

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

49  
NO. 18  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
THURSDAY, FEB. 24, 1972

PRESS REVIEW: TUES. FEB. 22  
11:00 am - 4:00 pm

## FIRST COMPLETE EXHIBITION OF MATISSE'S BRONZES AT THE MODERN MUSEUM OF ART

For the first time, all of the 69 known bronzes by Henri Matisse have been assembled in a single exhibition which will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from February 24 through May 1. The exhibition was selected and installed by Alicia Legg, Associate Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture. The sculptures are supplemented by 19 drawings, 4 prints and a ceramic tile which are related to certain sculptures. The great majority of the pieces, which date from 1894 to 1950, have been borrowed from private collections.

After the New York showing, the exhibition travels to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (June 20 - August 6) and to the University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley (September 18 - October 29).

Although Matisse exhibited his sculptures as early as 1904, and continued to include them along with his paintings in exhibitions throughout his career, he has been known principally through his paintings. His production in sculpture is now recognized as distinctly original and a crucial adjunct to his art.

Matisse's paintings of 1904 - 1907 "include figures in poses that were to become the classic repertory in his sculpture -- the reclining nude, the upright figure with one knee bent, the crouching figure, and the gesture of arms raised above the head as if arranging the hair," Miss Legg points out.

While Matisse had little formal training in sculpture, the influences of Rodin and Antoine-Louis Barye, the eminent animal sculptor, are evident in his first efforts at free-standing modeling. Among these is a free copy of Barye's Jaguar Devouring a Hare, in which the tense drama of the original is captured

(more)

"almost as if in shorthand," Miss Legg observes in her introductory preface to the catalogue of the exhibition.\* For one of his most celebrated sculptures, The Surf, 1899-1901, Matisse used a model who had posed for Rodin's Walking Man, 1877-78. Rodin's youthful, striding figure has matured in Matisse's Serf.

Among Matisse's best known sculptures are the 1907 Reclining Nude, I, which was the inspiration for his famous painting Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra) of the same year; Decorative Figure, 1908, a seated nude with "an archaic dignity and sensuous elegance"; La Serpentine, 1909, "an elongated figure with grotesque proportions that is both dignified and provocative." During 1923-25 in Nice, Miss Legg says, Matisse's sculpture combined the indolence of the painted odalisques of the period with an extraordinary vitality and tension, as seen in the Large Seated Nude.

Also represented are the various series on which Matisse worked throughout his career. In the five heads of Jeannette of 1910-13, the original naturalistic conception in the first state is transformed by gradual intensification of the features and simplification of the structure, "demonstrating an extraordinary mastery of organic form and its expressive possibilities."

One of the most obsessive recurring themes in Matisse's art is the reclining nude. Besides the Reclining Nude, I of 1907, with its contorted position of one knee thrust over the other outstretched leg, variations occur in four other bronzes, Reclining Figure with Chemise, 1906; Reclining Nude with Bolster, 1918; and Reclining Nude I and Reclining Nude II of 1927 and 1929.

\* THE SCULPTURE OF MATISSE by Alicia Legg. 56 pages; 81 illustrations; \$2.50.  
Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The four large reliefs of The Back from the Museum's Collection have been brought indoors from their customary place on the wall of the Sculpture Garden. Here again, the naturalistic modeling of The Back, I, 1909, is modified in a progressively abstract manner until the fourth and final version of 1930, in which "Matisse was taking logical but ever bolder steps toward monumental sculpture," Miss Legg comments.

Little-known works include Standing Nude, a small bas-relief of 1908, whose fluent modeling, Miss Legg points out, "is an exercise in highlighting form;" two torsos of 1929, three and four inches high, that are modeled with an organic simplicity; and the last two works in the show -- a cast of the slender bronze crucifix designed in 1949 for the Vence Chapel, and Standing Nude, 1950, the last repetition of the woman with arms raised above her head. This time, Miss Legg observes, the upright figure is stretched almost in exaltation.

Drawings include a study for Madeleine, several studios for Reclining Figure with Chemise and for The Back, and two remarkable portraits of the artist's young daughter.

Images of Matisse's sculptures frequently appear in his paintings. Among the canvases in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art that include sculptures and are on view in the second-floor galleries are The Red Studio (1911), in which appear Seated Nude with Arms on Head (1904), Decorative Figure (1908) and Jeannette IV (1910-13). Decorative Figure also appears in the Piano Lesson (1916), and Reclining Nude, I (1907) appears in Goldfish and Sculpture (1911).

\*\*\*\*\*

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501, - 7504.

\*\*\*\*\*