

1953 - 2023. HISTORY OF A COLLECTION

The Musée Matisse is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this year. To mark the occasion, the museum’s collection is being displayed on the ground floor of the Villa des Arènes (level 0 of the museum) through the prism of its history.

In the immediate post-war period, alongside artists such as Pierre Bonnard and art world personalities including Jean Cassou, Bernard Dorival and Georges Salles, Henri Matisse put his reputation to work for the Union Méditerranéenne pour l’Art Moderne (UMAM), an association created in 1946 to support contemporary art. He was involved in creating the Galerie des Ponchettes, Nice’s first modern art museum, inaugurated in 1950 with a major retrospective of his work, and played an active role in disseminating modern art on the Côte d’Azur.



View of the museum in 1963. Musée Matisse Nice Archives

In 1953, a year before his death, Matisse donated a collection of works to the City of Nice to create a monographic museum. This donation, supplemented by successive bequests and ongoing donations from his heirs right up to the present day, made it possible to create the museum.

The history of the collection, installed in 1963 in the Villa des Arènes which was extended in 1993 by the architect Jean-François Bodin, is inextricably linked to the museum’s institutional, municipal and administrative history, as well as the dynamics of the relationship between the State and the local authorities that have shaped its operations. The museum’s place in the landscape of French and international museum institutions is a fertile field of study, opening up new avenues of research, which this exhibition aims to explore.

MUSÉE MATISSE

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Summer opening times:

Open every day from 10 am to 6 pm except Tuesday

The Musée Matisse Nice houses a collection of over 600 works of art. The museum has a policy of regularly rotating this exceptional permanent collection, curating small themed displays and large temporary exhibitions to constantly bring fresh perspective to Matisse’s work. Rotations help us turn each of your visits into a new experience!

AROUND THE EXHIBITION « MATISSE IN THE 1930S »

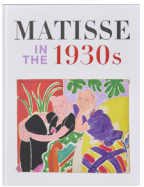


Scan the QR code to discover the programme of visits, workshops and other activities and events organised in connection with the exhibition.

ACTIVITY BOOKLET (FOR FAMILIES)

Families are invited to pick up a free activity booklet (designed for children aged 7 and over) at the museum reception desk.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE



Available in English
Matisse in the 1930s
Published by Yales University Press, in association with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Musée de l’Orangerie and Musée Matisse Nice
256 pages - 50 \$

MUSEUM SHOP

Level -1 of the museum and online at arteum.com

AROUND THE MUSEUM

Henri Matisse’s grave (in the monastery’s cemetery)
Nice-Cimiez Archaeology Museum
“Jardin des Arènes” (a garden planted with centuries-old olive trees next to the Roman arena)
Cimiez Monastery and its garden

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WEBSITE www.musee-matisse-nice.org

Engage with our collection online and get access to exclusive content.



HENRI MATISSE, LA GRANDE ROBE BLEUE ET MIMOSA, 1937, HUILE SUR TOILE, 192,7 X 137 CM, PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF MRS. JOHN WINTERSTEEN © SUCCESSION H. MATISSE | PHOTO © PMA - JOSEPH HU

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JUNE > SEPTEMBER 2023

MATISSE IN THE 1930s

THROUGH THE LENS OF *CAHIERS D'ART*

Exhibition presented from
23 June to 24 September 2023

The exhibition is organised with the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Henri Matisse's work is marked by significant milestones that demonstrate his determination never to remain confined to one particular style. After the period of Nice interiors and odalisques, the 1930s were a turning point, a time of maturity.

Crowned with success, however, Matisse did not want to be seen as an artist who had arrived, preferring to run the risk of the unknown once again. This unknown took pictorial form with the major challenge of creating the mural composition of *La Danse (The Dance)* for the Barnes Foundation, to which he devoted himself between 1930 and 1933. He gave up easel painting to tackle large-scale work, opening himself to other dimensions. His art underwent a profound transformation, both in its architectural ambition and in his ability to produce on a larger scale, freed from the limits of the frame.



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Henri Matisse's studio, Place Charles-Félix, 1938. Pinned to the wall are in-progress photographs of *La Danse*. Photograph by Roger Schall. © Collection Schall

This exhibition aims to explore the decade of the 1930s and highlight the transformation taking place in his work. It focuses on the artist's studios in Nice, defined as a conceptual and physical framework for creativity, and on the innovative procedures invented by the artist to meet the demands of a large format.

The exhibition also revisits Matisse's presence in the journal *Cahiers d'Art*, placing his work in the context of the international avant-garde and the great debates that enlivened it. Emerging in its early days in the wake of Cubism, the magazine adopted an aesthetic, universalist, and trans-historical approach that nourished the artist's thinking and his taste, far removed from the classical heritage, for extra-Western and ancient art.

PAINTING IN CRISIS

Henri Matisse had been living in his apartment-studio on Place Charles-Félix since 1924. He organised the premises as a theatrical space filled with props, oriental furniture, African velvets, and screens to stage his odalisques. The two 1927 odalisques in the Musée de l'Orangerie and the Musée Matisse in Nice mark the apogee of this subject. From then on, the artist never ceased breaking away from this archetype which had contributed so much to his success. He entered a period of crisis and scarcely painted at all or only with great difficulty.

He found his mode of expression in other practices: sculpture, drawing, and engraving. In his drawings and etchings, notably the important series of etchings from 1929, he allowed himself great freedom in integrating the figure into space.

HENRI MATISSE'S WORLD TOUR

For Matisse, the revival of the 1930s began with a period away from home, during which he set sail for the USA and Polynesia. For the first time, he was not working. As mnemonic devices, he used drawings, photographs, letters and postcards to record the sensations, colours, shapes and scents that would nourish his work and his imagination for many years to come.

He returned to New York twice more that year, each time by boat. The City was a hotbed of energy that he hoped would help him get out of the rut in which he found himself. Most of his letters and interviews emphasised the revitalising effect of the New World.

In New York, with its light and architecture, he experienced a feeling of lightness that he associated "with a sensation of deliverance..., of freedom, through the possession of a larger space." (letter to Amélie, March 6, 1930, Archives Henri Matisse). These stays in New York also gave him the opportunity to discover African-American culture through the jazz he listened to in Harlem clubs.

DRAWING AND THE AUTOMATISM METHOD

The daily practice of drawing became essential for Matisse during the 1930s. Through drawing, he allowed himself every freedom and developed his own method of improvisation. He distinguished between observational drawing with shaded charcoal, a conscious phase during which he immersed himself in the physical presence of the model, and improvised line drawing, carried out in bursts of performative creativity, with no possibility of repentance. His psychic approach to drawing attracted the attention of the Surrealists.

In 1936, the artist designed the cover of a special issue of the magazine *Cahiers d'Art* dedicated to these recent drawings. In the text he published in this issue, Christian Zervos, founder of the journal, made Matisse a precursor of automatism.

THE WINTER GARDEN STUDIO

Accessories in the apartment-studio on Cours Saleya and then in the vast spaces of the Régina, where the artist moved in 1938, became more contemporary. The oriental bric-a-brac disappeared in favour of fashionable dresses, coats and hats, while the Romanian blouse made its entrance.

Matisse drew on his constant dialogue with his surroundings – familiar objects and models – to create a kind of meditative journey. Everything that could nourish a sensation was therefore preferred. After he returned from the Pacific, which provided a reservoir of new impressions, the studio took on the appearance of a winter garden. The philodendron, a prolific plant, is the most obvious sign of this, present in many works of the period. This profusion, imbued with memories of Oceania, was matched by the spatial quality of the colours, which had regained the expansive character Matisse had achieved in certain works from the pre-1914 period.

THE STAGES OF PAINTING

Two major works from the period, *Grand nu couché (Nu rose) (Large Reclining Nude)* and *La Grande Robe bleue et mimosas (Woman in Blue)* are presented here, as they were in Matisse's studio, against a background of wallpaper imitating a tiled floor. Far from being an anecdotal decoration, this grid testifies to the importance of scale in the treatment of the figure, which acquired an increasingly monumental character regardless of format. To achieve this, Matisse developed an original working method, already used for the mural composition of *La Danse (The Dance)*: he had the work photographed at each stage he considered conclusive and kept a record of the parts he erased as the painting progressed. Several publications were devoted to this new approach at the time, including the journal *Cahiers d'Art*, whose pages revealed the stages of *La Danse* and *Le Chant (The Song)*.

METAMORPHOSIS OF THE DANCE

Painted sketches, drawings and photographs of the various stages of *La Danse* are exhibited together in order to follow the genesis of the work. The full-size sketch of the central figure in the first version of *La Danse*, illustrates the scale of the surface to be covered, which is 13 metres long and 3 metres high. Matisse insisted on working to scale to preserve the rhythm of his own body's performative movement and to validate the visual effectiveness of the flat tints that determine the figures and background.

Photographs of the successive states of *La Danse* show the tracings and the multitude of gouache-painted papers, mobile elements that Matisse's assistant Lydia Delectorskaya adjusted and moved according to the proportions of the figures. This extraordinary mosaic of moving papers evolved over the days, then months. The photograph reveals the excessiveness of the work, which lies as much in its size as in its transitory dimension. It is about something continually in progress, whose profound meaning lies in this dynamic incompleteness.

THE SPACE OF THE BOOK

Matisse worked simultaneously on *La Danse* and the illustrations for Mallarmé's *Poésies*, published in October 1932. These two projects were intimately linked in their architectural dimension. Matisse conceived the book as a totality, an architecture made up of elements that balance each other, particularly the double-page spread in which the typographic block and the illustrated page respond to each other.

This commission, like that of the The Limited Editions Club, which asked him to illustrate Joyce's *Ulysses*, was an opportunity for the painter to return to mythological themes, in particular the motif of the faun and the nymph, abandoned since the Fauvist period. Considering that "Joyce's spirit cannot be translated visually", and having not read the work, which was banned in the United States and impossible to find in France, Matisse used the *Odyssey* as a starting point for six etchings. This choice confirms the broader interest he shared with Zervos, the director of *Cahiers d'Art*, in the culture of archaic Greece, which he opposes to the canons of classical antiquity, devoid of emotion in his view.

FAUVISM REVIVED

The 1930s were a turning point for Matisse, during which he returned to the founding principles of his art at the time of Fauvism. From *La Danse* onwards, he returned to the decorative and architectural ambitions of his major works of the 1904-1917 period.

The publication of Georges Duthuit's extended essay on Fauvism in *Cahiers d'Art* radically renewed the approach to the movement while at the same time providing a theoretical framework for the transformation wrought by Matisse. "Our canvas," he explains, "introduces a new element in the room it enters. It changes the lighting. The walls recede..." (*Cahiers d'Art*, 1931). There is no better way of expressing the aim the artist set himself: to turn the painting back into a surface for interaction, a vector of energy capable of creating a stimulating environment that goes far beyond the confines of its frame.