Large Print

Félix Vallotton

Painter of Disquiet

The Sackler Wing of Galleries

Room 1

Do not remove from gallery

Félix Vallotton
Painter of Disquiet

Royal Academy of Arts
The Sackler Wing of Galleries
30 June — 29 September 2019

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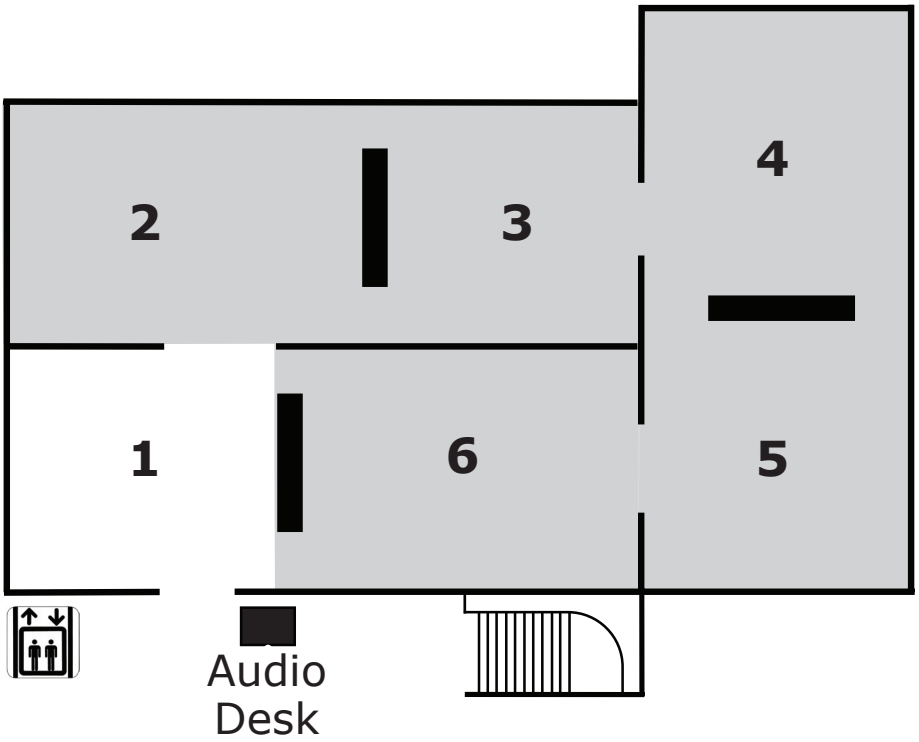

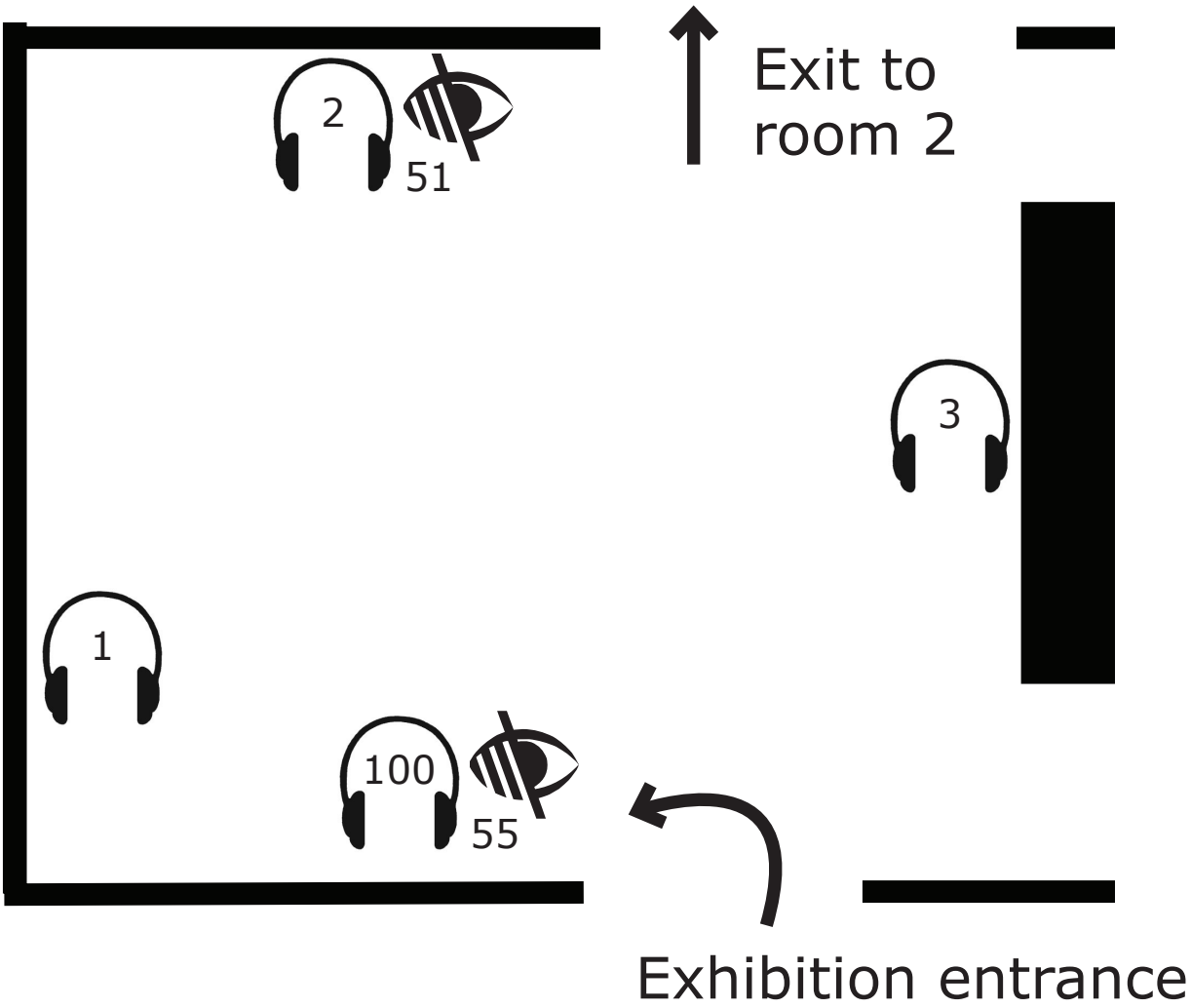

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100 55 Introduction

1 Self-portrait at the Age of Twenty, 1885

2 51 The Sick Girl, 1892

3 The Five Painters, 1902-03

Room 1

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Félix Vallotton Painter of Disquiet

The ‘very singular Vallotton’, as he was called, was one of the most distinctive artists working in Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

He is probably best known today for the acerbic wit of his satirical woodcuts of the 1890s, but he also created paintings of extraordinary visual intensity – enigmatic narratives, magnetic still-lifes, unsettling nudes and radiant landscapes.

Félix Vallotton (1865–1925) was born into a Swiss Protestant family in Lausanne.

(continued over)

At the age of 16, he set off for Paris, the indisputable capital of the art world.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Paris witnessed political upheaval, with anarchist bombings and assassinations, as well as unprecedented achievement in the arts. In this atmosphere of social instability and freewheeling creativity, Vallotton would flourish.

His early paintings display a precocious talent rooted in the Northern European tradition, and soon he emerged at the forefront of the printmaking revival. His genius in woodcut culminated in 'Intimacies', a series of sardonic vignettes of bourgeois hypocrisy infused with mystery and unease.

As an illustrator, he made drawings that were reproduced photomechanically in the many left-wing and satirical periodicals that proliferated at the time. He became

closely associated with the Nabi group of artists led by Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard and, for a time, adopted their style.

In 1899, Vallotton turned his back on his bohemian Left-Bank life and married Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques, the wealthy daughter of one of Paris's leading art dealers. Freed from the need to produce illustrations, he devoted himself to painting and for the rest of his career he employed a unique hard-edged realism in compositions of compelling strangeness, beauty and disquiet.

Celebrated in Switzerland and France, elsewhere Vallotton has not always been accorded the attention he deserves. His life and art defy categorisation; always outside the mainstream of artistic currents, his was a singular vision that continues to surprise and to challenge.

Early Works

Vallotton rejected a place at the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts and enrolled instead at the informal Académie Julian, favouring its more liberal approach. His early works, on view in this gallery, nevertheless demonstrate his fierce discipline and his precocious talent as a realist painter.

Their crystalline precision reveals his admiration for artists such as Holbein and Dürer and his disengagement from Impressionism, the prevailing avant-garde style in Paris at the time. This independence would characterise the rest of his career.

Room 1 list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)

The Coffee Service 1887

Le Service à café

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Self-portrait at the Age of Twenty 1885

Autoportrait à l'âge de vingt ans

Oil on canvas

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.

Acquisition, 1896

(continued over)

In this early self-portrait, the young Vallotton displays a self-confidence that belies his age.

He had been living in Paris for almost four years, yet the economical composition and restricted palette of this work reflect the artist’s continued allegiance to the linear clarity of Northern Renaissance artists such as Holbein, rather than the contemporary experimental styles that surrounded him, particularly Impressionism.

The Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, in Vallotton’s native Lausanne, purchased the painting in 1896, making it the first work by the artist to enter a public collection.

Félix Jasinski Holding His Hat 1887

Félix Jasinski tenant son chapeau

Oil on canvas

Finnish National Gallery, Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. Antell Collections

Vallotton and Jasinski met as students at the Académie Julian in the early 1880s. Jasinski was a Polish artist, and the two were united in their status as foreigners and by their interest in printmaking.

Here, Vallotton depicts his friend as a man of high standing and success, when in reality he was struggling through the early stages of his career.

(continued over)

Originally exhibited under the anonymous title of ‘Portrait of a Young Man’, perhaps Vallotton was projecting the ambitions of the two through this aggrandised depiction of a distinguished Jasinski.

Juliette Lacour 1886

Oil on canvas

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne.
Acquisition, 2002

The Sick Girl 1892

2 51

La Malade

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich. Association of Zürich Art Friends, bequest of Dr H. U. Doerig, with the contribution of Annette Bühler, 2016

Vallotton executed this narrative scene with a meticulous realism reminiscent of his eighteenth-century Swiss predecessor Jean-Etienne Liotard.

From the glass bottles on the side table (one reflecting an unseen window in a nod to seventeenth-century Dutch masters) to the woven chair seat, the room is rendered with remarkable precision.

The maid shows little interest in the sick girl; frozen in a static pose, she gazes out as if from a stage.

(continued over)

The painting represented the culmination of Vallotton's first decade in Paris. Soon afterwards, he would – for a time – embrace more experimental modes of image-making.

The Five Painters 1902–03

3

Les Cinq peintres

Oil on canvas

Kunst Museum Winterthur. Donated by Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler, Lisa Jaeggli-Hahnloser and Prof. Dr Hans R. Hahnloser, 1946

Vallotton joined the group of artists known as the 'Nabis' (the 'Prophets') in the early 1890s, but his Swiss nationality and distinct artistic identity earned him the nickname 'the foreign Nabi'.

He appears to emphasise that status in this group portrait, in which he positions himself slightly apart from his peers (L-R: Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Charles Cottet and Ker-Xavier Roussel).

Painted soon after the group disbanded, it was an homage to the movement that played such an important role in Vallotton's development in the 1890s.

However, by this point he had already abandoned the Nabi aesthetic in favour of the more realistic style that would define his later work.

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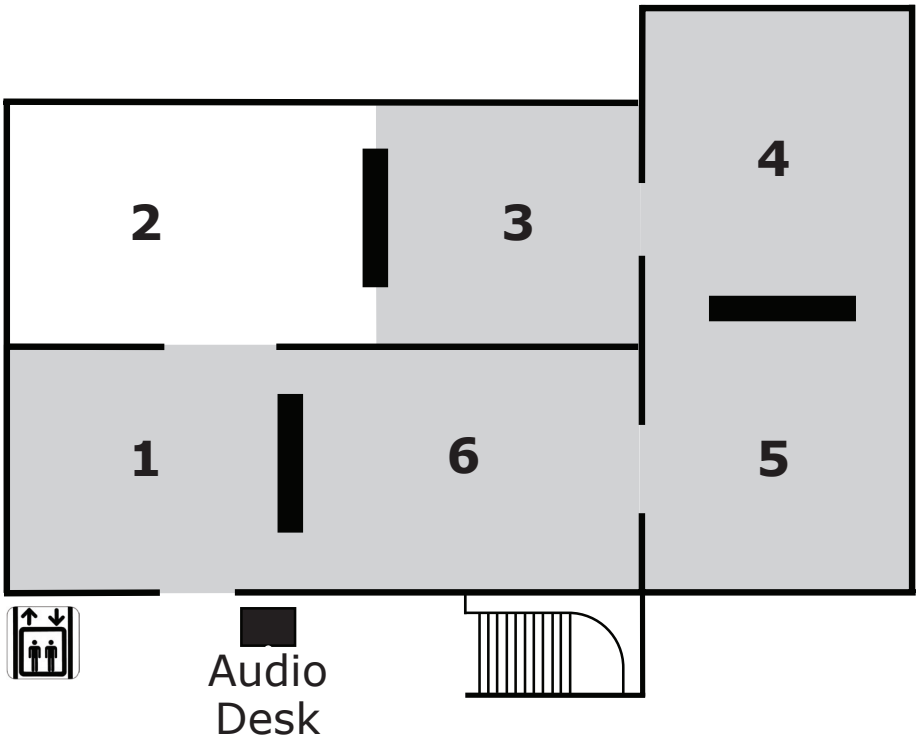

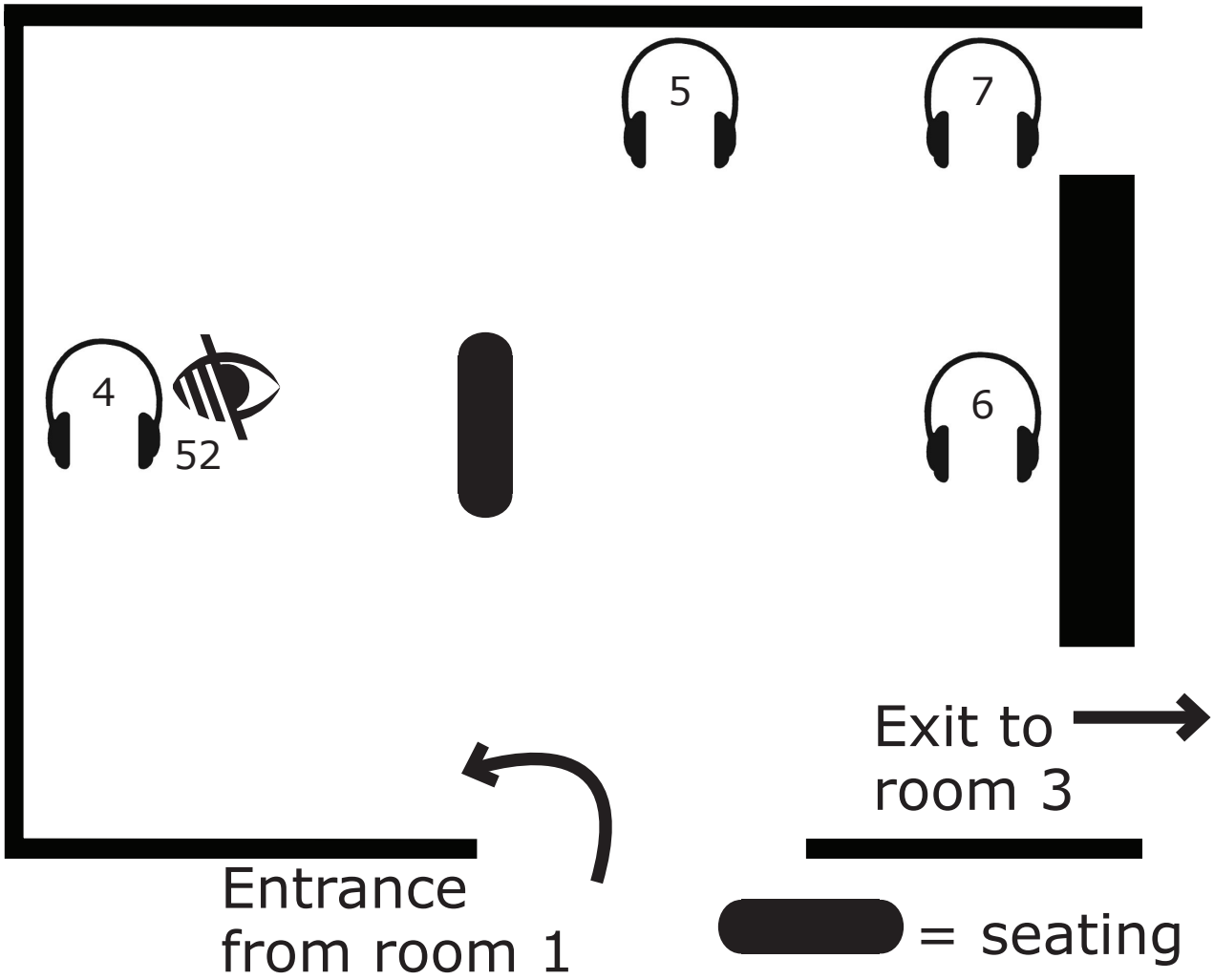

Multimedia tour room 2

Main commentary

Descriptive commentary

4 52 Bathing on a Summer Evening, 1892-93

5 Street Scene in Paris, c.1897

6 The Bon Marché Department Store, 1893

7 Woman in a Purple Dress under the Lamp, 1898

Room 2

Printmaking and the Early Nabi Years

Although Vallotton eludes classification, he is most closely associated with the circle of artists known as the ‘Nabis’ (‘Prophets’).

His involvement with the group in the early 1890s coincided with a radical transformation in his work, heralded by the daring new style of ‘Bathing on a Summer Evening’ and his discovery of woodcut printmaking.

The Nabis – whose best-known members were Vuillard and Bonnard – advocated an anti-naturalist approach to painting, believing that art should be a means of conveying emotion rather than replicating the external world.

(continued over)

Through the subjective application of colour in bold, flat forms, they strove to express inner feelings in pursuit of a heightened sensibility.

Vallotton began making woodcuts in 1891, and his unique talent placed him at the forefront of a European revival of the medium. It was doubtless his woodcuts that attracted the Nabis' attention.

Japanese woodblock prints by artists like Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Kitagawa Utamaro (c. 1753–1806) were a major influence on many contemporary artists, and their simplification of form, flattened perspective and decorative aesthetic became key stylistic influences for the Nabis.

The distinctive graphic language he developed gave Vallotton a key position in the liberal Parisian press of the 1890s. Technological developments had led to a

proliferation in the production of illustrated journals and newspapers, for which Vallotton received countless commissions. As principal illustrator of the influential journal ‘La Revue blanche’ he gained prominence in avant-garde circles in Paris, as well as a steady income.

Up to this point, Vallotton had resisted emotional expression in favour of a realistic naturalism. Although his involvement with the Nabis was always slightly removed, the group aesthetic nevertheless had a profound impact on his style.

Room 2 list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)

Moonlight
c. 1895

Clair de lune

Oil on canvas

Musée d’Orsay, Paris

Reflections, Decorative Effect
c. 1893

Reflets, impression décorative

Oil on canvas

Private collection

The Waltz
1893

La Valse

Oil on canvas

Musée d’art moderne André Malraux, Le Havre.
Olivier Senn Collection.
Donation Hélène Senn-Foulds, 2004

This painting was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants next to ‘Bathing on a Summer Evening’, hanging nearby.

The skaters seem to float over the ice, transported by the music. Speckles of ice sparkle in the artificial light.

Bathing on a Summer Evening 1892–93

4 52

Le Bain au soir d’été

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich. Gottfried Keller Foundation, Federal Office of Culture, Bern. Acquired 1965

In ‘Bathing on a Summer Evening’, Vallotton broke completely with his earlier realist manner. His stylisations and distortions of what is a traditional subject in Western art made the work incomprehensible to the public who saw it at the Salon des Indépendants in 1893.

They were unable to recognise its witty parody and sophisticated wealth of influences from Ferdinand Hodler to Henri Rousseau and, perhaps most importantly,

Japanese ‘ukiyo-e’ prints. Toulouse-Lautrec was one of the few to appreciate it, but even he thought that the police might come and take it away.

Photograph:

Kitagawa Utamaro, ‘Courtesans (Eight Views of the Beauties of Shimada)’, c. 1800

Colour woodcut, 36 × 25.2 cm

Private collection (former Collection of Félix Vallotton) © Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne

Bathing 1894

Le Bain

Woodcut on paper

Private collection

Three Bathers
1894

Les Trois Baigneuses

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

Paris Intense
1893–94

Zincograph on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphique

Frontispiece

VI:The Accident

L’Accident

VII: The Shower
L’Averse

Unlike the relief method of woodcut printmaking, in which the image is carved into a wooden block, zincography involves drawing onto a zinc plate.

The result is a freer, more expressive line, but the composition of these three images from Vallotton’s ‘Paris Intense’ series retains a distinct Japanese influence.

With simplified features and from unusual, slightly elevated perspectives, Vallotton conjures a variety of characters and scenarios in wittily caricatural snapshots of the chaos of city life.

Woman with a Poodle c. 1895

La Dame au caniche

Oil on cardboard

The Barrett Collection, Dallas, Texas

The Demonstration 1893

La Manifestation

Woodcut on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1922

Street Scene in Paris c. 1897

5

Scène de rue à Paris

Gouache and oil on cardboard

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975

Although Vallotton never fully embraced the Nabi aesthetic, this painting is one of the most characteristic of their style. Painting on cardboard, Vallotton conjures the spirit of 'fin-de-siècle' Paris with great economy.

Seen from above, colourful two-dimensional figures move across a Parisian street suggested merely by the absence of paint on the cardboard support.

(continued over)

With its flattened perspective and simplified forms, the work demonstrates Vallotton's indebtedness to Japanese printmaking as well as the relationship between his paintings and prints.

Although a stamp dates the work to 1895, recent research suggests that it was probably painted in 1897.

The Charge
1893

La Charge

Woodcut on paper

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d'arts graphiques

The Merry Latin Quarter
1895

Le Joyeux Quartier Latin

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

The Shower
1894

L’Averse

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

The Bon Marché Department Store 1893

Le Bon Marché

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques

The Gust of Wind 1894

Le Coup de vent

Nowhere is Vallotton’s skill in woodcut better demonstrated than in these lively scenes of crowds in Paris.

Whether caught in the rain or a gust of wind, enjoying the city’s nightlife or scrambling for the latest luxury goods in a

department store, the figures are captured with deft economy and wry humour.

Woman in a Purple Dress under the Lamp 1898

7

Femme en robe violette sous la lampe

Distemper on cardboard

Private permanent loan to the Hahnloser/Jaeggli Foundation, Villa Flora, Winterthur

The stiffly posed subject of this enigmatic painting is often thought to be Hélène Chatenay, the young seamstress with whom Vallotton had been in a relationship since 1892 and whom he would abandon in 1899 to marry the wealthy Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques.

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The rectangle of yellow light framed by the doorway contrasts with the shadowy interior whose sombre, tense mood seems to be echoed in the large painting on the wall behind by Vallotton's close friend Edouard Vuillard, 'Large Interior with Six Figures', 1897. The scene of marital discord had recently been given to Vallotton by the artist.

Photograph:

Edouard Vuillard, 'Large Interior with Six Figures', 1897

Oil on canvas, 88 × 193 cm

Kunsthaus Zürich. Acquired 1966

© Kunsthaus Zürich

The Bon Marché Department Store 1898

6

Le Bon Marché

Oil on cardboard

Private collection, Switzerland

This lively interior view of the world's first large department store was painted by Vallotton on three panels. It may have been with a degree of irony that he chose the triptych format, most commonly associated with religious paintings in churches, for this grandiose depiction of people out shopping.

Perhaps a sardonic comment about modern-day consumer culture, Vallotton captures the bustle of this contemporary phenomenon with great panache.

(continued over)

No detail has been spared in illustrating the lavish setting in which smartly dressed bourgeois crowds browse colourful displays in search of the latest luxury products.

Murder
1893

L’ Assassinat

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

The Bath
1894

Le Bain

Woodcut on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1922

Laziness
1896

La Paresse

Woodcut on paper

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Acquisition, 1903

Nude Seated in a Red Armchair
1897

Femme nue assise dans un fauteuil rouge

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée de Grenoble

Large Print

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Room 3

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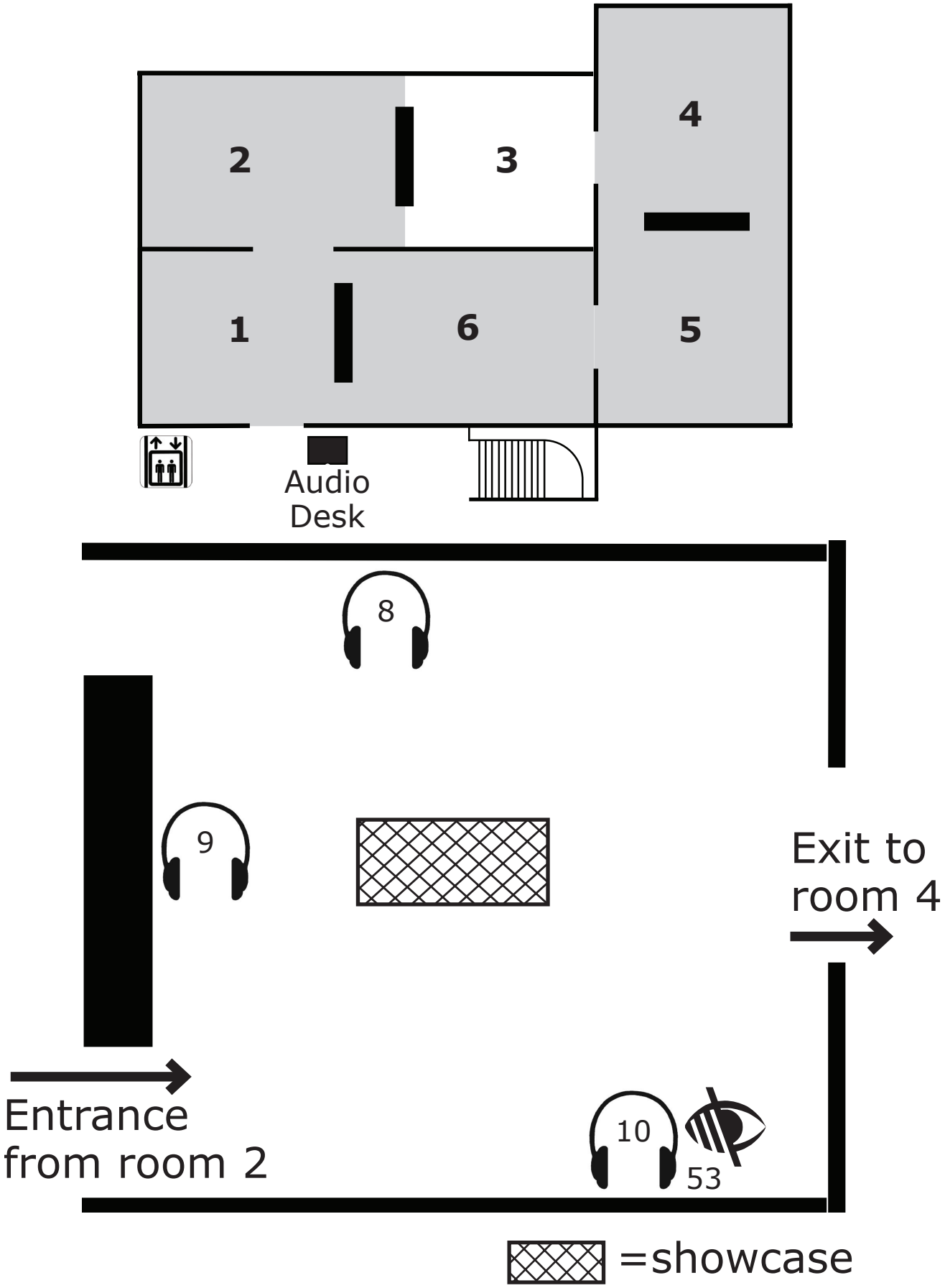

Multimedia tour room 3

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Descriptive commentary

8 Félix Fénéon at ‘La Revue blanche’, c. 1896

9 Intimacies, 1897-98

10 53 The Visit, 1899

ROOM 3

The Late Nabi

A major stimulus for Vallotton throughout the 1890s was his close association with ‘La Revue blanche’, the most brilliant literary and artistic review of its era.

Founded and managed by the three Natanson brothers, Alexandre, Alfred and Thadée, it hosted all the luminaries of the age. Stéphane Mallarmé, Marcel Proust, Alfred Jarry, Jules Renard, Claude Debussy and Erik Satie were among those who contributed to its pages and frequented its offices.

Vallotton’s role as chief illustrator for the magazine placed him at the heart of this milieu and he painted portraits of its principal players: Thadée Natanson; his charismatic wife, Misia; Félix Fénéon, the magazine’s editor; and his own thoughtful self-portrait.

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The 1890s was also the decade in which Vallotton emerged as the most gifted graphic artist of his generation, especially in the medium of woodcut. His greatest woodcut series, ‘Intimacies’ (‘Intimités’), 1897–98, received critical acclaim and is the work for which he is best known today.

In these ten graphic, fly-on-the-wall ‘short stories’, Vallotton mercilessly satirises the sexual mores of the Parisian bourgeoisie, manipulating the blacks and whites of the woodcut technique to dramatic effect.

A related group of paintings followed these psychological cameos on the same or similar subjects, their disconcerting narratives enhanced by the offbeat and often strident colours.

At the end of the century, Vallotton largely gave up printmaking in favour of painting, except for his six woodcuts documenting scenes at the World’s Fair held in Paris in

1900 and, much later, a series depicting the First World War.

Room 3 list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)

The Lie
1898

Le Mensonge

Oil on artist's board

The Baltimore Museum of Art. The Cone Collection, formed by Dr Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland

The Visit
1899

10 53

La Visite

Distemper on cardboard

Kunsthaus Zürich. Acquired 1909

Five O’Clock
1898

Cinq heures

Distemper on cardboard

Private collection

A man and a woman embrace in a red armchair, but their assignation seems entirely lacking in romance. They seem entrapped by the screen and the imposing furniture that surrounds them. Strong light and deep shadow contribute to the dramatic

tension of the scene. The title, ‘Five O’Clock’, was a well-known ironic comment in France on the hour at the end of the day when men would visit their mistresses after the office and before going home.

The Red Room 1898

La Chambre rouge

Distemper on cardboard

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Acquisition, 1983

The composition is like a scene in a play, reminding us that Vallotton, like other members of the Nabis, had been involved with the avant-garde theatre companies that were the first to put on the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg in Paris, and was himself a playwright.

(continued over)

The palette of clashing reds creates a tense, claustrophobic atmosphere. On the table lie the woman's parasol, gloves, purse and handkerchief, and reflected in the mirror is Vuillard's 'Large Interior with Six Figures', 1897.

The artist has wittily inserted himself into the picture in the form of a portrait bust on the mantelpiece. In the doorway, the couple seems engaged in a test of wills, yet their interaction is indecipherable.

Waiting
1899

L'Attente

Distemper on cardboard

Private collection

“The tragic violence of a patch of back” – Thadée Natanson

Vallotton’s series of ten woodcuts entitled ‘Intimacies’ (‘Intimités’) was his most sophisticated graphic undertaking. The ten images were published in ‘La Revue blanche’ in 1898 in an edition of only thirty before the woodblocks were destroyed.

The unusual cancellation proof made up of a detail – in each case the head of the protagonist – cut from each of the destroyed blocks was included in the portfolios.

Vallotton developed a printing technique that was partly inspired by Japanese woodblock printmaking. As well as being credited with reviving this medium in general, he also became known for his use of the white-line technique, in which much of the print is saturated in black, and the image is formed by lines cut directly into the block.

(continued over)

He also employed the black-line technique, in which the outlines and details of forms are printed after the surrounding white areas have been carved.

The blacks and whites of the woodcut technique are brilliantly exploited to explore with devastating wit and daring economy the hypocrisies, lies, deceits and subterfuges of bourgeois marital and sexual life.

Married couples quarrel ('Extreme Measure') and an adulterous couple drink a toast to a deceived spouse ('A Toast to the Spouse'), while in 'Money' the daring expanse of black fuses the silhouette of the man with the space of the room and ruthlessly throws into relief the ambiguous transaction between the couple.

Special thanks are due to the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, which holds one of the finest collections of Vallotton's prints in the world, for the generous loan of 35 examples to this exhibition.

Intimacies 1897–98

9

Les intimités

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

I: The Lie, 1897

Le Mensonge

II: The Triumph, 1898

Le Triomphe

III: The Fine Pin, 1898

La Belle épingle

IV: The Cogent Reason, 1898

La Raison probante

(continued over)

V: Money, 1898
L’Argent

VI: Extreme Measure, 1898
Le Grand moyen

VII: Five O’Clock, 1898
Cinq heures

VIII: Getting Ready for a Visit, 1898
Apprêts de visite

IX: A Toast to the Spouse, 1898
La Santé de l’autre

X: The Irreparable, 1898
L'Irréparable

Cancellation sheet, fragments of ten woodblocks, 1897–98

Self-portrait 1897

Autoportrait

Oil on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Acquired with the funds from an anonymous Canadian donor, 2007

Thadée Natanson, co-owner of 'La Revue blanche' and its principal art critic, remembered Vallotton's first arrival at his offices a few years earlier in 1893:

"He arrived here very young and very thin, blond, with a slightly asymmetrical oval face, a very small moustache and a mere nothing of a goatee. He walked sideways, careful of his steps. If his clothing showed a little thread it wasn't from not having been carefully brushed. He had the air of being constantly on his guard..."

Félix Fénéon at ‘La Revue blanche’ c. 1896

8

Félix Fénéon à ‘La Revue blanche’

Oil on cardboard

Private collection

Félix Fénéon, writer, art critic, collector, anarchist and editor of ‘La Revue blanche’, leans over his piles of paper, intensely engaged in his work.

Rather than a realistic likeness, Vallotton captures the essence of the character, his ferocious intelligence and concentration. The way he integrates the figure into an aesthetic arrangement of greys, offset by the green lampshade, is typical of the Nabis’ approach to portraiture.

Thadée Natanson
1897

Oil on cardboard

Association of the Friends of Petit Palais, Geneva

Misia at Her Dressing Table
1898

Misia à sa coiffeuse

Distemper on cardboard

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Misia Godebska was a pianist of Polish descent who married Thadée Natanson, co-owner and chief art critic of 'La Revue blanche', whose portrait hangs nearby. They were a glamorous couple at the

centre of the cultivated social milieu that surrounded the magazine.

Misia was muse to most of the Nabis, for whom she would often perform at the piano, as in the nearby woodcut ‘The Symphony’. Vallotton expressed his fascination with her in a number of portraits.

In this one, we are witness to a private moment as her almost sculptural figure leans forward on her dressing table to study her reflection in the mirror.

The Symphony 1897

La Symphonie

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

Showcase

Musical Instruments 1896–97

Instruments de musique

Woodcut on paper

I, II, III: Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques

IV, V, VI: Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Donation of Fondation Jean-Louis Prevost

I: The Cello, 1896

Le Violoncelle

II: The Flute, 1896

La Flûte

III: The Violin, 1896

Le Violon

IV: The Piano, 1896
Le Piano

V: The Guitar, 1897
La Guitare

VI: The Cornet, 1897
Le Piston

Each scene in this series of woodcuts is a portrait of a particular musician, some identified and some not, performing privately and engulfed in deep, mysterious shadow.

Vallotton's distinctive use of black is here particularly effective in creating an abstract sense of design and in conjoining the musicians, the surrounding space and objects.

Showcase

The World's Fair 1900

L'Exposition Universelle

Woodcut on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Rogers Fund, 1919

I: Looking at the Jewels

A la bijouterie

II: The Family Picnic Lunch

Le Déjeuner en plein air

III: The Shower

L'Averse

IV: The Street of Algiers
Rue d’Alger

V: A Footbridge
La Passerelle

VI: Fireworks
Le Feu d’artifice

In 1900, Vallotton gave up printmaking in order to devote himself to what he considered his true vocation, painting.

His last series of woodcuts of the decade was the six views of the World’s Fair that was held in Paris in 1900, depicting such attractions as a reconstruction of a street in Algiers and a firework display, as well as visitors enjoying a picnic lunch.

Large Print

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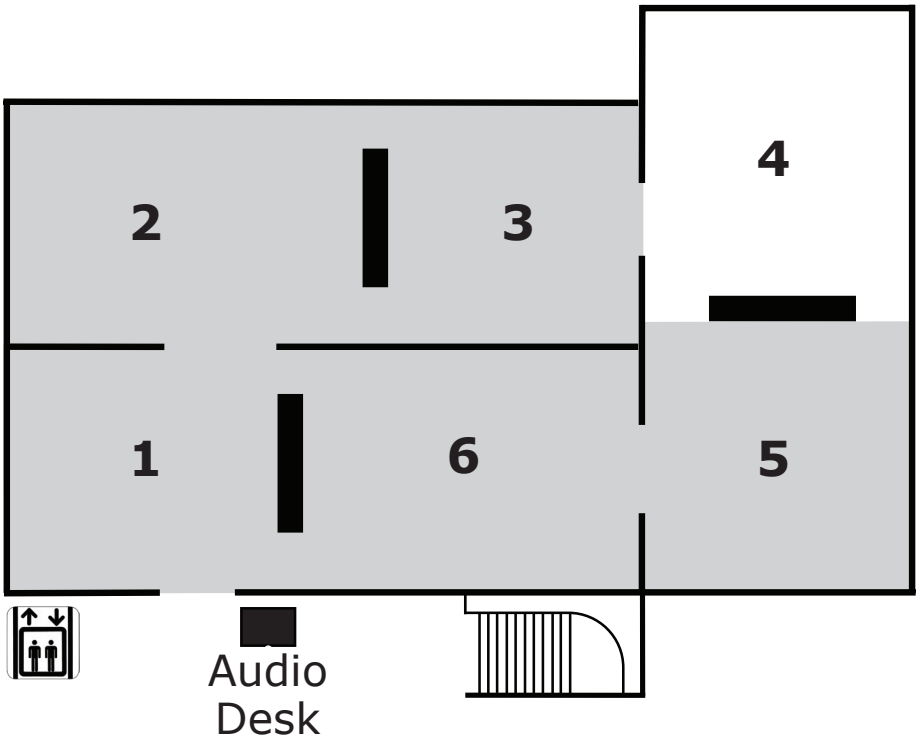

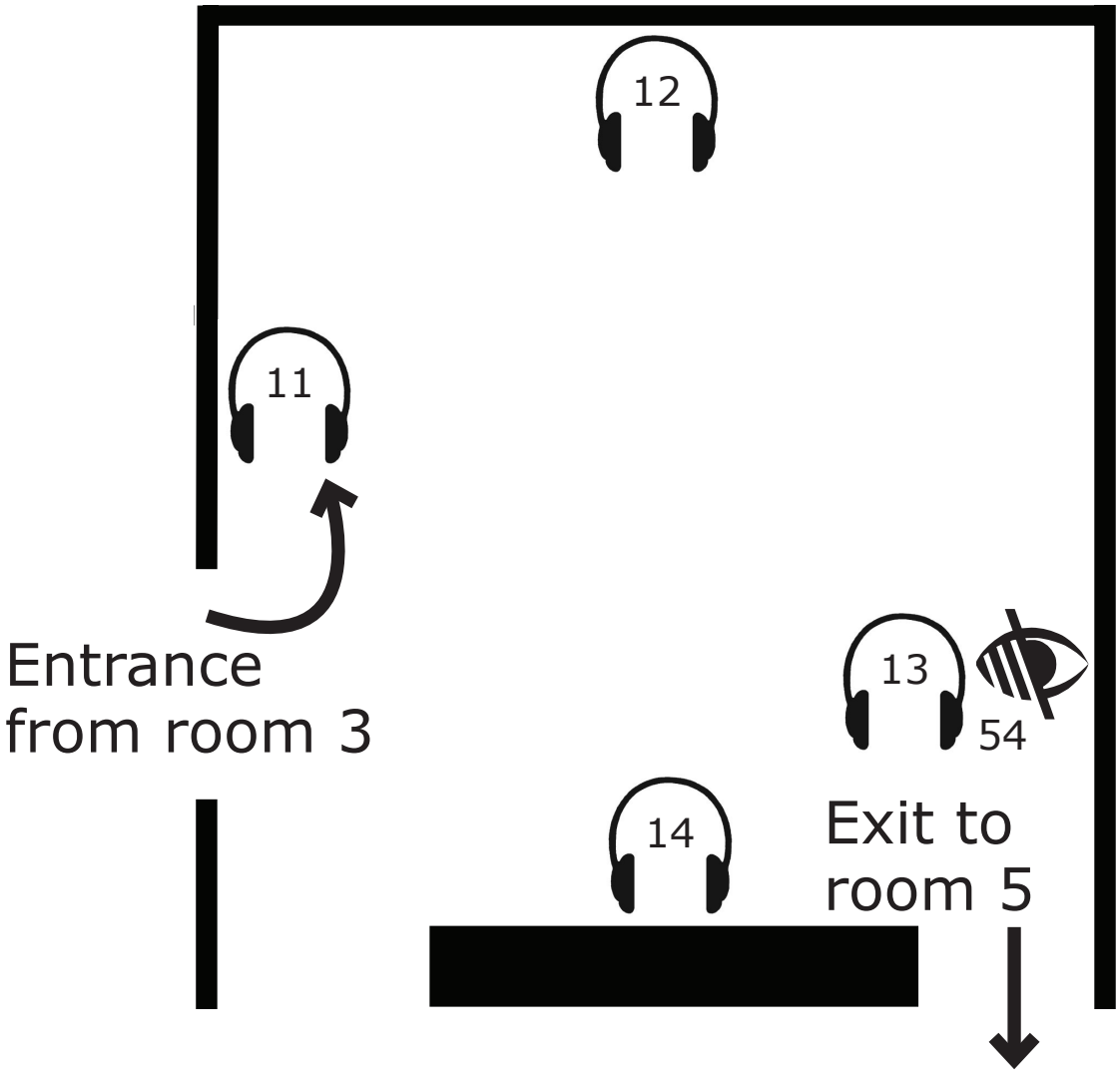

Multimedia tour room 4

Main commentary

Descriptive commentary

11 The Ball, 1899

12 Gabrielle Vallotton, 1905

13 54 Dinner by Lamplight, 1899

14 Gertrude Stein, 1907

Room 4

Domestic Life and Outdoor Scenes

The turn of the century brought a marked change to Vallotton's professional and personal circumstances.

In 1899 he married Gabrielle Rodrigues-Henriques, the widowed daughter of Alexandre Bernheim – one of the most successful art dealers in Europe and founder of the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune.

Then, in 1903, 'La Revue blanche' ceased publication and the close-knit artistic and literary group in which the Nabis had thrived came to an end.

(continued over)

Marriage to Gabrielle offered timely financial security, cushioning Vallotton from the loss of income occasioned by the demise of the artistic framework in which he had made his living.

It allowed him to concentrate on painting, depicting his new, comfortable apartment and his adopted family. At the same time, a new, hard-edged realism emerged which would come to dominate Vallotton's work.

Gabrielle appears frequently in Vallotton's paintings of this period. The examples in this gallery show her busy with domestic tasks, or sitting patiently for her husband as he renders her in meticulous detail in a composition that clearly plays homage to Ingres, his artistic idol.

Despite this shift in style and circumstance, a sense of disquiet continued to permeate even the most ostensibly innocent of scenes. Vallotton began to take photographs

and worked from them in the studio, adding a degree of separation between the painting and its subject.

A small girl runs across the grass on a summer’s day, yet nearby trees cast deep shadows on the sunlit ground and threaten to envelop her.

At a family dinner, Gabrielle’s daughter glares across the table at her new stepfather, whose presence is indicated merely by a looming silhouette. Domestic life, on closer inspection, seems more complex than it first appears.

Room 4 list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)

The Ball 1899

11

Le Ballon

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée d’Orsay, Paris. Bequest of Carle Dreyfus, 1953

The source for this painting is a photograph that Vallotton took from an upstairs room in the house of Thadée and Misia Natanson at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne (below).

Although the composition has been altered, the artist’s viewpoint affords a disorienting perspective. Vallotton was not

given to sentimentality, and a tension underlies this playful scene of a small girl playing in the garden on a summer's day.

Trees unseen above the picture plane cast deep shadows on the ground, while those at the top right seem to cascade menacingly towards her.

Photograph:

Félix Vallotton, View taken from a window at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, 1899

Archives Edouard Vuillard, Private collection

© Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne

On the Beach
1899

Sur la plage

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Private collection

Photograph:

Félix Vallotton, The beach at Etretat, 1899

Private collection

© Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne

Interior with Woman in Red
1903

Intérieur avec femme en rouge de dos

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich. Bequest of Hans Naef, 2001

Gabrielle Vallotton
1905

12

Oil on canvas

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux

The Red Room, Etretat 1899

La Chambre rouge, Etretat

Oil on artist’s board

The Art Institute of Chicago. Bequest of Mrs Clive Runnells

Vallotton had acquired a Kodak camera in 1899, and this work exemplifies his use of photography as a compositional aid.

Working from a stylish portrait photograph of his new wife Gabrielle, Vallotton has added a small child. This bourgeois scene encapsulates the unexpected transition in Vallotton’s life and work following his marriage.

Photograph:

Félix Vallotton, Gabrielle Vallotton sitting in front of a fireplace, Etretat, 1899

Private collection

© Fondation Félix Vallotton, Lausanne

Woman Searching through a Cupboard 1901

Femme fouillant dans un placard

Oil on canvas

Private collection, Switzerland

The Visit by Lamplight 1899–1900

La Visite, effet de lampe

Oil on cardboard

Kunst Museum Winterthur. Purchased in 1973

Dinner by Lamplight 1899

Le Dîner, effet de lampe

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In this dramatic scene, the claustrophobic space and bourgeois décor recall the psychologically charged interior scenes of earlier years.

Yet here Vallotton finds himself recording his own situation as he adjusts to the complex dynamics of family life. Looming over the table like an intruder, he seems to dwarf his new stepdaughter who sits opposite, visibly uncomfortable.

Gertrude Stein 1907

14

Oil on canvas

The Baltimore Museum of Art. The Cone Collection, formed by Dr Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland

The American writer and art collector Gertrude Stein moved to Paris in 1903, where she hosted a regular salon at her home which was attended by leading figures in the art and literary worlds.

(continued over)

Picasso had painted her portrait in 1905, and Vallotton rose to the challenge by producing his own version – which contains striking compositional similarities – a year later.

Stein was intrigued by his painting process, which she recalled as “like pulling a curtain down and by the time he was at the bottom of the canvas, there you were”. She seems to have been unmoved by the result.

Large Print

Félix Vallotton

Painter of Disquiet

The Sackler Wing of Galleries

Room 5

Do not remove from gallery

Félix Vallotton
Painter of Disquiet

Royal Academy of Arts
The Sackler Wing of Galleries
30 June — 29 September 2019

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The Sackler Wing of Galleries

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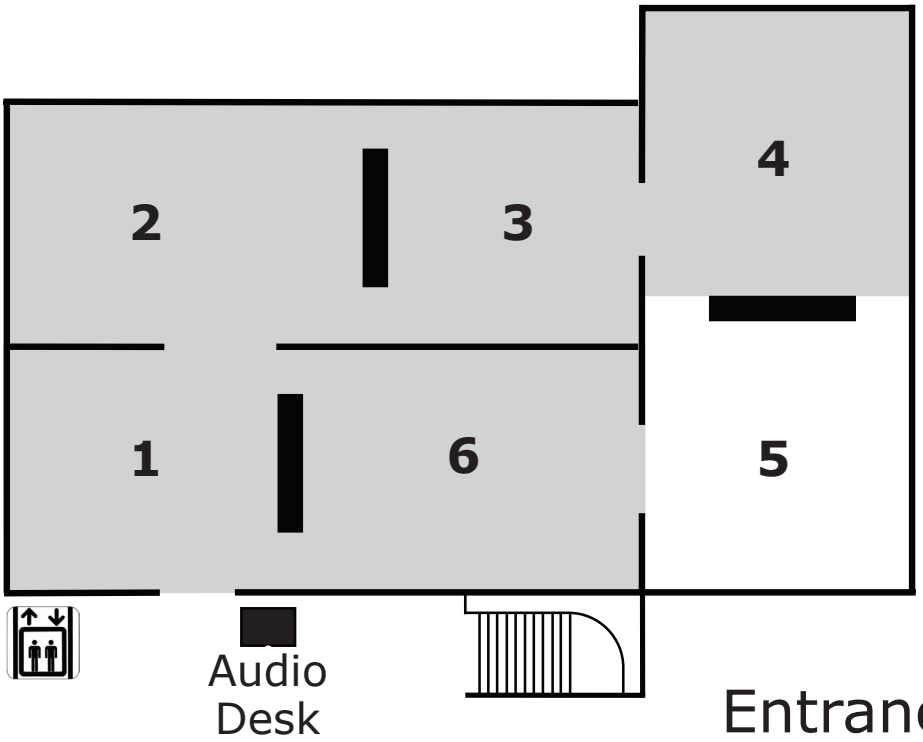

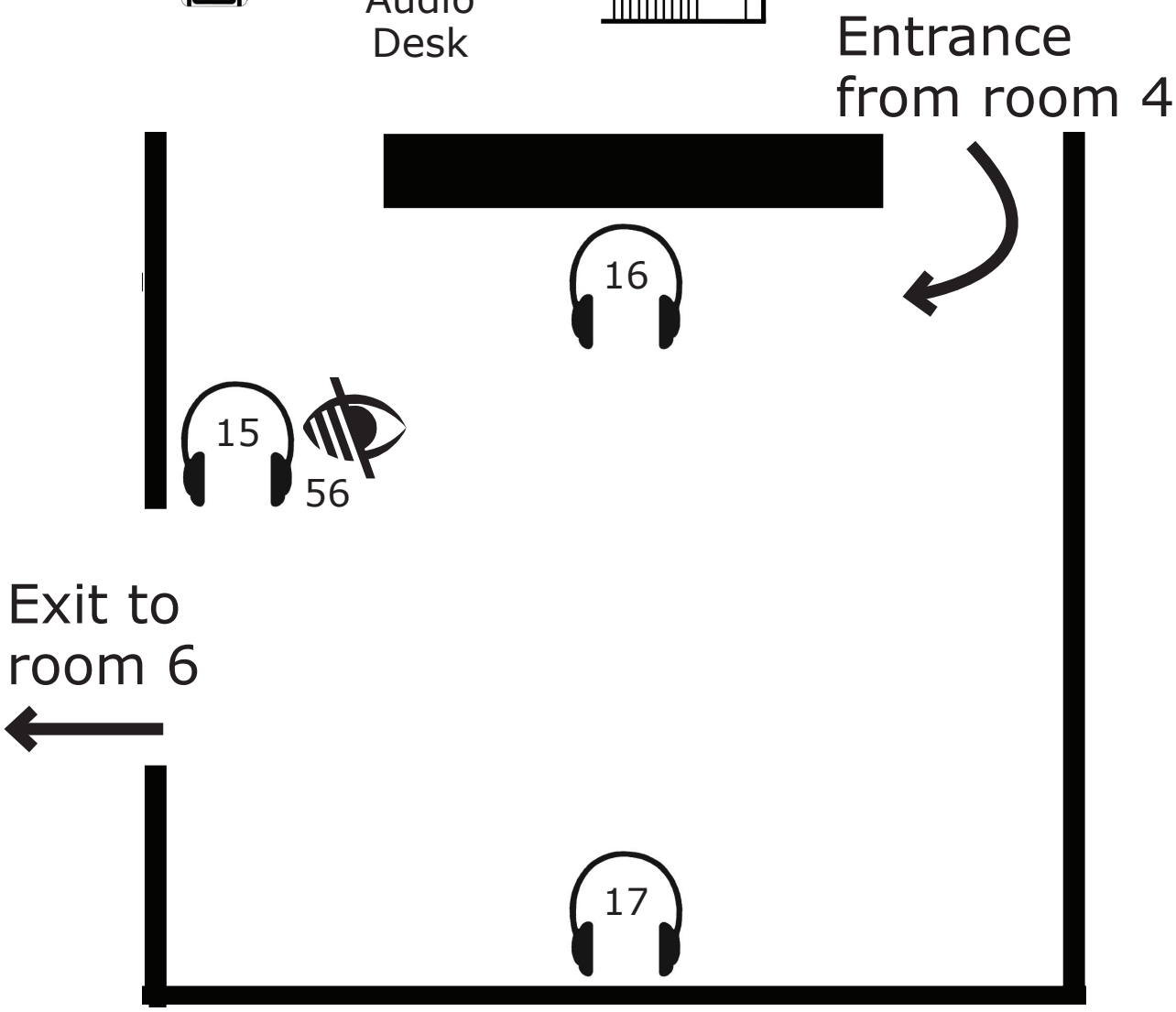

Multimedia tour room 5

Main commentary

Descriptive commentary

15 56 The Theatre Box, 1909

16 The White Woman and the Black Woman, 1913

17 Models Resting, 1905

Room 5

Social Scenes and the Nude

From 1904 the female nude was Vallotton's principal subject. The cold, severe style that distinguishes his nudes is the result of his deliberate detachment, relying on a single sketch drawn from life and completing the painting in the studio away from the model.

Despite their mixed reception, it was with his nudes that Vallotton defined himself as an artist and wished to make his mark at the Salon. 'Models Resting' was his major submission to the Salon d'Automne of 1905, which also included a debut exhibition of the Fauves, led by Matisse, who Vallotton dismissed as having "no style, no form whatever" – and an Ingres retrospective.

(continued over)

Although Vallotton’s nudes reflect his admiration for earlier artists such as Cranach, Ingres’s example was paramount. The serene ‘Models Resting’ and ‘Naked Woman Holding Her Shirt with Both Hands’ emulate his classicism, and the impeccable contours and flawless surfaces of his paintings.

Subversive wit largely disappeared from Vallotton’s work after 1900, but occasionally resurfaced in paintings such as ‘The Theatre Box’, which, with the greatest economy, conveys the sense of an elicit assignation rather than a bourgeois evening out, or ‘The Provincial’, in which a submissive young man from the provinces is victim to a predatory Parisienne.

Room 5 list of works

(clockwise in order of hang)

The Theatre Box 1909

15 56

La Loge de théâtre, le monsieur et la dame

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Chaste Suzanne 1922

La Chaste Suzanne

Oil on canvas

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Joint acquisition with the Gottfried Keller Foundation, Federal Office of Culture, Bern, an exceptional contribution by the State of Vaud, and a gift of the Association des Amis du Musée, 1993

In this painting Vallotton turns the Old Testament story of Susanna and the Elders on its head.

Whereas in the biblical story Susanna is a young innocent woman who is the victim of lecherous old men, here she is a wily seductress in a sequinned hat who holds the two balding men, trapped in the confines of a pink sofa, in her thrall.

The Provincial 1909

Le Provincial

Oil on canvas

Pauline Art Foundation

The White Woman and the Black Woman 1913

16

La Blanche et la Noire

Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Bern. Hahnloser/Jaeggli Foundation, Villa Flora, Winterthur

This painting is, in some senses, Vallotton's response to Manet's famous 'Olympia' of 1863, which shows a white model lying on a bed attended by a black servant.

(continued over)

Here, Vallotton reconfigures the dynamic in a complex and layered subversion of the traditional relationship between mistress and servant.

The black woman appears relaxed and confident as she smokes a cigarette and observes her dozing companion who, meanwhile, is disengaged from the viewer. The relationship between the two women is ambiguous, yet Vallotton persists in outlining their differences: active and passive, nude and clothed, black and white, idealised and not.

Photograph:

Edouard Manet, ‘Olympia’, 1863

Oil on canvas, 130 × 190 cm

Musée d’Orsay, Paris

© Musée d’Orsay, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt

Nude Seen from Behind in an Interior
1902

Nu de dos dans un intérieur

Oil on cardboard mounted on wood

Kunsthalle Bremen. Der Kunstverein in Bremen

Nude Holding Her Gown
1904

Femme nue retenant sa chemise à deux mains

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Model Sitting on a Divan in the Studio 1904

Modèle assis sur le divan de l’atelier

Oil on cardboard

Kunstmuseum Bern. Hahnloser/Jaeggli Foundation, Villa Flora, Winterthur

Models Resting 1905

17

Le Repos des modèles

Oil on canvas

Kunst Museum Winterthur. Donated by Hedy Hahnloser-Bühler, Lisa Jaeggli-Hahnloser and Prof. Dr Hans R. Hahnloser, 1946

Vallotton always had the greatest admiration for Ingres and is said to have wept in front of his ‘The Turkish Bath’ (1852–59/1862), below.

He considered ‘Models Resting’ one of his own greatest works, and the early portrait of his parents and one of his landscapes reflected in the mirror seem to add to the significance that the work held for him.

Photograph:

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres,
‘The Turkish Bath’, 1852–59/1862

Oil on canvas glued to wood, 206 × 146 cm Musée du Louvre, Paris. Gift of the Société des Amis du Louvre, with the aid of Maurice Fenaille, 1911
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot

Nude in the Red Room 1897

Nu dans la chambre rouge

Oil on cardboard

Pauline Art Foundation

Large Print

Félix Vallotton

Painter of Disquiet

The Sackler Wing of Galleries

Room 6

Do not remove from gallery

Félix Vallotton
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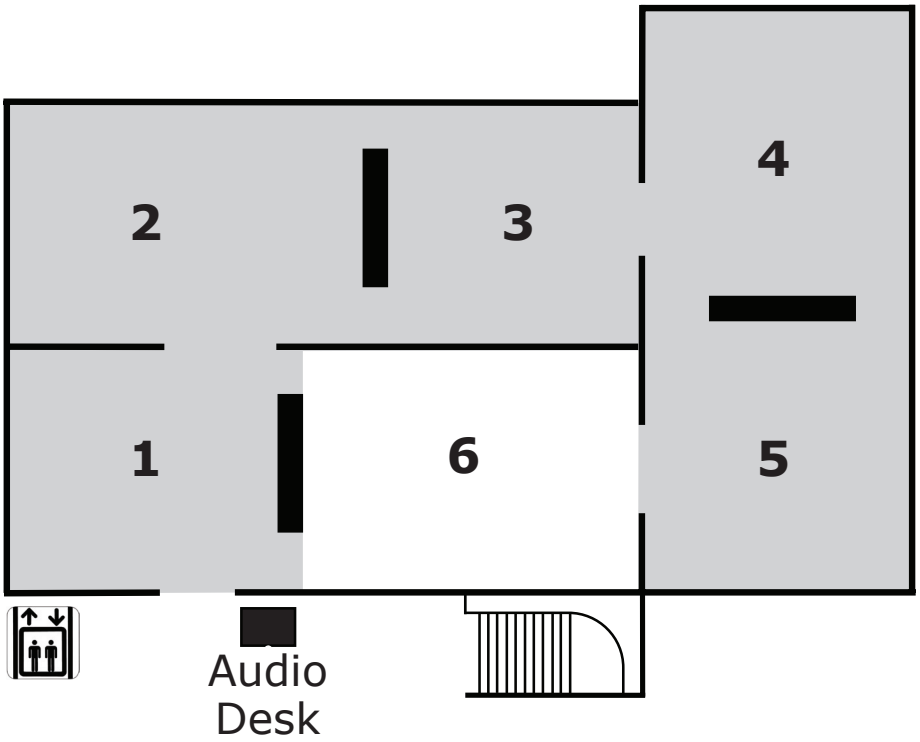

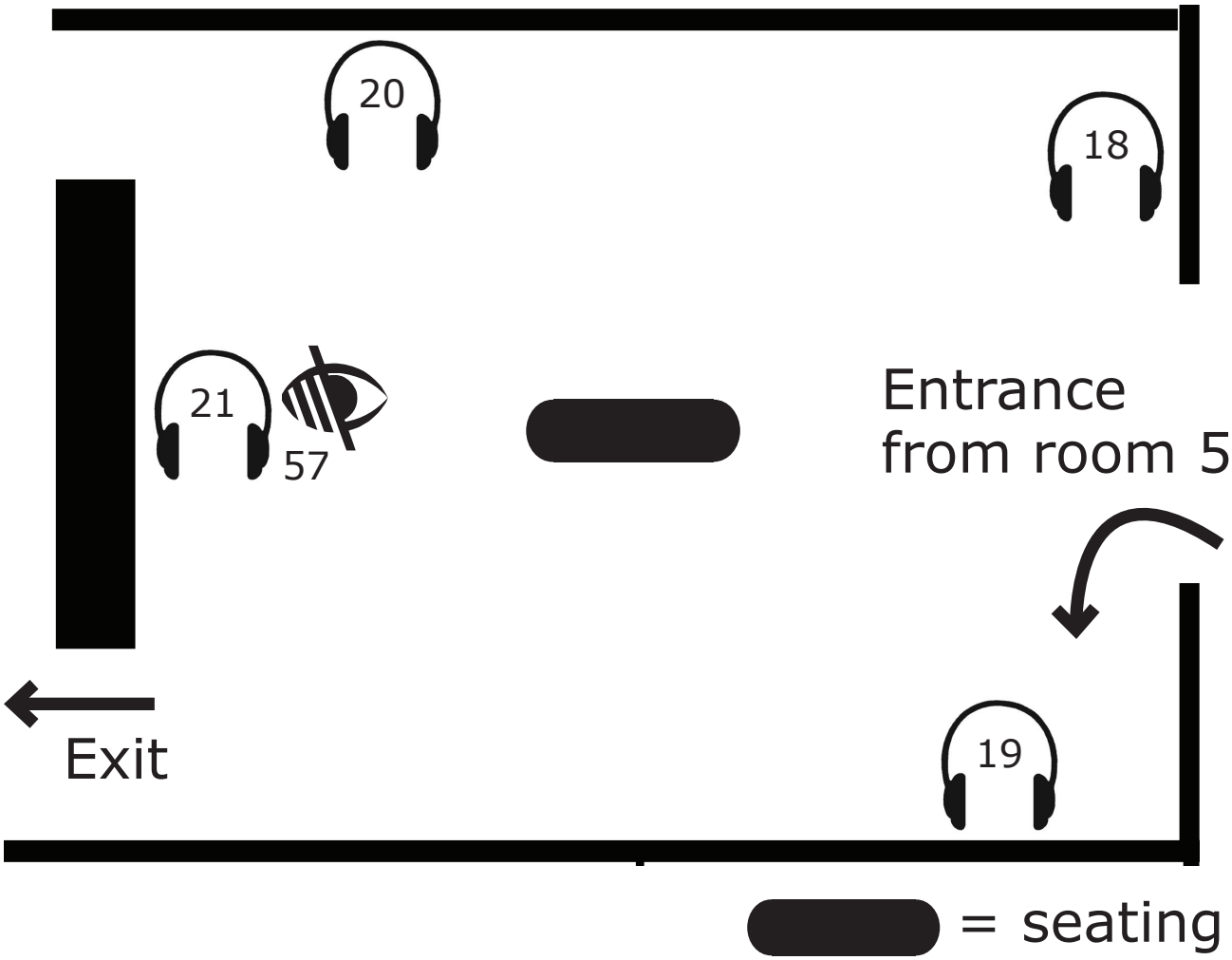

Multimedia tour room 6

Main commentary

Descriptive commentary

18 Red Peppers, 1915

19 The Pond, 1909

20 Demijohn and Box, 1925

21 57 Sandbanks on the Loire, 1923

Room 6

War, Landscapes and Still-lifes

“War! The word is magnificent...” Vallotton stated in a 1917 essay.

“The day I saw it appearing in big letters on the walls, I honestly believe I felt the strongest emotion of my life.”

Deeply patriotic about his adopted country – he had become a French citizen in 1900 – Vallotton was frustrated that at 49 he was too old to enlist. However, a government commission to tour the trenches in the Champagne region in June 1917 inspired paintings of Verdun, ruined churches and his last print portfolio, ‘This is War!’ (‘C’est la guerre!’).

From around 1909, landscape assumed a prominent role in Vallotton’s work.

(continued over)

He called his particular approach to landscape ‘paysage composé’ (‘composed landscape’).

“I dream of a painting free from any literal respect for nature,” he wrote in 1916, “I would like to be able to re-create landscapes only with the help of the emotion they have provoked in me...”.

A summary drawing of the motif was the starting point for a scene which he re-composed in his imagination. This process allowed him to simplify compositions into broad zones – a structure that recalls the flat designs of his earlier woodcuts – and to intensify colour.

The result was an idealised abstraction of nature and a heightened, almost magical aura that gives many of his landscapes their distinctive edge, especially the vivid sunsets he painted during summers in Honfleur, Normandy. Others, such as

‘Sandbanks on the Loire’, are filled with a silent, eerie stillness.

A similar detachment gives sharp-edged clarity to objects and textures in his still-lifes. In ‘Red Peppers’, painted in 1915, the seemingly blood-steeped knife seems to evoke Vallotton’s feelings about the First World War. ‘Demijohn and Box’, majestic in its simplicity, was painted in 1925, the year that Vallotton died of cancer.

Room 6 list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)

The Pond 1909

19

La Mare

Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Basel.
Donated by the Friends of Kunstmuseum Basel 1995

(continued over)

Painted in Honfleur, Normandy, this is an example of Vallotton's 'paysage composé' ('composed landscape') method in which he began with a sketch and notes made on the spot but painted the work from memory and imagination in his studio, often fusing different views into an artificially constructed composition.

This allowed him to concentrate on essential features and to heighten the mood. A cloud of white blossoms floats above but an ominous darkness engulfs the water that creeps menacingly across the unnaturally bright green grass.

Sunset, Villerville
1917

Coucher de soleil, Villerville

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich. Association of Zürich Art Friends. Acquired 1977

Last Rays
1911

Derniers rayons

Oil on canvas

Musée des beaux-arts, Quimper

Vallotton painted many seascapes at Honfleur on the Normandy coast, where from 1909 he spent his summers.

(continued over)

On several occasions he painted this group of umbrella pines that overlooked the Bay of the Seine.

In this canvas, he eliminates every reference to the surrounding countryside in order to focus on the graceful silhouettes of the trees caught in the evening sun. With its simplification and strong sense of design, this work clearly asserts the influence of Japanese prints on Vallotton's art.

Sunset, Grey-blue High Sea
1911

Coucher de soleil, mer haute gris-bleu

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Sandbanks on the Loire 1923

21 57

Des Sables au bord de la Loire

Oil on canvas

Kunsthaus Zürich. Acquired 1938

Still-life with Flowers 1925

Nature morte à la peinture chinoise

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot (1876–1967), 1967

Demijohn and Box 1925

20

Dame-jeanne et caisse

Oil on canvas

The Barrett Collection, Dallas, Texas

Painted in the last year of Vallotton's life, this monumental still-life contrasts the texture and forms of a simple wooden box, the roughness of an earthenware jug and the smooth translucence of the large, green bottle.

The discreet reflection of a window in the glass of the bottle emulates the technical virtuosity of the Dutch seventeenth-century masters Vallotton admired. It recalls a similar motif in the exquisite bedside still-life of his early painting 'The Sick Girl', 1892, on display at the beginning of this exhibition.

Apples
1919

Pommes

Oil on canvas

Kunst Museum Winterthur. Donated by Dr Herbert and Charlotte Wolfer-de Armas, 1973

Sketch for Verdun
1917

Verdun, esquisse

Oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

This is a study for a much larger painting, in the Musée de l'Armée, Paris, of the battlefield of Verdun illuminated by projectors at night (illustrated below).

(continued over)

Vallotton was challenged by depicting the battlefield in modern painting and described this work as: “Verdun. Interpretive depiction of the war, blue-black coloured projections and ruined red terrain, and clouds of gas”.

In the painting and the sketch on view here, Vallotton creates a virtually abstract composition unique in his work, in which he appears to respond to avant-garde styles such as Cubism and Futurism.

Photograph:

Félix Vallotton, ‘Verdun’, 1917

Oil on canvas, 115 × 146 cm
Musée de l’Armée, Paris © Paris-Musée de l’Armée, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/image musée de l’Armée

This is War! 1915–16

C’est la guerre!

Woodcut on paper

Musée d’art et d’histoire, Geneva; Cabinet d’arts graphiques. Gift of Lucien Archinard

Portfolio cover, 1915–16

I: The Trench, 1915
La Tranchée

II: The Orgy, 1915
L’Orgie

III: Barbed Wire, 1916
Les Fils de fer

(continued over)

IV: In the Darkness, 1916
Dans les ténèbres

V: The Lookout, 1916
Le Guetteur

VI: The Civilians, 1916
Les Civils

This portfolio of six prints was Vallotton's last venture in printmaking. The bold blacks and whites of the woodcut technique convey the brutality of war and its effect on soldiers and civilians – an explosion, corpses sprawled across barbed-wire fencing, a family cringing in fear in their home.

Yet despite the tragic subject, Vallotton has drawn the figures with an element of

caricature. The cover is splattered with blood-red ink.

Red Peppers 1915

18

Poivrons rouges

Oil on canvas

Kunstmuseum Solothurn. Dübi-Müller Foundation

This painting shows Vallotton as a meticulous realist. Displayed on a white marble table, the peppers, with their hard skins so shiny that they reflect the light, are startlingly tangible.

The congealed red on the blade of the knife, placed ominously in the foreground, looks like blood, suggesting that this still-life, painted during the First World War, held a symbolic meaning for Vallotton.

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Braille

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