

## Henri Matisse

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During the course of his career, Matisse developed intense (but apparently non-sexual) relationships with a succession of female models, painting, drawing, and sculpting them obsessively for extended periods of time. Far more than physiqués for hire, they were, as he readily acknowledged, working partners

four female models who figured most prominently in his work from the mid-teens until his death in 1954. The first was a dark Italian beauty called Lorette, hired in late 1916, as Matisse moved toward a less geometrically severe, more sensual treatment of the figure. He delighted in dressing her up in fanciful costumes, and the exhibition included a portrait of Lorette regally arrayed in an elaborately embroidered jacket. Meanwhile, in *Lorette*

than in the group of works devoted to Henriette Darricarrère, a dancer who became Matisse's preferred model for his famous odalisque series of the 1920s. Displayed near a velvety lithograph of Henriette nude, languorously reclining in a patterned chair, is Matisse's most daring freestanding sculpture, *Large Seated Nude* (1922–29)—dramatically simplified in form, but virtually identical in pose.



Left to right: Henri Matisse's *Reclining Nude (II)*, 1927, bronze; *Large Odalisque in Striped Pantaloons*, 1925, lithograph; *Nude with a Blue Cushion beside a Fireplace*, 1925, lithograph; *Large Seated Nude*, 1922–29, bronze; a North African pierced hanging once owned by Matisse, late 19th or early 20th century, textile; *Reclining Nude*, 1938, charcoal on paper; *Reclining Nude*, 1938, charcoal on paper.

in his exploration of the expressive possibilities of color, line, and the human figure. "I depend entirely on my model," he said.

"Matisse and the Model," a museum-worthy gathering of some 46 works, was the first major survey of this fascinating and fundamental aspect of Matisse's art and working methods. Curated by Ann Dumas, of London's Royal Academy, it began with a few gems from the early 1900s, when Matisse could rarely afford paid models. Among them are a Fauvist portrait of his daughter, and favorite model at this time, *Marguerite* (1906), and his early sculpture *The Serf* (1900–3), a ferociously muscled nude, based on some 100 sessions with a burly Italian male model called Bevilacqua.

From there the show focused on the

in *a White Blouse* (1916), Matisse presents her, with startling directness, as the simple peasant woman she was.

Works here depicting Antoinette Arnoud, a stylish young French girl who became Matisse's model shortly after he moved to Nice, in 1917, included the spectacular *Woman in a Flowered Hat* (1919), in which she wears—with great aplomb—one of the extravagant chapeaus fashioned for her by the artist himself. The image, for all its lushness, still retains a clear structure and solidity. But in *The Painter and His Model: Studio Interior* (1921), his last painting of Antoinette, Matisse employed a much lighter, more decorative touch and coloristic brilliance.

The exhibition abounded with such telling comparisons, nowhere more so

Matisse's longest sustained relationship with a model was with Lydia Delectorskaya, a Russian émigré who began working for him in 1932, and who remained as a studio assistant, caregiver, and companion until his death. Blonde, with an innate elegance (Matisse called her his "ice princess"), she is posed in a flowing taffeta evening gown in a charcoal from 1937. And it is Lydia's finely chiseled features that are rendered with a few bold strokes in a remarkable brush-and-ink portrait from 1946. Matisse's pursuit of simplicity and an art of pure form and color was ultimately realized in his cutouts—for which Lydia prepared the colored papers—examples of which closed this deeply satisfying and thought-provoking exhibition.

—Elizabeth Wilson