

National Touring Exhibitions

Organised by the Hayward Gallery
for Arts Council England

MATISSE

DRAWING WITH SCISSORS



Henri Matisse, *Nu bleu / Blue Nude II*, 1952. © Succession H.Matisse/DACS 2004

Education Pack

MATISSE

DRAWING WITH SCISSORS

Matisse: Drawing with Scissors presents an overview of the spectacular last works of the French artist Henri Matisse. The paper cut-outs that Matisse made during the last years of his life are among his most vibrant and joyous creations. Confined to his wheelchair or bed, and no longer able to paint, sculpt or make prints, he 'drew with scissors', cutting directly into brilliantly coloured paper pre-painted by assistants under his supervision.

The images in this exhibition are lithographic reproductions of Matisse's late cut-outs, produced for the French art review *Verve* and published in 1958, four years after Matisse's death. The publication – a special double-issue dedicated to Matisse – had been discussed with the artist in the last year of his life. Matisse made a cut-out for the cover of the book and the first lithographic plates were prepared under his direction a few days before his death on 3 November 1954.

Matisse was extremely exacting about the printing of his images, insisting above all on accuracy of colour. These fine lithographs are exceptionally faithful small-scale reproductions, intended to introduce the original cut-outs to a wider public.

ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack contains a brief introduction to the artist, his subject-matter and the technique used for the original cut-outs. It also contains discussion points and suggestions for Art and Design exercises, together with a number of cross-curricular links. There are also notes for teachers on planning a visit. The pack is intended for Key Stage 3 and above, but includes material that can be adapted to suit students of any age.

The pack also includes a separate Activity Sheet devised for Key Stage 2, but which could also be used by families and by younger children, with adult help.



Henri Matisse, *Tristesse Du Roi (Sorrow of the King)*, 1952 ©
Succession H.Matisse/DACS 2004

HENRI MATISSE (1869-1954)

Henri Matisse's life coincided with a period of dramatic change in both society and the world of art. Born in 1869 in the north of France, he began his career as a clerk in a law office before going to Paris to study Fine Art. He recalled, 'the moment I had this box of colours in my hands, I had the feeling that my life was there'. At first strongly influenced by Impressionism, he soon created his own style, using brilliant, pure colours, and started making sculptures as well as paintings. In 1905 Matisse and his friends became known as the Fauves or 'wild beasts' because of their unconventional use of bold and vivid colour.

As a painter, Matisse believed that the arrangement of colours was as important as subject matter to communicate meaning. His works ranged from portraits, interior scenes, still lifes and sculpture to large decorative schemes, including murals, stage designs and stained glass windows.

After 1941 the ageing Matisse suffered increasing ill health. Confined to his sickbed from about 1948, the artist was able to continue his work by 'drawing with scissors', cutting out shapes in coloured paper and pinning them to the wall of his studio. 'There is no gap between my earlier pictures and my cut-outs', Matisse wrote, 'I have only reached a form reduced to the essential through greater absoluteness and greater abstraction'.



Henri Matisse, *La Chevelure (Flowing Hair)*, 1952 © Succession H. Matisse/DACS 2004

THEMES AND VARIATIONS

'What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling and depressing subject matter, an art which might be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer... like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.'

Despite the effects of war and illness Matisse's works are full of happiness and colour. A number of themes run through all his work: music and dance, natural forms, still-lives and the female nude are all represented in this exhibition

Matisse was strongly influenced by his travels, most specifically to North Africa and Oceania. While the latter stimulated his organic designs (particularly the coral/leaf shapes that appear in many of the cut-outs), the influence of Islamic art and architecture can be seen in the large, decorative patterns (such as *Large Decoration with Masks*).

The female form is another recurrent theme and the Odalisques of the 1920s are echoed in *Zulma* as well as in the *Blue Nudes* and *Bathers*. In all of these the model has lost her identity to the extent that her facial features are not represented at all, and all elements of the picture are reduced to the bare essentials.

'Expression for me does not reside in passions glowing in a human face or manifested by violent movements. The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive; the place occupied by my figures, the empty space around them, the proportion, everything has its share...'

Nature too is simplified into repeated motifs of plants, flowers and fruits, but these are not static still-lives, instead the organic forms fill the page, alive and vibrant.

'I am incapable of making a slavish copy of Nature. Instead I feel compelled to interpret it, and adapt it to the spirit of the picture. When I put colours together they have to join in a living chord or harmony of colour.'

Henri Matisse, *L'Escargot (The Snail)*, 1952-53 © Succession H Matisse/DACS 2004



MATISSE'S CUT-OUTS

Matisse's first paper cut-outs (*gouaches découpées*) were made in the early 1930s as part of the design for a mural. Ten years later he began to regard cut-outs as independent works, seeing them as a way of resolving what he called 'the eternal conflict of drawing and colour'. Paper cut-outs, he said, 'allow me to draw in colour. Instead of drawing the outline and putting the colour inside it, I draw straight into the colour... Scissors can acquire more feeling for line than pencil or charcoal'. He made a series of energetic cut-outs for *Jazz*, and in 1948 began the first cut-outs for designs for stained glass windows, ceramic murals and vestments for the Dominican chapel at Vence, near Nice.

In 1950, aged 80, Matisse began to make large independent paper cut-outs, mostly in a format developed from the Vence windows. For the next four years cut-outs and brush drawing formed virtually his only means of expression. Using assistants to pre-paint paper with gouache and to pin the cut-outs to the studio wall, Matisse often worked on several cut-outs simultaneously. He spent months surrounded by these configurations, subtly changing and re-arranging each piece until he was happy with

the layout. Finally, when a compositional balance was achieved they were taken from the walls and pasted onto sheets of paper.

Many of the cut-outs were large-scale designs for stained glass windows or ceramic murals. Matisse described the original cut-out of *The Parakeet and the Mermaid*, which is nearly 8 metres wide and was arranged on two walls of his apartment, as being 'a little garden all around me where I can walk'. Most of the original cut-outs are now in public collections in Europe and America. One of the most famous, *The Snail*, is owned by Tate Modern.

'It is comparatively easy to achieve a certain unity in a picture by allowing one colour to dominate, or by muting all the colours. Matisse did neither. He clashed the colours together like cymbals and the effect was like a lullaby.'

John Berger, Toward Reality, 1962

'An avalanche of colour loses all its force. Colour can achieve its full expressive power only if it's organized, and its degree of intensity corresponds to the emotion in the artist.' Matisse

GENERAL DISCUSSION POINTS

Original versus reproduction

Awareness of the size of an original work of art is essential to the understanding and appreciation of that work. Can a reproduction ever convey the same qualities of the original?

The Artist's Assistant

An artist should be involved in every stage of creation. Is it enough just to have the idea or vision?

Travel and inspiration

Exposure to difference is essential for inspiration. How much does the exchange of ideas between people of other cultures provide us with more ways to express ourselves?

War and peace

Many of Matisse's cut-outs, including some of his most joyous works, were made during or just after the Second World War. Is it the role of the artist to reflect the realities of the society he or she lives in? Or is it simply enough to create an object of beauty? (It is worth remembering that Matisse himself was very ill during much of this time.)

The Female Nude

In the later work the female nude becomes faceless and anonymous. To what extent do you think this is because Matisse has ceased to care who the women are, merely seeing them as if they were an orange or piece of fruit?



Henri Matisse, *Végétaux (Vegetation)*, 1952 © Succession H. Matisse/DACS 2004

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXERCISES RELATED TO THE EXHIBITION – ART AND DESIGN

1 Scissor exercises

The most important aspects of drawing with scissors are the quality of the scissors and the way they are used. As with any tool, from a pencil to a chisel, children need to be instructed how to use scissors to obtain the best results.

While plastic paper scissors may be safer, their lack of sharp edges leads to poor results and frustration, so it is recommended to use metal blades and encourage safe usage:

- Remember to carry scissors with your fingers wrapped around the closed blades, and the blades pointing downwards.
- Pass all scissors by presenting the handle to the person taking them.
- Sit at a table or desk while working.
- Place the thumb in the top loop, the pointer finger around the handle as a guide and the other fingers in the bottom loop. If there is no space for the little finger it should remain behind the scissors, helping to close the blades and push the scissors forward.
- Hold the paper with one hand and the scissors in the other.
- Start by getting a feel for the scissors with short snips, then opening the blades out to use their full extent and keep the curves smoother.
- First cut a straight line, then move to swerves and finally cut a continuous spiral from an A4 sheet of paper.

2 Colour

To be able to discuss and benefit from the exhibition it is helpful to:

- Know primary, secondary and complementary colours before visiting the exhibition. Creating a colour wheel with quality paints would be useful.
- Experiment with exercises looking at colour after-images.

3 Still-life

- **Fruit.** Concentrating on composition and developing language skills, groups construct a still-life. Draw quick versions using different materials (e.g. biro, charcoal). Remove still life. Working directly into gummed coloured paper reproduce each fruit in a limited colour range. Arrange on paper.
- **Leaves.** Collect leaves from a variety of species of plants. Cut 4 different “leaves” from 4 different coloured papers. Try to keep the off-cut in one piece. Arrange the off-cuts on one sheet of paper. Finally arrange the leaves so that no two pieces of the same colour are together.

(See also notes for art and science)

4 Life studies

- **From life:** concentrating on the outline, students draw each other in dramatic poses. Emphasise that this exercise must be done very fast. A simpler exercise is to project a strong light on the model and the group draw the shadow.
- **Positive/negative versions** can be made directly into coloured paper in the style of *Venus*.
- **From magazines:** collect images of people. Cut out different parts of bodies and reassemble to make new figures.



Henri Matisse, *Fleurs de Neige* (Snowflowers), 1952 © Succession H Matisse/DACS 2004

CROSS CURRICULAR PROJECTS

Art and Science

Taking *Ivy in Flower* as a starting point, explore and identify the vegetation in your local environment and create your own version.

- Give each student a pen/pencil of each colour in the picture and a blank grid.
- Show a slide of the picture for 2 minutes. Students draw from memory.
- Discuss the balance and harmony of the colours.
- Identify and analyse varieties of plants found in local area/playground.
- Give groups a large grid divided into 9 and ask each of them to record the number of different plants found in each square of the grid.
- Calculate the averages. Find the most/least common. Why and how do they grow in the environment?
- Students create their own abstract versions of *Ivy in Flower*, using local plant forms that they have found.

Art, Drama and English

Taking *Sorrow of the King* as a starting point, create a shadow puppet show.

(In Turkey, Karagoz is a tradition of story telling using colourful shadow puppets, with the image cast onto a white sheet using back projection.)

- Sheets of coloured acetate can be used to make the puppets, linking the moveable parts with butterfly clips.
- Use the figures in the exhibition to develop the characters and the vegetation as the scenery.

(Alternatively this could be produced as an animated/Flash film)

Art, Maths and Science

Taking *Chinese Fish* or *Christmas Eve* as a starting point, design a “stained glass” window.

- Compare the difference between opaque and translucent, and the effects of different colours and patterns on the interior of a room.
- Measure the window to be designed and make a scale model. When the design is ready calculate the quantities and the cost of the coloured gel needed.

NOTES FOR TEACHERS – PLANNING A VISIT

To ensure your visit is as successful as possible it is recommended that you:

- Visit the exhibition before you take a group – each venue is different and you will need to check that the pictures you are planning to see are accessible for your group, that they can work as a group in front of them and even in what order the works are hung.
- Book if necessary – it is always advisable to arrange any group visit with the venue as overcrowding causes problems and disappointment.
- Find out what materials and resources the venue can offer – clipboards, pencils and scissors may be available, but don’t assume they are. Also check if there are any materials the venue doesn’t allow (most galleries are “dry” spaces only allowing the use of pencils).
- Ensure you have enough accompanying adults – the expected ratio is 1:8 for KS1&2 and 1:12 for KS3. The adults are responsible for controlling the group and should be easily identifiable. Therefore children should be aware of the following rules in most galleries:
 - No running
 - No touching
 - No photography
 - No eating or drinking
- Find out in advance where facilities are, especially toilets, cloakrooms and lunch rooms if appropriate.
- Calculate your timing – include the journey to and from the venue and also consider carefully the amount of time you will need in the exhibition.