

# ESPRIT

# MONTMARTRE

## BOHEMIAN LIFE IN PARIS AROUND 1900

Edited by  
Ingrid Pfeiffer  
Max Hollein

SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

HIRMER

# PREFACE

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As a reflection of its openness to the world, Amundi has chosen to extend its patronage policy in two main areas: culture and social action. As part of this involvement, Amundi is supporting the exhibition "Esprit Montmartre. Bohemian Life in Paris around 1900".

In contrast to the sophisticated Paris of the Belle Époque, at that time the hill of Montmartre still radiated a village-like flair that appealed to numerous poets, composers and painters. The exhibition and the accompanying catalogue portray life in this still very rural part of Paris and how the artists who lived there saw it. As well as depicting the streets and scenes of urban life together with the dancers, cafés and bar scenes characteristic of Montmartre, the over 200 works by 26 artists on display also describe the tragic moments of everyday life. Amundi is very proud to support this exhibition which develops a new perspective on a popular era of art history.

Yves Perrier  
Chief Executive Officer of Amundi

## LENDERS

We are especially grateful for the generous support provided by the following museums and institutions, private lenders and galleries, all of whom have contributed to the success of this exhibition:

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who wish to remain anonymous.

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# FOREWORD

Montmartre – no other place in the world could boast such a large contingent of noteworthy artist-personalities as this unique quarter of Paris around 1900. From Vincent van Gogh to Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec to the young Pablo Picasso, who moved into the famous Bateau-Lavoir shortly after the turn of the century, they created works of art that bore the imprint of the particular historical, topographical and social conditions of that time and place. Although this subject has been examined with reference to certain individual artists in previous exhibitions, such as *Picasso 1904* (Bielefeld) and *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre* (Washington/Chicago), a comprehensive study focused on the full social and historical context and devoted to distinguishing the myth and the legend from the reality of Montmartre has been lacking until now.

Featuring over 200 works by twenty-six artists from the years 1885 to 1910, the *Esprit Montmartre* exhibition examines various phenomena of the period in sections devoted to different themes. The artists considered in “Montmartre as a Village – A View of a Different Paris” portray the unique topographical setting in atmospheric images – from the steep streets that rise to the ‘Butte’ (the hill) to the structure of Sacré-Cœur, which stood in such stark contrast to the poor huts and houses on the north side and the barren terrain of the ‘Maquis’. The second section is devoted to the cafés, *varietés* and cabarets of Montmartre, to the singers and dancers and to the typical portraits of drinkers suffering from the effects of over-indulgence in absinthe. A third section describes the numerous depictions of nudes – from painters’ models to women engaged in the various forms of prostitution. Yet another chapter is devoted to clowns and travelling entertainers. “Montmartre as an Arena for Outsiders and Social Change” presents the labourers, beggars, clochards and washerwomen that constituted a significant section of the population as well as the demonstrators who played an important role during this politically turbulent period of French history. The selected works reveal the penetrating images conceived by the artists without regard for prevailing clichés and trace the development of new genres during the heyday of the artist-bohème – genres that are still valid today. Another selection offers insights into the network of artists, their self-portraits and portraits of each other and the rise of a new and growing community of art dealers. The last section of the exhibition is devoted to the excellent poster designs and numerous illustrations in magazines that emerged as a new art form during the period. The whole is a panoramic view of the vital and powerfully influential art scene in Montmartre as an important point of crystallisation for the latest currents in art around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

The extraordinarily complex exhibition project could not have been realised without the trust and support of numerous public and private lenders from Germany and abroad. We are very grateful to them all for their generous contributions. I wish to express special thanks in particular to Frances Beatty, Edwin Becker, Sylvie Brame, Anne Buschhoff, Waring Hopkins, Leo Jansen, Jennifer Jones, Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick, Marianne Le Morvan, Elena Llorens, Daniel Malingue, Henrike Mund, David Ninson, Ivonne Papin-Drastik, Sylvie Patry, Christine Pinault, Florence Valdes-Forain and Kitty Valkier-

Schreurs for their multifaceted support in scholarly matters and for their assistance in the procurement of works on loan.

The help provided by our partners and patrons is no less important. We are pleased to have engaged the French asset management firm Amundi as the main exhibition sponsor. In Amundi, we have gained a partner who needs no convincing and one who has not only provided essential financial support for this exhibition, but has also accompanied with great interest this thematic exhibition devoted to an analysis of a period in Paris that is of great significance to European and international cultural history. Special thanks go to Yves Perrier, Chief Executive Officer at Amundi and Hubert Dänner, Director of the local branch office in Frankfurt. Additional thanks to the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung for its sponsorship of the catalogue.

We are indebted in a very fundamental sense to the City of Frankfurt and to all decision-makers in the municipal government, represented above all by Mayor Peter Feldmann and Culture Commissioner Felix Semmelroth, who make our work possible in the first place.

I wish to thank our media partners, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the Scholz & Volkmer Agency, the *Journal Frankfurt* and the VGF for providing media support for the exhibition; the Deutsche Bahn, our mobility partner; and last but not least, our culture partner hr2-kultur.

I should also like to express my very special thanks to our curator Ingrid Pfeiffer, who developed the idea and the concept for this unusual project and guided the exhibition and the catalogue to fruition with laudable energy, expertise and sensitivity. She was assisted by Lea Schleiffenbaum, whom I thank as well for her vigorous support.

Thanks are also due to the renowned experts who have described the unique living and working circumstances of the artists in Montmartre in their catalogue essays: Nienke Bakker, Markus A. Castor, Phillip D. Cate, Danièle Devynck, Anita Hopmans, Peter Kropmanns, Chloë Langlais, Vinyet Panyella, Robert McD. Parker and Ingrid Pfeiffer. I also wish to thank Michael Raeburn, who researched the addresses of the various studios, amusement spots and galleries, thus enabling us to develop a historical map that provides a compact overview of the artists' quarter around 1900. Karoline Hille, Vinyet Panyella, Lea Schleiffenbaum and Katharina Siegmann wrote artists' biographies focused on their time in Montmartre. Jane Michael and Annette Siegel handled the editing duties in expert fashion, and excellent translations were provided by Volker Ellerbeck, Ingrid Hacker-Klier, Bram Opstelten, Bernadette Ott, David Sánchez Cano, John Southard and David Wharry – all of whom are deserving of my thanks as well. I wish to thank Karen Angne, Sophie Friederich and Director of Publishing Kerstin Ludolph from the Hirmer Verlag for their guidance of the catalogue production. The task of designing the catalogue was entrusted to the experienced hands of Ernst Georg Kühle and Lena Mozer, whom I thank for their convincing graphic design. All of these many threads were held together by Catalogue Manager Katharina Siegmann. I wish to thank Karsten Weber (architecture) and Studioheyhey (exhibition design) for the overall design of the exhibition.

I am grateful as always to the entire team at the Schirn Kunsthalle for their excellent work. Thanks go to Exhibition Manager Esther Schlicht; Karin Grüning, Jessica Keilholz and Elke Walter for arranging for loans and coordinating the setup and removal processes; Ronald Kammer and Christian Teltz for their technical exhibition support; Andreas Gundermann and his installation team; conservators Stefanie

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Max Hollein  
Director



# 'AU HAUT DE LA BUTTE'

## VAN DONGEN'S EARLY YEARS IN PARIS

<sup>1</sup> H.P. Berlage, address to the Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Bouwkunst (Society for the Advancement of Architecture), reviewed in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 25 April 1896. The content of this article is part of my forthcoming doctoral thesis *Kees van Dongen: Varieties of Success*, University of Utrecht.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Anita Hopmans, *De onbekende Van Dongen. Vroege en Fauvistische tekeningen 1895-1912 / The Van Dongen nobody knows. Early and fauvist drawings 1895-1912 / Van Dongen retrouvé. L'Œuvre sur papier 1895-1912*, exh. cat. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam / Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon / Institut Néerlandais, Paris, Rotterdam 1996; idem, *De grote ogen van Kees van Dongen / All eyes on Kees van Dongen*, exh. cat. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Rotterdam 2010; idem., *Van Dongen. Fauve, anarchiste et mondain*, exh. cat. Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris 2011. In these catalogues you will also find references to the letters of van Dongen quoted below.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Otto van Rees, manuscript (private collection); Tom Schilperoort, "Kees van Dongen," in *Op de Hoogte 2* (1905), p. 735; Saint-Georges de Bouhélier (Stéphane-Georges de Bouhélier-Lepelletier), "Ah! si Van Dongen ne s'était pas fait naturaliser," in *L'Époque*, 5 July 1938.

A year before leaving Rotterdam for Paris in July 1897, Kees van Dongen was introduced to the latest French poster art – a form of applied art, it was explained, very modern, currently "especially popular throughout France" and an important addition to book and magazine illustration.<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the ideas of Walter Crane and William Morris, the young left-wing idealist Van Dongen worked in this field after having started out as a painter. He drew illustrations for books, designing, for example, the cover of a Dutch translation of Peter Kropotkin's *Anarchism. Its Philosophy and Ideal* (fig. 1). He hoped to continue pursuing this line of work in Paris, where printmaking was so much more advanced. Once there, he thus made contact with Georges de Feure, a Dutch-born designer and illustrator just then achieving his first successes, who got him an illustration commission. He was taken in by the painter Siebe ten Cate, who had an apartment in the faubourg du Temple and a studio on rue de Malte – near the place de la République –, and he was introduced to other Dutch artists and journalists living in Paris.<sup>2</sup>

This first stay in Paris lasted not much longer than half a year, as recently retrieved information shows. By the end of February or, possibly, early March 1898, Van Dongen returned to the Netherlands, determined to take the plunge once more when better prepared. Back in Rotterdam, he returned to the art academy to draw from models, and evolved into a journalistic and free-lance draughtsman. In September 1899 Van Dongen again travelled to the French capital, this time settling in Montmartre. Together with his friend, Guus (Augusta) Preitinger, he found accommodation on rue Ordener and subsequently an apartment high up on the impasse Girardon overlooking the city: in "a lonely, three-storey apartment building" on the northern slope of the Butte Montmartre, where, at the end of the rue Lépic, the land was covered with shrubs, with the Moulin de la Galette around the corner. "At the top of the hill," as the writer Saint-Georges de Bouhélier recalled, "in an old cottage of sorts in the middle of a wild garden."<sup>3</sup>

Van Dongen now opposed the decorative, élitist symbolism of artists such as De Feure and rejected the idea of making art as a commodity. Nor did he have a proper studio. In the attic space that he had fitted out for this purpose he could "stand upright on only one side." This *other*, elevated, "free" and not yet fully urbanised Montmartre, with which Van Dongen's name would come to be associated, attracted renewed interest around 1900, contributing to his success as a foreign artist in the French capital and his early admittance to the avant-garde circle of the Fauves. The significance of "the Butte" for Van Dongen was, however, different from what it had been two decades earlier for Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec or, for example, Vincent van Gogh. This shift deserves more attention. What did "Montmartre" mean to Van Dongen?

← Escalier Utrillo, Montmartre, around 1900



1 Kees van Dongen, Cover of Pierre Kropotkin's *De Anarchie*. *Philosophie en ideaal*, The Hague, 1897

## DREYFUS, "TRUTH AND JUSTICE"

During Van Dongen's first stay the Dreyfus affair erupted in full force. Rumours and additional statements about the innocence of the Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been convicted of treason in 1894, set in motion a spate of revelations and accusations from the end of October 1897. Garnering huge attention in the press, the affair grew into an explosive political and public issue.<sup>4</sup> Following efforts by the writer Émile Zola, a nascent broader intellectual and artistic vanguard – limited in number – became involved. A first open letter, in which Zola espoused Dreyfus's innocence, appeared in *Le Figaro* on 25 November. Fierce pleas by Zola for truth and justice followed on 1 and 5 December, when new documents came to light. On 13 January 1898, after the acquittal of the real culprit, Major Esterhazy, the daily *L'Aurore* then published Zola's famous open letter addressed to the President of the Republic under the headline *J'Accuse...!* on its front page, and with a print run of 300,000. As a result

of this accusation the case became a world affair and the renowned French writer was prosecuted.

The same period also saw the publication of Zola's *Paris*, the final part of the trilogy *Les trois villes*, as a feuilleton in *Le Journal*. The first part of the serialised novel appeared in October 1897, just before the affair exploded, accompanied by a large-scale advertising campaign. For a week, some thirty advertising carts carrying a monumental poster by Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen (fig. 2) were driven around the city, and on the eve of the first instalment this number was increased to one hundred; in addition, there were sandwich men and criers distributing flyers.<sup>5</sup> The final part of the series, after which the novel was published as a book, appeared during Zola's trial in February 1898. This would harm the writer's legal case because of his attacks against the *bourgeoisie dirigeante*, clericalism and the commercial practices of the

<sup>4</sup> Michael Burns, *France and the Dreyfus Affair. A documentary history*, Boston & New York, 1999; George R. Whyte, *The Dreyfus Affair. A chronological history*, New York, 2005.  
<sup>5</sup> Anon., "Reclame voor Zola's 'Paris'," in: *Nieuwsblad voor den Boekhandel*, 64 (1897), no. 87, p. 442.



2 Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Cover of *Le Journal*, published by Emile Zola, October 1897, Lithography, 140×200 cm (2 parts), Grand Palais, Paris

press, as Charles Snabilié, a Dutch correspondent in Paris and friend of Van Dongen, commented. In his regular column, "Letters from Paris," Snabilié described the final scene of Zola's novel – when, up high on the Butte Montmartre, a mother with her young child, the son of the protagonist Pierre, points to the sun-lit metropolis Paris and the future harvest of "truth and justice" – virtually as a call to his readers.<sup>6</sup>

Such a call was, in fact, issued. Just after the publication of *J'Accuse*, petitions were published for a revision of the Dreyfus trial and for citizens' rights. A growing group of scientists, writers and artists threw their weight behind these by making their names public in the press in the "protest of the intellectuals," as it was called, pejoratively at first.<sup>7</sup> Among these were the aforementioned De Bouhéliér and Félix Fénéon, with whom Van Dongen became friends in Montmartre; other writers from the circle surrounding *La Revue blanche*; a number of Nabis; and Claude Monet, Eugène Carrière and a few Neo-Impressionists – members of the Société des Artistes Indépendants whose office was located in Montmartre, including Camille Pissarro, Paul Signac and Maximilien Luce. These actions resonated throughout the world, eliciting thousands of statements of support for Zola. At the same time the nationalist sentiment had also strengthened, not least because of all of the public attention. Zola's conviction was followed by anti-Jewish rallies, a series of riots and looting and even sanctions against Dreyfusards and measures targeting foreign journalists.

Meanwhile the affair provided significant impetus to the illustrated press, as images gained an unprecedented presence. Papers that accompanied their columns with cartoons, obviously targeting Dreyfus and Zola, saw their print-runs increase. At the same time there were those few who considered all of this to be very disconcerting. In an anthology titled *L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'Image*, which was published in March 1898, John Grand-Carteret (Jean Carteret) followed in Zola's footsteps and pointed out the extent to which the French daily press had misled the people and the drawing pencil had taken on a subservient role, delivering the same message. The only cartoons he found that were critically above this were by artists such as Steinlen, Henri-Gabriel Ibels and especially Félix Vallotton: "C'est simple et c'est précis."<sup>8</sup> A similar preference is expressed in Zola's novel *Paris* through the young, Montmartre-based draughtsman Antoine, who opts for "le noir et le blanc": a more trenchant art of drawing that would get to the heart of the matter without the deceptive sweetness of colour – direct, naïve and honest.

Strikingly, this appreciation resonated in the Netherlands, where a pro-Dreyfus sentiment prevailed. Thus a collection of all of Ibels's drawings for *Le Sifflet* under the title *Allons-y* (Let's Go) was praised as one of the "wittiest and most caustic contributions to the affair."<sup>9</sup> For the first time exhibitions were devoted to contemporary French drawing and graphic arts, with loans from, among others, the collection of Cornelis Hoogendijk, a collector who acquired a number of works by Steinlen from the Galerie Vollard in Paris during this very period.<sup>10</sup> This introduction seems to have been accompanied by conclusions regarding a decrease in "the number of aristocratic artists" versus growing ranks of "democratic artists," as well as by moral judgments fuelled by outrage over the affair. One

3 Kees van Dongen, *La Vérité – Tas de vermines*, ca. 1901-1902, watercolour, 28 × 44 cm, Private collection



<sup>6</sup> Anon. [Charles Snabilié], "Het proces-Zola. II," in: *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 12 February 1898.

<sup>7</sup> Whyte (see note 4), pp. 151-7; Christophe Charle, *Naissance des 'intellectuels' 1880-1900*, Paris, 1990; Alain Pagès, *Émile Zola, un intellectuel dans l'affaire Dreyfus. Histoire de J'accuse*, Paris, 1991, pp. 127-32, 325-31.

<sup>8</sup> "C'est simple et c'est précis." John Grand-Carteret, *L'affaire Dreyfus et l'image. 266 caricatures françaises et étrangères*, Paris 1898, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> "Wetenschap en Kunst", section in: *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 18.11.1898.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Henkels, "Cézanne en Van Gogh in het Rijksmuseum voor Moderne Kunst in Amsterdam: de collectie van Cornelis Hoogendijk (1866-1911)," in: *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 41 (1993), no. 3-4, pp. 164, 170-2.

reviewer, for instance, criticised some of the French drawings from the Hoogendijk collection as “boulevard art [...] suitable for the Esterhazys and the wide-mouthed gentlemen who dishonour the French Army.”<sup>11</sup> This negative image was also invoked in reviews of Zola’s novel, such as the passage about a visit to a *café-chantant* in Montmartre, which was described as the “height of depravity” and “disgusting corruptness.”<sup>12</sup> Earlier, Ibels had likewise spoken out critically, referring to the cabaret culture as a calculating “industry.” Not just Paris and the press seemed to be divided into two “zones,” but also Montmartre. Van Dongen’s ideals can be related to this context (fig. 3).

### ARTISTE DE MONTMARTRE

“I live very high up, very pleasantly healthy and I work a lot,” Van Dongen explained shortly after moving to his new address – “secluded, with Paris below me.” Years later, the Rotterdam-based journalist Brusse who had visited him in Montmartre still remembered the low rents for a furnished apartment (“15 Francs a month”). He described the “rigid, austere, grey shabbiness” of Van Dongen’s dwelling as a form both of thriftiness and of a convinced “asceticism” and reported that the artist hated “any excess, any luxury ...The only thing worthwhile was working.”<sup>13</sup> Photos and a few (self-) portraits show him with a critical, scrutinising look, eschewing finery (fig. 4; cat. 269). De Bouhéliér likewise characterised him as “shuffling around in a worker’s pullover, fully focused on his work.”<sup>13</sup> Van Dongen combined art with, as he called it in his letters, “paw-the-ground jobs” in order to make “direct” money. He was not embarrassed about it. His existence in the working-class neighbourhood was worlds away from the *café* culture around the place de Clichy, which in the meantime had degenerated into a tourist attraction, together with the artists and the “petit Boulevard,” the scene that Van Gogh had still sought to join.

Another, more authentic Montmartre located higher up – “about ten storeys above” – also features in descriptions from the period. Its rather rural appearance, previously cherished by the painters of the Barbizon School, appealed to freedom and called to mind the time of the Commune. It was here that returning revolutionaries had established a so-called “Maison du peuple”, inspired by the Vooruit

in Ghent, Belgium, and a *Université populaire* was founded in 1900. Even the streets rebelled against any attempt at creating order here, as Georges Montorgueil (Octave Lebesgue) noted in *La Vie à Montmartre* (1899). According to him Montmartre was also devoid of official painters, sculptors or architects, of any literary coterie or classic atelier. Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec had been replaced by draughtsmen, the best-known being Somme, Steinlen and Willette. These together more or less made up “toute la réputation de Montmartre.”



4 Kees van Dongen, *Autoportrait*, September 1899, black chalk, watercolour, 45 × 27 cm, Private collection

5 Kees van Dongen, *Le chiffonnier*, ca. 1900, black chalk, watercolour, 19 × 29.5 cm, Private collection



<sup>11</sup> Anon., “Het boek van de maand. Barthold Meryan door Cornelie Huygens,” in: *De Hollandsche Revue*, 3 (1898), no. 2, pp. 144–5; A. C. Loffelt, “Parijsche Teekenaars in den Haagschen Kunstkring,” in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 16 February 1899.  
<sup>12</sup> Jan ten Brink, “Zola’s laatste roman,” in: *Nederland*, 1898, part 2, pp. 98–101; see also W. K. [W. Koster], “Bibliografische kroniek,” in: *Wetenschappelijke Bladen*, 1898, part 2, pp. 310–1: “a pandemonium [...] in an ordinary café-chantant.”  
<sup>13</sup> De Bouhéliér (see note 3)

<sup>14</sup> Anon., "Fransche spotbladen," in: *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 11 November 1901. For *L'Assiette au Beurre* see Sepp Hiekisch-Picard in: exh. cat. *Bilderwelten II. Satirische Illustrationen im Frankreich der Jahrhundertwende*. Aus der Sammlung von Ritter, Dortmund (Museum für Kulturgeschichte), 1986, pp. 27-33.

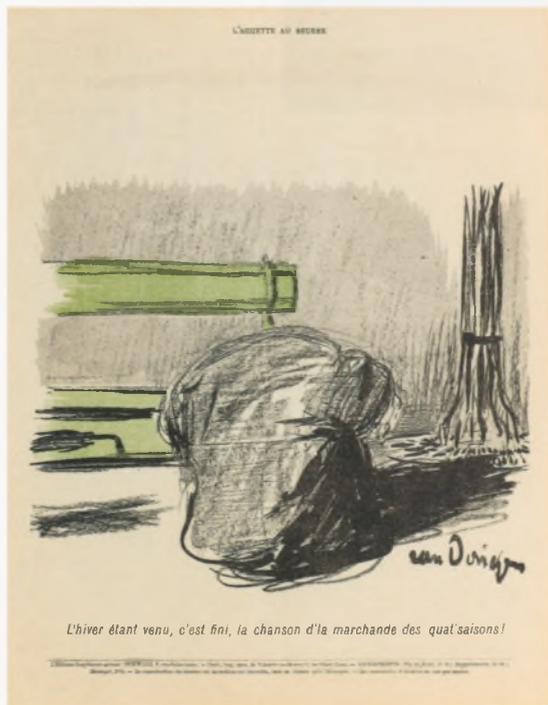
<sup>15</sup> Anon., "Een Hollandsch talent", in: *Zutphensche Courant*, 01.07.1901.

This milieu of the "counter-culture", in opposition to the École and the Salon, not only stimulated Van Dongen, but also offered him opportunities. He was helped by his first contacts, including the journalist Snabilié and anarchist friends such as Fénéon and Alexander Cohen (who at the time was publishing on contemporary cartoons in *La Revue blanche*), as well as Maximilien Luce and others. Steinlen is said to have introduced him to the left-wing *L'Assiette au Beurre*. This magazine, which published its first issue in April 1901, may best illustrate the outlined revival of a social art of drawing – a "proletarian art of sorts", as one negative review called it.<sup>14</sup> Its reach was international and no other publication included so many contributions by foreign draughtsmen. Berthe Weill, who had started out as an antiquarian in the rue Victor-Massé in 1897, also signalled that the art of drawing and illustration was thriving during those years; most of the works she bought and sold belonged to this category. It was an interest that, as Weill noted, became more international thanks, among other things, to the 1900 World Exposition. Another initiative, the progressive Collège d'Esthétique moderne, which was founded in late 1900 by De Bouhélier and others ("Tous Dreyfusards!"), regularly showed works on paper in its own exhibition space, including drawings by Van Dongen. It was here that the Dutch artist expanded his "foreign" contacts. And it was also at this time, in September 1901, that he self-confidently stated in a letter that he was mainly drawing for publications and had dropped painting, as it catered to "luxury" and the market.

7 Kees van Dongen, *L'hiver étant venu, c'est fini, la chanson d'la marchande des quat'saisons!*, illustration in *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 26 October 1901, no. 30

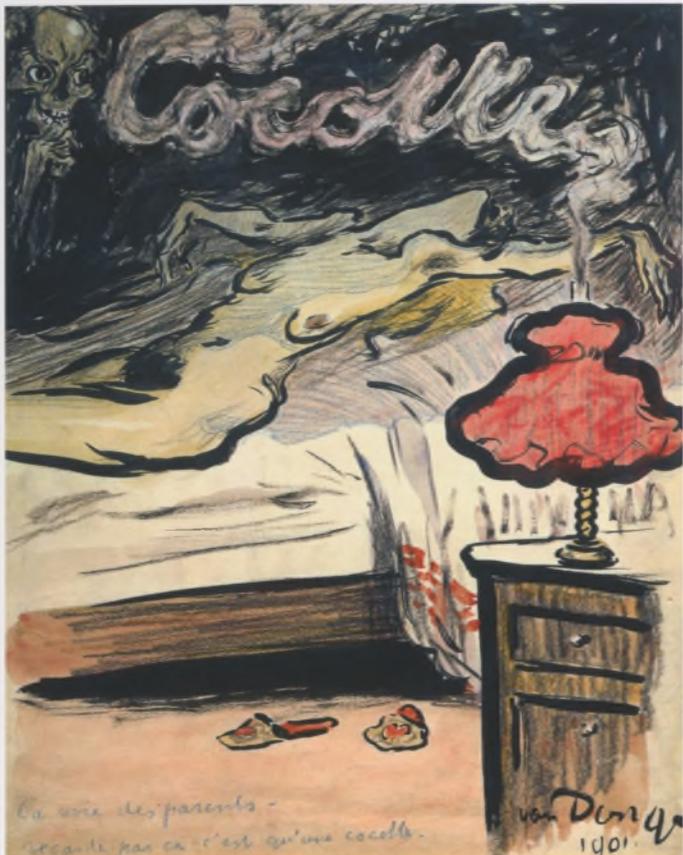


6 Kees van Dongen, *J'suis ni musicien, ni chanteur... Je suis crève-faim!...*, illustration in *L'Assiette au beurre*, 20 June 1901, no. 12



### "FOR THE PEOPLE AS A WHOLE"

Van Dongen wanted "to work as much as possible for the general public and for the people as a whole." Inspired by Steinlen and attracted to the streets, he roamed through Montmartre and along the peripheral boulevards. He drew beggars, poor road workers, worn-out workhorses and lonely prostitutes – in short, the underside of society and the lot of the outsiders (fig. 5). In a primitivist and austere expressive drawing style partly modelled after Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Dongen managed to create a "vivid picture of the misery," as the commentary read when a first drawing was published in *L'Assiette au Beurre* (fig. 6)<sup>15</sup>. What is striking here is how he, more so than his model, excluded the picturesque, drawing mainly in black chalk or ink in a direct, uncompromising style. This harder-hitting approach is evident in works such as *De Absinth-drinkster* (Woman Drinking Absinth) and his well-known series about the fate of a prostitute (figs. 7, 8, cat. 81), with which Van Dongen achieved his breakthrough as a socially



8 Kees van Dongen,  
Cocotte, illustration in  
*L'Assiette au beurre*,  
26 October 1901, no. 30

engaged artist. Using washes to create an almost ominous effect, he vividly captured the life of "a seduced young girl and her daughter." According to a Dutch newspaper, he proved himself a "Dutchman here to the extent that no drawing could be described as 'décolletée'."<sup>16</sup> In later, more colourful and bold drawings his manner is looser, artistically freer. Through this updated "Montmartre" style, which became part of his image, and by opting for subjects such as popular fairground entertainment, Van Dongen was able to join the ranks of the emerging new avant-garde.

<sup>16</sup> Anon., "Uit Parijs", in: *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17.11.1901.



Kees van Dongen  
with his family,  
around 1910