HENRI MATISSE. THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS
CHRONOLOGY



Henri Matisse in the Grand Atelier at the Régina, Nice, 26 June 1949. Photo © Lucien Hervé

1947

December: First meeting with Brother Rayssiguier, a young Dominican and amateur architect who was convalescing in Vence.

First in-depth discussion of the overall project for the Chapel of the Rosary. Matisse expresses the desire to design the entire chapel. Sister Jacques-Marie, his former nurse, who he identifies as the initiator of the project, now acted as an intermediary between the artist and her superiors.

1948

April: First mention of the interior model of the chapel, whose windows Matisse covered with "spaced splashes of color" to represent stained glass.

The artist decides on the principle of a Stations of the Cross drawn on a single panel. He decides to do it "graffiti style, in black". First studies in a notebook.

May: Matisse envisages "huge drawings in black for the walls opposite the windows [...] on white ceramic". He counts "on the colored reflections from the windows enriching them with delicate tones, depending on the changing time of day."

Summer: Matisse considers various aspects of the chapel, from its overall plan (ceiling height, dimensions of the bell) to technical details such as the heating system and the shape of the altar.

November: The sketch for *The Stations of the Cross* is finished.

Matisse places the photographs of the panels of *The Stations of the Cross*, the *Virgin and Child*, and *Saint Dominic* in the model.

December: Matisse leafs through and comments with Rayssiguier on an issue of *Verve* (vol. III, no. 11) reproducing Étienne Chevalier's *Book of hours* painted by Jean Fouquet. He compares certain compositions to Giotto's frescoes.

Matisse asks Rayssiguier and Rouveyre about the iconography of Saint Veronica and if it's alright to turn Veronica's hands into flowers.

1949

Early January: Matisse leaves Villa Le Rêve, which he had been renting since July 1943, and returns to his apartment-studio at the Régina in Nice.

Early February: He begins a third version of the stained-glass windows, which he ultimately chooses, *The Tree of Life*.

15 March: Matisse writes to Father Couturier to announce that he has finished the stained-glass windows. "I'm about to start doing studies for the panel of the Virgin. By Easter I'll have the surface for the two tiles [murals] of the Virgin or the Stations of the Cross —and Saint Dominic".

2 April: Matisse writes to Father Couturier: "I'm now working feverishly on the Stations of the Cross."

23 April: Matisse notes in his diary: "At noon, Bérard with print of the Stations of the Cross." This name appears regularly in his diaries, confirming the importance Matisse attached to having his work photographed, allowing him to keep track of his progress. Other photographers will come and capture his work: Hélène Adant, Lucien Hervé, Robert Capa, Alexander Liberman.

Mid-May: Matisse draws a series of images of Saint Dominic directly on the walls of the studio.

End of June: The stained-glass artist Bony and the ceramist Bourdillon were commissioned to execute the stained-glass windows and the three ceramic murals. Matisse is slowed down and frustrated by the disaster of broken ceramic tiles following firing tests carried out before drawing on them.

4 November: "I am still working on the chapel. It is a big problem that I think I have solved, the problem of a lifetime's work... I have to juggle and maintain an expressive balance between two forces, the color of the stained glass on the right side and the black and white on the entire left side, which covers the same amount of surface area... It is a very delicate and subtle process, and I believe I have mastered it."

12 December: Laying of the chapel's foundation stone.

1950

14 February: Matisse writes: "I'm working on the Stations of the Cross, which will turn out well, I hope. It's no longer a compilation of compartmentalized scenes, but a great drama organized architecturally."

While conversing with Sister Jacques-Marie, Matisse justifies the difference between the charcoal sketch and the ceramic panel: "If I had used all of the studies I'd done for the Stations of the Cross, you would have had 14 little pictures, one next to the other without any connection, whereas the Way of the Cross is really a drama in which everything is interconnected. The Stations are linked and can't be separated. Everything is centered around the cross: 'Jesus dies on the Cross.'"

9 June: He considers his work for the chapel finished.

1951

25 June: Inauguration of the Dominican Chapel of the Rosary.

1952

Concerned about the misunderstanding that his *Stations of the Cross* may have caused, Matisse confides to André Verdet: "I know some of them —good friends even!— reproach it for being too simple, too hasty. But didn't they understand that I treated this in an allusive manner, that it is intentionally an *emblematic* representation? It's like a road sign, a *totality of signs*."