ambitions, hoping to join the refined artists of the conservative French Academy. As an outsider, Rousseau was unfamiliar with the rules of the artistic establishment. Although he worked in traditional genres, producing landscapes, portraits, allegories, and exotic scenes, they were transformed in his hands, made odd in a way that provoked ridicule by traditionalists. Often Rousseau turned to the popular culture of his time and class—illustrated magazines, dime-store adventure novels, postcards, and photographs—integrating its dramatic subjects and bold graphic style into his paintings

Rousseau was best known for his bold pictures of the jungle, overflowing with flora and fauna. But this painter of exotic locales never left France; his exotic paintings were the concoctions of a city dweller, shaped by visits to the botanical gardens, the zoo, colonial expositions, and images of distant lands seen in books and magazines. Towards the end of his life, Rousseau was championed by a younger generation of avant-garde painters, writers, and their associates, including Pablo Picasso and the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, who saw in his work new possibilities for the future in his work. In 1911, the year after his death, the Salon des Indépendants celebrated his achievements with an exhibition of more than 40 paintings.

Exhibition

The exhibition is organized thematically, as follows:

Surprised: *Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)* (1891) was Rousseau’s first jungle picture. The subject matter of this work was not unusual for the time, but Rousseau’s style—its bold lines and flat planes of bright palettecolor—provoked mostly negative reviews, and it was more than a decade before he returned to the jungle theme.

Forest Pictures: Filled with both enchantment and menace, Rousseau’s earliest exhibited works—*Carnival Evening* (1886), *Promenade in the Forest* (c. 1886), and *Rendezvous in the Forest* (1889)—introduced mysterious images of costumed figures, strangely situated in forests.

Suburban Landscapes: Although Rousseau directed most of his efforts toward large-scale canvases for Salon submissions, he needed to sell paintings to support himself. Rousseau chose subjects designed to appeal to his petit-bourgeois clientele, who wanted familiar scenes to decorate their homes. In these modest pictures, the artist offers a tranquil vision of Paris, accented with signs of modernity, but free from the chaos of the modern metropolis, as can be seen in *The Customs Post* (c. 1890) and *View of Malakoff, Paris Region* (1908).

Allegories: Rousseau, like many of his social class, supported the government of the newly formed Third Republic. He courted its cultural authorities with patriotic allegories, such as *The Representatives of Foreign Powers Coming to Greet the Republic as a Sign of Peace* (1907). In *A Centennial of Independence* (1892), the colorful group of dancing figures was borrowed from an illustration in *Le Petit Journal*, for which Rousseau served briefly as a sales representative.

Portraits: Rousseau's portraits represent some of his most unsettling paintings, inhabited by fiercely independent children in *To Celebrate the Baby* (1903); sitters given peculiar, unexplained props in *Portrait of Monsieur X (Pierre Loti)* (c. 1910); and familiar subjects with odd expressions in *Portrait of the Artist's Second Wife* (1900-1903). Several portraits depict the most important women in his life: his first wife, Clémence, who died in 1888, in *Portrait of a Lady* (1895-97), and the Polish Yadvigha in *Portrait of a Woman* (1895), an early love and a recurring figure in his exotic works.

Jungle Paintings: In contrast to the solitary tiger seen in *Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)*, Rousseau's later jungle animals often appeared as social creatures, even as human stand-ins. *Fight between a Tiger and a Buffalo* (1908) shows the central beasts locked in struggle, while in *The Merry Jesters* (1906) monkeys play with back scratchers and a milk bottle. *Tropical Forest with Monkeys* (1910) depicts two monkeys fishing, an activity often seen in his suburban landscapes. As his contemporaries recognized, there was nothing realistic about Rousseau's jungles: he freely mixed flora and fauna from different environments, and transformed species to create fantastic worlds. *The Dream* (1910), depicting a nude woman reclining on a velvet couch in the jungle, brings together the

domestic and the exotic; the work mystified much of its audience but won the acclaim of the avant-garde.

The Exotic in 19th-Century Popular Culture: Against the backdrop of colonial expansion, France witnessed a growing fascination with the exotic. Rousseau's jungle paintings draw upon the French popular understanding of these far-off places and cultures. Rousseau was a frequent visitor to the Museum of Natural History and the Jardin des Plantes (the surrounding zoo and botanical gardens) as well as numerous colonial expositions held in Paris in the last decades of the 19th century. He was also an eager scavenger of images from a variety of printed sources, which he adapted and transformed in his paintings.

Visitors to the exhibition will see a broad selection of documentary material showing how the exotic was represented in 19th-century French popular culture. Materials include tabloid-style illustrated magazines; photographs and souvenirs from the Paris zoo and botanical gardens; monumental bronze sculptures of struggling man and beast by the artist-in-residence at the Paris Museum of Natural History, Emmanuel Frémiet; ephemera from colonial expositions and World's Fairs; and popular adventure tales by Jules Verne and Rudyard Kipling. The exhibition includes a taxidermy display from the zoological collections of the Paris Museum of Natural History which served as a source for one of Rousseau's most famous paintings, *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* (1905). An excerpt of a documentary film produced by the Gallery and narrated by award-winning actor Kevin Kline features archival and present-day footage of the Parisian parks, gardens, and greenhouses that fueled Rousseau's imagination. It will be shown continuously in the exhibition.

Curators, Catalogue, and Related Activities

Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris is organized by Christopher Green, professor of art history, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and Frances Morris, curator and head of displays, Tate Modern, London, with Claire Frèches-Thory, conservateur général, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. The display of documents, popular ephemera, and source material was organized by Vincent Gille, chargé de mission, Pavillon des Arts, Paris, and Nancy Ireson, assistant curator, National

Gallery, London. The exhibition was coordinated for the Washington venue by Leah Dickerman, associate curator, modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Published by Harry N. Abrams, the catalogue includes essays by Green, Morris, Ireson, Gille, Frèches-Thory, as well as John House, Courtauld Institute of Art, and Pascal Rousseau, University of Lausanne. The essays offer a comprehensive overview of Rousseau's career as well as insights into the sources that inspired his work. The catalogue also includes previously unpublished reproductions of his sources alongside his paintings. The catalogue is available for \$50 in hardcover and \$35 in softcover. To order call 1-(800)-697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov (224 pp., 100 color and 45 black-and-white).

The National Gallery of Art is planning a full program of related lectures, tours, and concerts.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Ave. NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the Fourth Street Entrance of the East or West Building to permit X-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. Any items larger than 17 X 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms. For the safety of the art work and visitors, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely

in some other manner must be left at the checkrooms.

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