



Toulouse-Lautrec and the Brothels

1.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
The salon in the Rue des Moulins, 1894,
Oil on canvas.

The ambivalence between individual portrait and anonymity is at play in the painting *The salon in the Rue des Moulins*.

Great care has been expended on the figures, with careful attention to their features, the prostitutes are individualised and in the foreground, with her leg folded, one can recognise Rolande, who also figures in the study titled *Rolande on the divan*. But despite all that the faces tell us about the individuals, they do not bring any life to the atmosphere of emptiness and silence which haunts this picture. The characters are made uniform in their passivity and by the lack of eye contact between them and the viewer.

This suffocating uniformity is reinforced by the diagonal composition, the lack of opening to the outside world, and by the treatment of the decor with a dull palette of shades of pinks, reds and purples associated with greens.

2.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Woman pulling up her stocking, 1894,
Oil on cardboard.

Lautrec uses the pose of *Study for Woman pulling up her stocking* in a composition with two figures, one naked and one dressed, in a picture kept at the Musée d'Orsay, bearing the same title.

The study is essentially a drawing with a deft and nervous line in mid-violet which has been re-worked in an intense blue, very visible on the legs. The flesh tones placed within the drawn outline indicate the body, but with little modelling. The sketch is completed with colours which underline certain details, a dark green for the arms, a paler blue-green for what looks like a chemise around the woman's neck and a flaming orange red for the hair. The hands, so important for describing gesture, are barely suggested as if Lautrec is challenging the viewer to use his own imagination to complete the line.

3.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Le Divan Rolande, 1894,
Oil on cardboard.

This oil on cardboard is part of a series on the motif of Lesbian intimacy, a fairly common theme in decadent *fin-de-siècle* iconography with its opposition to bourgeois values. These paintings were reserved for gentlemen, often given to friends, and the Albi Museum is one of the few to possess works on this subject.

The scene is depicted with a sobriety which goes beyond simple description to become a purely visual transcription with a daring layout and an extremely modern graphic quality.