

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MATISSE'S ORIGINAL DESIGNS FOR VENCE CHAPEL

GO ON VIEW FOR FIRST TIME IN AMERICA

- MATISSE FILM SHOWN WEEKLY -

Full-scale designs by Henri Matisse for his most recent work, the Vence Chapel, will go on view for the first time in America at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, on December 7.

These designs, which include seven brilliantly colored window cartoons more than 15 feet high, are supplemented by a plan of the building and photographs in black and white and color. They will form the final section of the Matisse retrospective which opened at the Museum in November and will be on view through January 13. This material, lent to the Museum by the artist, was delayed in arrival by the recent dock strike. Extensive mounting and construction, required for the installation, has prevented its being shown earlier.

The Chapel of the Rosary for the Dominican nuns of Vence in France was consecrated in June of this year. Matisse, in collaboration with a Dominican architect Brother L.-B. Rayssiguier, under the supervision of Auguste Perret, designed the entire chapel, all its furnishings and decoration. Occupied with the chapel since the fall of 1947, Matisse devoted himself almost exclusively to it for four years. He has called it "...the ultimate goal of a whole life-of work and the culmination of an enormous effort, sincere and difficult".

Designs for Stained Glass Windows To Be Shown

The stained glass windows of the chapel, which provide the color and colored light for the white interior, are represented by seven full-scale designs, executed in gouache on cut-and-pasted paper. The six narrow windows designed for the nave have been set into a gallery wall approximately the length of the nave of the chapel. The theme of the windows, the Tree of Life, is developed in pairs of great leaves, alternately golden yellow and sapphire blue, against a grass-green background. On an adjacent gallery wall is one of the two apse windows, broader in proportion and with a richer design of foliage forms.

Color transparencies are shown in the same gallery to give the exhibition visitor some sense of the magical radiance of the light, and the shimmer of reflected color on the great tile murals which face the windows.

Among the other studies is the final ink drawing for the circular tile design for the exterior wall of the apse, and a charcoal drawing for the carved wood door to the confessional, one of the most beautiful architectural details of the chapel.

The small bronze crucifix, which in the church rises above the priest's head on the great stone altar, is represented in the exhibition by a cast.

Brilliantly colored paper patterns for five chasubles fill the last gallery like giant six-foot butterflies, recalling a remark attributed to one of the Dominicans, "At last we shall have a gay church!"

Writing recently of the chapel, Matisse has said in part:

....simple colors can act upon the inner feelings with all the more force because they are simple. A blue, for instance, accompanied by the shimmer of its complementaries, acts upon the feelings like a sharp blow on a gong. The same with red and yellow; and the artist must be able to sound them when he needs to.

In the chapel my chief aim was to balance a surface of light and color against a solid white wall covered with black drawings....

This is not a work that I chose but rather a work for which I have been chosen by fate towards the end of the course that I am still pursuing by my researches. The chapel has afforded me the possibility to realize them by uniting them....

Whatever weaknesses this expression of human feeling may contain will fall away, but there will remain a living part which will unite the past with the future of plastic tradition.

I trust that this part, which I call my revelation, may be expressed with sufficient power to be fertilizing and so return to its source.

Special Screenings of Matisse Film on Mondays During Exhibition

The original French version of the film HENRI MATISSE will be shown at 2 p.m. every Monday through January 13 in the Museum Auditorium for the duration of the Matisse exhibition.

The film, made in 1946 in Paris and Vence, shows the artist at various stages of work and discussing several of his pictures. One sequence shows 15 stages in the development of the famous painting The Rumanian Blouse (Musée National d'Art Moderne) over a period of several months. Another shows Matisse making a series of sketches of the head of his grandson.

One of the more impressive sections of the film shows Matisse painting, and then the same sequence is repeated in slow motion to give a dramatic and intimate view of his technique. Of this Matisse described his own impressions: "Before my pencil ever touched the paper, my hand made a strange journey of its own. I never realized before that I did this. I suddenly felt as if I were shown naked.... I was unconsciously establishing the relationship between the subject I was about to draw and the size of my paper."

The film was produced by François Campaux under the auspices of the Department of Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The director was André Leveille. The film has been seen widely abroad.

The musical score is a compilation from compositions by César Franck. Running time is 23 minutes. The film is being shown here through the courtesy of the Cultural Division of the French Embassy. No special admission is charged for these screenings.