

## **Eduard Vuillard: Exploring the Limits of Intimism**

Belinda Thomson

## **Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's "Femmes de Maison": The "Back" Story**

Richard Thomson

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Olivier Meslay: Good evening, and welcome to the Dallas Museum of Art's Late Night and to this evening's lecture. I am Olivier Meslay, Senior Curator for European and American Art and the Barbara Thomas Lemmon Curator for European Art here at the DMA, and it's my privilege to introduce you to tonight's speakers, Belinda and Richard Thomson, as part of our Richard R. Brettell Lecture Series. Richard and Belinda Thomson will speak not together, but successively. They will enlighten us, commenting on works from the collection of another formidable couple, Wendy and Emery Reves, as part of a year-long celebration of the jubilee of the Reves Collections coming to Dallas Museum of Art.

Belinda Thomson is now an independent art historian and an Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. She curated many exhibitions on both sides of the ocean. Belinda shares with Richard interests for some same artists, but had focused more on the later generation with artists like Vuillard and Bonnard. She will talk tonight on "Vuillard: Exploring the Limits of Intimism."

Vuillard is one of the artists best represented in our collection with six paintings, two in the Reves Collection, one given by Mrs. Margaret McDermott, one given by Mr. and Mrs. Barron Kidd, and another by the Bromberg family and one by the Meadows Foundation. I do not mention the works on paper, drawings, and prints and it would be a real pleasure to learn more about them.

Richard Thomson is the Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art at the University of Edinburgh since 1996.

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Edinburgh University was created during the 16th century, is one of the oldest and for sure one of the most important universities in the world. Richard wrote numerous books and curated many exhibitions on artists like Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat, Degas, Pissarro and on French landscape. He will talk tonight on “Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's ‘Femmes de Maison’: The ‘Back’ Story.”

Richard and Belinda are famous scholars, but they are also charming and really kind. They always welcome you very graciously when you go to Edinburg, but nobody is perfect, if I remember well, Richard has a ferocious anti-French ancestor, but I forgive him for that. Above all, we are also pleased to have them tonight and proud to add the Dallas Museum of Art to the prestigious list of their lecture places, please join me in welcoming to the stage Belinda, then Richard.

Belinda Thomson: Thank you very much Olivier and it’s a great honor and great privilege to be invited to speak to you tonight. In fact I am afraid, as so often, I gave the title before I came to think seriously about the lecture, so there are two titles but essentially I’ll be talking about the same thing. I start with the scripted title and then I could move on perhaps to my preferred title, “An Artist’s Rooms,” and I’ll be talking about four paintings essentially.

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And let’s look at them straight away. When I started to look into the paintings by Vuillard in the Dallas Museum of Art, which Rick Brettell so kindly asked me to speak about, what struck me almost immediately was that they are linked by that common concern with observing people in rooms.

Some of you may immediately be feeling I’ve got it wrong, what about that painting with a large wedge of blue sky *La Tente* [*The Tent*, 1985.R.83] that’s unmistakably an outdoor scene. Well yes, but what is the artist’s point of interest, if not that family group under the makeshift room formed by the striped awning held so precariously by tent poles and guide ropes? I say, it was kind of Rick to invite me to talk about Vuillard, but as he knows I am somewhat obsessed at the moment by work on Gauguin and it’s been a lovely distraction to leave him behind with all his bombast and complexity to re-familiarize myself with Vuillard who could scarcely be more different.

An artist characterized by diffidence and nervous sensitivity, although our somewhat over sentimental view of the artist’s character perhaps has

been challenged by Guy Cogeval in the monumental three volume catalogue raisonné *Vuillard: The Inexhaustible Glance*, published in 2003, which is a resource that didn't exist when I was last working on Vuillard and it's an enormously enriching production.

Looking at the close chronological range of the paintings you have in the Museum dating from just before and just after 1900, I was immediately thrown back into that extraordinary game of visual detection that working on Vuillard involves. One alights with eagerness upon tell-tale clues.

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All those banal details that give French homes their distinctive individuality and that in his case allow one sometimes to know with absolute precision which room we are looking at.

One becomes expert in being able to spot specific interiors where Vuillard lived with his mother. Be it the flats in the rue des Batignolles, rue de la Tour, rue Truffaut, Place Vintimille. Because of the recurrence of certain chair designs, a fireplace, a balustrade, a shelf, it's rare to find an artist who gives such consistent and reliable information about how he and his nearest and dearest lived.

Obviously by concentrating on rooms, simply in the interests of thematic unity, I am forced to pass over somewhat quickly the vertical panel known as *La Murette* [*The Garden of La Murette à Passy, Paris (La Murette)*, 1982.100] on the left, which dates to 1906. I hope you will forgive me; it is a fascinating work in its his own right and it's great to see it displayed, particularly without glass, and it reminds one that Vuillard was at the outset a decorative painter. And I am looking at it here alongside probably the most famous panels that he ever painted in 1894, the *Jardins publics*.

Essentially, it's a reprise of that theme of a view of the Parisian street life and squares. Any of you have been who have been to the Musée Marmottan in the west of Paris will have probably walked through the area that he paints in *La Murette*.

Before looking at the individual Dallas interiors, I should introduce Vuillard himself. Born in 1868, his own self-portraits show us a man with a very vibrant red beard, which quickly turned to gray, and in these two paintings from 1891 to 1892, you see him scrutinizing his appearance and seeking the simplest forms.

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Flat schematic areas of light and dark tone, old contrast of black, orange and yellow in which to distill his personality. An extremely bold way of painting a very nervous and diffident personality, interestingly. Their radical simplicity shows the abrupt jolt that had interrupted his stylistic development in his early career.

Previously, in the late 1880s, he had been obsessed really with painting, copying, studying the work of the Chardin in the Louvre, but he had been forced to reappraise his whole understanding of art by the discussions he had in 1890 with fellow students Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard.

I wanted to give you an interesting insight into Vuillard's own point of view, this moment of the formation of the Nabis is often discussed in relation to those artists, but we don't often know quite what Vuillard's point of view was. And I came across a letter he wrote to his friend Marc Mouclier about visiting the 1890 Salon.

Typically of the student, his most scathing comments about the works on show are reserved for his former teacher Jules Lefebvre and I am showing you here the painting he was talking about. He is writing to this friend Marc Mouclier fellow art student: "We also have Monsieur Lefebvre who has thrown himself into painting a huge canvas, which dominates the large room. Seeing that one begins to regret Cabanel and recognize he had certain qualities. A little woman is traipsing down a deserted street on a white horse; it is badly painted, badly drawn, complete idiocy, above all in the poses." Apparently, he remained unenlightened as to the picture's subject, Lady Godiva, and he continues, "despite that, there is still a crowd around it, quite an entertaining crowd, what's more, with their brightly colored outfits far more interesting than the paintings and fun to look at from a comfortable seat. I have promised myself to go and spend some enjoyable moments there from time to time, thanks to your pass."

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Mouclier had a pass to the salon because he was an exhibiter that year. So he was busy signing his name Mouclier. What is fascinating to me about these off-the-cuff remarks is how revealing they are of the artist Vuillard was to become. He is highly critical of Lefebvre's poses and his own ability to capture quirks of posture. Body language was to be a

particular forte of Vuillard's art and indeed he was in general highly critical of what he called *rhetoric* in composition.

Then there is his delight in the crowd, the spectators rather than the pictures, their colorful attire. The son of a corsetière and dress maker, Vuillard was always alert to changing fashions, delighting in color, pattern, hats, silhouettes. Thirdly, the comment about his preferred viewing point, a comfortable seat from where he can study others without drawing attention to himself. Vuillard was shy and sensitive to others' moods, the permanently alert observer in company able to catch the most momentary exchanges or expressions, sketch book, or camera to hand.

At that same salon of 1890 Jean-François Raffaëlli exhibited this painting, a bourgeois room of the kind Vuillard knew well. The painting was part of the artist's series called *Ménages sans enfant*, households without children. And the title or caption read, "We'll give you 25 francs, 50 to start off with." Immediately one grasps the subject, the hiring of a new maid and the stiff elderly couple making her this offer are her future employers.

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Such anecdotalism in composition and title had become *de rigueur* for naturalistic Salon painters treating modern subjects, a sure way of intriguing the spectator. Even though Raffaëlli had earlier sought acceptance with the avant-garde Impressionist group, in this work, playing to the popular audience, he showed his true colors as a narrative painter.

Maurice Denis in his famous "Définition du Néo-traditionnisme" which was his theorizing of the new ideas that the Nabi group had come together to espouse in the wake of their first encounter with Gauguin. He began that famous article with the memorable statement, "Remember that a painting before it is a warhorse, a nude, or some anecdote or other is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." But to demonstrate his thesis Denis took pot shots at the prevailing anecdotalism and naturalism of the Salon and took this work by Raffaëlli in particular to task. He wrote, "Only the caption interests me, for I am repelled by the ridiculousness of this meticulous rendering of unattractive people and grotesque furnishings."

In this essay, Denis became the spokesman of the new group of artists, the Nabis, which Vuillard had just joined. But while Vuillard certainly took

to heart Maurice Denis' challenging opening statement about painting being a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order, this particular line of argument must have presented him with a considerable challenge. For painting ordinary looking people in rooms stuffed with grotesque furnishings was precisely what Vuillard had already begun to do and would continue obstinately to do for the rest of his career.

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The trick was to approach that very subject matter in a way that did not try to tell a story or at least only in the most ambiguous open ended way, but rather conveyed an emotion that took the spectator by surprise and showed things in a new way.

Vuillard's earliest works almost all deal with his intimate family, in particular focusing on his mother and unmarried sister Marie, the women with whom he lived. We see them in the painting on the left known as *The Chat*, perhaps inappropriately because they don't appear to be conversing. This is a painting I know well because it's in Edinburgh. And on the right the painting also known slightly anecdotally as *The Outspoken Dinner Party*--this is not a title Vuillard would have given it--but it does give us an instant insight into the sense of a conversation conveyed by the posture of his sister, that very sinuous pose, where she seems to be pressing home her point in the argument or certainly making herself heard, as against the rather stolid forms of the mother on the right, the pipe smoking brother, and then the hollow black silhouette of the grandmother.

The challenge for Vuillard's art over coming years would be how to sustain that highly strung vision, that nervous ambiguity of form without slipping into the pedestrian and the overly detailed. Here are two further paintings of interiors featuring his mother and sister, they are contrasting figures. The drama of their opposing presence. In the left hand painting, the uncharacteristically masculine posture of Madame Vuillard which is being commented upon by art historians, the self-effacement shrinking almost into the hectic wallpaper of Marie.

We sense a burgeoning appetite here for psychological drama and theater was an art form in which Vuillard was steeped.

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He was a close friend of the actor, director Lugné-Poë and with him founder of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre and he attended performances there

and then at other theaters several times a week. He designed programs, he designed sets, painted backdrops and so on. And the standard fare of this very avant-garde theater was northern European drama: Ibsen, Strindberg, or in this case in the design of the program on the left, the German playwright Gerhart Hauptmann whose *Âmes solitaires* was performed in December 1893.

On the right is an example of Vuillard's color lithographs of which he made a series of 12 in 1899 known perhaps misleadingly now as *At The Patisserie*, it was known in his day as *Terrasse de Café la Nuit*. And just one other example of the type of work that he is known for in the 1890s this is the two of the four decorations painted for Dr. Vaquez in 1896 which take the theme of floral wallpaper and run with it, so to speak. Vuillard and Bonnard were both great fans of the millefleurs tapestries in the Musée de Cluny and here he gives that idea of the garden of delight some modern twist. The series of four panels was loosely inspired by the interiors of his friends the Natansons and we'll be hearing more about them: Thadée, art critic and founder of *La Revue Blanche*, and Misia Godebska, the accomplished pianist and muse for many a painter. The couple married in 1893 and during the '90s regularly played host to their artistic circle.

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Vuillard, it is widely believed, fell in love in Misia and he was certainly a regular, extra, and onlooker at their unconventional childless household where he played the inglorious role of supernumerary, fondly welcome bachelor, and would-be suitor.

Turning now to the earliest or at least as it was presented to me initially earliest of the Dallas images by Vuillard and I want to come back to the question of its date. Here we are presented with people in a room, but in a public space. It is entitled *Le Petit Restaurant* [The Little Restaurant, 1985.R.85], but how should we understand that word *petit*? To my mind we are looking at a sizable restaurant, with its row upon row of identical marble topped tables and regularly spaced tall windows. We should read this I think as a daytime scene, although at first I thought it was nocturnal, but seeing the painting in the Reves Collection, I am pretty sure that what we are seeing is regular shafts of light marking each window, punctuating that yellow background. Notice also the presence of a young family at the second table, a mother in tartan dress with her back to us, father in dark jacket and bowler hat, and two children possibly a third figure to the left in a mauvish costume.

The nature of the restaurant is interesting; it seems to me more in the line of a popular eating house. There is no visible table linen; the chairs are very simple and wooden. Perhaps a *restaurant a prix-fixe*. There were many such establishments in Paris, particularly around the boulevard of the Right Bank. The Restaurant de Famille for example in the rue de Choiseul near the Opéra offered lunch at a fixed price of two francs at this period. Such establishments had a regular turnover of clientele, several sittings. You can get something of their flavor at Chartier, some of you have possibly visited on the rue du Faubourg-Montmartre.

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So I think, and I would stand corrected from Olivier and Laure, but I think possibly it's in the sense of its modesty that one should understand the title *Le Petit Restaurant*. But rather than an anonymous glimpse of Parisian life I would like to propose an identification of this family with its little dog, tail a-quiver, standing to the right expectantly. I would hazard a guess that we are looking at the family of Cipa Godebski, younger half-brother of Misia, his wife Ida, and their two children, Mimi and Jean.

Why do I say this? Well if we compare the figure in the black jacket and black bowler hat with these two portraits done by Vuillard of his friend Cipa, on the right, I think there is quite a striking resemblance that [inaudible] a very small detail in the painting and I am not proposing this is a hard and fast reading. But I think it works. If one also looks at the dog, which in a second I will do, just to say though if it is Cipa, his children Mimi and Jean were rather interesting children brought up in a very artistic household and they are the dedicatees of Maurice Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye*, a beautiful piano suite composed in 1910.

But I suspect that little dog can be identified with Misia's little dog, who appears in these two photographs taken by Vuillard on the left and also in this lovely painting of Misia with Vallotton and Thadée on the right and you see the dog pestering for scraps or whatever. Probably someone will know the name of the dog, I haven't gone to that detail, but it does seem to me the same breed of dog.

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So if I am right, 1894 is clearly too early a date. Mimi was born in 1899 and Jean I think in 1901. So the date of this painting would need to be put back to 1901.



In the next painting we'll be introduced to Vuillard's in-laws. In 1893 or 1894 his sister Marie tied the knot with Vuillard's close friend and fellow Nabi artist Ker-Xavier Roussel. Vuillard had played a not inconsiderable role in making this match, a responsibility that must have weighed heavily on his conscience when things started to go wrong between the couple. Roussel was a handsome man, an intellectual prone to stray from the path, not perhaps a natural husband and father. He had already run off once when the couple's first child was born and sadly soon afterwards died. And Marie seems to have suffered something like a postnatal depression or perhaps just post-death depression.

But by the date of the painting we're looking at here on the left, 1898, Marie is holding her second child, a daughter Annette who survived and in this magnificent composition there is a sense of resolution perhaps to the family. It's more symmetrically posed than usual, the two parents occupying however very different spheres, Roussel somewhat cut off, his fear demarcated by the bottle of red wine and the newspaper, whereas Marie's is all wrapped up in her baby.

Mother-in-law Madame Vuillard, who one feels can't wait to take a turn with the new baby, presides over the table. The setting for this painting was the flat in Levallois-Perret where the Roussel's were living. But they were soon to move.

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In the small painting on the right, granny has her chance. She has got the little Annette on a chair in front of her, she must be a little bit older now, about 6 months I would guess, and she is playing with her. They seem to have a game possibly involving looking through the grandmother's magnifying glass.

The paintings seemed almost linked by that red and white cloth, but I'm not sure that it's the same cloth, which leads us naturally on to the second painting in the Dallas Museum of Art called *Les Premier Pas (The First Steps)* [1994.220]. This, to my mind, was clearly painted in 1900 or 1901 because it records the early tottering steps of that same child, Annette. The setting is Vuillard and his mother's apartment in the la rue Truffaut just north of the boulevard of Batignolles in Montmartre, and here is the preliminary sketch on the lower left and you can see that the whole composition has been worked out as so often by Vuillard in pencil, in a sketchbook.

On the top left, you see granny, Madame Vuillard, with the baby at an earlier phase when she is still a little smaller. But you sense the pride both of the uncle and the grandmother in this new addition to the family. I want to question the identification given both in the catalogue raisonné and in previous literature about this painting as to the identity of the woman in the doorway, watching over the child's first steps and in fact I also want to question the first steps idea.

You see the child tottering around the environment which was probably fascinating for her, but probably rather dangerous because it's full of canvasses leant against the wall. It's really the artist's studio.

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And I will argue that the figure in the doorway is not the mother as is said in the catalogue raisonné, i.e. Marie, but Madame Vuillard, the grandmother.

I am 90% sure that *Les Premier Pas* was not Vuillard's own title, but rather added by a later collector. Because the first steps are not what we're seeing here. This looks like a child of at least two, who has been walking for some time. She may well be still tottering, but I don't think these are her first steps. And there was already a sort of tradition in French realist painting of that moment of the "first steps," which have been beautifully recorded by Jean François Millet in this pastel on the left and which had then been picked up by Vincent Van Gogh and turned into his painting on the right, with the two parents watching proudly.

What I would argue is that rather than wanting to mark that emotional moment in a child's development, Vuillard's attraction to the subject was more the conjunction of figures of disparate ages, a theme that appears very early in his work. On the left on a bench we have an elderly woman in black widow's weeds and a boy in sailor suit, sharing an intimacy or perhaps the boy is receiving a reprimand on a park bench.

The complete contrast in their bodily shapes and movements is caught with such precision that it doesn't matter that the paint is applied coarsely and roughly and that we cannot make out either figure's features. The spacing is crucial, too. That emptiness of the bench to left balancing the composition, but telling its own story about how respectable Parisians conducted themselves in the public spaces they all shared. The boy looks extremely sage, well behaved, was probably not one who was allowed to run and play hide-and-seek in the trees like other boys in Vuillard's panels.

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I'd like to just explain that the layout of the room that you see in *Les Premier Pas*, because it's one of the rooms that Vuillard painted most regularly in the rue Truffaut salon and I was lucky enough when working on Vuillard to actually visit this apartment, which had not changed at all really.

You came into that room through a double door, as seen in the Dallas painting, and you were confronted then by two windows with large French windows opening onto a large expanse, which gave a lot of light and that for Vuillard was a new experience. His earlier interiors such as the ones we saw from the 1892-93 period tend to be very dark because the apartments he lived in were very low ceilinged and often very dark. But the rue Truffaut was really the first apartment where light began to be a factor that he could introduce into the paintings. Madame Vuillard herself clearly made use of that light for her sewing and many pictures show her seated by the window.

At the far end of that room was this characteristic black mantelpiece and in the painting on the left with the woman sitting near a fireplace, the room is clearly the place where a visitor is welcomed, still dressed in her street attire. She looks a bit on edge, perhaps she is a model come for an interview. The double doors you see in the mirror reflected are the doors of the Dallas painting. That shape that I was asked about when we were looking at the painting in the store just now, to the left of the figure, is in fact the bracket of a shelf which ran the length of that inner wall and which Vuillard used to store his rolls of paper and so this is another of those details that enables one to pick out this room from others. And although in the painting on the left which is known as the *White Bedroom*, that title is given, we also know that Madam Vuillard may have had this room for her bedroom for a short time, but pretty quickly Vuillard took it over and made it his studio.

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In the painting on the left we again have mother and sister of the artist confronting one another, but here they are in a new relationship. Mother is stolidly seated with the baby Annette on her lap. Marie is poised with hat on about to go out shopping perhaps.

Note her relative height in relation to the door, further proof I think if proof were needed that the figure with Annette in the Dallas painting is

the grandmother, not the mother. Is it that delicate moment of goodbyes when one hopes not to upset the child as she goes out? Notice, also, behind *maman's* chair unmistakably and practical, a child's chamber pot. Both paintings are that extraordinary delicate symphony of off-whites, drabs and grays with just the high note of coral in the sofa on the left.

This room was the setting for several paintings of nudes and a transitional moment in this painting on the right of the model undressing by that same recognizable fireplace near that sagging shelf on the wall. Passing through the doorway to the left of that fireplace you came to a little slip of a room, which was converted into Madame's bedroom, was just wide enough to hold the length of her bed.

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And here you see her pouring water from a carafe. It was pretty lacking in privacy because if I remember right you had to walk through that room to get to the kitchen.

In the painting now on the right where you see Marie with her daughter, again in order to prove my point I suppose, but also to introduce a new setting. In this case, the room is in the new house that the Roussel's moved to in 1899 in L'Étang-la-Ville to the west of Paris. Here she looks as though she is pregnant and certainly she had a second child in 1901. The new house they moved to more or less in the country was characterized by riotous wallpaper in every room, a different pattern, and the third painting in Dallas represents an upstairs room in that house known as "La Montagne" just because it was somewhat raised up from other parts of L'Étang-la-Ville.

In this painting called *Interior* the light spills into the room reflecting off the half open French window and hitting the floor casting the main figures into *contre-jours*. Notice the reflection of the picture caught in the mirror of the wall wardrobe. It's intriguing to see the way the wallpaper has been taken right over the ceiling in that lowered section to the right. The identity of the figures here is generally given as the two grandmothers, Madame Vuillard on the left and grandmother Roussel on the right.

I was inclined to wonder if it wasn't Marie again on the right, but perhaps the stiff stoop of the figure suggests an older woman. The views from this house, which Vuillard knew well and regularly spent time in, actually opened him up to landscape in a big way.

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He spent the whole summer of 1899 there and that view from the window was what inspired these, his two largest and most accomplished decorative panels, now in Pasadena and Chicago, the view over the wooded hillside of Marly from La Montagne.

Just out of interest the figures that we have encountered earlier crop up again in Vuillard's work. Here is a painting that I actually saw with Rick Brettell in Paris, not long ago called *La Tasse Noir* because the particular set of china that Misia had prided herself on buying is featured, but it features Misia seated and Mimi, the little baby in the painting I talked about, the daughter of Cipa Godebski. Here Vuillard is moving towards his mid-20s style in which sometimes the pictures work well and at other times I wonder if he is not getting dangerously close to Raffaelli once again.

What is thought is that Vuillard at this point was influenced by a new form of entertainment. Whereas theatre was the primary inspiration in the '90s, by the '20s we know he was a regular attender of the cinema and certainly seeing this film still from a popular film of the early 1920s I was reminded instantly of many Vuillard paintings and interiors.

Finally, I come to the largest and latest of the Vuillard rooms known as *La Tente* dating from 1908. The impression it makes immediately is of a windswept and somewhat chaotic summer scene.

[00:36:04.08]

Almost reminiscent perhaps of *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday*. But what is this tent and what is its purpose? Initially I assumed it was on a beach, but in fact, thanks to Vuillard's habits of detailed pencil sketches and taking photographs, we can reconstruct the place of this tent with exactitude. It was put up in the garden of the house in Le Pouliguen, a Breton resort, which had been rented for the summer by his friends.

And I was rather thrilled to find a postcard, which we'll come to in a moment, but here you see the two little pencil studies that Vuillard made, mapping out the exact composition of *La Tente* and then focusing on the figures of the woman with child on her knee. But on the Internet I was able to find this little postcard showing what the house itself was like and exactly how it stood in relation to the beach at Le Pouliguen. I am afraid it's a slightly faint image.

We also have some information about staying in that house from Annette Vaillant who was the daughter of the couple Alfred Natanson and his actress wife Marthe Mellot who had rented the holiday property for the summer. And in renting it they welcomed the whole circle of their friends, this was a very artistic Bohemian set including Vuillard's dealer Jos Hessel and his wife Lucy who had become more or less his mistress at this moment, Lucy Hessel's sister Marcelle, her husband and lover, and Vuillard himself. Probably Madame Vuillard from time to time, Roman Coolus, and Tristan Bernard, both of whom were playwrights.

[00:38:05.20]

So this set of Parisians who would descend upon a particular rented property for the summer which they called their *villégiature* involved a particular style of life of somewhat laid back, enjoyable outdoor life where breakfasts probably lasted all morning, where certainly men spent most of the morning in their pajamas as you see from photographs, but also from a number of Vuillard's paintings, and where women seem to spend their time in Peignoir or kimonos. And Annette Vaillant recalled, the girl of eight, that she was allowed exceptionally to play on the beach because it was just over the parapet wall that marked the end of the garden of this large free standing property.

What's striking about the images Vuillard painted on holiday is their freedom, that slashing stroke of a very broad brush using distemper, his particular favorite medium which he had first experienced when painting stage flats and that briskness is something that is very, very liberating I think for him when he is staying away from Paris. The sight of the Le Pouliguen itself is right next to La Baule, sadly La Baule was to be the place he died. He came to La Baule in a moment of great panic in June 1940 just after the invasion and the armistice when he and his friends left Paris and he died there, people say from partly the shock of those events.

But to close, I'd like just to make a final comparison between that painting *La Tente* and its evocation of Brittany holidays and a painting by Maurice Denis, his old friend who was also painting Brittany and beach holidays where he and his family went every year to the northern coast of Perros-Guirec.

[00:40:06.18]

This is, as you see, one of many paintings that Denis painted and what's striking by this time is the difference between the two artists, whereas Denis has set his course on submitting his art to a more measured

ordered and rule-bound classicism, Vuillard, by contrast, had refused to go down that path, refused to let go of that belief in the importance of sensation, in the immediate spontaneous response to the things seen that gave him his greatest satisfactions as a painter. Always the peripatetic vacationer at the mercy of his friend's whims, the uncertainties of his position are present there on the canvas. *La Tente* with its somewhat chaotic appearance demonstrates both the pros and perhaps the cons of such an individual aesthetic. Thank you very much.

Richard Thomson: It's a great pleasure to be here in Dallas this evening and Belinda and I are very grateful to the Dallas Museum of Art for inviting us to give these lectures and it's a particular honor to be giving the Brettell lectures named after our great friend Rick. Rick was the first person to invite me to lecture in the United States in 1982 and here am I doing it again.

So these lectures are really a sort of homage to Rick who is a major scholar in our field of Impressionist studies and a very great friend.

[00:42:05.13]

My lecture is on Toulouse-Lautrec's pastel *Femmes de Maison* [*Prostitutes (Femmes de Maison)*, 1885.R.75]. I don't have the privilege Belinda had of speaking about four works of art. I am going to speak about a single one and the subtitle I suppose is "The Back Story" because it's a picture of a back. This fine and unusual object is made from what at first sight are unpromising materials. The subject does not depict the human condition at its most noble. The generic title *Femmes de Maison* is a succinctly elegant French articulation which in English translates bluntly as "prostitutes in a brothel."

The media Lautrec used are a perplexing and experimental combination, the fragility and sensitivity of powdery pastel on the roughly textured surface of emery board. Yet from the base matter of humanity and his equivocal materials Toulouse-Lautrec crafted a remarkable object. Above all, *Femmes de Maison* demonstrates his remarkable draftsmanship. One senses that he began with a central figure which forms the vertical axis of the composition. She was surely drawn from life, perhaps from a professional model in the studio, possibly from an actual prostitute in a brothel. The woman's quite slender body dominates the composition, her flesh still youthful though with some of the muscle tone beginning to slacken. Her pale nakedness catches and reflects the muted indoor light, the flesh tone picking up the ambient blues.

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The second figure of the woman in a pink chemise would have been a later addition and her full shape, clad in a bellowing pink chemise topped with a mint blue scarf, does much to fill the left hand side of the composition. The right, by contrast, opens out briefly to suggest the room with the iron frame of a single bed over which is spread a disheveled electric blue fabric. The blue accents are offset by the striking ginger hair of the central woman and warm tones are picked up both on the picture on the wall behind her head and the furniture which she faces, Lautrec consciously orchestrating the chromatics of his work, offsetting the blues with a complementary orange. For this was a work made by a 30-year-old artist in full control of his powers.

His command of the human figure is evident with only some slight adjustments to the position of her right elbow. The confidence of the drawing satisfyingly models the naked body and places it in pictorial space. And around it Lautrec, with different levels of gestural intensity, blocked in the second woman and did enough to suggest the domestic setting. The whole has a comfortable balance between the solid and the approximated, indicating where the artist has carefully looked and where he asks the spectator to look.

For all its apparently spontaneous and vibrant handling *Femmes de Maison* is a skillfully crafted object, Lautrec dictating what and how we see. Lautrec produced the majority of his brothel subjects between about 1893 and 1896 in which year he staged a one man show at the Manzi-Joyant gallery in Paris.

[00:46:00.21]

There he displayed the brothel scenes in a discreet room on the first floor, which he only showed to his closest friends. *Femmes de Maison* dates from this period and belongs within that group of subjects.

Lautrec of course has a celebrated reputation as a painter of brothel life, but the closer we look at these pictures the more we should be aware that they should not be seen as a lumpen category. They involved considerable variety. Lautrec depicted the world of prostitution in different media, chiefly in his trademark peinture à l'essence on board on the left, but also in color lithography as with the great *Elles* series of 1896, and also in pastel, for *Femmes de Maison* is one of several such subjects in that delicate medium. The brothel subjects also encourage Lautrec to essay a range of compositional and narrative strategies.



As raw material for his artistic interests they should not be considered as direct observation. They were contrived for particular purposes. And another crucial dimension to Lautrec's brothel pictures is their interplay with other cultural forms and debates around them. These are dimensions that I am going to explore in this lecture. Lautrec's brothel pictures fall into different categories. Some are frankly, almost drearily, domestic representing the women at their daily chores and pastimes such as bed making, gossiping over a meal, or telling each other's fortunes with cards.

Others suggest a narrative interplay between two figures often exaggerating the facial features to give a characterful, even a grotesque, quality to the protagonists.

[00:48:02.23]

We find this for example in the *Woman with a Tattoo*, in which the chunky tattooed female is prettified by a petite, pointy featured friend or in *The Laundry Man* where it seems to be suggested that the laundry man is leering because the absent minded tart has let her peignoir hang open.

Another group of brothel pictures are simply lewd such as the staircase in the *Rue des Moulins*. There were probably more pictures like this and worse but his family destroyed them on Lautrec's death. A fourth group depicted lesbian couples and Lautrec typically staged these as delicate moments of psychological engagement between the women, tentative, affectionate, and pre-erotic.

Finally, he painted some straightforward portraits of the brothel inmates. Sometimes these are named such as *Marcelle* and Lautrec favored the profile format. This combination echoed the formula of the police photograph of which some 60,000 were held at the Paris Préfecture de Police by 1890 under the aegis of the pioneering criminal statistician Alphonse Bertillon who photographed himself as a criminal. Lautrec's depictions of brothel life and personnel were very various then.

The material could be manipulated to suit his artistic concerns but the parallel with police photographs suggests that to understand Lautrec's representations it may be necessary to look both to picture-making concerns Lautrec shared with fellow artists and also beyond, to the wider contemporary culture with which he was engaged.

[00:50:03.21]

In *Femmes de Maison* Lautrec obviously set up contrast between the naked and the clothed. The figure on the left is completely covered except for the smallest flash of ear. Whereas the central woman is bare except for the black stockings, which just make themselves visible at the lower edge, their presence revealing that she is not strictly naked but more or less unclothed, a more intimate and titillating state. The “naked” was a concept which had emerged in the second half of the 19th century, challenging the nude vaunted by academic art. Here as a Bouguereau -- that ideal figure of bodily harmony, neither setting nor clothes sully its aesthetic integrity.

Nakedness was by contrast a factor of naturalism, a straightforward indicator of physical actuality. In fact, if somebody came in late to these lectures they would think it was not an art history lecture, but a convention of cosmetic surgeons perhaps. Variations on the naked abounded among artists dedicated to naturalism.

One variation was the interplay of the naked and clothed. For example, Edgar Degas' *Mistress and Maid* dating from the mid-1880s took a plausible narrative of the domestic holding up a towel or robe as her mistress steps from it into her bath. This seems to be the narrative as Degas has pitched the mistress depicted only as a flank and trailing arm moving one way and the maid tilting in the other direction. With the mistress's back turned the maid ventures an insolently appraising glance adding an edgy, interpersonal nuance to the scene.

[00:52:00.26]

It's significant that the model Degas used for the maid was Réjane, a reputed actress as if he knew that to enhance the mundane narrative of his domestic scene with psychological intensity, he needed a model with theatrical gifts.

Lautrec also played with the naked and nude. About 1894 he made a painting from life representing a live, young model pulling on a stocking. It vividly demonstrates his ability as a draftsman, swiftly manipulating the brush loaded with thinned paint to catch the forms and movement. Lautrec then recycled this figure in a second painting, moving her slightly off center coarsening her face, thickening her body, and presenting it more immodestly. To the left he added another woman using the crow-faced model who had appeared in the *Woman with a Tattoo*.

This rather improvised relationship is not entirely satisfactory. It's not clear where the gaze of the green-clad woman falls and her arm is

ludicrously long. But Lautrec was evidently trying to suggest some kind of narrative of voyeurism perhaps or proprietorship. The difference between Degas' and Lautrec's parings of the naked and nude is that Degas was concerned to show psychological nuance and needed an actress to offer and hold the expression he needed, whereas Lautrec, here, took a more charactural approach, rendering the naked body unforgivingly and tipping his physiognomies towards the grotesque.

A crucial aspect of *Femmes de Maison* and one which differentiates it from *Woman Pulling on Her Stocking* is its insistent focus on the figure seen from behind.

[00:54:03.09]

It is a standard convention of much of World art that the human figure, especially the central one in a composition, should be seen from the front, engaging with the viewer via facial expression and gesture in a way that communicates and involves. However the vagaries and accidents of everyday life do not correspond with conventions of art.

This was increasingly an issue for the generation of artists who preceded Lautrec. Reacting against the received wisdom of the academic tradition and responding to the increasing metropolitanization of the modern world, artists in the 1870s had developed pictorial idioms intended to heighten the naturalism of their pictures.

In 1876 the novelist and critic Edmond Duranty published a pamphlet, *La Nouvelle Peinture*, "the new painting." It appeared at the same time as the second Impressionist exhibition and was attempting to explain the new painting in terms of its naturalistic treatment of the modern world. "In real life," Duranty wrote, "views of things and people are manifested in a thousand unexpected ways. For example, if one considers a figure, either in a room or on the street, it isn't always in a straight line. It's never in the center of the canvas or the center of the scene. It's not shown whole but often appears cut off at the knees or mid-torso." Duranty argued that not only was *how* we see the figure in the everyday world fragmented and haphazard but also that our habits of observation, our perceptions of other people, are attuned to this. He propounded that a back should reveal temperament, age, and social position.

[00:56:01.06]

A pair of hands should reveal the magistrate or the merchant. And a gesture should reveal an entire range of feelings. Duranty allusively

credited Edgar Degas as the leading Parisian artist responsible for finding visual forms for these expressly modern, diffuse, and partial ways of seeing.

At the fifth Impressionist exhibition in 1880, Degas exhibited a pastel of *A Woman at Her Toilette*, which might be taken as an exercise according with Duranty's notion that depicting the figure from behind could be revealing of personal characteristics. The art historian Charles Ephrussi reviewing the show described this figure, "seen from behind, clumsily articulated, scarcely sketched in, stumped out and it would seem without any feeling for form," as being of the caliber as the great Florentine draftsman. Ephrussi's point was this, that this new, approximate, unconventional visual idiom could achieve the highest standards.

Degas was not the only naturalist artist to explore the possibilities of the figure seen from behind. At the second Impressionist exhibition, at the time *La Nouvelle Peinture* had been published, Gustave Caillebotte had shown *Young Man at the Window* depicting his younger brother gazing out over the boulevard Malesherbes and in 1888 Caillebotte had submitted to Les Vingts, the enterprising Brussels avant-garde group, an even more daring back view, *Man at His Bath*, though this canvas seems not to have been shown -- the Belgians chickening out -- perhaps because the figures nakedness was considered too natural, too immodest.

Lautrec, as it happened was a fellow exhibitor at the 1888 Les Vingts and this painting, banned from the show, might have come to his attention.

[00:58:02.24]

As Lautrec emerged during the second half the 1880s from his academic training and developed his individual identity as an artist, his instinct was to develop as a naturalist depicting the everyday world and finding ways to do so which corresponded with the vagaries of vision. Inevitably, he practiced representing the figure from behind. *La Toilette*, *The Rest of the Model* [*The Model Resting*], from Getty Museum of 1889, or *Woman Arranging Her Hair* of 1891, now in the Ashmolean, both do this. But these paintings of his early maturity remain exercises in foreshortening and movement respectively. Narrative plays little or no part.

At this point, we need to take a sideways step towards another cultural form. Naturalism was not just manifesting itself in the visual arts, but also in the theater. In March 1887, the young actor/manager André Antoine opened the Théâtre Libre in Montmartre, Lautrec's quartier of Paris.

Antoine's aim was to put on plays that were naturalistic and he used devices of staging and performance to that end.

In terms of staging for instance, in October 1888 a play called *The Butchers* by Fernand Icre was presented with real sides of beef hanging on set dripping blood. From the point of view of performance, one of Antoine's tricks was to flout theatrical convention and sometimes have his actors speak with their backs to the audience. As a directorial device, the extent intension was to make the play more plausible, closer to the life-like.

[01:00:00.24]

This playing "the back" angered the distinguished conservative critic Francisque Sarcey who in October 1887 thundered against the practice in Antoine's staging of the Goncourt brothers *Soeur Philomène* from his theatrical column in *Le Temps* because it broke with the established conventions of the stage by which actors played to the audience. The debate resonated beyond the world of the theater. The following year, the Neo-Impressionist painter Paul Signac produced a color lithograph for a program for another play "Le Chance de Françoise" staged at the Théâtre Libre. The print is an exposition of the color theories of Signac's friend Charles Henry, but its depiction of a spectator scene from behind may well be a knowing retort to Sarcey's objections. Indeed the heavy, grizzled dome is not unlike Sarcey himself.

At the Salon Nationale des Beaux Arts in 1893 Alfred Roll exhibited an enormous canvas representing the Centenary of the Estates-General, a national fête that had taken place four years previously. It's a big picture at least this size; I show you the sketch for it because there is no color reproduction of the big picture which is rolled up in the basement of Versailles.

In his review of the 1893 Salon for "L'Art et la vie," the critic Jean Robiquet[?] described the way that the crowd in this painting teems, stirs and agitates in a very life-like brouhaha in a way that is how Monsieur Antoine would no doubt have proceeded with such a scene in his theater. In other words, by playing the back. The debate about Antoine's naturalistic experiments on stage had seeped into the discussion of pictorial representation.

[01:02:05.27]

How does this help us with Toulouse-Lautrec? Lautrec was a keen theater goer and attended the Théâtre Libre. When we look at his painting *Á la mie* exhibited in 1891 alongside a photograph of actors on the set of the Théâtre Libre, in this instance in “En famille,” a play by Lautrec’s friend Oscar Méténier staged in May 1887, one can see how the picture is similarly composed.

Further than that, the man in *Á la mie* was neither a genuine proletarian drunk nor a professional model. He was the artist’s crony, Maurice Guibert, a representative of the champagne firm Moët & Chandon who Lautrec got to act a role for his painting. And there are photographs of Lautrec himself in part. There he is, playing a working man on the sauce.

In other words, Lautrec adapted theatrical idioms making them part of his studio practice. This returns us to playing the back. Significantly, Lautrec depicted figures seen from behind frequently in the lithographs he made during the early and mid-1890s of theatrical subjects. Several of these, appropriately enough, feature Antoine himself. For example, *Au Théâtre Libre, Antoine dans L’Inquiétude* of 1893 or *Yahne et Antoine, dans l’age difficile* of 1895. Lautrec’s program for “L’Argent” (at the bottom left) performed at the Théâtre Libre in 1895 also used the device, but he employed it for lithographs depicting other theaters too, such as le Théâtre de l’Oeuvre in *Lugné-Poë et Baldy en “L’Image”* of 1894.

[01:04:02.13]

The back also appears consistently in Lautrec’s album of color lithographs *Elles* published in 1896, a series of the intimate life of the prostitute or, more likely, the kept women. The cover of *Elles* set the tone and three others of the twelve prints in the album depict a woman seen from behind, the woman washing, the woman with the mirror and the so called *Conquête de Passage* or “passing fancy”.

In sum, during the mid-1890s Lautrec used the figure seen from behind in prints chiefly of two subjects, the theater, appropriately enough, and the intimate female world of the *Elles* album, contemporaneous with an overlapping in theme of the brothel pictures, which returns us to *Femmes de Maison*.

We might also ask what does the depiction of the back suggest? An obvious place to start is with the front. Seeing a figure frontally suggests frankness. In the 1880 portrait of Jules Grévy, President of France, by Lautrec’s teacher Léon Bonnat, the direct bodily and facial frontality combined with the upright back and the hand on the law books is

intended to evoke solidity and sincerity. But he was a politician, so we don't really believe that. Lautrec, too, could use frontality as in *La Goulue Entering the Moulin Rouge* but here the Rouge dancers' outrageously licentious persona is once again frankly conveyed by the directness of her seedy expression and her gaping cleavage.

[01:06:00.23]

By contrast, the back can be used to suggest modesty. In 1895, Camille Pissarro painted a rural girl posing naked in his studio, the view from behind and the rather gauche posture adapted from a drawing evoking shyness. Alfred Roll's *After the Ball* of about 1885 turns the women from our view which might be the privileged gaze of a husband as she sets about disrobing, concentrating on her own private concerns. So the back can also suggest feminine rituals from which men are excluded. One can read Degas' 1881 *At the Milliner's* in this way, the women preoccupied with the tilt and fit of a new bonnet. In a number of pastels made in the mid-1880s Degas depicted pairs or trios of woman out of doors but in some undefined setting seen from behind and conversing quietly or animatedly, but creating a wall of backs which exclude the viewer from the secrets of their inclusive world.

Finally, the back was also used as surely it was on stage to register disjunction between the protagonists and thus as an active device in a narrative. This is how both Caillebotte's *Interior* of 1880 and Signac's *Sunday* of 1890 function. The woman's back combined with the man's insouciance suggests at least momentarily divided attentions. At worst, some rift. In both cases, the back does what Doranty suggested it could in 1876, give a sense of social class or mood via body language.

[01:08:03.21]

That said, the back's refusal of information about facial expression particularly doesn't help with a certain narrative reading, and it stimulates ambiguity.

There is one further aspect of *Femmes de Maison* to which we should turn. The pastel presents us with a naked woman physically very close to another female. Do we simply read this as women comfortable with each other's company or, given Lautrec's fascination with the subject, as a representation of some lesbian liaison. Lautrec had been interested in that subject since the early 1890s.

In November 1892, his painting *The Kiss* showing two women in bed had been exhibited at the Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery in Paris, a daring assertion on the part of both the artist and dealer of the viability of such a subject, shocking to many people at the time in Modern art and, indeed, still shocking in the state of Mississippi. And I wonder what's happening to that girl going to prom with her girlfriend--you've probably been reading about it. The story has reached Edinburgh, I can tell you. That's validity... I can tell by your chuckle you have been reading about it.

That validity was founded on the aesthetic of naturalism which Lautrec espoused. Naturalism was the dominant aesthetic in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, its central tenant was that everything in the material world was of interest and value and was worthy of analysis and representation. This belief lay at the core of the novels of Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant or of the paintings of artists as different as Claude Monet and Bastien-Lepage, who I find hanging next to each other upstairs I'm delighted to see.

[01:10:01.12]

Naturalism in the arts set great store by being scientific. It claimed that the methodologies of science, scrupulous analysis of data, precise presentation of detail and followed science's exploration of hitherto unexplored areas. How does this help with Lautrec who outside making art was given to booze rather than books, and with his lesbian pictures?

First we might think of these paintings in terms of narrative. There are three paintings, all made about 1893-4, which all seem to use the same model, a fair-haired woman with a retroussé nose, paired with a dark-haired woman whose face we don't see.

Another consistency is the handling of paint in all three pictures, rapidly applied especially in the scantily handled backgrounds with their blue-green striations and with swathes of blue white sheeting in the foreground. These consistencies could simply mean that the paintings were made at much the same time, using at least one and perhaps both models for all three.

On the other hand, one could go further and suggest that the three paintings make an informal sequence, seen like that the implicit narrative of each single painting becomes extended across the longer narrative of a triptych, if one reads them sequentially, for example, as seduction, love making, and rest. What I am suggesting here is that Lautrec may have



experimented with narrative across three different compositions using the lesbian story as the storyline.

A second approach is, strange as it may seem, to link Lautrec's lesbian pictures with science.

[01:12:03.18]

According to his friend Thadée Natanson, Lautrec was fascinated by perversions and bizarre behavior. In particular, Natanson remembered, Lautrec enthusiastically had a friend tell him at length about Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

The recollection is entirely plausible. Lautrec had several friends who were doctors, among them his cousin Gabriel Tapié de Céleyran and his flat-mate Henri Bourges. The German doctor Richard Krafft-Ebing, seen there with his wife Marie Luise, was a thoroughly respectable individual. He published *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886. It was modern, groundbreaking research on extreme human sexual behavior, using the methodology of the case study. Under a particular category, shoe fetishism for example, Krafft-Ebing would give an episodic chronological account of the symptoms and their presentation in a specific patient. Lautrec might simply have got a kick out of stories of human strangeness, but one suspects that there was more to his interest in Krafft-Ebing's book than that.

About 1894-1895, Lautrec made a number of paintings of lesbian couples which are more finished than the trio which we have just considered. These paintings show two women reclining on a bed or a couch in close, intimate, but not interlocked contact. Their surroundings are minimal, the better to concentrate the spectator's attention on the faces and body language of the women. In some of the paintings, one of the faces is turned away or semi-obscured, so that we have to guess from the gestures and the reaction of the second figure what the expression on that face might be.

[01:14:03.10]

For each of these paintings sets up a different nuanced narrative. In the [inaudible] painting at top left, the two women close on each other, apparently with mutual intent, although the slightly clenched fingers of the foreground figure perhaps suggest a certain edge to her anticipation. In the most finished of these paintings with the couple reclining on yellow cushions, the lying figure, one forearm held across her forehead seems

rather cautious of her friend's advances. In the Metropolitan's painting at lower left there might be some kind of stand-off between the two women.

And finally, in the Dresden picture at bottom right, the two figures turn quite away from each other as if the naked woman has repudiated or been angered by the seated woman in the foreground. There is no single certain way of reading any of these paintings but each is a mini narrative, setting up a subtle if only suggested moment in an unfolding, erotic story. This brings us back to Krafft-Ebing's case studies. Take Case 176: Miss X, aged 55. At the age of 27, a girl approached her with unequivocal proposals, expatiated on the senselessness of refusing, gave a full explanation of the homosexual instinct, which [inaudible] her and stormed furiously at her. Patient bore this girl's caresses, but did not admit her to any sexual intimacy in so doing, as she felt that sexual intimacy without passionate love was repulsive.

[01:16:00.09]

What Lautrec may well have drawn from what he was told of Krafft-Ebing's work was that sense of psychological instincts and sexual imperatives functioning as a narrative, as a negotiation between couples fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. Lautrec's lesbian paintings are far from scientific and certainly did not derive from any text, but it seems plausible that he was encouraged or justified by the cross disciplinary example of Krafft-Ebing in his exploration of the psychological nuances of the erotic instinct.

So we have considered narrative, the naked and the nude, the theatrical and playing the back, and a modern psychological text. Where does that leave us with *Femme de Maison*? In the Dallas pastel, narrative is not clear. The naked woman might be looking in a drawer or handling something on the surface of a piece of furniture; her elbows are at the right position to suggest this. The clothed women might possibly be helping her or simply conversing. It appears that there is an easy intimacy between the two figures, but not necessarily any more than that. There is no suggestion of disjunction, nor of any secrecy between the two women, but there is a detachment from us as in other narratives where the back is used as a blank, undemonstrative obstacle between the spectator and the protagonist of the picture.

*Femmes de Maison* is quite unlike *Conquête de Passage* where, despite the woman turning her back, the narrative of physically assertive female and attentively absorbed male is well adumbrated, nor is it like the 1892

color lithograph of *La Goulue and Her Sister Entering the Moulin Rouge* where we can easily guess the narrative of predatory women on the troll.

[01:18:05.05]

*Femmes de Maison* doesn't quite function like the overtly lesbian paintings, in which Lautrec used a particular sexual proclivity as a script for exploring psychological norms. In those pictures Lautrec got his models to act out particular relationships and responses, so the lesbian pictures are to a certain extent performed, theatrical.

By turning both to Antoine's practice as a theatrical director and to Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, I've tried to show how Lautrec's art looked outwards, drawing from other disciplines to stimulate and deepen his own work. *Femmes de Maison* remains a subtle and suggestive image of domesticity and sisterhood in grim surroundings, combining remarkable draftsmanship and idiosyncratic chromatics with nuanced associations with the worlds of the theater and of psychology, and revealing Lautrec as an artist of wider range than such a straightforward motif would at first suggest. Thank you.

Olivier Meslay: Thank you Richard, thank you Belinda. It's always fascinating to see how two people like you could scrutinize paintings in a different way. It's really fascinating; it's really for us a new way to look at paintings. I am sure that there is even if this subject seems to be exhausted in a way, you have probably some questions to the speakers and they would be probably very pleased to answer your questions.

[01:20:04.12]

Audience member: I was wondering how the two artists supported themselves. Did they support themselves off the paintings they produced or was there outside income from family or, how did they support themselves?

BT: I think in the case of Vuillard, he didn't come from a wealthy family at all, so, yes, I think art was the essential means of making a living.

RT: Toulouse-Lautrec came from an aristocratic family and they had estates in the south of France. He wasn't incredibly wealthy. He did have some private money from the family and the family were very useful for sending him things he needed, like barrels of wine and dead pheasants. But he was very keen to paint and make prints and sell his work because it showed that he was an independent artist. So he didn't necessarily need to earn a living but it was a matter of pride that he did.

Audience member: The back studies were all women, would you comment on the paintings depicting Aristide Bruant, all of which also start out clearly with the back?

RT: That's a very good question. I almost showed one of the Aristide Bruant prints, the posters, because the final print that Lautrec did--the poster that Lautrec did for Aristide Bruant--was showing him seen from the back.

[01:22:01.09]

For those of you who don't who Aristide Bruant was, he was a cabaret singer who had a dreadful voice, very, very similar to early Bob Dylan, who sang songs in Parisian working-class slang about life on the back streets and Lautrec made a number of posters promoting Bruant who he knew quite well.

But the last poster shows Bruant from behind and I think Lautrec could do that because he had so well presented Bruant from the front, Bruant with his striking black hat and scarlet scarf and trousers tucked into his boots that people then knew the silhouette of Bruant, so when Lautrec did him like this, people got it, it read Bruant. So the back then was a way of saying "you know as well as I do" and that's a good way of selling something to make the potential purchaser part of the deal.

So, the lady there --

Audience Member: I have a question about Vuillard. On one hand, you make this really convincing interpretation of the interiors as something very personal to him, something very bound up with familial relations and with the identity of the figures. On the other hand, there is also his relationship with the theater that also seems to be very important to him at that time period. Is there any way in which the interiors can be read as somewhat staged, as somewhat less interior or maybe more exteriorized and playing to an audience?

BT: That's a very interesting point as well. Quite a lot of the compositions do actually borrow from the stage, the sort of proscenium arch idea and certain compositions I think have been related to specific plays. So I think the theatrical is an aspect that he builds very consciously into the presentation.

[01:24:04.23]

And must have in mind that we are going to be the spectator, it's not a private presentation in that sense.

Audience member: Those paintings then were sold on the market, or did they stay in the family or were they things that went out into the world?

BT: Certain of them were sold, yes. But what's interesting is that whereas now we are fascinated by the possibility of matching with the photographs of being able to identify who individual members of the group were, his titles would always be neutral or as neutral as possible, so as to make them actually more acceptable I suppose to the outside world.

RT: Lady at the back.

Audience member: I was interested to what degree voyeurism is a part of Lautrec and even Vuillard at a certain point.

RT: They were both great lookers.

Audience member: I mean, for us as a viewer. The back view you are in essence, the viewer, the voyeur of each painting.

RT: Well, I think, I can't speak for Vuillard, I don't dare, but certainly with Lautrec, I mean, he was very conscious of where he was looking from, how he was looking, that's what I was trying to suggest with that pastel. He was looking most consciously at that back and the middle. The room behind her didn't matter. So he makes us look in the same way. So he orchestrates the way we look at the works of art. Vuillard?

BT: Yes, I would sort of slightly differently characterize Vuillard from the way Lautrec is being a voyeur but nevertheless that viewpoint that he identified in the quote I gave you of liking to watch people who aren't aware of being watched.

[01:26:07.15]

And building that into his work. I think in that sense, he is a voyeur.

RT: Yes.

Audience member: Do you believe there is any correlation between what the works of art would sell for, say at Christie's, of a given artist and that artist's excellence as perceived by critics?

BT: Critics of the time they were working you mean, or critics today?

Audience member: Either critics today or critics then. Critics then, not so much for Impressionism because critics didn't really appreciate Impressionism...

RT: We are art historians, we don't know much about the market.

Audience member: [inaudible]

RT: Sorry, stuck.

Lady in the middle?

Audience member: One thing that was fascinating that we are sitting here in this kind of clean gallery talking about these paintings that originated in a such a vibrant lifestyle and were made in brothels or in the summer villas of their artist's friends and I was wondering, you know you've given us this great insight into a lot of times they are psyche and how that shaped to be the paintings or the cultural things that were going on. And I was just wondering how do you approach your research, where you begin, do you think that it has a story or do you start with the formal art aspects?

BT: I think one always begins with the object.

[01:28:01.19]

And that leads us to ask questions and those questions may take you in a number of different directions, but yes, I don't think it's wise to begin with a story, but with an artist like Vuillard where one has built up and built up a knowledge of many works, it's perhaps insidious that the story does come to the fore, and perhaps not entirely wrong, because he wants to engage us and I think he is doing so in a very knowing way.

RT: Having just given an absolutely feeble answer to the previous question and said we're art historians, I would try to answer this much more rigorously as an art historian. An art historian is a kind of historian and whereas an economic historian has as their primary evidence a lot statistics or a military historian might have his as primary evidence a tank. An art historian has as the primary piece of evidence the work of art. One must start with that and then as Belinda says, what the questions that that work of art arouses in one's mind lead off in all sorts of different directions, but certainly for the kind of art historians we are, it's always a question of starting with the work of art, and however far one goes from it, always try to come back to it.

BT: Tried to be, yeah.

Audience member: You said that in the pastel, the clothed figure was added later and so how did that change how you interpret with that paint or look at that piece art?

[01:30:02.18]

RT: Well I think it, by adding a second figure he added some sort of narrative relationship, didn't he? He with the woman pulling on the stocking that I showed you as well, he began with a single figure and then left her as it happens in that case, and reproduced her again, recycled the same figure with a second figure to set up some narrative. With the Dallas pastel, I believe he started with the drawing in the middle of the nude figure, the naked figure, which he might have left, but then added the second figure in order to develop some sort of suggestive narrative between them. So it was a question of development of the same subject on the same large drawing.

Olivier Meslay: Well, thank you very much, thank you. Just to add a final touch about the question, how do you look at paintings, to give you a clue probably, Belinda and Richard are coming from University of Edinburgh, one of the most famous student in Edinburgh University was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and probably you took your method from him.

[Laughter]

