



Moulin Rouge (1952) Art Appreciation

Description

Written and reviewed by Larry Gleeson

[Moulin Rouge \(1952\)](#), directed by John Huston (*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, *Chinatown*), stars Jose Ferrer, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Colette Marchand, and Susan Flo, and is based on the novel, "Moulin Rouge" by Pierre La Mure. The film was nominated for six Oscars winning two, one for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Color (Paul Sheriff, Marcel Vertes), and one for Best Costume Design, Color (Marcel Vertes). Houston makes the artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (Jose Ferrer), the central character in the fictional narrative. The casting is excellent. The musical score (Lambert Williamson) doesn't miss a beat. The mise-en-scen is basically responsible for the film's two Oscars.



The film opens with a text overlay introducing the theme of *Moulin Rouge*:

â??His palette is caked, his brushes are dry, yet the genius of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec is as fresh and alive as the day he laid them down. Here, for a brief moment, they shall be restored to his hands, and he and his beloved city and his time shall live again.â?•

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, born into an old, prominent aristocratic family was a Post-Impressionist (Van Gogh, Gauguin, CÃ©zanne, and Serault) painter, caricaturist, print maker, draftsman, and artist. Toulouse-Lautrec broke his legs in adolescence. His legs stopped developing giving him a distorted appearance.



After suffering ridicule at the hands of a woman of equal social standing, Toulouse-Lautrec moved to the Montmartre, the center of bohemian life in Paris. During this time, he began imbibing in alcohol, frequenting brothels, cabarets and dance halls â?? many of the individuals he encountered became his subject matter. In addition, Toulouse-Lautrec was an early pioneer of poster design, and became a fixture of Parisian nightlife, particularly at the Moulin Rouge, the most popular and scandalous entertainment venue. Many of the Moulin Rouge characters also became fodder for his art. Eventually, Toulouse-Lautrec developed alcoholism, and due to complications, died at the age of 36. His legacy was a collection of elegant, provocative work of bohemian 19th Century Parisian lifestyles.



Throughout film history several films have been made about the infamous Moulin Rouge. A French film was released in 1940, featuring the extraordinary American-born French singer, dancer and actress, Josephine Baker, as Princess Tam-tam. In addition, a 1934 Pre-code, Hollywood musical comedy featured Constance Bennett and Francine Tone as well as a recently restored 1928 silent film with a synchronized soundtrack. The most latest was the somewhat bizarre 2001 musical, *Moulin Rouge!* by Baz Luhrmann, featuring Nicole Kidman.



Director John Huston was seemingly more interested in recreating Toulouse-Lautrec's art works than the accuracy of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's life with his *Moulin Rouge* titled film. Toulouse-Lautrec's art works are a visual smorgasbord and are on full display throughout. Huston also hired a color consultant. The resultant mise-en-scen is full of oranges, yellows, and pinks splattered across a

blue-green backdrop (*Shape of Water*). With rarely a dull moment, Huston hit his mark as his *Moulin Rouge* is eye-catching with colorful costumes, colorful characters, and a compelling narrative. Huston even managed to create a happy ending element that brings a smile to a face. Highly recommended.



Category

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Author

hollywoodglee