

# Henri Matisse

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## A RETROSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 24, 1992 - JANUARY 12, 1993

### MAJOR MATISSE RETROSPECTIVE OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The most comprehensive exhibition ever held of the work of the French master Henri Matisse (1869-1954) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on September 24, 1992. Organized by John Elderfield, director of the Department of Drawings and curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, with the assistance of Beatrice Kernan, associate curator, Department of Drawings, **HENRI MATISSE: A RETROSPECTIVE** comprises more than 400 works which together reveal the exceptional range and depth of the artist's work. The exhibition offers the opportunity for a reassessment of both Matisse's career and the critical role his work plays in the history of twentieth-century art. Matisse is fully revealed not only as a painter of scenes of primal beauty, but as one whose art rests on a foundation of extraordinary visual intelligence and rigorous discipline.

The exhibition, which remains on view through January 12, 1993, is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

**HENRI MATISSE: A RETROSPECTIVE**, which follows a number of more recent Matisse exhibitions on specialized topics, is unique in comprising the largest and most evenly balanced representation of Matisse's work ever to be assembled. The last American retrospectives devoted to his work were in 1966, at the UCLA Art Galleries, University of California at Los Angeles, and in

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1951, at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Neither of these included any of the great works from Russian museums. It is now over twenty years since the last retrospective anywhere, at the Grand Palais, Paris (1970).

Installed chronologically in the Museum's second- and third-floor collection galleries, the exhibition focuses on the artist's greatest achievement, his works in color. It includes some 275 of Matisse's most important paintings and 50 of his paper cutouts, complemented by a generous selection of sculptures, drawings, and prints.

The retrospective, which can only be seen in New York, draws extensively on the four most important, and mutually complementary, Matisse collections in the world, those of The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; The Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow; the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. It is thus able to represent Matisse's most innovative period, from Fauvism through the experimental years, more thoroughly than ever before. By joining these four collections with masterworks from numerous other private and public collections throughout the world, the exhibition is expanded to encompass Matisse's entire career.

Many of the works on view have never before been exhibited in this country. These include some of the loans from the Pushkin and Hermitage museums (such as the Hermitage's *Dance II* of 1909-10); several from the Centre Pompidou (such as the *Portrait of Auguste Pellerin II* of 1917 and *The Rumanian Blouse* of 1939-40); and the six superlative paintings from the J. Rump Collection, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (including the greatest of Matisse's self-portraits, painted in 1906), which have not been seen outside of Copenhagen in some sixty years. Similarly, there are works from American

collections that have not previously been permitted to travel, including *Bathers by a River* (1909-16) from The Art Institute of Chicago and *The Terrace, Saint-Tropez* (1904) from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

The exhibition unites several pairs of paintings, such as MoMA's and the Hermitage's versions of the *Dance* (1909, 1909-10), which have never been seen together in the United States, as well as *Le luxe I* (1907) and *II* (1907-08) and *Nasturtiums with "Dance" I* and *II* (both of 1912), among others. Also brought together are most of the great invented figure compositions of 1907-10, a group of Matisse's studio paintings of 1911-12, and ten paintings of the model Lorette of 1916-17. Other sequences of related works include odalisque paintings of the later 1920s, Rumanian Blouse paintings and drawings of the late 1930s, late Venice interiors (1946-48), and all of the paper cutout maquettes for *Jazz* (1943-46).

**HENRI MATISSE: A RETROSPECTIVE** is divided into seven sections:

**1890 - 1904: Discovering Modern Art** opens the exhibition with Matisse's work of the 1890s, academic paintings and tonal still-lives in which his interest in the art of Chardin and in Dutch naturalism is evident. His transition to the vocabulary of more contemporary painting is seen in *The Dinner Table* of 1896-97. From this point, Matisse's art is seen changing rapidly, demonstrating an interest especially in Neo-Impressionism and the work of Cézanne. The former is most evident in his "proto-Fauve" paintings of 1899-1900, such as *Sideboard and Table* and *Still Life Against the Light*. It is in these works that Matisse's genius as a colorist is first revealed. The influence of Cézanne, which dominated Matisse's art from 1900 through 1904, is seen in such works as *Male Model* (ca. 1900) and *Carmelina* (ca. 1903-04).

**1905 - 1907: The Fauvist Epoch** follows the early work with an exploration of Matisse's invention of an art of pure color. This period is richly represented through a group of his breakthrough canvases painted in the summer of 1905 at Collioure, including *The Open Window* (1905), and by important subsequent Fauve paintings, among them *Interior with a Young Girl (Girl Reading)* (1905-06) and *Pink Onions* (1906). The conclusion of Fauvism is marked by the famous *Blue Nude: Memory of Biskra* (1907), and the two versions of *Le Luxe*, which lead to Matisse's decorative style.

**1908 - 1913: Art and Decoration** explores the period during which Matisse established the use of brilliant, flat color and decorative pattern for which his art is best known. Virtually all of the great invented or imaginary figure compositions are on view, including *Bathers with a Turtle* (1908), *Game of Bowls* (1908), and *Nymph and Satyr* (1908-09), and culminating with the *Dance* compositions of 1909-10. Included as well are the great *Harmony in Red (La desserte)* (1908) and *Nude with a White Scarf* (1909); the studio interiors of 1911-12, such as *The Red Studio* (1911) and *Corner of the Artist's Studio* (1912); *Conversation* (completed 1912), and many Moroccan pictures of 1912-13, such as the famous Moroccan Triptych, comprising *Landscape Viewed from a Window*, *On the Terrace*, and *The Casbah Gate*.

**1913 - 1917: Abstraction and Experimentation** is a comprehensive representation of Matisse's work just before and during World War I, a time of restless experimentation that led to highly abstracted compositions reflecting the influence of Cubism. Included are *Woman on a High Stool (Germaine Raynal)* (1914), *View of Notre-Dame* (1914), *French Window at Collioure* (1914), and *Piano Lesson* (1916), as well as the large, ambitious compositions *The Moroccans* (1915-16), and *Bathers by a River*. On view as well are many of the

extraordinary portraits of the period, beginning with the *Portrait of Mme Matisse* (1913) and moving to the untraditional *Portrait of Mlle Yvonne Landsberg* (1914) and *The Italian Woman* (1916), which was the first in the series of paintings Matisse made of the model Lorette.

**1917 - 1930: *The Early Years at Nice*** is dedicated to a period in which Matisse painted more naturalistic works, notably harmonious, light-filled, often profusely decorated interiors with languorous or exotic models and odalisques. These include *The Meditation: After the Bath* (1920-21), *The Moorish Screen* (1921), and *The Hindu Pose* (1923). In this period, Matisse's color is subordinated to light, the gentle pulsation of which endows the scenes with both great sensuality and a meditative quality. This was also the period of Matisse's remarkable drawings of a model in a plumed hat (1919), as well as the bronze *Large Seated Nude* (1925-29).

**1930 - 1943: *Themes and Variations*** reveals Matisse's return to a formal simplicity comparable to that of the decorative period twenty years earlier, but now with groups of works that comprise variations on favored subjects. This first thorough review of this rich, poetic, and often vividly colored work includes such paintings as *Woman in Blue (The Large Blue Robe and Mimosas)* (1937), *Large Reclining Nude (The Pink Nude)* (1935), *Woman in a Purple Robe with Ranunculi* (1937), and *The Rumanian Blouse* (1939-40), as well as a sequence of paintings and drawings of a sleeping woman (1939-40) and a set of drawings from the famous *Themes and Variations* series (1941).

**1943 - 1954: *The Final Years*** concludes the exhibition with Matisse's dazzling last paintings and the even more surprising paper cutouts that supplanted the medium of painting in the artist's final years. This section reveals how his painting came to a strikingly original conclusion with works

that are among the greatest revelations of the exhibition, notably the extraordinary Vence interiors of 1946-48. Additionally, it explores the broad range of cutouts that Matisse made, from the twenty maquettes for his illustrated book *Jazz* -- works that revealed to Matisse a way of resolving what he called "the eternal conflict of drawing and color" -- to the designs for windows and vestments for the Chapel of the Rosary of the Dominican Nuns in Vence that he made from 1948 through 1952. Also in the exhibition are such large-scale cutouts as *Memory of Oceania* (1953), and the 1952 *Swimming Pool*, which joins the contemporaneous *Women with Monkeys*, next to which it was originally mounted in Matisse's dining room. In these works, which still seem radical in form and composition, drawing and color -- the relationship between which Matisse had explored throughout his career -- are literally united.

In the catalogue to the exhibition, John Elderfield says that Matisse "altered painting so decisively...that our experience of any painting must be affected by what he achieved." With **HENRI MATISSE: A RETROSPECTIVE**, that achievement can finally be seen in its totality, enriching our appreciation not only of the work of Matisse, but of the history of twentieth-century art as well.

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Philip Morris Companies Inc. began its support of the arts in 1958. Since then, the company has developed one of the most comprehensive corporate cultural programs. Through its broad spectrum of sponsorship, Philip Morris promotes contemporary and minority visual and performing arts, as well as

major international exhibitions and tours. **HENRI MATISSE: A RETROSPECTIVE** is the fifth exhibition sponsored by Philip Morris at The Museum of Modern Art. The first was **MIRRORS AND WINDOWS: AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY SINCE 1960** in 1978; the second, **"PRIMITIVISM IN 20TH CENTURY ART: AFFINITY OF THE TRIBAL AND THE MODERN** in 1984; the third, **BERLINART: 1961-1987** in 1987, and the fourth, **PICASSO AND BRAQUE: PIONEERING CUBISM** in 1989.

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