

## Matisse, Matisse, Matisse ...

By Julien Beauhaire (translated by Lauren Hasty)

**A new, educational journey towards better understanding Matisse is currently being offered at Centre Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition presents the artist's repetitions of pairs, series and identical compositions using various canvases, and treatments.**

"The wasps flower green / Dawn passes around the neck / A necklace of windows / Wings cover the leaves / You have all the solar joys / All the sun on the earth / On the ways of thy beauty" (Paul Eluard, "The Earth is Blue Like an Orange" in *The Love of Poetry*, 1929)

The first work by Henri Matisse exhibited at the Pompidou Center, on the occasion of the exhibition "Matisse, Pairs and Series", is an explosion of color and clean fauvism, accentuated by a clear and airy hanging which highlights the series works, another way of understanding the work of Matisse.

### Consistency

For the exhibit, sixty paintings, including four large gouaches on paper, and about thirty drawings have been assembled together. Being exposed for the first time since the retrospective organized by the MoMA in New York in 1992, these works by Matisse are being presented from a new angle, the artist's fascination with pairs and series. From one work to another he varied the setting, contours, and colors like an explorer. "I wanted to show the consistency of his work through a singular essential and critical aspect: the manner in which the artist worked by using or repeating the same compositions and distinct formal treatment according to the paintings, in pairs or sets", says Cecile Debray, the curator of the exhibition.

Matisse is an extraordinary artist, often considered as one of the masters of modern art, but too often depicted as a virtuoso of an easy and joyful style. While studying law, a serious illness led him to paint, and while at first failing to be accepted at the Académie de Beaux Arts, he tried again several times and was finally accepted 1894. In Saint-Tropez, he studied under Signac and painted *Le goûter* in 1904, then *Luxe, calme et volupté*. He then moved to Collioure, and during the summer and winter of 1907 painted *Luxe I* and *II*, which signified the starting point of his famous "soeurs" series. This was an important first step in a dialogue that came to nurture the art of the second half of the twentieth century.

### Doubt

Towards the end of his career as a painter, and until the paper cutouts of the 1950s, Matisse reproduced the same pattern for three or four parallel paintings in a single temporal sequence. While similar, the works are in opposition, forming contrasts that differ in the inheritance of his discoveries. The Giotto frescos allowed him to implement a new treatment using tempera, acidulate colors and filigree, which brought about his later works known as "pop". The articulation between the versions is done on surfaces and color. One senses the doubts, anxieties and obsessions of the artist. The drawing, the color, the surface, and the volume, everything is questioned. "We go from plastic doubt to philosophic doubt," says Cecile Debray.

### Work in progress

The rest of the visit follows a chronological thread. The visual demonstration, paired with a few commentaries, is enough to explain the absence of the painter's method. "Painting is like a game of

cards, you need to know from the beginning what you want get in the end. Everything must be worked in reverse and ended even before it began”, he admits. Belonging to no particular period or artistic movement, Matisse took his colorist revolution from Fauvism, a few draft plans from Cubism, certain pauses from Naturalism and a dreamlike style from Onirism.

In 1945, Matisse presented 6 paintings at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, surrounded by enlarged and framed photographic prints depicting the steps of his painting. Plunging into the abyss of his own work, the painter became a photographer and his photographs become complementary parts of the pairs and series. Recreated for the exhibition, “This room of work in process, almost film like, is very innovative,” says Cecile Debray.

The last room gives way to the masterful series of *Blue Nudes* (1952). Always very considerate of the form, the artist opts this time for blue gouache on white paper, cut and pasted on canvas. Blue like an orange. Like oranges.

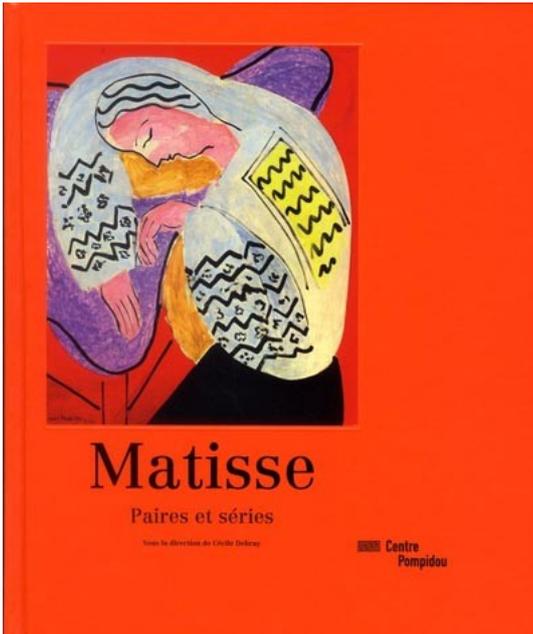


Henri Matisse, *Nu bleu II: Nu bleu II*, 1952, Cut paper and gouache glued on white canvas, 116.2 x 88.9 cm. Acquired in 1984. Centre Pompidou Paris Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle © Succession H. Matisse



Henri Matisse, *Nu bleu III: Nu bleu III*, 1952, Cut paper and gouache glued on white canvas, 112 x 73.5 cm. Acquired in 1982. Centre Pompidou Paris Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle © Succession H. Matisse

**Matisse, Pairs and Series** from March 7<sup>th</sup> until June 18<sup>th</sup> at Centre Pompidou.



Beautiful and rich the catalogue *Matisse, Pairs and Series*, written under the direction of Cecile Debray (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 288 pages, 42 €).

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