Walter Sickert
Painting and transgressing

14 October 2022 - 29 January 2023

Petit Palais
Musée des Beaux-Arts
de la Ville de Paris

Information
petitpalais.paris.fr

The Petit Palais has partnered with Tate Britain to present the very first major retrospective in France dedicated to the English painter Walter Sickert.
This resolutely modern artist, who chose enigmatic subjects, is poorly represented in French collections. This despite the fact that Sickert forged artistic and personal ties with many French artists and brought to England a manner of painting shaped by the time he spent in Paris. The exhibition is therefore an opportunity to (re)discover a unique artist who had a decisive impact on English figurative painting, notably that of Lucian Freud.

The exhibition follows a chronological order while presenting themes drawn from key subjects in Sickert's painting.The first rooms, dedicated to the artist's debut, present his personality that was at once intriguing, complex and seductive. Very provocative, in the context of a relatively corseted English academic art, Walter Sickert painted unusual subjects such as music hall scenes,

Walter Sickert, *Little Dot Hetherington at the Old Bedford,* c. 1888-1889. Collection particulière.
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or later, de-eroticised nudes stripped of all glamour in poor Camden Town interiors. His contemporaries were struck by the artist's choice of colours - as virtuoso as strange, inherited from training with Whistler - and disconcerting framing.
From 1890, Sickert travelled more regularly to Paris and Dieppe, eventually settling in the seaside resort from 1898 to 1905. He was heavily influenced by the French art scene and became close to Edgar Degas, Jacques-Émile Blanche, Pierre Bonnard, Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro.

He returned to London in 1905, where he diffused his deep knowledge of French painting in England through art critiques, his influence on certain exhibitions, and his teaching. This is when he started the "modern conversation pieces" series, in which he transformed traditional genre scenes of English painting into ambiguous, foreboding, even sordid paintings, the most famous being from the "Camden Town murders" series.

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At the end of his career, between the two world wars, Sickert innovated by turning news photographs into paintings, a process largely taken up in the 1950s by artists such as Andy Warhol. While he never crossed the threshold into abstraction, Sickert unceasingly provoked the art world and the public with his iconographic and pictorial inventions. Indeed, the legacy of his art is the lasting mark it left on the work of many artists for generations to come.

The exhibition proposed by the Petit Palais is arranged very much like that of the Tate Britain, the works being largely the same. Aside from a few additional loans, notably from French collections, what makes the Petit Palais exhibition stand out is the exhibition design and cultural mediation. The exhibition design, by Cécile Degos, consists of different coloured and aerated atmospheres, creating perspectives between the rooms. Here and there throughout the exhibition, more immersive designs, like the one dedicated to music halls, brings the space alive. Cultural mediation consists of, on the one hand, audio clips created from archives that bring the voice of Sickert and his contemporaries to the ears of visitors, and on the other hand a screen that allows visitors to experience a projection lantern, a transposition procedure that Sickert claimed to have used.

Exhibition curators:

Tate Britain
Alex Farquharson, Director, Tate Britain
Emma Chambers, Curator, Modern British Art, Tate Britain
Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, Curator of Drawings, Musée d'Orsay and former Curator, British Art, 1850-1915 at Tate Britain
Thomas Kennedy, Assistant Curator, Modern British Art, Tate Britain

Petit Palais
Delphine Lévy, Director of Paris Musées (2013-2020)
Clara Roca, Curator in charge of 19th- and 20th-century graphic arts collections and photography at Petit Palais