

***MATISSE: RADICAL INVENTION: 1913–1917* OFFERS UNPRECEDENTED REASSESSMENT OF PIVOTAL MOMENT IN HENRI MATISSE'S CAREER**

**Archival, Art-Historical, and Conservation Research Generate New Understanding of the Artist's Most Demanding and Enigmatic Works**

**Required Timed-Entry Tickets Available on MoMA.org**

***Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917***

July 18–October 11, 2010

The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Gallery, sixth floor

**Press Preview:** Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 10:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

RSVP (212) 708-9401 or [pressoffice@moma.org](mailto:pressoffice@moma.org)

**NEW YORK, July 12, 2010—***Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917*, a large-scale investigation into a pivotal moment in the career of Henri Matisse (1869–1954), presents an important reassessment of the artist's work between 1913 and 1917, revealing this period to be one of the most significant chapters in Matisse's evolution as an artist. On view from July 18 through October 11, 2010, at The Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition examines paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints made by the artist between his return to Paris from Morocco in 1913 to his departure for Nice in 1917. Over these five years, he developed his most demanding, experimental, and enigmatic works: paintings that are abstracted, often purged of descriptive detail, geometrically composed, and dominated by blacks and grays. Comprising nearly 110 of the artist's works, *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* is the first exhibition devoted to this period, thoroughly exploring Matisse's working processes and the revolutionary experimentation of what he called his "methods of modern construction."

Organized by The Museum of Modern Art and The Art Institute of Chicago, the exhibition is curated by John Elderfield, Chief Curator Emeritus of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, and Stephanie D'Alessandro, Gary C. and Frances Comer Curator of Modern Art at The Art Institute of Chicago. The exhibition is the result of a five-year collaboration between MoMA and The Art Institute of Chicago, combining new archival and art-historical research, fresh physical examinations of artworks, and innovative methods of scientific investigation to generate an unprecedented understanding of Matisse's work during these years. Technical examinations have revealed the evolution of objects from this period and illuminated previously unknown relationships among them.

*Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* is organized chronologically, and begins with the immediately preceding years of 1907–1912. When Matisse was 22 years old, he began to study under Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, who sent his pupils to make copies of Old Master

paintings in the Musée du Louvre. Matisse pursued a similar practice in his independent work, reusing compositions and a range of subjects and poses in an effort to pare down forms to what he called “a truer, more essential character.” On view is Paul Cézanne’s (French, 1839–1906) *Three Bathers* (1879–82), a work Matisse had acquired in 1899 which then became a touchstone for the artist as he worked on issues of color and construction in his own bathers compositions. Also on view are Matisse’s *Nude with a White Scarf* (1909) and *Bathers with a Turtle* (1908), which inaugurated Matisse’s new practice of extensively reworking his canvases.

By 1909 Matisse had formed relationships with a number of important and supportive collectors, including Sergei Shchukin, who commissioned decorative panels by Matisse for the stairway of his Moscow home. For this project Matisse initially suggested imagery of dance and bathers, subjects that would allow him to synthesize his evolving interests in harmonious colors, arabesques, and flat, overall designs with the tradition of *décorations*, pictures of mythical subjects intended to evoke tranquility. The composition of bathers begun that year would be transformed over the following nine years to become *Bathers by a River*, on view in the final gallery of the exhibition. Also in 1909, Matisse continued to work on his largest sculpture to that point, the bas-relief *Back*, begun in 1908, which he would return to several times over the next 21 years. On each occasion Matisse began with a new plaster cast of the relief; but instead of destroying the previous states when he moved on to the next version, Matisse preserved them, resulting in *Back (I)*, *Back (II)*, *Back (III)*, and *Back (IV)*, each of which is on view within the exhibition. The last gallery of the exhibition also includes a digital presentation illustrating the known states of *Bathers by a River* and *Back*, exploring the techniques that provided the foundation for the artist’s most radical inventions of this period.

In winter 1910–11 Matisse traveled to Spain and Morocco, following the harsh reception of his recent works at the 1910 Salon d’Automne. During his travels, rich textiles and Moorish architecture inspired him to introduce decorative patterning and flat expanses of color to his canvases, such as *The Manila Shawl* (1911). In the years that followed, he continued to explore the language of color, juxtaposing flat areas of contrasting hues, as in *Zorah in Yellow* (1912). Other paintings, including *Fatma*, *The Mulatto Woman* (1912), dissolve form and reconstruct space into vaporous, interwoven layers of color.

The exhibition continues with the spring of 1913, when, after his final return from Morocco, Matisse abruptly altered his course, pursuing an interest in formal structure that accompanied and then superseded his prior focus on color. Evidence of this attempt to forge a new path can be seen in *Bathers by a River* (1909–10; 1913; 1916–17) which the artist drastically altered in 1913. In addition to photographic illustrations of Matisse working on that major painting, the section includes two paintings from 1913, *The Blue Window* and *Flowers and Ceramic Plate*.

### **1914, New Ambitions**

On January 1, 1914, Matisse and his wife, Amélie, moved into an apartment on the fourth floor of 19 quai Saint-Michel in Paris, directly beneath the studio he had occupied from 1894 to 1907. Matisse wanted a break from his studio in Issy in order to better focus on his artistic exploration. The new space energized him, and in just over six months he produced almost a dozen canvases. Although Matisse used a different visual approach in almost every painting, the works are united by palette and size, giving them the quality of a series. These remarkably bold works constitute Matisse's response to Cubism's new challenge to the representation of form and space. On view is *Interior with Goldfish* (1914), the first of four great canvases from this period that picture the artist's studio. The form and position of the fishbowl, furniture, grillwork, and planter within the work underwent multiple revisions, many of which are visible in the finished painting. He reprised this composition in *Goldfish and Palette* (1914–15) simplifying the vertically banded format of the earlier work into a single broad black band.

Also on view is *View of Notre Dame* (1914) and *Woman on a High Stool* (1914), the latter of which shares its simplified geometric forms, heavy contouring, and austere palette with the work of Cézanne and the Cubist paintings of Matisse's own peers. In *View of Notre Dame* (1914), which depicts the Paris cathedral as seen from Matisse's studio window, he reworked features of the canvas before covering almost the entire surface in blue, leaving early compositional elements visible beneath the paint.

The section concludes with *Portrait of Yvonne Landsberg* (1914): startling even to its maker, it is one of the most dramatic of Matisse's canvases from early 1914. After many campaigns of wiping, incising, and repainting, work on this canvas ended with the artist scraping the lines that radiate from the figure, echoing the curve of the subject's hairline and the arms of her green chair. This painting is joined by *Branch of Lilacs* (1914), and *Still Life with Lemons* (1914), a work that demonstrates Matisse's interest in the visual vocabulary of Cubism.

### **August 1914–1915, Interruptions and Returns**

Matisse's daring achievements in 1914 came to a dramatic and abrupt end with the outbreak of World War I. The period between August 1914 and the end of 1915 was full of stops and starts, interruptions and returns, as the artist tried to negotiate the challenges of wartime and satisfy his own creative ambitions.

In summer 1915 Matisse and his family moved from Paris back to Issy, which they had left the previous year when their home there was requisitioned by the French military. While reorganizing his studio, the artist was inspired by the rediscovery of his 1893 canvas *La Desserte (After Jan Davidsz. de Heem)*, on view in this section, which he had copied from the 1640 original in the Musée du Louvre when he was a student. He remade the composition with *Still Life after Jan Davidsz. de Heem's "La Desserte"* (1915) "adding everything I've seen since," he said, and working with "the methods of modern construction." He was most likely referring to Cubism,

which he used to toughen his visual approach, though continuing to privilege detail and brilliant color.

In his new work he also returned to still lifes, portraits, and open windows or doors—familiar subjects that he could easily set down on canvas and then develop when time allowed. On view is *Composition* (1915), in which Matisse returned to his earlier mode of working, drawing the composition and then filling it in with color. In contrast, the surface of *Head, White and Rose* (1914–15), reveals the extent of the artist's revisions; the scraping and overlapping layers of paint as Matisse reworked a naturalistic image into an abstracted face. These canvases are joined by *The Italian Woman* (1916), which demonstrates how, even in his most daring and austere paintings of this period, Matisse continued to reuse and repeat themes, this work being the first of a series of over 50 paintings and drawings of the Italian model Laurette that Matisse would make over the next year.

Finally, over the summer of 1916 Matisse brought many of his most ambitious works to conclusion, including the sculpture *Jeannette (V)* (1916). This work, with its formal and psychological concentration, is more radical than its predecessors (*Jeannette I–IV*), demonstrating a primal, atavistic power well beyond the traditional protocols of portraiture.

This section also focuses on Matisse's printmaking. In fall 1913, after a six-year hiatus, Matisse returned to printmaking; and when he relocated to his quai Saint-Michel studio, he purchased a hand etching press with which to make his own prints. Through early 1917 he produced eight lithographs, 66 drypoints and etchings, and at least 69 monotypes, the latter for the first and only time in his career. Their modest subjects reflected the world around him—everyday life in the studio, and especially his family and friends. The format, tools, and techniques of printmaking had a great impact on Matisse's practice, and in its potential for simplification of color and form the medium complemented the artist's formal goals.

The section concludes with a series of prints Matisse made to benefit his compatriots imprisoned by German forces. From the early days of France's involvement in World War I, Matisse's hometown of Bohain-en-Vermandois was under German control. Matisse had no news of his family for months, and his concern deepened with reports of the poor condition of civilians transported to a prison camp in Havelberg, Germany. This situation spurred the artist to aid the French war effort, and with funds from sales of his prints he was able to send weekly shipments of food and other necessities to Havelberg. Although Matisse mainly sold single prints, in at least one instance he sold a set, in June 1915 to the French collector Jacques Doucet: a group of portraits of artists, wives, and daughters of men who had been called away to serve and friends otherwise affected by the conflict. Each was inscribed, "For the civil prisoners of Bohain-en-Vermandois." The selection on view represents examples of all but one of the works Doucet acquired.

### **January–November 1916, The Challenge of Painting**

The year of 1916 was one of the worst of the war for France, punctuated by the terrible battles of Verdun and the Somme. That year, Matisse made progress on some of the most difficult but pivotal works of his career, notably *The Moroccans* (1916) and *Bathers by a River* (1909–17). In *The Moroccans*, he employed his demanding “methods of modern construction” on an ambitious scale. Its surface is thick with the trails of repeated reworking, products of the artist’s attempt to reconsider and adjust his approach to familiar motifs. Matisse conceived this “souvenir of Morocco” in 1912, stretched a canvas for it in 1913, returned to his composition on an enlarged scale in 1915 and started this new canvas in 1916. Black is the principal agent in *The Moroccans*, at once simplifying, dividing, and joining the three zones of the canvas: the still life of melons and leaves on a tiled pavement, bottom left; the architecture with domed marabout, top left; and the figures, right, among them a seated Moroccan seen from the behind and, above the shadowed archway, figures in two windows. Matisse built up the surface with thin layers of pigment, with the color of the underlying layers modifying those on top.

Other paintings of this time demonstrate that the artist had begun to loosen his approach in certain ways, with the works in this gallery suggesting that Matisse was slowly beginning to experiment with a new process while preserving the same formal concerns: paring down what he had previously painted not by scraping it away but by applying new paint to cover and reshape what lay below. In *The Window* (1916), light from the outside powerfully enters the room. Turquoise merges floors and walls, flattening deep space and solid forms into a single plane. The thick band of white paint signals the powerful, dematerializing nature of light. In *Bowl of Oranges* (1916), the still life fills the canvas’s visual field, producing an effect of colossal size. Matisse reinforced this sense of monumentality through near-sculptural handling of paint, applying coarse, hatched strokes, layering new pigment over dry layers, reserving the heaviest paint for areas of reflected light, and employing a thinner application in the dense, dark shadows. This compressed composition echoes the dense, compacted areas of the surface of *The Moroccans* and recalls its vivid yellow melons and other circular motifs.

### **1916–1917, Changing Course**

In spring, summer, and fall 1916 Matisse returned yet again to *Bathers by a River* and his *Back* series, both of which were by then significantly altered from their 1913 states. The artist built upon his earlier processes of scraping and incising while adding new material, reducing and fragmenting form. He also painted *The Piano Lesson* (1916), the most ambitious of his interiors in this whole period, and, in early 1917, the starkest of this period’s portraits, *Portrait of Auguste Pellerin (II)*. While these works make no direct reference to the war in style or subject, they were physical and mental challenges for the artist, pushing his art to levels of extremity and difficulty that may be considered his responses to the conflict.

*The Piano Lesson* depicts the living room of Matisse's home at Issy-les-Moulineaux, with his elder son, Pierre, at the piano. The painting also features, at bottom left, the artist's sculpture *Decorative Figure* (1908) and, at upper right, his painting *Woman on a High Stool*. The artist began with a naturalistic rendering which he then purged of detail as he worked, scraping down areas and rebuilding them in broad fields of color. His incising on the window frame and stippling on the left side produced a pitted quality that suggests the eroding effects of light or time, a theme reiterated by the presence of the metronome on the piano.

*Portrait of Auguste Pellerin (II)* (1917) is the second of two portraits commissioned by Pellerin, a wealthy Parisian businessman and renowned art collector. The first—a colorful, thinly painted work—was rejected by the sitter as too daring. The artist began again, on this larger, more vertical canvas, reworking and revising as he went; the dark ground conceals the changes made to the position, size, and contours of the sitter's head, and incised lines define the shape of Pellerin's black suit and keep his torso from merging completely into the background. Matisse transformed what had been the more naturalistic portrait into a radically formal, masklike representation.

The artist's major preoccupation in 1916–17 was the advancement of *Bathers by a River*. He transformed the almost monochrome canvas of 1913 into a composition of vertical bands with now greatly enlarged and abstracted figures confined within the rigid geometric structure. His changes closely relate to those that he made in transforming *Back (II)* into *Back (III)* at the same time in the Issy studio. In the painting, a central black band both divides and coheres its two halves, one filled with verdant foliage, the other void of incident. Matisse's final work on the canvas was to revise the colored band between the third and the fourth figure, and to lightly scrape into the paint at the left side to reveal the layers beneath. The incising of the foliage here relates to that of the contemporaneous landscapes *Shaft of Sunlight, the Woods of Trivaux* (1917) and *Garden at Issy* (1917).

*Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* concludes with a digital presentation illustrating the known states of *Bathers by a River* and *Back*, exploring the techniques that provided the foundation for the artist's most radical inventions of this period.

**SPONSORSHIP:**

The exhibition is co-organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

The exhibition is made possible by AXA Equitable Life Insurance Company, AllianceBernstein, and AXA Art.

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**TIMED TICKET INFORMATION:**

Timed tickets for *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* are required for entry to the exhibition, except for MoMA members and their guests, who may enter at any time upon presenting their membership card and/or member guest admission ticket. Timed tickets are free with regular Museum admission and may be purchased online at MoMA.org (\$20 adults; \$16 seniors 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D.; free for children 16 and under). No additional service or handling fees are assessed for purchasing Museum admission tickets on MoMA.org, and the ticket permits access to all other Museum galleries and exhibitions. A limited number of timed-entry tickets are available daily at the Museum on a first-come, first-served basis, beginning at 10:30 a.m.

**Early Viewing Hours**

**Wednesdays–Mondays, July 14–October 11, 9:30–10:30 a.m.**

MoMA Members get special early viewing hours of *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* before the Museum opens to the public. Breakfast will be available for purchase at Terrace 5, including fresh-baked breads, coffee, and mimosas. Early Viewing Hours are open to all MoMA members and their guests by presenting a membership card and/or member guest admission ticket at the Museum entrance.

**PUBLICATION:**

The accompanying publication, incorporating over 650 illustrations—including never before published archival, X-ray, and infrared images—exemplifies a new kind of art history that fully integrates historical, technical, and scientific information for a fresh look at this popular artist's most demanding, experimental, and surprising creations. 368 pages with 650 illustrations. Hardcover, \$65.00. It is published by the Art Institute of Chicago and is available through the MoMA Stores and online at [www.MoMAstore.org](http://www.MoMAstore.org).

**PUBLIC PROGRAM:*****Henri Matisse in the Twenty-first Century***

Wednesday, September 15, 2010, 6:00 p.m., The Celeste Bartos Theater  
Matisse's art continues to be popular, but also to be misunderstood as an art of hedonistic pleasure. This lecture, presented by **John Elderfield**, Chief Curator Emeritus, Department of Painting and Sculpture, and co-organizer of the exhibition *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917*, explores the important lessons that his art, and his attitudes towards it, continue to teach us more than a century after he burst with such controversy into public attention.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at [www.moma.org/talks](http://www.moma.org/talks).

**Brown Bag Lunch Lectures**

September 27 and 30, 2010, 12:30 p.m., Classroom B

***Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917***

This lecture provides an overview of *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917*. Beginning with the artist's return to Paris from Morocco in 1913 and ending with his 1917 departure for Nice, this era gave rise to works as demanding, experimental, and ambitious as any in his long career. Matisse himself acknowledged the significance of these years when he identified two canvases from the period, *Bathers by a River* (1909–17) and *The Moroccans* (1916), as among his most pivotal. While these works have in the past typically been seen as individual, unrelated responses to the influences of Cubism and World War I, this presentation—incorporating extensive new art-historical, archival, and technical research—illustrates their critical role in an ambitious, cohesive project that took the act of creation itself as its main focus. Lauren Mahony, a curatorial assistant in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, will conduct the

lectures. Participants may bring their own lunch. An induction loop sound-amplification system is available for all sessions. Tickets (\$5; members, students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$3) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, at the film desk, in the Education and Research Building lobby, and online at [moma.org/talks](http://moma.org/talks).

**MoMA AUDIO:**

An audio program featuring commentary by the curators of the exhibition will be available at the Museum free of charge, courtesy of Bloomberg; on MoMAWiFi at [www.moma.org/momawifi](http://www.moma.org/momawifi); and as a podcast on [www.moma.org/audio](http://www.moma.org/audio) and iTunes. MoMA Audio is a collaboration between The Museum of Modern Art and Acoustiguide, Inc. Available in English only.

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**For downloadable high-resolution images, register at [www.moma.org/press](http://www.moma.org/press).**

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**Public Information:**

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**Flickr:** [www.flickr.com/groups/themuseumofmodernart/](http://www.flickr.com/groups/themuseumofmodernart/)

**Hours:** Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m.  
Closed Tuesday

**Museum Admission:** \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

**Film Admission:** \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)