



1.



2.



3.

The academies

1. *Torse*, 1882, Charcoal
2. *Couple nu, femme assise*, 1882, Charcoal
3. *La comtesse Adèle de Toulouse-Lautrec*, 1882, Charcoal

1. 2. DEPICTING THE REAL

In 1882, Lautrec decided to enrol at the studio of the portraitist and historical painter Léon Bonnat (1833-1922) to perfect his art. He wanted to work on his technique, as he wrote in a letter to his uncle Charles in 1882: “*You need to muster up your courage and start again, and have your rubber ready*”... the teaching which Lautrec followed with Léon Bonnat and then, from 1883 on, with Fernand Cormon (1854-1924), emphasised descriptiveness, mixing objective observation with an academic finish. Lautrec benefitted from Cormon’s teaching for five years and his works show his master’s influence until 1885. In the private studios, the pupils’ work was geared to success in the entrance

competitions for the Fine-Arts Schools where admission was based on two tests: a sketch or composition on a set subject and a figure painted from life.

Lautrec followed the four degrees of teaching and began his apprenticeship drawing from engravings, then from plaster mouldings and lastly from live models. These exercises, often executed in charcoal, obliged him to observe reality, to structure his drawing and capture the real.

3. THE FAMILY, THE FIRST MODELS

The two hundred-odd academy drawings kept by the museum prove Lautrec’s assiduity and seriousness. They show diligent, thorough and sensitive drawing like the 1883 charcoal *Child’s head. Severino Rossi*. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec very often drew his uncle Charles de Toulouse-Lautrec (1838-1917), a patient and attentive model who recognised his nephew’s precocious talent. The technique of charcoal and material itself were often at the centre of their discussions, and Lautrec used this tool for portraiture. He learned this technique with Bonnat, giving form to his model with stripes, shading them by smudging and creating light by rubbing out. Between 1879 and 1886, Lautrec made many portraits of his mother, such as the 1882 charcoal of *Adèle de Toulouse-Lautrec* seated in a barely outlined armchair with her hands on her knees. Here he gives primacy to the face, devoid of all sentimentality, to leave just an intense and severe gaze, underlining the reserve of women from the affluent classes at the end of the nineteenth century. From 1885 on, Lautrec affirmed his own style and technique. With a precise and expressive line, he seizes the morphology of his models, and even more their psychology. He began to get his inspiration from subjects drawn from modernity and treated them with a freer technique. Line began to take over in importance in his work.