

EXHIBITION

Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen (1859-1923) The Centenary Exhibition



EXHIBITION DATES

From October 13, 2023 to February 11, 2024

Inauguration: Thursday October 12, 2023
at 6.30 p.m.

Press: Wednesday October 11, 2023 at 9 a.m.

EXHIBITION CURATORS

Leïla Jarbouai, Chief Curator of Graphic Arts
and Paintings at the Musée d'Orsay

Saskia Ooms, former Head of Conservation
at the Musée de Montmartre

With the scientific contribution
of Aurore Janson, Assistant Curator
at the Musée de Montmartre

Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen

La rentrée du soir, vers 1885

Oil on canvas, 65 x 50 cm

Association des amis du Petit Palais de Genève,

© Studio Monique Bernaz

'Actions speak louder than words. The world is not as it should be.'

Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, 1898

The Musée de Montmartre is devoting an exhibition to Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen (1859–1923), an emblematic Montmartre artist of the end of the nineteenth century. The exhibition, which is being held from 13 October 2023 to 11 February 2024, marks the centenary of the artist's death; it pays tribute to this unclassifiable and multifaceted artist, who was a draughtsman, engraver, painter, and sculptor, and who belonged to one school only—the school of freedom.



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Apothéose des chats*, 1905, oil on canvas, 164,5 x 300 cm © Studio Monique Bernaz, Genève



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Le cri des opprimés* ou *La Libératrice*, 1903, oil on canvas, 114 x 146 cm. Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Genève © Studio Monique Bernaz

A common theme is evident in his extremely prolific oeuvre: that of commitment, as the artist combined art and politics, by acting as a critical witness of his time. Steinlen disseminated his motifs from one technique and medium to another, as he worked in the illustrated press, illustrated books, and made posters and paintings. The human population, and also the cat population, which resembled a carnival-like duplicate of the human population but with an irrevocable animal strangeness, were the main subjects of the artist, who also practised traditional genres of painting, in particular the nude and landscapes. Wary of all the art movements, Steinlen believed in the social and political dimension of art, as a voice and path towards a better world.

After he produced the iconic poster *La Tournée du Chat Noir*, Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen was henceforth associated with the artistic and bohemian

life in Montmartre—an emblematic district of Paris that became legendary in 1900—at the end of the nineteenth century. Originating from Lausanne, in Switzerland, he settled on his arrival in Paris in 1881 in the Butte Montmartre area, where he lived and relentlessly roamed during his lifetime. A member of the Chat Noir cabaret and chief illustrator of the eponymous journal, he frequented the cabaret’s main actors, with whom he collaborated. He contributed to conveying the ‘spirit of Montmartre’, characterised by humour and nonconformism. Because of his association and involvement with the Chat Noir, it was entirely logical that the Musée de Montmartre devote an exhibition to this major artist of Montmartre, on the occasion of the centenary of his death.

Driven by the ideas of social justice and freedom, the artist constantly used his pencil to mock and denounce the political, religious, and bourgeois authorities as being oppressive and tyrannical. He thus became the spokesperson of the people, those who lived on the margins of society, and the dispossessed—animals, children, men, and women—, indiscriminately representing their harsh living conditions. Although many have described Steinlen as a militant anarchist, he was in fact a ‘taciturn

destroyer' and a pacifist. During his career and throughout his oeuvre, he used certain preferred iconographic motifs, which he employed using a wide variety of techniques, as indiscriminately as his subjects: press illustrations, posters, prints in all their forms, paintings, pastels, and sculpture. Likewise, he refused any academic classification of his subjects.

The exhibition's chrono-thematic approach retraces Steinlen's career and gives visitors a general idea of his diverse oeuvre through a selection of a hundred works, including a large proportion of oil paintings, which are less well known than his graphic works, which also largely feature in the exhibition, along with sculpture works. **Following the theme of social art, the itinerary focuses on three main areas: Montmartre and Le Chat Noir; the people as an artistic subject and goal; and, lastly, history painting and intimate nudes, the relation between classical genres and the history of art, ever in the service of a political vision of art.**



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Les Mineurs*, 1903, oil on canvas
65 x 50 cm. Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Genève
© Studio Monique Bernaz

- The itinerary begins with the work produced during his early Parisian years, linked to the **Chat Noir cabaret**, already imbued with the artist's convictions and sense of commitment: the anarchist circle he joined inspired Steinlen's social and political interests. The figure of the cat he depicted in this environment was already a symbol of freedom and an emblem of social outcasts. It illustrates Steinlen's observations of human conduct and the relations of domination, along with his large-scale work for illustrations for journals with often radical political stances.

- A second body of work comprises a selection of works that demonstrate the artist's commitment to serving the people: 'Everything comes from the people, and everything comes out of the people. And we are just their bullhorn', wrote Steinlen. In his allegorical works of the popular Revolution against oppression and his paintings illustrating the workers' misery and suffering—peasants, miners, carters, coal sorters, and prostitutes—, Steinlen denounced the harsh social realities. Like a reporter, he even visited the Prison of Saint-Lazare, where the prostitutes were held, and made numerous studies; he used his pencil like a weapon.



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Le 14 juillet*, 1895, oil on canvas
38 x 46 cm. Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Genève
© Studio Monique Bernaz

- The third and final group brings together works inspired by the major academic genres: **history painting, landscapes, and nudes**. Steinlen used the codes of religious painting to depict his dream of a better society. Having lived through the Great War, he used pictorial and graphic means to represent the indescribable, and, faced with the absurdity of human history, began to work on



Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, *Détente*, 1912, oil on canvas, 151 x 151 cm. Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Genève © Studio Monique Bernaz

landscapes. He produced a series of nudes, including those that featured Masséida, a woman of Bambara origins who became the model for works in which Steinlen explored the contemporary notions of exoticism, primitivism, and colonialism. This production of academic genre works should be placed in the continuity of his work inspired by the same social message and humanist outlook: Steinlen continued the tradition of the masters and the classical tradition whose iconographic codes he interpreted with irony, revealing little by little his anti-militarist, anticlerical, and anti-colonial stances.

The exhibition comprises works from the collections of the Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie Le Vieux Montmartre and has benefitted from major institutional loans, in particular from the Musée d'Orsay, the Association des Amis du Petit Palais in Geneva, the Musée de Vernon, and prestigious private collections, including the David E. Weisman & Jacqueline E. Michel Collection. It also includes a selection of Steinlen's works from the Timothy Hanford & J.J. MacNab Collection, which were recently donated to the Musée de Montmartre, thanks to the American Friends of the Musée de Montmartre.

Practical information

Musée de Montmartre Jardins Renoir

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Opening days and hours

The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Bookstore-Shop

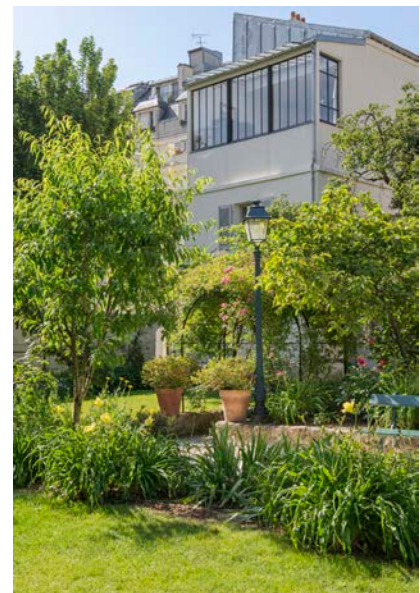
The bookstore-boutique is open during the hours of the museum, including Sundays and public holidays.

Prices

Full price: 15 €
Free for children under 10
Reduced prices from 8 to 12 €

Access

Lamarck-Caulaincourt (line 12)
Antwerp (line 2)
Bus 80
Bus 40



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