

Expert meeting on prints

The Van Gogh Museum organized an expert meeting on 1 June 2017 on the subject of French fin-de-siècle prints as part of the programme around the exhibition *Prints in Paris 1900*. The international participants exchanged ideas on meaning, context and materials.



Participants of the expert meeting discuss French prints in the exhibition 'Prints in Paris 1900'.

Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Van Gogh Museum, Fleur Roos Rosa de Carvalho, kicked off the expert meeting by explaining the specific challenges of an exhibition dedicated to prints, and by outlining the synthesis at which she arrived after her many years of research, culminating in the *Prints in Paris 1900* exhibition.

Hierarchy between high and low art overturned

In the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, Roos Rosa de Carvalho convincingly shows how avant-garde artists like the Nabis overturned the traditional hierarchy of high and low art. Artists such as Bonnard or Toulouse-Lautrec navigated with ease between the seemingly opposing worlds of 'elite' and 'street'. What's more, many artists broke through

traditional barriers by working in a wide variety of media, ranging from printmaking to painting, illustration, decoration, and even jewellery design.

Prints in the context of their history

Roos Rosa de Carvalho's contribution to the expert meeting highlighted her intention to return the prints to the larger context of their history, as Peter Parshall put it. Taking the actual object as her starting point, she was able to show the many different segments of the *fin-de-siècle* print world in their own right, and to bring considerable nuance to the supposedly democratic qualities of *fin-de-siècle* prints.

Distinguishing print techniques

Philip Dennis Cate (Emeritus Director of The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum) discussed the highly complex range of modern photomechanical printing techniques in the late nineteenth century, with particular reference to magazine illustrations. With help of paper restorer Nico Lingbeek and armed with magnifying glasses, the experts tackled the problem of distinguishing a lithograph from a photomechanical reproduction.

New insights into the work of Toulouse-Lautrec

Gabe Weisberg (Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota) and Richard Thomson (Watson Gordon Professor of Fine Art, University of Edinburgh), offered fresh insights into Toulouse-Lautrec's iconic poster for the *Divan Japonais*, encouraging oblique ways of looking and presenting brand new research findings.

Material qualities of the print

A new generation of print scholars shared their insights. Natalia Vieyra (PhD candidate from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University) and Britany Salsbury (Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings, Milwaukee Art Museum) gave thought-provoking talks on the intrinsic material qualities of the print. Their innovative approaches showed how these material qualities served as agents to convey immaterial meaning and were used strategically by printmakers to enhance the subject matter, tone and viewing experience of their works.

'Cabinet d'amateur' and the 'invention of rarity'

Nicholas-Henri Zmelty (Maître de conférences en histoire de l'art contemporain, Université de Picardie Jules Verne) and Willa Silverman (Professor of French and Jewish Studies, Pennsylvania State University) shared their approach to print-collecting practices. Silverman was this year's

Visiting Fellow for the Van Gogh Museum's annual research seminar, which coincided with the expert meeting. She provided her historian's insight into the milieu of collectors of fine books and prints and their circuits of production, distribution and reception. Silverman also elaborated on the décor of the cabinet d'amateur as a space of contemplation and male sociability. Zmelty spoke about the 'invention of rarity', showing why and how artists and art dealers introduced the concept in poster-making and collecting.

Conclusion

It was a privilege for all those present to be able to engage with one another and with the artworks on display. This inspiring exchange will no doubt lead to new endeavours in the fascinating era of fin-de-siècle printmaking.