

The Museum of Modern Art

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Impresario — Ambroise Vollard, the major summer exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, is built around the extraordinary career of the foremost art dealer and publisher of prints and beautifully illustrated books in France at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first four decades of the twentieth century. On view from June 9 through September 6, the exhibition, directed by Riva Castleman, Director of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, provides a panoramic view of modern art before World War II.

The exhibition, which has been made possible by generous grants from Exxon Corporation and the National Endowment for the Arts, will later travel to the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Krannert Art Museum of the University of Illinois, and the Toledo Museum of Art. On the occasion of the exhibition, the Museum is publishing AMBROISE VOLLARD, EDITEUR by Una Johnson, a revised and expanded version of the author's 1944 catalogue raisonné.*

With a seldom-challenged authority, Ambroise Vollard was the all-round impresario of the Paris art world. At the end of the last century, his little gallery on the rue Laffitte, known locally as the "rue des tableaux," became a lively center for the young artists involved in the controversial new movements of modern art: Bonnard, Cézanne, Chagall, Denis, Gauguin, Maillol, Picasso, Rouault, and Vuillard, among others. In 1895 Vollard gave Cézanne his first one-man show and did the same for Picasso in 1901. However, it was as a publisher that Vollard achieved perhaps his greatest eminence. Inspired by the idea of publishing works done by painters who were not printmakers by profession--an original idea at that time--Vollard began to commission works from his artist

*AMBROISE VOLLARD, EDITEUR: PRINTS-BOOKS-BRONZES by Una Johnson, with a Preface by Riva Castleman. 168 pp, 62 black and white illus., 16 color illus.; bibl.; chron. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Cloth \$17.50, distributed by New York Graphic Society. Paper \$7.95, distributed by The Museum of Modern Art.

friends. Beginning in 1895, for almost 45 years he spent the income gained from dealing in modern paintings to publish fine prints and some of the most beautiful books of the century.

"This exhibition, more than a century after Vollard's birth," notes Miss Castleman, "is a tribute to a self-made and often self-interested merchant who knew that in art he would have the final word. Time has irrevocably linked him with the foremost artists of his day, and his determination to encourage them to make multiple art works in the form of books, prints, and bronzes has spread their genius--and his--throughout the world."

Included are more than 30 of the books brought out by Vollard, as well as more than 400 of the prints that he published. Vollard's editions of bronze sculptures by Picasso, Renoir, and Maillol are to be seen, as is a sampling of Vollard memorabilia, including Picasso's and Renoir's portraits of the art dealer.

Among the famous published art works on view in this exhibition are Cézanne's The Bathers (both the large and small plates), Edvard Munch's Anxiety, and Renoir's Pinning the Hat. Also on view are some of Bonnard's most beautiful prints, among them The Laundress, Boating, Child with Lamp, and Quelques Aspects de la vie de Paris, a portfolio of 12 color lithographs. Vuillard is represented by some of his best work in the print medium including The Tuileries Garden and a portfolio of 13 color lithographs, Paysages et intérieurs.

Vollard published Picasso's two most important series of etchings, the 14 prints of The Saltimbanques, executed during 1904-05, and the set of 100 prints of the Vollard Suite, executed during 1931-37 (of which 98 will be on view in this exhibition). The Museum's third-floor Sachs Galleries have been wholly turned over to the work Picasso did for Vollard.

From early in his career, Vollard was interested in issuing editions of bronzes. On view in the exhibition are four Maillol bronzes done for Vollard: Bather Combing Her Hair, Young Girl Crouching, Leda, and the Bust of Auguste

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Renoir. Three Picasso bronzes are also to be seen: Woman Combing Her Hair, Harlequin, and Head of a Woman (Cubist Head). Had it not been for Vollard, it is rather unlikely that Renoir would have ever made sculpture. Renoir was already 73 and debilitated by arthritis when Vollard, on a visit to Cagnes, persuaded him to consider working in the medium and introduced him to a young assistant. The Triumph of Venus, The Bather, The Blacksmith, and, from the Museum's own Sculpture Garden, The Crouching Bather (The Washerwoman) are four works that Renoir executed, with the help of the young sculptor Richard Guino.

For all the work that Vollard published in his lifetime, there were a significant number that he commissioned from his artists that, for one reason or another, never saw final publication or were, at the very least, delayed for many years. One such unfinished work was Georges Rouault's Miserere, an ambitious portfolio of 58 prints executed during 1916-18 and 1920-27. Another work in the exhibition whose production extended over many years is Chagall's 100 etchings for Les Fables by La Fontaine. (At the time, Vollard was roundly criticized for his choice of the Russian-born Chagall to illustrate this masterpiece of French literature.) Also in the exhibition are Chagall's etchings for the Old Testament.

An unusual feature of the installation is the use of slide projections to enable visitors to view all the pages and illustrations of several of the books on display. Among the books that may be viewed this way are Bonnard's illustrations for Paul Verlaine's Parallèlement, Picasso's illustrations for Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu of Balzac, Redon's edition of Flaubert's La Tentation de Saint-Antoine, and Rouault's illustrated edition of Suarez's Passion. Also on exhibition is Vollard's own 1932 book Les Reincarnations du Père Ubu. For Vollard was himself an author, penning not only informative and frequently droll monographs and essays on his artists, but also stories which used that inventive, sinister, violently grotesque character Père Ubu, originally invented by the inimitable Alfred Jarry.

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"Much has been said of his taste, his judgement and his tactics as an art dealer," observes Una Johnson of Vollard in her catalogue essay. "There can be little doubt that in his accord with the 'new' artists and in his faith in their beliefs lay his genius. Because of his own desire that his name endure through his books, he often inspired a similar feeling in his artists. As the art historian Julius Meier-Graefe expressed it, 'Vollard is one of those remarkable dealers, only produced in Paris, who are sometimes better connoisseurs-- or rather have surer artistic instincts--than the connoisseurs themselves.' With some resignation and not a little self-assurance Vollard once declared, 'All the same, I shall have the last word.'"

Color transparencies, photographs, and additional information available from Bruce Wolmer, Assistant, or Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019.
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