

# MATISSE IN MOROCCO

## The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913

a USA/USSR Joint Project

National Gallery of Art, Washington

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

The State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad

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MATISSE'S ART INSPIRED BY MOROCCO

TO BEGIN USA/USSR TOUR AT NATIONAL GALLERY

SHOW INCLUDES NEWLY DISCOVERED WORKS

Washington, D.C., November 14, 1989 -- An exhibition of paintings and newly discovered drawings executed by Henri Matisse in Morocco in 1912 and 1913 will be held in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art March 18 through June 3, 1990. Matisse in Morocco, The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913, organized by the National Gallery of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, and The State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, will be the first exhibition worked out in all phases jointly by western and Soviet curators. Matisse in Morocco, the most comprehensive show ever devoted to this pivotal phase of the artist's career, is made possible by a generous grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

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"This extraordinary exhibition owes its existence to the vision and diligence of a unique team of Soviet and western scholars," said J. Carter Brown, National Gallery director. "It represents for me not only one of the most dazzling moments in twentieth-century art, but also new chapters in the study of Matisse's art and in the cooperation of museums and scholars east and west."

Richard E. Oldenburg, director of The Museum of Modern Art, commented: "This exhibition will contribute importantly to modern art scholarship and give great pleasure to a large public in this country and in the U.S.S.R. We are delighted to be collaborating on this project with our museum colleagues in Washington, Moscow, and Leningrad."

Henri Matisse visited Tangier twice, from late January to mid-April 1912, and from early October 1912 until mid-February 1913. Already an established artist in Europe, he came to North Africa in search of new motifs. The exotic environment of Morocco proved extraordinarily fruitful. Matisse completed 23 paintings, many of them masterworks, and more than 60 drawings, most of them lively studies of the people and the Casbah of Tangier.

For Matisse, Morocco represented a kind of earthly paradise. He was struck by its strong southern light and bold architecture, which inspired him to flatten and simplify his compositions while employing bold juxtapositions of color. He chose as subjects the landscape, architecture, and gardens of Tangier, still lifes, and the Moroccan people. The motifs and techniques he developed in Morocco influenced and informed his work for the rest of his career.

Matisse in Morocco, a U.S.A./U.S.S.R. joint project, will include loans from public and private collections in the United States, Soviet Union, France, Sweden, and Switzerland. There will be 23 paintings, 12 of which have never been exhibited in the United States, and 45 drawings, the vast majority of which were unknown before research for the project began and 42 of which have never been exhibited before. The Moroccan paintings are large and colorful. The drawings are energetic, personal pen-and-ink sketches made by Matisse as he searched for motifs in the Casbah and medina (old city) of Tangier.

One of the most important features in the exhibition, a trio of paintings never before seen in the United States, is the famous Moroccan Triptych from Moscow's Pushkin Museum. The ensemble features Sur la terrasse (On the Terrace), a painting of Matisse's Moroccan model Zorah, flanked by Paysage vu d'une fenêtr<sup>e</sup> (Landscape Viewed from a Window), a rendering of the view of the city and bay of Tangier as seen from the artist's hotel window, and by Porte de la Casbah (Casbah Gate), a view through an arched gate to the medina.

Matisse's Moroccan paintings were immediately sought after by private collectors in France, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, and Russia. His two most important patrons were Ivan A. Morosov and Sergei I. Shchukin, both from Moscow. Ultimately, Morosov and Shchukin acquired nearly half of the paintings Matisse completed in Morocco, and these paintings are today in the collections of The State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad and the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.

matisse in morocco . . . page four

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue containing essays by the initiators of the exhibition: Jack Cowart, curator of twentieth-century art at the National Gallery, and Pierre Schneider, a noted art critic and writer on Matisse; as well as by John Elderfield, director of the drawings department at The Museum of Modern Art; and Albert Kostenevich, chief curator of modern European painting at The Hermitage. The catalogue also contains contributions by Laura Coyle, research associate for the exhibition at the National Gallery; Beatrice Kernan, assistant curator in the department of drawings at The Museum of Modern Art; and Marina Bessonova, curator of modern French painting at the Pushkin Museum. The catalogue features many rare archival photographs, full entries on the paintings in the show, new chronologies, many never-before-published drawings dated 1912/1913, and significant new documentation excerpted from letters and postcards Matisse wrote in Morocco.

After its premiere at the National Gallery, the show will travel to The Museum of Modern Art, New York, June 24 through September 4, 1990. It will also appear at the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, September 28 through November 20, 1990 and The State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, December 15, 1990 through February 15, 1991.