

Biography

Louis Legrand was born in Dijon in 1863. Employed as a bank clerk, his desire to become an artist was such that he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in the evenings and his spare time. In 1883, he won the Devosge Prize at the school, and left for Paris the following year. Soon after moving to Paris, at the age of 21, he became friend with Felicien Rops, who was to teach him thoroughly the techniques of etching and engraving. In 1884, he received a first commission for a set of etchings called "Les Premières Illustrées". The following year, he realized eight etchings to illustrate a novel by Joseph Gayda, "Ce brigand d'amour".

A resident of Montmartre, Legrand had depicted its bohemian life, its women, and its cafes, and his drawings and etchings of can-can girls and the Moulin Rouge were published even before those of Toulouse-Lautrec. In 1891, he began making images of ballerinas. Later, his major compositions were re-issued in a book called *Le Cours de Danse, Fin de Siècle* with a text by his friend and collector, the lawyer Eugène Rodriguez, who wrote articles and art chronicles under the pseudonym Erastene Ramiro. After his series on 'Can-can', Legrand turned to the world of ballet and his ballet dancers are among his most well-known works.

Spending much time in the rehearsal rooms and foyers of the Opera, he was showing the work and the evolution of the 'would-be ballerina'. He was interested in the back room training rather than in the stage performance. His ballet plates form an important body of work where the protagonists are always graceful, whether sitting, standing, dressing or exercising. He published two albums, "Les Petites du Ballet", in 1893, and "La Petite Classe" in 1908.

Gustave Pellet, one of the turn of the century's greatest publishers, had commissioned some of Toulouse-Lautrec's most important color lithographs, the great pointillist prints by Signac and Luce, as well as works by the symbolists Rops, Raffaelli and Redon. He had, however, a particular passion for the work of Legrand, ultimately publishing some 300 prints, and purchasing nearly all of the pastels for his personal collection. Ballet schools were the artist's favorite subjects. Although he created noteworthy paintings, it was his prints, pastels and drawings, with their mastery of draughtsmanship, technique, and vision which thrust him to the forefront of public regard and made his reputation immense.

In 1896, his first solo exhibition was held at Samuel Bing's gallery. In 1900 he received a Silver Medal at the Universal Exhibition. In 1904, he had a second solo exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit. Two years later he was awarded the Légion d'Honneur. In 1911, a complete retrospective exhibition took place at the Galerie Durand-Ruel. He had been exhibiting at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts from 1902 onwards and vast numbers of articles about his work were written throughout his career. In 1908, the magazine 'L'Art et le Beau' devoted a complete issue to him, written by Gustave Kahn.

The work of Louis Legrand holds great historic importance. His works are included in most major museum collections, and he has been reintroduced to the collecting public, as is the case with many "rediscovered" master printmakers such as Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Tissot, Helleu, Rops, Redon, and Steinlen.

Museums

Musée Magnin, Dijon.

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Cleveland Museum of Art

San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts. (the Achenbach Foundation for graphic arts).

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