

Limited Edition

Vollard, Petiet and Modern Master Prints

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

Tuesday to Sunday 10am to 6pm.
Fridays until 9pm

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In this ground-breaking exhibition, the Petit Palais explores the work of the famous art dealer Ambroise Vollard as a publisher of prints and illustrated books.

Vollard worked with the greatest artists of his times: Picasso, Bonnard, Cassatt, Chagall, Maillol, Redon, Rouault, to name but a few. Passionate about printmaking, that is where he invested the bulk of the fortune he made selling paintings by the masters of modern art, taking it to new, unprecedented levels.

Having benefited from several gifts and bequests from Vollard himself and his heirs, the Petit Palais has undertaken to shine a light on this exceptional collection of prints, illustrated books and limited edition artworks (bronzes and ceramics), enriched by numerous loans from other institutions and collections.

The exhibition is also an opportunity to evoke the name of Henri Marie Petiet, Vollard's successor and a major figure in the post-war print trade. The exhibition therefore pays double tribute to the roles of these two art dealers and publishers.



Aristide Maillol, *La Vierge*, wood engraving, 1895-1898, Petit Palais, donation Indivision Petiet 2020 © Paris Musées / Petit Palais

The brilliant career of Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939) made him a major player in the art trade at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, on a par with Paul Durand-Ruel and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. It was he who promoted the likes of Cézanne and Gauguin, and opened his doors to a young Pablo Picasso.

In addition to selling paintings, Vollard threw himself heart and soul into publishing prints as early as 1894, when he released a new edition of Gauguin's *Volpini Suite*. But the adventure really got off the ground when he produced two famous albums of prints and engravings (1896 and 1897) which featured prints from masters such as Fantin-Latour, Puvis de Chavannes, and new artists who were the embodiment of a new modernity like the Nabis, in the footsteps of Redon. Vollard distributed works by Mary Cassatt but also published the famous *Saltimbanques* suite by Picasso as well as individual albums of works by Bonnard, Vuillard and Denis, betting on the same principle of publishing artists' prints in limited editions.

At the same time, Vollard expanded his publishing activity to include artists' books, investing himself fully, both financially and personally. However, it wouldn't be until the 1920s, and especially the 1930s, that his publications really began to sell, and a craze for them took hold. Ever the perfectionist, Vollard himself chose and placed orders for the paper and typefaces. In doing so, Vollard became an artist in his own right, at the head of a whole host of individuals involved in an editorial adventure of monumental proportions.

From his first publications, notably the masterful *Parallèlement* of Verlaine's poetry illustrated by Bonnard (1900), bibliophiles were shocked by Vollard's approach, and especially by his predilection for colour lithography. But the publisher's reputation was well-established. Many major publications followed, such as *Le Jardin des supplices* (illustrations by Rodin, 1902), *Sagesse* (Maurice Denis, 1911), *Les Fleurs du mal* (Emile Bernard, 1916), *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (Picasso, 1931) and *Passion* (Rouault, 1939). His influence on artists was such that he encouraged painters to take an interest (which sometimes proved long-lasting) in prints of course, but also to try their hand at painting ceramics or at sculpture, a good example being Maillol.



Gyula Halász, known as Brassai, *Ambroise Vollard at home*, 1934, photography
© Paris Musées / Petit Palais / Brassai
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In 1939, Vollard died suddenly in a car accident. Henri Marie Petiet (1894-1980), who had been sourcing from Vollard since the 1920s, bought up the bulk of his prints, including Picasso's famous *Vollard Suite*, which he undertook to distribute. Petiet immediately emerged as Vollard's successor in selling prints, but also as an ambassador of French modern art around the world, especially in the United States. Petiet himself published some artists who had worked with Vollard, like Maillol and Derain, and went on to publish an artists' book, *Les Contrerimes* by Toulet, illustrated by Jean-Émile Laboureur, his favourite engraver. He also promoted new artists such as Marie Laurencin, Marcel Gromaire, and Édouard Goerg, the latter dubbing him the "most Vollard-esque of dealers".

The exhibition is designed to help people gain a better understanding of the techniques of printmaking and publishing. It includes printmaking tools and a copper printing press on loan from the French national printing works (Imprimerie nationale), which will be activated during live demonstrations. Lastly, visitors can enjoy a lively guided tour of the exhibition by downloading the museum app, due to launch in tandem with the exhibition. The app, whose contents will also be available on the museum's video guide, takes visitors through several key works and offers a glimpse of the unique and endearing personalities of Vollard and Petiet themselves through several anecdotes. There will also be a small area dedicated to creating a printed page with typeface and ornamental patterns.

Curator:

Clara Roca, curator of graphic arts and photography from the 19th and 20th centuries at the Petit Palais

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