



'No matter how spontaneous and deep Rousseau's work is (and the same holds true about all folk dilettantes), the nice matter-of-factness that he does not abandon even in the most poetical or fantastic topics, the profoundness and sharpness of viewing, and simple and plain spatial rendition of what he sees rank him in the tradition of art which was emerging at the beginning of the 19th century.'

Josef Čapek

PRESS RELEASE

Rousseau Displayed Next to World Famous Artists in the National Gallery in Prague

The first exhibition of Henri Rousseau in the Czech Republic presents the wide array of Rousseau's paintings face to face with Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, or Josef Čapek. The story of a painter who became famous for his legendary jungle scenes without ever leaving France unfolds through the exhibition at Kinsky Palace on the Old Town Square. The exhibition *Douanier Rousseau: Painter's Paradise Lost* has been prepared by the National Gallery in Prague in cooperation with the Paris Musée d'Orsay and it will run from 15 September to 15 January.

There were many myths around Douanier Rousseau related to his military career, job, and painting activities. Despite having been described as a Sunday and self-taught painter, he received advice from academic painters and learned by copying the works in Parisian galleries. Rousseau began his professional painting career in 1893 when he retired from his job of collecting duties on food. He was not a true customs officer as indicated by his 'Le Douanier' nickname which he received from Alfred Jarry. Many years after the artist's death, the legend spread about his participation in the military campaign in Mexico. The stories of his friends as well as visits to the botanical and zoological gardens and the natural history museum were his only sources inspiring him to depict exotic jungles. The painter never left France.

'At first, the spectators ridiculed his paintings but he was later acknowledged by some painters, literates, and art collectors. In his paintings Rousseau dealt with similar issues as Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, and Frida Kahlo. He was a source of inspiration mainly for the Der Blaue Reiter group led by Wassily Kandinsky,' says Kristýna Brožová, the curator of the exhibition at the National Gallery in Prague.

In the Czech milieu, there were different responses to Douanier's work but he played an important role for the Czech avant-garde artists. *'In the second half of the 1920s, an image was created of a stylised, rather eccentric artist wearing a beret, who is not a very skilled painter. Rousseau was an archetype of artist for Czech popular culture. This may have been reflected in a nice yet slightly peculiar painter (acted by Rudolf Hrušínský), who paints a castle from the same spot all year long, in a Czech film How the Poets Are Enjoying Their Lives,'* adds Kristýna Brožová.

The Kinsky Palace exhibition puts on display Douanier's famous scenes from tropical jungles (*The Snake Charmer, Fight between a Tiger and a Buffalo, Tropical Forest with Monkeys*) next to the exotic motifs by Max Ernst, Toyen, and Emil Filla. Rousseau's landscapes with houses, factory chimneys, trees, fishermen, and pedestrians (*Footbridge at Passy, People Walking in a Park, The Avenue in the Park at Saint-Cloud*) are exhibited next to the landscapes by Paul Signac, Georges Seurat, Kamil Lhoták, and Jindřich Štýrský. The paintings rendering women are put next to the portraits of Frida Kahlo and Pablo Picasso. Rousseau's famous self-portrait *Myself, Portrait-Landscape*, for which the Czechoslovak state paid more than 300,000 Czech crowns in 1923 (a great sum of money at that

time) is displayed next to the works of Jiří Kolář and Giorgio de Chirico.

As part of the exhibition architecture devised by Jiří Javůrek and his company (SGL project), the façade of the Old Town palace will come alive – the visitors will pass through jungle on their way to the ticket counter and, in addition to the exhibition, will find a creative workshop on the first floor. Surrounded with greenery, children and adults will be able to get inspired, be creative, or read books dealing with Le Douanier there. Besides the traditional guided tours and art workshops, the public programme will include a ‘Soirée’ organised by contemporary artists and inspired by the legendary banquet which Pablo Picasso held in honour of Henri Rousseau. The artists’ party will take place in the Kinsky Palace cellars.

The visual design of the exhibition produced by Tomáš Machek (Side2) boldly combines the motif of Le Douanier with *The Snake Charmer* background. At the same time, the Snake Charmer is the main character of the advertising spot (directed by Marek Partyš) which takes the visitors from jungle to the exhibition by a virtual walk through a picture.

The exhibition will be moved from the famous Musée d’Orsay where it was a hit among visitors and one of the most successful exhibitions of the last decade. The Prague exhibition will run from 15 September 2016 to 15 January 2017.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT HENRI ROUSSEAU

1844

Henri Julien Félix Rousseau was born in Laval on 21 May into the family of the tinsmith **Julien Rousseau** and his wife **Eléonore**, née Guyard. He had three older sisters and a younger brother.

1849–1860

Rousseau attended primary school and lyceum in Laval. Although he was not a talented student, he won awards for music and drawing.

1851

His father's business went bankrupt. The family moved many times before settling in Angers in 1861.

1863

Rousseau started to work for a lawyer in Angers from whom he stole several francs and postage stamps. To avoid a stricter punishment, he enlisted in the army as a result of his parents' pressure. In the next year, he was sentenced to a month in prison in Nantes for his theft. After serving his sentence, he joined his regiment.

1867

He listened to the recollections of the soldiers who had survived the French expedition to Mexico sent by Napoleon III of France to support Emperor Maximilian. When he later explained the exotic themes of his paintings, Rousseau pretended that he participated in the Mexico expedition.

1868

After his father's death, Rousseau was released from the army. He moved to Paris and became a bailiff's typist.

1869

He married **Clémence Boitard**. According to his 1907 statement, they had seven children but only their daughter Julia lived to an adult age.

1870

During the Franco-Prussian War, Rousseau was drafted into the regiment in Dreux but despite the legends about rescuing the city, he did not take part in any battles.

1871

In December, Rousseau was appointed as a collector of duties on food, and beginning in February of the next year he mainly supervised wine and spirit merchants at the guardhouses on the Seine riverbanks and at the town gates. At that time, he appeared to have begun painting.

1884

Based on the recommendation of the painter **Félix Auguste Clément**, Rousseau obtained permission to copy paintings at the Musée du Louvre, the Musée du Luxembourg, and the royal palaces of Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

1885

Rousseau exhibited his two paintings at the Salon des Indépendants which most likely were not accepted by the jury of the official Salon. He was awarded a prize by the Literary and Musical

Academy of France for his Clémence waltz with a violin or mandolin overture which he dedicated to his wife.

1886

Rousseau first exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants which was established two years earlier with a motto 'with neither jury nor reward'. He exhibited there regularly with the exception of 1899 and 1900.

1888

His wife died from tuberculosis.

1889

Inspired by the Universal Exposition, Rousseau wrote a vaudeville play with three acts and ten scenes entitled *A Visit to the Exposition of 1889*; however, the Châtelet Theatre rejected it and it was first published as late as 1947 by **Tristan Tzara**, the 'father of Dadaism'.

1893

Rousseau retired to devote himself entirely to painting.

1894

He met **Alfred Jarry**, the writer of the *Ubu Roi* drama, who nicknamed him Le Douanier (customs officer).

1895

Rousseau wrote a short autobiography for the second volume of the book *The Portraits of the Next Century* which, however, was never published.

1899

He married the widow **Joséphine Noury**.

1902

He became a teacher of the Association Philotechnique which held drawing and painting courses for adults.

1903

His second wife died.

1905

Rousseau introduced one of his greatest paintings, *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* at the Autumn Salon. The work was exhibited near the paintings of **Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck**, branded by art critic **Louis Vauxcelles** as wild beasts (les fauves), the basis for the artistic term Fauvism. In addition to vibrant colours, Rousseau's Hungry Lion may have influenced the very term.

1906

Rousseau moved to Perrel Street No. 2b where the sculptor **Armand Queval** leased a large studio to him. There he gave drawing, painting, and music lessons. Alfred Jarry introduced Rousseau to **Guillaume Apollinaire**.

1907

Rousseau exhibited *The Snake Charmer*, which was commissioned by the mother of the painter **Robert Delaunay**, at the Autumn Salon. At that time he met **Wilhelm Uhde**, an art critic and art collector of German origin who wrote Rousseau's first monograph.

1908

Uhde organised Rousseau's first exhibition but forgot to place an address on the invitation cards. Guillaume Apollinaire introduced Le Douanier to **Pablo Picasso** who held a legendary banquet at Bateau-Lavoir in Rousseau's honour. At other times, parties were also organised in Rousseau's studio.

1909

A suspended sentence was imposed on Rousseau for bank fraud in 1907. However, he was successful at that time, selling works not only to **Ambrois Vollard** and **Wilhelm Uhde** but also to the Hungarian art collector and merchant **Joseph Brummer**, Italian writer and painter **Ardengo Soffici**, Russian painter **Sergei Jastrebov** (aka Serge Férat), and his cousin **Hélène d'Ættingen** (using for example an artistic pseudonym Roch Grey).

1910

He hurt his leg and died from gangrene at the Necker Hospital on 2 September. Only seven people came to his burial; among the artists were **Paul Signac** and **Robert Delaunay**. Guillaume Apollinaire later wrote an epitaph that **Manuel Ortiz de Zarate** and **Constantin Brâncuși** carved on the tombstone.

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAM

Guided tour in English

Sunday, 27 November, 4.30 pm, with Lenka Kerdová, art historian and artist

Admission fee: free with valid ticket / **Duration:** 30–90 minutes

Pre-booked guided tours

Book a guided tour in Czech, English, German, or French.

SOIRÉE

THU 12 January 2017, 6 pm – 12 pm. A soirée organised by contemporary artists and inspired by the legendary banquet which Pablo Picasso held in honour of Henri Rousseau. Can Rousseau be as fascinating today as he was back then?

Find possible answers to this question at the exhibition which will remain open until 8 pm, or at the after party of artists which will take place in the Kinsky Palace cellars.

Free admission

Studio

RE-ROUSSEAU!

A space in the exhibition with workshops prepared for children and adults. Get inspired by the world of Henri Rousseau: experience real and imagined things, surround yourself with greenery, and get immersed in details. Study Rousseau from all angles – examine, draw, and capture. Compose and play with proportions. Immerse in fiction and non-fiction books.

Activity sheets

JUNGLE IN PARIS

Learn about the worlds of Rousseau – the city, jungle, wild flowers... A colourful exhibition guide for children and playful adults.

Free of charge at the Kinsky Palace ticket counter.

Information and Reservation

Education department, National Gallery in Prague, e-mail: vzdelavani@ngprague.cz, tel.: 224 301 003, www.ngprague.cz

Meet at the ticket counter. The programme is subject to change.

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Duration

15 September 2016 – 15 January 2017

Venue

National Gallery in Prague – Kinsky Palace

Exhibition creators

Gabriella Belli, Guy Cogeval

Curator

Kristýna Brožová

In cooperation with

Musée d'Orsay

Supported by

Ministry of Culture Czech Republic

General partner of the National Gallery in Prague

Komerční banka

Main partner

The Pudil Family Foundation

Partners

Prague, Institut français de Prague, Law Office Pelikán Krofta Kohoutek, Prague Botanical Garden

General media partner

Česká televize

Media partner of the exhibition

Radio 1

Media partners of the National Gallery in Prague

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CONTACT INFORMATION AND PICTURE MATERIAL

Press Materials and Pictures

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