

## Review: Matisse: From Tate Modern and MoMA

[Kirsty Henley-Washford](#) reviews the first in a series of screenings at York Picturehouse. Looking back on the life of Henri Matisse, the Tate Modern exhibits its collection of his 'cut-out' pieces and their significance

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*Image Credit: [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)*

**Venue:** The York Picturehouse

★★★★☆

As part of a new 'Exhibition on Screen' series, York Picturehouse recently screened 'Matisse: From Tate Modern and MoMA'. The documentary centres on the recent Tate exhibition of Henri Matisse's cut-outs, offering an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the exhibition, underpinned by a biographical study of the artist's life. The exhibition of 120 cut-outs at the Tate was a resounding success, attracting over half a million visitors. Rather unsurprising, considering the brilliance of these works. Produced by Matisse in the 1940s, they mark the final chapter in his career, and are often celebrated for their simplicity, originality and expressive use of colour and shape.

However, what most people are not aware of – and what this documentary shed light on – is the conditions under which they were produced. After undergoing radical colon surgery in 1941, Matisse was forced into a wheelchair at the age of 71, and was more or less bed-bound for the last 13 years of his life... But despite this, he began to work with even more energy, and, with the help of his assistant, Lydia Delektorskaya, started experimenting with coloured paper and pins, developing a new way of working, which he called 'painting with scissors'.

The documentary captured this beautifully through its inclusion of authentic footage of Matisse working in his studio – a highlight of the film for me. Watching him hack into coloured paper with an unapologetically

large pair of scissors and an incredible sense of assurance was fascinating. These videos, alongside photos of his studio and voiceover relaying direct quotes from Matisse, captured his experimental and expressive nature perfectly, really bringing his 'carvings into colour' to life.

The film offered an interesting exploration of some of the themes of his work, paying particular attention to nature, dance, religion and jazz music, and how these inspired him. Viewers were also treated to an imaginative piece of choreography by Will Tuckett and modern jazz music, which not only helped demonstrate the inspiration behind Matisse's work, but also exemplified the manner in which his work continues to inspire other art, of all forms.

For me, the only thing the documentary was let down by was the 'virtual tour' of the Tate exhibition, which I found very frustrating. The camera glided through the different rooms far too quickly, preventing proper viewing. The swooping camera work was also accompanied by some strangely dramatic music, giving the tour a very intense, epic feel - totally at odds with the mood of Matisse's work, in my opinion. I was fortunate enough to view the exhibition when it was held at the Tate over summer, but had I not been, I would've felt slightly cheated, as watching the virtual tour did not compare to seeing the exhibition first-hand.

However, all in all, the film offered an interesting insight into the life and work of Matisse - particularly his later years.

And what really shines through is the work itself: Bold, exuberant and bursting with colour, the cut-outs evoke such an overwhelming sense of energy and dynamism, that one can't help but feel a certain 'joie de vivre'. I left the cinema grinning, in complete awe of Henri Matisse - an artist who really was (if you'll pardon the terrible pun) a CUT above the rest.



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