

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
December 1988

HENRI MATISSE: NUIT DE NOEL AND LITURGICAL VESTMENTS

Through January 10, 1989

In celebration of the holiday season, The Museum of Modern Art has installed in its lobby Henri Matisse's stained-glass window, Nuit de Noël. The window, originally commissioned by Life magazine in 1952 for Christmas celebrations at Rockefeller Center, is on view through January 10, 1989. The window installation is accompanied by chasubles and related maquettes designed by Matisse between 1950 and 1952 for the Chapel of the Rosary in the French village of Vence.

Matisse, who had enjoyed working on the stained-glass window for the chapel at Vence, undertook a number of subsequent commissions for such windows. Nuit de Noël was formally commissioned on January 15, 1952, and Matisse soon completed a maquette of cut-and-pasted paper in which a large star with three leaf forms below it establish the basic theme of the work as a Christmas Eve sky over a landscape of organic shapes.

In March 1952 the finished maquette was turned over to Paul Bony, the stained-glass craftsman who had made the Vence chapel windows, and four months later the nearly eleven-foot-high window was completed. On December 8, 1952, the window arrived in New York and was displayed in time for Christmas Eve in the reception center of the Time-Life Building at Rockefeller Center. On the occasion, Matisse wrote to Alfred H. Barr, Jr., then director of museum collections at The Museum of Modern Art, that the "maquette for a stained-glass window and the window itself are like a musical score and its performance by an

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orchestra." In June 1953 Time, Inc. gave both the window and the maquette to the Museum.

The last items designed by Matisse for the Chapel of the Rosary were the chasubles, which are long, sleeveless vestments worn by the celebrant of the Mass. There are six chasubles, each of which has as its basic color one of the prescribed liturgical colors--white, green, violet, red, rose, and black. Symbolic rather than traditionally representational imagery is employed in the design of these garments' large semicircular shapes. Matisse selected the fabrics for the chasubles and supervised their dyeing and manufacture.

When the white chasuble proved to be too heavy when used, The Museum of Modern Art arranged to obtain it in exchange for commissioning a lighter replacement for use in the chapel. The Museum subsequently arranged through Matisse the commission of a set of the remaining five chasubles. Of the complete set of six chasubles, five are on view as well as two maquettes for the red chasuble.

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For further information or photographic materials, contact the Department of Public Information, 212/708-9750.