

Matisse

Cahiers d'art

The Pivotal 1930s

Henri Matisse,
Woman with a Veil
(*Femme à la voilette*), 1927
Oil on canvas, 61.6 × 50.2 cm
New York, Museum of Modern
Art, William S. Paley collection

1 March – 29 May 2023
Musée de l'Orangerie

Matisse's oeuvre is made up of important milestones that mark his desire never to be confined to a single way of painting. In 1930 he turned 62. Known for his paintings of the Fauve and Nice periods, he found the strength to resist the weight of his age and fame and threw himself into the unknown by embarking on the creation of *The Dance* (*La Danse*), a mural decoration for the Barnes Foundation in Merion, near Philadelphia. Through the lens of *Cahiers d'art*, a French art journal, the exhibition places Matisse's work in the context of the inter-war period. The art dealer Paul Guillaume, whose collection is partly displayed in the Musée de l'Orangerie, was involved in the same avant-garde movement. In 1930 he owned twenty-five paintings by Matisse, and many more passed through his gallery.

Paul Guillaume always counted Matisse among his favourite artists, alongside Picasso, Modigliani and Rousseau, and he never ceased to promote his work; therefore, it seemed natural that the exhibition should take place at the Musée de l'Orangerie. Organized in collaboration with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Matisse Museum in Nice, it presents an opportunity to discover works by the painter that have been kept in American institutions and collections for a long time and have rarely, if ever, been shown in France, such as the *Large reclining nude* (*Grand nu couché*), 1935, from the Baltimore Museum of Art, or *The Song* (*Le Chant*), 1938, an exceptional loan from the Lewis Collection.

Claire Bernardi

When Matisse received a commission for a decoration in the hall of the collector Albert C. Barnes's Foundation, he had just returned from several months traveling in the United States and Tahiti. The retrospectives of his work multiplied at a time when he was struggling to paint canvases. However, he worked tirelessly on drawings, engravings and sculptures, and then on the composition of *The Dance (La Danse)*, a monumental mural to which he devoted himself for three years (1930–33). The painter researched, explored and invented new methods such as paper cut-outs. His encounter with Lydia Delectorskaya, who became his assistant and model, ushered in a new productive period in his painting.

At the turn of the 1930s, *Cahiers d'art* published articles on Matisse's current and past work, illustrated with many reproductions of his artworks. By showing engravings and drawings as they were created, as well as productions by artists such as Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger and Wassily Kandinsky, the magazine placed Matisse's work in the context of the artistic trends of his time.

1926: Matisse works and lives in Nice, where he devotes himself to the *Odalisques* series, paintings of nude figures in oriental settings modeled by Henriette Darricarrère. In April, he agrees to contribute to *Cahiers d'art*, the magazine founded by Christian Zervos, the first issue of which reproduces a lithograph by the artist, marking the beginning of a long collaboration. In October, Paul Guillaume exhibits three works from Matisse's radical Cubist-inspired period of the 1910s, including *Bathers by a River (Baigneuses à la rivière)*, 1909–17.

1927: A major retrospective is organized in New York by Pierre Matisse, the artist's son and art dealer. In France, several solo and group exhibitions are held in Paris at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon des Tuileries. At the Salon d'Automne, Matisse presents two paintings, including *Odalisque in Gray Pantaloons*.

He completes *Woman with a veil*, begun in 1926, the last painting modeled by Henriette Darricarrère. The work sounds like a double farewell – both to a woman and to a pictorial style –, and heralds the period of self-doubt of the 1930s.

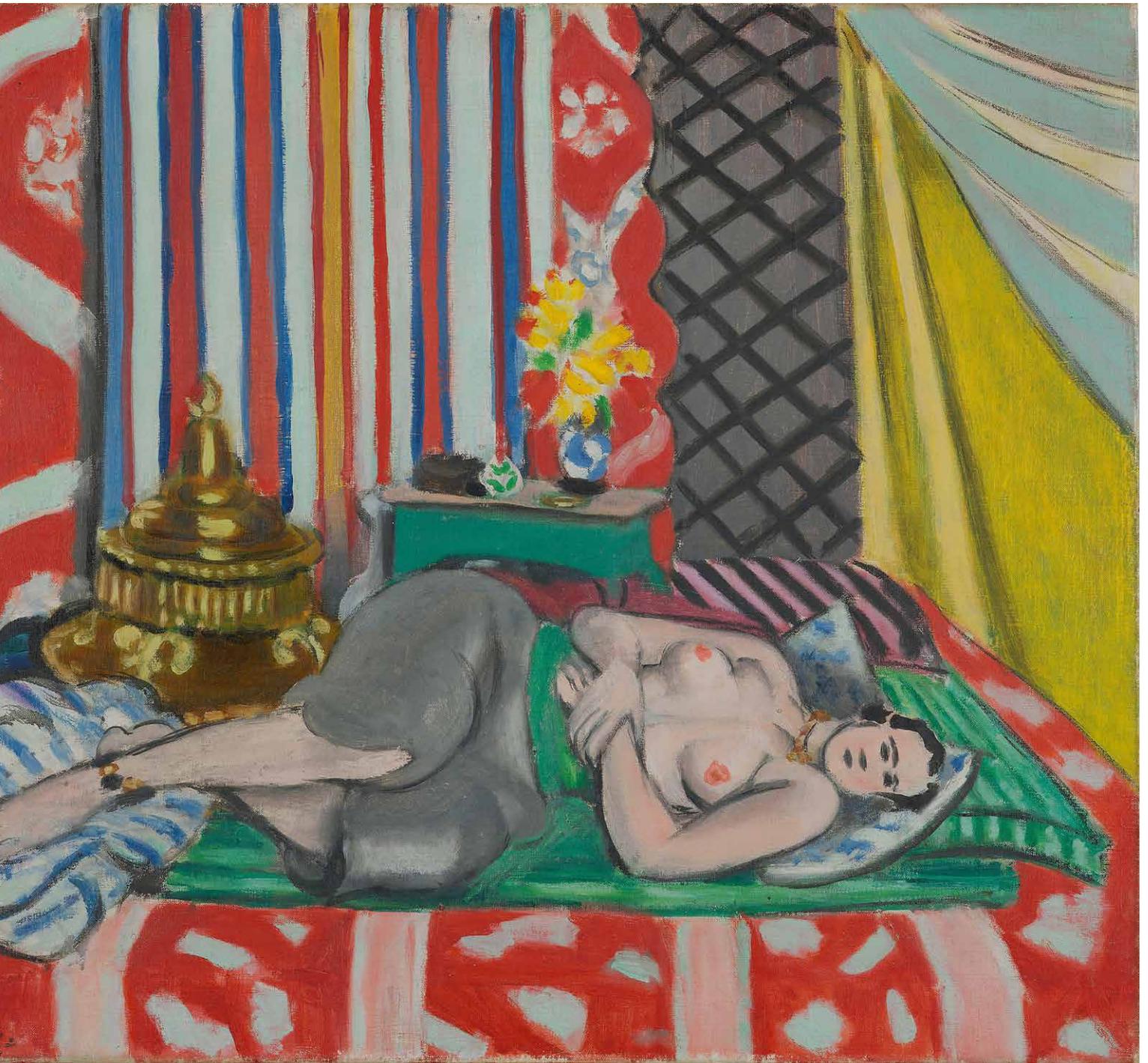
1929: Matisse writes to his daughter Marguerite: "I worked a great deal, but far from the realm of painting. I sat down several times to do work, but confronted with a canvas I had no idea – whereas in drawing and sculpture, it worked like a dream".

He produces many engravings. Nineteen of them are published in issue 7 of the *Cahiers d'art*, and the gallery Bernheim-Jeune organizes an exhibition entitled "Forty original lithographs by Henri Matisse". That same year, he completes *Large seated nude (Grand nu assis)*, a sculpture he had been working on since 1922.

1930: On 26 February 1930, Matisse embarks for Tahiti from Le Havre. First port of call, New York: "I was amazed at my arrival in the port of N.Y. and in everything I have seen thus far; the power of human effort that I sense is reassuring. Now I'm afraid that I'll find the perfumed charms of Oceania rather dull". He travels by train across the United States to San Francisco, which he leaves on 19 March for Tahiti, where he stays until June. He produces little work during this trip: some sketches, a series of drawings and a collection of photographs.

In September, he returns to the United States and meets the collector Albert C. Barnes, who commissions him to paint a mural for his Foundation in Merion, near Philadelphia.





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Henri Matisse,
Odalisque in Gray Pantaloons
(*Odalisque à la culotte grise*),
1926-27
Oil on canvas, 54 × 65 cm
Paris, musée de l'Orangerie



2

1931: On his return to France, Matisse begins to work on the decoration for Barnes. The sheer monumentality of it necessitates the use of a large garage that Matisse rents in the rue Désiré-Niel in Nice. At the same time, he works on the engravings commissioned by the publisher Albert Skira to illustrate *Poésies* by Stéphane Mallarmé.

The year is marked by two major exhibitions in Basel and in New York, at the recently-opened Museum of Modern Art, to celebrate the artist's sixtieth birthday and present a retrospective of his work. *Cahiers d'art* publishes a special edition dedicated to Matisse.

1932: On 22 February, Barnes informs Matisse of an error in the measurements of the decoration in progress. "The tragic thing [the artist replies in a draft letter to his patron] is that the decoration is almost complete, and that it's impossible to add the missing sections. I have no choice but to start over." During the summer, Matisse works on a second composition. He uses paper cut-outs of different colors for the background and for the figures, so that he can modify the composition and only paint it once it is fixed. In October, Lydia Delectorskaya, a young Russian immigrant, is hired as a studio assistant for several weeks, marking the beginning of a lifetime collaboration.



2

Contemporary view
of the Barnes Foundation
with *The Dance*, 2012
Philadelphia,
Barnes Foundation Archives

1933: In January, Barnes travels to Nice to view *The Dance* in the studio and approves the work. In February, Goyo, a housepainter, starts to assist the artist in transposing the paper cut-outs into solid colors. In May, Matisse accompanies his canvases of *The Dance* to the United States and oversees their installation at the Barnes Foundation. He writes to his friend, the artist Simon Bussy: "It's a magnificent thing that cannot be imagined without being seen". In the autumn, Matisse restarts work on the first unfinished decoration to complete it. He resumes easel painting with *Nude in a bathrobe (Nu au peignoir)* and a first stump portrait drawing of Delectorskaya.

1935: Delectorskaya models for many paintings. She also begins to record the dates of the painting sessions, making it possible to follow the progress of the work more closely. On 29 April, Matisse begins the *Large reclining nude*, using the technique of gouache-painted cut-outs in the composition. The painting occupies him for several months, and on 16 September he writes to his son Pierre: "It has already changed a lot. I'm killing myself over this. It's odd that for a while it's the color vision that is proving the hardest thing to do. Maybe because having toiled over the work's drawing and composition, I'm a little worn out".

In the autumn, an illustrated version of *Ulysses* by the Irish writer James Joyce, for which Matisse has been making engravings since 1934, is published.



3

Henri Matisse,
The Song (Le Chant), 1938
Oil on canvas, 282 × 183 cm
The Lewis Collection

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Henri Matisse,
Large Reclining Nude
(*Grand nu couché [Nu rose]*),
1935
Oil on canvas, 66.4 × 93.3 cm
Baltimore Museum of Art

3

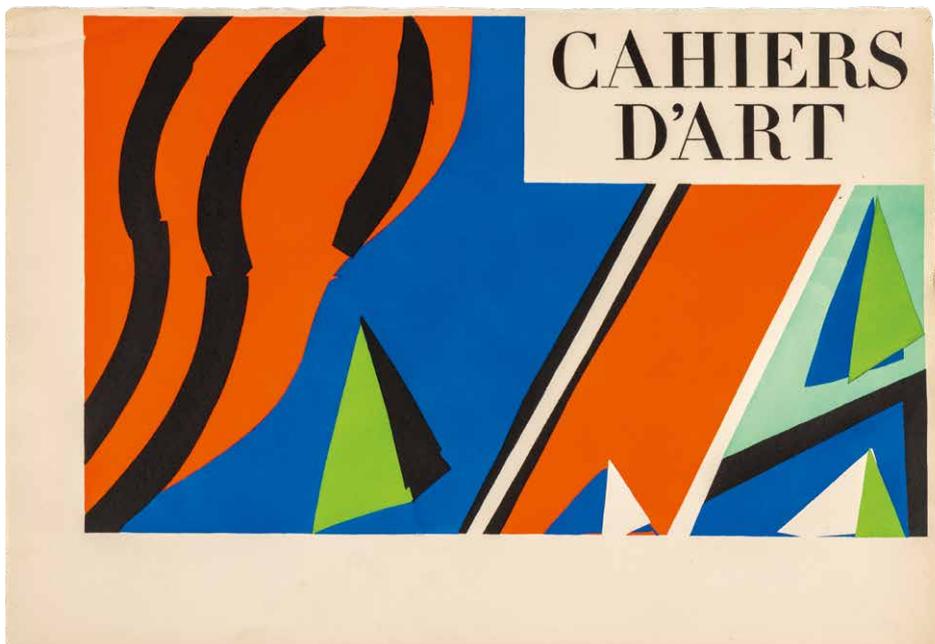
1936: Matisse devotes himself to the tapestry cartoons he began in 1935 with *Window at Tahiti II* (*Fenêtre à Tahiti II*) and *Nymph in the forest* [*Verdure*] (*Nymphe dans la forêt*). He works on a number of paintings and drawings of Delectorskaya, following on from a series made the previous year and reproduced in a special edition *Cahiers d'art* dedicated to him in 1936. These line drawings depict Delectorskaya nude or wearing a Romanian blouse. Matisse works assiduously on drawings and engravings as well as on the preparation of the special issue of *Cahiers d'art*, for which he designs the cover of the luxury edition with gouache paper cut-outs.

1937: On 21 February, Matisse starts drawing *Woman in Blue* (*La Grande Robe bleue et mimosas*) on canvas. Then, on 25 and 26 February, he begins to add colour to the picture. He works on the painting during a dozen sittings until April, and the photographs record the major stages of its progress. In the autumn, he resumes work with the model Hélène Mercier-Galitzine who poses with Delectorskaya for a series of Romanian blouses.

1938: Matisse buys an apartment in the former Excelsior-Régina Palace Hotel in Cimiez, in the hills overlooking Nice. In the spring, he produces several easel paintings for which Delectorskaya and Mercier-Galitzine posed. In October, now in his studio at the Régina, Matisse begins work on the panel of *The song* (*Le Chant*) commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller to decorate the mantelpiece of his New York apartment. A series of charcoal portraits of Delectorskaya and Mercier-Galitzine precedes the panel's composition and coloring.

1940: Matisse finishes *Romanian Blouse* (*Blouse roumaine*) begun the previous year. In January, he begins *The Dream*, a painting he will create many versions of. At the same time, he works on *Striped Robe, Fruit, and Anemones*, and *Interior with an Etruscan Vase*. The Second World War brings his production to a halt; he considers leaving France for Brazil but ends up canceling his departure. In May, he flees Paris with Delectorskaya on an intense journey: Bordeaux, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Ciboure and Marseilles, where he joins his daughter Marguerite. He tries to reach Nice, where he arrives in August. He immediately gets back to work.





5

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Henri Matisse, front and back cover design for the special issue of *Cahiers d'art*, 1936, nos. 3-5
Gouache on paper, 39.5 × 57 cm
Paris, Éditions Cahiers d'art

Related events

Tours

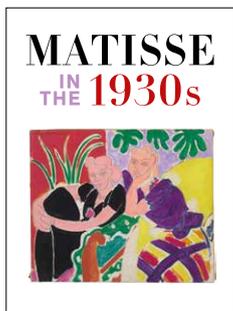
Audioguides (French, English) for adults (€6), members (€4) and children (€3.5)

Guided tours (French/English)

Workshops for adults and families

Publications

Exhibition catalogue in English
Matisse in the 1930s
Musée de l'Orangerie-RMN
256 pages, €55



Curator for the Paris exhibition

Cécile Debray, director of the Musée national Picasso-Paris assisted by Alice Marsal, research documentalist with curatorship duties at the Musée de l'Orangerie.

In partnership with *Libération*, *Le Point*, *Les Échos Week-end*, *BFM Paris Île-de-France*.

Exhibition organized by the Établissement public du musée d'Orsay et du musée de l'Orangerie – Valéry-Giscard-d'Estaing



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Workshop

Wednesday 23 May 2023 – 10 am-5 pm

Auditorium de l'Orangerie
In partnership with the Musée Matisse Nice

Weaving his web. The circulation, reception and popularization of Matisse's work at the turn of the 1930s

How did Matisse's work become instantly recognizable? International researchers will discuss the manner in which the works completed in the 1930s were received worldwide. They will look at the different ways in which Matisse's work quickly became accessible to a large audience by means of exhibitions, museum purchases and the publication of his paintings in the French and international press.

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Listen to the interview with Cécile Debray, curator, and find out about events related to the exhibition:



Programme and bookings
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