



Press release

March 2020

Matisse, like a novel

21 October 2020 – 22 February 2021
Gallery 1, Level 6

Communication and Digital Department

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To mark the 150th anniversary of Henri Matisse's birth (1869-1954), the Centre Pompidou pays tribute to the artist through the exhibition "Matisse, like a novel", featuring over 230 works, 70 documents and archives. Matisse once wrote that "an artist's importance is measured by the number of new signs he has introduced into the language of art." Throughout his life, he was this decisive innovator.

A nine-chapter timeline retraces the early days of the young artist, who came late to painting in the 1890s, through to the full liberation of lines and colour with the gouache cutouts he produced in his later years.

For the first time, some hundred works from the Musée national d'art moderne (MNAM) collection will be displayed together. It is one of the most significant collections of Matisse's works by its importance and scope, and representing the techniques continually explored and deepened by Matisse. For this celebratory event, the MNAM collection has been complemented with remarkable loans from other French museums: the Matisse museums in Cateau-Cambrésis and Nice, as well as the rich Matisse collection from the museum in Grenoble, including *Still Life with Aubergines* (1911), exceptionally loaned for the exhibition. This assortment of key works, from major French and foreign collections both public and private, illustrates Matisse's journey through over five decades, and some of the most significant pages in the history of modern art.

Referencing Louis Aragon's book title, *Henri Matisse, roman (Henri Matisse, A Novel)* (1971), the exhibition "Matisse, like a novel" reviews his principle of exploring the work, seeking, as in the book, to find "enlightenment as to what is happening". Each of the nine sequences within the exhibition is illuminated by a writer's view on Matisse's work: Louis Aragon, Georges Duthuit, Dominique Fourcade, Clement Greenberg, Charles Lewis Hind, Pierre Schneider, Jean Clay and Henri Matisse himself. Echoing these writers, critics and poets, the exhibition questions Matisse's relationship with writing – from plastic vocabulary to word.

**Henri Matisse, *La Blouse roumaine*, 1940,
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm**

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne,
Paris

Gift of the artist to the State, 1953

Attribution, 1953

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Photo © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges
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"Where to mark this beginning?"¹ Aragon asked in *Henri Matisse, A Novel*, tracing Matisse's different practices throughout his career, as a painter, sculptor, draughtsman and printmaker, to his earliest works made in the 1890s. Each technique offered Matisse a different way of "writing" his experience. Throughout his life Matisse was also keen to shed light on his own creative process. Indeed, "Matisse explains Matisse"²: "a fauve painting is a block of light formed by the harmony of several colours, in turn forming a space that is possible for the spirit (akin, I feel, to a musical chord) (...)"³. During his fauve period (1905-1906), he ventured into a radical reformulation of colour and drawing.

This revolution was reconfigured in the 1910s in works in which he focused on ideas of the decorative. *Still life with Aubergines* (1911), the only one of his "Symphonic Interiors" to be preserved in France, is a prominent example. This new "language of art", as he called it, was not however nailed down as a style: in the 1910s, the painter was seeking to experiment with various stylistic tendencies in the air at that time, such as cubism. A prime example of this is *White and Pink Head* (1914). In 1917, he left for Nice. In the decade that was to follow, he abandoned the experimental dimension of art constantly teetering on the cusp of abstraction, choosing instead to revisit a subject modelled by light.

The literary focus in Matisse's work took a new turn in the 1930s, when he explored book illustration in *Poems of Stéphane Mallarmé*. This resonated with some important canvasses in this period, such as *Nymph in the Forest (La Verdure)* (1935-1943). In 1947, Matisse produced *Jazz*, featuring an intermingling of shapes and words, cutout gouaches and hand-written texts. The expansive nature of colour and black and white is reflected in the intimate dialogue between his "Interiors in Venice" and his brush drawings. Last but not least, his vivid stained-glass windows and drawings on ceramic-tiles produced in his later years for the Rosary Chapel in Venice, evoke yet again the never-ending migration between artwork and writing in what Matisse saw as a great open book in space.

¹ Louis Aragon, "Anthologie I" in *Henri Matisse, A Novel* (1971), Paris, Gallimard, Collection Quarto, 2013, p. 373.

² Jean Clay, "Matisse explique Matisse", *Réalités*, 325, February 1973, p.82-97.

³ Letter from Henri Matisse to Marguerite Duthuit, undated, 1949-1950, quoted in Rémi Labrusse, *Matisse, la condition de l'image*, Paris, Gallimard, 1999, p. 37.

Practical information

The Exhibition

Matisse, like a novel

21 October 2020 – 22 February 2021

Gallery 1, Level 6

Curator **Aurélie Verdier**

Assisted by **Anne Théry**

Researchers

Marjolaine Beuzard, Anne Théry

The exhibition is supported by



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The exhibition is organized with the exceptional support of museums

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Musée départemental Matisse du Cateau-Cambrésis
Musée Matisse de Nice

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Le Centre Pompidou

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Schedules and Rates

Exhibition open every day from 11am to 9pm,

Thursdays until 11 pm, except Tuesday and May 1st

15 €, reduced rate 12 € / Free for under 18s.

Children under 26*, teachers and students of art schools, as well as members of the Maison des artistes benefit from free admission to the Museum and a reduced ticket for exhibitions.

Free access for members of the Centre Pompidou.

Time-stamped ticket

Le Centre Pompidou is setting up a recommended advance reservation system with a choice of time slots to offer the public greater comfort in visiting its exhibitions in Galleries 1 and 2 during the renovation of the main entrance and the "Chenille".

www.billetterie.centrepompidou.fr

The reservation of a time slot applies to all visitors except those who are free.

* 18-25 years old nationals of an EU member state or of another state party to the European Economic Area agreement. Valid the same day for the National Museum of Modern Art and all exhibitions.

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