

PRESS KIT

EXHIBITION

TOM WESSELMANN AFTER MATISSE

24 february – 29 may 2023

Curated by Claudine Grammont, director of the Musée Matisse Nice

With his *Great American Nudes* series from the 1960s, Tom Wesselmann turned the Matissian odalisque into a pop icon. Subsequently, Matisse's work remained a central reference in his search for visual effectiveness and overload.

Through a selection of forty-one artworks, the exhibition *Tom Wesselmann. After Matisse* explores the multiple ways in which the artist expressed his admiration for Matisse, from his first collages in 1959 to his last works, the *Sunset Nudes* series in the 2000s. They reflect different modes of appropriation: works based on Matisse, direct quotations, or, more profoundly, a Matissian conception of colour and surface.

The exhibition investigates Wesselmann's creative processes in the studio and helps to understand the elaborate technique of collage or 3D drawing he used, showing how attentive he was to the question of scale, in small formats as in large-size works. It brings together four significant series of works which testify to the dialogue between this major American Pop artist and Henri Matisse: collages, *Great American Nudes*, *Steel Drawings* and *Sunset Nudes*.

The exhibition was curated in collaboration with the Estate of Tom Wesselmann and with the support of the Almine Rech Gallery.

ALMINE RECH

Forthcoming catalogue with essays by
Gail Stavitsky and Claudine Grammont
and a conversation with Susan Davidson.

Claudine Grammont
Director

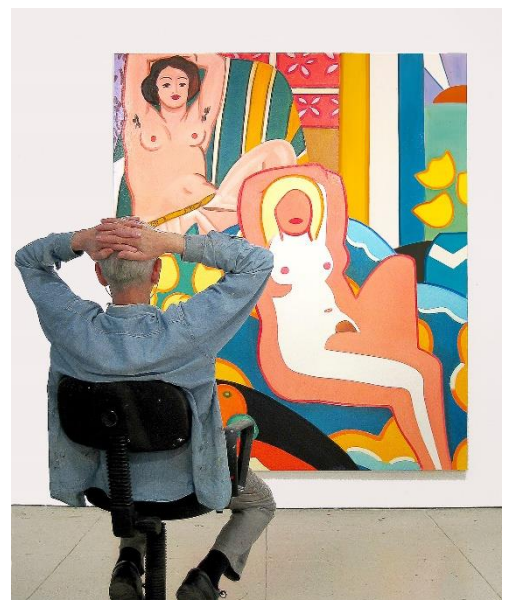
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Tom Wesselmann studying *Sunset Nude*
with Matisse *Odalisque*, 2002

© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp,
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Photo © Kate Wesselmann





Tom Wesselmann, *After Matisse*, 1959, pastel, collage and staples on composition board, 81,3 x 61 cm
© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023
Photo © Jeffrey Sturges

SECTIONS OF THE EXHIBITION

First Collages

When Tom Wesselmann moved to New York in 1956 to attend Cooper Union, Henri Matisse, who had died in 1954, was still quite present on the American art scene and his work still felt very timely. While it is difficult to identify the first contacts that Wesselmann had with the French artist's work, there were numerous such opportunities, both at MoMA and in galleries. In addition, the boom in the production of colour postcards and posters helped circulating the artist's work. The popularisation of Matisse interested Wesselmann more than the original works to which he could have access. At this key moment in his career, the example of Matisse appeared as a kind of distraction from abstract expressionism, from which he was seeking to distance himself. "I learned a lot from Matisse," he explained. "I remember spending hours studying reproductions of his paintings. In imaginary conversations, I wanted to get him to tell me why he made each element the way he did." (Quoted in John Rublowsky, *Pop Art*, New York, Basic Books, 1965, p.131)



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #1*, 1961, mixed media and collage on board, 121,9 x 121,9 cm
© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023
Photo © Jeffrey Sturges

Great American Nudes

In his famous *Great American Nudes* series started in 1961, Wesselmann went even further in this process of assimilating Matisse, and it turned out to be increasingly sophisticated. He was specifically interested in the French artist through the theme of the nude, or more precisely the nude figure in a domestic interior, with a highly erotic quality. What took precedence for him was the search for a form of visual excitation, of retinal titillation, whether it came from a confrontation of colours that were increasingly smooth and garish or from a whole range of popular, trivial imagery, such as pin-ups, which came directly from the mass media, posters, magazines, etc. The *Great American Nudes* series thus presents itself as an Americanisation of the Western tradition of the nude, whose Matissian stereotype found itself transposed into the cultural context of the 1960s.

"Wesselmann, he wrote in his autobiography, wanted works that explode on the wall. Matisse was an important influence in this respect. To Wesselmann, Matisse's full use of all the components of a painting – colour, shape, line, texture, etc. – offered the most promise of realising fully the visual intensity of the elements while at the same time keeping some sense of the realness of the situation depicted." (Slim Stealingworth, *Tom Wesselmann*, New York, Abbeville, 1980, p. 17)



Tom Wesselmann, *Monica with Tulips*, 1989, enamel on cut-out aluminum, 144,8 x 182,9 cm
© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023
Photo © Jeffrey Sturges

Monica and Steel Drawings

References to Matisse subsequently disappeared from Wesselmann's art and only resurfaced twenty years later. In the 1980s, Matisse reappeared through direct quotation, or, once again, through processes that recall his own. In the series with Monica, works by Matisse appeared behind the model. They were not very recognizable, for they were most often very schematically or even only partially reproduced. Now a familiar figure in the studio, Matisse slipped more surreptitiously into Wesselmann's work through his sculpture *Nu couché II* which also appeared in various compositions.



Tom Wesselmann, *Blue Dance*, 1996/2002, oil on cut-out aluminum, 210,8 x 294,6 x 12,7 cm
© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023
Photo © Jeffrey Sturges

For the *Monica* series, Wesselmann used the process of steel drawings, drawings on cut-out aluminium or steel. The artist used all the freedom and fluidity of drawing with marker or ink on chrome coat paper, which was then enlarged by projection before being produced in steel cut with a laser. He then drew on the steel with charcoal or paint, if the work was in colour. Seen from the right distance, this relief drawing created the illusion of a drawing produced directly on the wall, like Matisse's large ink brush drawings. This spontaneity produced by various mechanical or even computerised processes was an elaborate way of pursuing his exploration of reproducibility in its formal potential, even conceiving of it in three dimensions. In a more elaborate way, this would also give rise to *Blue Dance* (1996/2000).

Sunset Nudes



Tom Wesselmann, *Man Ray at the Dance*, 2004, oil on canvas, 248,9 x 188 cm

© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023
Photo © Jeffrey Sturges

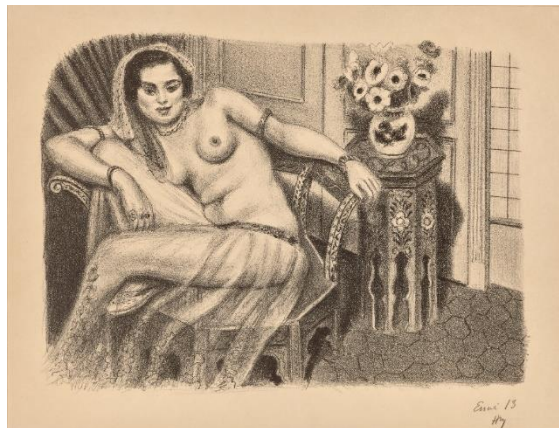
Toward the end of his life, Wesselmann produced a series of paintings that are his last homage to Matisse, *Sunset Nudes*. These large-scale compositions produced from 2002 to 2004 are also a kind of retrospective movement regarding his own work, because he seems here to return to the eclectic collages of the 60s with Matisse as a background, an image that subsequently became so familiar in his work. In *Man Ray at the Dance*, Wesselmann associates *La Danse* by Matisse with a female nude whose pose is inspired by a photograph by André Kertész, *Danseuse satirique* (1926). This visual collage is reminiscent of the mise en abyme effect Matisse used, depicting one artwork within another. In *Sunset Nude with Matisse Odalisque* (2003), Wesselmann scales up one of the artist's very famous odalisques whose posture he reproduces with one of his own figures associated with a still life and a sunset as a backdrop.

Looking at Odalisques Again

The last section of the exhibition returns, by way of conclusion, to the Matissian odalisque. It shows how Tom Wesselmann's Pop assimilation of Matisse's works allows us to look at these odalisques differently, placing them in the context of popular visual culture in the 1920s.



Tom Wesselmann, *Sunset Nude with Matisse Odalisque*, 2003, oil on canvas, 304,8 x 254 cm
© Estate of Tom Wesselmann / Adagp, Paris, 2023



Henri Matisse, *Hindoue à la jupe de tulle*, 1929, lithograph on paper, 36,2 x 49,6 cm, Musée Matisse Nice

© Succession H. Matisse
Photo © François Fernandez

LE MUSÉE MATISSE DE NICE

A museum that is part of a major heritage site

Located on top of a hill, the Musée Matisse is part of the vast heritage complex of Cimiez, the former Roman city of Cemenelum which became the central feature of Nice's development into a winter resort town in the 19th and 20th centuries. The city is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The museum, inaugurated in 1963, consists of a 17th century villa which was revamped and extended with a new wing by the architect Jean-François Bodin between 1987 and 1993. It sits in the middle of a public garden and stands in harmony with the surrounding area, offering the public a simple and engaging introduction to Henri Matisse's work.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

musee-matisse-nice.org

Open daily except on
Tuesdays
from 10 am to 5 pm from
November 1st to April 30th
from 10 am to 6 pm from May
2nd to October 31st

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The museum shop offers a
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the French Riviera.

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HÔTEL BEAU RIVAGE
★★★★

A unique collection

The collection which comprises works donated to the city by the artist and his heirs is displayed in a 900 square meters exhibition space. Its presentation helps the public to experience Matisse's art more fully and measure the importance of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century.

In close proximity to the studios where Matisse created most of his work, the museum holds a large collection of his personal objects made accessible to everyone through a chronological and multidisciplinary curatorial approach which sparks stimulating dialogues between art movements, techniques, and civilisations.



Exterior view of the Musée Matisse Nice
Photo © François Fernandez

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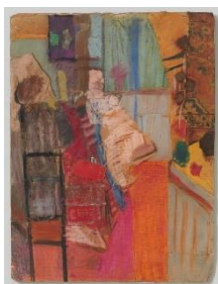
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VISUALS FOR THE PRESS



Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude #1*, 1961, mixed media and collage on board, 121,9 x 121,9 cm

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Tom Wesselmann, *After Matisse*, 1959, pastel, collage and staples on composition board, 81,3 x 61 cm

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Henri Matisse, *Hindoue à la jupe de tulle*, 1929, lithograph on paper, 36,2 x 49,6 cm, Musée Matisse Nice

© Succession H. Matisse
Photo © François Fernandez



Henri Matisse, *Nu couché II*, Nice, 1927, bronze, 29 x 51,5 x 16,5 cm, gift of Madame Jean Matisse to the French state on deposit at the Musée Matisse Nice, 1978, musée d'Orsay, Paris

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Photo © François Fernandez

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