

# FRENCH MASTERS ON PAPER

*from Degas to Matisse*



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## *from Degas to Matisse*

The great artists who spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries travelled a huge imaginative distance. The journey was unparalleled, and not since the Renaissance had so much ground been covered in a lifetime. The sixty-year career of Henri Matisse (1869-1954) illustrates this transition best of all, from his early paintings of modest realism, through to the triumph of the *gouache découpées* (cut outs) of his final decade. Today, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, the two avant-garde movements in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century, are as mainstream and well-liked as ever. At the time of writing the National Gallery in London is holding a Post-Impressionism exhibition, *After Impressionism - Inventing Modern Art*, and the Royal Academy will host *Impressionists on Paper* this coming autumn. The Impressionists, who held eight exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, sought to depict everyday life, as opposed to historical, religious or mythological subjects. The Post-Impressionists, who began to exhibit from the mid-1880s onwards, looked for less prosaic ways to describe reality and veered towards symbolism and the mythic. Though the two movements had different aims, they were united in their pursuit of a new visual language with which to express themselves. Inspiration had to be found outside of the ridged academic forms that had dominated French art until the mid-nineteenth century, and this extended to the physical materials they used.

Drawing on paper, whether with pencil, ink, charcoal or pastel, had been used as a means of preparation for

painting in European art for centuries, and the practice was still widely acknowledged in the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist era. Since the mid-seventeenth century the official body for training French artists had been the *Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture*, founded in 1648. The Académie promoted a strict learning process with students starting by making copies of prints and drawings, then progressing to drawing plaster casts (usually copies of antique statuary), and eventually to drawing from life models with poses in accordance with classical taste. The Académie was denounced at the time of the French Revolution, but later reinstated as the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, with the teaching overseen by the *École des Beaux-Arts*. The training was rigorous and helped many young artists to become skilled draftsmen, the most promising of who went on to receive commissions for the church and state and to exhibit in the official Salon exhibitions. The downside to this system was that creativity was stifled to conform to a classical taste that became increasingly irrelevant as the century went on. In 1863 the École was reformed by the government to broaden admission and encourage a greater freedom of expression with new techniques and ideas. Places at the École were highly sought after and an entrance examination was required for admission. Those that failed to obtain a place could look to private academies to receive training, such as the *Académie Suisse* on the Île de la Cité, where Monet trained, or the more famous *Académie Julian*, founded in 1868, which could count Vuillard and Matisse amongst its protégés. These independent academies

admitted women and were run on a commercial basis. They were popular with avant-garde artists, especially those who failed to gain admission to the École des Beaux-Arts or, having done so, found it uninspiring.

Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists continued to use drawing in the traditional way, as a preparation for finished paintings, but they also experimented using ink, watercolour, pastel, charcoal, conté crayon, gouache, and *peinture à l'essence* (oil paint diluted with turpentine) to make pictures destined for exhibition on their own. The modern style of painting was executed at speed and not highly finished, which meant that the visual gap between oil paintings and drawings had narrowed, making it easier to break down the existing hierarchies, and the subservience of drawing to painting. Intellectually, the less finished paint surface of the Impressionist style was understood to be more appropriate for capturing the essence of modern life, a fleeting glimpse into a passing moment, as seen in the many studies of ballerinas by Degas (see p. 14). For the Post Impressionist groups such as *Les Nabis*, whose central figure was Vuillard, mediums like pastel for example proved the ideal tool for creating strong atmosphere, while eschewing pictorial illusionism.

As the nineteenth century progressed the public's interest in drawings increased with dedicated exhibitions being held at the annual Salon at the Palais des Champs-Élysées, as well as displays of Old Master drawings at the Musée du Louvre and the École

des Beaux-Arts. Major journals such as *L'Art* and *La Vie Moderne* commissioned drawings (see p. 6) and arranged and promoted exhibitions. The dealers of the age like Paul Durand-Ruel and Georges Petit were quick to capitalise on the public interest for drawings, encouraging their artists to concentrate on works on paper, which were less costly and time consuming to create than traditional easel paintings, and could be produced in greater volumes. Thus works on paper in their many forms became an essential component of the avant-garde movements at the turn of the twentieth century in France.

The pictures in this exhibition cover the rise of Impressionism, with the earliest being a drawing by Caillebotte from 1878, through to the mature work of Matisse, with his exquisite ink portrait from 1944. The collection showcases the rising status of works on paper, as well as being testament to the refined taste and astute selectivity of the private collector who assembled them.

It is our great privilege to be exhibiting these French drawings for the first time in a generation and we are delighted to present them in collaboration with **London Art Week**.

**James Astley Birtwistle**  
**June 2023**

**GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE (1848-1894)***Baigneur s'apprêtant à plonger*, 1878

black pencil on paper  
 15 3/4 x 10 1/4 in. (40 x 26 cm.)  
 signed G. Caillebotte lower centre

## PROVENANCE:

Private Collection, France;  
 Neffe-Degandt Fine Art, London;  
 acquired from the above in 2002, thence by descent.

## LITERATURE:

*Paris l'été. À la Grenouillère*, in 'La Vie Moderne', 17 July 1880 (illustrated);  
 A. Tabarent, *Les Peintures à la campagne*, in 'Le Bulletin de la vie artistique', 1 September 1921 (illustrated);  
 M. Berhaut, *Caillebotte, sa vie et son oeuvre, Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris, 1978, pp. 113 and 266, no. 90A (reproduction from La Vie Moderne illustrated, p. 113);  
 P. Wittmer, *Caillebotte au jardin. La période d'Yerres: 1860-1879*, Saint-Rémy-en-l'Eau, 1990, p. 174 and 332 (illustrated, p. 174);  
 M. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte - Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris, 1994, pp. 118 and 306, no. 119A (illustrated, p. 118).

Gustave Caillebotte was an invaluable exponent in the Impressionist movement, revered as much as a patron and benefactor to the group, as well as an active member himself. Rich and well connected, he played a crucial role in organising and financing the eight Impressionist exhibitions and showed his own work in five of them (1876, 1877, 1879, 1880 and 1882). He collected paintings by his fellow artists from the mid-1870s onwards both for their quality and to support his friends, and upon his untimely death in 1894, he bequeathed the collection of nearly sixty works to the French State, for display in the Musée du Luxembourg. The Caillebotte bequest forms the heart of the Impressionist collection to be found in the Musée d'Orsay today.



fig 1, *Baigneur s'apprêtant à plonger*, 1878, oil on canvas, private collection



fig 2, *Les Orangers*, oil on canvas, MFA Houston



fig 3, *Baigneur s'apprêtant à plonger*, pastel, Musée d'Orsay

Caillebotte's father was a successful entrepreneur and investor who purchased an estate at Yerres to the south-east of Paris. The house and its grounds were the setting for many of Caillebotte's paintings in the 1870s, including this *baigneur*, drawn from a large painting (fig 1) executed there in 1878. This was the final summer he would spend at the family home before it was sold in 1879 after his mother's death. Several of Caillebotte's greatest paintings come from this period including *The Floor Scrapers* (Musée d'Orsay) and *Les Orangers* (fig 2), both created in the summer of 1878.

Much like his close associate Edgar Degas, Caillebotte delighted in depicting contemporary subject matter, engaging in whatever he saw before him. This accounts for the unusual perspectives and compositions found in his works, as in this drawing where the diver faces away from the viewer, poised to dive out of the picture space. To accurately depict these complex spaces, he made many preparatory pencil studies, designing the scene like a set stage. This drawing was in fact made after the painting to be engraved and illustrated in *La Vie Moderne* a major journal of the time and a testament to the popularity of the picture. Caillebotte explored the subject of the diving figure in several other pictures, notably a fine pastel drawing from 1877 today in the Musée d'Orsay (fig 3).



**CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926)***Etretat, le Cap d'Antifer*. c. 1885

pastel on paper mounted on board  
 10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in. (27 x 35 cm.)  
 signed *Claude Monet* lower right

**PROVENANCE:**

(possibly) Mme Materne (c. 1894);  
 I. Stchoukine, Paris;  
 their sale; Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 24 March 1900, lot 36;  
 Olivier Vainsère;  
 Galerie Lorenceau, Paris;  
 Wildenstein & Co., Paris;  
 Alice Tully (acquired from the above in 1973);  
 her sale; Christie's, New York, 10 November 1994, lot 138;  
 Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;  
 acquired from the above in 2002, thence by descent.

**EXHIBITION:**

East Hampton, New York, Guild Hall, *The Sea Around Us*, August - September 1953, no. 45;  
 Washington D.C, Adams Davidson Galleries, *The French Impressionists and their Followers*, December 1971 - January 1972;  
 London, Royal Academy of Arts; Williamstown, The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, *The Unknown Monet: Pastels and Drawings*, March - September 2007, no. 139, pp. 158-159 and 302 (illustrated p. 158).

**LITERATURE:**

D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet, Catalogue raisonné, Supplément aux peintures, dessins, pastels*, Lausanne, 1991, vol. V, no. P 80, p. 171 (illustrated)

No artist can personify the idea of the Impressionist painter better than Claude Monet. In the right conditions he could be found working *en plein air*, directly from nature, painting spontaneously what he saw onto canvas. With next to no preparation, the hand and eye working as one, he transcribed the scene before him. As the idea of using drawings, whether in pencil or pastel to prepare a painting was at odds with Monet's publicised creative process, he tended to downplay its importance in his work. However, after his death eight folios containing over four hundred drawings came to light as well as many pastels. This convenient and lightweight medium allowed him to experiment with composition and colour and develop ideas for his oil paintings at speed. He also used pastel to produce finished pictures, as in this example.

Raised in Le Havre, Monet started out drawing caricatures, until he met Eugene Boudin, who convinced him to pursue landscape painting. Moving to Paris he continued his training, first in the Académie Suisse in 1860 and thereafter in the studio of the Swiss history painter Charles Gléyre, where he worked alongside Renoir, Sisley and Frédéric Bazille. During the 1880s Monet returned to the Normandy coast. He found inspiration in the sparkling light and famous limestone cliffs, as had Delacroix and Courbet. As well as working directly in oils, he followed Boudin's example (fig 1) and used black chalk and pastel to study the effects of light and colour on the sky, sea and land.



fig 1, Eugène Boudin, *Sunset on the Beach*, pastel, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

In this seascape at Etretat, twenty miles round the coast to the north of Le Havre, Monet has chosen an unusual composition, dividing the landscape down the centre with the vertiginous cliffs; the left half of the picture composed of earthy greens and browns, the right half a sun dappled sea that dissolves into the sky, the horizon only suggested by the lightest touch of charcoal. This picture has a marked difference in atmosphere to another pastel of the nearby *Porte d'Aval* (fig 2), dateable to the same period, whose late afternoon sky shows the range of expression that could be achieved with pastel. By the summer of 1885 the year he made this pastel Monet had largely abandoned urban subjects, and was more drawn towards natural phenomena. He painted many views along the coast under different light conditions. As noted in the *catalogue raisonné* on Monet, this pastel is not a preparatory study for an oil painting, but a wholly original composition. It demonstrates how well the painter understood and enjoyed the versatility of the medium when trying to capture such variable weather.

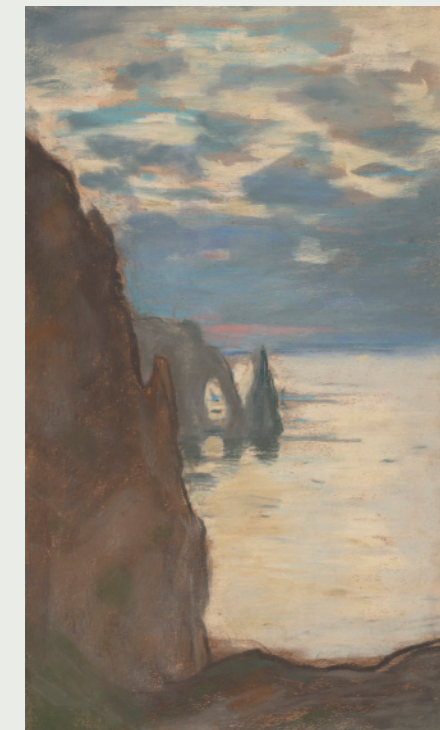


fig 2, Monet, *Etretat, L'Aiguille et La Porte d'Aval*, pastel, 1885, National Galleries of Scotland

**EDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940)***Profile of a woman in a hat*, c. 1890

pastel on paper  
 8 5/8 x 5 1/8 in. (21.9 x 13 cm)  
 stamped E.V lower right

**PROVENANCE:**

Jill Newhouse, New York;  
 Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;  
 acquired from the above in 2002, thence by descent.

In 1890 Edouard Vuillard attended his first meeting of *Les Nabis* (The Prophets), a group of young artists in Paris who sought to reinvigorate the art of painting. Inspired by the example of Paul Gauguin, the Nabis consciously rejected academic traditions, intentionally painting in a non-naturalistic style, with bold flat areas of colour, emphasizing the two-dimensional and decorative qualities of their paintings. Though the group shared common ideas and ideals about art, there was a great variety of styles amongst the members, with artists such as Maurice Denis and Paul Sérusier using religious and mystical themes to imbue their paintings with an other-worldly, symbolist aura, whilst the likes of Pierre Bonnard, Félix Vallotton and Vuillard chose to paint subjects based on observations of the world around them.

For Vuillard, the interiors of his family home provided the setting for his most compelling works in the 1890s. He grew up surrounded by women. His mother was a corset maker with the family apartment

doubling as her workshop, and constantly filled with seamstresses, as well as his sister and grandmother. He made many small scale pictures of women going about their daily tasks, five of which were exhibited at the third *Exposition des peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes* in 1892 where they were praised for their perceptiveness and subtlety, earning him the label *intimiste*. The pictures of this period, such as the two illustrated here, were modern in style but part of an older artistic tradition that stretched back to the paintings by Dutch seventeenth century masters, whose modest subjects and clear arrangement of forms appealed to Vuillard.

Although his subjects were done from life, Vuillard created from memory, a working practice that had been encouraged by Gauguin. This deliberate distancing from the motif combined with a stylization lifted from Japanese prints and other so called 'primitive' arts, resulted in uncompromisingly modern works. Unlike the paintings of his more symbolist contemporaries Vuillard's *intimiste* pictures found an immediate audience. These two pastels from the early 1890s, reveal the influence of Japanese woodblock prints in their strong use of colour and silhouette.





**EDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940)**

*Femme entrant dans le salon*, c. 1892

pastel on paper  
 13 3/4 x 15 1/8 in. (35 x 38.5 cm)  
 signed *E. Vuillard* lower right

PROVENANCE:

Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;  
 acquired from the above in 2007, thence by descent.

EXHIBITION:

London, JPL Fine Arts, *Private View*, May - July 1989, no. 39 (illustrated);  
 Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum; Sheffield, Graves Art Gallery; Amsterdam, Van Gogh  
 Museum, *Vuillard*, September 1991 - March 1992, no. 30, p. 45 and 94 (illustrated, p. 45).

LITERATURE:

A. Salomon and G. Cogeval, *Vuillard, The Inexhaustible Glance: critical catalogue of  
 paintings and pastels*. Paris, 2003, vol. I, p. 262 and 1699, no. IV-58 (illustrated, p. 262)

**EDGAR DEGAS (1834-1917)***Danseuse rajustant sa jupe*, c. 1895

charcoal and white chalk on toned paper  
 12 x 10 in. (30.4 x 25.4 cm.)  
 with studio stamp lower left

## PROVENANCE:

2ème Vente Atelier, Galerie George Petit, Paris, 11th December 1918, lot 219;  
 Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;  
 Private collection United Kingdom, acquired from the above in 1997, thence by descent.

## LITERATURE:

*Catalogue des Tableaux, Pastels et Dessins par Edgar Degas et provenant de son atelier, 2ème Vente, Galerie George Petit, Paris, 1919, Vol. I, p. 122.*

Drawing was indispensable to Edgar Degas throughout his life. With little interest in nature and landscape, he was essentially an urban man whose main inspiration came from the human figure. From the outset he used drawing in the traditional sense, copying pictures by past and contemporary painters to absorb and distil what he saw, as well as to plan his larger paintings, but the frequency and intensity with which he drew suggests he had a deeper reverence for drawing than its mere practical application. As it was for his mentor, Jean-Auguste Ingres, for Degas, drawing was a daily exercise in self-discipline and one that he maintained all his life.

After an initial foray into history painting, he focused on scenes from contemporary life, keenly observing ballet dancers, cabaret performers, jockeys and laundresses. Degas was respectful of the various skills and demands made of them, and saw their challenges reflected in his own struggle for perfection. He took the dignity and gravity he saw in history painting and transplanted it to his own time, as Christopher Lloyd writes "Degas sought out the heroic amid the mundane and the universal amid the incidental."<sup>1</sup>

The theme of ballerinas began in the 1870s, and remained a principal subject throughout his *oeuvre*. He gained a wide knowledge of classical dance, and was granted privileged access to studios to observe classes and rehearsals. The early ballet pictures were ambitious multi-figured scenes, often painted in oil. However, over the following decades he put fewer figures in his pictures, often shown in a quiet moment backstage or in the stage wings (fig1). For these intimate portraits Degas increasingly turned to softer media such as charcoal and pastel, keenly contrasting the contours of the figure, with the soft modulations of tone and colour in the gauze dresses.



fig 1, *The Dance Examination*, c.1879, pastel, Denver Art Museum

By the 1890s Degas was working mostly from his studio due to his worsening photophobia, relying on models and his memory to create his pictures. He did not give up painting entirely but increasingly used dry media such as pastel, being easier to work with in his condition. In the present sketch, from the mid-1890s, he has used a toned paper to provide a midtone, and then worked in charcoal and white chalk to add both the darks and the lights, a drawing technique close to painting in how the areas of tone are applied. In this sense, Degas found a way to replicate the loose handling of paint while working in a dry medium, with darks and lights vigorously drawn in broad strokes, and accented with deft lines. The simplicity and immediacy of this drawing shows the virtuosity of a man who drew daily out of pure compulsion. It was only after his death, and the subsequent studio sale in 1918 (where this drawing was sold) that the full extent of his graphic *oeuvre* became known.

<sup>1</sup> C. Lloyd, *Impressionist & Post-Impressionist Drawings*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2019, p.73





**EDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940)***Gabrielle Jonas devant sa coiffeuse*, 1927

19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. (50 x 50 cm.)

signed *E. Vuillard* lower right pastel on paper

## PROVENANCE:

Gabrielle Jonas, Paris;  
 Private Collection, Paris;  
 Matthiesen Fine Art, London (in 1952);  
 Jean-Pierre Durand, Geneva (in 1955);  
 JPL Fine Arts, London;  
 acquired from the above in 1989, thence by descent.

## EXHIBITION:

London, Matthiesen Gallery, *French Paintings of the XIXth and XXth Centuries*, June - July 1952, no. 39

## LITERATURE:

A. Salomon and G. Cogeval, Vuillard, *The Inexhaustible Glance, Critical catalogue critique of paintings and pastels*. Paris, 2003, vol. III, p. 1430 and 1700, no. XI-242 (illustrated, p. 1430)

The final exhibition of *Les Nabis* took place at the Galerie Bernheim in 1900, at which point Vuillard began to move away from his close, stylized interiors, and employ a greater degree of naturalism in his work. His style softened, and he preoccupied himself with the effects of light and colour, rather than systematic distortions. No longer at the forefront of the avant-garde, Vuillard travelled widely and enjoyed a close rapport with many of his clients who hosted him on extended sojourns in the country and abroad. He became especially close to the art dealer Jos Hessel and his wife Lucy, who would often have him to stay at their apartment in Paris, and from 1926 onwards at the *Château des Clayes*, a seventeenth-century chateau near Versailles. In the last decade of his life the chateau became a near permanent rural retreat for Vuillard. Madame Hessel features in two of the pastels here, once with her dogs on a walk, perhaps in the grounds of the chateau which were laid out by André Le Nôtre, and again at the dining table with her daughter.

Vuillard's travels around Europe and the French countryside provided him with new vistas to explore, and led to an increased interest in landscape painting. He no longer suppressed three dimensional space, and used the effects of natural light as a dynamic and unifying force within the composition. These three later period pastels from the 1920s and 1930s illustrate this shift, with the use of bright colour, a hallmark of Vuillard's art since the early 1890s, still in effect but with a greater variety of application. Rather than blocks of solid colour he used a mix of coloured pastels to convey different light sources. A good example of this technique is seen in *Gabrielle Jonas devant sa coiffeuse* where the scene is lit from both the blue daylight that streams through the window on the right, striking Gabrielle, her chair and the far wall, and the warm glow of the interior lighting made up of pinks, reds and yellows seen in the room beyond. In *Le Déjeuner au Château des Clayes* too, Vuillard used the brown tone of the paper combined with warm red and orange pastels to create a comforting interior atmosphere, and then the highlights on the glassware were picked out with touches of white pastel to suggest the light from the window on the left.



**EDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940)***Madame Hessel avec ses chiens*, c. 1935

pastel on paper  
 24 x 18 7/8 in. (65 x 50 cm.)  
 signed *E. Vuillard*

## PROVENANCE:

Private Collection, Guernsey;  
 JPL Fine Arts, London;  
 Acquired from the above in 1990, thence by descent.

## LITERATURE:

A. Salomon and G. Cogeval, *Vuillard, The Inexhaustible Glance, Critical catalogue critique of paintings and pastels*. Paris, 2003, vol. III, p. 1598 and 1703, no. XII-305 (illustrated, p. 1598)



**EDOUARD VUILLARD (1868-1940)***Le Déjeuner au Château des Clayes*, c. 1935-38

pastel on paper  
 13 ¼ x 18 ¼ in. (33.7 x 46.5 cm.)  
 signed EV lower right

## PROVENANCE:

Charles-Auguste Girard, Paris;  
 Fernand Herbin, Paris;  
 Private collection, Paris;  
 Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 11 April 1989, lot 21;  
 Christie's, London, 27 June 1989, lot 136;  
 JPL Fine Arts, London;  
 Private Collection, Switzerland;  
 Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;  
 acquired from the above in 2004, thence by  
 descent.

## LITERATURE:

A. Salomon and G. Cogeval, *Vuillard, The  
 Inexhaustible Glance, critical catalogue of  
 paintings and pastels*. Paris, 2003, vol. III, p.  
 1564 and 1699, no. XII-214 (illustrated, p. 1564)

## DESCRIPTION:

This pastel represents Madame Hessel, the wife  
 of Vuillard's dealer, with her daughter, aged six  
 at the time.



**HENRI MATISSE (1869-1954)***Portrait de femme*, 1944

ink on paper

19 ¼ x 14 ¾ in. (49 x 36.5 cm.)

signed and dated *H Matisse 44* lower right

## PROVENANCE:

with Neffe-Degandt Gallery, London;

acquired from the above in 2005, thence by descent.

By studying Old Master paintings, Henri Matisse taught himself to consider composition, value contrasts and harmony in his work. He then made a conscious effort to forget this learned technique, or as he put it, "understand it in a completely personal manner". As his career progressed, he searched for a way to unite the formal elements of colour and line. On the one hand, he was known as a master colourist: from the non-realistic palette that earned him the designation of a 'fauve' or 'wild beast', in the first decade of the twentieth century, to the light-infused interiors of the 1920s. On the other hand, he was a master draftsman, celebrated for drawings and prints that described the figure in fluid arabesque lines.

This pen and ink drawing from 1944, the same year Picasso arranged for Matisse to be represented in the *Salon d'Automne* put on to celebrate the liberation of Paris, demonstrates the mature artist's masterful use of pure line. Though effortless in appearance, the portrait is the end result of a challenging creative process in which he would make many studies of the subject in looser mediums such as charcoal and stump drawing, and only when confident that the subject

was fully understood, the character of the model internalised, would he give free rein to his pen. The drawing would then be executed in a single sitting, no hesitation in his hand nor opportunity for correction. If inadequate there was no alternative but to discard the work and begin again, with each attempt a unique performance, as if it were an acrobatic feat.

In his writings Matisse was at pains to express that his ink drawings were not sketches, but finished artworks, and their function was to convey the purest and most direct translation of emotion:

*"I have never considered drawing as an exercise of particular dexterity, rather as principally a means of expressing intimate feelings and describing states of mind, but a means deliberately simplified so as to give simplicity and spontaneity to the expression which should speak without clumsiness, directly to the mind of the spectator."*

Matisse built upon the technical experimentation and innovation of the preceding fifty years, to creating drawings of bold expression, emancipated from archaic hierarchies, opening the way to the modern art of the later twentieth century.



