



BALTIMORE
MUSEUM OF
ART

**For media in
Baltimore:**

Anne Brown

410-274-9907

abrown@artbma.org

**For media outside
Baltimore:**

Alina E. Sumajin

PAVE Communications

& Consulting

646-369-2050

alina@paveconsult.com

BMA Exhibition Captures Significance of the 43-Year Friendship Between Baltimore Collector Etta Cone and Artist Henri Matisse

More than 160 Artworks—Including Rarely Seen Works on Paper—Illuminate the Vision of this Important Collector and Her Role in Creating an Unparalleled Public Resource

BALTIMORE, MD (May 24, 2021)—This fall, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will present the first comprehensive exhibition to explore the singular 43-year friendship between Baltimore collector Etta Cone (1870-1949) and French modern master Henri Matisse (1869-1954). Their relationship laid the foundation for the BMA’s Matisse collection, which with more than 1,200 paintings and works on paper is the largest public collection of the artist’s work in the world. *A Modern Influence: Henri Matisse, Etta Cone, and Baltimore* will include more than 160 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and illustrated books that demonstrate how Cone’s bond with the artist provided her with a sense of identity, purpose, and freedom from convention. The exhibition will be accompanied by a scholarly catalogue that includes research on the formal, technical, and social aspects of their artistic and collecting practices, as well as Cone’s seminal role in bringing European modernism to the United States. On view October 3, 2021–January 2, 2022, the exhibition precedes the December 2021 opening of the Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies at the BMA, which will allow for greater public and scholarly engagement with the museum’s Matisse collection.

“*A Modern Influence* is an incredible opportunity to explore the vision and work of an extraordinary female collector, who through her passion and commitment had a profound impact on Matisse’s career in the United States and shaped the BMA’s collection in ways that continue to serve public and scholarly exploration. This is a little-told story that is deserving of much greater attention, and one that provides a wide range of avenues to experience and further understand the development and importance of Matisse’s practice to modernism and to the generations of artists that have followed,” said Katy Rothkopf, The Anne and Ben Cone Memorial Director of The Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies and Senior Curator of European Painting and Sculpture at the BMA.

Etta Cone first visited Matisse’s studio in January 1906. At the time she had been living in Paris near her friends, siblings Gertrude, Leo, and Michael Stein, and Michael’s wife, Sarah, who made the important introduction to the artist. Cone immediately felt a kinship with Matisse, and purchased two drawings

during the visit, only to return several weeks later to purchase another drawing and watercolor. Shortly thereafter, Cone's older sister, Claribel (1864–1929) also came to know Matisse, and together, the two sisters collected hundreds of his works, including important paintings such as *Blue Nude* (1907), *The Yellow Dress* (1929-31), and *Large Reclining Nude* (1935). Following Claribel's death, Matisse traveled to Baltimore in 1930, and, for the first time, saw the impressive holdings that the Cone sisters had already acquired. It is likely that during this visit Etta also mentioned her interest in supporting the BMA, which had moved into its current location the year prior. From this point, Matisse began to create and offer Etta works with her collection and the museum in mind.

Altogether, the Cone sisters collected approximately 700 works by Matisse, with Etta bequeathing more than 600 of them to the BMA upon her death. The works formed an important portion of the much more expansive and renowned Cone Collection of modern art at the museum. For years, scholars have debated the purchases made by both Cone sisters, with much more credit given to the important acquisitions of major paintings by older sister Claribel. *Modern Influence: Henri Matisse, Etta Cone, and Baltimore* will for the first time fully recognize Etta's achievements as a collector and acknowledge her role in building the majority of the sisters' Matisse collection, particularly the sculpture, drawings, and prints. Through a thorough examination of the letters written between Etta and Matisse, the exhibition catalogue captures Etta's collecting approach, focusing on her interest in artistic process and the depth of her discernment and understanding of Matisse's work and art more broadly.

"One of the most interesting facets of the intimacy between this artist and collector was the way in which, perhaps more so than for any other collector in that moment, it enabled Etta Cone to engage with Matisse's process. The exhibition brings to the fore not just the beauty of Matisse's finished works, but the way in which his iterative process was layered into and across multiple media. Etta Cone and Matisse shared a love of gesture and the female form, expressed not only through her collection of his major paintings, but through an early and sustained interest in his print making and drawing practices. The exhibition begins with work on paper and ends there as well," said Leslie Cozzi, BMA Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

The more than 160 works in the exhibition will be presented largely in order of their acquisition date, demonstrating the development of the collection and Etta's increasingly discerning eye. Among the major paintings in the exhibition are *Interior with Dog* (1934) and *Purple Robe and Anemones* (1937). The exhibition will also feature a large selection of drawings by Matisse, including a number of masterpieces that are rarely on view due to light exposure restrictions such as an extraordinary group of drawings from the 1930s. Also featured are major parts of one of Etta's most important purchases: the maquette for Matisse's first illustrated book, the *Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1932). Assembled by the artist and his daughter, Marguerite Duthuit, after the published book was complete, it features more than 250 objects that trace much of his process and includes preparatory drawings, prints in various states of execution, copper plates, and the final deluxe edition of the book. It has not been on view at the BMA since 1989 and is one of the Cone Collection's least-known treasures. A large, multi-touch digitized table will include high-resolution images of the printed version of the illustrated book, translations of Mallarmé's poetry, and information about the historical context of the work.

The last gallery of the exhibition will feature the paintings and works on paper acquired by Etta during the final years of her life, as her collecting started to slow down. After 1938 and the onset of World War II, she could no longer travel to Europe, but she continued to purchase works when she could, often from Matisse's son, Pierre Matisse, who had a gallery in New York. The exhibition will end with a display of Matisse's *Jazz* (1947), one of his most beautiful and important illustrated books, which looks forward to the paper cut-out compositions that he created at the end of his life.

“Etta Cone’s dedication to art, and to Matisse’s work in particular, has had a profound impact on the BMA and the focused and studied ways in which the museum continues to develop its collection. The forthcoming exhibition captures the exciting possibilities that can be achieved when artists, collectors, and public institutions join in a shared vision and commitment. We are delighted to present visitors with the incredible story of Etta Cone and the significant works of art that she brought to our museum, and to have this exhibition serve as a prelude to the presentations, programs, and publications that we’ll be able to create through our soon to be opened Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director.

The Matisse works in the Cone Collection inspired the BMA to expand scholarship and public engagement with the artist’s work. In addition to the Cone bequest, over the years the BMA has added more than 500 works by the artist, amassing the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of Matisse works in a public museum. This includes gifts from members of the Matisse family, such as a selection of works from the collection of the artist’s daughter Marguerite Duthuit and a major donation of prints by The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation in New York. The creation of The Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies fulfills a long-term strategic goal for the BMA to present the breadth and depth of its Matisse holdings, while also supporting the development of new scholarly publications that advance ongoing discussions on the trajectory of modern art and Matisse’s importance therein. When the center opens in December 2021, it will have a dedicated gallery and study room that increases opportunities for visiting scholars and the public to experience more of the collection on a regular basis.

A Modern Influence: Henri Matisse, Etta Cone, and Baltimore is co-curated Katy Rothkopf, The Anne and Ben Cone Memorial Director of The Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies and Senior Curator of European Painting and Sculpture at the BMA and Leslie Cozzi, BMA Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

This exhibition is generously supported by The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation and the Richard C. von Hess Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

Ticket Information

Tickets are available through artbma.org. Prices are \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors, \$12 for groups of 7 or more, \$5 for students with ID, and \$5 for youth ages 7-18. BMA Members, children ages 6 and under, and student groups are admitted free. For more information, call 443-573-1701.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue with new and recent scholarship, including a leading essay by Rothkopf that outlines the formative relationship between Etta Cone and Matisse and offers new insights into the importance of Cone as a collector and connoisseur. Cozzi's essay situates Matisse's evident pentimenti within ongoing discourses around sexuality and the gaze, and explores how the artist's work allowed Etta Cone to define her public and private identities. BMA Curator of European Painting and Sculpture Oliver Shell surveys the scope and significance of the Matisse sculptures in Etta Cone's collection. An updated and abridged version of an essay by BMA Emeritus Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs Jay McKean Fisher offers an in-depth exploration of Matisse's maquette for the Mallarmé book. Other contributors include Thomas Primeau, Conservator of Works on Paper at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, who provides a technical analysis and detailed timeline of the 15 preparatory drawings included in the exhibition for *The Yellow Dress* (1929–1931), one of the artist's most significant canvases. Kristin Ross, Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature at New York University and a noted authority on French cultural production of the 19th and 20th centuries, provides a reading of the controversial pleasures of Matisse's serial exploration of the female figure. Comments by emerging painter and Baltimore native Theresa Chromati interpret Matisse's process for the 21st-century viewer, offering painterly insights into the artist's touch, gesture, color, and line that demonstrate Matisse's lasting relevance for contemporary audiences.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world's largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation's finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art.

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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