

Jazz and Circus

- Henri Matisse

Henri Matisse was the principal artist of the Fauve group and one of the most important artists of the 20th century. His style is characterised by the use of flat patterns with brilliant and pure colours, either juxtaposed or separated by thin white lines or contours. Matisse's works are to be found in nearly every major museum of modern art in the world.

Henri Matisse created a series of stunning paper cut-outs which he then arranged into compositions producing a unique work of art that has been referred to as the visual counterpart of jazz music.

The circus provided the inspiration for more than half of the motifs - performing artists, the curtain, the star or flame, and balancing acts, with figures both standing and falling. The other images were Matisse's response to Jazz.

'Using a pair of scissors I simply cut into the paper which had been painted beforehand and, in one single movement, joined line to colour and outline to surface.'

These images were originally published in 1947 in an edition of only 370, hand-coloured using the pochoir process. In 2004 they were brilliantly reinterpreted by Idem-Mourlot, the great Parisian lithographers. The intensity of colour is stunning. The lithographs offered here were published in an edition of 1500.

The Last Works

- Henri Matisse

Between 1950 and 1954, the year of his death, Matisse created some highly innovative, brightly coloured gouache paper cut-outs. Illness had confined him to a wheelchair and severe arthritis made it difficult for him to paint. Some of the resulting colours were so strong that Matisse's doctor advised him to wear dark glasses.

In 1953 it was decided to reinterpret these works as lithographs. Matisse personally directed and supervised the first 'pulls' during 1954, in collaboration with the renowned lithographers Mourlot Frères of Paris. Founded in 1921, Mourlot worked with many of the great artists of the 20th century, including Picasso, Miró, Vlaminck, Bonnard and Dufy.

Matisse's joie de vivre was unimpaired by old age. He wrote, *'What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or disturbing subject matter... like a comforting influence, a mental balm – something like a good armchair in which one rests from physical fatigue.'*