Montreal, June 9, 2016 – The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) is unveiling *L’intérieur de chez Bruant : le Mirliton (Inside Bruant’s Mirliton)* (1886-1887) to the general public for the first time. Known until fairly recently only through its preparatory studies, this canvas by Louis Anquetin will be presented from June 18 to October 30 in the exhibition *Toulouse-Lautrec Illustrates the Belle Époque*.

*L’intérieur de chez Bruant : le Mirliton (Inside Bruant’s Mirliton)* is without a doubt a major rediscovery in terms of the art history of fin-de-siècle Paris. With vibrant brushstrokes and brilliant colours, Anquetin has conjured up the dynamic culture of Montmartre in its heyday. He depicts several iconic figures, including La Goulue and Aristide Bruant, contemporaries of Toulouse-Lautrec.

“Unknown to experts and specialists until very recently, this monumental work could only be imagined through its preparatory drawings, which have since been dispersed. It bears witness not only to Anquetin’s aesthetic modernity, but also to a deep change in the era’s artistic practices. From Toulouse-Lautrec to Picasso, painters’ studios were no longer in the academies but in the streets, café-concerts and cabarets,” explained Gilles Genty, art historian and guest curator of the exhibition *Toulouse-Lautrec Illustrates the Belle Époque*. 
“This painting is an incredible rediscovery... and a story of friendship, friends who shared a studio and bohemian life. Louis Anquetin called his friend Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who was three years younger and small of stature, ‘Mon grand.’ Anquetin enjoyed his friend’s quick wit and his psychological acuity that always hit the target. Henri admired Louis, for his friend was everything that he was not: he had a strong body and constitution, he was a sportsman, a skilled horseman and a jolly fellow... This son of an aristocrat liked this butcher’s son who protected him from humiliation. They shared the cabaret life that made Montmartre legendary, at the Chat Noir, the Mirliton and the Rat Mort... Anquetin is an artist that I greatly admire and he deserved a major retrospective. I am delighted today to be able to unveil this major painter of the ‘Petit Boulevard,’ thanks to this work,” said Nathalie Bondil, the MMFA’s Director and Chief Curator.

L’intérieur de chez Bruant : le Mirliton (Inside Bruant’s Mirliton) (1886-1887)
Conceived as a record of an era, this painting was created in the style of bohemian artists. Anquetin drew the general outline of his composition in pastel, while at the same time making myriad preparatory studies for each figure, sometimes even on wrapping paper. Those drawings were exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in March 1888.

Anquetin began the painting in a garret and continued working on it on site at the cabaret itself. However, the painting remains in the planning stages. The definitive painting represents several artists from the Belle Époque at the Mirliton, Aristide Bruant’s raucous café-concert that was a frequent haunt of Anquetin and Toulouse-Lautrec. The famous dancer Louise Weber, known as La Goulue, is depicted in the centre, leaning over the table, inviting us to enter. Charismatic and sensual, La Goulue caused a sensation in the cabarets with the chahut, her wild variation on the can-can.

Facing the viewer are Émile Bernard and Marie Valette, Anquetin’s favourite model from 1886 to 1892 and who, in a very daring move for a woman at that time, is lighting up a cigarette in public. On their left can be seen the tall, lean figure and top hat that were the trademarks of François Gauzi. Seated at the table, to the right, the artist Paul Tampier turns his back to the audience. To the left is the painter Émile Bernard. And standing behind him is Toulouse-Lautrec, a regular at the Mirliton who was to revolutionize printmaking.

In the background is Aristide Bruant himself, dressed in a red shirt, standing up on the bar, hands on his hips, preparing to declaim his poetry. A huge success at the Chat Noir, he opened his own cabaret, the Mirliton, in 1885. Local writers and artists made the cabaret one of the first establishments to permanently exhibit works by Toulouse-Lautrec – it was a veritable creative hub in the heart of Montmartre.

Louis Anquetin (1861-1932)
Painter, writer and designer Louis Anquetin was born in Étrépagny, France in 1861. In 1882, he studied at the Paris studio of Léon Bonnat, where he befriended Toulouse-Lautrec. Two years later, Anquetin and Toulouse-Lautrec transferred to Fernand Cormon’s studio, where they met
Émile Bernard and Vincent van Gogh. That same year, Anquetin joined Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and others to form the avant-garde group the Petit Boulevard. Working closely with Bernard, Anquetin pioneered Cloisonnism, a pictorial technique inspired by Japanese prints and stained glass that is characterized by darkly contoured, colourful flat forms. With Toulouse-Lautrec, Anquetin frequented entertainment hotspots in Montmartre and, like his friend, he depicted the cafés and cabarets of Paris, as well as its racecourses. These paintings, shown at the exhibition of Les XX in Brussels and the Salon des Indépendants in Paris, garnered attention. Anquetin exhibited at Café Volpini in 1889 and he organized the Salon du Palais des Arts libéraux in 1891. Although Anquetin exerted influence on the Paris avant-garde, by the mid-1890s he had returned to academic painting and classical subject matter.

_Toulouse-Lautrec Illustrates the Belle Époque_

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
June 18 to October 30, 2016

Organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., this exhibition presents a truly outstanding private collection. The exhibition gives the public the opportunity to admire close to one hundred prints and posters from nearly the entire period of Toulouse-Lautrec’s lithographic career, from 1891 to 1900, both iconic images and rarely exhibited unique proofs carefully chosen for their quality and colour. It also features four works by two close associates of the artist, including a large-format poster of Théophile Alexandre Steinlen’s famous _Tournée du Chat Noir_ (1896) and Louis Anquetin’s pastel _Au cirque (At the Circus)_ (1887) and the painting _L’Intérieur de chez Bruant : Le Mirliton (Inside Bruant’s Mirliton)_ (1886-1887), which is being exhibited for the first time.

On view at the MMFA from June 18 to October 30, the exhibition _Toulouse-Lautrec Illustrates the Belle Époque_ has received financial support from the MMFA’s Volunteer Association and Air Canada.
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About the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
The MMFA welcomes a million visitors each year. Quebec’s most visited museum, it is one of the most popular museums in Canada and ranks twelfth among art museums in North America. Its innovative temporary exhibitions combine artistic disciplines (fine arts, music, film, fashion and design) and are circulated to museums around the world. Its encyclopedic collection, which is on display in four – soon-to-be five – pavilions, includes international art, world cultures, decorative arts and design and Quebec and Canadian art. The Museum complex includes a 444-seat concert hall. The MMFA is also one of Canada’s leading publishers of art books in English and French, which are distributed internationally. The Michel de la Chenelière International Atelier for Education and Art Therapy, the largest educational complex in a North American art museum, will be housed in the future Michal and Renata Hornstein Pavilion for Peace, which will be inaugurated in November 2016.

Photo: Louis Anquetin (1861-1932), L’Intérieur de chez Bruant : Le Mirliton (Inside Bruant’s Le Mirliton), 1886-1887, oil on canvas, 145 x 157 cm. Private collection. Photo Peter Schälchi.