

Matisse cut-outs make powerful exhibit

By LOUISE SNIDER

I first saw an Henri Matisse paper cut-out when I was a college student. A professor projected a slide of "Icarus" from Matisse's "Jazz" portfolio.

Even though I was only looking at colored shadows, a poor simulation of the original, I was struck by its power.

The work was simplicity itself, an awkward, angular black figure with a red heart pasted onto a deep blue

background. Yet, it seemed to convey a sense of tragedy and to embody a universal theme.

A remarkable collection of 58 of Matisse's 220 catalogued paper cut-outs is on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) through Jan. 8. They include the "Jazz" portfolio as well as individual works and designs which constituted preliminary studies for many large decorative works.

Two Matisse scholars and friends,

John H. Neff, the curator of modern art at the DIA, and Jack Cowart, curator of 19th and 20th century art at the St. Louis Museum, cooperated to assemble this exhibit.

PRESENTED IN chronological order, the exhibit reveals the stylistic changes and increasing importance of the cut-outs in Matisse's oeuvre.

The early cut-outs, such as "The Dance" (1938), seem crude and speculative. They show the artist's process of putting the work together. The thumbtacks, crinkles, air bubbles, smears of glue—all contribute toward an appearance of something rough and preliminary.

Matisse began using the cut-outs in the 1930's as a preparatory stage in working out composition problems of various paintings. In "Still Life with Shell" (1941), the space is opened up and the medium is handled with greater refinement.

Through the 40's and up to his death

in 1954 at the age of 85, we see increased exploration and development of this medium to realize its potentials, not just as a preliminary stage in the execution of a large mural.

CUTTING INTO GOUACHE painted paper, Matisse created line and form at once, using his scissors like other artists use a brush and a stylus.

Along with the solution of formal problems of color and spatial (positive and negative) relationships, the cut-outs present a refreshing spirit of playfulness and freedom.

The curved lines are fluid, the shapes organic, and the interplay between the two dynamic. The rich choice of colors in itself reflects a youthful excitement. In a sophisticated way, it must be comparable to the excitement of a child opening up a giant box of crayons with all the extraordinary colors one could ever hope for.

"Colors have a beauty of their own

which must be preserved," Matisse said, "as we strive to preserve the tonal quality in music."

In "Beasts of the Sea" (1950) or "The Dragon" (1953/1954), the beasts are about as fearsome as Puff, the Magic Dragon. Like Paul Klee, Matisse had a unique talent for cutting through conventional concepts to the fresh images of childhood.

"Polynesia, The Sky" and "Polynesia, The Sea," both done in 1946 and inspired by an earlier trip to Tahiti, are large scale designs for tapestries.

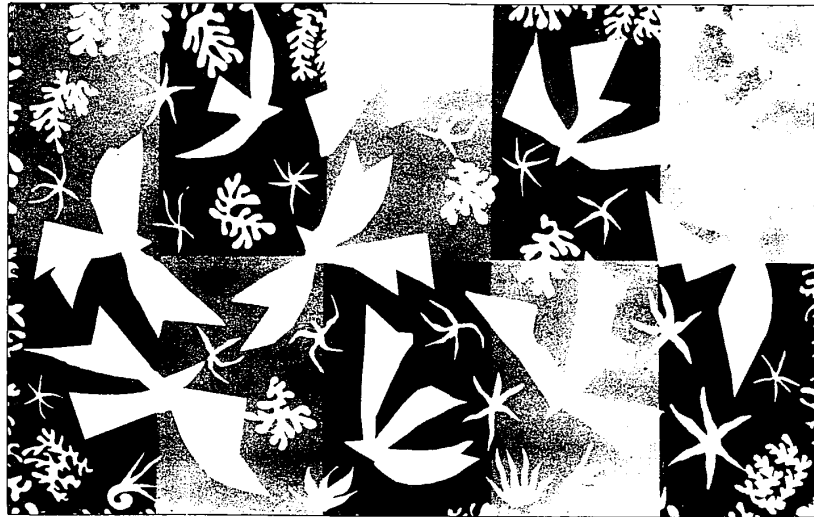
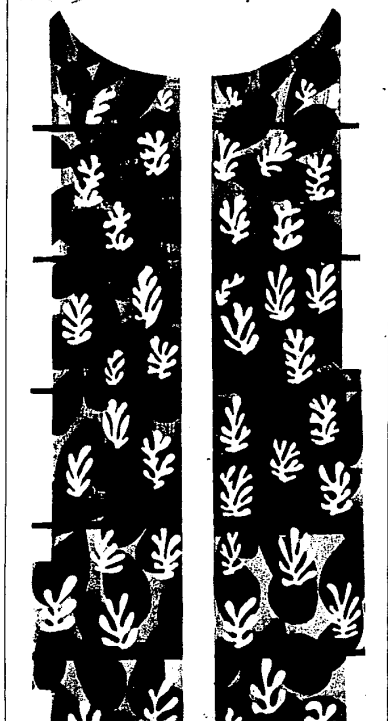
THE COLORS ARE subdued, but there is a rich variety of forms, suggestive of flora and fauna, which seem to float above the background. Not unlike Egyptian art, there is a feeling of a flat but changing perspective, as if one is seeing several views at once.

Some of the designs that are more regular and geometric in shape do not seem as successful or as suitable to the medium as the curvilinear and freer forms.

One of the most outstanding and monumental cut-outs is the 54-foot long "The Swimming Pool" (1952). An enveloping mural that occupies four walls, it successfully and jauntily integrates form, space, color and line. Unfortunately, the DIA has displayed it in an area where downspot lighting from the ceiling illuminates the floor and not the murals. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the work on jute mounting approximates its appearance in Matisse's apartment.

"The Swimming Pool" is a complex diversification of forms. If Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling can be seen as a compendium of the human anatomy, Matisse's "The Swimming Pool" can be seen as a catalog of movement.

The forms dip, stretch, reach, glide. They rise and bend changing from positive to negative, blue to white. It is a witty and complex work expressing the elan of an 83-year-old artist who was still growing.



"The Tree of Life" (left, 1949) and "Polynesia, the Sky" (above, 1946) are two of the Henri Matisse paper cut-outs on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The exhibit runs through Jan. 8.

Combinations replace single artist exhibits

By CORINNE ABATT

From now through the end of the month, many gallery owners will be showing a variety of art rather than a one-artist exhibit.

These are not only provocative shows, but they are fun. Art buyers and lookers will see a lot of variety and if they happen to have holiday gift money in hand, it will be hard to return home with all of it intact.

And if the shopper is going to really get into the swing of the varied fare, then thinking has to go beyond paintings to prints, sculpture, rugs (particularly kilims for hanging), fabric and wall fragments, Indian molas which often combine fine workmanship with a folk art feel, and pottery and ceramics from ancient civilizations.

Birmingham and environs may have more galleries per square foot than any other community of the same size with the possible exception of a few resort areas and the east and west coasts. There's a virtual treasure house of fine arts within easy access.

SHELDON ROSS GALLERY, 250 Martin, has a variety of holiday goodies from some charming Indian molas to Peruvian gourds and textiles.

Troy Art Gallery in the Top of Troy concourse has a beguiling selection of posters including many from the Polish circus. Gallery owner, Miriam Feldman, said these grow steadily more valuable particularly if they are signed and dated.

Posters can also be found at the Arnold Klein Gallery, 4520 N. Woodward, two blocks south of Fourteen Mile on the east side of the street, at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum gift shop and Allen Rubiner Gallery, 621 S. Washington, Royal Oak.

Photography show posters are at Halsted 831 Gallery along with a variety of photographs from some of the world's best. The price range for photographs is from under \$100 to over \$1,000.

Lee Hoffman, always imaginative in

her offerings, is showing all kinds of things from a huge wooden carved book that held fireplace accoutrements in 18th century Japan to Coptic fragments.

While Glen Michaels assemblages are still on display at Robert Kidd and Associates, and these are definitely worth a long look, there's a variety of glass and ceramics in a small room off the main gallery.

Little Gallery has a group show by some fine local artists, past and present, in addition to the ever-present display case of jewelry by local artists.

SUSANNE HILBERRY deals in fine contemporary art, but she has some pottery and occasionally glass, that is most attractive.

Yaw Gallery is really mecca for glass collectors, but Ms. Yaw doesn't limit herself to that. She is currently showing furniture, fine jewelry, several wall hangings and some ceramics.

The Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, 1516 S. Cranbrook, is another place where there's variety that can be either taken out on loan or purchased. As often as not, the piece taken on loan becomes too difficult to part with.

The serious buyer would be hard pressed to find better help in choosing either prints or paintings than at Donald Morris Gallery. And what is on the gallery walls is only the tip of the iceberg.

Ed Gray Gallery on the lower level of the Great American Building in Birmingham covers all art bases and adequate browsing time should be scheduled for a visit there.

Gallery 22 on Long Lake, just east of Woodward is another that has a quantity of framed and unframed graphics, plus ceramics, textiles and sculpture.

There's lots out there to see and enjoy and if a great uncle played Santa Claus, there's no better time than right now to enjoy his kindness.

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*Northland, Oakland, Twelve Oaks, Fairlane, Eastland, Ann Arbor

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