The Visual Arts in French Society

(G46.2339)

Kenneth E. Silver
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Objective: This course is designed as an intensive survey of a half-century of art-making in France, with special emphasis on representations and constructions of French identity.

Course requirements: regular attendance, extensive reading, class participation, culminating in class presentation based on a 15 page term paper (which will be read and commented upon by entire class).

January 22: Introduction

reading for 1/29:

February 4: Our class meeting on Thursday, February 4, will consist of a lecture by me, "A Short Visual History of French Painting, Sculpture and the Decorative Arts, 1890-1950."

In preparation for that, I would like you to visit the permanent collection galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, on the second floor (West 53rd Street between 5th and 6th Aves). Please pay particular attention to art made by French artists, as well as by foreigners living in France. These include the movements: Post-Impressionism--late Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Symbolism, Nabi (esp. Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, Seurat, Bonnard, Vuillard); Fauvism (esp. Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, Van Dongen, Dufy, Braque); Cubism (esp. Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger, Delaunay, La Fresnaye, Duchamp, Picabia); Dada (Duchamp and Picabia); Surrealism (Masson, Dali, Picasso, Oppenheim, Tanguy, Miro). Among sculptors, please take note of: Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi, Lipchitz. And a few unclassifiables: Modigliani, Picasso Neo-Classicism, Balthus. I will try to incorporate many of these works into my lecture.

You will have no reading assignment for that week's meeting.

There are also fine examples of early 20th-century French art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 81st and 5th (on the ground floor of the Lila Acheson Wallace wing) and at the Guggenheim Museum, 89th and 5th (the Thannauer Collection wing).

At the moment there is no permanent collection installation of French
decorative arts for the period in New York, although you will see scattered examples at the Met, which owns an excellent collection of 20th-century French decorative arts, especially from the Art Déco period, c. 1925, unfortunately mostly in storage. MoMA's permanent "design collection" galleries also has a few French items--Hector Guimard furniture, for ex.--although in contradistinction to its painting collection, which is quite Francophile, the majority of its design works are German, Belgian, Italian, and American. There is still, I believe, a large piece of a Guimard Métro station outside in the sculpture garden (as well as a Lachaise sculpture, a Rodin, and a Lipchitz). You will also see the work of important Parisian photographers--including Atget, Lartigue, Cartier-Bresson, Brassai, Kertész, Model--in MoMA's photo galleries.

readings for 2/12:


Kenneth E. Silver, "The Other Fin-de-Siècle," Art in America (December, 1987), pp. 104-111; 173.

readings for 2/19:


(December 1992), pp. 655-668.

**readings for 3/5:**


**readings for 3/26**


**readings for 4/2:**


**readings for 4/9:**


**readings for 4/16:**

4/23:

Soutine opening, The Jewish Museum, 5th Ave. at 92nd Street, 6:30-9:00 (you will all receive invitations). N.B.: Class papers must be turned in, with four copies for all class members, to the Fine Arts department by 5:00 pm.

4/30:

Discussion of class reports (class extended one hour, food and drink provided)

(Class Soutine exhibition visit to be scheduled).