

# Henri Matisse

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## A RETROSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 24, 1992 - JANUARY 12, 1993

### MATISSE AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Since its inception, The Museum of Modern Art has actively collected, exhibited, and promoted scholarship on the work of Henri Matisse. In 1931 the two-year-old Museum's first director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., organized a large Matisse exhibition. This was both the first one-person show the Museum had devoted to a European artist and the first important Matisse exhibition to be held at an American museum. In the year following that pioneering show, the Museum received its first Matisses, a group of twelve prints given by Mrs. Saidie A. May. In 1934 *Interior with a Violin Case* (1918), which had been left to the Museum as part of the superb bequest of Lillie P. Bliss, formally entered the collection. During this same decade, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller purchased for the Museum a number of highly important Matisse works, including *Bather* (1909), the bronze *La Serpentine* (1909), and *The Blue Window* (1913). In 1946 *The Piano Lesson* (1916) and in 1949 *The Red Studio* (1911) were acquired with monies from a fund set up by Mrs. Simon Guggenheim.

In 1951 Alfred Barr organized another, more comprehensive Matisse show. Monroe Wheeler, then the director of Exhibitions and Publications and a trustee of the Museum, commissioned Matisse to design the cover for the catalogue. This design has been used again for the cover of the current exhibition catalogue.

After this exhibition, the pace of major Matisse acquisitions by the Museum greatly accelerated, largely as a result of the efforts of Mr. Barr. In 1955 the Museum received *Goldfish and Sculpture* (1912) as a gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney. In 1963 *Dance (I)*, of 1909, was given by Nelson A. Rockefeller in honor of

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Mr. Barr. In the following year, *Woman on a High Stool (Germaine Raynal)*, of 1914, was given by Florene M. Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx. This was the first of five major Matisse paintings they committed to the Museum; the others include *The Moroccans* (1915-16). Among the Museum's paper cutouts, the largest, *The Swimming Pool* (1952), was acquired in 1975 with monies from the Mrs. Bernard F. Gimbel Fund.

In 1990 *Landscape at Collioure* (1905) entered the collection as a fractional gift of Mrs. Bertram Smith. Also in 1990, the Museum acquired six Matisses from the William S. Paley Collection, including *Woman with a Veil* (1927) and *Odalisque with a Tambourine* (1925-26). Today The Museum of Modern Art's Matisse holdings -- comprising painting, sculpture, drawings, cutouts, prints, illustrated books, a stained-glass window, and a set of chasubles -- constitute the single most comprehensive and perhaps the most important collection of Matisse's art.

In addition to the full-scale shows of 1931 and 1951, the Museum has regularly presented specialized exhibitions of Matisse's work, including THE LAST WORKS OF HENRI MATISSE (1961), MATISSE: 64 PAINTINGS (1966), THE SCULPTURE OF MATISSE (1972), THE DRAWINGS OF HENRI MATISSE (1985), and MATISSE IN MOROCCO (1990).

In addition to its collecting and exhibition activities, The Museum of Modern Art has, through lectures, symposia, and its publishing program, vigorously promoted the serious study of Matisse. It has published more than a dozen monographs and catalogues on the artist, including the seminal *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, by Alfred H. Barr (1951), *Matisse in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, by John Elderfield (1978), and now *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective*, also by Mr. Elderfield.

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No. 55.3

September 1992

For further information, contact the Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9750.