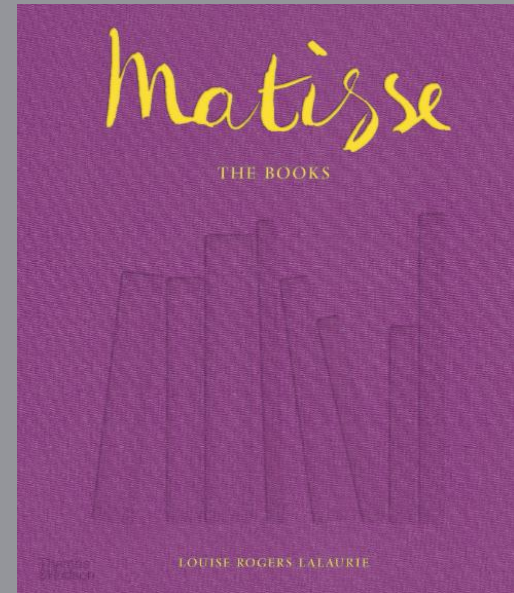


Provisional

Matisse: The Books

Louise Rogers Lalaurie, Matisse Estate

An unprecedented biographical and interpretative overview of Matisse's *livres d'artiste* – intimate visions of the artist's war in words and pictures intrinsic to his life's work



237 illustrations

31.5 x 26.2cm

320pp

ISBN 9780500021682

BIC Individual artists, art monographs

Hardback

£65.00

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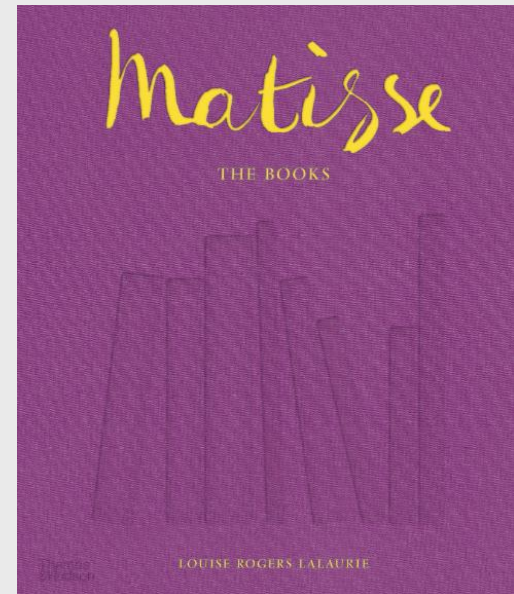
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Book

Provisional

Key Sales Points

- The first dedicated work on Matisse's rich, intriguing *livres d'artiste* – a subject of hugely popular and academic interest.
- Offers unique access to these rare, limited editions, generously illustrated with colour reproductions of their pages.
- Features new translations of Matisse's letters and draws on the archival research an expert author.
- Produced with the support of the Matisse estate, the book brings important new perspectives on the artist's life and work.





Opposite: Mallarmé
page 7

*Matisse is a difficult author.
Not for nothing did he illustrate Mallarmé.*

Louis Aragon, 'Matisse-en-France', 1943

A A book in a box. Thick sheets of cream Arches paper, folded loose inside cream paper wrappers, enclosed within a folder of plain boards and all presented in a tan slipcase. A collection of over fifty poems, interspersed with twenty-four full-page illustrations and a further six head- and tailpieces placed above or below the text, occupying roughly half the printed page. Lines of poetry in large, decorative, mostly italic type with simple, seemingly hand-drawn quotation marks and contrastingly elaborate, calligraphic ampersands in place of the French word *et* throughout – already, we are instructed to read a decorative sign as a word. The illustrations are reproduced as etchings, their impossibly thin black lines like a spider's web; an even spread of rhythmic curves that leaves abundant white space, perfectly balancing the airy pages of type. The poems are by the French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), and the illustrations are by Henri Matisse. Mallarmé's verse is a series of allusive, cumulative 'word-clouds', sustained by almost hypnotically regular metre and rhyme schemes within which meanings cohere – an effect replicated precisely in Matisse's illustrations, whose regular, pulsing lines gradually resolve to depict luxuriant vegetation, ocean swell, cloud forms or the rippling hair and full-bodied curves of his female figures.

Matisse had published volumes of his own drawings in 1920 and 1925, and contributed illustrations to other publications – a 1914 book on Cézanne, and an anthology of writings about Paris in 1927. But in his 1946 article 'Comment j'ai fait mes livres' (How I made my books), he described the *Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé* as 'my first book' – an authorial foray into the creation of a new, composite literary and visual text. Matisse did not selection or re-order Mallarmé's poems to the extent that he would later with Ronsard, Baudelaire or Charles d'Orléans, but his illustrations work with and in counterpoint to the text, to shape a parallel narrative of their own.



The book was commissioned in 1930 by the ambitious young publisher Albert Skira (1904–1973), as the follow-up and pendant to his first (exceedingly costly) venture, namely Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, illustrated by Matisse's friend and rival, Pablo Picasso. In April 1930, Skira drew up a contract during Matisse's extended trip across the US to Tahiti. The artist would illustrate a retelling of classical myth, Jean de La Fontaine's *Amours de Psyche et Cupidon* (1669). A revised contract shortly afterwards stipulates virtually identical terms, but a different text:



Opposite L1, L5
Above: L17



Chapter Six

LES FLEURS DU MAL

1939–1947

Paris: Martin Fabiani Éditeur, 1944

Etching, woodcut and photolithograph on Rives paper.

Each page 28.6 x 23 cm (11³/₈ x 9¹/₈ in.)

'320 copies on Rives paper...300 numbered 1 to 300 and 20 non-commercial copies for the collaborators, from A to T, including an original Indian ink etching, thirty-three original photolithographs, sixty-nine original drawings by Henri Matisse (jettrines, tailpieces, full-page ornaments) reproduced as woodcuts, and a cover drawn specially for this book. All copies have been signed by the artist. After printing, the copperplates, stones and wood blocks were scored through.'



Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits,
 Au parfum mélangé de musc et de havane,
 Œuvre de quelque obi, le Faust de la savane,
 Sorcière au flanc d'ébène, enfant des noirs minuits,

Je préfère au constance, à l'opium, aux nuits,
 L'élixir de ta bouche où l'amour se pavane ;
 Quand vers toi mes désirs partent en caravane,
 Tes yeux sont la citerne où boivent mes ennuis.

Par ces deux grands yeux noirs, soupiraux de ton âme,
 O démon sans pitié ! verse-moi moins de flamme ;
 Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t'embrasser neuf fois,



Henri Matisse

Jazz

Éditions de la Vierge



am watching a conjuror whose tricks I haven't managed to figure out.' The passivity of the experience frustrates him; like the cowboy's victim, he feels he has been ensnared or caught off guard. Again, words and pictures combine to generate meaning – here, an intimate evocation of Matisse's ambivalent, very physical sense of his own relationship to a controlling deity.

The next picture presents another double-act: *Le lanceur de couteaux* (The Knife Thrower). Black and azure fronds float against a ground of white, and a tall silhouette of a woman, in pale mauve streaked with deeper blue, stands with the top of her head and raised arms reaching off the page, her body a reminder of the earlier armless, headless *Forms*. A deep magenta form directs a blade at a black square containing a cut-away frond, placed over the woman's heart. As with the cowboy, we see one passive figure confronted by the mysterious – godlike? – skill and showmanship of another. But the knife thrower, the last of the book's sequence of circus acts, effects a change: unlike the choked sword swallower or the cowboy's toppling victim, his target has acquired agency. She is poised and calm. The aggressor has evolved, too. Contained by vertical strips of beige and pale blue, he does not encroach into his target's space, seeming almost to writhe in impotent frustration. The woman is the focal point of jazz's transition from the emotional and physical violence of the earlier sections to the serene joy of

the closing pages. Surrounded and overlaid by floating fronds, she resembles an amphora lying at the bottom of a lagoon.

This remarkable image is the culmination of this series of statements articulated in words and pictures, in which Matisse exposes the heart of his 'existence as a painter' – the origins of his distinctive formal vocabulary, his quest for authentic emotional expression, the interplay of acquired, practised skill, instinct and spontaneity, and the vital importance of humility and receptiveness to the mystery of inspiration – God-given or otherwise. The artist's relationship to his models and critics is one vital aspect unstated in the text, but clearly addressed in the pictures. We may remember the impassive nymph reclining as the Faun humps her leg in the *Poésies*, or Europa taking the bull by the horns to haunt the artist's dreams in the *Florilège*. In *Le lanceur de couteaux*, the model stands inviolate, even victorious, depicted with skill, humility and, as we discover at the turn of the page, love – not sexual passion, but simple, uncomplicated acceptance.

The book's final sections jettison the pain, jeopardy, coercion and control that have gone before, and instead express a resounding personal and artistic creed. Addressing 'young painters, misunderstood painters, painters comprehended late in their careers', Matisse advises 'pas de Haine' ('have no hatred') because 'hatred is a parasite that devours all.' Love is the only constructive emotion. Emulation



Jazz, The Cowboy 98-99