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The “Stars”

1. *Jane Avril* © Musée du vieux Montmartre

2. *Aristide Bruant* © Bibliothèque nationale de France

3. *May Milton* © musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi

1. JANE AVRIL

Lautrec portrayed Jane Avril many times, in head and shoulders, standing, full face, in profile and from behind, sensitive to her elegance and to the frenetic dancing of the one they nicknamed *la Mélinite* (an explosive). He conveyed the character of this lively but delicate-natured dancer, who was his friend and whose intelligence he appreciated. In 1893 *Jane Avril at the Jardin de Paris* brings out the solo star as the embodiment of dance. Lautrec offers the portrait of a woman with a sad expression as if prisoner of her frame, even though it takes the form of a musical instrument. In the poster *Le Divan Japonais*, seated beside the musical critic Édouard Dujardin, she becomes the symbol of femininity and elegance. With her triumphs at the Divan Japonais and the Jardin de Paris, she takes on the allure of a woman of the world; beyond her the scrolls of the double basses stick out of the orchestra pit like serpentine arabesques. In 1896, Jane Avril was in London where she went on tour with the quadrille troupe formed by Eglantine Demay. She asked Lautrec to make the poster *La troupe de Mademoiselle Églantine* to announce their show at the Palace Theatre. Using a photograph that she provided, he made a flat and linear graphical transcription, with a rhythm reinforced by the colours laid on in flat areas. In 1899, Jane Avril commissioned a poster from Lautrec which was never printed because the dancer's manager refused it. He used the inkwell process allowing several colours to be printed in a single pass of the machine. After Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's death, Jane Avril gave up dancing to become an actress, then gave up altogether in 1905.

2. ARISTIDE BRUANT

Every one of Lautrec's compositions reflects his concern for legibility, removing all anecdotic elements, as can be seen in the posters he made for Aristide Bruant (1851-1925). This singer and realist composer, opened the *Mirliton* in July 1885. Bruant was such a success that in June 1892 he was engaged to perform at *Les Ambassadeurs*, one of the most important café-concerts of the time; and the following year at the Eldorado. Lautrec designed the poster for the Eldorado using the image created for *Les Ambassadeurs* and inverting it. The signature HTLautrec was replaced by the initials in a circle: this monogram becomes a graphic element. Lautrec created four posters for the singer of Parisian nights, immortalising this friend whom he loved for his banter and capacity to build his own image.

3. SHORT-LIVED STARS

Lautrec also made a portrait of Caudieux, a comic artist nicknamed the canon-man. He suggests the movement with a flat and stylised figure, arbitrarily cut in the foreground. For models he used artists in vogue, Jane Granier for the poster *Confetti* (1894), and Marthe Mellot for the poster *La Gitane*, the last one he designed; Lautrec simplified their features and just kept a welcoming smile or a grin. In 1895, he met the Englishwoman May Milton and made the poster for her American tour; he designed it as a communication tool, paying as much attention to the simplified image as to the effective and pithy message. A witness to his times, Lautrec has left us images of the stars of fin-de-siècle Paris which revolutionised poster technique. His fame is shared with that of the stars of the café-concert.