

EXHIBITION REVIEW:

Nice, Summer, Art.
Thu-Van Tran, *We Live in the Flicker*,
MAMAC, Nice, 10.06-01.10.2023
***Matisse in the 1930s. Through the Lens of Cahiers d'Art*,**
Musée Matisse, Nice, 23.06.2023-24.09.2023



When you first arrive on the Côte d'Azur you expect an incredibly beautiful seaside, the sort you see on Instagram, Saint Tropez movies or in old postcards found around the house. You expect sunshine and a sky melting in a sparkling azurite sea. The advertisement is adequate, but the

French Riviera is much more than that. You pass from Italy to France without feeling a cultural transfer on the coast, it's as if the two countries have put the best of each other together, in the only place where this was possible: Nice.

A huge, dense city of mountain and sea, with luxuriant hills, and lavish courtyards spilling out onto the stony slope and down into the sea. A sea that is always calm, torrid and... blue. Nice is not only special for this Franco-Italian overlap that permeates the atmosphere, but also for the abundance of art! Maybe it's something one doesn't really anticipate when planning a summer vacation, but the Cote d'Azur's incredible culture and art are overwhelming.

The air, the light, the blue horizon between Cap Jean Ferrat and Antibes attracted the best modern artists. But the secret of this abundance lies not only in this magnetic attraction for creators, but also in a sensible cultural policy of



decentralization, beautifully applied by Andre Malraux as minister for cultural affairs in the '60s. This policy resulted in a French Riviera studded with museums dedicated to art, cultural foundations, and art schools such as the famous Villa Arson.

From my *niçoise* trip of 2023, I will focus on two exhibitions, one contemporary and one modern.

Nice has MAMAC (Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain), namely a huge building, half dedicated to a collection of modern and postmodern art and the other half dedicated to contemporary art by means of temporary exhibitions. I will not detail the permanent collection. Suffice it to mention some admirable pieces by Jean-Christo, plenty of Yves Klein, Kiki de Saint Phale, and an accurate "room" by Daniel Spoerri, just to call out a few names. Additionally, there were also three temporary exhibitions in the museum at the time of my visit, but I will only refer here to the good one, the very, very good one!

An astonishing exhibition signed by the artist Thu-Van Tran who was also present in the 2017 edition of the Venice Biennale. Her works vary across different mediums from painting to video and object, all placed organically in a huge installation. In fact, the whole exhibition – spread over an entire floor of the museum – was an installation, naturally unfolding in space. Objects rhythmically followed each other with accumulations and concentrations during moments of conceptual tension. I found many textures in this exhibition, bronze, paper, canvas, plaster, plastic, textiles, shadows, light and sound projections. I'm usually skeptical about such syncretism because the multitude of surfaces and the way they absorb or reflect the light/gaze is always difficult to harmonize within the same space. Nevertheless, the artist fully succeeded! Her work is lyrical but not monotonous, it is fragile but well-articulated, it is distant but intimate, and it covers the whole range of visual perception.

In Nice and its scorching summertime, I also visited a Matisse biographical exhibition hosted by the Matisse Museum, one of the many cultural institutions founded by Malraux. A gorgeous villa surrounded by olive trees where Matisse and many other artists and writers spent time creating art. This summer exhibition covered Matisse's journey through America and his experience of encountering civilization overseas. This journey involved many sketches, postcards and a stopover in Tautira on Tahiti Island, at the invitation of the director Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau while he was filming the famous *Tabu*.

Matisse was on a creative hiatus at the time, with an indisposition to paint and already feeling canonized in interior subjects and odalisques. Thanks to these transatlantic journeys, the painter returns to painting full of energy and gestural vigor. His seemingly simple, clear, and vivid painting unfolds generously in works brought together in this exhibition from American collections, difficult

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to view otherwise. The public could admire portraits, the fabulous and typical collages, illustrations for Joyce's novel *Ulysses* and Mallarme's poems, plus the wonderful *Le Danse* mural project documented in various work stages, all of which displayed throughout the space of the villa that celebrates 60 years of existence.

The permanent collection includes atypical works by the artist (still lifes and landscapes in a classical, study key) that demonstrate the sinuous path followed by an artist with an effervescent talent, sharpened in a life dedicated to the search for line, form and color. By combining these three elements, he stated directly and without hesitation that life is worth living. And it is a belief that Matisse did not hide, continuing to draw and create cut-outs daily, even when he could not leave his bed, being sick with cancer. An artist and a tremendous painting, which glows in the light of the azure coast.

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