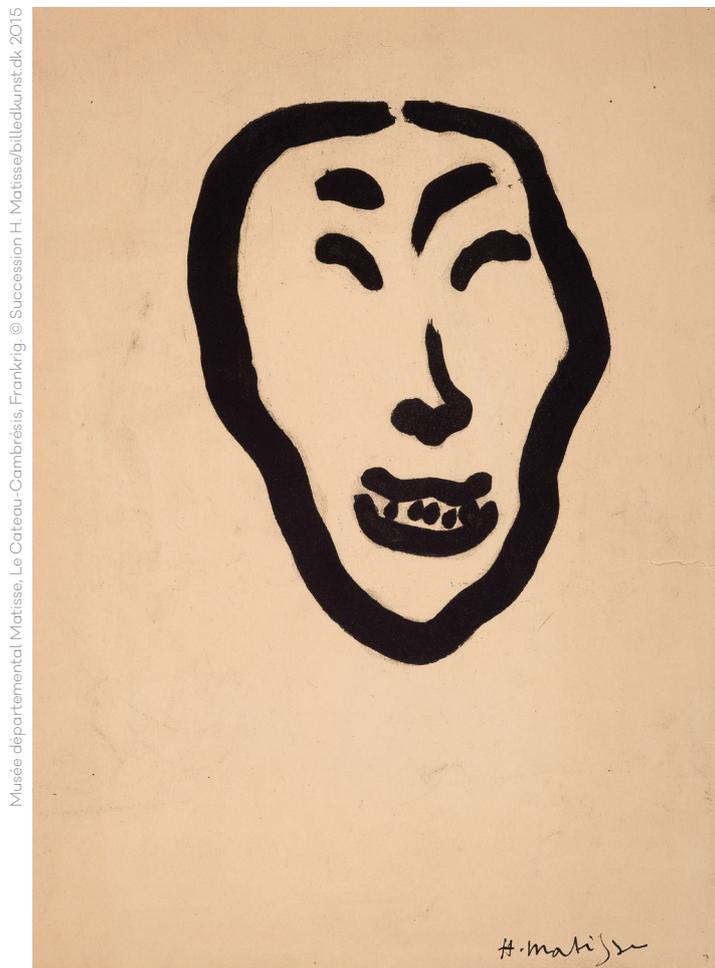


Matisse and the Eskimos

An Overlooked Chapter in Art

21 August – 29 November 2015



Henri Matisse. *Une fête en Cimmérie*, 1964

Henri Matisse is primarily known for his colourful paintings and brilliant paper cuttings, with their bright colours and many details. But probably few people are aware that in the autumn of his life, Matisse turned his gaze to the far north. The result was a unique series of Eskimo portraits, which can now quite extraordinarily be seen at Ordrupgaard, starting in August.

From 21 August to 29 November, Ordrupgaard will be holding the exhibition *Matisse and the Eskimos. An Overlooked Chapter in Art*, which will present a niche of Matisse's extensive production that is known only to a few.

Matisse and Eskimos. On the face of it, two things could hardly be more different and incommensurable than one of the 20th century's most colourful artists and the Eskimos of the white-grey regions far to the north.

But late in life, the great French artist Henri Matisse in fact

created a series of works that are unknown to the general public: portraits of Inuit people – or Eskimos as they were known back then. The many graphic works took the form of illustrations for one of the numerous book works that he loved to create during this period of his life – the “second life” he felt he had been given as a gift following a serious bout of cancer. This book work, *Une fête en Cimmérie* (‘A Celebration in Cimmeria’, published 1963), illustrates a long poem written by his son-in-law, the Byzantinist and writer Georges Duthuit, and became a kind of bridge between two cultures: Matisse's world of the warm, Mediterranean south, and the world of the Eskimos in the cold north.

A focal point of this encounter was the Danish polar explorer Knud Rasmussen, and in particular his book *Across Arctic America*, with its photographs from the famous fifth Thule Expedition. Duthuit's collection of Eskimo masks also provided inspiration for Matisse's simplified representations of Inuit faces. Whether he immortalised them on paper with pencil, etching needle or scissors, most of them share the iconic character of the mask. The series of Eskimo portraits became a new but overlooked chapter in Matisse's art, which most people associate with brightly-coloured portraits, landscapes, still lifes and decorative interiors populated by exotic women.

Matisse in brief

Henri Matisse (1869-1954) was one of the most influential visual artists of the twentieth century. He was originally influenced by Impressionism, and achieved his breakthrough with explosive colours as a Fauvist in 1905, but soon afterwards developed his own personal style. This was to endow him with a central position in the history of modernism, and he is now considered to be the master of colour – not least due to his conviction that a painting should first and foremost be “a feast for the eyes”.

***Matisse and the Eskimos. An Overlooked Chapter in Art* has been realised with help from:**

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