

Press Release

Soutine's Portraits: Cooks, Waiters and Bellboys

The Courtauld Gallery, London

19 October 2017 – 21 January 2018



Chaïm Soutine (1893-1943), *Bellboy*, around 1925, oil on canvas
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle

- First major exhibition of works by Chaïm Soutine in the UK in 35 years
- First ever exhibition to assemble Soutine's remarkable portraits of service staff from the fashionable hotels and restaurants of Paris in the 1920s
- **Breakfast press preview on Wednesday 18 October, 9am – 11am.**

This major international loan exhibition of works by Chaïm Soutine (1893-1943) will be the first show on the artist in the United Kingdom in 35 years. Soutine was one of the leading painters in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, part of the influential 'School of Paris' and seen by many as the heir to Van Gogh. The exhibition will focus on a group of remarkable modern portraits that helped establish Soutine's name and reputation.

Soutine's progress is the ultimate rags-to-riches story. Born in Russia (modern-day Belarus), Soutine arrived penniless in Paris in 1913 and lived in poverty in Montparnasse alongside other immigrant artists, including his closest friend Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920). In the early 1920s, Soutine became fascinated by the cooks and waiting staff of French hotels and restaurants, attired in boldly coloured uniforms. Over the next decade, these humble figures sat for the artist in Paris and the south of France. This exhibition brings together 21 of the most important paintings from this series, drawn from public and private collections around the world. It will also be the first thematic exhibition anywhere on Soutine.

These portraits played a key role in establishing Soutine's reputation and turned him from a struggling painter into a wealthy one. In 1923 the American collector Albert C. Barnes saw one of Soutine's early paintings of a pastry cook and thought it one of the greatest modern works. He bought some fifty works on the spot and helped lift the artist out of his desperate circumstances. This endorsement brought Soutine to greater prominence, as his portraits of hotel and restaurant workers became especially prized by contemporary collectors. Today, they are considered among his greatest achievements.

The works offer powerful images of a new social class of service personnel, which went from aristocratic households of past centuries to the luxury hotels and restaurants that arose in the late 19th and early 20th century. These often-overlooked figures from France's most fashionable places of leisure, including the famous Maxim's restaurant in Paris, appealed to Soutine's sense that profound emotion and humanity could be found in modest sitters. The contrast between their working uniforms and the striking individuality of their faces adds to the emotional charge of these extraordinary portraits. Soutine strived to achieve the most forceful effects of colour from the bold whites, reds and blues of their different liveries, enhanced by frontal poses and close-up views.

Soutine's approach to depicting these modern urban workers recalls Cézanne and Van Gogh's portraits of humble rural figures. Soutine was also deeply influenced by French Old Masters, which he studied during regular visits to the Louvre. In this way, Soutine's portraits combine a distinctly modern expressiveness with a strong connection to the art of the past.

Soutine is truly 'an artist's artist' and his legacy can be felt throughout the latter part of the 20th century. In their commitment to figuration in painting, celebrated British painters such as Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossof cite Soutine as a key influence, and he was also instrumental in the development of Abstract Expressionist art, with Willem de Kooning singling him out as his favourite artist.

Soutine's Portraits: Cooks, Waiters and Bellboys will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays and entries on each work. This publication will be more than a record of the show. It will include the results of extensive new research on this series and constitute a long-term resource for anyone interested in the art of the first half of the 20th century.

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Contacts

SUTTON

Caitlin Collinson

caitlin@suttonpr.com

+44 (0)20 7183 3577

The Courtauld Gallery

Emily Dodgson

emily.dodgson@courtauld.ac.uk

+44 (0)20 7848 1149

Courtauld.ac.uk/soutine

Notes to Editors and Ticket Information

Address

The Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

Opening Times

Daily 10am – 6pm (last admission 5.30pm)

Admission

£10.50, including donation (concessions available)

*Price includes a £1 voluntary donation to The Courtauld Institute of Art

Friends of The Courtauld Gallery can enjoy a year of free entry to our exhibitions and displays, including *Soutine's Portraits: Cooks, Waiters and Bellboys* and much more. Friends can bring a guest for free.

About The Courtauld Gallery

The Courtauld Gallery is one of London's must-see art museums. Its collection stretches from the early Renaissance to the 20th century. It is displayed in the elegant setting of Somerset House, one of the city's most dynamic cultural venues. The Courtauld Gallery is renowned for its unrivalled Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, including masterpieces by Manet, van Gogh and Gauguin and the largest collection of Cézannes in the UK.

The Gallery is at the heart of The Courtauld Institute of Art, one of the world's leading centres for the study of art history and conservation.

"One of the world's great collections of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art"

- The Guardian