

FONDATION **BEYELER**

E

Matisse

Invitation to the Voyage



Cover:

Henri Matisse

Baigneuses à la tortue, Paris, 1907/1908

Bathers with a Turtle

Oil on canvas, 181.6 × 221.0 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer Jr.

© Succession H. Matisse /2024, ProLitteris, Zurich

MATISSE

Invitation to the Voyage

22 September 2024 – 26 January 2025

INTRODUCTION

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) is one of the most significant and influential exponents of modern art. From his revolutionary early paintings and sculptures to the legendary cut-outs of his later years, he constantly renewed his artistic practice. This retrospective features more than 70 of his most important works.

The exhibition takes as its starting point the famous poem *L'invitation au voyage* (*Invitation to the Voyage*) by French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), which Matisse repeatedly referred to. Indeed, Matisse travelled greatly and widely for his time: to the South of France, Italy and Spain, North Africa and Russia, the United States, and as far as the South Pacific. These journeys, often undertaken in search of new light and colours, inspired him and shaped his works in multiple ways.

We thus invite you on a journey through Henri Matisse's fascinating oeuvre and hope you enjoy many inspiring encounters with his unique pictorial worlds.

ROOM 1

1 La desserte, Paris, 1896/1897

The Dinner Table

Oil on canvas

Private collection

A housemaid is busy putting the last touches to a lavishly laid table. The motif, the details and the size of the canvas signal the ambition of a young artist keen to display his technical skills as a painter. This rarely exhibited painting is regarded as Henri Matisse's first major work. Next to the influence of Impressionism, it bears the traces of Matisse's intense study of works in the collections of the Louvre in Paris as a student of the French painter Gustave Moreau. There, Matisse engaged deeply with 17th-century Dutch still-life painting, and more specifically with Jan Davidsz. de Heem's *A Table of Desserts* (1640), in order to study the depiction of various objects and textures in complex lighting situations. This early work not only displays Matisse's engagement with the history of painting, it also prefigures certain leitmotifs as well as the exceptional sense of colour that were to characterise his work.

ROOM 1

2 Luxe, calme et volupté, Paris, 1904

Oil on canvas

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

In this painting, numerous shimmering dots of colour produce a scene of mythological appearance. With the title *Luxe, calme et volupté* ("richness, serenity and pleasure"), Matisse makes a direct reference to the refrain of Charles Baudelaire's famous poem *Invitation to the Voyage* (1857). Like the poet in his verses, in his painting Matisse envisions an idyll that appears as though fallen outside of time, which he attempts to carry over into his present reality. The image is thus based on a painting Matisse made of his wife and one of their two sons on the beach of Saint-Tropez in the summer of 1904. The artist spent that summer in the company of the Neo-Impressionist painter Paul Signac, experimenting with the so-called Pointillist painting technique. However, Matisse seems not to have been fully convinced: he soon began transforming the dots of colour into larger colour fields – a step that would soon after lead him to Fauvism.

ROOM 2

3 La fenêtre ouverte, Collioure, 1905

The Open Window

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Matisse painted this small-format canvas in the fishing village of Collioure in southern France, near the Pyrenees, where he spent a first summer in 1905 with his family and the painter André Derain. This stay is viewed as pivotal for the artistic revolution that led to the liberation of colour from its representational function. Critics coined the term “Fauvism” for this movement, following a description of the avant-garde artists gathered around Matisse as “fauves” (the French word for “wild beasts”). The painting features a palette of unmixed colours and seemingly spontaneous brushstrokes. Here, Matisse aims for maximum chromatic intensity and largely dispenses with light-and-dark effects, volumes and spatial depth. Instead, the composition is divided into highly contrasted areas of colour, which are structured by varying brushwork in different sections of the image. From then on, the open window was to become a key motif in Matisse’s work. In its symbolic dimension as an eye onto the world, the open window also operates as a form of “invitation to the voyage”.

ROOM 2

4 Les tapis rouges, Collioure, 1906

The Red Rugs

Oil on canvas

Musée de Grenoble

A red wall hanging as well as other blue and red fabrics almost completely fill the picture space, their decorative colourfulness governing the composition. Fruit, a vase and a book – typical elements of traditional still lifes – here feature as rather random details.

Matisse grew up in Bohain-en-Vermandois in northern France, home to many weaving mills, and all through his life he remained fascinated by fabrics of all kinds. In May 1906, he travelled to Algeria, at the time a French colony. He found inspiration in the local craftsmanship. On the markets of Biskra, he was especially captivated by prayer rugs, of which he bought several. From then on, these and other fabrics in Matisse's collection became defining elements of his pictures. On the one hand, they sparked his interest in ornament and decoration. On the other hand, they spurred his abandonment of more conventional conceptions of perspective and form, freeing his approach to spatiality.

ROOM 3

5 Le luxe I, Collioure, 1907

Oil on canvas

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

In the summer of 1907, Matisse and his wife Amélie undertook a journey through Italy. In Padua, he engaged deeply with the Italian artist Giotto's late medieval fresco paintings. Just before this journey, Matisse had painted *Le luxe I* ("richness"), a canvas already evocative of a fresco and heralding a turn toward monumental painting. Only a few years after his early Fauvist works, Matisse here displays a wholly different pictorial idiom. The painting's subject is enigmatic: is the standing figure a real woman or a cult statue? What exactly is the figure bowing at her feet doing? The title of the painting once more echoes the refrain of Baudelaire's poem *Invitation to the Voyage*: "Luxe, calme et volupté ..." Borrowing from various artistic styles and periods ranging from Antiquity to the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Japanese colour woodcuts, in these three female figures Matisse condenses body images drawn from different cultural traditions into a new figuration that reaches beyond Western canons of beauty.

ROOM 3

6 Baigneuses à la tortue, Paris, 1907/1908

Bathers with a Turtle

Oil on canvas

Saint Louis Art Museum

This large-format painting gives a sense of the lasting impression left on Matisse by his encounter with Giotto's fresco paintings in Italy – both in the radically reduced landscape composed of three horizontal bands of colour and in the three women's sculptural corporeality. The image also attests to Matisse's engagement with Paul Cézanne's modern depictions of bathers. These European influences combine with the bodily representations of sub-Saharan African sculpture, which echo in the figures' strong and angular lines, smooth planes, sharp edges and stylised stiffness. The fascination for these sculptures was part of a wider interest – shaped to no small extent by a colonial backdrop – taken by modern European artists in supposedly “primitive” art. Matisse's enigmatic image harks back to notions of the primeval: the seemingly archaic naked bodies and the turtle's prehistoric origins are evocative of an immemorial past.

ROOM 4

7 Acanthes (Paysage marocain), Tangier, 1912

Acanthus (Moroccan Landscape)

Oil on canvas

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Isolated tall trees rise above an undergrowth suggested only by a few stylised forms. The landscape, rendered predominantly in shades of purple, blue and green, appears as the visualisation of a sensory perception of nature. *Acanthes (Paysage marocain)* is one of three large landscape paintings produced during the artist's first journey to Morocco in the Senya el Hashti park, a vast private estate in Tangier. Matisse's stay in the winter of 1912, dogged by persistent rainfall, initially proved disappointing. Yet eventually, he found himself enthralled by the blaze of colour unleashed by the lush vegetation bursting into bloom on the hills around Tangier. In this composition, Matisse focusses on the acanthus, a plant he was familiar with from southern France. Its formal reduction abstracts the depiction of nature and illustrates the decorative possibilities inherent in botanical elements.

ROOM 4

8 Poissons rouges et sculpture, Issy-les-Moulineaux, 1912

Goldfish and Sculpture

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

At first, the relative scales in this composition featuring a goldfish bowl, a flower vase and a reclining nude feel awkward. Only at second glance do we realise that the figure is in fact a sculpture, one element of a still life arranged within an entirely blue space defined by just a few lines. The sculpture is a terracotta figure dating from 1907, whose appearance Matisse varied in several paintings. It is on display in this exhibition room as a bronze titled *Nu couché I (Aurore)*. Following Matisse's journeys to Morocco, the goldfish bowl also joined his inventory of props, and it can be found in many of his paintings. The objects purchased and impressions gathered over the course of his travels turned Matisse's studio in Issy-les-Moulineaux near Paris into an inspiring space of retreat and imagination.

ROOM 4

9 Poissons rouges et palette, Paris, 1914/1915

Goldfish and Palette

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Featuring large colour fields of blueish grey, black and a matte white as well as sharply broken lines, this painting conveys a subdued mood rarely found in Matisse's work. A more vividly coloured still life stands out, the curved shapes of the goldfish, a plant and a piece of fruit echoing the scrolls of the balcony railing. Matisse painted this picture during a particularly experimental phase. Multiple perspectives and the flatness of the spatial representation reveal the influence of Cubism. The painting technique also attests to Matisse's appetite for experimentation: scratching, layering and scraping, he accentuated hatchings and light reflexes. The outbreak of World War I most likely also left its mark on the picture – established orders collapsed and Matisse's formerly vibrant colour palette darkened.

ROOM 5

10 Grand intérieur, Nice, Nice, 1919

Large Interior, Nice

Oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago

Depicted in delicate colours, an interior space guides our gaze through an open window toward a balcony, where it is returned by a seated female figure. The room's brightness seems to barely differ from its seaside surroundings. This impression of unity between exterior and interior is further reinforced by the carefully rendered shadows on the translucent curtains. Matisse returned repeatedly to the motif of the open window as an interface between the inside and the outside, especially in times of artistic crisis. Between 1917 and 1922, chiefly during the winter months, he used a hotel room in Nice as his studio. The many interiors he painted there give expression to the simultaneous sense of the transitory and the domestic typically conveyed by hotel rooms.

ROOM 6

11 Nu de dos I, Issy-les-Moulineaux, 1909

The Back I

Bronze, cast 5/10

Kunsthaus Zürich

Next to painting, Matisse also engaged deeply with sculpture. These four nudes seen from behind are remarkable in a number of ways. As low reliefs and in terms of sheer size, they differ greatly from Matisse's small-format figures and busts. Taken as a whole, the series shows how he kept developing the same motif over a period of more than twenty years from 1909 to 1930. After a first – lost – version made of clay, he changed his material to plaster. With each new version, the initially dynamically twisting figure became flatter. Matisse gradually simplified the forms down to the last, radically pared down and almost axisymmetric composition, in which the long plait of hair marks the parting line. This process of abstraction is akin to the one he followed for the *Jeannette* busts (→ Room 4). However, it seems that the *Backs* were of mainly experimental value to Matisse: almost all bronze casts were produced only in the last years of his life and the plaster version of *Nu de dos II* was discovered in his studio in Nice only after his death.

ROOM 6

12 Figure décorative sur fond ornemental, Nice, 1925/1926

Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Ground

Oil on canvas

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

Matisse furnished his studio in Nice with numerous decorative elements, which he used for his “oriental” pictures. In these images, he staged models – naked or dressed in clothing he provided, reclining or sitting – in the manner of so-called “odalisques”. Originally, the term referred to servants in the sultan’s harem. This theme had gained in popularity in 19th-century European painting, conveying widespread erotically charged stereotypes of “the Orient”. In the 1920s, Matisse worked on such images in idealising reminiscence of his North African travels. He succeeded in lending the subject a novel, modern form. *Figure décorative sur fond ornemental* is probably his most impressive odalisque. In depicting the female figure sitting on the ground, Matisse forwent anatomical accuracy. The body is both sensual and angular, bringing to mind a modern sculpture. As for the ornaments of the rug and the floral wallpaper, they extend across the entire pictorial space. There is even a hidden violin... Can you spot it?

ROOM 7

13 Grand nu couché (Nu rose), Nice, 1935

Large Reclining Nude (The Pink Nude)

Oil on canvas

The Baltimore Museum of Art

In this chromatically overwhelming painting, the large female nude bursts the confines of the canvas. The body's pinkish-orange colouring forms a strong contrast to the blue-and-white chequered bench. In the background, we see a red ledge, a white tile pattern with green joints and a hard to identify shape in yellow and ochre. We immediately notice the huge disparity in size between the woman's small head and the rest of her body, especially her elongated limbs. The skin tone is applied in flat strokes – the impression of volume is created only by the body's curved outline, which is emphasised by a dark contour.

Matisse spent several weeks reworking this image, for which his long-term collaborator Lydia Delectorskaya posed as a model. Over the course of more than twenty-six revisions, he pared down the figure to such an extent that it finally looks as though collaged into the picture. This work thus already displays great kinship with Matisse's later paper cut-outs (→ more information in the exhibition's multimedia space).

ROOM 7

14 La grande robe bleue et mimosas, Nice, 1937

The Large Blue Robe and Mimosas

Oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art

In this painting, Matisse depicted his collaborator Lydia Delectorskaya in a decorative domestic setting. Due to the unusual perspective, the frontally seated figure takes up almost the full height of the picture. The curved shape of her armchair and the black, wing-like areas echo the baroque forms of her blue dress. Like a radiant crown, yellow mimosas fan out behind her head. The depiction is reminiscent of traditional ruler portraits. Yet its modernity is manifest in the interplay of voluminous forms and flat arrangements of colour. Matisse establishes a dialogue of equals between line and colour, drawing and painting. He forgoes naturalism in favour of compositional balance, as is particularly apparent in the oversized hands. The painting's flatness and vivid colours give a clear sense of Matisse's lasting influence on subsequent artistic movements such as Pop Art.

ROOM 8

15 L'Asie, Vence, 1946

Asia

Oil on canvas

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

An imposing female figure is pictured against a red background interspersed with black arabesques. The body's verticality is broken by the dynamic lines of the gown, the string of pearls, the head and the arms. The face, the hair, the clothes and the hands are delineated by dark lines that echo the background decor. The various areas of colour are balanced down to the smallest detail. The blue-green of the eyes thus precisely matches the hue of the pearl necklace. The background red, the skin's ochre tones, the colours of the fabrics and the contrasting black of the hair form a vibrantly colourful whole.

The title *L'Asie* suggests that we are looking at a personification of the Asian continent. It may also refer to the Chinese cloak the model is wearing over her dress. Both items of clothing were taken from Matisse's private collection of textiles, which he often drew upon for his works. The model is Elvire Josephine Van Hyfte, whom Matisse portrayed several times. Born in the Belgian Congo, she studied philosophy in Belgium and met the artist through writer friends.

ROOM 8

16 Intérieur à la fougère noire, Vence, 1948

Interior with Black Fern

Oil on canvas

Beyeler Collection

This striking painting is among the last Matisse produced at the villa “Le Rêve” in Vence in southern France before devoting himself fully to paper cut-outs. Its skilfully devised composition features intense colour contrasts and a dense juxtaposition of various expansive patterns. Against the red wall, the sweeping outline of the fern appears far livelier than the teeming vegetation behind the window. As can also be seen in several others of Matisse’s late interiors, the framing window transforms nature into an image within the image. The dynamic lines of the leaf stalks find their echo in the lines of the table legs. The left leg casually pierces through the outline of the sketchily drawn seated figure, which compared to the surrounding objects’ animation appears passive and inert. In terms of form and colour, the figure is connected to the bowl of lemons on the table, establishing a soothing counterweight within the composition. With its perspectival foreshortening, the plain black rug at the bottom of the image bolsters the impression of spatiality, as well as providing a background for the artist’s signature and details of the painting’s year and place of production.

ROOM 9

17 Océanie, le ciel and Océanie, la mer,

Paris, both 1946/1948

Oceania, the Sky and *Oceania, the Sea*

Screen print on linen

Beyeler Collection

The light brown canvas features a riot of white and stylised sea and air creatures interspersed with seaweeds. Framing borders of algae close off the rhythmical compositions. These motifs are a late echo of the impressions left on Matisse by his journey to Tahiti in 1930. The compositions came into being rather accidentally: Matisse cut out a swallow in white paper to pin it onto a dirty patch on the fabric-covered wall of his apartment on the Boulevard du Montparnasse in Paris. This was followed by a cut-out fish and other motifs, and soon the entire wall was covered in various paper shapes.

Unlike his other cut-outs, in collaboration with London-based textile designer Zika Ascher, Matisse used a screen printing technique to transfer his ephemeral compositions onto a linen fabric whose texture and colour precisely matched those of the original wall covering. This meticulous process took more than two years.

ROOM 9

18 Nu bleu aux bas verts, Cimiez / Nice, 1952

Blue Nude with Green Stockings

Gouache on paper, cut and pasted, on paper on canvas

Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

A female nude is hovering in a pale pictorial space alongside two leaf-shaped seaweeds. With its blue and magenta colouring, the body is related to the plants, only the legs displaying a green life of their own. In this work, Matisse combines two key themes of his cut-outs: the blue female nude and ornamental plant shapes. Contrasting with the lavishly detailed spatial designs of his paintings, this life-size work is pared down to the utmost. Only the sharp outlines of the cut paper shapes animate an otherwise undetermined space, placing the focus firmly on the figure's appearance. Matisse compared working on his cut-outs to sculpture: "Drawing with scissors. Cutting straight into colour reminds me of a sculptor's direct carving into stone." His *papiers découpés* merge drawing, painting and sculpture. They collapse traditional oppositions between foreground and background, or ornament and the human figure, in favour of fluid forms that carry the potential for transformation within themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibition is generously supported by:

Beyeler-Stiftung

Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation

Martin and Marianne Haefner-Jeltsch

L. + Th. La Roche-Stiftung

Dr Christoph M. Müller and Sibylla M. Müller

Novartis

Tarbaca Indigo Foundation

Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne

Federal Office of Culture

Peter and Simone Forcart-Staehelin

Annetta Grisard

Hans Imholz-Stiftung

Hilti Art Foundation

HMSL Stiftung

Karitative Stiftung Dr. Gerber-ten Bosch

FX and Natasha de Mallmann

Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF)

Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso

Fondation Philanthropique Famille Sandoz

Scheidegger-Thommen-Stiftung

Georg und Bertha Schwyzer-Winiker-Stiftung

Max and Marianne Staehelin-Seidel

Sulger-Stiftung

Friends and Art Club of the Fondation Beyeler

as well as further private patrons who wish to remain unnamed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Art Education Programme and enabling free admission for children and young adults up to 25 are supported by the Thomas and Doris Ammann Foundation.

The exhibition guide has been produced with the friendly support of



INFORMATION

Exhibition

Curator: Dr Raphaël Bouvier

Curatorial Assistants: Dominique Huber
and Amelie Baader

Exhibition guide

Texts: Julia Beyer, Raphaël Bouvier, Stefanie Bringezu,
Victoria Gellner, Dominique Huber, Janine Schmutz

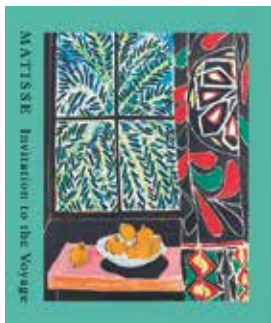
Editing: Stefanie Bringezu

Translation: Maud Capelle

Graphic design: Heinz Hiltbrunner

“Invitation to the Voyage” by Charles Baudelaire
from *The Flowers of Evil* by Charles Baudelaire,
translated by Anthony Mortimer, Richmond, 2016,
translation © Anthony Mortimer, 2016, reproduced with
permission of Alma Books Ltd

We look forward to receiving your feedback on the
exhibition guide at kunstvermittlung@fondationbeyeler.ch



EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

MATISSE – Invitation to the Voyage

Edited by Raphaël Bouvier for the
Fondation Beyeler, Hatje Cantz, 216 pp., 114 ill., CHF 62.50

EXHIBITION COMPANION VOLUME

Matisse

Edited by Raphaël Bouvier for the
Fondation Beyeler, Hatje Cantz, 56 pp., 32 ill., CHF 9.80

Further publications on Henri Matisse are available from
our Art Shop: shop.fondationbeyeler.ch

Upcoming exhibition:

NORTHERN LIGHTS

26 January – 25 May 2025

FONDATION **BEYELER**

Baselstrasse 101, CH-4125 Riehen/Basel
fondationbeyeler.ch

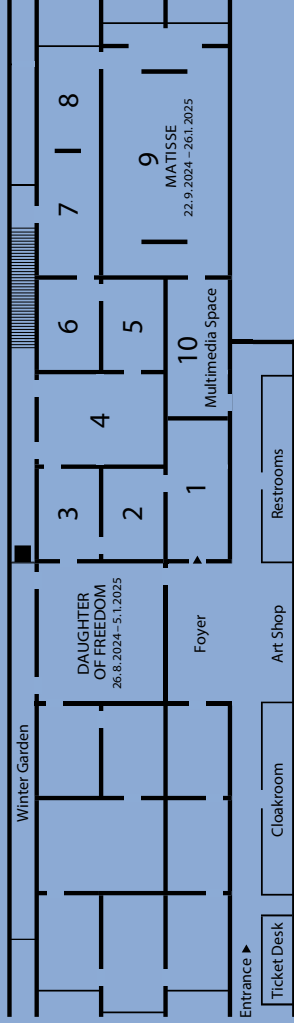
#BeyelerMatisse



MATISSE

Invitation to the Voyage

22 September 2024 – 26 January 2025



Please do not touch the artworks!