



Royal Academy of Arts  
Press Release

**Félix Vallotton: Painter of Disquiet**  
**The Jillian and Arthur M. Sackler Wing of Galleries**  
**30 June – 29 September 2019**

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In June 2019, the Royal Academy of Arts will present a survey of paintings and prints by the Swiss artist Félix Vallotton (1865–1925). This will be the first exhibition of the artist's work in the UK since 1976. Greatly admired in his native Switzerland, Vallotton remains relatively little known elsewhere. The exhibition will serve as a rare opportunity to discover the highly original and innovative work of this often overlooked artist.

Comprising around 100 works from public and private collections across Europe and the U.S., the exhibition will demonstrate the intensity of Vallotton's unique vision by bringing together outstanding examples from every period of the artist's career. A sense of disquiet runs through much of Vallotton's oeuvre, and as such the legacy of his vision has found echoes in later twentieth-century art; in the German New Objectivity movement of the 1920s, in the American painter Edward Hopper's studies in alienation, and perhaps even in the films of Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock.

The exhibition will be organised in thematic sections. The first will present Vallotton's work from the 1880s, following his arrival in Paris at the age of sixteen. Enrolling at the informal Académie Julian, Vallotton displayed a remarkably precocious talent. He avoided the contemporary movements such as Impressionism and turned instead to artists of the Northern and Dutch traditions, as is evident in the detachment and cool realism of his earliest known self-portrait, *Self-portrait at the Age of Twenty*, 1885 (Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne) and the linear clarity of the painting *The Sick Girl*, 1892 (Kunsthaus, Zürich).

The second section will bring together work from a period of radical development for Vallotton. In the early 1890s he formed ties with the Nabis, a group of avant-garde artists including Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard. Like them, Vallotton was an attentive observer of contemporary life in Paris, though his unsparing caricatural illustrations and satires of Parisian society set him apart. It was through the Nabis that Vallotton became part of a circle of writers, critics, and artists surrounding the influential cultural periodical *La Revue blanche*, later becoming principal illustrator, a position that gave him considerable prominence in progressive Parisian circles.

Vallotton distinguished himself as one of the great printmakers of his age. Magazine illustrations provided a stable income for the artist and *La Revue blanche* was a ready vehicle for his prints. Simple in design and bold in their use of black, his woodcuts provide sharply reductive imagery, owing in part to Japanese woodblock printing. Technically daring and biting satirical, the series *Intimités*, 1897–98, best articulates the artist's unvarnished voyeurism and his exploration of the subtle power struggles and hypocrisies of the Parisian bourgeoisie. These are themes that are echoed in the celebrated paintings of interior scenes, 1898–99, such as *The Visit*, 1899 (Kunsthaus, Zürich), a masterpiece of enigmatic narrative.

The closing of *La Revue blanche* coincided with Vallotton's marriage to the wealthy widow Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques in 1899, bringing with it a new financial security that allowed him to concentrate on painting. His early claustrophobic, psychologically charged interiors open up to light-filled rooms of well-appointed apartments, and the synthetic style of the prints is replaced with a broad, painterly realism. A portrait of *Gabrielle Vallotton*, 1905 (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux) pays homage to Ingres with its smooth, flawless surface and meticulous contours, coupled with the sitter's pose, white dress and paisley shawl.

From around 1904 onwards, the female nude became Vallotton's principal subject. This section of the exhibition will present works such as *Nude Holding her Gown*, 1904 (Private Collection) and *Models Resting*, 1905, (Kunst Museum Winterthur). Here the subjects are depicted in a distinctive, hard-edged style, indebted to artists of the Northern tradition such as Cranach and, again, Ingres in the classical coolness and smooth surfaces.

A section will focus on paintings and prints produced during the First World War, an event that profoundly affected the artist. The cover of his portfolio *This is War!*, 1916 (Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva), Vallotton's last series of woodcuts, features splattered red ink on the cover, while the six images, in strongly contrasting blacks and whites, capture the danger and terror of the ordinary soldier fighting at the front. Vallotton also alludes obliquely to war in one of his greatest still-lives *Red Peppers*, 1915 (Kunstmuseum Solothurn), in which the startling red of the peppers is echoed in the shocking, seemingly blood-steeped knife.

The exhibition will conclude with a survey of Vallotton's landscapes and still-life paintings. This selection includes the artist's remarkable *paysages composés*, landscapes based more on memory and imagination than composed from real life observation. These works often have a disturbing quality, as seen in the eerie stillness of *Sandbanks on the Loire*, 1923 (Kunsthaus, Zürich), painted two years before Vallotton's death.

The majority of the loans in the exhibition have been generously lent by museums and private collectors in Vallotton's native Switzerland. We would like to acknowledge particularly the contribution of the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, who has lent 41 of the artist's greatest prints.

## **Organisation**

The exhibition will be presented at the Royal Academy of Arts and then travel to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It will be curated by Ann Dumas, Royal Academy of Arts, and Dita Amory, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, with Katia Poletti, Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne. Exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in collaboration with Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne.

## **Exhibition Tour**

Royal Academy of Arts, 30 June – 29 September 2019

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 29th October 2019 – 26 January 2020

## **Accompanying Publication**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue produced by the Royal Academy, with essays by the curators and leading scholars in the field.

## **Dates and Opening Hours**

**Press Day**                      **Thursday 27 June 10am - 1pm**

Open to public:                Sunday 30 June – Sunday 29 September 2019  
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)

Late night opening:        Fridays until 10pm (last admission 9.30pm)

## **Admission**

Standard Adult tickets £16 (£14 without Gift Aid donation); concessions available; children under 16 and Friends of the RA go free.

## **Tickets**

Tickets are available daily at the RA or visit [royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk). Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email <mailto:groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk>

## **Images**

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#FélixVallotton

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### **About the Royal Academy of Arts**

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy launched a new campus as part of the celebrations of its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2018. Following this transformative redevelopment, designed by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the National Lottery, the new Royal Academy of Arts reveals more of the elements that make the RA unique – sharing with the public historic treasures from its Collection, the work of its Royal Academicians and the Royal Academy Schools, and its role as a centre for learning and debate about art and architecture – alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. [Royalacademy.org.uk](http://Royalacademy.org.uk)

**For public information, please print 020 7300 8090 or [www.royalacademy.org.uk](http://www.royalacademy.org.uk)**

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