

The background is a light blue sky. In the top left, there are yellow and green stylized leaves. In the top right, there are black and white stylized leaves. In the center, a man with a white beard and glasses, wearing a brown shirt, stands in a garden. To his right, a white bird with a yellow beak is perched on a grey rock. In the foreground, there are large, stylized flowers: a red one with white stamens on a purple stem, and a pink one with brown leaves. The bottom right corner features the MoMA logo.

Samantha Friedman
Illustrations by Cristina Amodeo

MATISSE'S GARDEN

with reproductions of artworks
by Henri Matisse

MoMA



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The Museum of Modern Art, New York



One day the artist Henri Matisse cut a small bird from a piece of white paper.



It was a simple shape, but he liked the way it looked and didn't want to throw it out. So he pinned it on the wall of his apartment to cover up a stain.





The bird seemed lonely by itself. So Matisse cut out more shapes, which joined the bird on the wall.

As he cut shape after shape from the white paper, he thought about a trip he had taken many years before, to the island of Tahiti. The shapes looked like the birds, fish, and seaweed he had seen there.





As his scissors glided through the paper, he thought about how a bird must feel when it flies. As he cut, Matisse felt like he, too, was flying.



Soon his walls were covered with plant and animal shapes. They captured the feeling of soaring and the sensation of swimming, but they didn't convey the bright blue of the sky or the deep blue of the sea.

So he made a new work, this time pinning his white forms to sheets painted azure and marine blue.



Matisse
46





When he saw how the color brought his shapes to life, he asked his assistants to paint sheets of paper in a range of shades, from vermillion to lemon to violet. Instead of using only white paper, he decided he would make his shapes by cutting directly into color.

Produced by the Department of Publications
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Edited by Chul R. Kim and Emily Hall
Designed by Cristina Amodeo
Production by Hannah Kim
Printed and bound by Ofset Yapimevi, Istanbul

With thanks to Genevieve Allison, Karl Buchberg,
Madeleine Compagnon, Cerise Fontaine, Cari Frisch,
Jodi Hauptman, Elizabeth Margulies, Amanda Washburn,
Makiko Wholey, and Wendy Woon, and a special thanks
to Georges Matisse

This book is typeset in Absara Sans.
The paper is 150 gsm Amber Graphic.

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2014939198
ISBN: 978-0-87070-910-4

Published by The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street
New York, New York 10019
www.moma.org

Distributed in the United States and Canada
by Abrams Books for Young Readers,
an imprint of ABRAMS, New York

Distributed outside the United States and Canada
by Thames & Hudson Ltd.

Printed in Turkey

PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

Photo: Martin P. Bühler, Kunstmuseum Basel (*Composition [The Velvets]*)
© 2014 CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN–Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY:
photo: Jacqueline Hyde (*Polynesia, the Sea*);
photo: Jean-Claude Planchet (*Polynesia, the Sky*)
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HENRI MATISSE (1869–1954)

Henri Matisse was born in 1869, in Le Cateau-Cambrésis, in northern France. He trained to be a lawyer but took up painting while recovering from appendicitis. In 1891 he went to Paris to study art at the Académie Julian, and he became an apprentice to the painter Gustave Moreau. In the summers of 1904 and 1905, in the sunlit South of France, Matisse began to paint with bright, clashing colors. This style was eventually called Fauvism, after a critic called Matisse and other artists painting in this manner *fauves*, or wild beasts.

From there Matisse continued along a path he described as “construction by means of color.” On a visit to Morocco in 1912 and 1913 he took in light, architecture, and textiles that influenced his painting; during his Nice period, from 1917 to 1930, he focused on female figures, interiors, and still lifes. In the 1930s and ’40s Matisse turned increasingly to printmaking, and in the last decade of his life he pioneered a new form that came to be known as cut-outs, creating perhaps his most radical works at the end of his career. He died in 1954, at the age of eighty-four.

WORKS BY MATISSE

Polynesia, the Sky. 1946

Maquette for tapestry
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, mounted on canvas
6' 6 3/4" x 10' 3 5/8" (200 x 314 cm)
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle



Polynesia, the Sea. 1946

Maquette for tapestry
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, mounted on canvas
6' 5 3/16" x 10' 3 5/8" (196 x 314 cm)
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle



Composition (The Velvets). 1947

Gouache on paper, cut and pasted
20 1/4" x 7' 1 5/8" (51.5 x 217.5 cm)
Kunstmuseum Basel. Acquired with support from
Dr. Richard Doetsch-Benziger, Basel, and Marguerite Hagenbach, Basel



Composition, Black and Red. 1947

Gouache on paper, cut and pasted
16 x 20 3/4" (40.6 x 52.7 cm)
Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley,
Massachusetts. Gift of Professor and Mrs. John McAndrew



The Bees. Summer 1948

Preliminary maquette for the side windows
of the Chapel of the Rosary, Vence
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, mounted on canvas
39 3/4" x 7' 10 7/8" (101 x 241 cm)
Musée Matisse, Nice. Gift of the artist's family



Zulma. Early 1950

Gouache on paper, cut and pasted
7' 9 11/16" x 52 3/8" (238 x 133 cm)
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen



Chinese Fish. 1951

Maquette for stained-glass window
Gouache on paper, cut and pasted,
and charcoal on white paper, mounted on canvas
6' 2 3/4" x 35 1/2" (189.9 x 90.2 cm)
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

The Parakeet and the Mermaid. 1952

Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, and charcoal on white paper
11' 5/8" x 25' 2" (337 x 768.5 cm)
Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, acquired with
the generous support of the Vereniging Rembrandt and the
Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds



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