



Henri Matisse was born in Le Cateau-Cambrésis in northern France on December 31, 1869. The son of a middle-class family, he studied and began to practice law. In 1890, however, while recovering slowly from an attack of appendicitis, he became intrigued by the practice of painting. In 1892, having given up his law career, he went to Paris to study art formally. He joined

Gustave Moreau's studio at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Matisse's true artistic liberation, in terms of the use of color to render forms and organize spatial planes, came about first through the influence of the French painters Paul Gauguin and Paul Cézanne and the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh, whose work he studied closely beginning about 1899.

Although intellectually sophisticated, Matisse always emphasized the importance of instinct and intuition in the production of a work of art. He argued that an artist did not have complete control over color and form; instead, colors, shapes, and lines would come to dictate to the sensitive artist how they might be employed in relation to one another. He often emphasized his joy in abandoning himself to the play of the forces of color and design, and he explained the rhythmic, but distorted, forms of many of his figures in terms of the working out of a total pictorial harmony.

From the 1920s until his death, Matisse spent much time in the south of France, particularly Nice, painting local scenes with a thin, fluid application of bright color. Often bedridden during his last years, he occupied himself with decoupage, creating works of brilliantly colored paper cutouts arranged casually, but with an unflinching eye for design, on a canvas surface.

Matisse died in Nice on November 3, 1954. Unlike many artists, he was internationally popular during his lifetime, enjoying the favor of collectors, art critics, and the younger generation of artists.