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NEW BOOK BY JACK FLAM UNLOCKS THE MYSTERIES

BEHIND MATISSE'S DANCE MURALS

WASHINGTON, DC -- Matisse: The Dance, a new book written by Jack Flam, one of the world's leading Matisse scholars, reveals the fascinating story behind Henri Matisse's monumental Dance murals. The richly illustrated 87-page book has been published by the National Gallery of Art on the occasion of the first public display of the newly discovered and restored Unfinished Dance Mural (approximately 44 x 11 feet)--considered by experts to be one of the most remarkable art discoveries of the twentieth century, as reported in the New York Times. On loan from the Estate of Pierre Matisse and the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Unfinished Dance Mural is displayed across from the Merion Dance Mural (approximately 42 x 11 1/2 feet), which was part of the popular exhibition Great French Paintings from The Barnes Foundation: Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and Early Modern at the National Gallery of Art.

"In his absorbing narrative, Jack Flam vividly evokes both

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dance mural book . . . page 2

the art-historical and human dimensions of the mural project.

Matisse: The Dance adds a great deal to our knowledge about Matisse himself, and to our appreciation of the immense energy, ingenuity, and sophistication that he brought to everything he did," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition of the Unfinished Dance Mural is made possible by a gift made in memory of the artist's son Pierre Matisse, a noted art dealer. The two Dance murals are on view through September 26, 1993, at the National Gallery and are currently scheduled to be on display at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris with the Paris Dance Mural, a third version of the subject, from mid-November 1993 through mid-March 1994.

The exhibition Great French Paintings from The Barnes Foundation is supported by a grant from GTE Corporation. The show at the National Gallery, which closed on August 15, will be on view at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, from September 6, 1993, through January 2, 1994, and at the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, January 21 through April 3, 1994.

"Intrigued by the complexity of what had at first seemed to be simply an incident in Matisse's life, I turned up a great deal of fresh documentary material pertaining to the whole mural project," said Jack Flam. His book draws upon unpublished letters and diary entries and is illustrated by previously unpublished photographs of the work in progress and previously

dance mural book . . . page 3

unknown studies for it.

Flam describes how Matisse came to the United States to serve on the 1930 Carnegie International Exhibition jury. He visited The Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania, which had the largest private collection of Matisse paintings in the world at that time, and met Dr. Albert C. Barnes, the collector. Dr. Barnes gave Matisse a private tour and proposed that the artist create a mural for the main gallery of the foundation.

Flam reveals how the commission from Dr. Barnes came at a critical time in Matisse's career and precipitated a radical change in his art, including the development of his innovative cut-paper technique.

Just as Matisse was about to finish the mural, he discovered that a mistake had been made in the measurements. He had to start over again, painting a second version that was later installed in Merion. It was referred to as Dance II.

The artist returned to the first set of canvases and reworked the composition extensively, still using the cut and pinned paper technique that he had developed as he began the mural project over the abandoned oil painting. When Matisse arrived at a satisfactory final composition, he transferred the cut-paper design to a third set of canvases, now in the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris and known as the Paris Dance Mural (which is dated 1932 on the canvas, and previously referred to as Dance I, but was actually finished in 1933). He then

dance mural book . . . page 4

rolled up the first set of canvases and stored them away. They disappeared from sight until they were discovered in the spring of 1992 in Matisse's last studio in the Hotel Regina, Nice, and became known as the Unfinished Dance Mural. This discovery has shed new light on the sequence of the three versions.

The book also provides rare insights into the personal side of Matisse during this period. Flam relates how Matisse left his critics and marital problems behind as he sailed off for the United States, en route to Tahiti in early 1930. According to Flam, Matisse arrived in New York and "reveled in the clarity of the light and the energy of the people, and the day after he arrived he wrote that he felt twenty years younger."

Matisse: The Dance contains full-color illustrations of the various versions of the Dance murals, as well as black and white illustrations of preparatory studies and sketches, related works, and photographs of the artist at work. The price of the softcover book is \$7.95. It is available in the National Gallery of Art bookstores in Washington or may be ordered by calling (301) 322-5900.

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