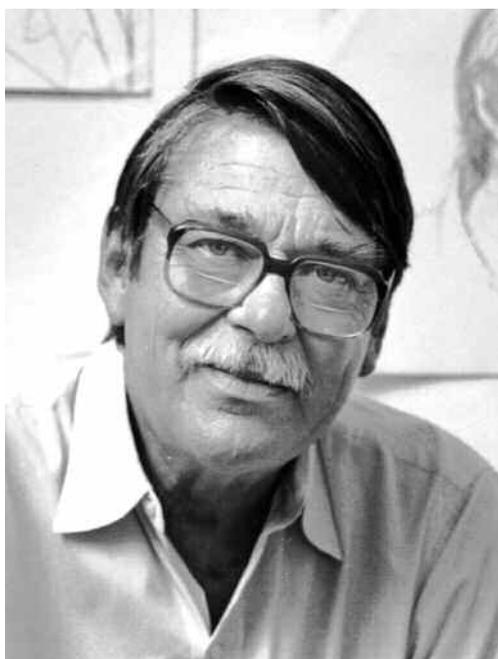
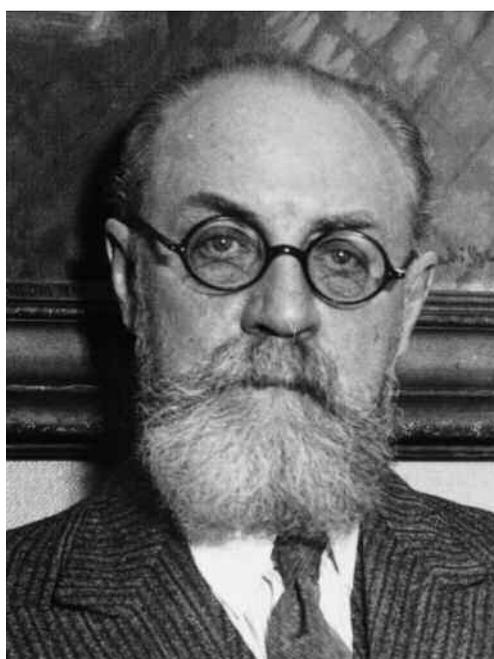


# RICHARD DIEBENKORN: THE MATISSE EFFECT



Richard Diebenkorn



Detail, Henri Matisse in Claribel Cone's apartment at the Marlborough Apartments, Baltimore, Maryland, December 17, 1930. Claribel and Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art. CP29.2.3

BY AMY BEVERUNGEN

Though Henri Matisse (1869-1954) is known to have influenced many artists of the 20th century and beyond, there is something special about the effect that Matisse had on American painter Richard Diebenkorn (1922-1993). When placed in perspective, the similarities in the artists' oeuvres are striking and convey that Diebenkorn found a deep connection with the art of Matisse. The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will present this connection in a large-scale exhibition opening this fall entitled *Matisse/Diebenkorn*. The exhibition is a collaboration between the BMA and

the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and will be the first in-depth visual comprehension of the influence of Matisse on Diebenkorn. *Matisse/Diebenkorn* will be on view at the BMA from October 23 to January 29. Afterwards it will travel to SFMOMA. Katy Rothkopf, Senior Curator and Department Head of Painting and Sculpture at the BMA and co-curator of the show, will lead a tour for PDPS members on Thursday, November 17.

The *Matisse/Diebenkorn* exhibition is a project several years in the making and will carry forth the BMA's goal to demonstrate the effect that Matisse

had on other artists.\* “When we first discussed exploring Matisse’s influence on artists of subsequent generations,” says BMA curator Katy Rothkopf, “my first idea was to pair the French master with Richard Diebenkorn, who I think was one of the most important and compelling post-war American artists. Diebenkorn was very open about his interest in Matisse’s work, freely discussing him in many interviews, but their work had never been shown side by side in a major exhibition. This exhibition could provide an opportunity to see both artists in a new way.”

Rothkopf had been planning an exhibition of art by Diebenkorn alongside that of Matisse for some time, and in 2010 she began working with Janet Bishop, Thomas Weisel Family Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA. While the BMA has one of the most expansive collections of works by Matisse, SFMOMA houses strong works by Diebenkorn as well as a small yet meaningful collection of works by Matisse. Thus, the two museums are perfectly suited to collaborate on a focused exhibition of the two artists.

Now that the BMA has been fully renovated and expanded, there is a fresh space for this long-conceived project to fully blossom. Assembling key works from museums in the United States and Europe, *Matisse/Diebenkorn* will be an impactful exhibition and greatly develop the understanding of Matisse’s effect on Diebenkorn. The exhibition will be in-depth, presenting 13 Matisse publications that Diebenkorn owned, notably his copy of Alfred H. Barr Jr.’s book, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* [1951].

In viewing the two artists together, one can identify in Diebenkorn’s work derivations from Matisse’s techniques in drawing and painting. Diebenkorn had an honest and sincere admiration for the ways of Matisse and spent time analyzing how his work was made. He sought out Matisse’s work often and had a remarkable ability to absorb the ideas of Matisse and blend them into the unique character of his own art. “Diebenkorn’s visual memory was incredible,” says BMA Curator Katy Rothkopf.

In Diebenkorn’s work one can find apparent similarities to Matisse’s color palette and



Henri Matisse  
*Reclining Model with a Flowered Robe*  
 ca. 1923-24  
 Black chalk and stumping and erasing  
 352 x 480 mm (18 7/8 x 24 3/4 in.)  
 The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Cone  
 Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone  
 and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland,  
 BMA 1950.12.52

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\*“Museums organize the first exhibition to show the influence of Henri Matisse on Richard Diebenkorn,” Art Daily, accessed July 12, 2016, <http://artdaily.com/news/84439/Museums-organize-the-first-exhibition-to-show-the-influence-of-Henri-Matisse-on-Richard-Diebenkorn>.

compositional arrangement. Diebenkorn also developed a style of exposing in its final form the process of making the piece, just as Matisse did. Noticeable brushstrokes and retraced lines are an integral part of each artist's style. These shared qualities are highly visible in a pairing of works that will be on view: Matisse's *Reclining Model with a Flowered Robe* (c. 1923-24), a black chalk on paper drawing, and Diebenkorn's *Untitled (Woman Seated in a Chair)* (1963), an ink, conté crayon, and charcoal drawing on paper. When presented side by side the drawings are unmistakably related, yet exhibit the distinctive styles of each artist.

The impact of Matisse's art on the later artist is the product of Diebenkorn's thoughtful and continuous study of the French master. Diebenkorn first came into contact with art by Matisse while visiting the Palo Alto, CA home of Sarah Stein—the sister-in-law of Gertrude Stein and an early collector of art by Matisse—while Diebenkorn was a student at Stanford University. During World War II he served in the Marine Corps and was stationed in Quantico, VA. While positioned on the East Coast, Diebenkorn was

able to visit several major institutions where he was exposed to more work by Matisse. He patronized the Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and particularly the Phillips Collection. While Diebenkorn developed his work in different parts of the country, he continued to seek out exhibitions of modern art.

These deliberate and meaningful encounters had a powerful and lasting effect that is evident in each body of work from Diebenkorn's career. A compelling example of this influence is evident from Matisse's painting, *French Window at Collioure* (1914), which Diebenkorn viewed at a large Matisse exhibition in 1966 at the University of California, Los Angeles. This painting is a radical work: It is a representation of an open window; yet it has the emotional impression of a large-scale color abstraction. BMA Curator Katy Rothkopf notes the possibility that Diebenkorn's exposure to this work gave him the confidence to generate the *Ocean Park* series, which contains some of his most evolved works.

*Matisse/Diebenkorn* will graphically present the profound effect that Matisse had on Diebenkorn. One can imagine what fascinating new connections will be drawn between these two artists through this pairing of their works side by side.



Richard Diebenkorn  
*Untitled (Woman Seated in a Chair)*  
1963  
Pen and black ink, conté crayon, and charcoal and brush, and black wash  
432 x 352 mm (17 x 13 7/8 in.)  
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Thomas E. Benesch Memorial Collection,  
BMA 1970.21.3

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