

The Museum of Modern Art

136
No.68
For immediate release

MASTER DRAWINGS BY HENRI MATISSE TO GO ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first comprehensive survey of the drawings of Henri Matisse ever to be presented in New York will open at The Museum of Modern Art on February 28, 1985. THE DRAWINGS OF HENRI MATISSE features approximately 150 works on paper, nearly a third of which have never been on public view before. The exhibition's many masterpieces, shown in combination with works only recently discovered or in collections inaccessible until now, confirm that the drawings of Henri Matisse are among the greatest in modern art.

THE DRAWINGS OF HENRI MATISSE, which opened last fall at the Hayward Gallery in London, will remain on view at The Museum of Modern Art until May 14, 1985. The works in the exhibition have been loaned by museums and private collectors from seven countries, and span the full range of Matisse's draftsmanship, from his early academic studies to the audacious large-scale works of his last years. Arranged chronologically, the exhibition enables the viewer to appreciate the development and changing form of Matisse's work and his mastery of a variety of drawing media. Within the historical framework of the exhibition, groups of thematically related works demonstrate how the artist explored particular motifs, such as the Plumed Hat series of 1919 and the Thèmes et Variations of 1941-42.

The exhibition was organized by art historian John Golding for the Arts Council of Great Britain, with the assistance of Catherine Lampert; collaborating with Mr. Golding was John Elderfield, Director of The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Drawings, with the assistance of Magdalena Dabrowski, Assistant Curator in the same department. The New York showing is being sponsored by Meredith Corporation, with additional support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. An indemnity for the exhibition has been provided by the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities.

A dedicated and assiduous draftsman since his earliest student days, Henri Matisse believed that drawing was the foundation of pictorial art. But drawing for Matisse was also an independent activity that produced a succession of masterpieces in their own right. Jeanne Manguin (1905-06) is one of Matisse's extremely rare and important Fauve portraits included in the exhibition. The drawings of this period, done mostly in brush, reed pen and black ink, are rendered in a mixed technique of quick lines and dots comparable to that of Matisse's Fauve paintings. Radically different in technique are Matisse's so-called Cubist works from the period of World War I. Among them is a 1915 portrait of violinist Eva Mudocci. Its geometric structure and radical abstraction make it one of the artist's most daring compositions, demonstrating his adaptation of Cubist principles into his own idiom.

Matisse's more detailed, naturalistic work of the 1920s featured odalisques and other models, often pictured lounging in an exotic setting of cushions, patterned textiles, and Moorish furniture. His works of this decade are frequently rendered in charcoal and estompe, a medium which Matisse favored for its remarkable range of soft, closely graded tones of gray and black and its subtle luminosity. As he began to conceive of drawing as a way of creating abstract signs for objects, the modeled forms of the 1920s gave way to more simplified line drawings of the 1930s. Reclining Nude in the Studio (1935) is one in a suite of free and open pen and ink works done in the years 1935-37. Matisse later referred to his use of unshaded line drawing in these years as "the purest and most direct translation of my emotions."

The exhibition presents a number of remarkable works produced from the 1940s until Matisse's death in 1954 that are characterized by an increasing boldness of draftsmanship. According to John Golding, "if Matisse's illness and subsequent operation in the early months of 1941 represented a personal tragedy--

he was to remain a semi-invalid for the rest of his life--they channelled his drawing into new and ever deeper waters." Often confined to his bed, drawing became increasingly paramount as a means of expression for Matisse. In 1943, 158 drawings of this period were published as a portfolio called Dessins: Thèmes et Variations, in which the themes which preoccupied Matisse throughout his creative life--the female figure, still-life, flowers and fruits--were developed in series, each theme undergoing several variations.

Also dating from these years are vividly patterned still lifes in brush and ink, such as Dahlias and Pomegranates (1947) and Still Life with Pineapple (1948). John Elderfield writes of their lively juxtapositions of black and white that "figure and ground interact in a give-and-take of space that keeps them both resolute in their flatness and luminous in their exhilarating openness." Acrobats (1952), one of the artist's finest paper cut-out compositions from this period, a combination of charcoal drawing and drawing with scissors, completes this rare view of the work of a master draftsman.

Among the very important unpublished or unfamiliar works on view will be: Violinist at the Window (1924), an exploration of tonal modelling in charcoal; Dancer Resting (1927), a spare, fluidly rendered figure study in brush and ink; and Young Woman in a "Fishnet" Dress (1937), a charcoal drawing of a model seated at a table, looking pensively toward the viewer. Portrait: Dancer ("The Buddha"), a powerful charcoal drawing done in 1939, is unique in Matisse's oeuvre, with its monstrously exaggerated features and tulip-shaped head.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum is publishing The Drawings of Henri Matisse, the first definitive study of this important aspect of the artist's work. John Golding provided the introduction; John Elderfield is the author of the text of the book. Magdalena Dabrowski documented the works reproduced. The 312-page

volume features 220 illustrations, and will be available for \$17.50 in a paper-bound version. A clothbound edition, published by Thames and Hudson, Inc. will sell for \$29.95.

A lecture on Matisse's drawings will be presented at The Museum of Modern Art by Jack Flam, Professor of Art History at Brooklyn College, on March 5, 1985 at 8:30 p.m.

For further information, please contact Debra Greenberg, Senior Press Officer, or Pamela Sweeney, Assistant Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019. (212) 708-9750
