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THE BMA PRESENTS AN EXHIBITION OF HIGH-FLYING CIRCUS IMAGES BY PICASSO AND OTHERS

BALTIMORE, MD (January 12, 2009)—See daring feats, exotic acts, and colorful circus characters through the eyes of some of the greatest artists of the 20th century. ***A Circus Family: Picasso to Léger***, on view at The Baltimore Museum of Art **February 22–May 17, 2009**, features more than 80 prints, drawings, paintings, and books by Pablo Picasso, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Fernand Léger, and other European artists fascinated by the extravagant spectacle of the circus and the bohemian lives of the performers outside the ring. This special ticketed exhibition brings together major works from museums and private collections to offer a behind-the-scenes look at the circus during its heyday as a form of popular entertainment.

The BMA recreates the intimacy and excitement of the circus in the first gallery of the exhibition as colorful posters of tightrope walkers, clowns, and can-can dancers by Toulouse-Lautrec and Jules Chéret emerge from a semi-circular canvas tent that corresponds to the 13-meter circus ring typically used in Europe. These vibrant 19th-century posters illustrate the circus as public entertainment, much like Paris's famed dance halls. A selection of prints and archival photographs provide a realistic look at both the circus performers of the era and their enraptured audiences.

A group of 30 rarely shown works on paper by Picasso from the BMA's world-renowned collection of modern art are on view for the first time with related paintings and sculpture loaned from the Göteborg Museum of Art in Sweden, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Detroit Institute of Arts. Throughout 1904-05, Picasso visited the Médrano Circus in the Montmartre section of Paris, sometimes on a nightly basis. He and many of his contemporaries identified personally with the circus performers as they lived by their skill and talent at the fringes of society. Picasso's many sympathetic portrayals of circus families reveal the private side of circus life and offer an extraordinary opportunity to see the artist's development at a pivotal moment in his career.

School of Paris artists such as Gino Severini and Natalia Goncharova reveled in the modernity of dance halls and circuses and found ways to express their excitement in new emerging styles. Juan Gris and Georges Rouault emphasized the links that connected circus performers to the past and to the old *commedia dell'arte* tradition. Some of the most dramatic works appear in a section of the exhibition devoted to artists associated with German Expressionism. Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and others focused on the sinister, artificial, and alienating aspects of the circus that implied a broader critique of modern mass society. Swiss artist Paul Klee viewed the circus as an oasis within the bleak, industrial city, providing one of the last remaining opportunities for childlike play.

The exhibition concludes with a selection of works from two books, Henri Matisse's *Jazz* (1947) and Léger's *Cirque* (1950). Throughout much of its production, *Jazz* was intended to be named "Cirque" and many images are circus themed. Léger's *Cirque* plays on the double meaning of the title (signifying both "circus" and "circle" in French) to launch into a wild celebration of all things circular in the universe and the most circular of institutions, the circus. Through his vivid color and black lithographs, he encourages the reader, "Go to the circus. Nothing is as round as the circus."

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Circus Family Activity Space

Join the circus at the BMA's Circus Family Activity Space. Dress up as your favorite circus performer and strike a pose. Discover how Picasso created some of his famous circus prints, one color at a time, using a hands-on puzzle book. Design your own circus book featuring you as the star performer!

Special Programs

The BMA hosts several programs to round out your circus experience. Don't miss the imaginative Zany Umbrella Circus, a European-style troupe featuring acrobatic feats and madcap charm. A lecture and panel discussion with circus performers reveals what circus life is like from their perspective, and Steve Martin's acclaimed comedy, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, receives a staged reading from Theatre Hopkins actors at the BMA. Family workshops, adult drawing classes, and guided exhibition tours ensure that everyone can get in on the act! For more information, call 443-573-1832 or e-mail programs@artbma.org.

The European Circus

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, traveling circuses crisscrossed Europe setting up tents wherever they might find an audience, but urban renewal in Paris under the regime of Napoléon III led to the construction of permanent buildings to house circuses. By the end of the century, the city boasted five permanent circuses. For many years, French law had made speech an exclusive monopoly of the theater. In response to this prohibition on speech in the circus ring, performers employed mimicry, slaps, buffoonery, and dramatic gestures to convey comic effects. Circus performers were able to reach any audience through pure spectacle, even if they could not speak in the local idiom. The universal easily understood visual language of the circus became a model for avant-garde artists who sought to develop a direct, unmediated means of communication with the public.

Picasso and the Circus

For Picasso and many of his contemporaries, life in the circus provided a revealing parallel to the struggling existence of contemporary artists and their representations of these performers became instant metaphors for the condition of all creative individuals struggling to make it in the modern world. Together with his friends, the poets Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob, Picasso spent the years 1904-05 frequenting the Médrano Circus in the Montmartre section of Paris and befriended jugglers, clowns, and acrobats. Like artists, circus performers lived by their wits and skill in small communal groups on the fringes of society. Picasso lived among a tight-knit group of artist friends (the so-called "bande Picasso") and clearly identified with the extended circus families that he witnessed.

The Acrobat Family Reunited

One of the most significant aspects of *A Circus Family: Picasso to Léger* is that it reunites the Göteborg Museum of Art's large Picasso watercolor *The Acrobat Family* (1905), which is rarely seen outside of Sweden, with the BMA's remarkable collection of circus-related drawings, watercolors, and prints by Picasso. Almost all of these BMA works on paper were acquired by the legendary Baltimore collector Etta Cone. *The Acrobat Family* was one of the earliest works by Picasso purchased by Gertrude and Leo Stein. It hung prominently in their Paris apartment where Etta Cone would have seen it during her earliest encounters with Picasso's work. In November of 1905, Gertrude Stein invited Etta Cone to accompany her at one of her many sittings with Picasso while he worked on her famous portrait (now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art). On this occasion, Etta bought two works from the artist, only to return four months later to purchase an additional eighteen. The works she chose indicate that Etta developed her taste for Picasso's art based on *The Acrobat Family*, leading her to assemble the greatest collection of related studies for this extraordinary painting.

The BMA has created a special two-sided display that demonstrates the relationship between *The Acrobat Family* painting from Göteborg, Sweden and the three sketches that were once part of a single sheet of studies. These include the following sketches: *Circus Family with Violinist*; *Sketches of Monkey*, and *Clown's Family with Violinist*; *Monkey*; and *Sketches of Violinist*; *Mother Caressing Child with Standing Woman*; and *Sketches of Cropped Figures*. Reassembled, this sheet reveals a great deal about Picasso's working method and visual thought process. Not only was he thrifty with paper, he also explored variations of expressive details as well as composition on the same sheet. Another major work, *The Circus Family* (1905), is among the most important Picasso drawings at the BMA. X-ray photographs have revealed that it is the preliminary compositional sketch for the artist's most famed painting from this period, *Family of Saltimbanques* (at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC).

TICKETS

The Circus Family: Picasso to Léger is a special ticketed event. Tickets go on sale February 15, 2009. General admission to the BMA and the collection is free.

Adults	\$8	Under age 6	FREE
Seniors / Students	\$6	BMA Members	FREE
Ages 6 to 18	\$4		

Purchase tickets: **In person** at the BMA Box Office in the Visitor Lobby, Wednesday–Friday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 11 a.m.–6 p.m. (No service charges apply). **Online** at www.artbma.org. **By phone** through Tickets.com at 1-800-919-6272. (Service charges apply to online and phone orders).

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The Baltimore Museum of Art is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914, the BMA's outstanding collection encompasses 90,000 works of art, including the largest and most significant holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world, as well as masterpieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent van Gogh. An expanding collection of contemporary art features iconic post-1960 works by Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt, as well as exciting acquisitions by artists such as Kara Walker and Olafur Eliasson. The BMA is also recognized for an internationally acclaimed collection of prints, drawings, and photographs from the 15th-century to the present; grand European painting and sculpture from Old Masters to the 19th-century; distinguished American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts and Maryland period rooms; one of the most important African collections in the country, and notable examples of Asian, ancient American, and Pacific Islands art.

VISITOR INFORMATION

General admission to the BMA is free; special exhibitions may be ticketed. The BMA is open Wednesday through Friday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. (except major holidays). The Museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The BMA is located on Art Museum Drive at North Charles and 31st Streets, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general Museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

VISIT BALTIMORE

For more great Baltimore experiences, visit web sites for the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association (www.baltimore.org), Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts (www.baltimoreevents.org), and Greater Baltimore Cultural Alliance (www.baltimoreculture.org).