

Henri Matisse, Interior Promenades

Exhibition from 12 June to 4 October 2015

Musée Matisse

Henri Matisse: interior promenades

Fascinated by the endless blue of the sea's horizon and the radiance of Nice's skies, Henri Matisse began visiting the city from late 1917 in a bid to reignite his imagination, before moving to 1 Place Charles-Félix definitively in 1921, in a building overlooking the Cours Saleya, the gentle curve of the Baie des Anges and the Promenade des Anglais. In the aftermath of the war and following the success of cubism, Matisse found in Nice a retreat well-suited to reflection, working in the cosy atmosphere of the Beau Rival hotel rooms, followed by those of the Hôtel de la Méditerranée. He surrounded his models with vases of flowers, fabrics, wall hangings, furniture and objects from around the world, using the light that filtered through the louvered shutters.

An appreciation of the eternal vital forces of nature and the intensity of the light and colours of the Mediterranean seaside allowed the painter to retreat into indoor spaces that became gardens of patterns.

The Musée Matisse compares and contrasts the intimate world of the artist's studio and the sweeping Baie des Anges, the deep blue of the sky, the vegetation that hugs the Quai des États-Unis as glimpsed through an open window. In doing so, the exhibition examines the significance of these depictions of Nice's interiors as well as the creation of imaginary compositions where horizons collide in colourful spaces.

Exploring the shore

Matisse sought the most accurate form of expression with which to convey his vision of the world: "I take what I need from nature, expression sufficiently eloquent to suggest my thoughts. [...]" This observation- and reflection-based approach to landscape explains why he decided to move to Nice at the end of 1917, opting for the intimacy of indoor spaces overlooking the Baie des Anges.

This wasn't the first time that the shore and sky had captured his imagination. For various different reasons, seaside landscapes gave him the opportunity to experiment with new pictorial forms. During a stay in Brittany in 1896 at Belle-Île-en-Mer, Matisse painted coastal landscapes: "**I came back from my travels with a passion for all the colours of the rainbow**". In 1904, a summer spent in Saint-Tropez with Signac along with his use of pointillism marked a transitory step towards Fauvism: "**Working in front of a thrilling landscape, the only thing that concerned me was making my colours sing**". In 1905 in Collioure with Derain, attempting to find a form of expression as closely matched to his emotions as possible, he explored the sensations triggered by the forces of nature, which he then translated through the pure colour of Fauvism. Through every step in the process, Matisse moved further away from direct depictions of landscape. In the relationship the painter created between interiors and exteriors in Nice, he once again found inspiration in the hedonism he developed throughout his work.

Looking out over the Baie des Anges

At the end of 1917, Matisse wanted to travel to Marseille and then Nice to make the most of a climate that suited his paintings well. He stopped off at the Beau Rivage hotel, and although the gloomy weather proved to be a disappointment, the wind picked up, revealing the intense blue of the Baie des Anges. During this first stay, Matisse found in Nice the environment he was seeking: "[...] **for my paintings, I need to feel the same sensations for several days in a row, and I can only do so in the atmosphere of the Côte d'Azur**." Rather than venturing outdoors, he mostly painted in rooms in the hotels he stayed at, such as the Beau Rivage and the Hôtel de la Méditerranée from 1918, and then later in 1921, in his apartment and studio at the Cours Saleya. The atmosphere of these 'Nice interiors' reminded the painter of the artist's studio, a self-contained space of creation. Matisse gradually began putting his models in costumes and surrounding them with decorative objects. To light these indoor scenes, he used the rays of sun that filtered through the louvered shutters. "**A nice old hotel, of course! And beautiful Italian ceilings! Stunning tiles! [...]. I stayed four years out of a love of painting nudes and figures in old rococo lounges. Do you remember the light that poured through the louvered shutters? It streamed down from above, like a spotlight. Everything was false, absurd, astonishing, delightful.**"

In these spaces that seemed enclosed, Matisse moved beyond his own boundaries and sources of inspiration. "**I was able to incorporate the outdoor world, such as the sea, as well as the indoor world into my paintings, because the atmosphere of a landscape and that of my room were one and the same. I didn't bring one closer to the other - both were united in my mind.**" On occasion, the Promenade des Anglais would attract the painter's attention in its own right, as exemplified by the paintings Storm in Nice, a reminder of the painter's arrival in the city in poor weather conditions, and **Festival of Flowers**, in which his models pose on a balcony, absorbed by the passing parade. Yet it is Nice's light filtered through the louvered shutters and hinting at the blue of the sea in an almost introspective fashion that lends the painter the atmosphere required for his constant quest for an expressive form in perfect harmony with his emotions.

The Cours Saleya "From the horizon to myself..."

In 1921 when Henri Matisse decided to settle more permanently in Nice, he rented an apartment on the Cours Saleya, 1 Place Charles-Félix, overlooking the Quai des États-Unis and the Promenade des Anglais. Just as he did at the hotels, in response to the infinite horizon, Matisse painted interiors with a view to maintaining continuity within his body of works, "**I worked in Nice as I worked everywhere else.**" Nice's sky as seen through a window is incorporated into his interiors. This alliance between the outdoors and carefully staged intimate space lies at the heart of a unique, emotional dimension to Matisse's art: "**My goal is to convey my emotion. My state of mind is created by the objects around me and those that trigger a reaction within me: from the horizon to myself, including myself. [...] I express the space and objects I see as naturally as if they were only sea and sky, meaning as if they were the simplest of things.**"

Beyond windows: a new space

Beyond Nice, its interiors and horizons, Matisse was seeking new space, and from this sense of curiosity emerged his desire to visit Tahiti in 1930: "**Having spent forty years working in European light and spaces, I had always dreamed of other proportions that might be found on the other side of the world. [...] I was looking for something other than real space.**" Although his stay in Tahiti didn't provide any instant solutions, on returning to Nice, Matisse got back to work with a new mind-set. He began creating large compositions that combined impressions of space from Tahiti and the spaces overlooking the Baie des Anges. Having seen the stretch of the sky blurring into the horizon of the sea, the painter magnified his pictorial space. In doing so, he pushed against the boundaries of the canvas: "**The painting becomes more spaced out, aerial, even**". He created large-scale compositions made out of gouache paper cut-outs which would then be worked into tapestries (**Polynesia, the sky; Polynesia, the sea**) or ceramic panels (**Apollo, The Swimming Pool**). Matisse's work occupies a singular place in modern pictorial depictions of the world. It establishes a continuity between his observation of what is real and the mystery of what is felt. It elevates the expression of a sensitive vision of simplified form to the status of a universal language of the 'sign'. The painter draws inspiration from more than just the topic itself: "**It was only after having long enjoyed the light of the sun that I tried to express myself through the light of the soul.**"

Events related to the exhibition

- **Jazz concert** : So What Compagny on July the 11th at 7:30 p.m.
- **Projection** : the Promenade des Anglais in the work of Matisse, from Monday to Friday at 2 p.m. and 3 :30 p.m.

Curator :
Marie-Thérèse Pulvéris de Seligny



Henri Matisse in 1929 on the balcony of his 4th floor apartment at 1 Place Charles-Félix, overlooking the Cours Saleya and the Promenade des Anglais. The Baie des Anges and the promenade pier casino can be seen in the background.
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Henri Matisse Woman on Couch or The Divan, [1921]
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm
Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris
© Succession H. Matisse ; Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée de l'Orangerie) / Michel Urtado / Benoit Touchard



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Admission price

Single ticket:
10 € - admission to a museum or group of museums

7-day tickets:
20 € - admission to all museums and galleries

Free ticket:
free admission upon proof of status.

Free tickets available for:

- children under 18
- jobseekers (monthly statement)
- recipients of the Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA) scheme benefits
- recipients of the Allocation de Solidarité Spécifique (ASS) and Allocation de Solidarité aux Personnes Agées (ASPA) scheme benefits
- severely disabled visitors and disabled ex-servicemen (plus one guide per person)
- students (upon proof of student status)
- museum curators
- journalists

Nice Museum Pass:
Free pass granting all Nice locals and residents of all municipalities in the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis free admission to all of Nice's municipal museums. This pass can be collected for free upon presentation of:

- ID (national identity card or valid passport)
- proof of address issued under 3 months ago

Guided tours:
Horaires des visites et réservation pour les groupes auprès des musées concernés.

- individual guided tour: 6 €
- group guided tour: 82 €

Individual guided tour: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 3:30 p.m.

USEFUL INFORMATIONS

