Henri Matisse: The dissolution of line and colour
2nd July - 2nd October 2011

This exhibition discusses the reasons for which Matisse perceived the sea, bodies of water and the sky as endless horizons of light and creation. The theme of water, in the history of art as in the works of Matisse, can be interpreted in several ways, including emotionally.

This theme allows us to observe the manner in which Matisse created a line, in stages, with successive rubbings out, in a sort of "graphical dissolution". The fluidity of the line, its relationship to the whiteness of the paper, the expression given to the model, to the daydreams of his sleeping figures, and to the representation of the body, all correspond to the constant search of the artist for the simplification of forms. In its arrangement of colours and planes, the picture may also achieve a fluidity of the pictorial space, which reaches new heights with the creation of the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence.

The donation by Mr and Mrs Claude Duthuit of the ceramic La Piscine, created from the gouached paper cut-out by Henri Matisse preserved in the MoMA in New York, will substantially enhance the Matisse Museum's collections. This ceramic will be exhibited at the completion of redevelopment works (2011-2012) but already forms the highlight of the exhibition, even presented in the paper version.
**Water and sky: endless horizons of creation**

From late 1916, Matisse decided to holiday in Nice on a regular basis. The town, the windows, the balconies overlooking the Baie des Anges and the hills around it became places of inspiration and creation.

The stable Mediterranean light, so different from the changing light of the North, gave the painter the opportunity to work continuously, both with landscapes and with models. "When I realised that every morning I would see this light, I couldn't believe my luck"... Although very fond of the light of Nice, throughout his life Matisse remained interested in discovering different types of light during his travels and holidays, and he considered this changing light to be a continual surprise:

"Having worked for forty years in European light and space, I have always dreamed of other proportions, which could be found, perhaps, in another hemisphere. I have always been conscious of another space inhabited by the subjects of my dreams. I was searching for something other than real space."

This led to Matisse visiting Tahiti for several months in 1930. Of this visit he retained wonderful memories of the light he encountered. "The light of the Pacific, of the Islands, is a deep golden goblet in which one peers."

This special light led him to experiment with the sensation of confusion between the spaces of sky and sea. This union of colour and form is illustrated in the drawing *Le requin et la mouette*, and in the great compositions, *Océanie, le ciel* and *Océanie, la mer*, from 1946-1947, in which fish, coral and birds mingle.

The artist had an ongoing intense relationship with nature, as is made clear from the photographs of the wide horizons and of vegetation which he took in Tahiti. The sky and large bodies of water are sources of inspiration, renewal and creation. The energy of the sea is translated in the 1952 work *La Vague* by the simple cut-out of a curved line from blue paper.

---

1 Comment quoted by Georges Salle, preface to the catalogue for the exhibition *Henri Matisse*, Galerie des Ponchettes, Nice, January-March 1950.
2 "Interview with Tériade", *L'Intransigeant*, 19th, 20th and 27th October 1930.
Water and its representations

The interest shown by Matisse in different lights and spaces is illustrated in his numerous representations of bodies of water, river banks and the sea. To follow the development of their handling, in drawing and painting, leads to an understanding of the works of Matisse: the search for the most direct expression of his emotions, the discovery of a new relationship between colour and line.

During 1891-1982, as a pupil of Gustave Moreau, Matisse and Albert Marquet visited the quays of the Seine to produce a series of rapid sketches. Later, from his studio at 19 Quai Saint-Michel, Matisse produced multiple perspectives in pencil, pastel and paint of the river and the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris.

In 1895, Matisse visited Brittany, staying in Beuzec-Cap-Sizun with the painter Émile Wéry, his neighbour from Quai Saint-Michel. He painted landscapes in a laborious manner with a sombre palette. The following summer, he travelled to Belle-Île-en-Mer, where he met the Australian artist John Russell, a friend of Monet and the Impressionists. With him, he worked from nature, representing the coastal landscapes in a new way, as demonstrated in Côte sauvage à Belle-Île-en-Mer: "[...] I was seduced by the brilliance of the pure colour. I returned from my trip with a passion for rainbow colours [...]".

In the same way, in 1898 the landscapes of Corsica and the area around Toulouse offered Matisse the opportunity for new research, emphasising interpretations in colour of the effects of light and shade.

In 1902, Matisse returned to his native region of Picardy, settling in Lesquielle-Saint-Germain, where he wandered and painted the countryside and the verdant banks around: Bord de canal près de Bohain or Arbres près d’une rivière.

The clarity of the light of the south of France had captivated Matisse, and this region was the site of intensely emotional discoveries, including the experience of pointillism with Signac at Saint-Tropez in 1904 and the discovery of Fauvism in 1905, during his visit to Collioure in the company of Derain: "[...] A few months later, working in front of a stimulating landscape, I thought of nothing but making my colours sing." From 1916-1917, at Nice, faced by new landscapes, Matisse attempted to capture a new spirit in his work. He produced many more paintings of interiors. The characteristic style of his works of this period is recognisable, with a carefully arranged setting surrounding a model and the effects of the light subdued by the shutters beyond. However, he in no way abandoned the landscape. He enjoyed walking through the hills around Nice to paint the landscapes of Mont Boron and Mont Alban which dominate the bay of Nice and the Nice area.

---

4 “Interview with Henri Matisse”, L’Art vivant, No. 18, 15th September 1925.
**Thematic biography**

*This biography highlights the interest which, in his constant research for a reconciliation between line and plane, line and colour, Matisse gave to bodies of water, rivers and coasts, and to bodies of light, which he captured in a different way each time. It has been drawn up with the invaluable collaboration of Wanda de Guébriant, head of the Archives Henri Matisse. Some quotes, in italics in the text, are, to date, unpublished.*

Born on 31st December 1869 at Cateau-Cambrésis, Matisse passed his childhood in Picardy, at Bohain-en-Vermandois. He died in Nice, nearly 85 years later. Between these two places, he undertook numerous voyages abroad, together with visits to several regions of France, where he painted landscapes with eminently different light intensities, concentrating in particular on coastlines and rivers.

Matisse discovered painting in 1890 during a period of convalescence.

At the Académie des Beaux Arts, he was a pupil of Gustave Moreau, who recommended copying old masters in the Louvre. Matisse also painted and drew from life in company with Albert Marquet. Notre-Dame cathedral and the Pont Saint-Michel were to become the even more common and preferred subjects of his studies after 1894 when he moved into the fifth floor of a building located between these two sites, on the Quai Saint-Michel.

During the summer of 1895, Émile Wéry, his fellow tenant, took him on a trip to Brittany. Until that point Matisse had been very skilled in the "art of grey" as is demonstrated by works such as *Village en Bretagne* (Nice, Musée Matisse), but now Matisse opened himself little by little to the Impressionist palette: "I was led to remark upon and to estimate the brilliance of the Impressionist palette, with its mix of prismatic colours [...] I return therefore with the idea of a new palette". In 1896 and 1897 Matisse returned to Brittany, to Belle-Ile-en-Mer, where he met John Russell, an Australian artist who was a friend of Monet and Van Gogh. These visits to Brittany represented a decisive stage in the genesis of his work. ""Matisse, my friend, [...] no longer thinks except through Claude Monet"", wrote Evenepoël to his father.

In January 1898, on the advice of Camille Pissarro, Matisse went to London on his honeymoon to see the paintings of Turner: "It seems to me that Turner must be the bridge between tradition and impressionism". In February, he travelled to Corsica, where he remained until July. Under the impact of the Mediterranean light, he abandoned himself without restraint to his passion for colour. ""It's exasperated painting [...] you know it well, because you warned me yourself in advance that it was 'epileptic'", commented Evenepoël, who ended with, "Well! Go on, then, luminist!"

From August 1898, at Toulouse and then at Fenouillet on the banks of the Garonne river, his touch seemed to become calmer, but his palette remained highly coloured. In *Les Gourgues* (1898, Nice, Musée Matisse), he applied himself to translating the reflections of light from foliage onto a body of water.

In 1899, Matisse acquired from Vollard the Cezanne canvas *Trois baigneuses*, which makes the connection between the representation of the human body and of water; a common theme

---

6 Interview with Pierre Courthion, 15th April 1941 (Archives Henri Matisse, later noted by AHM).
8 Letter of 6th June 1898 (AHM).
in the history of art. This painting would influence Matisse as much through the morphology of the bathers depicted as the mythological atmosphere of the river bank. During the same period, he bought drawings by Seurat and pastels by Redon, which bear witness to his growing interest for the absorption of contours and models.

Between 1900 and 1902, Matisse painted in the Bois de Boulogne and the Jardin du Luxembourg, and produced many views of Quai Saint-Michel and of Notre-Dame, in various different techniques; oil, pen and pastel. However, the artist's life was far from simple for this father of three with fragile health, and soon he was obliged to return to his family in the North, "where I am rather badly thought of," he wrote to his friend Biette in July 1903. He rented a house at Lesquielles-Saint-Germain, a verdant small village bordered by a watercourse "with smiling banks," near Bohain, where he painted various landscapes while dreaming of returning to the South of France. "I believe that I work twice as much there as in the North where the winter is so poor in terms of light."

In 1904, just after his personal exhibition at Vollard's gallery, he rented the villa La Ramade at Saint Tropez for 50 francs a month, and spent the summer there, soaking up neo-impressionism in the company of Paul Signac and Henri-Edmond Cross. But his venture into this artistic current only lasted a few months.

The following summer, Matisse painted at Collioure in the company of Derain. They worked on the same landscapes, which enabled them to impose a manner of painting and a new use of colour which was described as "fauve" ("fauves" = "wild beasts") during the following Salon d'Automne. "In front of a stimulating landscape, I thought of nothing but making my colours sing, without taking account of all the rules and prohibitions. From then on I composed my picture so as to plunge directly into an intertwining with colour." On his return, and still with the same ideas in mind, he hired a large studio on rue de Sèvres, where he composed Le Bonheur de vivre. He exhibited the work in March 1906 at the Salon des Indépendants, to the jeers of the public and the fury of Signac: "Oh, these pale pink tones! [...] They evoke [...] the multicoloured signs of ironmongers."

From May 1906 to September 1907, Matisse lived for a whole year in Collioure - he rented a house there by the year, which he kept on until 1916 - traversing the borders of the Mediterranean, and making short visits to Algeria (May 1906) and Italy (July 1907).

In 1909, after a summer at Cavalière, he moved to Issy-les Moulineaux to undertake large scale works in which he gave free rein to his search for decorative synthesis. But the short winter days of this Paris suburb only made his memories of the Mediterranean light more obsessive.

In January 1912, the painter set off for Tangiers with his wife Amélie, in the hope of discovering new clarity there. And in fact, after the beginning of the visit under "A deluge of

9 (AHM).
10 Lettre to Bussy, 31st July 1903 (AHM).
11 Ibid.
rain, which lasted more than a month\textsuperscript{14}, he discovered the humid light characteristic of a Moroccan spring, which he translated into several landscapes in soft, fluid tones. He returned to Morocco from October until the end of February 1913.

At the beginning of the First World War, after having considered moving to Collioure, where he had spent part of the summer, Matisse finally chose to remain in Paris, at Quai Saint-Michel.

In 1917, he acquired for himself, "A small car which I have bought and which allows me to easily transport myself and all my equipment into the woods\textsuperscript{15} and set up his easel in the surroundings of Issy-les-Moulineaux, Clamart, Trivaux (the lake) and at the crossroads of Malabry.

But his attraction for the South had not left him. In December 1917, after a short stay at Marseille in the company of Marquet, Matisse travelled to Nice to treat the bronchitis from which he was suffering, little suspecting the importance that this town and its region would have for his art.

As at Tangiers, it was only after a period of pouring rain, during which he was restricted to painting indoors, that he discovered the incomparable light of Nice and its surroundings. Fascinated by the garden of Harris, "It's the most beautiful thing I've seen; it reminded me in some way of the garden of Broux\textsuperscript{16}", he rented the villa des Alliés for the month of May 1918. "I will be at the heart of my work\textsuperscript{17}, and produced several landscapes representing the Villa Bleue and Mont Boron before returning to Paris for the summer.

Matisse would return to Nice the following winter, and would end up spending all of his winters there.

The style and composition of his Nice paintings are characteristic. The painter arranged his settings carefully, allowing the light to filter through the shutters, through which the blue of the sea can be glimpsed.

In summer 1920, he stayed on two occasions at Étretat, where he returned in 1921. Here he painted more than forty landscapes in all weathers.

On his return to Étretat in the autumn of 1921, he rented in Nice a first apartment in Place Charles-Felix, overlooking the flower market, before settling on the top floor of the same building, with the blue of the sea on the horizon. Other than his paintings of odalisques in exotic settings, which characterise the whole Nice period, he loved to travel through the region by car, with his daughter Marguerite and his model Henriette, who he painted in woodland settings along the Vallée du Loup. He also perfected his drawing technique, adding to innumerable drawings in pencil or pen more considered works using techniques such as stump or charcoal.

"I have often travelled in my imagination, and as the main aim of my work is the clarity of light [...] I promised myself [...] twenty years ago to go and see it\textsuperscript{18}.

This was how he set off for Oceania in 1930, via New York.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview with P. Courthion, 19th April 1941 (AHM).
\textsuperscript{15} Letter to Camoin, summer 1917 (AHM).
\textsuperscript{16} Letter to Amélie, 28th April (AHM).
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Interview with P. Courthion, 19th April 1941 (AHM).
He stayed there for six months, a period during which he experimented with the confusion of space between sky and sea as he dived into the turquoise blue of the lagoons. He brought back a multitude of photographs and forty drawings.

He was also fascinated by the United States, which he visited three times during 1930, and by the atmosphere of New York in particular and of American towns in general. "The light of New York is a thing of extraordinary clarity, pure as crystal". On his return in 1931, Matisse undertook the great decorative work La Danse, which was commissioned from him by Dr. Alfred Barnes for his foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania. The illustrations for the Poésies of Mallarmé, carried out at the same time, borrowed greatly from the voyage to Tahiti and the idea of the high seas.

But it was only four years later that the sensations of space and colour, so strongly felt during his voyage through Oceania, were to appear in a tangible manner in his work. This began in 1936 with the two "Fenêtres à Tahiti".

In 1938, seeking calm as much as fresh air, Matisse moved to the hill of Cimiez in an apartment in the Hotel Regina at Nice.

His stay here was disturbed by the announcement of the start of the Second World War: he was preparing to travel to Brazil when France fell in spring 1940.

After a detour through Bordeaux, Ciboure and Saint-Gaudens, he returned in October to the wide perspectives of the Bay of Nice. He then took up several works in progress, such as Nymphé dans la forêt – La Verduré (Nice, Musée Matisse), begun in 1935, whose mythological theme is related to the symbolism of water and sleep.

A serious operation immobilised him in 1941-1942.

During 1943, faced with the occupation of the Hotel Regina by the Germans, Matisse moved to the villa Le Rêve in Vence. Here he painted interiors whose windows opened out onto the landscape. The horizon is both that of the room containing the objects represented and the model, and that of the landscape which is kept separate by the window. Everything becomes a symbol, such as the branches of the palm tree in Nature morte aux grenades, 1947 (Nice, Musée Matisse). In its simplicity, the painting becomes the mirror of Matisse's universe, which he observed and constructed as he painted and drew, as is shown in the 1946 film by François Campaux, in which one sequence makes clear the fluidity of the artist's line as he produces a portrait.

In the same period, the souvenirs of his stay in Tahiti reappear again, as the source of large compositions in cut-out gouached paper. The sea and the sky - birds, fish, jellyfish - are here mingled as in Océanie, la mer (1946), and Océanie, le ciel, (1946-1947) which were turned into silkscreen prints (Nice, Musée Matisse), but also in Polynésie, le ciel (1946-1947, Paris, Mobilier National) and Polynésie, la mer (1946, Nice, Musée Matisse), executed in tapestry.

From this point on, Matisse worked on the materialisation of a pictorial and graphic space which "does not depend on its various proportions, but on a spiritual light which it reflects".
"I have for a long time been conscious of expressing myself by light or even in light, which seems to me like a block of crystal in which something takes place - it's only after having enjoyed for a long time the light of the sun that I have tried to express myself by the light of the spirit. It is in this universe that Matisse makes material the simplicity of his expression by the dissolution and abandonment of certain forms. "Things have become closer and have sung through the law of contrasts."

From 1948, Matisse was working on the creation of the Chapel in Vence, which was to be inaugurated in June 1951. "It is no longer a question of recalling souvenirs of the sea, the countryside, and so on. It is necessary to make constructions. It is the vibration of the individual which counts rather than the object which has produced an emotion: one does not render the material, but rather human emotion, a certain elevation of the spirit which can result from any sight."

But the Villa Le Rêve turned out to be too cramped for the execution of the Chapel project. Matisse returned definitively to the Hotel Regina in 1949.

In 1952, Matisse was unable to leave Nice during a particularly torrid summer. So he created for himself an aquatic universe to refresh himself mentally: he decorated the walls of his studio with a large fresco in gouached cut-out paper: *La Piscine*, which depicts swimmers basking in the waves.

The large work *Fleurs et fruits* (Nice, Musée Matisse), created two years before the death of the artist, illustrates the new direction that he was taking through its scale and creation of endless space: "As if I was going to produce a large-scale composition [...] As if I had my whole life before me... at least a whole other life... [...] in some paradise where I would create frescoes..."

Matisse died at Nice on 3rd November 1954 and was buried in the cemetery of Cimiez.

---

The daydreams of the model

Matisse, as the majority of classically trained artists, liked to paint and draw from models, who he placed in a setting composed of fabric, furniture, objects, and flowers in his apartment-studio.

"The painter must find himself before his model without a preconceived idea. Everything must come to his spirit as all of the scents of a landscape would come to him: those of the earth, the flowers associated with the play of the clouds, the movements of the trees and the different noises of the countryside."

To develop this atmosphere of "daydreaming" and meditation, the artist would observe the model for a long time in order to capture their most natural pose. Matisse thus often suggested that the model should read, watch the goldfish in their bowl or settle themselves comfortably in an armchair and take up a dreamy pose.

The alchemy between the model and the painter created a poetic universe whose richness permits numerous variations:
"The model is no more for me than a particular theme from which emerges bursts of lines or values which release my limited horizons."

26 Henri Matisse, preface to Portraits, Monte-Carlo, éditions André Sauret, 1954.
27 Ibid.
From daydreams to the dissolution of space and line

For Matisse, daydreams were part of the ephemeral perceptions which an artist feels when observing the posture and expression of his model.

"In this succession of moments which composes the superficial existence of beings and things, and which clothes them in changing appearances, so soon gone, one can seek a more real, more essential character, to which the artist clings to give a more durable interpretation of reality."  

For Matisse, this translation of a "more real character" resides in the actual conception of the work. For him, it is therefore "necessary to have, from the beginning, a clear vision of the whole."  

Matisse observed the model for *Nu dans un fauteuil, plante verte*, then drew her to understand her forms and contours until he could paint the subject in such a way that the work radiates her real character and emotions.

Matisse had complete understanding of his subject. He could now address himself to themes such as *Nymphé dans la forêt - La Verdure*, in relation to that of *Figure endormie* and the model's evanescence. The personality of the model is dissolved in a general pictorial harmony, metamorphosing and becoming the stuff of allegory which, although in the work of Matisse remaining entirely visual rather than progressing into dramaturgy, maintains the tension of the theme. This form of dissolution of the being, of the model and of the subject enable an enlargement of expression which allows to appear "emotion as directly as possible and by the simplest of means. The aim of painting is no longer to describe history, because that is in books [...] Through painting, the artist expresses his internal visions." 

"It's a long-drawn out work of reflection [...]. I have a woman's body to paint. First I think about the form; I give it grace, charm, and then it's a question of giving it something more. I shall condense the meaning of this body, by seeking its essential lines." This form of artistic introspection dissolves the barriers between the subject of the work, the model and the artist. "It is only on entering into the subject that one enters one's own skin. I have to create this Parakeet with coloured paper. Well, then! I become a parakeet. And I find myself in the work." 

In full possession of his subject, the painter could envisage the removal of some elements of his painting or drawing, in order to arrive, by the dissolution of forms, lines and colours, at the essence of his message, which, as in *Nature morte aux grenades*, is transmitted to the spectator through symbolism. "[...] new visual symbols which enter in turn into the shared language [...]"

The importance of an artist is measured in the quantity of new symbols that he has introduced into the visual language.

---

28 "Notes d'un peintre", *La Grande Revue*, t. 52, 25th December 1908.  
The fluidity of the body

In 1931, Matisse was approached, during a trip to the United States, by Dr. Albert Barnes, an art collector, to produce a composition which would integrate into the architecture of his foundation at Merion in Pennsylvania.

This composition was to become for Matisse a plastic subject, but also the opportunity to consider the manner in which to approach painting on a large scale.

For three years, Matisse worked in Nice, in a studio in Rue Désiré-Niel, on his composition, thirteen metres long by three metres high, "constantly moving like the figures on a chessboard, and modifying with scissors eleven coloured paper flats on the scale of the decoration, up to the moment when I obtained the balance which satisfied me."

The work, *La Danse*; one of many on the same subject by Matisse, consists in its original form of a circle formed by a round dance, recalling that of *Bonheur de vivre* (1905) or *La Danse* in Moscow (1910). The energetic pose of each dancer and the long-studied fluidity of the lines of their bodies create movement which occupies the spandrels above the high windows. Architecture and painting enter into a relationship to form a special space into which the composition settles perfectly.

Later on, in 1952, Matisse pursued his research in the installation of an art work in space using an acrobat as his theme. He translated the flexibility and strength of this body into the energy of a single line which filled, with its intensity and simplicity, the white space of the page.

With *Les Sirènes*, allegorical illustrations of France for the *Florilèges des Amours* by Ronsard (1948), Matisse once again produced a new graphical representation of the body. Beyond it, the flexibility of the lines mingles with the space around, creating an emotional universe which can be found in other works such as *Baigneuse dans les roseaux* and *La Piscine*, in 1952.

---

The fluidity of space: Tahiti

"I bathed in the lagoon. I swam around the coral in colours highlighted by the bright and dark accents of sea cucumbers. I plunged my head into the sea, transparent over the absinthe bottom of the lagoon, my eyes wide open... and then suddenly I lifted my head out of the water and viewed the brilliant whole. The contrasts 35 ..."

In 1930, Matisse spent three months in Tahiti, where he had gone to seek a different light to that of Europe. Unexpectedly, while bathing in the lagoons, he experienced a new sensation, that of the confusion between sky and sea.

This alliance of spaces was to become a source of inspiration for him, both for the graphical forms of the seabed and of birds, and for the experience of the infinite, which confirmed in him his desire to produce large-scale compositions.

Memories of Tahiti: Océanie, le ciel, Océanie, la mer

"This panel, printed on linen - white for the motifs and beige for the background - creates, with the second, a mural hanging composed during daydreams which appeared fifteen years after a trip to Oceania. There, the enchantment of the sky, sea, fish and coral in the lagoons initially plunged me into the inaction of total rapture. The local tones of objects had not changed, but their result, in the light of the Pacific, gave me a sensation similar to what I have felt when looking into the interior of a great golden cup. My eyes wide open, I absorbed everything, as a sponge absorbs liquid. It is only today that these marvels have come back to me with tenderness and accuracy and have allowed me, with some delectation, to produce the two panels in question."

36 *Labyrinthe* magazine, 23rd December 1946.
Presentation model of the ceramic La Piscine by Henri Matisse

The Town of Nice is planning a redevelopment of the modern entrance to the museum, on level -2, in order to present Matisse's monumental ceramic, La Piscine, which is the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Claude Duthuit.

While awaiting this redevelopment, a scale model of La Piscine has been created by the museum, in order to give viewers a perception enabling them to evaluate the monumental dimension of this ceramic.

La Piscine is comprised of two separate compositions, each around eight and a half metres long by two and a half metres high, with a one metre return at each end. Placed opposite each other, the two compositions create a space which the visitor crosses.

Claude Duthuit, grandson of Henri Matisse, has had La Piscine produced in ceramic by the ceramist Hans Spinner37 This creation is comprised of various elements of blue and white ceramic inserted in ten panels of lava stone (eight for the length of the work and one each for the two returns).

Presented in this room are some of the paper patterns, on loan from a private collection, which served for the creation of the work in ceramic. Gouached blue paper was cut following the lines of the original work. These motifs were placed in the required locations.

The donation of Mr. and Mrs. Claude Duthuit was made to the Town of Nice for the benefit of the Musée Matisse, on 14th February 2011, and accepted by the Town Council on 8th April 2011.

The redevelopment of the space where this ceramic will be exhibited is planned to take place during 2011 and 2012.

37 Well-known ceramist who has produced, using this technique, works for Juan Miró, and more recently Pierre Alechinsky, Anthony Caro, Eduardo Chillida and Antoni Tapiès.
The fluidity of water

From 1946, Matisse sought to express himself through large-scale compositions. He therefore created three works, to be interpreted in tapestry, which were intended for wall decoration: *La Femme au luth*, *Polynésie, le ciel* and *Polynésie, la mer*.

Georges Fontaine, administrator of the Mobilier national and the Manufactures des Gobelins et de Beauvais, contacted Matisse to commission works by him. Initially, the painter proposed the creation of *Océanie, le ciel* and *Océanie, la mer* as tapestries. The difficulty of obtaining a sustainable balance between the white and beige forced Matisse to give up this project, which would later be carried out as a silkscreen print by Zika Ascher.

At the request of Georges Fontaine, Matisse began to work with a turquoise and a dark blue, of which he said: "with ugly colours, I shall make beauty". He cut from paper large white birds, seaweeds and coral, and surrounded the composition with a border of plants, recalling the lagoons of Tahiti. For the shape of the birds, Matisse took inspiration from the flight of the gulls swirling at the mouth of the Paillon river on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice. *Polynésie, le ciel* and *Polynésie, la mer* were produced in tapestry in a few weeks. The nuances of the whiteness of the superimposed cut-out papers was faithfully reproduced.

The works of Matisse in gouached paper cut-outs were always to be peopled by these aquatic and plant forms. Thus, still impressed by the memory of the lagoons, Matisse created aquatic forms for plates XVII and XIX, *Le Lagon*, of the illustrated book *Jazz* (1947).
Views on contemporary art

The exhibition "Henri Matisse: the dissolution of line and colour" gives the opportunity to present two works from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art and Contemporary Art (MAMAC) of Nice as examples of the development of this theme in contemporary art. The painting *Cézanne – Sainte Victoire – Gris* by Gérard Gasiorowski illustrates the dissolution of form, while the composition *Sans titre* by Albert Chubac that of colour.

In *Cézanne – Sainte Victoire – Gris* (1983), Gérard Gasiorowski represents a landscape from the region of Aix, which he hides from view with brush strokes of grey paint. The structure of the ochre-coloured houses located at the foot of the mountain of Saint-Victoire is dissolved in a space creating a new reality, as Cézanne did in his time. Even the title of this painting proves the attachment of the artist to art history, to which he makes reference in his expression, despite the obliterations and over-paintings. The painter wavers between abstraction and figuration. He deconstructs the forms, of which he retains some few details. The spirit of dissolution inhabits the works of Gérard Gasiorowski. In 1975, the artist began to employ the principle of fiction-painting, which led him to hide his own personality and no longer sign his works.

From a generation in which painting was deconstructed, the work of Gérard Gasiorowski can nevertheless claim to follow in the tradition of figurative painting. The artist questions the act of painting and the problem of the achievement of a work.

The painting *Sans titre* (1962) by Albert Chubac reminds us that the artist was initially influenced by Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró and Fernand Léger, progressing in a decisive manner by the abstraction of Nicolas de Staël, while demonstrating an interest in pictorial gestures since the 1950s. In this way, *Sans titre* is the expression of the choice of a few primary and secondary colours, used on a white background. By the use of this reduced colour range, from which black is absent, the painter seeks to express himself with the minimum of means.

His painting style, in line from 1952 with the abstraction of Nicolas de Staël, Hans Hartung and Georges Mathieu, is described by the critic Michel Tapié as "Informal art", in opposition to geometric or formal abstraction. The vibration produced by the distribution of the colours on the white surface of the canvas creates a diffuse pictorial space based on the effects of the dissolution of line and colour.

---

38 The choice of works by Gérard Gasiorowski and Albert Chubac has been made by Gilbert Perlein, head conservator at MAMAC, and Michèle Brun, conservation officer. These two loans are part of the system of exchanges between Nice museums. Under this scheme, the Musée Matisse will make available two works by Matisse in cut-out gouached paper, *Danseuse créole* and *Femme à l’amphore*, for the MAMAC exhibition *La couleur en avant*, in the context of "Contemporary Art and the Côte d’Azur, 1951-2011, A territory for experimentation".


The Chapel of the Rosary in Vence

In 1947, Matisse undertook the design and execution of the Chapel of the Rosary for the Community of Dominicans in Vence. The genesis of this work began in 1941, with the meeting of Henri Matisse and Monique Bourgeois, who would later take the veil and become Sister Jacques-Marie.

In 1941, after a serious operation undergone in Lyon, the seventy-three year old Henri Matisse returned to the Hotel Regina in Nice. A student nurse, Monique Bourgeois, was engaged to care for him. Matisse appreciated her character and personality. He painted and drew her portrait several times. In 1943, the painter met her again, while she was convalescing at the Dominican Lacordaire centre at Vence, near the villa Le Rêve where he was then living. In 1946, after having taken the name of Sister Jacques-Marie, she returned to Vence and met Matisse once again. She told him of the desire of the community to build a chapel. Sister Jacques-Marie showed the painter a sketch of a stained-glass window that she had drawn, which represented an Assumption.

In 1947, having decided to undertake the architectural design of the chapel, Matisse began working on the interior and exterior decoration: roof, bell tower, wall decoration, stained-glass windows, priestly garments and liturgical objects. When the Chapel at Vence was inaugurated in June 1951, Matisse was extremely ill and could not attend. He wrote to Bishop Rémond of Nice.

"This work has required from me four years of exclusive and assiduous work, and it is the result of my whole active life. I consider it, despite all of its imperfections, as my master work."

The dissolution of colour in light

"I have for a long time been conscious of expressing myself by light or even in light, which seems to me like a block of crystal in which something takes place - it's only after having enjoyed for a long time the light of the sun that I have tried to express myself by the light of the spirit."

It is in this bright space that Matisse gives shape to his perception of the world and which establishes an limitless relationship between line and colour, as in his water-colours of 1905. Matisse succeeded in escaping from the space of the picture to find a new spirit of creation: "Being caught by the light, I have frequently asked myself, as I escaped spiritually from the small space surrounding my motif [...] if I was also escaping from the space to be found behind the motif of the picture, to feel in spirit above myself, above motif, studio, even home; a cosmic space in which one no longer feels the walls, any more than do the fish in the sea."

The personal dimension of the creator allowed him to surpass the sensation offered by the visible to create his own space, a space which took on a spiritual character. A great freedom from sentiment and creation led Matisse to mingle light and space on a single surface. The light is both colour and extent. The creation in 1947 of the stained-glass windows of the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence was the result of the use of colour as a source of light and space.

---

41 June 1951, extract from the letter by Henri Matisse to Bishop Rémond of Nice, read by Father Couturier during the inauguration of the Chapel, and published in "L'Art Sacré", no. 11-12, July-August 1951.
43 Ibid.
Matisse discovered the union between space and light by transcending the simple vision of an object, the stained-glass window, to creates a spiritual space.
Esper Lucat, hope in the light

Comment by Henri Matisse reported by Father Marie-Alain Couturier⁴⁴:

"We speak of the black chasuble: I tell him that it is not a sad chasuble but a chasuble of resurrection. He (Matisse) answers me: 'That is what is required, isn't it? Death is not the end of everything, it's a door opening.' Immediately his eyes fill with tears."

By choosing ears of wheat as the motif for the ornamentation of the black chasuble, Matisse reclaimed the traditional representation of life, growth and hope. The ear of wheat is a future. It stems from a time of gestation, in the gloom of the earth that buries it, and from the revelation in the light that makes it flourish. Since Antiquity, the ear of wheat has become symbolic in many ways. As the symbol of the god Osiris who was resurrected after having been assassinated and thrown into the Nile, the ear of wheat, buried in the alluvial earth, will revive as soon as the floods arrive. Thus, from the black fabric of the chasuble erupts the brilliance of the ears of wheat which Matisse arranges in a dynamic manner on each side of the cross and of the inscription "Esper lucat". This expression, in old Provençal, means, "the eyes are opened to the light". Thus, opening the eyes to eternal life becomes linked with the representation of wheat, which, in the Christian West, symbolises the passage from ignorance to revelation, in the same way as the sharing of bread between men.

The contrast between the black and the white, far from symbolising sadness, makes the chasuble brilliant. It is used in the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence on Good Friday and for the Office of the Dead.

⁴⁴ Comment on the Chapel at Vence reported by Marie-Alain Couturier, extracts from Se garder libre, Paris, éditions du cerf, 1962.