

PRESS RELEASE

MATISSE – BONNARD. “LONG LIVE PAINTING!”

13 SEPTEMBER 2017 TO 14 JANUARY 2018

Press conference: Tuesday, 12 September 2017, 11:00

Städel Museum, Exhibition House

Frankfurt am Main, 12 September 2017. From 13 September 2017 to 14 January 2018, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt will be presenting two outstanding artists – Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) – in an exhibition that is the first in Germany to bring these key modernist masters together. At the heart of the special exhibition “Matisse – Bonnard: ‘Long Live Painting!’” is the friendship between the two French artists which lasted for over forty years. Both artists shared a preference for the same range of subjects: interiors, still lifes, landscapes and the female nude. With a selection of more than 120 paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints, the exhibition opens a dialogue between Matisse and Bonnard and offers new perspectives on the development of the European avant-garde from the beginning of the twentieth century to the end of the Second World War. The selection of works is enriched by a series of photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson, who visited the two painters in their country homes on the French Riviera in 1944.

For this year’s major autumn show, the Städel has been able to secure an array of outstanding loans from internationally renowned collections, among them the Art Institute of Chicago, Tate Modern in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg and the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Also on display will be a host of major works from private collections, not normally accessible to the public. Among these, two pictures are of special importance, because each was painted by one artist and owned by the other: Pierre Bonnard’s *Evening in the living room* (1907, private collection) and Henri Matisse’s *The Open Window* (1911, private collection). They are being shown together for the first time here in Frankfurt. Another exhibition highlight is Matisse’s *Large Reclining Nude* of 1935, on loan from the Baltimore Museum of Art, which has not been seen in Germany for more than thirty years. This iconic nude was a milestone on the artist’s journey towards an aesthetic of highly simplified forms and is a portrait of his studio

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assistant and last important model, Lydia Delectorskaya. It is very likely that the painting was inspired by Bonnard's *Reclining Nude against a White and Blue Plaid* (c. 1909), which it closely resembles in composition, and which has been in the collection of the Städel Museum since 1988. The opportunity to compare and contrast these two paintings was an important inspiration in designing the exhibition.

The exhibition is sponsored by the global banking group Societe Generale and supported by the Städtelscher Museums-Verein as well as the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

"Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard are represented in our collection by two marvellous paintings: a nude by Bonnard and a still life by Matisse," said Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum. "Taking these two paintings as the starting point, our main exhibition for this year reveals a visual interplay between these two artists, whose influence on each other becomes unmistakable when their works are seen side by side. The exhibition continues the Städel's successful series, where we present our visitors not only with unique masterpieces but also with new and fresh perspectives on the major protagonists of modern art."

The exhibition has been curated by Felix Krämer, who will be taking up the post of Director at the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf from October, and co-curated by Daniel Zamani (Städel Museum). "Following the exhibition *Monet and the Birth of Impressionism* (2015), the Städel Museum is turning to another exciting chapter in the history of French art: the friendship between Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard, which lasted over 40 years," explains Krämer. "The exhibition brings out the creative dialogue between these two exceptional artists. It has been a long time since so many of their major works have been seen in Germany." As Zamani points out, "Both artists developed an unmistakable and individual pictorial language, driven by their unremitting dedication to their work and life-long delight in experimentation. In their own lifetimes Matisse and Bonnard were seen as two of the most important pioneers of modern art. With Bonnard's paintings, in particular, it is only when you come face to face with the originals that you become aware of their full fascination. It is worth visiting the Städel just for that."

The title of the exhibition, "Long Live Painting!", is based on the programmatic exclamation "Vive la peinture!" with which Matisse saluted his friend Bonnard on 13 August 1925. Those three words on a postcard from Amsterdam were the beginning of a correspondence that went on for more than twenty years and that testifies to the depth of the respect and appreciation the two artists felt for each other. In the first decade of the twentieth century, both artists left Paris, then the capital of the avant-garde, for the Côte

d'Azur, where they continued to cement their reputation as leading lights of the European art scene. Despite the near-contiguity of their lives and careers, art historians tend to correlate the two artists with opposing trends: Bonnard's breezy, loose brushwork and scintillating soft pastels give rise to the construct of the painter as the last great heir of Impressionism, while Matisse's preference for strong colours and flat, heavily contoured compositions earn him the accolade of being named a pioneer of twentieth-century abstraction.

In themed chapters, the exhibition focuses on different interpretations of major artistic themes: interiors, still lifes, landscapes and nudes. The aim of presenting Matisse and Bonnard together is to allow comparative contemplation, to create a space in which commonalities and differences emerge – but not to engender any kind of competition. Such a thing would be quite at odds with the relationship between the two artists. “When I think of you, I think of a spirit freed from every traditional aesthetic convention; this alone allows a direct vision of nature, the greatest happiness to which a painter can aspire. Thanks to you, I share a little of that happiness,” wrote Bonnard to Matisse in January 1940. The value which the latter attached to the judgement of his friend is documented in a letter of November of the same year: “I ought to see someone, and you are the person I would like to see.” Matisse did not want to discuss his pictures with anyone else. Seldom have two artists complemented one another so well.

Exhibition tour

The exhibition extends over two floors and is arranged around a series of different artistic themes: interiors, landscapes/nature, still lifes and female portraits/nudes. An introductory section, occupying the first rooms on the ground floor of the exhibition, is devoted to the friendship between the two artists, featuring portraits by the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, self-portraits, and the two works painted by one artist and owned by the other.

The following rooms are devoted to interiors and, in particular, to the motif of the window, where the close exchange of ideas between the two artist-friends is strikingly apparent. Among the outstanding works here are Bonnard's paintings *The Bowl of Milk* (c. 1919) and *The Window* (1925), both from the Tate Modern in London, and Matisse's *Large Red Interior* (1948), one of his last iconic works in oil, which is on loan from the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The last room on the ground floor is devoted to the letters exchanged between the two artists, a selection of which can be heard in dramatised readings, and all of which can be digitally viewed.

Upstairs, the exhibition continues with the theme of landscape and nature, in which the lifelong fascination of both artists with the light and atmosphere of the French Riviera plays an important role. Here, a highlight of the exhibition is Bonnard's *The Sun-Filled Terrace* (1939–1946, private collection). The painting is unusual because of its extremely horizontal format. It shows a terrace, on either side of which a garden landscape stretches

away in vibrant, almost pink tones. While many of Bonnard's late works depict views taken straight from the surroundings of his home at Le Bosquet, this large-scale work has the feeling of a timeless idyll. Matisse was deeply impressed when he was allowed to examine it, still unfinished, in his friend's studio. In a letter to him in January 1940 he wrote: "Your work is still clear in my memory, in all its details. Never before has it seemed to me so complete, and I can still picture quite distinctly the decorative passage with the rose branches. I like it very much."

Another theme in which the dialogue between the two painters is reflected is still life. Unlike many painters of their generation, Bonnard and Matisse remained faithful to this centuries-old genre. Taking inspiration from older painters like Jean Siméon Chardin and Paul Cézanne, they released it from naturalistic depiction of everyday objects and made it a starting point for radical artistic experimentation with colour and form. The works on show here include Matisse's still life from the Städel Museum, *Flowers and Ceramic Plate* (1913) – an early masterpiece and a firm favourite of visitors to the collection – and Bonnard's luminous *Bouquet of Mimosas* (c. 1945, private collection), which makes a perfect pendant to it. As in many paintings in Bonnard's late, almost abstract style, it seems as though the physical properties of the paint itself are the real subject of the composition, with the thickly applied touches of yellow and orange apparently dissolving the vibrant flowers into the surrounding interior.

In their approaches to the female nude, each painter developed his own "signature style": Bonnard's were sensuous nudes in baths or boudoirs, while Matisse's were dreamlike odalisques, women of the harem in exotic settings. Bonnard's model is his wife, Marthe, whom he immortalised in almost 400 paintings over a period of over 50 years and whom he continued to paint even after her death. Her still-youthful body appears again and again in paintings of a woman bathing, permeated with a dreamlike and often disconcerting atmosphere of mystery. Matisse's odalisques are completely different – works of intimate theatricality, full of shimmering colour, where figure and interior are meshed together in vividly ornamental compositions that give vibrant expression to the artist's vision of an art of total harmony.

The exhibition also gives an insight into the creative process behind one of Matisse's masterpieces, *Large Reclining Nude*. Using a camera, the artist documented the development of the painting from May to October 1935. In a total of 22 black-and-white photographs, we can see how he gradually reworked essential elements of the composition, continually simplifying it and making it more two-dimensional. This work is also one of the very first oil paintings where Matisse used cut-out paper shapes as aids to composition – a technique which was to become decisive for his late work and which completely superseded his painting on canvas after 1948. Perhaps the best-known work to have been created using these so-called "cut-outs" is Matisse's artist's book *Jazz*

(1947), devoted to the brightly-coloured world of the circus, clowns, and the theatre, which is also on display in the exhibition.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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Curator: Dr. Felix Krämer (Head of Modern Art, Städel Museum)

Co-curator: Dr. Daniel Zamani (Research Associate, Modern Art, Städel Museum)

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Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun & public holidays: 10 am–6 pm, Thurs & Fri: 10 am–9 pm, Mon: closed

Special opening hours: Tue, 3.10.; Tue, 31.10.; Mon 25.12; Tue 26.12; Mon 8.1.2018: 10 am–6 pm; Mon, 1.1.2018: 11 am–6 pm; closed: Sun 24.12.; Sun. 31.12.

Admission: €14; concessions: €12; Sat, Sun, public holidays: €16, concessions: €14; family ticket: €24; free entry for children under 12; groups of more than 10 regular-admission paying people: reduced per person rate. Groups must give notice of visit in advance by calling +49 (0)69-605098-200 or emailing info@staedelmuseum.de

Members of the Städtischer Museums-Verein enjoy free admission to the special exhibition.

Introductory tours of the exhibition: Tue 3 pm, Wed 1 pm, Thurs 6 pm, Fri 7 pm, Sat 4 pm and Sun 12 pm. On all public holidays (3.10., 31.10., 25.12, 26.12., 1.1.) as well as on 8.1. the tours take place at 4 pm. Places are limited. Tickets for the tours are available from the ticket desk, two hours before the tour is due to commence, priced €5. A portion of tickets for the introductory tours is available via our relaunched online ticketshop; the price of admission is combined in the special price of €18, to book, go to: tickets.staedelmuseum.de

Catalogue: Accompanying the exhibition, a catalogue with 240 pages and 208 colour illustrations will be published by Prestel. It will include contributions by Dita Amory, Jenny Graser, Margrit Hahnloser-Ingold, Iris Hasler, Felix Krämer, Elena Schroll, Beate Söntgen, and Daniel Zamani. German edition/English edition, €39.90 (museum edition).

Accompanying booklet: a booklet to accompany the exhibition is available in German, price €7.50.

Audiotour and Städel App: An audiotour to the exhibition is available in German and English. The German guide is voiced by the actress Sophie Rois. One audiotour costs €4, two audiotours cost €7. As well as renting the audio equipment at the exhibition, you can download the audiotour conveniently at home with the Städel App. The app is available for free from Google Play and the Apple App Store and downloading the audioguide to current IOS and Android smartphones costs €1: <http://www.staedelmuseum.de/de/angebote/staedel-app>. Visitors can hire the audiotour from the museum on the day, priced €4 (€7 for two audiotours). The audioguide is supported by the Georg and Franziska Speyer Foundation.

Digitorial: The Digitorial has been made possible by the Aventis Foundation. It can be downloaded at: matissebonnard.staedelmuseum.de/en.

Social Media: The Städel Museum posts updates on the exhibition on social-media platforms using the hashtags #MatisseBonnard and #Staedel.

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