CHAPTER 7

Henri Toulouse-Lautrec: the questioning of values

Introductory

I must admit that, when I first came to Castelnau de Montmiral, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901) was not one of my favourite artists. Along with many other people, I regarded him as somewhat of a lightweight relative to many of his illustrious contemporaries. However, when I visited the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec in Albi, I found myself changing my mind. I have now been well over one hundred times with students and, in this way, have had ample opportunity to get to know the work exhibited there. As a result, I have developed a very different perspective on the artist that produced it.

As what follows will be illustrated by means of works found in the Musée, it is appropriate to explain that it was gathered together at the artist's death by Maurice Joyant, whom Toulouse-Lautrec had first met at school (the Lycée Condorcet) and who was his gallery-man and friend during the 1890s. It consists of work from the artist's studio and from the collection of earlier works in the possession of his mother.

September 1991 to September 1992 was designated "the year of Toulouse-Lautrec". A big exhibition of the artist's work was held, first in London and, then, in Paris. To mark the occasion, I was asked to write an article for La Revue du Tarn, a scholarly periodical published in Albi.[1] As it has never been made available in English, I present it here, in an abridged and minimally revised version. Its title, "At last I don't know how to draw - Toulouse-Lautrec, the first modern painter", hints at why I feel it appropriate for a discussion of creativity.

1 *'Enfin, je ne sais plus dessiner» Toulouse-Lautrec, Le Premier Peintre Moderne".* La Revue du Tarn, Printemps, 1982, Troisième Série, No 145.

The claim

Perhaps no artist's reputation, one might even say credibility, has suffered more from a combination of myth and mass popularity. Though his posters and his social comment have made him one of the best known of all artists, it is hard to think of a reputable account in English of formal developments in late nineteenth century art in which the formal qualities of his work are taken very seriously. If he appears at all on lists of artists of historical significance it is for being an inventive poster designer, cashing in on the modish Japanese approach.

In this chapter, the case will be argued for putting Toulouse-Lautrec at the top of the list of important precursors of twentieth century painting, alongside Manet, Monet, Cézanne, Seurat, Van Gogh, Gauguin and the rest, and that, indeed, in one important respect, namely that of modernity of outlook, he should possibly be placed above all these. Readers are asked to consider the proposition that he should be given the accolade of "*the first modern painter*" and recognised as the first true embodiment of the spirit of twentieth century art with its compulsion for radical reappraisal and unfettered experimentation.

The argument which follows is original in the sense that it goes beyond the claims of recent apologists, including the organisers of the London/Paris exhibition of works by Toulouse-Lautrec just referred to. These seem to have been too intent upon freeing the artist from his myth and giving him a degree of respectability. In the process, they come very close to damning him with faint praise.

So, what is the myth? It is of the physically deformed and emotionally frustrated aristocrat descending to the low life; of an unsentimental "*eye*" tossing off cruelly "*true*" caricatures, in "*no time at all*", on some handy café tablecloth; of the chronicler of "*La belle époque*" when *Paris* was at a pinnacle of creative ferment; of the habitué of café, dance-hall and brothel; of syphilis and drink; of decadence and debauchery, leading to failing powers and an early death. In short, it is a titillating mixture of truth and half-truth which combines into an overblown nonsense, smacking both of media hype and media myopia, which leaves us with a picture of a slightly dilettante, amateurish and superficial caricaturist, drunkenly basking in the reflected glory of a fabled era.

Nothing could be more misleading. As Richard Thomson points out in the exhibition catalogue, Toulouse-Lautrec was a highly trained, thoroughly professional artist, whose serious work seldom if ever descended to mere caricature and whose evident interest in worldly success never succeeded in suffocating

his overriding need to satisfy his inner-self. To quote Thadée Natanson, who had every opportunity to know him well,[2] "*throughout his life his true nobility lay in the fact that it meant more to him to satisfy himself, which was not easily done, than to achieve success*."

The key to the claim that Toulouse-Lautrec can be considered "*the first modern painter*" lies in the saying attributed to him: "*at last I don't know how to draw*". Significantly, I first came across it in an introduction to a catalogue to an exhibition of drawings by Matisse, being quoted by the great man with evident approval. Its importance lies in the fact that it proclaims the necessity for creative artists to go beyond the known in the production of works of art. Thus, the proposal to be considered is that Toulouse-Lautrec was the first artist consciously to embark on an exploration of the "*unknown*" and that, by doing so, he took a revolutionary and crucial step out of the past and into the future of art.

Influences

Before discussing the special contribution of Toulouse-Lautrec, it should be emphasised that he was very much a part of a milieu in which multitudes of ideas were in the melting pot. Thus, he came to maturity during the epoch of *Impressionism*, with the associated radical questioning of traditional values, and worked alongside other pioneers of modernist tendencies, including not only Vincent Van Gogh and Emile Bernard, whom he met in the studio of Cormon in 1886, but also Bonnard, Vuillard and other members of *La Revue Blanche* crowd, with whom he regularly mingled in the 1890s. Also, from as early as 1882, when he came to Paris to study under Bonnat, he was enthused by the ideas of a radical group calling themselves "*Les Incohérentes"*, with whom he was soon to be exhibiting. These precursors of *Dada*, thumbed their nose at "*serious art*" and proudly exhibited the work of people whom they claimed did not "*know how to draw*".

Although Toulouse-Lautrec himself said, "*I don't belong to any school: I work alone in my corner*," it is not necessary to argue that he was a complete original (if such a thing could exist), but that, earlier than others, he went further in his exploration of certain ideas that were already very much in the air. In particular, as just suggested, he came to recognise that his future lay in the unknown; and how, again and again, he dared to step into it. To illustrate this thesis, a

2 Proprietor of *"La Revue Blanche*", whose ever open-house was frequented by a dazzling list of the Modernists poets, playwrights and artists and where, during parts of the 1890s, Toulouse-Lautrec is said to have spent almost half his time.

number of paintings, drawings and prints have been selected, all of which can be found in the *Musée Toulouse-Lautrec*. Many of them will not be familiar (even in reproduction) to anyone who has not been to *Albi*.[3] This is no coincidence. They have been chosen for the very reason that they illustrate aspects of the artists' work which have been sadly neglected.

The work

Figure 1 Classical scene with tigers

A good starting place is the black and white "*abstract"* shapes at the top of the "*Classical scene with tigers*" illustrated in *Figure 1*, which was painted in 1883, when Toulouse-Lautrec was only nineteen years old. It is very easy to imagine these shapes being painted in the twentieth century, but who else had produced anything like it before? And, look at the head of the more erect of the two tigers. Is the strange, two-dimensional, blocked-out shape merely evidence of a momentary burst of dissatisfaction? Or, does it tell us something more sig-

3 It is difficult to find them in any of the many books on Toulouse-Lautrec and even *Google* cannot find them.

nificant? Even if the artist did produce it in a moment of anger or self-disgust, why did he leave it unchanged? Was the painting simply abandoned as a failure or was it kept to sow the seeds of future thoughts? Certainly, if Toulouse-Lautrec did regard this painting as a finished product (and the existence of the signature in the corner rather suggests that he did) he was, by doing so, demonstrating a remarkably "*Modern*" outlook. It is difficult to imagine anyone versed in *Twentieth Century* art failing to sense a connection between the incongruous tiger's head and the bizarre mask-like superimpositions that, more than anything else, made Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* one of the great watershed paintings of *twentieth century* art. It is even more difficult to avoid making an association between the group of dancing figures on the left and Matisse's *La Danse*, another ground breaking work. Notice, in particular, the drawing (simplification) of the dark figure on the extreme left. Could Picasso or Matisse, both well attested admirers of Toulouse-Lautrec, have known this little painting? It is probably too fanciful to suppose they could, but the fact remains that it is a painting pregnant with hints as to what the future might hold.[4]

The room in the *Musée Toulouse-Lautrec*, in which the original of *Figure 1* is found, is almost entirely dedicated to early works, many done while the artist was learning his craft in the studio of the Academic artist Cormon. The assemblage of paintings provides a remarkable testimony to a restless spirit trying out a gamut of different possibilities, mostly derivative, veering from the "*academic*" to the "*progressive*", but over and over again (though by no means always) remarkably well achieved. One gets the feeling that Toulouse-Lautrec could have mastered anything. But it is also clear that nothing he did really satisfied him. He was always looking for something else; some more meaningful means of expression. Perhaps one can sense a young man caught, like so many of us, between two needs: the need for the safety of the "*known*" and the need for the challenge of the "*unknown*".

The drawing illustrated in *Figure 2* again shows the young Toulouse-Lautrec in adventurous mood. It is of the head of a woman looking through a partially open lattice-work door. It has the superficial appearance of a slightly awkward sketch and one might easily pass it by, but a close look shows how carefully it has been thought out and how astonishingly modern it is. Three elements catch the attention: the left eye of the woman (that is to say, on the right-hand side of the

4 Although both would have had the opportunity to go to the posthumous exhibition put on by Maurice Joyant in Paris in 1901

picture); the lock; and the lattice-work. None are drawn with the confident line of which we know the artist was capable. Some might even call it "*bad drawing*" (a criticism that could be levelled at much of the work of Toulouse-Lautrec), but to me every mark is redolent of a tentative search for something not quite understood, of a process of tiptoeing cautiously and questioningly into the "*unknown*". And, just look at the other eye (or, rather, lack of it) as well as at the orange shadow on the right hand side of the face which defines where it must be. What an extraordinarily forward-looking passage of drawing.

Figure 2: Woman looking through lattice work doorway

Also, worth noticing, for what it indicates about the thought processes of the artist, is the pale vertical line in the space to the left of the image. In the original, it is scarcely visible, for it has been carefully covered with white in an obvious attempt to obscure it from view.[5] What does this careful camouflage mean? Surely, it indicates that the artist was deeply involved with the placement on the page of his image. He had obviously tried something out and then rejected it, eschewing

5 We can suppose that with time the covering paint has become more translucent.

the balance that would have been provided by the obscured line and opting for a daring displacement of the image towards the right. This is a patently thoughtful move and makes clear that the result is the opposite of a lightly tossed-off sketch. On the contrary, it is the product of a very mature painterly intelligence, one which seems to belong more to the twentieth century than to the nineteenth and which has much in common with the mature drawing of Bonnard. This may be no coincidence for both were habitués of the Nathenson household in the 1890's the two artists were to become friends and collaborators.

Figure 3: Man in a hat

Figure 3, again an early work, hammers home the same point. Just look at the way the image of the man in a hat is constructed. What an amazing collection of marks. How could anyone's thought-processes lead them to such a seemingly unimaginable placement? I find it difficult to conceive of a drawing of such transparent purposefulness that could so baffle my attempts to sense the inner

logic of the processes that brought it into being. Yet, quite evidently it is a *tour de force* of exploratory line making. Notice how, in various places, the paint has been allowed to drip down the picture surface. Notice also, how the hands are represented with so many carefully applied tiny touches of different, extremely pale colours which, in the context of the much bolder treatment of hat and coat, are scarcely visible. Was the artist trying to tell viewers that the lack of visibility of the hands was a very careful calculated part of his artistic intentions and, in the process, indicating where their interest should be focused? Certainly in many works he displays great astuteness in maintaining pictorial and psychological balance, by playing down the importance of the psychologically dominant hands and face. And, perhaps it is worth pointing out that this is a work which predates pointillism and the friendship with Van Gogh.

Figure 4 : From the "Artilleur et femme" series.

Figures 5 : From the "Artilleur et femme" series

Figures 4 and *5* show the same intelligence at work, this time in 1886 (the year of Seurat's "*La Grande Jatte*"), exploring ways of laying on paint and in general creating the kind of effects that, in the language of the twentieth century, would be described as "*painterly*". These studies can be compared with Degas's experimental manipulation of the monotype. Both the similarities and the differences are striking. Degas achieved wonderful painterly effects, but they are brought into subservience to the image. Toulouse-Lautrec, much more than his idol, seems to be exploring paint and brush-marks in their own right. Again notice the drips of paint being left to run freely down the picture surface. Also remarkable is the degree to which the marks exhibit independence from the image. They stay on the surface as marks in their own right. Remove the faces from *Figure 4* and you have something distinctly like an *Abstract Expressionist* painting.

The same thoroughly modern painterliness characterises the work illustrated in *Figure* 6. It is usually described as a "*study*" for the lithograph "*La Loge*", in spite of the fact that the two works have so little in common. Again a comparison with Degas is instructive for he painted a picture of a similar subject in which dark/light contrasts are of vital importance. However, there the similarity stops. The four-square composition, with the horizontal band of white taking up so much of the picture surface, the crude drawing, the varied and inventive ways of laying on the paint are all astonishing for the time. And, perhaps, most amazing of all is the painting of the face of the woman in the shadow on the right of the picture. Who else would have thought of those three near triangles of colour, until the twentieth century?

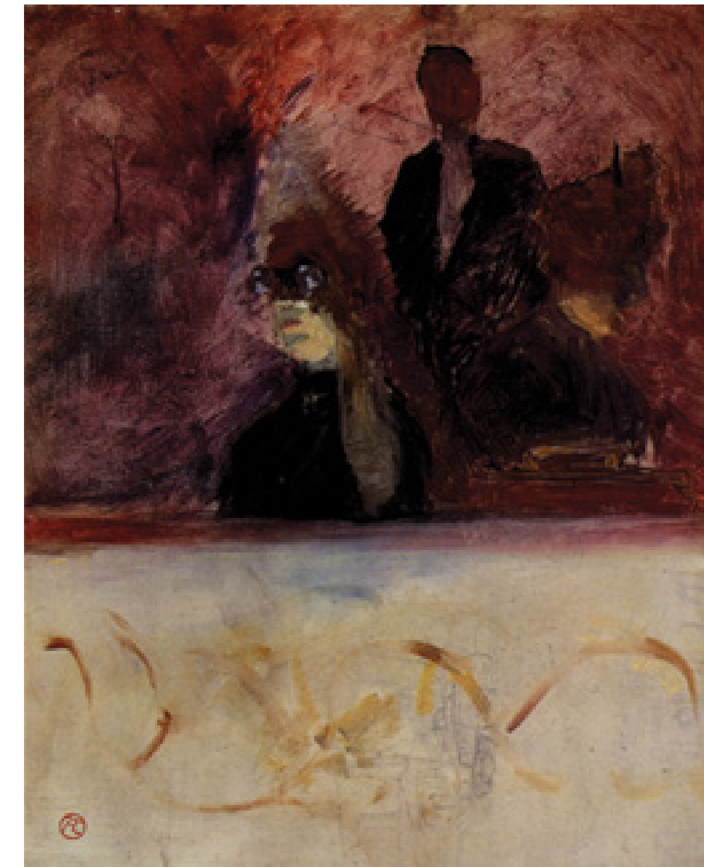

Figure 6: La loge

The story goes on. Wherever you look, there is something to wonder at. Take just one small detail of the drawing represented in *Figure* 7: the line that delineates the right foot of the male dancer (to the left-hand side in the painting). Consider the importance of this line to the energy and character of the image as a whole. It is obviously crucial. Now, notice the delicacy and the tentativeness of the way it is drawn. What were the criteria that governed its creation? Certainly not literal appearances. And, if the artist wasn't going to resort to knowledge of how things actually look, how could he know what to do? No way. He just had to take the risk. And, the character of the line makes it quite clear that he didn't just shut his eyes and hope. Rather, it shows him taking his courage in both hands and proceeding with determined, alert, almost quivering, trepidation. How else could he have made a brush trace like that?

Figure 7: La Golue and Valentin le Désossé.

In similar vein, it is possible to analyse detail after detail of this wonderfully original, personal and mature work, produced in 1895, when the artist was at the height of his powers. Everywhere there are indications of a painterly sensibility and painterly logic. But the most remarkable aspect of the painting is the evidence it provides of a willingness to experiment with distortion and what, by the standards of the time, would surely have to be dismissed as "*bad drawing*". The foot of the male dancer which I have been praising, is one example of it, but it is quite upstaged by the depiction of his left arm and hand (on the right-hand side in the picture). What could he have been up to? The reader should be in no doubt that this is not bad drawing by my standards. Quite the contrary. It is adventurous draftsmanship of great descriptive and expressive power.

Moreover, it is wonderfully well adapted for tapping those creative powers of human vision that can be conjured up by "*abstraction*". As argued in "*What Scientists can Learn from Artists"*, modern research makes very clear that the capacity of human beings for making sense of what they are seeing seldom, if ever, relies on precise analysis of outline shapes. Rather, it depends on gross generalisations. The power of these is that they allow many different views of the same object (whatever it might be) to be recognised as being that object, notwithstanding the variety of different shapes, forms and colours entering the eyes.

Nobody knows exactly what information the brain needs to recognise something, but it is quite clear that it can use a vast variety of different routes to arrive at the same conclusion. For the artist, the practical implication of the brain's capacity for recognising a multitude different concatenations of visual information as the same object is that a '*likeness*' of anything can be achieved in a virtually limitless number of ways. Furthermore, it is clear that a vast majority of these will not conform to the dictates of exact appearances. The result is an enormous freedom and vast tracts of unexplored territory comprising all the manifold possibilities of abstraction. To men of the temperament of Toulouse-Lautrec and the other pioneers of *Modern Art*, this territory must have seemed like the *Promised Land*. However, such a land could only be entered by iconoclasts riding roughshod over the old rules, based as they were on the fiction of a need for a direct correspondence between image and reality. Thus, the challenge for Toulouse-Lautrec and, after him, Bonnard, Picasso, Matisse and the rest, was to find new rules. They would have to rediscover how to draw for they could no longer "*know*" how to do it.

Proofs

So far in this exposition, Toulouse-Lautrec has been characterised as facing up to the challenge of finding new rules for drawing in a number of examples of his work, but no proof has been offered of the interpretations given. All have been my own insights, derived from a combination of the cues available, a personal experience of artistic practice and a lifetime of living with art works. Frequently, in the absence of relevant statements by the artist, critics have no recourse but to rely on this kind of subjective judgment. However, in the case of Toulouse-Lautrec, there is unequivocal evidence from his work of a very positive attitude to what has been termed "*bad drawing*" and the distortions it entails. This is because, very often, the artist left us preparatory drawings to compare with the final product. From these it is easy to deduce just how carefully he guarded his deviations from exact appearances.

For example, in the first, perhaps best known and, by many experts regarded as, the most successful of the posters of Toulouse-Lautrec, we see "*bad drawing*" at its best and most powerful. There is very little literally "*right*" with the figure of Valentin le Désossé which, by virtue both of its scale and its expressive force, dominates the poster entitled '*Le Moulin Rouge*', done in 1891. Yet we know for certain that every nuance of this image was carefully considered by its creator for there is a full size study of it, in which the figure of Valentin is almost identical. The small differences between the two seem all to be in the direction of less anatomical correctness (though very much in keeping with the dancer's nickname meaning "*the boneless one*"). Added evidence that Toulouse-Lautrec was really keen on the distortions comes from the fact that a repeat of a "*bad drawing*" is much less likely to come about by chance than a repeat of a "*good drawing*".

Figures 8 and *9* provide another demonstration of preserved distortion. They illustrate a full-sized study for a poster and the finished product, which is to a large extent based on it. The poster had been commissioned by the cycle firm of *Simpson's* and, significantly, was rejected by its commissioners on the ground of "*sloppy draftsmanship*" (the rejection accounting for the lack of script with the image, for that would have been added later). Also significantly, Toulouse-Lautrec had two hundred prints made at his own expense. This can only be interpreted as an gesture of defiance signifying confidence in the value of any sloppiness in his drawing.

Figures 8: Study for the "Cycle Michel" poster

Figures 9: the 'Cycle Michel' print

There are many differences between the study and the print, but one thing they have uncompromisingly in common is the extraordinary form of the cyclist's body. Here is a kind of distortion that, to my knowledge, is unique in the work of the Toulouse-Lautrec. It is difficult to say exactly why, but whereas other examples might be mistaken for laxness, seen as tending towards stylisation or, even, dismissed as "*mere caricature*", this one has the air of a purposeful search for something "*quite different*". Moreover, this impression is given support by the many partially erased lines in the study (*Figure 8*), which indicate much trial and error in the process of finding the form. It forces comparison with the deliberate and hard-found distortions of Matisse.

Admittedly, my own first reaction to this image was negative. It seemed too awkward in too many ways. But the awkwardness had a compelling quality and gradually it has gained my respect. Now it seems to me one of the most memorable passages of drawing to be found in the *Musée Toulouse-Lautrec*.

Nor should the reader forget that a poster is quintessentially a presentation piece. Earlier in the article, when discussing the *Classical scene with tigers* and *The woman looking through the lattice-work door* (*Figures 1* and *2*), it was only possible to speculate as to whether the artist meant what he had made to be taken as a finished work. It was necessary to write "*if*" he did, "*then*" it is very remarkable. Here, however, it cannot be denied that every detail of the drawing was intended for the public gaze. In view of this fact, one can only marvel the more at the audacity of the artist.

However, the most surprising of all is both the amount and the degree of the "*sloppiness*" remarked upon by the commissioners. Of many examples the most extraordinary must be the representation of the back wheel of the bicycle. How could Toulouse-Lautrec allow himself to produce anything so seemingly incompetent? And, more pointedly, why did he retain it in this form?

There can be only one answer. Any creative artist will tell you that in the "*unknown*" (which, as argued earlier, is necessarily the arena for their explorations), it is always those elements which at first disturb that, in the long run, prove to have lasting value. They will also tell you that it is far from self-evident whether something disturbing is "*good*" or "*bad*" and that, accordingly, it is as well to hesitate before consigning anything to the rubbish bin on the grounds that it is uncomfortable to look at.

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon of Picasso has already been referred to. The reason why it was such an important work is precisely because it probes the rules. Furthermore, it is the challenging "*awkwardness*" of the mask-like additions that provide the most fundamental questions. In the *Cycle Michel* poster we find Toulouse-Lautrec asking equally fundamental questions a decade earlier!

Before leaving the cyclist images, it is worth calling attention to one startling difference between the drawing and the print, namely the treatment of the area which contains the chain, the pedals and the feet. What a contrast. The print is so static and for that reason challenging and enigmatic, while the drawing is so dynamic and full of what seems, at first sight, wild energy. It is a marvellous example of what the Italian *Futurist* painters were, later, to strive to achieve. But look closer and decide for yourself whether you could believe those marks to have been made in a spirit either of explosive expressiveness or gay abandon. Rather, they stand as a virtuoso demonstration of a controlled sensitivity searching for something seemingly almost within its grasp. Once again, there had been nothing like this in art before.

Finish

Over and over again Toulouse-Lautrec confronts us with a lack of "*finish*" in various senses of that term, and the question arises, "*is this the real thing or, merely, either a sketch or an abandoned failure*?" As so few of the artist's comments about his own work are recorded, in most cases conclusions have to be drawn from internal evidence. However, the proposition for the poster with Napoleon on his horse, illustrated in *Figure 10*, provides more specific information, for we have the artist's response to its rejection precisely on the grounds of its seeming lack of finish:

> *"These people annoy me. They want me to finish things, but I see them that way and I paint them that way. It is no trouble to finish things. I could easily paint like Bastien-Lepage …nothing is simpler than to finish a picture in a superficial sense."*

To which he added,

" *Never does one lie so cleverly as then*."

Also, as with the *Cycle Miche*l poster, he made clear his feeling by having an edition of a prints run off (this time one hundred).

The quotation concerning "*finish*" could hardly be more explicit. The ques-

tion it dealt with was of prime importance to Toulouse-Lautrec and he was prepared to authenticate so many extremely sketchy works precisely because they represented artistic statements of importance as they stood. Nobody else was anywhere near him in this respect.

Figure 10:Napoleon

The painting illustrated in *Figure 11*, was produced in 1901, the last year of the life of Toulouse-Lautrec. Amongst other things, it hammers home the point about the artist's attitude to finish. According to Joyant himself, it took sixty-five sittings to produce, yet the bare wood is still clearly visible in the top part of the picture. Like Manet, who took inordinate number of sittings to achieve the "*spontaneous look*", this shows Toulouse-Lautrec as the perfectionist who would go to any lengths to achieve what he wanted. Unlike Manet, the final work main-

tains its lack of finish, if "*lack*" is the right word. Clearly, the artist must have been assiduously guarding this quality.

The painting also shows Toulouse-Lautrec experimenting, in his last years, with a range and richness of colour that goes well beyond that of his earlier work as did several of the productions of this final phase of his life. One way of describing this development might be as a synthesis of the painterly mark-making (already much emphasised), with the broad areas of colour found in his posters. The yellows of the oilskins and the browns and blues against which they are set are a marvel of colour, richness and depth.

Figure 11: Maurice Joyant in oilskins

Colour

This brings us to the subject of colour. Toulouse-Lautrec is not usually thought of as a colourist of pioneering significance, though his bold handling of large flat areas of colour in some of his prints has been compared to that of Matisse. Nor, perhaps, in general, should he be. However, it would be a pity to pass over the subject without mention of one large pastel painting, which is illustrated in *Figure 12*. It has often been described as a "*study*" for its much more famous look-alike, the oil painting *Au Salon de la Rue des Moulins*. Finding this description unbelievable, it was a relief to see it described, in the *London Exhibition catalogue*, as a "*reprise*". The fact is that, except for the compositional shapes (which were evidently transferred mechanically), the two works could hardly be more different.

Figure 12: Pastel version of "Au salon de la rue des moulins"

Colour is very difficult to reproduce to the standards demanded by a painting whose subject-matter is colour relationships, but all are recommended to go to Albi and look at the way the flat areas of pink, white, grey and green, etc., have been put together. If they do, it is hard to believe that they will not agree that it has been done with a sensitivity and painterly intelligence of a high order. But, more significantly, there is a very real sense in which colour and texture have become the twin subjects of the painting. They seem to be being investigated in their own right, not just as supports for an image. If so, once again, Toulouse-Lautrec was demonstrating a very twentieth century *Modernist* attitude. Of course, this interpretation is based on no more than the fallible perception of someone who may be accused of putting twentieth century ideas into nineteenth century mind of the artist. However, there had to be some reason why the artist should have gone to all the very considerable trouble of restructuring his image in every detail; and a comparison between the two paintings shows clearly where the differences lie. They lie in the flatness of the colour and the use of texture as an element in its own right. It is the artist's handling of these painterly qualities that show him, once more, to be a pioneer.

Conclusion

The comparison between the pastel and the more popular oil painting makes a natural link with a question which has been puzzling me. I cannot help asking myself, *"why, when for me (and to all my artist friends) the pastel is so much more interesting as a work of art, is the oil more popular*?" Or, to put the same point in other terms, "*why has the oil painting and not the pastel gone to the supposedly definitive Exhibition in London and Paris?*" And, indeed, why are virtually all the works used to illustrate this article (and many others which could have been used to support the points made) left in *Albi*, when as many as eighteen works by Toulouse-Lautrec went to *London* and *Paris*? The only answer which makes any sense is that the people who have been developing the image of Toulouse-Lautrec see his work very differently to the way it has been presented here. They see him belonging where he has always been put, namely in the shade of the *Impressionists* and *Post Impressionists*, interesting more for his subject matter than for his art. Sadly, in this company, when judged on their terms, he stands out only in the looked-down-upon realm of poster design. Comparatively speaking, his other work comes out second best.

This is unfair. It is high time for a reassessment. Already in his youth Tou-

louse-Lautrec showed a need to search beyond his current horizons; and when this restless spirit found, in Paris, a cauldron of progressive and iconoclastic ideas, he was driven to adventure further and yet further. He became the experimentalist par excellence of his time. His influence on later artistic production is difficult to assess. However, it is well known that he was admired by the great triumvirate, Picasso, Matisse and Bonnard; and, we find all these artists (not to mention other admirers as diverse in their painting styles as Rouault, Modigliani and Kupka) recognising his influence and further exploring pathways he pioneered. We also know the high status given him by two of the main French, turn of the century, *avant garde* composers. In a public lecture on Claude Debussy, given well after the death of Toulouse-Lautrec, by Erik Satie, who at the time frequented the company of Picasso, Braque and Brancusi, asked, "*why not make use of the means of representation which Claude Monet, Cézanne and Toulouse-Lautrec were showing us*?" In his view, at least, and very likely in the minds of the artists within his milieu, Toulouse-Lautrec was up there with the best of them. According to the arguments presented in this chapter, that is exactly is where he should be.

It is not necessary to insist on the sub-title of this article, art history is far too complicated for such an over-simplification. However, the claim that Toulouse-Lautrec should be accorded the accolade of being "*the first modern painter*" is certainly one both that can be strongly argued and which may be difficult to gainsay.

Implications

In this chapter it has been argued that Toulouse-Lautrec was in the vanguard of the artists who relished the ideas and the liberties that had been opened up by his Modernist predecessors and contemporaries. In particular, he explored the possibilities of mark-making in its own right, the energising power and limits of distortion and the question of when a work can be considered as finished. In the process he radically challenged a whole range of current preconceptions and inspired the experimental attitude in other artists.

The next chapter deals with an artist who was still alive in the 21st century and whose work illustrates one way in which the ideas of the Modernist painters of the late nineteenth century were developed in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond.