

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS PREVIEW:
Thurs., Sept. 8, 1977
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART PREMIERES MAJOR EXHIBITION OF MATISSE CUT-OUTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 12, 1977. Matisse: The Cut-Outs, the largest and most comprehensive exhibition of Henri Matisse's achievements in that medium, will premiere at the National Gallery of Art September 10 through October 23.

During the last years of his life, Matisse (1869-1954) devoted much of his time to exploring a new art form described by one critic as "cut-out paintings." Often of heroic size, the works are made of painted paper attached to a plane surface. They are widely considered the culminating achievement of one of the twentieth-century's greatest artists.

In 1941, recuperating from an illness which left him bedridden, Matisse turned to the cut-out, a pictorial method with which he had experimented earlier in his life and which, during the next ten years, replaced painting and sculpture as his major interest.

The fifty-seven examples selected for the exhibition, all

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reflecting Matisse's extraordinary sense of design and color, include his large independent compositions (Grande décoration aux masques, La Piscine, Les Mille et une nuits), as well as his designs for stained-glass windows (Les Coquelicots and L'Arbre de vie), church vestments (Chasuble rouge and Chasuble noir, for the Chapelle du Rosaire at Vence), tapestries (Polynésie, le ciel and Polynésie, la mer), carpets (Mimosa), and ballet sets (Figure de ballet avec deux danseurs).

For the first time since they were acquired in 1973, five National Gallery cut-outs will be on view: Vénus (1952), from the blue nude series; La Négresse (1952/53), a large composition inspired by Josephine Baker, the famous American entertainer who captivated Parisian audiences; Femme à l'amphore et grenades (1953), a large work in blue on a white ground; Grande décoration aux masques (1953), a 32-foot-long work inspired by the mosaic tile walls Matisse had seen in the Alhambra, the fourteenth-century palace of the Moorish kings in Granada, Spain; and Les Bêtes de la mer... (1950), in which the artist incorporated a variety of forms based on sea plants and sea animals.

Matisse developed the cut-out technique during the 1920s and 1930s, when he was first commissioned to design murals and ballet sets. He also used cut-outs to work out compositions and colors for his paintings before and during execution. After 1951, most of his major works were cut-outs, which were produced from paper painted by his assistants with opaque watercolor, then cut by Matisse and arranged on a background.

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When the composition was complete, the cut paper was attached securely with glue. In his villa La Rêve in the remote hill town of Vence above the French Riviera, Matisse developed an intensely personal and almost romantic feeling for his cut-outs, referring to the brightly colored works surrounding him on his walls as his "garden."

The exhibition was organized by The St. Louis Art Museum and the Detroit Institute of Art, where it will also be seen. The preparation of the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue were initiated and supervised by Jack Cowart, Curator of 19th and 20th Century Art, St. Louis, with assistance from John Hallmark Neff, Curator of Modern Art, Detroit. The installation of the exhibition at the National Gallery was designed by Gaillard F. Ravenel and Mark Leithauser, in consultation with Jack Cowart.

The catalogue, a comprehensive reference work with entries on 218 of Matisse's cut-outs, is the first extensive survey of his production in this medium. The 320-page publication is fully illustrated in both color and black and white. Matisse scholars in the United States and France who have contributed to this volume are Jack Cowart (Introduction), John Hallmark Neff ("Matisse, His Cut-Outs and the Ultimate Method"), Jack D. Flam ("Jazz," discussing a key series within Matisse's work), and Dominique Fourcade ("Something Else," exploring the cut-outs as "drawing-with-scissors"). In addition, Antoinette King has contributed a Technical Appendix on the conservation and restoration of the cut-outs, and John Haletsky has supplied information on the Vence commission and iconography of the chasuble designs.

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This project is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal agency, and financial assistance from the Missouri Arts Council and the Michigan Arts Council. The exhibition is also supported by a Federal indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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Itinerary: National Gallery of Art, Washington
September 10 through October 23, 1977

The Detroit Institute of Arts
November 23 through January 8, 1978

The St. Louis Art Museum
January 29 through March 12, 1978

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.