

ABSINTHE EXHIBITION

"L'absinthe : de la fée verte à notre dame de l'oubli"

"Absinthe: from the green fairy to our lady of oblivion"

21 MAY 2005 - 21 AUGUST 2005

Absinth, that fashionable aperitif in the century of Rops, is no longer appreciated at all nowadays, but retains its worldwide legend and its aura as a philtre that arouses both fascination and dread.

"*La Fée verte*" (the green fairy), "*l'Atroce sorcière*" (the Ghastly Witch), "*Notre-Dame de l'oubli*" (our lady of oblivion), did indeed have the power to carry absinth drinkers away into the euphoria and visions of a world set free from the trials and tribulations of life at that time. Moreover, absinthe drinkers made a ritual of their drinking sessions, esteeming absinthe as a "holy plant" with extraordinary and aphrodisiac powers, a love potion. However, for those for whom its virtues were their only pleasure, "*la verte*" as it was called, became a trap, plunging them in the depths of hallucinations and madness. Absinthe was finally prohibited at the beginning of the twentieth century ... which only increased the fascination for that now forbidden drink.

At the outset, absinthe was a man's liqueur, but in the nineteenth century, it was to become the favourite drink that people ordered in the public dances that sprang up in Paris. Those were popular venues, considered more or less "decent" places to frequent (le Bal Bullier, le Bal Mabille, l'Elysée-Montmartre, la Closerie des Lilas ...) where, depending on the spot, students, painters and poets rubbed shoulders with ragmen, where "gentlemen" paid for "ladies", for girls who came there, led the dance, drank "*la verte*" and were often reduced to destitution.

The 19th-century, artistic Parisian bohemia turned to heavy absinthe drinking to break with the orderly and conformist life of that time, hoping to find a source of creativity in the bottom of a glass. It did not become a muse for all that, but absinthe was celebrated in that way by many writers, poets and painters of the time: Paul Verlaine, in his *Confessions*, Emile Zola, with the tragic story of *Nana*, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Arthur Rimbaud, Musset... and for the painters of that period, Toulouse-Lautrec, Daumier, and later, Edward Munch, Spilliaert ...

Félicien Rops was a regular patron of Parisian dance halls and derived his best known works from them, including the famous *Buveuse d'absinthe*, not to mention the illustration of the book by Alfred Delvau, *Les Cythères parisiennes, histoire anecdotique des bals de Paris*, and works such as *La Dèche*, *Le Gandin ivre*, *le Bouge à matelots*, all set in the favourite haunts of absinthe drinkers.

The exhibition, organised with the collaboration of the Absinthe Museum in Auvers-sur-Oise, proposes both a discovery of that mythical drink, its origin, its production, its rituals, in the setting of the period, of the social, artistic and political life and further proposes documents, posters, books, poems, graphic and painted works, inspired by the "Green fairy". Several publications on the subject will be on sale at the museum.

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Open Tuesdays to Sundays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Educational possibilities with practical workshop. Cost 25 €

Admission fee: adults: 3 €, students, senior citizens, artists, groups: 1.5 €

Schoolchildren: 1 €; under 12s: free

Possibility of combined tickets with the visit to the museum: 5 €, students, senior citizens, artists and groups: 2.5 €

Schoolchildren: 1.5 €