

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 1961

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

An exhibition of The Last Works of Henri Matisse: Large Cut Gouaches will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York City from October 18 through December 3. About 40 cut-and-pasted gouaches, including designs for murals, stained glass windows, and church vestments, executed during the four years before Matisse's death in 1954, were selected by Monroe Wheeler, Director of Exhibitions and Publications, and installed by Alicia Legg, Assistant Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions. Nearly all of the works were borrowed from European collections and have never been shown in this country.

For this brilliant final chapter of his lifework Matisse used a new technique which he called "drawing with scissors." He cut shapes directly from paper which he had first painted with brilliant colors--scissors rather than pencil or pen were his drawing instrument. He then composed and pasted the forms on large sheets of paper or canvas.

As Mr. Wheeler points out in the exhibition catalog*, Matisse's audacious final productions have a particular significance with reference to certain early achievements and to his art as a whole. They epitomize three aspects of his art: brilliant color, precise draughtsmanship and illusory three-dimensional form.

Matisse began to work with cut-and-pasted paper as early as 1931, in planning a mural for Dr. Albert C. Barnes' Gallery in Merion, Pennsylvania. In subsequent years he designed posters, book covers, rugs, ballet sets, costumes and tapestries in much the same way. He also used this method to make the picture book, Jazz (1947), which is on view in the show. During the final years of his life when he was too ill to stand at an easel, Matisse further developed the technique, producing increasingly larger works in which he achieved great subtlety and depth of meaning. The predominantly abstract compositions, such as Creole Dancer, lent by the Museums of the City of Nice; The Thousand and One Nights, and the great Sorrows of the King from the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, exceed, in their ingenuity of design and astonishing color, all previous concepts of wall decoration.

The exhibition includes a series of 10 "blue nudes" culminating in a nine-foot wide design for a wall ceramic, Women and Monkeys. These were executed in 1952, one of Matisse's most productive years. Also from that year, is Matisse's largest composition, the 54-foot wide Swimming Pool, also intended for execution in ceramic tiles.

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* The Last Works of Henri Matisse: Large Cut Gouaches by Monroe Wheeler. 64 pp; 34 plates (13 in color by the French master-lithographer Fernand Mourlot). \$4.50, cloth; \$3.50, paper. Published by the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y. Distributed by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

His frequent use of plant forms is seen in another mural composition, The Acanthuses, in Ivy in Flower, The Vine, and Wild Poppies, designs for stained glass windows, and in three designs for church vestments for the Vence chapel. The 33-foot wide Large Decoration with Masks, also a floral and fruit composition, demonstrates the dual interest in pure line and in patterns of joyous color, found throughout Matisse's art.

The design for a rose window in the Union Church of Pocantico Hills, New York is his last work, completed only a few days before his death on November 3, 1954.

Also shown are designs for the jacket of Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s book Matisse: His Art and His Public and for the catalog of the Museum of Modern Art's Matisse retrospective held in 1951-52.

The exhibition will be shown at the Art Institute of Chicago from January 10 through February 13 and at the San Francisco Museum of Art from March 5 through April 15.

Photographs and additional information available from Nancy Reed, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N.Y. CI 5-8900.