

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release

MAJOR WORK BY MATISSE, GIFT OF MRS. BERTRAM SMITH, ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

August 10, 1990.....Richard E. Oldenburg, director of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, announced today the gift of an outstanding Matisse painting from 1905, *Landscape at Collioure*, from a generous trustee and noted collector, Mrs. Bertram Smith. A partial share in the picture has been given at this time with the balance of the gift to be completed at a later date. As of today, the work is on view in the collection galleries on the Museum's second floor.

The Museum is renowned for its extensive Matisse holdings, but its representation of the artist's work in the formative period around 1905-06 has been relatively thin. Though such extraordinary *fauve* Matisses as Mrs. Smith's *Landscape at Collioure*, as well as David Rockefeller's *Girl Reading* (1905-06), had been awaited as future gifts, the galleries were not strong in this area. Mrs. Smith's gift gives the public immediate access to the painting and greatly enhances the Museum's Matisse presentation.

Mr. Oldenburg stated, "We are deeply grateful to generous donors such as Louise Smith who believe in the concept of public collections. With museums caught in a vise between the rising costs of art and tax laws that discourage major donations of art works, we depend more than ever on the good faith and generosity of such individuals. In their far-sighted dedication rests our hope for continuing to present the best of modern art to our public."

In describing the painting, Kirk Varnedoe, director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, stated, "With its bold array of unconventional hues,

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this splendid image of trees and foliage dappled with Mediterranean light pulses with a striking sense of energy. Remarkably abstract, the picture speaks both of passionate response to the experience of light and color, and of Matisse's search for new, non-imitative forms of harmony. I wholeheartedly concur with the Matisse experts who have felt that it was among the artist's most beautiful and telling early works."

Landscape at Collioure represents the moment at which Matisse broke with the predictable schema of Neo-Impressionism, in favor of a more instinctive, spontaneous way of painting that was unparalleled among his contemporaries. The landscapes he painted in the summer of 1905 were "wilder, more reckless than any subsequently produced in his career," according to John Elderfield, a Matisse scholar and director of the Museum's Department of Drawings.

"In the works of that period," Mr. Elderfield observed, "color speaks for itself with a directness previously unknown in Western painting, and speaks directly too of the emotional response to the natural world that required changing the color of this world the better to render that emotion. Mrs. Smith's gift is among the greatest of Matisse's *fauve* landscapes. And it is of additional importance in that it both reveals Matisse's admiration for the works of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh, and also looks forward to the artist's great early masterpiece, the *Bonheur de vivre* of 1905-06 (Barnes Foundation), whose background landscape derives from this picture."

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