ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a multidisciplinary companion for K–12 educators bringing their students to view Spectacle and Leisure in Paris: Degas to Mucha, on view at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum from February 10 to May 21, 2017. Our intent is to offer a range of learning objectives, gallery discussions, and post-visit suggestions to stimulate the learning process, encourage dialogue, and help make meaning of the art presented. Teachers at all grade levels should glean from this guide what is most relevant and useful to their students.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Spectacle and Leisure in Paris: Degas to Mucha brings together a broad selection of prints, posters, photographs, and films offering an overview of the thriving entertainment cultures of Paris in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Themes addressed include the pulsating life of the boulevards, the speed of the racetrack, and the performance worlds of the café-concert, ballet, opera, and theater, both classical and popular. Artists represented include Pierre Bonnard, Jules Chéret, Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Alphonse Mucha, Pablo Picasso, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, among others.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Advertising and Marketing, Art, Art History, Dance, Decorative Arts, European History, Fashion, French Language and Culture, Film, Graphic Design, Illustration, Music, Performing Arts, Poetry, Printmaking, Technology and Innovation, Theater, Women and Gender Studies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will explore the history and culture of fin-de-siècle Paris.

Students will discuss the rise of celebrity culture and personal brand management.

Students will examine the way new technologies were adopted by and explored in the visual and performing arts.

Students will consider the cultural impact of advertising and visual culture in everyday life.

This guide was prepared by Allison Taylor, head of education and community engagement, and Amy Miller, assistant educator. To schedule a visit to the Kemper Art Museum, contact Amy Miller at amy.miller@wustl.edu or 314.935.5624.
Paris in the last decades of the nineteenth century was a city bursting with a variety of entertainment and public spectacles that drew the interest of both men and women from a wide variety of social classes and occupations. In representing these modern forms of urban pleasure and leisure—such as cafés, cabarets, racetracks, theater, opera, and promenades—artists explored a range of styles, mediums, and techniques.

The most popular of these artistic pursuits was the promotional poster. Changes in Parisian laws that allowed for more liberal display of posters on the streets and advances in lithographic printing techniques elevated the modern commercial poster to new heights. This new poster culture helped shape the personas of well-known performers and create cults of celebrity.


Discussion Questions
What framing devices does Toulouse-Lautrec use in these posters? Compare the two depictions of Avril. What adjectives can be used to describe her body language and facial expressions?

IN THE GALLERY
Ideas to consider when viewing the exhibition

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HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC
Artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was already an accomplished draftsman and painter when the owner of the Moulin Rouge, a Parisian cabaret, commissioned him to create his first promotional poster. Thereafter he used the theaters and cabarets as living studios and created highly sought-after posters that showcased the era’s performers. One Parisian dancer who saw the potential of poster-driven fame was Jane Avril, who herself commissioned Toulouse-Lautrec to make a poster of her performing. Avril, with her red hair, distinctive fashion sense, and recognizable dance movements, was a popular subject for artists. In Divan Japonais, Avril is pictured not as a performer but as a spectator, which suggests her confidence that she was already someone well-known in the entertainment world of Paris. It also demonstrates the central idea that in Paris one was as aware of being watched as one was of observing city life itself.

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EDGAR DEGAS
Throughout his career Edgar Degas created over six hundred dance-related images, especially of the ballet performances at the Palais Garnier, home to the popular Paris Opéra. Degas's focused studies of singers and dancers show both the grace and strain of the body in performance. Unlike Toulouse-Lautrec, who saw theaters and cabarets as living studios, Degas rarely created his works on site. Instead he relied on his memory, imagination, and sketches to construct his images and would often hire dancers as models to pose for him.

Discussion Questions
How do Degas's images of entertainers reinforce the idea of spectatorship? In The Café-Concert Singer how is the interaction among singer, musicians, and audience rendered?

ALPHONSE MUCHA
Czech artist Alphonse Mucha moved to Paris in 1887 and worked as an advertising illustrator for magazines. In 1895 he produced his first poster for the actress Sarah Bernhardt. Bernhardt personified the era's obsession with celebrity, and no other performer was more aware of the power of new media in promotion and advertising. Bernhardt used her notoriety to build a business around her personal brand, and she capitalized on every new medium and technology available—from posters to photography and eventually to film—to sell her personal style, her unconventional ways, and her versatile and distinctive dramatic talents.

Discussion Questions
Look at the different depictions of Bernhardt in the gallery. What do they have in common? How are they different?

POSTERS
Advertising posters using alluring young women to sell products were also popular during this era. Mucha's JOB poster depicts a beautiful long-haired woman in a flowing gown with a lit cigarette in one hand and a packet of JOB cigarette papers in the other.

Discussion Questions
What do her posture and attire communicate to the viewer? How does the use of color reinforce the message of this image?
CONTEMPORARY CELEBRITY BRANDS
Research current celebrity brands and have students pick two that resonate with them, such as Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, Drake, and Kanye West. What approaches do these artists take to their brands? What approaches would students take to build their own brand? How would they market their brand to the public? Where would they want these images to be available to the public?

THE RISE OF FILM
The new medium of film was initially labeled a curiosity or amusement and garnered little respect as an art form. The Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 changed this perception, and from then on film was celebrated both as a technological marvel and an exciting new form of art and entertainment. Have your students research early French films and filmmakers such as the Lumière brothers and Georges Méliès. Who invented film? Where were these early films typically shown? How did film become a business?

Watch early French film shorts on YouTube. What were some themes of these early films? How did celebrities such as Sarah Bernhardt use this new technology? What other technologies were incorporated in these early films?

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM
For more immersion into Parisian art, culture, fashion, and public life, consider visiting the Saint Louis Art Museum to see Degas, Impressionism, and the Paris Millinery Trade on view February 12–May 7, 2017.

VOCABULARY

- cabaret – a nightclub or restaurant featuring musical, literary, dramatic, or comic performances
- café-concert – a café offering programs of light, popular music
- celebrity persona – a person's perceived or evident personality; the public role or image of a well-known official, actor, or individual
- fin-de-siècle – French for “end of the century”; relating to or characteristic of the close of the nineteenth century and especially its literary and artistic climate of sophistication, world-weariness, and fashionable despair
- Jane Avril – French dancer celebrated by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec in his paintings and posters
- Montmartre – a section of northern Paris dominated by a large hill and noted for popular entertainments and for the artists who frequented and lived in the area
- Paris Universal Exposition of 1900 – an event attended by fifty million people from April 14 to November 12, 1900, to celebrate the achievements of the previous century and to accelerate development into the next.
- personal brand – the identity created by people marketing themselves and their careers like a commodity
- Sarah Bernhardt – renowned French stage and early film actress. An astute entrepreneur, she opened her own theater and successfully managed her public image through new visual media.
- visual culture – aspects of culture expressed in visual images; a field of study that addresses social practice and meaning primarily through analysis of pictures, images, and visualizations, rather than through texts and words

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Exhibition catalog