

Press release  
March, 31, 2026

# HENRI MATISSE— YVES SAINT LAURENT

## Beauty, Fashion and Happiness

Exhibition on view at the Musée Matisse Nice  
from June 17 through September 28, 2026

An exhibition originated by the Musée Matisse Nice  
and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris

**MUSÉE MATISSE** Musée YVES SAINT LAURENT Paris

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The Musée Matisse Nice and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris have joined forces to mount a major exhibition devoted to two leading creative geniuses who continually reexamined the twentieth century, exploring its canons while transgressing them, in order to abolish the established boundaries between the “fine arts” and the “applied arts.”

For Henri Matisse (1869–1954), vibrant decorative prints became a way to create a pictorial space that extended “beyond the limits of the tangible”; for Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008), painting offered a conduit from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional plane, leading him to conceive of clothing as a mobile that unfolds in space, as painting in motion. Sewing and painting are gestures that contribute to “the same experimentation with line, the same precision in the handling of contrasts between materials and volumes<sup>1</sup>.” Henri Matisse and Yves Saint Laurent share a common vocabulary in this respect: “to carve into color” and to “strike into the material.”

<sup>1</sup> Dominique Paini, “Le peintre de la femme moderne,” in *Yves Saint Laurent: Dialogue avec l'art*, 2002. As seen with other couturiers passionate about art—Jacques Doucet, for example—certain gestures, such as painting and sewing, find the same experimentation with lines and the same attention to contrasts between materials and forms.

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Born during the second half of the twentieth century in Le Cateau-Cambrésis, a center of the wool textile industry in northern France, Henri Matisse developed a deep interest in fabrics from a very young age and cultivated a marked taste for clothing and accessories. Thus, whether through haute couture or popular garments, fashion permeates his work and constitutes a significant characteristic of his oeuvre. Many of the paintings presented in this exhibition bear names inspired by the clothing worn by their subjects: *Mademoiselle Matisse in a Scottish Coat*, *Blue Dress Reflected in a Mirror*, *The Striped Dress*, *Lorette in a Red Jacket*, *The Blue Gandoura*, *Purple Robe and Anemones* and many others.

Matisse's "working library," a veritable laboratory of patterns and colors, reflected his passion for textiles. It constituted a visual and tactile repertoire essential to his art, allowing him to explore color harmony, the movement of the body and a decorative aesthetic. Far from being mere ornamentation, textiles represented for Matisse a field of formal experimentation. As Pierre Schneider pointed out, "interested as he was in the craftsmanship of clothing, Matisse could not help but be interested in fashion."

Yves Saint Laurent was passionate about modern art; he was deeply influenced by what Nietzsche called his "aesthetic ghosts." Among them, Matisse was a source of inspiration and creativity for the couturier. Without copying him, Saint Laurent drew sustenance from him, first through books in his personal library—in which monographs of the painter held a prominent place—and then by collecting, with his partner Pierre Bergé, works by the master. Far beyond the references made to the artist through several haute couture collections during the 1980s and 1990s, he subtly observed Matisse's oeuvre throughout his career, admiring his bold use of colors, his intense harmonies and his taste for ornamentation. He grasped the essence of Matisse's creative processes, such as the use of cut-out gouache papers, which allowed the artist to "draw with scissors".

For both the painter and the couturier, the "mementos" of their travels—particularly to Morocco, to name only the most emblematic place—but above all their studios and the books they surrounded themselves with, were a vast source of inspiration at the heart of their creative output. The ongoing exploration of these horizons, which opened onto new worlds to discover, reveal an immense curiosity, extensively documented by the abundant archives left by each of them. In this constellation, where painting, music, dance, cinema and literature intersect, certain references were common to both, including Apollinaire, Aragon and Proust. Both Henri Matisse and Yves Saint Laurent had read Charles Baudelaire, who inspired the title<sup>2</sup> of this exhibition.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "Le beau, la mode et le bonheur," in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, published in 1863; reprinted in *L'Art romantique*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1885, Œuvres complètes, volume III, p. 51–56.

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In Matisse's Nice studios, fabrics, costumes and objects blended with wallpaper to create rich atmospheres of textures and patterns. Within these spaces, the painter created numerous interior scenes, painting, drawing and sculpting young women, either nude or dressed in garments from his own collection. Later, by moving and adjusting cut-out gouaches pinned to the wall until they achieved a perfect balance, he achieved one of the twentieth century's pictorial revolutions. In Yves Saint Laurent's studio, silhouettes were constructed through successive adjustments using drawings pinned to cork panels and worktables cluttered with objects and mirrors, in a constant dialogue between vision and materials. In their respective creative approaches, Yves Saint Laurent's Polaroids reveal the process behind constructing a garment, while various stages in Matisse's work document a painting's development.

The painter and the couturier shared common ground: a formal language founded on the primacy of drawing, which, repetitive as it is, became an almost instinctive, immediate gesture. For Matisse, drawing eliminated the superfluous to achieve expressive precision. For Yves Saint Laurent, it constituted the foundational act of everything he created.

Before the work of the in-house ateliers, before having chosen the fabric, there was the paper, on which he would trace, with an almost spontaneous gesture, the essential line. It captured the bearing and posture of the body, its balance, a silhouette already in motion that heralded the appearance of the garment.

It is important to note how keenly Yves Saint Laurent assimilated the principle of cut-out gouache papers, emblematic of Matisse's work, and translated it into his own unique style. Clothing, like pictorial composition, would become a medium through which a harmony of forms was experienced, at the intersection of sight, gesture and body. Well before conceiving of cut-out gouache papers as an independent artistic vocabulary, Henri Matisse had used the technique as early as 1919 to design sets for the ballet *Le Chant du rossignol* [The Song of the Nightingale], for which he himself created the costumes in Paul Poiret's workshop, and again in the early 1930s when he created the mural *La Danse*. His compositions would evolve from large sheets of painted paper, which he would pin to the wall, moving, adjusting and recomposing them to test their balance. He became a couturier himself when the London industrialist Ziska Ascher asked him to design linen scarves and wall coverings (*Oceania, the Sea* and *Oceania, the Sky*), which Matisse offered to the City of Nice in 1953.

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Today, the relevance of the connection between fashion and the visual arts is undeniable. Yves Saint Laurent's interest in painting is intrinsic to his work, while Matisse's attraction to the applied arts lies at the heart of his decorative aesthetic. The artistic resonance between the two creators is evident. This resonance not only rests on a shared system of references, on the parallels between their practices and the similarities in their vision, but also on their analogous aesthetic research concerning the body, matter, color, light and pattern, as well as on the practice of drawing as an inexhaustible source of exploration.

The exhibition highlights the connections between the painter and the couturier and creates a dialogue between their works. It draws on the rich collections of the Musée Matisse Nice and of the Fondation Pierre Bergé–Yves Saint Laurent, supplemented by important loans from France and abroad.

Bringing together 160 works—haute couture creations, popular traditional garments, paintings, drawings, textiles, accessories and archival documents—the Musée Matisse Nice offers us a unique journey highlighting the profound associations that the couturier—one of the most innovative voices in French fashion—forged with the art of Henri Matisse, one of the greatest artists of his time.

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## Curators

**Serena Bucalo-Mussely**, exhibition curator and commissioner, and **Aymeric Jedy**, historian, director of the Musée Matisse Nice, researcher associated with the Centre de la Méditerranée moderne et contemporaine (Université Nice Côte d'Azur).

This project benefited from the invaluable support of the scientific teams at both museums. Among them, **Domitille Éblé**, head of collections at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris and **Claire Gooden**, research officer at the Musée Matisse Nice, worked tirelessly to bring this exhibition to fruition.

## Exhibition design

**Studio Matters**, located in Charenton-le-Pont, France, is responsible for the exhibition's scenography, which will be unveiled in seven thematic sections over two levels of the museum. To coincide with this exhibition, the Musée Matisse Nice will present an enhanced display of its collections dedicated to models who posed for Matisse's paintings.

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# Publication

## Exhibition catalog

Edited by Serena Bucalo-Mussely and Aymeric Jeudy,  
with texts by Khémaïs Ben Lakhdar Rezgui, Laurence Benaïm, Serena Bucalo-Mussely, Domitille Éblé,  
Claire Gooden, Aymeric Jeudy, Mouna Mekouar, Victor Sainsot and Popy Venzal.

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# The Musée Matisse Nice

Founded in 1963, the Musée Matisse Nice is located in the heart of the Cimiez Hill, the site of the ancient Roman city of Cemenelum, which became an important winter holiday destination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Located in a seventeenth-century villa, which architect Jean-François Bodin renovated between 1987 and 1993, and to which he added a contemporary underground extension, the museum today blends harmoniously into its surroundings. The museum's collection, made up of works from successive donations to the city by Henri Matisse and his heirs, is displayed in an exhibition space of over 1,200 square meters, allowing visitors to fully appreciate the work of one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century. Closely associated with the Nice studios where Matisse produced a significant portion of his oeuvre, the museum also houses the painter's personal collection.

This exceptional collection is made accessible to a wide range of visitors through a chronological and multidisciplinary presentation that fosters a dialogue between different eras, techniques and cultures. Every year, major international-caliber exhibitions offer fresh perspectives on the museum's collections and allow for the display of works from around the world. Recent programs have explored the work of Henri Matisse from diverse and original angles, in the context of the history of twentieth-century art.

Visit [Musée Matisse de Nice | Site officiel](#) to learn more about the museum and its programs.



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# The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, presided over by Madison Cox, is the first museum dedicated to a great couturier of the twentieth century to have opened in the capital of fashion.

It opened its doors on October 3, 2017, fifteen years after the closing of the haute couture house; its collection has been granted the designation “Musée de France” by the French Ministry of Culture. It occupies the historic hôtel particulier at 5 Avenue Marceau where for nearly thirty years, from 1974 to 2002, Yves Saint Laurent’s creative genius held sway. The museum’s vast collection includes 12,000 garments—including 8,300 haute couture pieces—more than 100,000 graphic artworks, including 55,000 fashion sketches by the couturier and 194,000 photographs, including slides, negatives and vintage and modern prints. An archive of more than 4,000 magazines and 60,000 documents, including correspondence, audiovisual materials and personal objects, completes the collection. The museum’s collection is the result of the pioneering and systematic archival work initiated by Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé in the early 1960s.

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris is temporarily closed for renovations.  
It is scheduled to reopen in the fall of 2027.

Visit [Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris | Site officiel](#) to learn more about the museum and its programs.

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Musée **YVES SAINT LAURENT** Paris

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