Celebrating French Women

On the occasion of Women’s Day, celebrated internationally on March 8, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin spoke before a large audience of guests at his Matignon residence, insisting on the need to promote a “true culture of equality.” Following President Jacques Chirac, who had earlier emphasized this need, the prime minister stressed in particular the importance of professional equality: “the stake is to show women that the whole field of possibilities is available to them.”

Demonstrating its resolve, the French government unveiled a Charter of Equality Between Men and Women during the ceremony. Officially presented to Raffarin by Nicole Ameline, minister delegate for parity and equality in the workplace, the charter states that equality between men and women is essential for democracy in France and includes approximately 300 concrete actions that will be undertaken by the government, businesses and other organizations to attain parity (please see page 6 for more information).

From Suffrage to Parity (Continued on page 4)

THE CHARTER IS THE LATEST in a long series of measures seeking to give women equal rights.

Women were granted the right to vote in France in 1944 by President Charles de Gaulle and the following year they were able to present themselves as candidates for parliament. On becoming president in 1995, Jacques Chirac decided to re-emphasize the importance of parity. The Observatory for Parity Between Women and Men was established, and in 1999 the French Constitution was amended. Articles 3 and 4 now expressly state that parity is a national goal, and that legislators may thus enact laws that promote parity.

In June 2000, the National Assembly passed a law mandating that political parties present an equal number of female and male candidates in most elections (particularly in regional, parliamentary, and European elections). France thus became the first country in the world to require an equal number of male and female candidates. Parties that do not present an approximately equal number of male and female candidates are fined.

Such policies are beginning to have an effect, especially on France’s political culture. Today, 11 women are part of Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s government, which is composed of 39 ministers, minister delegates and secretaries of state. Among them, Mme. Alliot-Marie holds the key position of minister for defense, while Claudie Haigneré, a former astronaut, is minister delegate for research and new technologies.

French Women Firsts

1851: Angélique Duchemin (1772-1859), who fought for France in the Napoleonic Wars, was the first woman to be awarded the Legion of Honor, personally presented to her by Napoleon III in 1851. At first Duchemin fought disguised as a man, but by the time her gender was discovered, she had proved so valuable in battle that she was allowed to remain in the military openly as a woman.

1903: Marie Curie (1867-1934) was the first woman to be awarded a Nobel Prize (Physics, 1903) and soon obtained a second (Chemistry, 1911). In 1995, she became the first woman to be interred in the Panthéon, the mausoleum reserved for France’s most revered dead.

1947: Germaine Poinsot-Chapin (1901-1961) became the first female minister (for public health) in France.


1959: Simone Veil was the first woman to preside over the European Parliament.

1961: Marguerite Yourcenar (1903-1987) was the first woman to be elected to the Académie Française.

1990: Christine Janin was the first French woman to climb Mount Everest, and in 1997 became the first woman in the world to reach the North Pole alone, without a dog team or mechanical help.


1996: Claudie Haigneré, French astronaut, was the first European woman in space. She is now minister delegate for research and new technology.

1997: Laurence de La Ferrière was the first French woman to reach the South Pole.

2000: Peggy Bouchet became the first woman to row across the Atlantic.

2002: Michèle Alliot-Marie was the first woman to head the French Ministry of Defense.

Paris Goes to Washington...

Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë presents a gift to Washington Mayor Anthony Williams during a reception, attended by French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte (left), at the French Embassy on March 7. Williams had invited “his friend” Delanoë to address the members of the National League of Cities, which was holding its annual meeting that same day. In very warm terms, both mayors expressed satisfaction with the high level of exchanges between their two capitals, in particular in cultural matters, and with the excellent prospects for reinforced co-operation.
Excellent Franco-U.S. Coordination in Haiti

U.S. PRESIDENT GEORGE W. Bush and French President Jacques Chirac hailed their countries’ cooperation over the Haiti crisis, in what is the latest sign of a gradual rapprochement between the two nations. Indeed, on March 2, Bush called Chirac to “thank France for its action” and to praise the “perfect coordination” between French and American troops. The two military forces will work side by side, as they do in many other locations, including Afghanistan. Of the 2,500 international troops already present in Haiti, about 850 are French legionsnaires and gendarmes.

On February 29, France and the United States, along with Canada and Chile, sent troops to the Caribbean island following Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide’s decision to resign. The forces, under a joint U.S. command, are attempting to restore order to the country after an armed rebellion threatened to ignite a bloody civil war. Both the U.S. and France have a strong interest in restoring order to Haiti. The former French colony is home to 2,000 French expatriates who rely on France for their safety, and America wishes to avert a crisis in its close neighbor which could lead to a large influx of Haitians seeking refuge on U.S. soil.

According to French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin, the joint Franco-American operation has been a model of “good diplomacy working.” Villepin has kept in constant contact with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell during the crisis, and the two countries believe that the United Nations and the Caribbean Community (Caricom) must play a key part in resolving the crisis and bringing peace and stability back to Haiti.

Villepin declared on March 3 that the intervention in Haiti was carried out “with due regard for the law” and he hopes that it will “restore order and security throughout the country.” The French foreign minister also added that, in cooperation with the U.S., France will provide “humanitarian aid to address the needs of the Haitian people for whom the crisis has caused particularly grievous suffering.” Finally, Villepin announced his plans to travel to Haiti as soon as the country has elected a new government.

Minister Delegate Noëlle Lenoir Visits U.S.

LENOR promoted European integration during her week-long visit in America.

French Minister Delegate for European Affairs Noëlle Lenoir received a warm welcome from members of the Congressional French Caucus and the Bush Administration during her visit to Washington, D.C., from February 25 to March 2. Her meetings with U.S. officials revolved around transatlantic trade issues as well as political issues concerning the greater Middle East, Iraq, Iran and the enlargement of Europe. Lenoir also gave several speeches at American think tanks and universities.

In addresses to the Brookings Institution, the Center for Transatlantic Relations of John Hopkins University, Yale University, and Columbia University, she emphasized that “Europe was always meant to be a political force, not a mere market.” She argued that the political nature of European integration has been present for the last 50 years, and it resulted in the creation of unique institutions, numerous common policies, and in the ambition to have a unified foreign policy for Europe. In light of this, she explained, “the draft Constitution aims at bringing more purpose and effectiveness into our political aspirations.”

She also spoke of a more cohesive European foreign policy, with, for instance, the appointment of a European foreign minister, and of a more ambitious European defense. She emphasized the advances toward a common European citizenship, and she announced the upcoming distribution of a booklet stating the rights and duties of E.U. citizens to all European youths on their 18th birthday.

New President, Members for Constitutional Council

After the terms of Constitutional Council President Yves Guéna and two other Council members expired on March 8, President Jacques Chirac and the presidents of the National Assembly and Senate named three new members and appointed one of the current members, Pierre Mazeau, as the new President of the Council. Every three years, one-third of the Council’s members are renewed (they are limited to a single term). The Council is the French equivalent of the U.S. Supreme Court. It is composed of 9 members who control the constitutionality of laws and the validity of presidential and parliamentary elections. For more information, please visit www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr.

Addressing the question of enlargement, she repeated that “the unification of Europe was always one of the purposes of the European Union and successive enlargements (including the present one) are arguably its most successful policies.” Finally, she said that Europe is determined to “develop strong partnerships with its neighbors in order to build areas of stability and prosperity around it,” and she emphasized the importance of the transatlantic link in this endeavor.
Earth’s gravity cancel each other out, the James Webb Space Telescope, which will replace the Hubble Space Telescope that now orbits Earth. The French National center for space research (CNES) will participate technically and financially to the project, contributing approximately 17 million euros. The CNES will notably help design the telescope’s infrared instrument, MIRI (which stands for Mid InfraRed Instrument).

The different space agencies involved in the project hope to launch James Webb with a European Ariane 5 rocket around 2011. Placed in orbit 1.5 million kilometers away from Earth, at a point where the Sun and Earth’s gravity cancel each other out, the James Webb Space Telescope will help researchers better understand the origin and evolution of galaxies, stars and planetary systems. Indeed, the space telescope, unaffected by atmospheric disturbances, will be capable of peering further away than has ever been achieved.

The Hubble Space Telescope was launched in April 1990. About the same size as a school bus, Hubble is 14 feet across and 43 feet long. On the ground it would weigh over 25,000 pounds but in space it weighs nothing. The telescope orbits about 353 miles (569 kilometers) above the Earth, and takes about 97 minutes to complete one orbit. Among many other discoveries, Hubble recently observed one of the most distant galaxies ever identified (please see NFF 04.02 for more details).
In the early fifteenth century, a young girl, destined to become one of France's most cherished heroes, was born in present-day Domrémy-la-Pucelle. Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc in French) helped the King of France, Charles VII, oust the English from France during the Hundred Years' War. She approached Charles VII and convinced him that she alone had a mission to save France, and that her mission was of divine origin. Armored and carrying a white flag with the fleur-de-lis on it (representing God blessing the French royal emblem), Joan of Arc led the French to victory over the English in Orleans. A courageous leader, she was not afraid to present herself as an equal to men in an age when no one had yet heard of women's rights.

... in science: Marie Curie

Marie Curie, née Maria Skłodowska, became one of the world's most famous scientists. Born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1867, she moved to Paris in 1891 to continue her scientific studies at the Sorbonne. There she met Pierre Curie and together they worked on radioactivity. In 1903 the Curies were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics, making Marie Curie the first woman to have won the prestigious Swedish prize. Marie Curie also became the first woman to teach at the Sorbonne, taking over her husband's chair following his death in 1906. In 1910 she succeeded in isolating pure radium metal and she was awarded her second Nobel Prize (in chemistry) in 1911. During World War I, Curie helped pioneer the use of radiation for medical purposes, using X-rays to find bullets lodged in bodies for instance. Curie died in 1934 of leukemia, caused in all probability by her extensive exposure to high levels of radiation during her research.

... in fashion: Coco Chanel

Coco Chanel, née Gabrielle Chaned, France's legendary fashion designer, opened her first hat boutique in 1909 when she was 26 years old. Three years later, she decided to diversify her activity and opened a fashion shop in Paris, then in Deauville (1913) and Biarritz (1914). By the mid-1920s, with the expansion of the 'Chanel style'—casual wool jersey suits that feminised masculine designs—her name had become synonymous with elegance and chic. Chanel was the first seamstress to launch her own perfume brand (1921), and she gained world-wide celebrity with her Chanel No. 5 fragrance. She was soon employing nearly 4,000 workers and selling 28,000 pieces per year worldwide, particularly in the United States where she had a faithful clientele. She died in 1971, a few weeks before her last, triumphant collection was presented.

... in music: Edith Piaf

Edith Piaf, née Edith Gassion (1915-1963), was France's most popular singer. Born to an acrobat and a singer, she moved to Paris when she was 15 and worked as a café and street singer. She was discovered in 1935 by a cabaret owner who named her La Môme Piaf (The Kid Sparrow), aptly describing her physical characteristics, as she was only four feet, ten inches tall (1.47m). Thanks to her unique, impressive and powerful voice, she became famous with songs such as "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" or "L'Hymne à l'Amour" (the little sparrow wrote more than 80 songs during her career). In 1937, she officially became Edith Piaf and acted in her first movie, La Garçonne. In 1956 she became internationally acclaimed after her concert at the prestigious New York Carnegie Hall. She died in 1963 in the south of France.

... in journalism: Françoise Giroud

Françoise Giroud, born in Geneva in 1916, was a liaison agent in the French resistance during World War II, until she was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943. But Giroud is mostly known for her important contribution to French journalism, having founded L'Express, long France's number 1 newsmagazine, in 1953 with the help of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber. During her 21-year stint at the magazine, she found the time to write about 20 books. In 1974 she went into politics, becoming secretary of state for women (1974-76) and for culture (1976-77) under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Giroud passed away last year, on January 19.

... in business: Anne Lauvergeon

Born in 1959, Anne Lauvergeon, a graduate of the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, is now one of France's leading CEOs (27 percent of the country's CEOs are women). At the helm of Cogema since June 1999, she has helped the $4–billion company consolidate its position as the world's premier nuclear fuel cycle expert. Cogema, with a staff of 20,000 and operations in over 30 countries, mines, enriches and recycles uranium for nuclear power plants. In 2001, Lauvergeon was appointed chairperson of Areva, Cogema's parent company.

... in philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir

Born in 1908 and educated in Paris, Simone de Beauvoir was among the first women permitted to study at the École Normale Supérieure. Through her lifelong friendship with Jean-Paul Sartre, she contributed significantly to the development and expression of existentialist philosophy. But she is most well known for her role in the development of feminism, with many crediting her as being the first true feminist. In Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex, 1949), Beauvoir traced the development of male oppression through historical, literary and mythical sources. Her works of fiction focus on women who take responsibility for themselves by making life-altering decisions, and she herself lived her life according to these principles.
Rosetta Launched, Probe Will be First to Land on Comet

ON MARCH 2, at 7:17 am GMT, the new European space probe, Rosetta, began a ten-year journey to the comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko, nicknamed “Chury.” Launched atop an Ariane 5 rocket from Kourou, French Guiana, the probe will cover half a billion kilometers before achieving orbit around Chury, all under the watchful eye of the European Space Agency (ESA).

The billion-euro mission will be carried out primarily by the robot Philae, which will eventually land on the comet in order to collect samples of the comet’s composition and to take photos of its surface and surroundings. Once the probe is well in the comet’s orbit, Philae will be dropped from a distance of approximately one kilometer. The impact of the landing should result in a broadened choice of services and lower fares for Americans and Europeans. In addition, security and environmental regulations would be standardized and strengthened. The OAA would also provide clear benefits for airlines: it would eradicate the restrictions that prohibit the foreign ownership and control of airlines, thus facilitating mergers, and American companies would be allowed to fly directly from one European city to another.

The Growing Success of Free Papers in France

THE FREE PRESS PHENOMENON emerged in France with A Nous Paris (“Paris belongs to us”), which offers a variety of news related to the city and which was later joined by the daily newspapers Metro and 20 Minutes and by the weekly sports publication Sport. Increasingly successful, these free papers rely on advertising to thrive. And advertisers are eager to pay up: often offered in metro stations, these free papers are especially valued by young urban professionals (yuppies), who read them on their way to and back from work. Indeed, 74 percent of their readers are between 15 and 49 years old. More than 50 percent of them did not previously read any dailies.

Circulation numbers are good indicators of the popularity of this form of media, which was launched in France in 1999 with the appearance of the weekly city guide A Nous Paris. At present, 350,000 copies of A Nous Paris are distributed in the metro stations of the Île-de-France region. Metro was launched in February 2002 in Paris (with a circulation of 340,000 issues) and in Marseilles (70,000) and was later distributed in other major cities (Lyon, Toulouse and Lille). The daily now claims 1.6 million readers throughout the country. That same year, 20 Minutes made its appearance in the Parisian metro and since its launching it has spread to Lille, Lyon and Marseilles and now boasts a daily circulation of 600,000.

FRENCH TRADE STILL GOING STRONG

Despite a sluggish global economy, France achieved a trade surplus of 4 billion euros in 2003, according to figures recently released by the Ministry of Economy. Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade François Loos noted that French exports to China and to the 11 countries that will join the European Union on May 1 have increased significantly. Loos expressed his confidence that 2004 will see even stronger results.

Even More Distant Galaxy Found!

French and Swiss astronomers announced on March 1 the discovery of an even more distant galaxy than the one found two weeks ago by a team led by French astronomer Jean-Paul Kneib (see NFF 04.02). This new galaxy is 200 million light-years farther than the previous record-holder, which itself lies 13 billion light-years from Earth. The discovery was made with the European Southern Observatory’s Very Large Telescope in Chile.

Rossignol: 50 Million Pairs of Skis!

With celebratory torches in hand, 700 mountain guides recently skied down the slopes of Courchevel in honor of winter sports giant Rossignol’s 50 millionth pair of skis. The French sports company was founded in 1907 and now dominates 25 percent of the winter sports market. Not content with producing an average of 6 million skis and snowboards per year, Rossignol has announced plans to expand into other outdoor sports products as well.

Dauzier to promote France’s Economy

Pierre Dauzier, 65, was recently named president of a new committee, the Comité de pilotage pour l’image de la France, formed to promote the economic image of France beyond its borders. As the former head of the marketing company Havas, image marketing is far from new to Dauzier.

L’Oréal Worth It: Profits Up 16.7 %

French cosmetics leader L’Oréal announced an increase of 16.7 percent in net profits for the 2003 fiscal year. This success is of particular note as analysts had formerly predicted a much more modest increase. Their lower estimate was due to the ever-increasing rise in the value of the euro relative to the dollar, which generally has damaging effects on European exports. It appears, however, that L’Oréal’s superior products speak for themselves.
CRACKING DOWN ON CLASS CUTTERS

On February 20, the government announced new measures to combat absenteeism in schools. The proposal calls for the regulation of attendance, as well as putting in place a protocol for dealing with frequent skippers. Parents and guardians are already responsible for informing the school of absences, and schools are now encouraged to maintain an open dialogue with them. As a very last resort, parents can now be held responsible for their children’s repeated absences with a fine of up to 750 euros.

GOING TO PARIS? GET OUT YOUR BIKE!

Bikes are quickly climbing up the list of preferred transportation options in Paris. During 2003, the capital saw a 31 percent increase in the number of cyclists on its streets. Denis Baupin, assistant to the mayor of Paris and in charge of transportation in the capital, gives credit to their plan to progressively reduce the amount of vehicles in circulation in Paris. When in doubt, it is usually best to follow the initiator’s lead. In any case, the French government is becoming increasingly aware of the quality of the food they put on their plates. In spite of France’s heritage of fine cuisine, it appears that in recent years French citizens are willing to sacrifice some taste in exchange for the guaranteed safety of their agricultural products.

In a 2002 poll of consumer preferences concerning agricultural products, 40 percent of respondents placed taste as the most important quality they look for in food. In a recently released survey, conducted in January 2004, only 23 percent still identify taste as their main concern, whereas 27 percent now place security as the most important criterion they take into account when purchasing produce. For these individuals, “traceability” and “guarantee of origin” are now essential.

These concerns have reached new heights as a consequence of several health scares throughout the world. The French government and the European Union have reacted forcefully, enacting new legislation and reinforcing safety measures. But the survey results indicate that the French still highly respect small farmers, who, according to respondents, fulfill their ancestral role of primarily “nourishing the people” and secondly of protecting France’s national culinary tradition. President Jacques Chirac recently underscored his commitment to help struggling farmers, in an effort to protect both national agriculture and the environment.

The Art of la Bise

IF YOU HAVE EVER been to France, you have surely noticed all the “air” kissing that takes place. This air kissing, or bise, is exchanged between friends, family, some colleagues as well as between friends of friends upon meeting and departing. Think of it as something done in lieu of the hugging that takes place in the United States. For those of you who have wondered about the when, where and wherefore of bise etiquette, rest assured. You are not alone. In fact, despite it being as common in France as breathing, French people are often at a loss themselves.

So who exactly is supposed to faire la bise? Women kiss men, men kiss women, women kiss women, and close male relatives kiss each other as well. As for technique, usually the kiss is a right-cheek-to-right-cheek action followed by the same thing on the left. One tends to make a slight kissing sound as if kissing the air: “mwoah.”

But actual practices vary from region to region, and other factors come into play as well, such as the level of intimacy between the two parties. Two bises (one on each cheek) is the most common form, although be aware that you could be the recipient of one to four bises. When in doubt, it is usually best to follow the initiator’s lead. In any case, the French are aware that many foreigners do not practice this custom and find their uncertainty and/or uneasiness cute or amusing. Be sure to use this to your advantage if you have a particularly attractive French person before you!
France Celebrates Birth of Arthur Rimbaud

Throughout the year, several events will be organized to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Arthur Rimbaud’s birth on October 20, 1854. These include a show called L’Espace Dernier in the Bastille Opera, an exhibit in Paris relating Rimbaud’s trip to Africa, and “Rimbaud – Verlaine,” an exhibit first created by the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels, and which will now be presented in Rimbaud’s city of origin, Charleville-Mézières. In autumn, a conference entitled “Rimbaud: Geography and Poetry” will be co-organized by the Paris IV University and the Society of Geography under the sponsorship of Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin.

Considered a precursor of surrealism, the precocious poet Arthur Rimbaud was a brilliant student, but a rebellious one, eager to leave the hypocrisy of his provincial town and his authoritarian mother. He ran away from home in 1870, and soon met Paul Verlaine. The two poets had a very controversial relationship, which ended tragically when Verlaine shot and wounded Rimbaud in Brussels (Verlaine was subsequently sentenced to two years in prison). After penning Une Saison en Enfer (A Season in Hell) and Illuminations (1874), Rimbaud quit writing to lead an adventurous life as a trader in Africa. He returned to Marseilles in 1891 and died on November 10 of that same year.

Rimbaud’s writings have inspired poetry, literature and music in the 20th century and he has become a symbol of youth’s rebellion against authority and convention.

For more information (in French), please visit the Ministry of Culture’s website: www.culture.fr/culture/actualites/celebrations2004/rimbaud.html.

Artists Find New Home in Paris Warehouse

The reconverted warehouse will serve as an artistic workshop until 2007

The Quai de Valmy, along Paris’s famous Saint-Martin canal in the 10th district, will soon be the home to a new space for artists. The city recently reached an agreement to transform a portion of the building along the canal, formerly a large warehouse, into a cultural space (the rest will house a new fire station). Paris’s City Hall has partnered with the association “Usines Ephéméres” (Ephemeral Factories) in this cultural endeavor. Usines Ephéméres refurbishes unused sites so that they can be transformed into temporary artistic celebration spaces. The building on the canal has been reserved for the association until December 31, 2007, after which the entire building will be devoted to an as yet undetermined cultural function.

The Usines Ephéméres Association is currently renovating the space to include workshops and studios for sculptors, dancers, musicians, and comedians. There will be two new concert halls, an exhibition hall, and a restaurant/bar that will be used to welcome conferences. The current remodeling seeks to rejuvenate and update the space, while leaving it rather rudimentary and simple in order to give free rein to the inspiration and imagination of the artists who will soon be working in it. Although the grand opening is not scheduled until July 14 and the main events will not begin until September, 15 performances of the new Brunu Lajara play, “Ne Pas,” were held there from March 1 to 11, allowing the curious public a first look at this new cultural space.

The Ancestral Heart of Paris is ... Nanterre?

The original urban settlement which gave rise to Paris may have been located over six miles northwest of the traditional heart of the French capital. New archaeological evidence has unearthed the site of the principal community of the ancient Parisii tribe. The Nanterre site covers 37 acres of land and includes a planned urban area centered around a market square and two parallel streets. Each house in the settlement possessed its own stone-lined well, and community ditches existed which drained away waste water.

The pre-Roman Nanterre community was situated on a peninsula-like piece of land surrounded on threessides by a large loop of the Seine River. Limited access to the site would have made it easy to defend and the peninsula would have provided the community with a rich array of fields, grassland and forest, making it an ideal site for the metropolis it was to become.
Toulouse-Lautrec: Master of the Moulin Rouge

HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC, one of France's most talented artists in the late 19th century, observed and captured in his art the Parisian night-life of Montmartre, the bohemian quarter of Paris which was swarming with an avant-garde community of writers, artists and performers who greatly influenced modern art at the time. The Baltimore Museum of Art is currently displaying a unique exhibition of more than 100 posters, prints and other graphic works by the French artist.

Born in the "Hotel du Bosc" in Albi (in the south of France) to one of France's wealthiest aristocratic families, Toulouse-Lautrec started drawing and painting by the time he was 10. At 12, he broke his left leg and at 14 his right leg; the bones failed to heal properly and his legs stopped growing (he was only 1.5 meters tall as an adult).

While he was living in Montmartre, he would attend circus performances, dance halls and nightclubs as often as he could. He loved to mingle with the crowd in nightclubs and thoroughly enjoyed sharing in the joie de vivre of that time. While laughing and drinking, he would make sketches that he would turn into bright-colored paintings in his studio the next morning.

He was only 26 when he became famous, almost overnight, thanks to his first poster, "Moulin Rouge, La Goulue" which depicts a popular cabaret performer nicknamed "La Goulue" ("the glutton") for her voracious sensual appetites (she was famous for going around draining the glasses of customers' unfinished drinks).

During his lifetime, his posters, bursting with colors and incredibly lifelike, except when garish faces were deliberately distorted to make them more expressive, became so popular that people would tear them down the minute they were plastered on the walls of Paris.

The posters, which often featured other popular nightclub performers such as Aristide Bruant, dancer Jane Avril, and singer Yvette Guilbert, helped move the humble advertising poster into an independent form of art. Toulouse-Lautrec understood very early that the poster is above all meant to be a form of communication, catching people's attention, and he decided to remove any superfluous details. He reduced his color spectrum to yellow, red, blue and black and the contours were replaced by solid background colors. He would get deep olive green from expert ink mixers for his lettering.

In the 1890s Toulouse-Lautrec, deprived of the kind of life that a healthy body would have allowed, started drinking heavily. His health soon deteriorated, and he was confined to a sanatorium. He died on September 9, 1901, in his family's Malrome château.

The exhibition includes virtually all of Toulouse-Lautrec's celebrated posters of Parisian dance halls, as well as sets of lithographs that he created for private collectors and advertisements for print portfolios, books and magazines. It also features works by his post-impressionist contemporaries such as Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Henri-Gabriel Ibel. For more information, please visit: www.artbma.org.