

HENRI ROUSSEAU: Paint + Process

A Menil Symposium

Scholars to present new findings on the artist's media and methods

Sponsored by the Vivian L. Smith Foundation

Saturday, October 2, 2010, 2:00–6:30 p.m.

FREE and Open to the Public
Jones Auditorium, University of St. Thomas, Houston

**So you think you know Rousseau – he of the magical pictures of sleeping gypsies
and jungles of the imagination? Come see...**

Houston, September 7, 2010 – An extraordinary gathering of art historians, curators, and conservators will gather in Houston on Saturday, October 2 to present and discuss new research into the work of Henri Rousseau. The afternoon symposium – to be held at Jones Auditorium on the University of St. Thomas campus, located two blocks east of the Menil Collection – is free of charge and open to the public.



Born in 1844, the French painter is perhaps one of the most misunderstood of modern artists. Although some of Rousseau's pictures are among the most famous and beloved of their era (and of art-history classes), debate has abounded for decades about the artist's methods, techniques, media, and intentions. To this day some consider Rousseau a grandfather of Surrealism, others a precursor of Cubism – while still others have positioned him as the leader of a school of modern primitives. Long acknowledged as a key figure in the evolution of modern painting, Rousseau, regarded as a “naïve” artist, suffered from a general disregard of the physical properties of his work, and his aesthetic objectives have never been well understood.

Fittingly, in 2010 – the centennial year of the artist's death – ***Henri Rousseau: Paint + Process*** challenges received wisdom regarding the creation of his captivating body of work. Marking the culmination of a year-long inquiry by two scholars in residence at the Menil – Katrina Bartlett, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Paintings Conservation, and Caitlin Haskell, Vivian L. Smith Foundation

Fellow – the interdisciplinary, international symposium will delve into questions about how Rousseau, who was first and foremost a painter, constructed his pictures.

Henri Rousseau: Paint + Process promises to be a stimulating Saturday, laying the groundwork for a new approach to the painter, drawing on conservation science as well as new art-historical insights. Among the works considered will be two unusual Rousseau paintings residing in the Menil Collection, *Bonne fête*, 1892, and *La Sainte Famille*, 1905, a singular work of modern sacred art whose attribution has remained in question for decades.

The distinguished company gathering in Houston to present groundbreaking research into Rousseau's paintings includes conservators, curators, and historians from the Art Institute of Chicago; the Barnes Foundation; Buffalo State College; Courtauld Institute; Fondation Beyeler; J. Paul Getty Museum; Kimbell Art Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Phillips Collection; Rice University; and the University of Texas at Austin.

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(Opening remarks followed by 3 one-hour sessions, with short breaks)

Welcome and opening remarks by Josef Helfenstein, Director, the Menil Collection, and Pierre Grandjouan, Consul General of France. Leading the symposium will be Katrina Bartlett, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Paintings Conservation, and Caitlin Haskell, Vivian L. Smith Foundation Fellow, who since last fall have worked in collaboration with conservators and curators from institutions worldwide. Speakers include Stephanie D'Alessandro, Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago; Gordon Hughes, Mellon Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History at Rice University; Nancy Ireson, an author of the exhibition catalogue "Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris" (2005) and Schroder Foundation Curator of Paintings, the Courtauld Gallery; Jay Krueger, senior conservator of modern paintings at the National Gallery of Art; Richard Shiff, Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art at the University of Texas at Austin; Yvonne Szafran, department head, Paintings Conservation, J. Paul Getty Museum.

Jones Auditorium is located at 3910 Yoakum Boulevard near the corner of Sul Ross Street. Free parking is available on the streets around the Menil and the University of St. Thomas, in the Menil's main parking lot (W. Alabama at Mulberry), and in the lot west of the Link-Lee Mansion (W. Alabama at Yoakum). Paid parking (\$2) is available in the Moran Center Parking Garage (W. Alabama at Graustark).

The Menil Collection gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the University of St. Thomas for the use of Jones Auditorium.

Photo Caption:

Henri Rousseau, *Bonne fête (Happy Birthday)*, 1892.

Oil on cardboard mounted on cradled panel

The Menil Collection, Houston. Photo: Paul Hester, Houston

For more information
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