



118 Henri Matisse

1869 – 1954 French

Femme assise sur un balcon

oil on canvas, on verso inscribed *Photo 2457 / inv 394 / 238 / PM / No. 32 / 31 à 41 / PMT #305002 Matisse Femme au balcon / PNM 41, January 1919*
26 x 20 in, 66 x 50.8 cm

PROVENANCE

By descent from the Artist to Pierre Matisse,
New York
By descent from the above to Pierre-Nöel Matisse,
New York and Paris
Estate of Pierre-Nöel Matisse
Acquired from the above Estate by a Private Collection
Private sale, Christie's New York
Acquired from the above by the present
Private Collection, Monaco, July 2008

LITERATURE

Francis Carco, *L'ami des peintres*, 1944, page 227
Raymond Escholier, *Matisse, from the Life*, 1960,
pages 99, 100, 101 and 102
Dominique Foucade, editor, *Henri Matisse: Écrits et
propos sur l'art*, 1972, page 123
Jack Flam, editor, *Matisse: A Retrospective*, 1988,
Ragnar Hoppe, "My Visit with Matisse," and
George Besson, "Matisse's Arrival in Nice,"
pages 167 and 169
Jack Flam, editor, *Matisse on Art*, 1995, pages 39,
146 and 205
Guy-Patrice and Michel Dauberville, *Matisse Chez
Bernheim Jeune, Volume 2*, 1995, catalogue #282,
listed pages 1436 and 1449, reproduced page 738
Hilary Spurling, *Matisse the Master: A Life of Henri Matisse,
Volume 2*, 2006, pages 205, 218, 222 and 228
Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Henri Matisse: Rooms with a View*,
2010, page 11

HENRI MATISSE ARRIVED in Nice for the first time on Christmas Day in 1917. He had come south to escape the grim austerities of wartime Paris, but the weather proved cold and windy. "It's freezing in this pig of a place," he complained to his wife from his modest seafront hotel, the Beau-Rivage. However, the charms of Nice revealed themselves soon enough. Although he had painted along the Mediterranean coast many times before—in Corsica, Algeria, Morocco and the small ports of Saint-Tropez and Collioure—the luminous winter light of the Côte d'Azur left him spellbound and inspired to paint. Even a New Year's Day snowfall that turned the palm fronds to lacework failed to dent his enthusiasm, and a planned stopover of only a few days



Nice—Promenade des Anglais, Hôtel de la Méditerranée et Westminster



Banquet for the Matisse retrospective exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, June 1931
Left to right: Maud Dale, Henri Matisse, Suzanne Bernheim de Villers and Chester Dale

turned into a five-month stay. He returned for a second visit in the winter of 1918–1919—"and I stayed," he later wrote, "for practically the rest of my life."

By the time he discovered Nice, Matisse had enjoyed large shares of both notoriety and success. The "wild beast" of art who had burst onto the scene at the *Salon d'Automne* in October 1905, shocking the public with his expressive forms and exuberant, unreal colours, was now, as he approached 50, prosperous and acclaimed. He looked, according to one visitor, like a distinguished Parisian professor, "as elegantly dressed as an English gentleman," with spectacles and a suit of the latest cut. His grave, methodical manner had earned him the nickname "Le Docteur."



HENRI MATISSE
Interior with a Violin Case
 oil on canvas, 1918 – 1919
 28 ¾ x 23 ¾ in, 73 x 60 cm
 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York,
 Lillie P. Bliss Collection, #86.1934
 Photo: © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / ART
 Artwork © 2019 Succession H. Matisse /
 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Not for sale with this lot

Yet, however outwardly respectable, he was still artistically restless, undergoing metamorphoses as he experimented with form and colour.

Femme assise sur un balcon was painted during Matisse's second sojourn in Nice. Arriving a month after the Armistice, he spent the winter of 1918 – 1919 at the more upscale Hôtel de la Méditerranée et de la Côte d'Azur, in a room with a balcony overlooking the Promenade des Anglais and the Baie des Anges. The hotel offered Matisse a blissful idyll, a chance to live what a friend called an "austere, laborious life." Detached from both the cares of family life at Issy-les-Moulineaux and the artistic fray of Paris, where for the previous ten years he had been Pablo Picasso's artistic sparring partner, he kept to himself, rising early to paint, eating a frugal lunch, then retiring early to bed. He was to remember the hotel fondly to a friend following its demolition in the 1930s: "It was a good old hotel, to be sure ... I spent four years there for the pleasure of painting nudes and figures in an old rococo room. Do you remember the light that came through the shutters? It came from below like footlights in the theatre, everything false, absurd, amazing, delicious."



HENRI MATISSE
Interior at Nice
 oil on canvas, circa 1919
 26 ¼ x 21 ¾ in, 66.7 x 54.9 cm
 Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum,
 Museum Purchase, #74.1945
 Photo: Saint Louis Art Museum
 Artwork © 2019 Succession H. Matisse /
 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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Matisse's room was considerably smaller than the studios to which he had been accustomed in Paris and at Issy-les-Moulineaux—hence his smaller canvases. Suffused with Mediterranean light, it was sparsely but stylishly appointed, with a pink-tiled floor and translucent muslin curtains that parted to reveal French doors and green shutters framing a balustraded balcony and the sea beyond. At first he had difficulties finding a model to place on this ready-made stage. His beloved 24-year-old daughter Marguerite, who often posed for him, was in poor health in early 1919, awaiting a risky operation. He eventually found, probably through the local art school, a 19-year-old local girl, Antoinette Arnoud (or Arnoux). She relished her role as a model, posing nude as well as in various costumes, including for at least 15 canvases, in a flower-bedecked and ostrich-plumed straw hat designed by Matisse himself.

In *Femme assise sur un balcon* Antoinette looks pensive and aloof. Wearing a floral-patterned blouse and a white skirt, she sits on the balcony with a book on her lap, facing a table, sharply cropped, and a bentwood chair, with Nice's dun-coloured beach behind. The chair is one of the sinuous, anthropomorphic props



Henri Matisse, Paris
 Photogravure from *Men of Mark*, May 13, 1913
 Rare Book Division, New York Public Library
 Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections

(like vases, violin cases or statuettes) that recur in so many of Matisse's paintings; here it finds its visual echo in the hourglass shapes of the balusters.

The motif is a familiar one. "Windows have always interested me," Matisse once said, "because they are a passageway between the exterior and the interior." Indeed, Shirley Neilsen Blum has noted that almost 100 of Matisse's works frame objects or figures on a threshold between intimate, decorative interiors and the expansive landscape beyond. This arrangement allowed him to explore the varying effects of light, and to experiment with the spatial and optical relations between foreground and distance. "The space is one unity from the horizon right to the interior of my workroom," he said in a 1942 interview, noting that the objects outside the window shared "the same space as the familiar objects around me."

The setting and furnishings, too, are familiar from works that Matisse painted around the same time, such as *Interior with a Violin Case* (collection of MOMA) and *Interior at Nice* (collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum). *Femme assise sur un balcon* presents the motif from a tighter angle. The decorative details of these

other works—the patterned wallpaper, flowers, tablecloth, even the slanting Mediterranean light spilling onto the floor in *Interior with a Violin Case*—have been muted or suppressed. This more subdued approach may have been a response to Marguerite's criticism that *Interior with a Violin Case* was overly pretty—the source of a famous family argument. But as the critic Guillaume Apollinaire had noted a year earlier, Matisse's work was taking on "an ever-increasing simplicity" that nonetheless made his work, paradoxically, "more and more sumptuous."

Matisse's painting at this time was, as always, in transition. Like many artists after the war, Picasso included, he returned to a more naturalistic style, rejoicing in the simple beauty of flowers, nudes, domestic interiors and especially the radiant light of the South. He engaged once again with Impressionism, one of his earliest and deepest influences. This renewed interest manifested itself in frequent trips to see the aged and ailing Pierre-Auguste Renoir at his home in Cagnes-sur-Mer (see lot 136 in this sale), some 10 miles down the coast from Nice. He regarded Renoir as a brilliant colourist and unsurpassed master of the nude. "Renoir's work saves us from the drying-up effect of pure abstraction," he claimed in a 1919 interview.

The first visit to Renoir had proved awkward: Matisse was overly formal ("an ambassador presenting his credentials to some aged Pope") while Renoir was suspicious and resentful, no doubt remembering Matisse's public disavowal of Impressionism in 1908 as superficial and "almost dishonest" in its approach to the landscape. Renoir was, however, impressed by Matisse's dress sense, "astonished," according to the art critic Georges Besson, "by this apparition of such an impeccable, sumptuous person, whose pale felt hat harmonized with his ample Shetland wool overcoat of a rare colour—chosen with a painter's eye." Soon on more relaxed terms, the two men began exchanging reminiscences and painting tips, with Renoir cautioning Matisse about the use of black, and Matisse discreetly warning Renoir—who sat "infirm and mummified in his armchair, his hands wrapped in linen bandages"—against overly exuberant applications of colour. When Renoir suggested that they exchange canvases, Matisse demurred: "I'm not worth it," he said. He took away from Cagnes-sur-Mer not only the older man's advice but also the courageous example of a painter who persisted in his art despite his horrendous physical sufferings.

Back with his family at Issy-les-Moulineaux in the summer of 1919, Matisse proclaimed himself the "happiest man in the world." Much of this happiness came from his discovery of the beauties of Nice and the artistic possibilities it offered.

We thank Ross King for contributing the above essay. King has written numerous best-sellers, including *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade That Gave the World Impressionism* and *Mad Enchantment: Claude Monet and the Painting of the Water Lilies*.

Included with this lot is a certificate of clearance from the ALR. This work is accompanied by a photo-certificate of authenticity from Archive Matisse, dated 5/1/2009, Paris and signed by Wanda de Guébriant.

ESTIMATE: \$3,800,000 – 5,800,000