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Au Moulin Rouge (recto)

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Scène de Café (verso)

LOUIS VALTAT

1869 Dieppe - Paris 1952

Au Moulin Rouge (recto); *Scène de Café* (verso)

Pastel (recto), pastel and watercolour (verso) on firm greyish-brown paper; 1895.¹
646 x 497 mm

PROVENANCE: Acquired directly from the artist by Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939), Paris. Inscribed on a handwritten label on the backing board: *L. VALTAT / 3 Au Moulin Rouge 1895 / Pastel / 63 x 49 cm / PN 18 124 val* (Vollard's stock number); a later Vollard label on the backing board bears the handwritten stock number *20 759* – Probably by inheritance to Vollard's lover Mme. de Galéa, thence to her son Robert de Galéa, Poissy and Chantilly² – Schröder & Leisewitz Kunsthandel, Bremen (1979) – Private collection, northern Germany

EXHIBITION: *Louis Valtat 1869-1952*, Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris, 21 March-11 April 1963, no. 6

Louis Valtat began his artistic studies in 1887 under Gustave Moreau at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He went on to complete his training at the Académie Julian, where he met Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard and Albert André. His early career reflects an interest in Impressionism. He was also attracted by the work of van Gogh and Gauguin and their expressive use of colour. He engaged with contemporary artistic trends such as divisionism and the unconventional approach of Les Nabis, a group of young French painters. He was a regular exhibitor at the Salon des Indépendants from 1893 and showed paintings and prints at the Salon des Cent in 1894. In the same year he worked alongside Toulouse-Lautrec and André on the stage set for the first production of Aurélien Lugné-Poë's *Le Chariot de terre cuite* at the avant-garde Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris. Lautrec's influence is reflected in Valtat's own choice of motif and his images of the city's vibrant night life with its boulevards, bars, cafe-concerts, clubs, variety shows and dance halls. Oils such as *Le Couple au Lapin Agile* [Fig. 1] and *Chez Maxim's* [Fig. 2] – both executed in 1895 – saw him adopt the simplified forms and flat areas of colour he had seen in Lautrec's work.³ But this Lautrecian approach was short-lived. Only a small number of Valtat's works are stylistically related to the present sheet. One of these is the pastel *Aux Courses* [Fig. 3], executed in 1895-6. He was soon to embark on a brighter, more optimistic portrayal of contemporary French life and from 1914 onwards focused on flower pieces, marine paintings and landscapes. Many of these works are marked by colouristic and formal experimentation, producing semi-abstract patterns of intertwining colours and shapes.

The recto of the present sheet depicts an apparently casual, randomly chosen excerpt of Parisian nightlife that captures the atmosphere of an evening at the Moulin Rouge. The centre of the image is occupied by a woman in a cape or stola seated on a bench. Her lips are painted a vivid red and her

¹ The sheet originally bore the initials *L. V.* in the lower right corner. They are visible in a photo certificate dated 1975. It is likely that the initialing was lost when the outer edge of the sheet was restored.

² On Vollard's death his private collection was divided up between his brother Lucien, his lover Mme. de Galéa and her son. During World War II the collection was housed in Robert de Galéa's two properties in Poissy and Chantilly. It was dispersed after 1949. (See Maryline Assante di Panzillo, 'The Dispersal of the Vollard Collection', in *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde*, exhib. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2006, pp. 258-62.)

³ For comparable works by Toulouse-Lautrec, see Richard Thomson, Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Weaver Chapin, *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre*, exhib. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington and The Art Institute of Chicago, 2005.

brown hair is crowned with a floral headpiece. A gauze veil partially hides her watchful gaze. At her left a hastily sketched figure with pointed chin, sharp mask-like features and an oddly shaped headdress turns towards her. The curved back of a chair is shown in the right foreground while the outlines of an arm, truncated at the shoulder, suggest the presence of a seated male figure. A pair of yellow columns define the middle ground, where groups of diners are seated. Behind them, a jostling crowd fills the dance floor. It is unclear whether the scene depicted behind the woman is viewed directly or in fact a reflection in a mirror. Lautrec's famous painting, *Au Moulin Rouge* [Fig. 5] depicts a similarly ambiguous spatial situation.

In an essay titled 'Dance Halls' published in the 2005 exhibition catalogue *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre* Richard Thomson describes the Moulin Rouge and its public: *The Moulin Rouge had been opened by Charles Zidler and his partner Joseph Oller in October 1889. . . . Like the Jardin de Paris, the Moulin Rouge put forward a range of attractions. The dance floor featured high-profile chahuteuses such as La Goulue or Môme Fromage; a stage accommodated café-concert performances by singers from the popular Yvette Guilbert to the famous Le Pétomane; the garden offered donkey rides and skittle alleys; and new entertainments such as processions and costume balls regularly appeared to catch the public's eye. That public varied over the course of the evening, with the café concert enjoyed early by the local petite bourgeoisie, and the quadrilles beginning at 9:30 with the arrival of the smarter crowd. Oller and Zidler had craftily located their new pleasure facility on the boulevard de Clichy, one of the outer boulevards that separated stylish central Paris from lower-rent Montmartre. Placed on a porous class frontier, it encouraged the frisson of class mixture. . . . The proprietors would have been well aware that their flashy commercial attractions thrived on the black economy of prostitution. Of course they did not profit from this directly, but the barely discrete presence of prostitutes on their premises served as a lure to their clientele.*⁴

In his painting *L'Anglais au Moulin Rouge* [Fig. 6], Lautrec portrays a dapper stranger addressing two stylishly dressed vamps. Could the woman depicted in the present pastel be awaiting a prospective admirer? The moment Valtat captures is frozen in time and its outcome is left to the viewer's imagination. The juxtaposition of vibrant blue pastel with areas of yellow, the robust ductus and forceful freedom of line, coupled with the choice of greyish-brown paper, reveal the true extent of Lautrec's stylistic influence on the young Valtat. It is illuminating to compare Valtat's pastel with Lautrec's oil and pastel portrait of *May Milton* [Fig. 7].

Valtat's *Scène de Café* – executed in watercolour and pastel on the verso of the present sheet – is a further example of Lautrec's influence. Valtat traces the contours of the figures with fluid, economical brushstrokes and fills untouched areas with broad internal hatching in pastel. Lautrec used this approach in his prints – for example in the lithograph *L'Anglais au Moulin Rouge* (1892) [Fig. 8]. Valtat also took up the cafe/bar theme in his painting *Chez Maxim's* [Fig. 2] – this time depicting a more sophisticated ambiance – and again, in the milieu study *À la Brasserie*, a pastel of circa 1896 [Fig. 4]. The present watercolour and pastel depicts a woman who, like the young man in black to her left, appears to be observing or listening while her bowler-hatted companion focuses his attention on his newspaper. A champagne glass stands on the table in front of the woman and a glass of red wine beside the man. While the absinthe drinkers of Manet, Degas and Picasso might immediately spring to mind, Valtat's intention here was not to portray isolation, emptiness and personal tragedy.

Accompanied by a certificate issued by Dr. Jean Valtat, dated 27 March 1975, on the verso of a photograph of the present pastel (recto).

⁴ Richard Thomson, 'Dance Halls', in *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre*, op. cit., p. 111 f.

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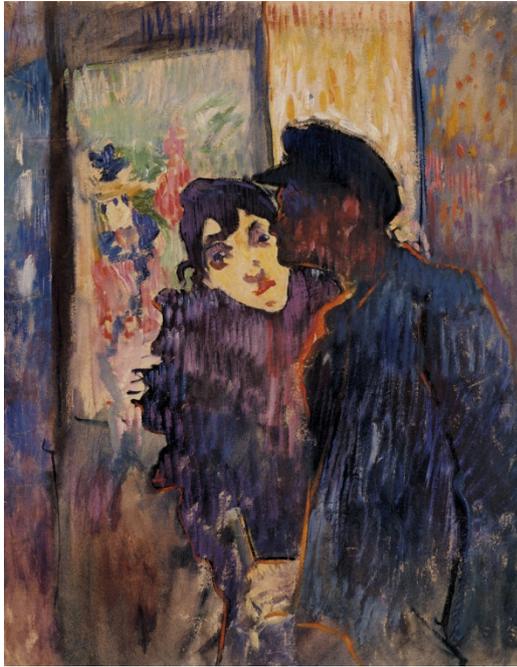


Fig. 1: *Le Couple au cabaret du Lapin Agile*, c.1895
Oil on paper, 79.9 x 62.1 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto [inv. 1970, 71/355]

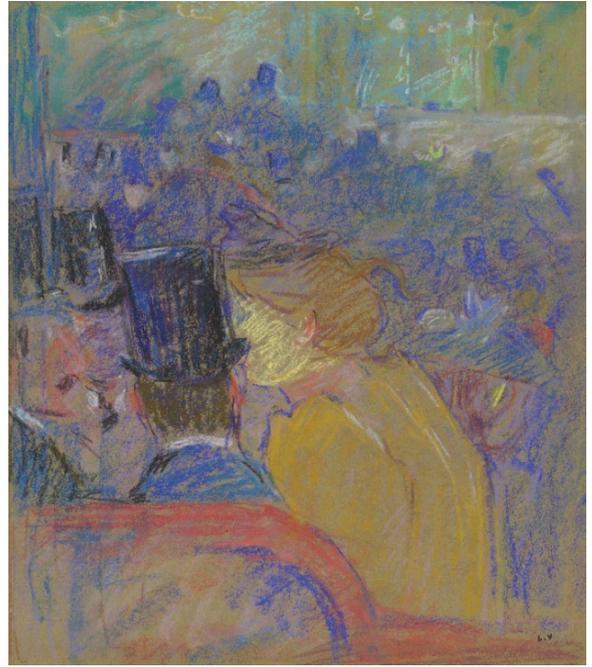


Fig. 3: *Aux Courses*, c.1895-6
Pastel on brownish paper, 62.1 x 50.1 cm
Sotheby's, Paris, 1 June 2011, lot 4



Fig. 2: *Chez Maxim's*, 1895
Oil on canvas, 81 x 60 cm
Musée du Petit Palais, Geneva



Fig. 4: *À la Brasserie*, c.1896
Pastel on brownish paper, 63.8 x 50.4 cm
Christie's, London, 21 June 2012, lot 245



Fig. 5: H. de Toulouse-Lautrec,
Au Moulin Rouge, 1892-5
Oil on canvas, 123 x 141 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago [inv. 1928.610]

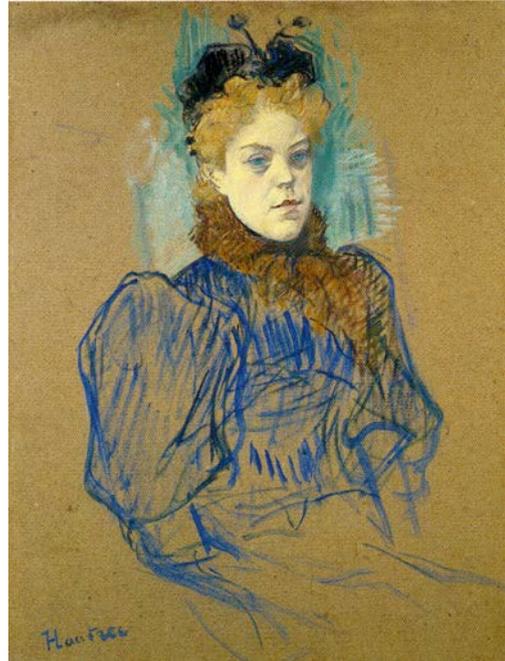


Fig. 7: H. de Toulouse-Lautrec,
May Milton, c.1895
Oil and pastel on cardboard, 66.1 x 49.4 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago [inv. 1949.263]



Fig. 6: H. de Toulouse-Lautrec,
L'Anglais au Moulin Rouge, 1892
Oil and gouache on cardboard, 85.7 x 66 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
[inv. 67.187.108]

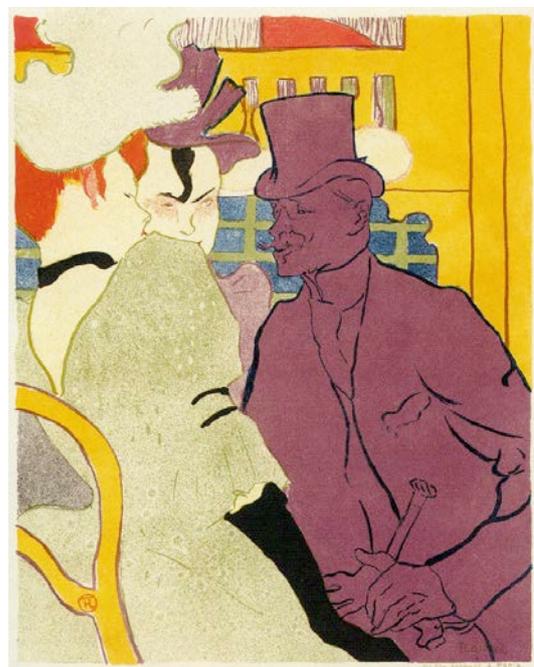


Fig. 8: H. de Toulouse-Lautrec, *L'Anglais au Moulin Rouge*, 1892
Colour lithograph, image: 52.7 x 37.3 cm
(Wittrock 2, 2nd state)