

PORTFOLIO COPY

BACKGROUND READING FOR ART PRESENTERS

Henri Julien Rousseau (1844-1910), *Exotic Landscape*

Source: <http://www.henrirousseau.org/biography.html>

Henri Julien Rousseau was born in Laval in the Loire Valley into the family of a plumber. He was mediocre in some subjects at high school but won prizes for drawing and music. With his father's death, Rousseau moved to Paris in 1868 to support his widowed mother as a government employee. A cabinetmaker's daughter, Clemence Boitard, became his first wife and he wrote a waltz bearing her name. He started painting seriously in his early forties, and by age 49 he retired from his job to work on his art. His wife died in 1888 and he later remarried.

His best known paintings depict jungle scenes, even though he never left France or saw a jungle. His inspiration came from illustrated books and the botanical gardens in Paris, as well as tableaux of "taxidermified" wild animals. He had also met soldiers, during his term of service, who had survived the French expedition to Mexico and listened to their stories of the subtropical country they had encountered.

Rousseau's flat, seemingly childish style gave him many critics; people often were shocked by his work or ridiculed it. His ingenuousness was extreme, and he was unaware that establishment artists considered him untutored. Many observers commented that he painted like a child and did not know what he was doing, but the work shows sophistication with his particular technique.

Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!) was exhibited in 1891, and Rousseau received his first serious review, when the young artist Felix Vallotton wrote: "His tiger surprising its prey ought not to be missed; it's the alpha and omega of painting." In 1905 a large jungle scene *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* was exhibited at the Salon des Independants near works by younger leading avant-garde artists such as Henri Matisse.

When Pablo Picasso happened upon a painting by Rousseau being sold on the street as a canvas to be painted over, the younger artist instantly recognised Rousseau's genius and went to meet him. In 1908 Picasso held a half serious, half burlesque banquet in his studio in Le Bateau-Lavoir in Rousseau's honour.

Henri Rousseau died 2 September 1910 in the Hospital Necker in Paris. Guillaume Apollinaire wrote the epitaph Brancusi put on the tombstone: We salute you, gentle Rousseau you can hear us, Delaunay his wife Monsieur Queval and myself let our luggage pass duty free through the gates of heaven. We will bring you brushes paints and canvas, That you may spend your sacred leisure in the light of truth painting as you once did my portrait facing the stars.

PORTFOLIO COPY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - Kindergarten
Henri Julien Rousseau, Exotic Landscape

Where is this picture? Beach? Mountains? A town?

Can you tell me what kind of animal is in the picture?

How many monkeys are there?

What are the monkeys trying to do?

Are there any flowers? How many?

How many trees are there?

Are there different kinds of grasses?

Do you see any fruit? What kind?

What colors do you see?

What shapes do you see in the picture? Plants?

Do you like this picture?

Would you like to go to the jungle where the monkeys are?

PORTFOLIO COPY

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES TO ACCOMPANY

Henri Julien Rousseau, Exotic Landscape

1. Leaf Rubbing

Materials: newsprint or similar paper, leaves of various kinds, peeled crayons

Make your own “leafy” picture by laying the paper on top of the leaves and rubbing across them with the side of a crayon. Leaves may be moved and rubbed several times.

2. Jungle picture

Materials: paper, pencils, crayons, music with jungle sounds.

Draw jungle pictures from the children’s imaginations. If possible, listen to music with jungle sounds – birds, frogs, monkeys, etc. The children can share their creations with the class.

3. Hidden animal pictures

Materials: Paper, pastels, glue

I cut out trees with no leaves out of brown construction paper and tore green paper for leaves - also used pastels - they glue trees and leaves to white paper and made animals with pastels -smearing some pictures, hiding animals with leaves, so they peeked out. They used their imagination wonderfully.

Have the students put their name on the back of their paper before the project begins.