

Artwork of the Week

Memory of Oceania

Henry Matisse

(1869-1954)



At the end of his life, bedridden and with poor health, Matisse began creating works known as **papiers découpés**, or cutouts: painted sheets of paper cut into various sizes and shapes and arranged into vibrant compositions. He used this method, which he described as “drawing with scissors,” to create *Memory of Oceania*, one of the largest of these works.

The roughly nine-foot-square cutout was inspired by memories of his 1930 trip to Tahiti and was based on a photograph of a boat that Matisse took from his window while there.

The green rectangle, fuchsia band, black curve, and blue crescent are used to describe the boat, its mast and mooring line, and the curtain of the window.

The shapes at the upper left represent a blonde woman seen from the back, the sharp vertical form delineating her spine and the surrounding blue and white curves depicting her body.

The composition is at once geometric and fluid, and the juxtaposition of contrasting colors against the white ground creates a sense of energy and luminance that suffuses the whole work.



Henri Matisse

Reflection

What was your first reaction to this artwork? Why do you think you had the reaction?

Describe the shapes and colours in this artwork

Why do you think this artist created this work?

How do you think the artist was feeling when he created this artwork?



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