

PRESS KIT

EXHIBITION summer 2025

MATISSE MÉDITERRANÉE(S)

From 7 May to 8 September 2025

Exposition
d'intérêt
national
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

This exhibition has been recognised as being of national interest by the French Ministry of Culture and benefits from exceptional support from the State.

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“ [...] In terms of significance, it's the Mediterranean. As a northerner, I wasn't familiar with it, so it's the Mediterranean that made the biggest impression on me. ”

Henri Matisse to Pierre Courthion¹

Curator:

Aymeric Jeudy, Director of the Musée Matisse Nice, Research Associate at the Centre for the Modern and Contemporary Mediterranean (University of Nice Côte d'Azur)

This exhibition is part of the 2025 Nice Arts and Ocean Biennale – “The Sea around us”, curated by Jean-Jacques Aillagon and Hélène Guenin and organised in concert with the United Nations Ocean Conference held in Nice in June 2025.



Henri Matisse, *Luxe, calme et volupté* [Luxury, Calm and Pleasure], Autumn-Fall 1904

Oil on canvas, 98.5 × 118.5 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris – Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle

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¹ COURTHION, Pierre, *Chatting with Henri Matisse. The lost 1941 interview*, ed. by Serge Guilbaut, Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, 2013, p. 128.

Presentation of the exhibition

Matisse never stopped being fascinated by the Mediterranean Sea, from his first stay in Corsica in 1898 to his uninterrupted visits to Nice between 1917 and 1954 and his many trips to Algeria, Spain, Italy and Morocco.

As Matisse himself expressed, the Mediterranean basin, with its captivating light, played a crucial role in the development of his work, inspiring him to experiment with a new visual language shaped by the region's artistic traditions, offering him a significant connection with the Near East and its ancient cultures.

Matisse, who sought to express his own perception of landscape, had a conceptual relationship with the sea, and with the Mediterranean in particular: a sea made of places that are lived in, experienced, dreamed of or fantasized about. This "machine for making civilisation²" as Paul Valéry (the first director of the Mediterranean University Centre established in Nice in 1933) described it, became for the painter an endless source of inspiration for his chromatic and structural research, a cradle for the discovery of new motifs.

Beyond the obvious and the clichés, it is first and foremost "a very old crossroads" of which Matisse was a witness and an actor, and where, in Fernand Braudel's words, "everything converged [...] men, beasts of burden, vehicles, merchandise, ships, ideas, religions, arts of living³."

From the beginning of the 20th century, the sea was present in Matisse's large experimental compositions exploring the themes of earthly paradise and Arcadia, as *Le Bonheur de vivre* (1905-1906) or *Les Baigneuses à la tortue* (1907-1908) where stylised strips of land, sea, and sky structure the background of the painting.



Henri Matisse, *Les Baigneuses à la tortue* [Bathers with a Turtle], 1907-1908

Oil on canvas, 181.6 × 221 cm
Saint Louis Art Museum
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Pulitzer Jr.

² VALÉRY, Paul, Extract from the *Revue Universelle*, 1st August 1925.

³ BRAUDEL, Fernand, *La Méditerranée, t. II : Les hommes et l'héritage*, Paris, Flammarion, 1986.



Henri Matisse, *La Plage rouge* [*The Red Beach*], 1905
Oil on canvas, 33 × 41 cm
Private collection

During the same period, while travelling along the shores of an asymmetrical Mediterranean Sea, – clearly marked by European hegemony –, in Corsica, Tangiers or Collioure where Fauvism flourished between 1905 and 1914, Matisse didn't paint the sea and vast horizons for themselves. Instead, in his work, the sea, the beach, and the figures build the space, redefining it as in *La Plage rouge* (1905).

This concept, based on a renewed relationship between foreground and background, figure and setting, was at the heart of Matisse's decorative aesthetic. It was underpinned by his discovery of the Mediterranean world, a region idealised since the 17th century, which Matisse was about to experiment with, and which led him to disregard anatomical conventions as evidenced by *Nu bleu (Souvenir de Biskra)* (1907).



Henri Matisse contemplating the sea from his balcony,
place Charles-Félix, ca. 1929
Photo by Pierre Matisse
Archives Henri Matisse, Issy-les-Moulineaux



Henri Matisse, *Nu dans l'atelier* [*Nude in the Studio*], 1928
Huile sur toile, 60 × 81.2 cm
Private collection

When arriving in Nice in 1917, where he would settle until his death in 1954, Matisse rediscovered the Mediterranean, this “crystalline environment⁴”, its light and its vegetation. In this open city, he had access, from his successive studios, to an unobstructed view of the sea. The windows overlooking its blue expanse were a common feature of the first rooms he rented in hotels with evocative names such as “Hôtel de la Méditerranée” or “Hôtel Beau Rivage” (beautiful waterfront) as well as to his studios in the Old Town or on the Cimiez hill.

⁴ MATISSE, Henri, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, Dominique Fourcade (éd.), Paris, Hermann, 1972.

Nice and the Côte d'Azur coastline, whose roads Matisse tirelessly explored in his car, provided him with an ongoing immersion in a wealth of Mediterranean motifs. The local fauna and flora fascinated him, and he settled in the city just as it became a major vacation destination, a hub of a hedonistic culture which promoted water sports (in which he participated with great enthusiasm) and exposed him to the bodies of bathers and swimmers, offering him many opportunities to hire new models. Having moved at the beginning of the 1920s in the palace Caïs de Pierlas, in the Old Town, he was surrounded by Mediterranean flavours, colours and sounds whose flowers, fruits and shells filled his work.



Henri Matisse, *La Villa bleue à Nice* [*The Blue Villa, Nice*], 1918

Oil on canvas, 54 × 65.4 cm
Private collection



Henri Matisse, *Intérieur à Nice, La Sieste* [*Interior in Nice, the Siesta*], ca. January 1922

Oil on canvas, 66 × 54.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris – Musée national d'art moderne/
Centre de création industrielle, Paris

If, as observed by Aragon, “people have come to Nice from the four corners of the earth, bringing with them the dust of their homeland, their customs and traditions⁵”. Matisse lived at the heart of a Riviera undergoing rapid change where the tourist industry boosted the arrival of a global high bourgeoisie but also of workers enjoying paid holidays.

In this eclectic city, the studio became the laboratory of an inner, fantasy world where the window played an important role. This window overlooking the sea flooded the rooms with light, and opened onto the Mediterranean horizon which became one with the studio. Here again, the figures, the balcony (the subject of many paintings of the Promenade des Anglais) and the balustrade structure the space.

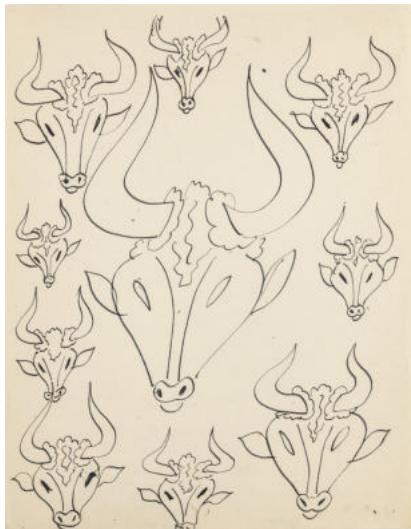
On the eve of the Second World War, Matisse moved into a spacious flat in the former Hôtel Régina. His big studio, filled with exotic and lush plants, and a distant view of the sea, led him to work on large-format compositions and inspired him to create his big cut-out papers, which he pinned directly on the wall. Among them, *La Piscine* (1952) or *La Vague* (1952) epitomise, through their universal quality, the Mediterranean ideal.

Henri Matisse, *La Vague* [*The Wave*],
Nice, ca. 1952
Gouache on paper, cut and mounted on canvas,
51.5 × 160 cm
Musée Matisse Nice



Nice also gave Matisse the opportunity to rub shoulders with writers, art dealers, collectors, musicians, and choreographers. These prominent figures of international modernism were drawn, like him, to the Mediterranean, with Pablo Picasso standing out among them.

⁵ ARAGON, Louis, *Henri Matisse: a Novel*, Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1972, p. 120.



Henri Matisse, *Étude de têtes de taureaux (pour Pasiphaé ?) (Study of Bulls' Heads [for Pasiphae?])*, n.d.

Ink on paper, 27 × 21 cm
Private collection, France

At a time of significant archaeological discoveries, Matisse drew inspiration, throughout his life, from images and symbols of the ancient Mediterranean world, going so far as to buy artworks like an Ancient Greek torso and casts of a Kouros from Delphi and Cycladic sculptures. Beyond his direct engagement with these objects, which he sketched since his first visit to the Louvre, Matisse's exploration of the Mediterranean took place through literature. The Mediterranean landscape became a fictional realm to dream about and to experience. Matisse populated his works with minotaurs, ancient fauns, and other classical figures as seen in the illustrations he created for James Joyce's *Ulysses* which embodied, in his eyes, a deeply Mediterranean horizon.

Matisse's work has become iconic of the Mediterranean and contributes to this day to convey the mythological weight of this geographical and cultural region. From the Americas to Europe and Japan, the greatest art collections allow visitors from around the world to enjoy the work of an artist whose production is deeply intertwined with the Mediterranean world.

The exhibition sets out to reconsider Matisse's work through the lens of the Mediterranean Sea and its emblematic locations. It highlights, through the presentation of a variety of artworks, the ties, rituals, and dialects of this civilisational area, exploring the relationship that Matisse had with it.

The exhibition will feature masterpieces rarely exhibited in France, on loan from major institutions, including the MoMA (New York), the Saint Louis Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), as well as works from private collections.



This exhibition has been produced with the exceptional support of the Centre Pompidou – musée national d'Art moderne, Paris.



Horus Pharma, an independent pharmaceutical laboratory specialised in ophthalmology and based in Nice for over 20 years, is especially proud to support the exhibition *Matisse Méditerranée(s)*.

By supporting this exhibition, which celebrates Matisse's deep connection to Mediterranean locations, landscapes and motifs, Horus Pharma reaffirms its commitment to the region and its natural and cultural heritage.

Beyond his mission to preserve sight – that most precious of senses, which opens us to the world – Horus Pharma firmly believe in the power of art to move, inspire, and enrich the way we look at our surroundings.

- A four-month exhibition
- Over 150 artworks on display, including 44 paintings and 90 drawings and engravings, alongside an extensive collection of archives
- A map of Matisse's travels around the Mediterranean



Photo © François Fernandez

The exhibition catalogue



Under the editorial direction of Aymeric Jeudy
Contributions by Anne Coron, Camille Frasca,
Claire Gooden, Aymeric Jeudy, Simon Kelly,
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MUSÉE MATISSE NICE

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

musee-matisse-nice.org

Open every day except
Tuesdays
from 10 am to 6 pm

ONLINE TICKETING



MUSEUM SHOP ARTEUM

The museum shop offers a wide selection of books and items inspired by Matisse and the French Riviera. To be discovered on site or online: arteum.com



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A museum set within 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 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 that was revamped and extended with a new wing by architect Jean-François Bodin between 1987 and 1993.

Nestled within a public garden, it stands in harmony with the surrounding area, offering visitors an engaging experience of Henri Matisse's work.

A unique collection

The collection which comprises works donated to the city by the artist and his heirs is displayed in a 1 200-square-meter exhibition space. Its presentation provides an insightful exploration into the œuvre 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



VISUALS FOR THE PRESS



Henri Matisse, *Luxury, Calm and Pleasure*, Autumn-Fall 1904
Oil on canvas, 98.5 × 118.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris – Musée national d'art moderne/
Centre de création industrielle
Photo © GrandPalaisRmn (musée d'Orsay)/Hervé Lewandowski



Henri Matisse, *La Plage rouge* [*The Red Beach*], 1905
Oil on canvas, 33 × 41 cm
Private collection



Henri Matisse, *Les Baigneuses à la tortue* [*Bathers with a Turtle*], 1907-1908
Oil on canvas, 181.6 × 221 cm
Saint Louis Art Museum
Gift by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer Jr.



Henri Matisse, *Nature morte aux oranges* [*Still Life with Oranges*], early 1912
Oil on canvas, 95 × 84.8 cm
Musée national Picasso, Paris
Photo © GrandPalaisRmn (musée national Picasso-Paris/
Mathieu Rabeau



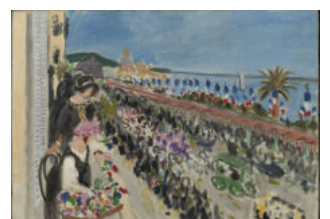
Henri Matisse, *La Villa bleue à Nice* [*The Blue Villa, Nice*], 1918
Oil on canvas, 54 × 65.4 cm
Private collection
Courtesy: Hauch Gallery, Praga



Henri Matisse, *Intérieur à la boîte à violon* [*Interior with a Violin Case*], Nice, 1918-1919
Oil on canvas, 73 × 60 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Lillie P. Bliss Collection, 1934
Photo © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence



Henri Matisse, *Intérieur à Nice, La Sieste* [*Interior in Nice, the Siesta*], ca. January 1922
Oil on canvas, 66 × 54.5 cm
Centre Pompidou, Paris – Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle. Bequest Mrs. Frédéric Lung in 1961
Photo © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn/Philippe Migeat



Henri Matisse, *Fête des fleurs* [*Festival of Flowers*], 1923
Oil on canvas, 65,5 × 92,7 cm
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
fund Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt

VISUALS FOR THE PRESS



Henri Matisse, *Nu dans l'atelier* [*Nude in the Studio*], 1928
Oil on canvas, 60 × 81.2 cm
Private collection



Henri Matisse, *Nature morte au coquillage* [*Still Life with Seashell*], 1940
Gouache, coloured pencil and charcoal on paper, 83,5 × 115 cm
Private collection
Photo © Becket Logan



Henri Matisse, *Dessin préparatoire pour le vitrail au poisson* [*Preparatory drawing for the stained-glass window with fish, Rosary Chapel*], Vence, 1950
Ink on paper, 88 × 67 cm
Private collection
Photo © Jean-Louis Losi



Henri Matisse, *Baigneuse dans les roseaux* [*Bather in the Reeds*], 1952
Sheets of paper painted in gouache and cut, glued to white Canson paper and mounted on canvas, 118 × 171 cm
Gift of Madame Jean Matisse to the French State, on long-term loan to the Musée Matisse Nice
Photo © François Fernandez



Henri Matisse, *La Vague* [*The Wave*], Nice, ca. 1952
Gouache on paper, cut and mounted on canvas, 51.5 × 160 cm
Musée Matisse Nice, gift of the Héritiers Matisse, 1963
Photo © François Fernandez

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