

6. A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN. VENCE, THE LAST INTERIORS



Grand intérieur rouge [Large Red Interior], spring 1948
Oil on canvas, 146 x 97 cm
State purchase, 1950. AM 2964 P

During the war years, Matisse moved to Vence in the hills above Nice, and settled into Le Rêve, a villa surrounded by a lush garden. He survived a serious surgical operation in 1941. Filled with new energy, he worked extensively and experimented with various techniques, in particular paper cut-outs which allowed him to 'draw directly in colour'. Between 1946 and 1948, he undertook his last great series of paintings, known as the *Vence Interiors*, which combined still life, landscape and studio scenes. The relationships between line and colour run through the paintings from this period, creating a space which was now fully unified. On his return to Nice in 1949, he immersed himself in a major commission, the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, which

represented for Matisse the 'summation of a whole life's work'. He designed the entire decor of the chapel, using his process of gouache cut-outs. With the reflection of the brightly-coloured stained glass on the black and white designs of the wall tiles, at the end of his life Matisse found a final balance between drawing and colour.

'The importance of an artist is to be measured by the quantity of new signs which he has introduced to the language of art.'

Henri Matisse, 1942

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HENRI MATISSE. A new country
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INFORMATION

OPENING HOURS

9.30 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., every day
Ticket offices close at 7:30 p.m.
The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except holidays and days before holidays), 1 January and 25 December

PRICES

Entry to permanent exhibitions: €7, concessions: €4
Entry to temporary exhibitions: €4, concessions: €2.50
Entry to permanent and temporary exhibitions: €9, concessions: €5.50

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HENRI MATISSE

A NEW COUNTRY

6 MARCH – 9 JUNE 2019

In the course of over sixty years, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) produced a body of work that was to have a profound impact on the modern perspective and would establish him as one of the major artists of the 20th century. He expressed his art through a variety of techniques which he explored tirelessly; painting, drawing, sculpture, illustrated books and the remarkable invention of drawing in colour, with the gouache cut-outs he created towards the end of his life, and which were so rich in artistic consequences.

'I have several paintings in progress. I am as curious about colour as one would be visiting a new country, because I have never concentrated so closely on colour expression. Up to now I have waited at the gates of the temple.'

Henri Matisse, 1947

This exhibition showcases the experimental side of his work and retraces the path, through six chronological sequences, of this key artist of modernity. From his early days in the 1900s, in the shadow of his masters, via the solitary and radical path of the period 1904-1917, the 'box of light' of the Nice years, to the modern language of the 1930s and the interiors of Vence and the Chapel of the Rosary, Henri Matisse's career is marked by masterpieces, those *new signs* which the artist aspired to and which have become universal today.

1. WITH AND AGAINST THE MASTERS. EARLY DAYS AND BREAKAWAYS (1900–1903)



Madeleine II, [1903]
Lost wax bronze casting, dark patina, 59,5 × 18,5 × 20 cm
Accepted in lieu of tax from Pierre Matisse, 1991. AM 1991-284

After a few years spent as a notary's clerk in his native northern France, Matisse defied paternal authority to live his true vocation as a painter. In 1891, at the age of twenty-two, he moved to Paris and embarked on a long artistic apprenticeship. The academic education he received at the Académie Julian and the École des Arts Décoratifs was too rigid to his liking. It was Gustave Moreau's workshop at the École des beaux-arts that would allow him to forge his own identity. During those years of training, Matisse continued to copy the masters of the Louvre, while at the same time, the freedom encouraged by Moreau fed his stubborn and rebellious nature. He was influenced by Turner's and Van Gogh's use of colour and accentuated light, and as of 1899, Cézanne's work finally freed him of his last academic instincts. His artistic development was enhanced by sculpture, which he took up in 1899. Throughout his life, sculpture served to support his pictorial research.

2. 'SIMPLER MEANS'. THE FAUVE AND 'PRIMITIVE' PERIOD (1905–1909)



Étude de deux visages [Study of Two Faces], [1906-1907]
Graphite lead on paper, 21,3 × 18,2 cm
Donated by Marie Matisse, 1984. AM 1984-62

In 1904, Matisse was attracted for a time by Paul Signac's divisionism, but he soon saw the limits to this pictorial method which prevented the communion between drawing and colour. His exploration of colour reached a decisive moment in the summer of 1905, during his stay in Collioure, near the Spanish border. In the same year, his work was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne, alongside that of Derain, Marquet and Manguin. The young group of painters, known as the 'Fauves', caused a scandal with its 'orgy of pure colours'. Despite a slating in the press, Matisse took his radical pictorial experiments even further. In the milestone years 1904-1906, he moved away from the imitation of nature to concentrate on the expression of feeling. The discovery of African statuary art influenced this shift and guided him towards a simplification of the line. In 1907, Matisse began to explore the decorative notion which was to be instrumental to his artistic career and was inspired by his

knowledge of the Orient, his trips to Algeria and Morocco and the craft objects he brought back with him. Through this research, he eliminated the duality between figure and background and affirmed that all the elements of a painting must contribute to its expressivity.

3. THE CHOICE OF RADICALITY. PORTRAITS AND FIGURES (1909–1917)



Le Violoniste à la fenêtre [Violinist at the Window], [spring 1918]
Oil on canvas, 150 × 98 cm
Purchase, 1975. AM 1975-260

In the portraits he painted, drew or sculpted during this period, Matisse pursued his quest for an expressive line and consolidated the analytical aspect of his work. Matisse's primary subject, the one he came back to time and again throughout his career, was the figure, whether individualised or developed to a simple 'visual sign'. In late 1916, Matisse reintroduced the model into his painting, seeing the collaboration

with his models as the 'source of [his] energy'. As of 1914, he used black in abundance, which he considered to be a colour in its own right. This vibrant hue, the famous 'black light', dominated some of his most radical portraits. In the winter of 1917, he discovered Nice and the Mediterranean light, a revelation for this native of northern France. He began to divide his time between Nice and Issy-les-Moulineaux, near Paris. A new period began at the end of the war in 1918, corresponding to a sort of truce after more than a decade of radical experimentation.

4. NICE, INTERIORS, FIGURES (1917–1929)



Odalisque à la culotte rouge [Odalisque with Red Trousers], [autumn 1921]
Oil on canvas, 65,3 × 92,3 × 2,5 cm
State purchase. Attribution, 1923. LUX 0.85 P

Beginning with his stay in Nice in the first half of 1918, Matisse's painting underwent a profound change, with a renewed interest in form and the influence of the soft light in his Nice workshop. The female body was an endlessly recurring theme in his 1920s work, as was the seminal motif of the window. Matisse transformed his models into Oriental odalisques, adorned with colourful fabrics from his collection. During this period, Matisse focused on the notion of inserting the volume of the body into a decor designed as pure image. The end of

the 1920s saw a lull in his inspiration. As he would do periodically, he reassessed his knowledge.

5. MODERNITIES. THE 1930s



Nu rose assis [Seated Pink Nude], [April 1935 / 1936]
Oil on canvas, 92 × 73 cm
Accepted in lieu of tax, 2001. AM 2001-215

1930 was marked by a decline in the volume of his work and a desire to travel. Matisse visited New York, then Tahiti, drawing new energy from these locations. From 1931 to 1933, he devoted himself to drawing, prints for book illustrations and above all, a commission from the American doctor Alfred Barnes for a mural painting in his house in Merion, Pennsylvania. It was to be *La Danse* [The Dance], in which Matisse would use his paper cut-out process for the first time. His studies for this 'architectural painting' were based on the balance of its composition, the arabesque line, extreme stylisation of bodies and the relationship between pink and blue colours. He pursued this research through easel painting, which he took up again in 1935, notably with his model Lydia Delectorskaya.

At this time, Matisse also began to have the successive steps of his paintings photographed, to better analyse them and enrich his visual design. This form of documentation also reveals the long and complex creative process of his paintings, as well as the efforts which led to the simplification of strokes and composition.

'I worked for years [...] so that people could say: Matisse – there's nothing to it...!'

Henri Matisse, 1943