RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

RACAR
Revue d'art canadienne | Canadian Art Review

Boudoir Scissorhands: Matisse, the Cut-outs and the Canon

William Wood

Volume 18, Number 1-2, 1991

Questionner le modernisme
Modernism in Question

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072980ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1072980ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Wood, W. (1991). Boudoir Scissorhands: Matisse, the Cut-outs and the Canon. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *18*(1-2), 5–17. https://doi.org/10.7202/1072980ar

Article abstract

Physiquement diminué par la maladie et ébranlé par la Guerre, Matisse entreprend une série d'oeuvres qui l'amènent thématiquement, formellement et techniquement hors des sentiers battus par sa propre pratique et par la tradition moderniste dont il constitue l'une des grandes balises. Il s'agit de travaux décoratifs effectués à partir de papiers découpés, composés avec l'aide d'assistants et destinés à des objets utilitaires : livres, écharpes, bannières, vitraux et murales en céramique. Celui que ses tracés déliés et sa virtuosité de coloriste ont consacré maître de la peinture, s'abandonne aux aléas de la reproduction mécanique et aux spécialistes des métiers d'art.

La relative position de faiblesse qui semble l'orienter dans cette voie ne mène cependant pas Matisse à une révision radicale du canon de l'art moderne (les critiques de Matisse sont ici complices de son conservatisme). Alors que ses expériences d'art appliqué connaissent un certain succès et le rappellent à l'attention du public, il s'inquiète des risques encourus dans l'entreprise. Celui pour qui facture rime avec signature se réclame toujours de la même originalité créatrice. C'est pourquoi il finira par abandonner l'univers du multiple pour le grand papier découpé autographe, lieu d'une projection fantasmatique où l'artiste invalide retrouve toute sa puissance de contrôle et d'infinie délectation.

Boudoir Scissorhands: Matisse, the Cut-outs and the Canon*

William Wood, Canadian Centre for the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Canada

Résumé

Physiquement diminué par la maladie et ébranlé par la Guerre, Matisse entreprend une série d'oeuvres qui l'amènent thématiquement, formellement et techniquement hors des sentiers battus par sa propre pratique et par la tradition moderniste dont il constitue l'une des grandes balises. Il s'agit de travaux décoratifs effectués à partir de papiers découpés, composés avec l'aide d'assistants et destinés à des objets utilitaires: livres, écharpes, bannières, vitraux et murales en céramique. Celui que ses tracés déliés et sa virtuosité de coloriste ont consacré maître de la peinture, s'abandonne aux aléas de la reproduction mécanique et aux spécialistes des métiers d'art.

La relative position de faiblesse qui semble l'orienter dans cette voie ne mène cependant pas Matisse à une révision radicale du canon de l'art moderne (les critiques de Matisse sont ici complices de son conservatisme). Alors que ses expériences d'art appliqué connaissent un certain succès et le rappellent à l'attention du public, il s'inquiète des risques encourus dans l'entreprise. Celui pour qui facture rime avec signature se réclame toujours de la même originalité créatrice. C'est pourquoi il finira par abandonner l'univers du multiple pour le grand papier découpé autographe, lieu d'une projection fantasmatique où l'artiste invalide retrouve toute sa puissance de contrôle et d'infinie délectation.

> *The arts have a development which comes not solely from the individual, but also from all the accumulated force, the civilization that precedes us. A gifted artist is not free to do just anything. If he simply used his talents, he would not exist. We are not the masters of our production. It is imposed upon us.*
>
> Henri Matisse[1]

Matisse was often obscure in his statements, yet this quote is exceptional for its decided interruption of mastery. Matisse intimates a force beyond the individual which determines artistic practice and limits its scope, making the artist subject to, rather than master of, a work externally conceived. Gaston Diehl quotes these words and concludes that: "His genius was born of [the] fruitful exchanges between his own personality and the novelties of the age he lived in."[2] We might ponder some of the implications of this dialogue. Where Matisse appears to turn attention away from his own identity towards some culturally invested "accumulated force," Diehl brings emphasis back to the personal and ends with a stress upon the master's seeming control; Matisse is next said to give "the very image of the epoch-making events of the past half-century." It is as if, for Diehl, the exchange between the artist and his culture transparently produced the Matisse valued as genius. Diehl does not examine Matisse's admission of extra-individual elements but interjects to put such concerns out of the way, so that the particulars of those "fruitful exchanges" can be summarily dismissed: Matisse lived in this time and so that time is potently expressed by Matisse. This "epoch-making" individual is not the sort of imposed-upon individual the artist describes, and we could surmise that Diehl quotes the questioning master in order to re-affirm the very mastery put into question. What Diehl performs, in this passage published the year of Matisse's death, is an example of a misprision found throughout Matisse scholarship wherein the master is quoted, examined and discussed only to seal him off from imposition. This strategy maintains Matisse as an assured, centred subject—a master off in his own world.

However, what if we took Matisse's exceptional comment and applied it to his work? One line would lead us to investigate how Matisse reacted to his admitted unfreedom in terms of his continuation of valued modes of representation and his appraisal of standard genres. This approach leads towards a notion of his production as being an extension both critical of, and acquiescent to, *beaux arts* tradition. We would posit the limits to his doing "just anything" as being located at the level of selected media and would privilege a version of modernism centred on technical progression and individual talent. Matisse has long been a familiar figure in the pantheon this analysis has constructed.[3] Yet, this move alienates the agent and such is what Matisse would expressly appear to contest in the quote, for the imposition he mentions constrains the artist in "using his gifts" in order to make him "exist." The link Matisse makes is not with advances in specific media or techniques that would be responsive to (his or others') particular gifts but is associated with the discourses put in motion by artistic production, to how gifts are made intelligible and communicative. The "force" Matisse alludes to suggests the formation we call the canon. He is indicating that outside forces determine his visibility in the culture, give him existence as an artist in a line of artists. These forces construct a master by reading in his production the effects the preceding canon has had upon the artist—and to say this is to mark Matisse's awareness of this process, not to suggest a great prescience on his part.

If we extend upon Matisse's comment, however, we could say that what he describes is a dialogic process, a field of statements and examinations which the artist enters and participates in, but not as a master *per se*.[4] He is an agent in its workings, a figure who does not just use (though perhaps is "used" for) his talents, who is limited in choice (in order to "exist" as a competent producer), who, finally, is not the mastering subject but the mastered subject of canonical deliberation. The artist is then effected by, and potentially effects, his age, but those effects are qualified by the mediating structures of the canon already constructed for him and incorporated by him. It is, indeed, a "fruitful exchange," though there is more than "novelties" and "personality" involved.

If Matisse's words acknowledge the persistence of the canon and his accommodation to it, then the ways in which he negotiated a position within the canon can be regarded as indicative of how he saw his position within its domain. They can equally be read as signs of how he incorporated its workings in forming strategies to

affect the world in accordance with its strictures. It might seem odd, then, to move to discuss the paper cut-outs, those "novelties" Matisse produced in the last decade of his life. However, the very fact that they were the last works he produced—and that they can be portioned off from his *oeuvre* as somehow innovative—make the cut-outs of especial importance with regard to the canon, its workings and Matisse's attempt to operate within its purview. The cut-outs were uncommon works produced under exceptional conditions, and Matisse, perhaps under the sway of his concept of canonical acceptance, continually attempted to de-differentiate the cut-outs from his other production. In 1951 he told a interviewer: "From *Bonheur de vivre*—I was thirty-five then—to this cut-out—I am eighty-two—I have not changed. . . . I have looked for the same things, which I have perhaps realized by different means."[5] In this remark, Matisse would appear to deny exactly what the cut-outs suggest, the idea of innovation, and this reflects his attempt to canonize the work himself by claiming its intrinsic extension from his previous work. The "different means" and the singular agent employing them both divert attention from the uncustomary look of the cut-out and bond them as relative to one another: the "accumulated force" of Matisse's status is intended to make the cut-out comprehensible because of its procession from his apparently secured position. Whether the work really does these things is not as important as the seal of continuity Matisse places upon them. Such are the rounds involved in examining the cut-outs, for Matisse is as aware of potential problems with the cut-outs as the works' reception is usually eager to confirm his genius and license him to use his different means. To parcel out the investments involved, to locate the agent who produced the work and tried to inflect its reception in a specific climate, is a task which will include consideration of how the canon normalizes what it receives, how the working methods of the producer respond to canonical readings, as well as entailing an investigation of what the concept of a mastered and mastering subject can mean to a producing artist.

*****

To take one example of canonical working upon the cut-outs, here is John Elderfield beginning his 1978 essay on the cut-outs:

> It is commonplace that great artists, in the last stage of their careers, often develop a new style which is barely predicted in their earlier work. It is astonishing nevertheless, that Henri Matisse, the greatest painter of the twentieth century, gave up painting . . . to create the works of his final maturity in a medium—paper cut-outs— . . . that he had taken up, not as a true medium of art at all, but as a mechanical aid in fixing the imagery of his paintings and as a form of maquette for his decorative commissions.[6]

There are a number of tensions in this passage, all of them indicative of canonical discontents with Matisse's cut-outs. No sooner does Elderfield claim astonishment than he actively seeks to control that break in decorum. To mollify the jolt of the unpredictable, the loaded words "great" and "greatest" and "last" and "final" set Matisse in motion as a superlative name defined as a "painter" and "artist" who made some sort of "mature" and concluding deposition prior to his death. The author-function is tentatively secured by its finality, though the eschatological implications still remain unsettled: do the conditions of the "barely predictable" apply here, tarnishing the reputation? These whispered worries are followed up in an unqualified distinction between a "true medium" and "a mechanical aid" that structures a division of Matisse's decoration from his painting. Indeed, "great artist" and "greatest painter" are easily opposed to "mechanical" and "decorative" in a manner that suggests the latter pair's force in disrupting the set pattern: the "artist" would seem to be "great" despite his dalliance with the lowly "mechanical"; the painter is tacitly contaminated by the paper-work of "decorative commissions." However, by the end of this introductory paragraph, Elderfield overrules astonishment by declaring that in the cut-out medium Matisse "created works of truly outstanding quality and importance that drew together—in an amazingly economical way—the threads of his entire life's work."[7] The amazing economics of this paragraph play on the distinctions between high and low, decoration and art, canonical status and untrue media, to concatenate the life, work and last days of Matisse.

The amalgam composed by Elderfield maintains a sub-level of disarray amid his wholesale attempt at normalization. As the essay moves to this statement of secured quality, the mechanical is dismissed by the original, the decorative by the important while the terminal quality is absorbed into the vital summation of a canonical figure. Though he admits to inconsistencies in the production, Elderfield goes on to normalize the situation in several ways. He distinguishes the cut-out technique from Cubist collage in order to account for its priority for Matisse, and finds long links in thematics and formal treatment between Matisse as painter and as scissor-worker. He reclaims the work for painting by stressing the use of gouache-painted papers, and goes on to claim the work as sculpture, stressing the physicality of the paper to be cut and the act of cutting itself. Having refound the cut-out as coming out of traditional media, the various objects are given a narrative progress where something is always learned, developed or recuperated from previous practice, ironically creating a Matisse-machine who self-adjusts his production in accord with a progressivist ideology.

Countering the imposition of the secondarily decorative, Elderfield's discussion of decoration reveals its operation as applying across Matisse's career, so that the decorative becomes an anodyne force when turned upon the cut-outs, or, more to the point, the enhancement of decorative projects at the close of the career only substantiates Matisse's serene overcoming of its potentially injurious effects over fifty years. Elderfield pulls on such threads till a picture of a "journey that could have gone on forever"[8] is unravelled and lies in the tatters of closeted judgments.

Such reflexive attempts to account for the production of art end up explaining little more than the existence of the remaining

objects in order to sustain the reputation of an already canonized figure. Through his regulation of the work and his heuristic reference to previous works, Elderfield's canon-forming process stresses and repeats an anxiety over the cut-out as a "mechanical aid," attempting to eliminate a late deviation which might destabilize the Matisse known as a painter, printmaker and sculptor. The urge to normalize this work speaks of an unease with the constitution of the total output of the artist, putting in its place a concept of the artist as a coherent subject successively solving the problems of the canonizing examiner. As with any deviance, the initial policing work is to normalize and contain the deviant, and Elderfield presents a thorough example of such a method. His essay suppresses the heterogeneous elements of the cut-outs, reducing their role to that of a tautological and ahistorical product: Matisse is good, they are by Matisse, they are good.

To return to the sort of agency suggested above, what is left behind by Elderfield is a need to recover the deviation which provokes normalization. If Matisse is to be seen as working both on and under canonical imposition, then this question needs to be asked: what is the canon's problem with the cut-out? The method involved having pieces of paper painted by assistants, Matisse cutting them out and composing the cut parts on a surface with more assistance. In addition, as formulated by Matisse, the cut-out was open to application for mechanical transfer and reproduction. Though he did indeed originally use it to help determine large painted decorations, Matisse proceeded after the late thirties to apply cut-outs to objects for others to execute: he designed magazine and book covers, scarfs, printed books, fabric hangings and tapestries, stained-glass windows and ceramic murals. Later he produced, with his assistants, cut-outs as autograph works, varying scale and filling his walls with cut-outs that were later parcelled out for sale.[9]

The shift from multiple to autograph cut-out is crucial in understanding the dialogue between the artist and the canon. The history of what Matisse produced and how it related to the question of multiples draws out the workings of the canon both on the agent and on the work's reception. The canonical urge to normalize production and authenticate media and "origins" meets with problems in the multiple environment, for the spread from multiple to autograph, maquette to singular work, all the various means of execution, make the cut-out's mechanical aura and decorative application into an instrument for a dispersion of formerly channelled energies and ambitions.[10] By the war years, Matisse was well known and collected precisely for the regularities in his production: his idealized world of luxurious odalisques in costume, his airy Mediterranean landscapes, his wispy, simplified renderings of nudes, each spoke to an almost phenomenal interest in opulent, playful, but always canonical, subject matter. In addition, such imagery was represented through an elegantly focused concentration on canvas and drawn or printed paper, with the trace of the brush or the drawing instrument all the while providing evidence of an undisputed, personalized facility. It was these regularities which led Louis Aragon to latch onto Matisse during the Occupation, to say that his work was "fraught with all the sweetness and greatness of French art" and to call Matisse "our pride."[11] For Aragon, Matisse had seemingly become one stable element in a confusing war-time situation. Yet, for Matisse, too, the situation of the war and the post-war period was unstable, and what made him change working methods and his means of production and distribution describes a set of conditions affecting the individual agent, the culture he was immersed in and the way that each saw the other. The cut-out technique cut across the regularized boundaries which Matisse had stayed within, and we shall see that there were some less than enthusiastic responses to his straying from the path.

A primary reason for Matisse's adoption of the cut-out technique was his near-fatal operation and near-invalid condition after 1940.[12] Weakened and often in pain from continuing liver and intestinal disease, he could no longer stand up for long to paint. Forced to work from a prone position, painting small canvases or drawing, working from bed or in a chair, Matisse was chronically unable to undertake large projects. This condition also effectively immobilized the patient. His apartment-studios on the Riviera and in Paris almost became his only habitat, enclosing him and his assistants while war and reconstruction went on outside.

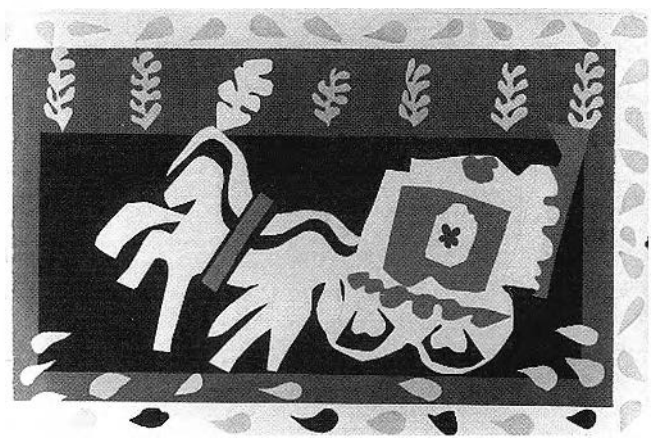
Though Matisse was often reclusive prior to his convalescence, the psychological effects of such confinement and illness can be appreciated. During his 1940 hospitalization in Lyon he wrote of experiencing deep melancholy alternating with a renewed vitality. The Dominican nuns of the hospital called him "the Resurrected one," and he came to think of himself as a Lazarus-like figure who had been saved from death.[13] At the same time he expressed irritation at not being able to work, not at all uncharacteristic of an artist who put such store in application and concentration, but still he held to ambitions far from his physical ability to realize. The most distinctive of these ambitions was wanting to produce on a grander scale. In 1943, just prior to beginning the *Jazz* cut-out maquettes, Matisse told Louis Aragon:

> It's just as if I were someone who is preparing to tackle large scale compositions. . . . it's odd, isn't it? As if I had my life ahead of me, or rather a whole other life. . . . Perhaps after all I have an unconscious belief in a future life . . . Some paradise where I shall paint frescoes . . .[14]

The cut-out technique could be used to such ends since its variability in application and collaborative options meant that Matisse could orchestrate works beyond his physical capacities.

Using his assistants for the labour of painting and composition, directing their movements in order to determine the final configuration, he could work on an intimate or a grand scale, depending on this support-system to prepare painted papers, to pin and glue them so that he could assess the work. His hands were not impaired even though his stamina was faltering, so his work began to be the preparation of plans and maquettes to be recomposed elsewhere, whether on the walls of the apartment he was currently inhabiting or off-site, in the print-shop, atelier or stained glass and ceramic

Figure 1. Henri Matisse, *L'enterrement de Pierrot* (Photo: Philippe Migeat, © Centre Georges Pompidou).



works he could hardly visit. He contracted for the skills of technicians to transfer the work from his rooms to the "outside" world, corresponding obsessively over details of colour, materials and options for presentation. What he gained from this distanced directing of work by others was a gain in territory: he could produce, in multiple, works on a scale and in materials appropriate for a number of environments and collectors, thus widening the application and market for the work. As with his mental state as a new man with another (borrowed) life, he was ready to pursue large-scale compositions without expending the labour involved in personal execution and with the potential of new markets and the mutability of new materials.

In line with this idea of renewal, instead of retaining the typical subject matter used in his painting when he could no longer accomplish much canvas work, Matisse expanded the subject matter open to his treatment. Only later, with the autograph cut-outs, did he attempt to revive his traditional themes in cut-out technique. From a cursory survey of the early period of the cut-out maquettes, prior to, and including the Vence Chapel, we see Matisse extending his reach into popular and religious culture, alternating this new emphasis with stylized nature studies suited to the flattened space of the cut-out. It is not until such works as the 1950 *Zulma* or the 1952 *Blue Nude* series that we witness Matisse working to present his typical subjects in the new, now autograph, cut-out method and material.

But the fact that Matisse was already canonical must also be retained. After the war we see Matisse working to apply cut-outs in multiple and in decorative projects. An examination of several cut-out projects will put forth the concept that rather than sealing himself off from the world, Matisse tried to become as involved as was possible in worldly ambitions and canonical conflicts. Matisse's change in ambitions is unpredictable but not capricious; it is grounded in the artist's practice, but not in a retrospective, self-adjusting project that culminated his production. What is passed over—or actively suppressed—in canon-formation are the changes in content and presentation that accompany alterations in working methods. Matisse pursued different themes in the cut-outs, developing not just a way of addressing decorative concerns but also addressing changing social conditions and a reformed art market.

*****

The stencil book-work, *Jazz*, was the first major cut-out project. It can be seen as a preliminary incursion into difficult territory, for its themes and iconography differ severely from the luxurious interiors and distanced eroticism of Matisse's studio-based painting and drawing. Matisse engaged popular culture for the 20 prints stencilled for the book, and he offset the theme by interspersing the images with his only autograph text published in book form. The relation of text to image is stated as being "purely visual,"[15] yet the writing takes up nearly twice as much space as the prints and Matisse's large-scale calligraphy heightens (or obliges) any reader's awareness of the text as some sort of complement to the imagery. Homilies to a sort of righteous but ethereal artistic life, the text is an ungainly and almost contradictory supplement to the imagery. The majority of the prints represent the circus, while other subjects include folktales and myths, invented allegorical tableaux, and, at the close of the book, three images of lagoons. There is no strict theme connecting these elements and such resourcefulness is as new to Matisse's imagery as the cut-out technique is to his characteristic mode of painting. Where the painting was expected to harmoniously transpose scrutinized experience into the effusive product of a regained Golden Age, these pieces eschew the model and the studio for a series of memories and fantasies that are operated upon in the virtual space of signage. The "jazzy" idea of improvisation, presenting the whole book as a kind of variation which has no theme other than that of the player, represents a literally off-hand Matisse, a frippery, an innovative category of product.

The most profound change in *Jazz* lies in the tenor of the subjects selected. For the circus images, Matisse chose subjects dealing with threatened injury, violence, or domination: the ringmaster with his whip (*Monsieur Loyal*); the knife-thrower and his assistant (*Le lanceur de couteaux*); trapeze artists (*Les codomas*); the sword swallower (*L'avaleur de sabres*); and—for the bizarre *Le cauchemar de l'éléphant blanc*—a dancing elephant falling off a ball. While these images offer a sort of entertainment, it is the sadistically sensational and dangerous elements of carnival-like excitement which are pictured. The circus is the theme, yet the accent falls upon re-lived violence to the self or another; the fear of being whipped, cut or falling—the idea of risking the body—comes through the improvisational context Matisse constructs.

The mythological and popular narratives display a similarly morbid, occult fascination: the wolf from Little Red Riding Hood ready to eat you up (*Le loup*), Icarus falling while trying to free himself (*Icare*), the dead Pierrot (*L'enterrement de Pierrot*). Concurrently, the allegories include the foreboding *Le destin* (once titled *La fatalité*),[16] where a "primitive" mask menaces an embracing, boxed-in white couple, and the rather creepily sentimental *Le coeur*,

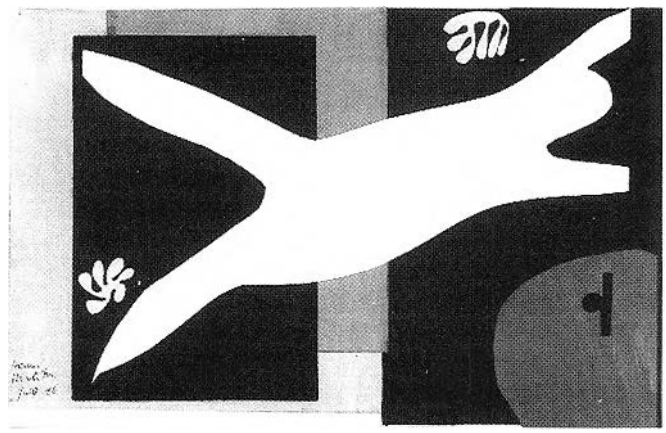
displaying a red heart layered atop flesh-coloured, black and light-blue papers. Facing the heart is the layering of a wedge-like, monochrome, black shape atop a green rectangle atop another light-blue-toned rectangle echoing the shape of the page. All the forces, colouristic and formal, seem able to thwart the heart and box it in, and this heart image carries over from the red circle punctuating the chest of the falling Icarus and foreclose the subsequent flowering, still-beating heart of Pierrot as he is borne to the grave. One would think that Matisse's idea of jazz begins and ends in New Orleans' funeral parades and that colour and form simply brighten the prospect of a cardiac arrest: the components point to an inevitable, redeeming death of the culture and the single individual.

The fearful and threatening aspects of *Jazz* are somewhat alleviated by the voyeurism of watching *La nageuse dans l'aquarium* and in the three, drifting, submarine *Lagon* images. These picturings of aquatic space represent figures open to wonder where the "popular" images introduce images of witnessed trepidation. *La nageuse dans l'aquarium* includes an excited male spectator, while the *Lagon* images deliver a submerged, shadow-like appearance of nature culminating the fantastic excursion into Matisse's perilous circus. However, the *Lagons* came quite late, implying that the overall tone of *Jazz* needed lightening.[17] These placid images of dimensionless, aquatic space stress a floating and uncertain character, seemingly hallucinating an enveloping nature, or, in the case of the swimmer, depicting a spectator suffused with provocative desire. Lydia Delectorskaya, Matisse's model, assistant on *Jazz* and primary *factotum*, reports that the image of the swimmer came from Matisse's memory of watching a night-club act in Paris, implying further that the watcher is the artist re-figured as voyeur to his own production.[18] As well, the opening and closing images of the book feature a clown not quite comfortable on a confining stage and a female figure tossed from a toboggan, bracketing the whole self-projective enterprise with an ambivalent dread of falling or being caught out.

The text of *Jazz*, added by Matisse after the war (once the plates were complete), also deals in anxiety and its pacification. The writing mixes wispy comments on the after-life and the experience of flight with defensive musings on his career and working methods. Attuned to the potential of his Lazarus mythography, Matisse inserts passages from Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. And, though he offers patronizing exhortations to artists to be free and without hate, these addresses envision little of the dread which accompanied the images. Any match between the inured threat of the images and the high-minded tone of the text is equivocal if not enigmatic.

To return to the imagery, the vacillation between a fascination with threatening spectacle and its alleviation in drifting but ambiguous pleasures is striking, and the general lack of coordination in the book tells of a conflicting set of circumstances. The cut-outs were executed in Nice during 1943–44, in the depth of the war, and they mark the first concentrated work by Matisse since his operation and illness. In the text, he places the imagery retrospectively as representing "crystallizations of memories of the circus, folktales,

Figure 2. Henri Matisse, *La Nageuse dans l'aquarium* (Photo: Centre Georges Pompidou).



and voyages,"[19] and we can cotton on to something of Matisse's tactics here. He was taking up popular culture and myth for contrary reasons: the charms of the circus, folktales and Tahitian lagoons are attractive, yet all three are removed from the World War by being memorial, since the simultaneous catastrophes of Matisse's illness and the Occupation put pleasure and myth into the past tense. Those charms are not, however, incapable of becoming allegories of the present. The resemblance of the ringmaster to de Gaulle and the use of the image of the falling Icarus imply that the world can both realize and resist ambition. Indeed, portraying de Gaulle as a ring-master, in 1943, reflects a disturbing consciousness of the permeable condition of oppression in the combined personal and social "circus" of occupied France. It represents "our pride," an Aragonian Matisse, ritually assuming the weight of terror for his beleaguered nation.

The "improvised" idea of jazz music is visited and presented in *Jazz* as a potency containing the trepidations of the present for Matisse and for his country and culture. The chromatic brightness of the prints agitates and inculcates the threats, stressing confinement within borders and boxes, expressing an incarceration made palpable by the artist's confrontation with their unsettling character. Even the text's jabbering presence, its large hand-written characters and effusive self-involvement, portrays the artist as engaged in aggrandizing and encapsulating himself against a hostile atmosphere. In sum, *Jazz* intimates some sort of triumphant self-protection, and, adding that the images were executed during the war while the text and production came after the Liberation, the revision of history as pathetic fallacy becomes a motif not worth losing for Matisse. The stated idea behind the "violent and lively images"[20] was to portray a revived, active Matisse. Though these concepts are bathetic in tone, Matisse was not unaware of their heroic effects: he presented *Jazz* as the product of a survivor of threats and violence, someone whose memories of the "good old days" had been shaken like that of France during the war. He even goes so far as to write: "An artist must never be a prisoner of himself, of a style, prisoner of a reputation, prisoner of success, etc."[21] The self-representation here

is of a figure, as Matisse called himself, "*mutilé*" like a veteran, not sick like an old man,[22] cutting paper amid the conflicts of real and imagined threat. In *Jazz*, Matisse represented himself as an artist overcoming infirmity, and, after the war, with the text, he presents himself as an exemplary, but recovering, victim of the war itself.

If this is a plausible reading of *Jazz*'s content, its production tells a strangely parallel story. Matisse's anxiety over the project is evident from a letter to his publisher, Tériade, in 1944, concerning the final work on the cut-out phase:

> This penny-ante toy drains me and all my being revolts over its intrusive importance. I am excited to see what your Paris team has made of it. In any case, my eyes are so tired that I go out only with 70% tinted glasses—and I am counting on you to bring me a white cane from Paris.[23]

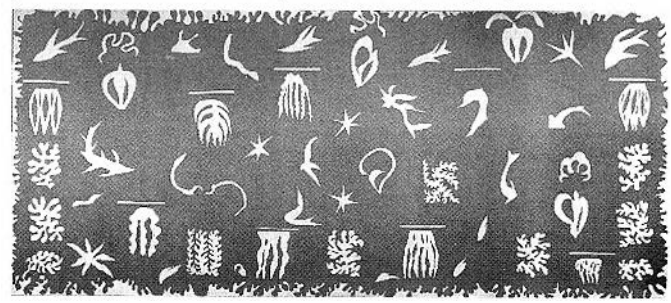
The joking exaggerations belie Matisse's actual worry. Tériade had commissioned the project in 1941, prompted by Matisse's cutting of loose paper smeared in printer's inks lying around the publisher's office, and the maquettes were complete by 1944. However, Tériade was not able to commence production till 1947 due to material shortages and Matisse's dissatisfaction with the various methods of reproduction tested.[24] Though Matisse had used gouaches keyed to printer's inks (and would use the same colours, direct from the tube, for almost all of the cut-outs),[25] the correspondence between artist and publisher is replete with apprehensions concerning the colour, texture and look of the final product. The use of *pochoir*, a stencil technique, allowed for brushed-on inks to add trace texture, yet Matisse had greater confidence in the maquettes than in the printed version.

Following publication, a letter to André Rouveyre tells of the artist's response to his belated paean to the Liberation:

> I thank you for your frankness on the subject of *Jazz*. *I agree completely with your opinion*. Despite all the pains I took with it, I just can't force myself to swallow it.
>
> It's a complete *mess*! And why is it that the paper cut-outs as I make them, as I see them on the wall, are pleasing and don't have the puzzle-like quality I find in *Jazz*? I think what was totally spoiled in the transposition was their sensibility, without which what I do is nothing. . . . I told Tériade how little affinity I have with this work. And, here it is, an unprecedented success, and it will stand out, etc. . . . What to say to avoid discouraging those who have a vested interest in it?[26]

The intense ambivalence of Matisse's attitude is worth noting. He may be dissatisfied with the product but his mention of its success and his condescension towards those who have a "vested interest" in it speak of an achievement he is close to but not quite unwilling to support. When we consider that Matisse proceeded to ask Rouveyre to write about *Jazz* in *Le Figaro* a few months later, and even suggested that he write an equivocal notice of the book,[27] we can appreciate that Matisse was moved to capitalize promotionally rather than aesthetically on *Jazz* as a project.

Figure 3. Henri Matisse, *Océanie: la mer* (Photo: Centre Georges Pompidou).



What would provoke such ambivalence? Matisse's complaints about the "puzzle-like quality" and loss of "sensibility"—the spectre of Elderfield's "mechanical aid"—appear to unseat the handiwork of the maquette and replace it with the anonymity of the printshop. Even though he had taken up the technique for its multiple potential and the possibility of working from a distant position, it is the distancing effect of the reproduction which disturbs the canonical subject. He wants his own experience of the work to be exactly repeated by his publisher, and, perhaps, especially so in a project that spells out a new mythography for the artist. It is worth remarking that it is the look of *Jazz* that bothers Matisse and that he expresses no reservations about its themes or his contribution. The book's successful reception does something else, fulfilling an important goal: it puts the new Matisse out in the public world, thus making it clear that he still "exists." Even if he is not totally approving of the means of achieving visibility, he definitely wants to be seen in the centre ring.

If we look to the other multiple projects executed during the lag-time of *Jazz*'s production, a similarly ambivalent attitude is displayed. The *Océanie: le ciel* and *Océanie: la mer* fabric hangings and the closely related *Polynésie: le ciel* and *Polynésie: la mer* tapestries both work from cut-out designs to large-scale, artisanal products.[28] The *Océanie* panels were published by Ascher and Company of London from maquettes prepared by Matisse and assistants in Paris. These maquettes used the cut-out method, but in different conditions and to different ends than *Jazz*. The *Océanie* hangings, each panel over one and a half metres high and nearly four metres long, represent silkscreened renderings of fish, aquatic plant motifs and birds in white against a beige linen background. This bichromatic scheme is echoed in the smaller *Polynésie* tapestries where nearly identical white images are placed against a grid of alternating deep- and light-blue panels, the background papers being giftwrap and the figures cut from gouache-highlighted letter paper. Both sets of images were executed in succession, both intended for multiple production: *Océanie* was released in an edition of 30; the *Polynésie* tapestries were contracted with a license to produce up to eight examples.

Both the *Océanie* and *Polynésie* titles refer to Matisse's memories of Tahiti, specifically to memories of looking at the ocean floor through a glass-bottomed boat and simultaneously seeing the sky. Although Tahiti had already been used as a motif-base for his paint-

ing, its usefulness for the post-war Matisse lies in the prospect of portraying stylized natural figures in the two-dimensional plane of the cut-out. Also, Tahiti, as seen in *Jazz*'s "*Lagons*," plays on the theme of memorial delight and amniotic surround, a point made rather floridly by Matisse in a promotional text for *Océanie*:

> It is only now that these wonders have returned to me, with tenderness and clarity, and have permitted me, with protracted pleasure, to execute these two panels.[29]

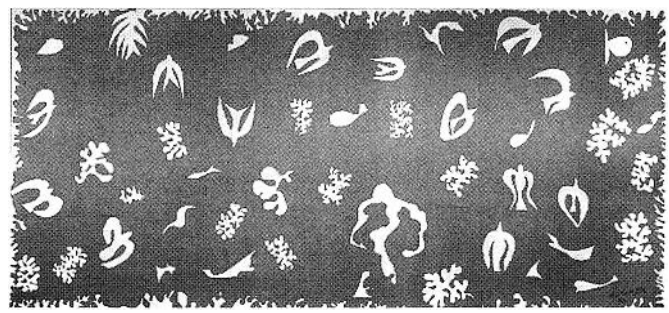
This stress upon memory is mythographic and ideologically loaded. Through it Matisse presents himself as a seigneurial figure recovering the pre-war world of luxury but putting that soothing understanding to work in order to "beautify" the post-war world of incipient reconstruction. If the South Pacific had only recently been in the news as the scene of battles and death, Matisse retrieves his memories of its previous lushness, establishing both its "wonders" and his capacity to reproduce them at a near-timeless distance from the contemporary world.

The details of the *Océanie* composition and execution describe the overwhelming importance of a self-reproducing capacity for Matisse. He did the cutting and composition work on the *Océanie* panels in his Paris apartment and the beige background is colour-keyed as near as was possible to the wallcovering there. The maquette *in situ* represented a far different type of ornament than the final product, producing a total surround, a blending of wall and adornment particular to the space of execution. Like those *Jazz* cut-outs whose sensibility he so valued placed on his walls, Matisse here worked to multiply an interior wall arrangement peculiar to his own rooms, almost as if he were testing out the applicability of his work as interior décor.

In a letter to the commissioner of the panels, Zika Ascher, Matisse's nervousness about the transfer from wall to print is announced in terms similar to the *Jazz* transposition. The artist outlines his concern over the difficulties involved in getting a precise photograph from his walls for the transfer and goes on to detail problems concerning fabric samples. However, what is most striking is Matisse's concentration upon the multiple's conditions of commercial acceptance. He frenetically describes various strategies for making the sale of the hangings a success if Ascher pays attention to his wishes:

> This hanging you are to print will be assured of *some measure of success if it is well-executed*—for the Thannhauser Gallery in Lausanne wants it. He must subscribe from you. He will show it framed by my drawings.
>
> The Galerie Maeght, the most beautiful in Paris, a new gallery, wants to show it in January. . . *Art & Décoration*, one of the oldest and best journals from Paris, is going to reproduce photos of the two panels. This is very important for you. . . I will show the hanging in the decorators' salon in Paris. *But the execution must be well done or I will not sign the prints.* I want to sign them in indelible ink. . . . If we come to an understanding to emphasize an *artistic character* in the publicity, your firm will have impressive business that will win you accolades. If the production is perfect I would be disposed to execute other projects with your firm.[30]

Figure 4. Henri Matisse, *Océanie: le ciel* (Photo: Centre Georges Pompidou).



As if this type of egging-on were not enough, Matisse goes on to lecture Ascher:

> *Think*: you have an important work by me, it is destined to create quite a stir. Value it, I tell you, *because I'm right.* It is something important to me but much more important for you. You are doing something that must be respected as a fine print. It is certain to become famous.[31]

The neurotic overtones of this letter, its weird oscillation from formal business terms to outright harangue, show Matisse wavering in his decisions, self-righteous and insecure, almost grasping to reassure himself and Ascher of his canonical significance and power in the art world.

In the postscript to another letter to Ascher, dated the same day, this anxiety is tied to the relation of the multiplied *Océanie* to Matisse's handiwork:

> You tell of how you will adjust the photographic enlargement. You write: "We will be able to make tracings of them." What tracings? Didn't you tell me that it would all be done photographically, thus without interpretation—if it is traced, it will be an interpretation on the part of the tracer. Get back to me quickly with the details of what method will be used.[32]

The technical details of reproduction were here mixed with the artist's concept of his role in producing work which is to proceed under his signature. The requirement that the work be fabricated at a distance reproduces the ambivalent relation of the singular artist to the multiple copy, shattering the canonical figure's desire for his touch to be intrinsic to the work. With the *Polynésie* tapestries, Matisse worked with the Beauvais works and again his handiwork was a problem. A pair of tapestries was woven and, once sent to Matisse, a set of variants was cooked up. This time it was several tonally graded passages which were to be added, and the implication is that the woven work was too close to the maquettes' inconsistencies in gouache highlighting;[33] Matisse wanted to renovate the accuracy of the transposition made at the tapestry works, clean up his splotchy maquette work. *Polynésie* was the last substantial

multiple project Matisse attempted from cut-outs, though he did continue to apply the cut-out to one-off replications in stained glass and fabric for the Vence chapel and other commissions.

Such problems with reproduction moved Matisse to produce cut-outs as autographs from now on, reflecting his need to re-inject his presence into work proceeding from his rooms. In the previously quoted letter to Rouveyre about *Jazz*, Matisse changed his tone after complaining, writing:

> Know that I don't find it totally discouraging, since I spend the afternoons making new colour combinations using the paper cut-out system. But I know that these ones will stay as they are, originals, simply gouaches.[34]

The cut-out medium, selected and applied for its potentially multiple purpose, next became a pretext for autograph works emerging out of the crisis of the multiple works' alienation from the master's hands.

The multi-form adaptability of the cut-out technique represented a strategy to maximize productivity against the debilitations of disease and isolation, but Matisse, too, worked under the sanctions of the canon. Prompting his elegists, Matisse discussed the cut-outs as technique and product using over-statement and inclusive rhetoric. "Cutting to the quick in paper reminds me of the direct cutting of the sculptor," he wrote in *Jazz*,[35] and, though this quip is much quoted, I have not found a writer who notes the incongruity between the gliding, ripping action of sharp scissors compared to the resistant, pulsing labour of putting chisel to stone. He says elsewhere that, "Scissors can acquire more feeling for line than pencil or charcoal,"[36] though the need to say so announces that a defensive strategy is already in place. Aragon reports that he once referred to the cut-outs as "wallpaper" in Matisse's presence and the artist was not at all amused by the comparison to ornament.[37] As if he was already witnessing resistance to the decorative quality of the cut-outs and needed to counter it, Matisse worked to carefully ennoble the medium in the canon's terms, and, against its multiple disappointments, he stressed continuity in his production.

*****

The Ascher panels were exhibited neither in Lausanne nor at Maeght nor at the decorators' Salon in Paris. They show up with the *Polynésie* tapestries in the 1949 Musée d'art moderne's "*Matisse: Oeuvres récentes 1947–48*" exhibition, along with several autograph cut-outs, some paintings and drawings. This was the first significant French display of the cut-outs and the most-visible Matisse exhibit in Paris during the forties. One of the most prominent reviews of this exhibition brings the full weight of the canon down on the cut-outs. Christian Zervos wrote in *Cahiers d'art* of how the cut-outs "have no other point than fantasy," of how cutting paper may have freed Matisse from the "impatience of long hours of insomnia and offered comfort in a pleasing distraction," but concludes that the work "does not rise to the level of art."[38] Of the fabric works, Zervos says they are "totally negligible, astray from the paintings."[39] Clement Greenberg was in accord with these thoughts when he wrote of an exhibition in New York in 1949, which again mixed painting and drawing with autograph cut-outs:

> . . .the paper cut-outs in the present show depend too much on the sheer quality of colour and have an elemental and static simplicity of design that makes them pieces of decoration rather than pictures.[40]

These reviews reject the idea of a new Matisse and they bring to the work an inability to see the continuity Matisse tried to assert. Presented as autographs amid paintings in New York, or, in Paris, showing autograph and multiple cut-outs alongside painting and drawing, the cut-outs were seen in a poor light that brought out their precise difference from his earlier work and not their maker's sense of doing the "same things . . . realized by different means."

It could be added that most of the post-war *Cahiers d'art* were being devoted to the group of younger artists now establishing reputations in Europe and that Greenberg was, throughout the post-war period, using Matisse as the exemplar of a type of painting important for its associations with a past modernism.[41] For these critics, the canon had already moulded Matisse into a set figure, and the cut-outs' deviation from that figure was consequently to be discouraged. The myth of a new Matisse, packaged in bright papers, would not seem to be working very well.

Zervos does not mention, or did not even consider, the element of the multiple in the fabric works and how this relates to discussions in the Parisian art world. During the late forties, much was made of the application of modern, particularly abstract art to the new buildings of reconstructed Europe in such journals as *Art d'aujourdhui* and *Art & Décoration*, yet Matisse was rarely considered to figure in this movement. Of his contemporary critics, only Jean Leymarie seemed to have made the connection between the cut-out and public art:

> In voluntarily renouncing the oil technique, Matisse abandoned the individual framed painting . . . and turned to cut-outs capable of practical application (in ceramics and stained-glass), towards the monumental decoration called for by contemporary reconstruction and collective programs.[42]

However accurate this assessment may be, it was not until 1959 that Leymarie wrote of Matisse's potential for such work and hence his comment is retrospective and not at all in keeping with the way discussions of art and the public were conducted when Matisse produced the multiples.

One journal in 1949 did make the connection between Matisse and public art, but the situation is not quite straightforward. In *Transition Forty-Nine*, a English-language journal published in Paris for export, editor Georges Duthuit (who was also Matisse's son-in-law) published "Matisse and Byzantine Space," an essay which claimed a role for Matisse's painting intimating that his treatment of space expressed a type of vital, quasi-existential public sphere.

After a meandering excursion through Byzantine "institutional art" and modern painting, Duthuit comes to Matisse and uses his "unity of beings and space" to challenge the art of socialist realism:

> The task of recreating this lost space in which the person and his surroundings are recomposed through an effort which is both movement of creation and movement of total organization of the disordered, chaotic, paradoxical and lacerated space in which we usually move, is parodied by the proponents of a second-rate social art. Their well-meaning intentions are drastically cancelled by sterile techniques which make their work incomparably more remote from the masses than the exceptional creatures painted by Matisse.[43]

Though he is privileging the paintings of Matisse and does not mention the cut-outs, the attempt to reclaim Matisse as a progressive and pertinent figure is significant; yet we must note that Duthuit deals with the art as a past lesson rather than as a going concern.

Even so, Matisse's public reputation is stated in other ways in this issue of the journal. A Matisse drawing graces the cover, a mass of faces, individual though grouped together—an image that fits neatly with Duthuit's proposal of Matisse as indicating "the first lineaments of an artistic structure capable of containing the individual and supporting him in his effort towards freedom."[44] In terms of Duthuit's overall argument, this positioning of Matisse would appear to be the ideal promotion for the master's myth of renewal. However, when the question of art and the public is taken up in an unsigned article at the close of *Transition Forty-Nine*, Matisse is in for rougher treatment.

Comparing two surveys of artists' statements regarding the public role of art, one from the pre-war *Cahiers d'art* and another from *Les Lettres françaises* in 1946, Matisse is quoted and brought up as a test case. The article, sarcastic in tone, begins with a mild rebuke to Duthuit's "Matisse and Byzantine Space" for its dependence on a "political settlement which is not yet in sight," but goes on to say:

> The relationship of art to the social groups which are arising or collapsing around us still remains a moot question. Before long, some answer will be forced upon us, and it may very well be the wrong one, if we are to judge from the incoherence of the suggestions that are being made in the name of sanity.
>
> Although such painters as Picasso, Matisse and Léger have come close to the C.P. since the war, the task of defining aesthetic policies is entrusted to second-rate artists whose generous but vague notions are echoed by second-rate writers in the peremptory manner which may be expected from such a combination of good-will, mediocrity and ignorance.[45]

The linking of Matisse to the Communist Party is based on his association with Aragon, and is repeated several times in the article, while the habitual consideration of him alongside Picasso as the two canonical figures of post-war art is also repeated. Aside from these critical commonplaces, the underlying question determining the relations between art and the public is one's allegiances to the Communist Party or to some idea of "freedom," and this echoes ongoing debates within post-war Parisian cultural life after the war.[46]

Within this horizon of debate, when Matisse's response to *Les Lettres françaises*' questions, "Is there a rupture between art and the public? Does this rupture result from another rupture, between art and reality?" is reprinted, the response has little resonance with either Aragon or Duthuit's party-line:

> Art cannot be hampered by the dead weight of the public. But today there is no rupture between art and the public. I experienced such a rupture during my youth. I resisted without compromising, and the public came to terms all the same. Does the rupture between art and the public result from a severance between art and reality? I keep my feet on the ground, true enough, and the public can always find their way into my work. But when I began, there was no way in. When an artist is gifted, people come to him as to a living spring.[47]

The last sentence describes what Matisse expected from the multiple works, and—according to his *Jazz* letters to Rouveyre—he got it through the success of the book. But the writer of this article suggests that, in Matisse's "refusal to admit of any connection between the forces at work in a painting and the activity of the living . . . we sense the influence of some Platonic myths which are bound to leave their imprint on the canvas." And he goes on:

> The Platonician, satisfied with having seized the unique essence and the singular secret, and wholly given over to his rapt contemplation, is hardly inclined to share it with the unworthy who live in the casual world of appearances.[48]

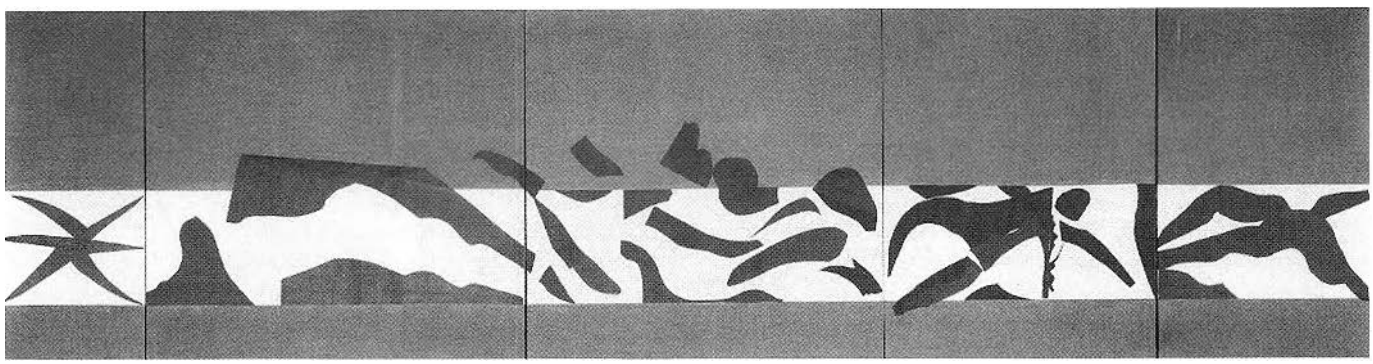
The writer, *pace* Duthuit, props his comment on the Matisse of removed luxury and not on the reconstructed myth of the revitalized but invalided artist—or perhaps he sees, in Matisse's association with the Communists through Aragon and with the Catholic church through the Vence Chapel, a misguided attempt to parley past glories into the "wrong" answer to the question of how art relates to the public.

The article goes on detailing the tapestry revival of Lurçat and the Fougeron scandal, but ends with a blistering description of the work planned for the Assy and Vence chapels, alluding to the problems with public art being in the hands of either the Church or the Party. It closes with a visit with "the Master" to Vence, using extreme irony:

> For the first time in our journey, we have steeped ourselves in the invigorating influences of a work of art which surrounds on all sides.
>
> "I want all those who enter here to go out feeling rested and happy."
>
> And the Master smiles at us as we leave the church of the Future.[49]

We see in this article how Matisse's pre-war reputation made him unsuitable for recuperation by post-war critics and how Matisse

Figure 5. Henri Matisse, *The swimming pool (La piscine)*, a–e (Photo: Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York).



was himself unwilling to engage a position beyond his own mythographic conceptions. Under his breath, the author appears to say that, for Matisse, there is no future, only the past intruding on the present. Such an attitude was too strong for the artist to contest when his brand of self-promotion spoke the moribund dialect of his canonical reputation. Matisse could not concede anything because he was not in a position of defense; rather, he was in a position of subservience to a canonical conundrum dictating that his reputation was past and brooked no further adjustment.

*****

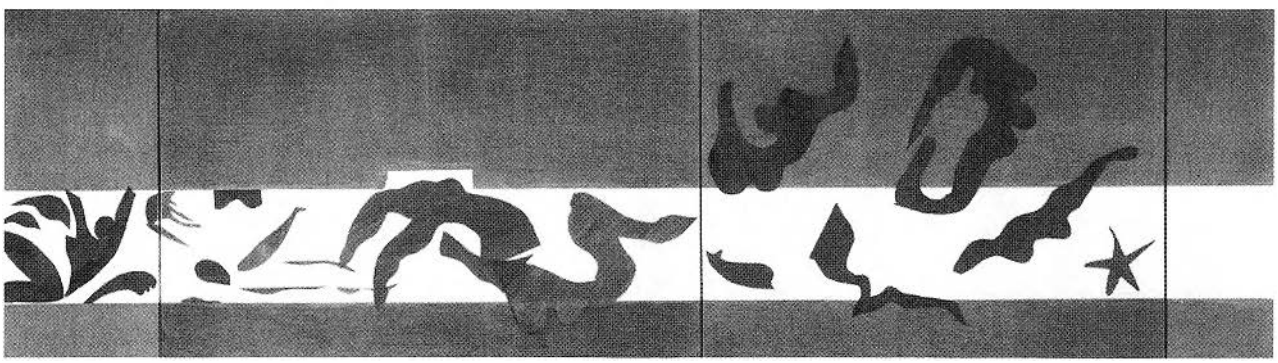
Neither merchant nor patronized artisan in the post-war period, Matisse was strangely placed as a master of luxury when the world was reforming around a new productivity torn between adequate reconstruction and consumerist populism, between resuscitating the School of Paris ideals in a set of new painters or bedding down with the USA or the PCF. Matisse fit in neither camp. He reacted with a set of attempts to partially break open the world to his decorative designations, but the major chord is struck when the obsessive quality of Matisse's attention combines with his salesmanship to create the image of the master peddling loose wares. With *Jazz*, he took on the mantle of Aragon's idea of himself and allied his life with that of the nation, but was consternated by the means of reproduction—the one element out of his hands. With *Océanie*, we are left with the idea that Matisse did not just prepare a set of maquettes, but used his own room and its peculiar coloration and architecture to plan the work, and was not satisfied with less than a fidelity which registered his presence. With *Polynésie*, the very fidelity of the weavers prompted his abortive corrections.

He had adopted a mercantile mode to succeed commercially, to feed the public what he saw them aching to take in, yet the interaction of vendors with his art, without his unequivocal control, repeatedly raised Matisse's discontents. Having made his career as a painter, he could not paint; having attempted multiple decoration in anticipation of a market, the result did not meet his singular aesthetic. He "just could not swallow it," but changed strategy again, working on autograph cut-outs to repair the damage, working in both large- and small-scale, and in various architectural spaces—though now only on commission for a single replication, never in the risky mode of multiples. In short, Matisses's attempts at commercial entry through multiples opened up and swiftly closed down his efforts at revivifying his career, but the canonical resources he had incorporated sent him back to the autograph and to his typical subject matter for solace. The Vence chapel, under such conditions, came as a godsend, and its duplicitous status as both a tribute to God and a tribute to Matisse keeps the canon rolling along.

Canonical decorum can hardly disguise the notion that decorative and artistic ends were not separate categories for Matisse in the cut-outs. If the walls of the *Océanie* maquettes do not suggest more than a pair of panels for any affording home, then perhaps some other rooms will prompt memory: the Vence Chapel; Tériade's commissioned dining room with its stained-glass window from a cut-out design and a ceramic mural based on a full-scale drawing.[50] Preeminent, however, are Matisse's own rooms bedecked with his coloured papers. Each of these images implies something double: an attempt to dominate an architectural space and a move towards equating cut-out work with wall-based defacement and decoration of that space. Matisse, unstable as any displaced subject, latched on to the walls he rented, to the frame he had built, and invested those walls with the vulnerable power of his compulsion to remain visible and active—despite his infirmity and his ossification by past reputation. Whether he thought he was decorating his studio or the middle-class interior makes little difference; regarding décor as anything other than something proceeding from his invalid's room is beyond the point because the incorporation of the canon into Matisse's subjectivity meant that any room was his room so long as a work of his was in it.

His own rooms, confining his cutting and his assistants' painting and pasting, became in part the scene where the canon did its production, but more important was Matisse's imagination where the trace of his hand and his knowledge of "protracted pleasure" could both resist and succumb to canonical pressures. While what has been offered so far deals with the way the canon is perceived by and performs surveillance upon the agent, there are other dimensions to the matter of the canonical dialogue over and within the

Figure 6. Henri Matisse, *The swimming pool (La piscine)*, I–i (Photo: Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York).



assumption of mastery. Matisse's cut-outs raise questions of mastery both in their production and their reception, due to Matisse's negotiation over the role he occupies in such spheres. They also represent a fraught attempt to retain mastery over a particular type of space and imagery: that of the feminine. A work known for its anomalous place in Matisse's work is apposite here. *La piscine* is John Elderfield's choice cut-out, the epitome of what he calls "the absorption of even so psychologically holistic an image as the human body into its surrounding space."[51]

Yet we should revise this to say that the represented bodies are gendered female and not human, partialized and not whole or holistic. Matisse executed *La piscine* in his Hotel Regina dining room, working on it at night while he processed other wall-sized autograph cut-outs by day. The beige background is slightly darker in tone than the Parisian background so important for *Océanie*, and it is occluded by white paper stretched across the burlap, but, for *La piscine*, the wall serves the same role of backdrop. Around some 16-metres of wall-space, Matisse had pinned and pasted a series of nude swimmers undulating amid sealife, yet there seems to have been no off-site project in mind. The blue accords with the hue of the series of *Blue Nudes* executed around this time, and the *in situ* photographs rarely miss the continuation of the blue nude and acrobat motif on the walls of adjoining hallways.[52] The atmosphere of nudes splayed across the wall, interrupting both paper and burlap, twisting and contorting as if in ecstatic snapshots, is symptomatic of Matisse's current needs: the image of woman, glimpsed secretly against a secured ground.

Matisse was here, in 1952, repeating himself, bringing up again the world of nude women he had been rewarded for representing in the past. But he was not doing so out of fear of acceptance in the art world or the after-life. The project was for his own consumption, reflecting a phantasmatic desire to extend and thereby sublimate his desires. However, like the work of the canon and his work on the multiples, his fear is so strong his desire will not be satisfied in product but in presence. What remains open is the subject's relation to the position he holds: the decorative possibilities are used, figuratively, to cover and assimilate the feminizing prospect of domestic space in order to assert a masculine hold of spatial command, to keep a hand in the delineation of the object of desire as it is made to be distanced on the wall. The nude and natural figures possess no place other than an imaginary position for their ideal viewer: producer of interiors out of his own interior, reflector of isolation, projector of desires and memories he imagines but can no longer possess.

The *Océanie* images of floating amid undulating natural shapes and *Jazz*'s "*La nageuse dans l'aquarium*" come to mind, each stressing how watching both ignites and distances desire, stretches it out, retains tension, suspense, permission to revisit the site of voyeuristic absorption. This non-possessive state is relative to the position of Matisse versus the art world, reviewing his career of being at once the subject and a subtle breaker of the canon. He worked beneath its sway and proved its force through occasional, furtive attempts at transgression, but, finally, the canon reinstated his idea that "We are not the masters of our production. It is imposed upon us." Since I have broached issues pertaining to psychoanalysis, it might be clear that my argument aims to indicate resemblances between the canon and the super-ego—the paternal policing agent the subject develops and uses to rein in desire and coordinate its application.[53] In this light, Matisse's return to the autographic mode signals his penance for attempting the canonically transgressive multiple. But it is a penance of pleasing punishment, for, as Kaja Silverman writes:

> Freud's moral masochist . . . lives in suspense, but without the promise of end-pleasure. Here suspense has a double face. It signifies both the endless postponement of libidinal gratification and the perpetual state of anxiety which is the result of that renunciation and of the super-ego's relentless surveillance. Of course these forms of suspense are not limited to the moral masochist; they are the cultural legacy of even the most conventionally structured of subjects. All that distinguishes the former from the latter is that his or her ego seeks to increase rather than decrease that tension, whether through the commission of misdeeds which will then elicit punishment, or—more classically—by the punctiliousness of its obedience.[54]

Can such a morally masochistic position be extended to encompass the art produced as cut-out? The vacillations available to

the moral masochist are available for examination in the history and imagery of Matisse's cut-outs. The evocations of combinations of fear, memory and desire all deal imperfectly with anxiety, and the artist's continual emphasis on his manual trace speaks of his canonical obedience and his "protracted pleasure" in preparing its representation. Leo Bersani, who regards sexuality as an intrusion of masochistically troped auto-eroticism into object relations, writes of how, in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*:

> Mallarmé encourages us to view sublimation not as a mechanism by which desire is denied, but rather as a self-reflexive activity by which desire multiplies and diversifies its representations. There is, to be sure, a certain purification of the desiring impulse, but purification should be understood here as an abstracting process which is not necessarily desexualizing. . . . Desire purifies the faun of his identity . . . just as the poet's sublimating speech divides the writer from himself, dissipates the oppressive themes of his being in the exuberant irony of his work.[55]

La piscine pictures this type of sublimation for Matisse. What is left over after one part is cut out is formulated as an erotic charge sublimated into plastic form, but there is only dispersal recorded in the composition of which each form is a part. The domination of space and the adaptation to a collaborative means of production implies a kind of sublimation geared towards a decorative substitute for troubling issues of sexuality, but Matisse, as in his attempts at public acceptability, encounters, in the mobile figure of the cut-out's polymorphous application, a house of mirrors reflecting his presence as both an invalid male commanding others to do his work and an artist made to exist through the canon. In returning to the subject that established his canonical status, the female nude, and in fabricating a work peripheral to his commissions, he finds himself in an infernal work of recuperation. In this penultimate formulation of the cut-out as surround, he locates a method to both adequate himself to his condition and extend himself, through rear-projection, through past success.

That woman features as his image of subservience in this scheme comes as no surprise, for Matisse lived in a house run by women of his choosing and employ. The Hotel Regina assistants and attendants were distaff to the cut-outs, models from the past, models for work yet to come.[56] They were the beings moving through the space he commanded, responding according to his call to compose and re-compose his handiwork. They provided his sustenance and bolstered his memory so that Matisse may have achieved, in ironic form, what his early eulogist Raymond Escholier claimed when writing that: "Cut-out paper was to allow him to realize the dream of his life."[57]

The quality and specifics of that dream as a cultural representation leads us beyond the questions and conditions addressed in this paper. However two final quotes may aid us in locating the ways in which the persistence of the canon is a feature of the patriarchy. Georges Duthuit wrote of the cut-outs:

> It is no longer a question of the painter employing one means or another, of putting himself inside a particular thing or of occupying the empty space which is between all things and which is also an interior. In the same way that it rose from the surfaces of his gouaches, so his scissors sent this intellectual melody soaring into the air—musical tones whose waves go on radiating on all sides at once.[58]

And Leo Bersani:

> In sublimation, the object of desire (the libidinal object) is nothing other than the consciousness that is pursuing a nonsexual aim. . . . The most notable achievements of culture and morality do indeed involve an abstraction from the sexual. And this means a certain civilized indifference to our cultural achievements and ethical ideals, an indifference without which tolerance becomes problematic and the fanaticism of the ideal returns. . . . the sexual produces the nonsexual, where interests and activities are narcissistic distillations.[59]

* This paper was prepared for a seminar jointly directed by Serge Guilbaut and John O'Brian of the University of British Columbia Department of Fine Arts in 1990-91. I want to thank both Serge and John for their comments on the paper and their encouragement towards seeing it published.

1 Quoted in "De la couleur," *Verve,* XII (November 1945), 13. First published as part of Tériade's "Constance du Fauvisme," *Minotaure,* II (1936), and reprinted in Dominique Fourcade, ed., *Henri Matisse: Écrits et propos sur l'art* (Paris, 1972), 128-129. This and, unless otherwise noted, all translations from French sources are by myself with thanks to Anne Dunlop and Serge Bérard for their help. In all quotations, original emphasis has been retained.

2 Gaston Diehl, *Henri Matisse* (New York, 1958), 76.

3 For an attempt at such a reading, see Marcelin Pleynet, "Matisse and System," *Painting and System,* Sima Godfrey, tr. (Cambridge, 1984), 7–77.

4 The concept of the dialogic refers to Mikhail Bahktin and his discussion in "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogical Imagination,* Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, tr. (Austin, 1981), 259–422. Though there are problems in applying Bahktin's linguistic concepts to art objects, his discussion is useful in this context as he deals more with competence in entering and using discourse than with whether an art object is a text. See, for a discussion and use of this idea in connection with art production, Timothy J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1964,* Serge Guilbaut, ed. (Cambridge, 1990), 172–243, especially the early portions of the essay.

5 "Testimonial, 1951," in Jack D. Flam, ed., *Matisse on Art* (London, 1973), 136.

6 John Elderfield, *The Cut-Outs of Henri Matisse* (New York, 1978), 7.

7 Elderfield, *The Cut-Outs,* 7.

8 Elderfield, *The Cut-Outs,* 39.

9 The most complete documentation of the cut-outs is found in Jack Cowart, Jack D. Flam, Dominique Fourcade and John Hallmark Neff, *Henri Matisse: Paper Cut-outs* (St. Louis and Detroit, 1977).

10 An attempt to contain this dispersion is evident in the detailed survey of the cut-outs prepared for the St. Louis Museum of Art in 1977. There the curatorial team treated the maquettes as autographs, discussing the multiple or transferred projects as side-lights to the real action found in the trace of the artist's cut-and-paste prepatory works. Questions of difference between maquette and produced multiple are rarely brought up. A conspicuous fetishisation of the maquette is found in the analysis of papers, glues and gouaches found in Antoinette King's "Technical Appendix." See Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs,* 272–277.

11 Louis Aragon, "Matisse, or Greatness," *Henri Matisse: a Novel*, Jean Stewart, tr. (New York, 1973), I, 11.

12 Pierre Schneider offers details as to the nature of Matisse's health problems in a biographical sketch at the close of his massive study, *Matisse*, Michael Taylor and Bridget Strevens Romer, tr. (New York, 1984), 738–740.

13 For the progress of this idea, see the letters gathered under the heading "Il me semble être dans une seconde vie," in Matisse, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, 277–299.

14 "Conversations with Aragon [On Signs]," Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 95.

15 Henri Matisse, *Jazz* (Paris, 1947), 21. All quotations from this text are taken from the facsimile version published in New York, in 1985. The translation is by Sophie Hawks, and, from now on, these notes will cite the facsimile edition's translation and pagination.

16 See an early plan for *Jazz*, dated March 7, 1944, published in Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Matisse: Oeuvres de Henri Matisse* (Paris, 1989), 343. As an aside, this volume provides rarely presented, comparative documentation of the plates found in both the maquette and published versions of *Jazz*, at 351–366.

17 According to the chronology in Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, these images come last, and are dated late 1944. See pages 113–114, and also see the inclusion of only one "*Lagon*" in the proposal submitted to Tériade, published in Monod-Fontaine, *Oeuvres de Henri Matisse*, 343. Matisse appears to have added the other two rather far into the image-portion of the book-work.

18 See Lydia Delectorskaya's notes in Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 110–111.

19 Matisse, *Jazz*, XVIII.

20 Matisse, *Jazz*, XVIII.

21 Matisse, *Jazz*, XVII–XVIII.

22 Janet Flanner, "The King of the Wild Beasts," *Men and Monuments* (Freeport, NY, 1970), 101.

23 Matisse to Tériade, Nice, March 7, 1977, published in Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 278.

24 For accounts of the work on *Jazz*, see Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 37–48 and 101–114, and the Tériade-Matisse correspondence published in Monod-Fontaine, *Oeuvres de Henri Matisse*, 342-344.

25 Antoinette King, "Technical Appendix," Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 274–275.

26 Matisse to André Rouveyre, Nice, 21 December 1947, published in Fourcade, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, 240–241.

27 Matisse to André Rouveyre, 15 February 1948: "We have a bit of a misunderstanding concerning *Jazz*. I asked you to write a line or two on it in *Figaro*. It was not a big deal. It's T. [Tériade] who wanted it. At the bottom of it all, *Jazz* has had a resounding success in France and abroad, and, if I had something truly serious to ask of you, it would be to pan it [*de la siffler*]. Since you've had discussions about it and have had to bring up its weaknesses, I'd thank you for stating them and too bad for those who don't see its qualities." Fourcade, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, 241.

28 For details on these works, see Monod-Fontaine, *Oeuvres de Henri Matisse*, 368–375.

29 "Oceania, 1946," Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 110.

30 Matisse to Zika Ascher, Paris, 24 October 1946, published in Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 279.

31 Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 279.

32 Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 279.

33 Monod-Fontaine, *Oeuvres de Henri Matisse*, 372.

34 Matisse to André Rouveyre, Nice, 21 December 1947, published in Fourcade, *Écrits et propos sur l'art*, 241.

35 Matisse, *Jazz*, XVI.

36 "Interview with Verdet, 1952," Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 144.

37 Louis Aragon, "The Cut-out Sky," *Henri Matisse: a Novel*, II, 283.

38 Christian Zervos, "A propos de l'Exposition Matisse au Musée d'art moderne," *Cahiers d'art*, XXIV (1949), 159–160.

39 Zervos, *Cahiers d'art*, XXIV, 160.

40 Clement Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Henri Matisse," in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2, Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949* (Chicago, 1986), 293.

41 For a discussion of Greenberg's conception of Matisse, see John O'Brian, "Greenberg's Matisse and the Problem of Avant-Garde Hedonism," in Guilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism*, 144–169.

42 Jean Leymarie, "Les grandes gouaches découpées à la Kunsthalle de Berne," *Quadrum*, VII (1959), 112.

43 Georges Duthuit, "Matisse and Byzantine Space," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V (1949), 36.

44 Duthuit, "Matisse and Byzantine Space," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V, 37.

45 "Documents," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V (1949), 110. The editorship of the journal and the repetition of "second-rate" in both "Matisse and Byzantine Space" and the "Documents" article may be evidence that Duthuit wrote the unsigned article. The rebuke, in this case, might be intended to throw us off the scent, since a virtually undistinguishable attitude towards the irreconcilable nature of the conflict between "freedom" and the PCF is articulated in both articles.

46 See Serge Guilbaut, "Postwar Painting Games: The Rough and the Slick," in Guilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism*, 30–84.

47 "Documents," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V, 118.

48 "Documents," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V, 118.

49 "Documents," *Transition Forty-Nine*, V, 126.

50 For a reproduction of Tériade's room, see Schneider, *Matisse*, 693.

51 Elderfield, *The Cut-Outs*, 31. For details on *La piscine*, see: John Elderfield, *Matisse in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York, 1978), 162–169; and Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 224-228.

52 For this documentation, see Hélene Adant's photographs in Cowart, *Paper Cut-outs*, 226–228, and Elderfield, *The Cut-Outs*, 116–119.

53 For the best discussion of the super-ego, see J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, tr. (New York, 1973), 435–438.

54 Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Subjectivity, *Camera Obscura*, XVII (May 1988), 46. It is advisable to note Silverman's recognition of the "cultural legacy" of the subject and to caution that this study is not a psycho-biography of Matisse.

55 Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body* (New York, 1986), 49–50.

56 Janet Flanner, "The King of the Wild Beasts," 103.

57 Raymond Escholier, *Matisse: A Portrait of the Artist and the Man*, Geraldine and H.M. Colville, tr. (New York, 1960), 196.

58 Georges Duthuit, "The Material and Spiritual Worlds of Henri Matisse," *Art News*, LV (October 1956), 67.

59 Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, 1990), 43–44.