

## **A Singular Collection**

The collection of the Musée Matisse, Nice, is unique in the world in its gathering of works and objects from the artist and his heirs. Much of these came directly from Henri Matisse's studio and thus constitutes an exceptional testament. To visit the Musée Matisse is to access the innermost layer of his creation and in so doing bring it back to life through an itinerary in which works and objects respond to each other.

For Matisse, the studio was not only a neutral place for production; it was a framework for his inspiration and its engine. It is also a site to present his own works for himself or those who might call on him. Matisse carefully selected what to surround himself with, thus creating a shifting environment that changed from the theatrical space of the studio on the Place Charles Félix in Nice, in which he deployed his odalisques, to the atmosphere of exotic garden in the apartment-studio at the Regina, where he worked on the maquettes for large cut-outs directly on the walls.

Matisse was the first-rate and the most demanding collector of his own works. The things he kept were selected because they meant something special to him and his oeuvre. Each of the objects and artworks in the Musée Matisse's collection is a legacy charged with such significance. Their material value is inestimable, but furthermore this exceptional ensemble should thus be read as a message the artist addressed to us through his—and now our—collection.

Matisse's furniture, textiles and various utensils, constituting what the writer and poet Louis Aragon elegantly called the artist's "palette of objects," are mostly held by the Musée Matisse, Nice, a collection of more than 130 objects. This rare ensemble are augmented by objects from various non-Occidental cultures, Oceanian, African and Far-Eastern or Islamic arts Matisse owned. They constituted the crucial source of inspiration for an oeuvre largely built on inter-cultural dialogue.

The Musée Matisse's collection include 31 paintings, 454 drawings and prints, 38 cut-outs and 57 sculptures, spanning all the periods of the artist's production, as well as more than 400 paper cut-out elements, shapes unused un Matisse finished works given by the Matisse family in 2012. There are a few exceptional bodies of works. The Musée Matisse is the only one in Europe to hold the quasi-totality of the artist's sculptural oeuvre, thus foregrounding a practice he associated to that of painting all through his career. With

*Nature morte aux livres*, his first painting from 1890, a body of works attests to his beginnings and his training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts: “I invented myself by considering at first my earliest works,” Matisse told Apollinaire in 1907. The works from the fauve period shows his entry into the field of expression by color, notably with the emblematic *Madame Matisse* of 1905, as well as the portrait of the artist by André Derain. The Musée also holds a set of preparatory works, drawings and paintings related to the *Dance* mural for Barnes (1930–1933), as well as two large compositions from the 1930s, *Tahiti I* (1935) and *La Verdure* (1935–1943). The cut-outs, the last technique perfected by the artist, are particularly well represented with pieces like *Nu bleu IV* (1952), *La Danseuse créole* (1950), as well as the great composition *Fleurs et fruits* (1952–1953), one of the largest in a European museum. This is complemented by an impressive body of preparatory works for the Vence Chapel, notably with 13 of 19 maquettes for the chasubles and large brush drawings.

Centered on this singular collection, the Musée Matisse develops a dynamic programming of temporary exhibitions, and educational and cultural activities aiming to promote the knowledge of Henri Matisse’s work. The central axe of the programming, begun in 2017, rests on the principle of dialogue between cultures and generations, echoing the spirit of Matisse’s artistic inquiry.