

MATISSE IN 400 IMAGES

MATISSE

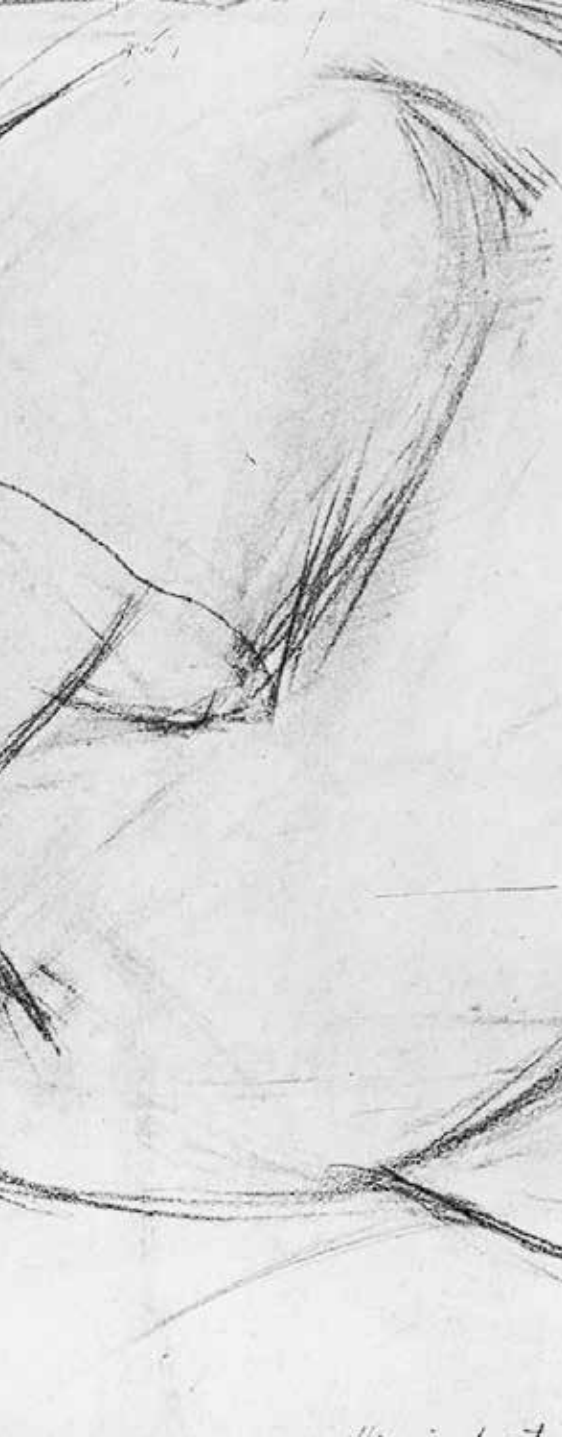
IN 400 IMAGES

Julie Waseige

Ludion

7	Introduction
10	The Call of Modernity 1869–1905
53	The Shock of the Fauve 1905–1908
103	The Reign of the Decorative 1908–1913
169	On the Threshold of Abstraction 1913–1917
217	The Intimate Theater of Nice 1917–1930
307	Themes and Variations 1930–1943
405	Matisse's Second Life 1943–1954
494	Biography
504	List of Works





Themes and Variations

1930–1943



The second version of *The Dance* as installed at the Barnes Foundation, occupying three lunettes, each above a tall window.



Matisse working on *The Dance* commissioned by Barnes, Rue Désiré-Niel, Nice, c. 1931–32.

At the turn of the 1930s, Matisse radically reoriented his practice as an artist, temporarily abandoning easel painting in favor of sculpture, printmaking, and drawing. During this time, too, he developed a novel creative process, using sheets of paper first painted in gouache and then cut to shape as aids for composing on a monumental scale. What was initially conceived as a preparatory method would, in the final years of his life, come to serve as the basis of an autonomous language of cut-out painted papers.

In December 1930, Matisse returned to Albert C. Barnes's home in Pennsylvania to inspect the site where the mural was to go. He had it in mind to revisit the theme of *The Dance* [241–45] on a different scale. The area he was asked to decorate was monumental—approximately thirteen meters long by three meters in height—and the challenge was considerable. The task was to bring to life an elevated section of wall in the foundation's grand gallery, facing a large glass roof. In his notes, Matisse emphasizes the complexity of the location and the need to create a vast, luminous ensemble that would link ceiling and wall, comparing the project to "the great door of a cathedral surmounted by its tympanum."¹

Having abandoned a first version, Matisse embarked on a second, which would eventually be bought by the City of Paris in 1937, as it turned out to be unfit for its intended location, as he had been given incorrect dimensions. Forced to completely remake the work in 1932, he further developed his use of painted paper cut-outs. In this third version—the one that would finally be installed at Merion—the figures expand, spilling beyond the boundaries of the space assigned to them and aligning more closely with the arches of the architecture. The subject is no longer only dancing bodies, but the balance between the figures and the spaces

1 Henri Matisse, "Notes sur La Danse de Merion," in Matisse, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, ed. Dominique Fourcaud, Hermann, 1972, p. 137.

separating them. In his “Notes sur *La Danse de Merion*,” Matisse tells how he worked on it for three years, moving about, “like pieces on a chessboard,” eleven great painted paper shapes cut to life-size and trimmed with scissors until the desired balance was achieved. He notes, in a satisfied tone, that “thanks to the magic of contrast, it was possible to make an architectural mass without light work to the advantage of the decorative painting.”²

In May 1933, Matisse traveled to Merion to oversee the installation of his work. That year also saw the publication in New York of *The Art of Henri Matisse* by his patron Albert C. Barnes and Violette de Mazia. Testifying to Matisse’s standing in American artistic circles, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had already dedicated a major retrospective to him two years earlier, in an exhibition that brought together more than 130 works, from the earliest to the most recent. Conceived and curated by the museum’s director, Alfred H. Barr Jr., the exhibition had been a huge success.

Although the Barnes commission kept him almost fully occupied between 1931 and 1933, Matisse did work at the same time on the illustrations that Albert Skira commissioned for Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Poésies*, published in 1932 with twenty-nine etchings [246–49]. The volume bears witness to the growing importance of printmaking in Matisse’s oeuvre. In keeping with his quest for ever greater refinement of form, the medium allowed him to experiment, seeking a direct line unadorned by expression.

In the summer of 1933, Matisse experienced a period of exhaustion and frailty; he rested in Nice before undertaking a cure at Vittel. The following year, while resident at the Hôtel Lutetia in Paris, he prepared engravings to illustrate James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, published in 1935 by the Limited Editions Club of New York. For these he found inspiration in the Homeric episodes echoed in the novel.

2 “Notes sur *La Danse de Merion*,” p. 137.



Lydia Delectorskaya, Beauvezer, 1935.

In winter of 1935, Matisse returned to easel painting. Lydia Delectorskaya, a young Russian immigrant who had acted as his assistant on the Barnes commission, began to sit for him. She appears, as well as in other works, in several nudes, which once again became a central subject: *The Dream* (1935) [262], *Large Reclining Nude*, sometimes known as *The Pink Nude* (1935) [261], and *Seated Pink Nude* (1935–36) [260]. The thirteen successive versions of this last, documented in photographs, reveal a process of formal reduction pushed so far as to make the model almost unrecognizable. In his studio in Nice, Matisse also made a series of ink drawings depicting nudes that would be published the following year in *Cahiers d'art*, accompanied by an essay by Christian Zervos and a poem by Tristan Tzara. The series bears witness to an ever-greater economy of means. Matisse points out that these drawings, despite their apparent simplicity, were preceded by charcoal or stump drawings, which afforded

him the opportunity to consider the model's character, the light, and the atmosphere. It was only after this process of refinement and clarification that he could give free rein to his pen, directly conveying his emotion.

During this period, too, Matisse introduced a variety of accessories into his paintings, such as dresses, hats, and jewelry, and he embarked on a series of paintings of models dressed in decorative costumes, notably of Persian and Romanian origins. He returned to the theme of the odalisque with *Small Odalisque in a Purple Robe* (1937) [282], whose striped silk robe reappears in at least three works, marking the advent of clothing as a structuring element of the composition.

In 1936, Matisse showed recent works at the Galerie Paul Rosenberg in Paris and, a few months later, signed a three-year contract with the gallerist, who remained his principal representative until 1939. A new contract was then signed, but the war and Rosenberg's exile in the United States were to drastically alter the terms of their collaboration. From July to November 1937, some of Matisse's works, confiscated from German museums, featured in the Nazis' "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich—an episode emblematic of his mixed reception on the eve of the Second World War. Rejected by regimes that had no time for the avant-garde, he simultaneously enjoyed the favor of art institutions. In the second half of the 1930s, his work was thus exhibited in the great museums of Paris, Lucerne, Oslo, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Boston, and New York.

In the autumn of 1938, Matisse moved into twin apartments in the former Hôtel Régina in Cimiez, in the hills above Nice. His son Pierre exhibited paintings and drawings created between 1918 and 1938 at his gallery in New York. Matisse painted *The Song* (1938) for a fireplace surround in Nelson A. Rockefeller's New York apartment. The following year, the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo would premiere *Le rouge et le noir*, with sets and costumes by the artist.

In March 1939, the Matisses separated. In Paris, the artist stayed at the Hôtel Lutetia and worked in a studio at the Villa Alésia, on the Rue des Plantes in the Petit-Montrouge district, lent to him by the sculptor Mary Callery. In August, the threat of war led him to cut short a trip to Geneva, returning hurriedly to Paris and depositing the work he had there for safekeeping at the Banque de France before traveling on to Nice. There, during the winter, he painted a series of important works, among them *The Romanian Blouse* (1940) [303] that he would later present to the French State. In its remarkable formal economy, the work encapsulates Matisse's artistic research over several years, with the motif of a garment being made into the very organizing principle of the pictorial composition. The photographs documenting the painting's successive stages reveal a lengthy process of reduction, the model losing her individuality, the background disappearing, and the blouse billowing ever more fully until it becomes the element that structures the whole image.

In mid-June 1940, with the German troops approaching, Matisse left Paris for Bordeaux and then traveled on to Ciboure, near Saint-Jean-de-Luz, before returning to Nice via Carcassonne and Marseille. In December, Varian Fry, American head of the Emergency Rescue Committee, offered to help him obtain a visa and a ticket to the United States, but Matisse chose to stay in France.

In January 1941, in Lyon, he underwent major surgery for cancer of the duodenum. This called for a long convalescence and left him partially disabled for the rest of his life. From autumn onward, while recuperating at the Régina, Matisse worked on a series of drawings that would be published by Martin Fabiani in 1943, as *Henri Matisse. Dessins. Thèmes et variations*, with a preface by Louis Aragon. This consisted of 158 lithographs on seventeen themes. Matisse generally began with a preparatory sketch in charcoal before producing a series of variations in a freer graphic style, in pen, ink, or pencil. During this second phase, he no longer observed



Matisse working on *Nymph in the Forest* (also known as *La verdure*) at the Hôtel Régina, Nice-Cimiez, August 1941. Photograph: Varian Fry.

the model, but developed a response driven by memory and sensation. The motif itself accordingly evolves into a graphic synthesis whose apparent simplicity conceals a long process of prior assimilation. “One starts off with an object. Sensation follows. One doesn’t start from a void. Nothing is gratuitous.”³ For Matisse, the *Themes and Variations* series [304–14] was to be understood as “a cinematography of the artist’s feelings.”⁴

3 André Verdet, “Entretiens avec Henri Matisse,” in *Prestiges de Matisse*, Paris, 1952, pp. 37–56, published in translation as “Interview with Verdet,” in Flam, p. 147.

4 Letter to Pierre Matisse, February 1945, in *Henri Matisse. Écrits*, p. 165.

In early 1942, Matisse began working with Skira on illustrations for Ronsard's *Florilège des Amours*, published in 1948 with nearly 130 lithographs [321–25]. He also gave two interviews to the Radiodiffusion Nationale, otherwise known as “Radio Vichy”, discussing art and his own practice and criticizing the prevailing academicism.

In 1943, with the risk of Allied bombing raids on Nice growing, Matisse left the Régina for Villa Le Rêve, on the road between Vence and Saint-Jeannet; this would serve as his principal residence until early 1949. It was then that his nurse, Monique Bourgeois, became his model, sitting for *Monique in a Grey Robe* (1942), among others. He continued his work on illustration: the *Poèmes* of Charles d'Orléans, which would be published seven years later with fifty-four full-page color lithographs, and Henry de Montherlant's *Pasiphaé: Chant de Minos (Les Crétois)* [326–27], published the following year with a 148 linocuts. It was in 1943, too, that his paper cut-outs took on a new and decisive role in his work.

From 1930 to 1943, Matisse had explored several media in parallel, but all converged on a single aim: the reduction of the image to its essential elements. The Barnes commission led him to devise a new method based on the successive rearrangement of painted paper cut-outs. In the years that followed, he applied the same approach to other fields. The motif itself was now reworked, photographed, simplified, and reconstructed until it became the reflection of a form accordingly mastered in the mind. When Matisse again took up the technique in Vence, in 1943, it stood at the meeting point of convergent lines of inquiry, made necessary as much by the developing inner logic of his work as by the physical constraints imposed by illness.



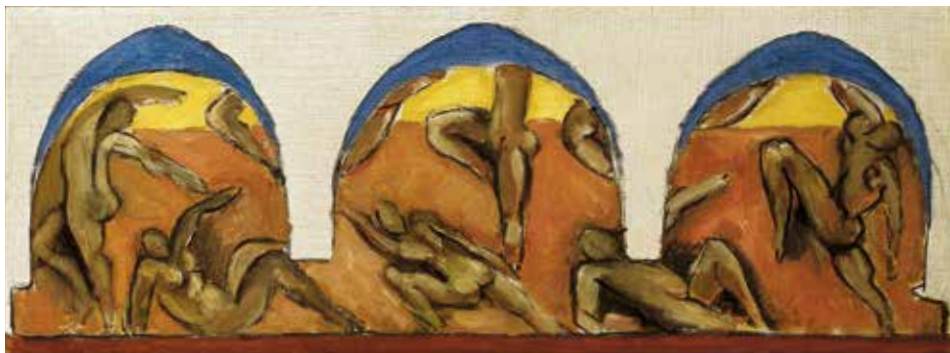
241 & 242

The Uncompleted Dance

1931

oil on canvas, 398 × 344 cm; 498 × 358 cm; 398 × 344 cm

Musée National d'art moderne, Paris



241
 Studies for "The Dance" (Ochre Harmony/Blue Harmony)
 early 1931
 oil on canvas, 33 × 87 cm
 Musée Matisse, Nice, France



244

The Dance

1931-33

oil on canvas, 340 × 387 cm; 355 × 498 cm; 335 × 391 cm

Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris



245

The Dance

1932–33

oil on canvas, 339.7 × 441.3 cm; 355.9 × 503.2 cm; 338 × 439.4 cm

The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, PA



246

The Swan

(Illustration for *Poésies de Mallarmé*, 1932)

summer 1931–autumn 1932

etching, 33 × 25 cm

private collection



247

Nymphs and Faun

(Illustration for *Poésies de Mallarmé*, 1932)

summer 1931–autumn 1932

etching, 33 × 25 cm

private collection



248

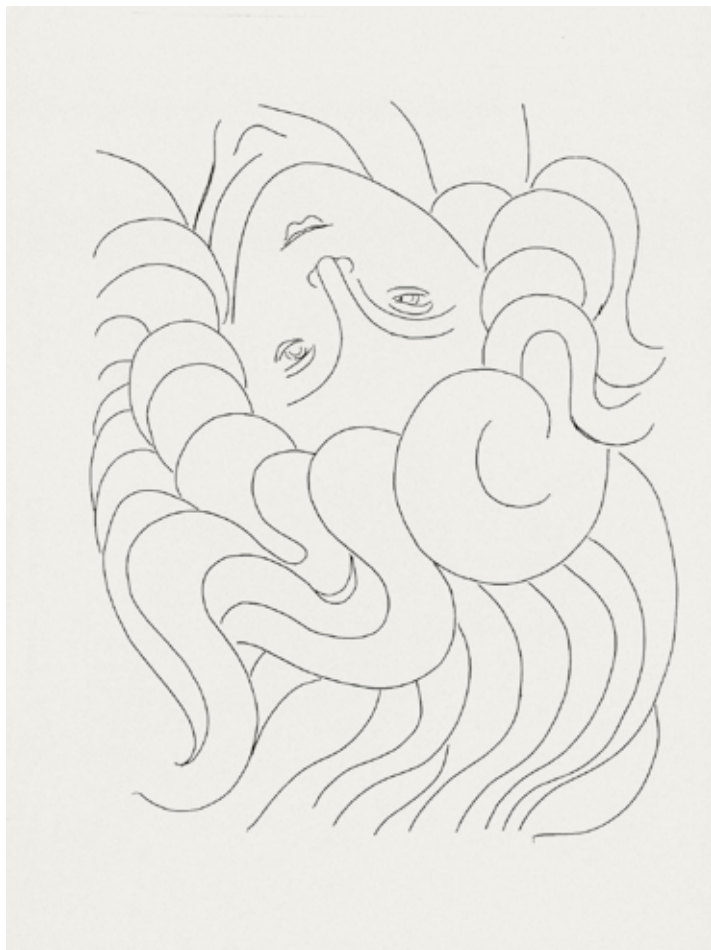
Nymph and Faun

(Illustration for *Poésies de Mallarmé*, 1932)

summer 1931–autumn 1932

etching, 33 × 25 cm

private collection



249

Hair

(Illustration for *Poésies de Mallarmé*, 1932)

summer 1931–autumn 1932

etching, 33 × 25 cm

Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia

Colophon

Text

Julie Waseige (Retrace)

Translation

Dafydd Roberts

Captions

Solange Gil

Editing

Sara Harrison

Project management

Ruth Ruyffelaere

Graphic design

Dylan Van Elewyck
& Steven Theunis,
Armée de Verre Bookdesign

Printing

Balto

D/2026/6328/2

ISBN 978-94-6478-123-6

Cover: *Small Odalisque in a Purple Robe*,
1937 [282] (detail)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

© Ludion & Julie Waseige (Retrace)

 LUDION

ill. 1 © Musée Matisse Nice/François Fernandez

ill. 2 © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI,
Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Jacqueline Hyde

ill. 8 © Fine Art Images / Bridgeman Images

ills. 10, 52, 62, 99, 257 © Bridgeman Images

ill. 15 ACME Imagery / SuperStock /

© Succession H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

ill. 23 Buffalo AKG Art Museum

ill. 26 © Fitzwilliam Museum / © Succession
H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

ill. 27 © 2026 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

All rights reserved / Bridgeman images

ills. 30, 200 © Succession H. Matisse /
Bridgeman Images

ill. 39 © Boltin Picture Library / © Succession
H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

ill. 88 © Peter Willi. All rights reserved 2026 /
© Succession H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

ill. 176 © Art Institute of Chicago /

© Succession H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

ill. 206 © Erich Lessing / © Succession
H. Matisse / Bridgeman Images

Every effort has been made to contact
copyright holders of photographs.
Any copyright holders we have been
unable to reach or to whom inaccurate
acknowledgement has been made are
invited to contact the publisher.

First published in 2026.

Also available in the same series:
Magritte in 400 Images
Text by Julie Waseige
ISBN 978-94-9303-916-2

Dalí in 400 Images
Text by William Jeffett
ISBN 978-94-6478-114-4