



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Opening of the “Toulouse-Lautrec and Jane Avril :
Beyond the Moulin Rouge” exhibition at the
Courtauld Gallery

Wednesday, 15th June 2011

Professor Swallow,

Friends,

First of all, I'd like to tell you how much pleasure it gives me this evening to inaugurate this magnificent exhibition, "Toulouse-Lautrec and Jane Avril: Beyond the Moulin Rouge" at the Courtauld Institute of Art.

It follows on from the remarkable show of Cézanne's "Card Players", inaugurated by my predecessor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, and is an integral part of a series of prestigious exhibitions during which masterpieces from the Courtauld collection have been revisited and reinterpreted through juxtaposition with works lent for the occasion by institutions all over the world: the MoMa in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, not to mention the Musée Toulouse-Lautrec in Albi and the National Library of France.

This initiative brings to light a particular aspect of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's work and his special relationship with Jane Avril, the star dancer at the famous Paris cabaret the Moulin Rouge. The young dancer, both muse and friend, inspired the master's most celebrated posters, which marked a major turning-point in the history of art and advertising at the end of the 19th century. Together they crossed the Channel in 1896, when Jane Avril introduced the French cancan to London's Palace Theatre with Mlle Eglantine's troupe, having specially commissioned a poster from the artist. As the subheading "Beyond the Moulin Rouge" makes clear, this exhibition skilfully highlights the close alliance between these two emblematic figures in the bohemian Paris of the Belle Epoque.

So I'd like to pay tribute to the remarkable work done to this end by Dr Nancy Ireson, the exhibition's curator, who carried out substantial research in French archives.

I'm delighted to see that the Institut français has once again joined forces with the Courtauld Gallery, to organize a series of films linked to Toulouse-Lautrec and the French cancan at the Ciné Lumière in July. "Moulin Rouge" by John Huston and "French Cancan" by Jean Renoir, among others, will be screened as a reminder of the bohemian, cabaret spirit of Paris in that period. We're also thrilled to welcome Dr Ireson to speak after the screening of Roger Planchon's film "Lautrec" on 6 July, and I welcome this new artistic cooperation between our two institutions.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you all a very enjoyable evening.