

From La Belle Epoque to Cubism

Large Collection of Prints by Jacques Villon to be sold at Sotheby's in June

A COLLECTION of etchings and drypoints made by an artist who moved in the same circles as Toulouse Lautrec and Picasso are among some of the most beautiful colour prints created at the beginning of this century. They will be sold by Sotheby's in London on Wednesday, June 30, 1999.

The prints, by the French artist Jacques Villon (1875-1963), illustrate this artist's development from early colourful Belle Epoque subjects to a later style based on Cubist structure and form.

Jonathan Pratt, Head of Sotheby's Print Department in London, said: "This is the most important collection of works by Jacques Villon to be offered at auction for many years. The collection shows the amazing breadth and versatility of an artist who worked during one of this century's most creative periods."

"It was the major Cézanne exhibition of 1906 which provided the catalyst for the development of cubism for this whole generation of young artists. What is fascinating is how Villon, along with Duchamp, Léger, Gleizes, Picabia and the artists of the Puteaux group developed their style in parallel with the Cubism of Braque and Picasso", he added.

The collection was assembled by a private European collector over a period of 30 years and comprises more than 300 important prints, many of them unique proofs and state variants. Estimated to raise in excess of £600,000, the collection includes some of the artist's most beautiful prints, in good condition and often at quite modest estimates ranging from £500 to £25,000. They will be included in Sotheby's summer sale of Old Master, 19th and 20th Century and Contemporary Prints in London.

Jacques Villon (1875-1963), born Gaston Duchamp, was the eldest brother of the sculptor Raymond Duchamp and of the renowned Dada artist Marcel Duchamp. After his arrival in Paris from Normandy, Gaston took the name of the French satirical poet Villon and called himself Jacques Villon.

Villon became a pupil at the Atelier Cormon on the edge of Montmartre in Paris where he met the painter Henri Toulouse Lautrec who influenced his style greatly. It was also during this time that Villon first encountered Eugène Delâtre, the master printer who initiated him in the art of colour etching. Over the next 15 years, Villon produced some of his most important colour etchings, displaying a total mastery of this technique.

From this period are two very different but equally stunning etchings with aquatint and printed in colours. *Boudeuse* from 1900 shows a semi-clothed woman who appears to be crying, lying upside down on a bed. Villon placed the emphasis of the composition to the top-right of the etching, aiming to capture the isolation and desperation of the figure. It measures 178 by 288mm and is estimated at £4,000-6,000.

The second etching, *Comédie de Société* from 1903, shows Villon in a completely different mood with vibrant colours and subject illustrating the elegance and lifestyle of the Belle Epoque period. *Comédie de Société* measures 500 by 420mm and is estimated at £20,000-30,000.

By the early 1910s, Villon's studio in Puteaux outside from Paris had become an important meeting place for painters and writers from the Cubist circle. His two brothers, along with artists such as Fernand Léger, Albert Gleizes and Francis Picabia were all frequent visitors.

By then, Villon had moved towards Cubist compositions and this stylistic and technical change was confirmed by his works on show at the 1911 Salon d'Automne in Paris and, three years later, at the 1913 Armory Show in New York City. From this period is *Portrait d'Acteur*, a stunning impression engraved with drypoint which is estimated at £20,000-30,000.