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Henri Matisse: Works on Paper

[USA Today \(Society for the Advancement of Education\)](#), [July, 2001](#) by [Carolyn Peter](#)

HENRI MATISSE (1869-1954), one of the world's best-known and most enduringly popular artists, is recognized in particular for brightly colored paintings, robustly sensual sculptures, and lively paper cutouts. He also created a large body of works on paper, including prints, drawings, and book illustrations. Among less-familiar aspects of his artistic practice, much of his graphic work is monochromatic and, upon first glance, may seem distinct from his painting and sculpture. Nevertheless, commonalities of subject matter, style, technique, and general artistic concerns can be found throughout his work in all media.

As was the case with most artists educated in the 19th century, drawing was an integral part of Matisse's formation. He began to pursue art seriously in 1891, when, after giving up a law career, he entered the studio of conservative academic painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau at the Academie Julien in Paris. The next year, he left and went to study at the more liberal studio of Gustave Moreau, where he stayed until Moreau's death in 1898. In both studios, Matisse drew figure studies from life. Moreau frequently took or sent his students to the Louvre to copy the works of the Old Masters. Although Matisse would go on to interpret the same classical subjects very differently, these experiences at the Louvre sparked a lifelong interest in still life, interiors, and the human figure.

Matisse moved to Nice in 1917 to distance himself from wartime activity. The 1920s were to be his most prolific period for printmaking. In his graphic work, he stretched himself further technically and thematically than ever before, using lithography and etching to achieve a range of different effects. In some of his studies of nudes from 1922 to 1925, he continued to use simple, charcoal-like contour lines to portray the human form. In others, he used lithography to create more detailed compositions of nude figures in interior settings. These images, which have the feeling of pencil drawings, reveal a concern with light, shade, depth, and volume.