



OCTOBER 2016

Two Views from Above

Henri Matisse | *Notre Dame, a Late Afternoon*

Richard Diebenkorn | *Cityscape #1*



Everything looks different when you are up in the air looking down. Buildings, bridges, rivers, roads, and farmers' fields reveal a side of themselves that we don't see from the ground.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) presents Paris late in the afternoon, when purple twilight softens the hard edges of the city. Looking down through a window in the artist's studio, we see the Seine River as a broad avenue of blue and green that flows under a bridge past the great Cathedral of Notre Dame. Tiny figures—mere brushstrokes—walk along the riverbank just below the window. We can see the entire zigzag path that will take them across the bridge and on toward the cathedral.

VISIT THE BMA

and see both paintings
in the special exhibition
Matisse/Diebenkorn, on
view October 23, 2016 –
January 29, 2017.

LEFT TO RIGHT:

Henri Matisse. *Notre Dame, a Late Afternoon*.
1902. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo. ©2016
Succession H. Matisse / ARS, New York

Richard Diebenkorn. *Cityscape #1*. 1963.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
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Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993), an admirer of Matisse's work, offers a bird's-eye view of a streetscape on the outskirts of San Francisco on a day when the air is clear and the sun is bright. An empty road seems to gather speed as it narrows, rising up and over a hill before it reaches the sea. On one side, densely packed buildings brightened with spots of blue and red throw long, dark shadows onto the street. On the other side, fields open up into an airy patchwork of color.

Different as they are, both paintings employ a high vantage point to provide an unobstructed view. Matisse's composition of river, bridge, and cathedral is a simplified version of what he could actually see from his window. Diebenkorn, however, took greater liberties with reality as he reimagined and restructured his scene. Gone are any houses that may have stood on the right side of the road. In their place, cultivated fields of green and gold defy urban sprawl.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Compare Matisse's painting with a tourist's photograph of the same scene, taken from ground level: bit.ly/2bMniEX. How do the composition and mood of Matisse's painting differ from the photo? How did Matisse alter the color of the actual cathedral, bridge, and riverbank? What details did he eliminate?

Diebenkorn was inspired by viewing the shapes and colors of the land from an airplane window. Make a sketch from a place that provides an unobstructed view of the land below: the top floor of an office building, apartment, or parking garage; a hill; or a roadside overlook. Use your sketch to create your own aerial composition.

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Notre Dame, a Late Afternoon

Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954). 1902. Oil on paper mounted on canvas. 28½ x 21½ in. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, gift of Seymour H. Knox Jr., 1927. ©2016 Succession H. Matisse / ARS, New York



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Cityscape #1

Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–1993). 1963. Oil on canvas. 60¼ x 50½ in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, purchase with funds from Trustees and friends in memory of Hector Escobosa, Brayton Wilbur, and J. D. Zellerbach, 1964. ©2016 The Richard Diebenkorn Foundation