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Late works

1899-1901

1. *La gitane*, Théâtre Antoine, 1900, Oil on board
2. *Messaline*, 1900, Oil on canvas
3. *Un examen à la faculté de Paris*, 1901, Oil on canvas

1. 2. THE THEATRE

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a habitué of many kinds of theatre, from the Comédie Française to the avant-garde salons. In 1893, Lautrec returned to the theme of the theatre box, which he had used from 1889, conceived as an inverted theatrical stage. In *The box with the gilded mask*, he offers a take on the human comedy, without detail or anecdotic content. He transcribes disturbing, voyeuristic and enigmatic characters with a bold composition and the use of strong and expressive colours. This stuffy and saturated world reflects the artificiality of fin de siècle bourgeois and aristocratic society. He also caught actors and artists on the stage or in the wings: René Maw Weill (1868-1952), aka *Romain Coolus*, novelist, playwright and scriptwriter, Marthe Mellot in a spontaneous and expressive pose in the preparatory study for the poster for Jean Richepin's play, *La Gitane*. In 1897, he captured the intensity of Berthe Bady's face. The concise style and shapes allow Lautrec to catch the image of the Belgian actress, considered at the turn of the century to be one of the great actresses of her time.

Lautrec depicts the complexity of the world of the stage, with its lights and shadows. He conveys the exaggerations inherent in the theatrical world through the sharpness of his line and the graphic representation it produces. Between mid-December 1900 and April 16 1901, he painted Thérèse Ganne in the guise of *Messalina*, the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius whose scandalous conduct eventually ruined her. Lautrec was fascinated by the atmosphere of licentiousness inspired by play's subject, evinced by suggestive props and backdrops. This play put on at the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux was the source of six paintings in which we see his manner evolving, with the line giving way to more pronounced effects of flat red and dark green areas, characteristic of his later works.

3. THE MEDICAL MILIEU

From his youngest age, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's frail constitution brought him into contact with the medical world. From 1887 until 1891, he discovered another side of it by living at the house of Henri Bourges, a doctor in medicine, at 19 Rue Fontaine where he would meet doctors Würtz, Delaunay and Baumgarten. But it was his cousin, Gabriel Tapié de Céleyran, who came to Paris in 1891 to continue the medical studies he had begun in Lille, who introduced Lautrec to the medical milieu. As an intern in the service of doctor Jules-Emile Péan (1830-1898) from 1891 to 1895, and then as his assistant at the international hospital founded by the surgeon until 1898, Gabriel Tapié de Céleyran opened the doors of the faculty of medicine to his cousin every Saturday morning, which allowed the painter to carry out numerous sketches and paintings of Péan operating. In June 1901, Lautrec began the portrait of his long-time friend, the associate professor Robert Würtz (1858-1919). Lautrec conveys the personality of his model by depicting his large size, the rigid attitude of the body and the severe expression of the face. This oil on board is a preparatory study for *An exam at the faculty of medicine*, where the pose of the man in the foreground is reversed. It is an imaginary reconstruction of his cousin Gabriel Tapié de Céleyran presenting his thesis, an event that took place on March 15th 1899 while Lautrec was interned in Dr Sémelaigne's rest home in Neuilly. Robert Würtz really was a member of the jury, but Lautrec replaced the others, placing his cousin before Dr Alfred Jean Fournier, known for his research on syphilis and alcoholism, perhaps echoing Lautrec's own state of health. In his last works, Lautrec's manner changed: colour took over from line, the paint became thicker, and the palette darkened. The frontal and the horizontal composition, converging on the white paper, the deformed hands and the exaggeratedly large arms in foreground make this work not so much a testament as a sign of a new departure where deformation and emotional language are inseparable.