

Canvassing opinions

Some art books are artworks themselves, says Martin Gayford

Henri Matisse: Cut-outs
ed by Gilles Néret & Xavier-Gilles
Néret, 2 vols

TASCHEN, £135

One day in 1946 Picasso's mistress, Françoise Gilot, asked Matisse how he had conveyed such joie de vivre with a certain picture. Matisse replied that he believed a work of art should intensify 'all the feelings likely to enrich the inner life of whoever looks at it'. None of Matisse's works were more joyous in this profound way than the 'cut-outs' of his last years. These were produced by the largely bedridden artist in his seventies and eighties by clipping shapes from sheets of painted paper – or as he famously put it, 'drawing with scissors'.

This splendid publication traces their genesis. It includes magnificent reproductions, photographs, numerous texts by Matisse himself and others, and a commentary that is genuinely enlightening. The second volume consists of a beautiful facsimile of *Jazz* (1944-7) – a set of cut-outs with accompanying text handwritten by Matisse and perhaps the greatest illustrated book of the 20th century.