

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY ANNOUNCES IMPORTANT MATISSE ACQUISITION

WASHINGTON, D. C. February 26, 1979. The acquisition of a major work, The Palm Leaf, Tangier (1912), by Henri Matisse, leader of the Fauve movement and one of the great twentieth-century masters, was announced today by the National Gallery of Art. The painting dates from Matisse's influential winter travel in Morocco.

The painting is on view in a reinstallation of twentieth-century galleries on the upper level of the East Building. Also on view are works acquired within the past several years but not previously exhibited, including Study for a Running Dog by Francis Bacon and a relief sculpture In God's Hands by Käthe Kollwitz.

Works from Matisse's Moroccan period are extremely rare in Western collections with only four in the United States and three in France; the remaining works are in the U. S. S. R. His two Moroccan trips, taken between 1911 and 1913, were of considerable importance in Matisse's development, and the paintings from this period have influenced later twentieth-century art.

Of the trips he wrote: "The voyages to Morocco helped me...make contact with nature again better than did the application of a lively but somewhat limiting theory, Fauvism." Alfred Barr, a renowned Matisse connoisseur and scholar who formerly owned the picture, wrote of this period:

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"The two winters in Tangier produced a deep and stimulating effect on Matisse and art."

Recalling The Palm Leaf, Tangier, Matisse said it was a "burst of spontaneous creation--like a flame." Although nearly an abstract composition, the scene in the painting is a private garden on the plateau overlooking Tangier, as if seen from a window. The picture is an exceptionally fine example of the artist's renewed contact with nature. The atypical colors are less bright but just as vibrant as the bold tonalities for which the artist is famed. Energetic brushstrokes enliven each color area, and all are unified in the center by the flash of palm leaf which seems captured in the midst of its creation. The black bark of the tree trunks and a terracotta-colored path below enhance the grays and greens of the landscape and sky.

The work was acquired through the Chester Dale Fund, which was created in 1965 under the bequest of the former president of the National Gallery for the purpose of making possible further acquisitions of French paintings. It is painted in oil on canvas and measures 46 1/4" x 32 1/4".

The Palm Leaf, Tangier is one of a trio of Moroccan garden paintings identical in size and similar in subject matter but varying greatly in composition and color as Matisse painted the garden from differing points of view. All three garden paintings were probably shown at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris in mid-April 1913, Matisse's fourth one-man show. After the exhibition closed, they were separated, two going into private hands and the third subsequently to the Stockholm Museum. The Bernheim-Jeune exhibition contained a dozen Moroccan paintings as well as sculpture and drawings and received rave critical reviews from

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writers Guillaume Apollinaire and Marcel Sembat. The Gallery's painting was bought by the important German collectors Professor Oskar and Mrs. Greta Moll of Berlin. Later it was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Barr, Jr.

Study for a Running Dog (c. 1954) by Francis Bacon was acquired by the National Gallery in 1976 as a gift of Ruth Fisher Rhetts and Family in memory of Charles Edward Rhetts. It is painted in oil on canvas and measures 60 1/8" x 46".

In God's Hands (1935/36) by Käthe Kollwitz was a gift in 1977 of Mr. and Mrs. Hans W. Weigert in memory of Lili B. Weigert (1907-1945). It is the first sculpture by this twentieth-century German master to enter the Gallery's collection.

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