

Slides 1 & 2

Rousseau was born in Laval, Mayenne, France, in 1844 into the family of a tinsmith; he was forced to work there as a small boy. His family had very little money. He attended Laval High School as a day student, and then as a boarder after his father became a debtor and his parents had to leave the town upon the seizure of their house. He was mediocre in most of his high school subjects, Rousseau won prizes for drawing and music.

Slide 3

After high school, he worked for a lawyer and studied law, to avoid a perjury scandal he served in the army for four years, starting in 1863. He never saw combat, and he never travelled out of France, but he was fascinated with other soldiers' accounts of foreign lands. With his father's death, Rousseau moved to Paris in 1868 to support his widowed mother as a government employee. He started painting at this time.

Slide 4

In 1868, he married. In 1871, he was appointed as a customs officer of Paris, collecting taxes on goods entering Paris. His wife died in 1888 and he remarried in 1898. In 1885 he tried to exhibit his art at the official Salon known as the Ministry of Painting and Sculpture, but was refused. A year later he was able to show his paintings at a Salon without judges or juries, but his art was ridiculed for years.

Slide 5

A portrait of his second wife with a lamp.

Slide 6

Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!) (1891) was the first of many jungle scenes for which Rousseau is best known. In 1893 he retired and began painting full time. He made so little money that he had other part time jobs, and also played violin in the streets for cash. He also worked briefly at *Le petit journal*, where he produced a number of its covers.

Slide 7

He moved to a studio in Montparnasse where he lived and worked until his death. In 1897, he produced one of his most famous paintings, *The Sleeping Gypsy*.

Slide 8

Self portrait 1902.

Slide 9

In 1905, Rousseau's large jungle scene *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants near works by younger leading avant-garde artists such as Henri Matisse, in what is now seen as the first showing of *The Fauves*. Rousseau's painting may even have influenced the naming of the *Fauves*. (French for *The Wild Beasts*, a group we talked about when we learned about Matisse, famous for bold strokes and strong colors.)

Slide 10

In 1907, he was commissioned by artist Robert Delaunay's mother, Berthe, Comtesse de Delaunay, to paint *The Snake Charmer*.

Slide 11

In 1908 When Pablo Picasso happened upon *Portrait of a Woman* by Rousseau being sold on the street as a canvas to be painted over, the younger artist instantly recognized Rousseau's genius and wanted to meet him.

Slide 12

In 1908, Picasso hosted a now-legendary party that inspired colorful written accounts by many of the guests, including Gertrude Stein. (A famous American novelist, poet, playwright, and art collector.) As the guest of honor, Rousseau sat in a throne improvised from a chair raised onto a packing crate, and even added to the entertainment by playing a waltz he had

written and named for his first wife. In spite of his popularity among his fellow artists, Rousseau continued to be seen as a figure of amusement in the art world, and lived in poverty for the rest of his life.

Slide 13

In the same month Rousseau discovered a sore on his leg, one which he ignored. In August, when he was admitted to the hospital in Paris where he was found to have an infection in his leg. After an operation, he died from a blood clot on September 2, 1910 at the age of 66.

He was buried in a pauper's grave. Shortly after his death his work began to receive the worldwide recognition it deserved.

Slide 14

A friend wrote this poem that was added to his gravestone in 1912.

We greet you
Gentle Rousseau, you hear us
Delaunay his wife Monsieur Quával and I
Let our baggage pass free through heaven's gate
We'll bring you brushes, paints and canvases
So that you can devote your sacred leisures
In the Real light to painting, as you did my portrait,
Painting the Face of the stars.