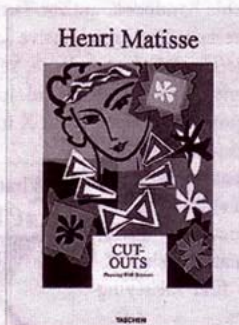


Henri Matisse Cut Outs: Drawing With Scissors

By Ed Giles Neret; Xavier Giles Neret
Taschen, \$200.00, 486 pages



Wheelchair-bound for the significant portion of his days, Henri Matisse, the "wild beast" of color and leader of Les Fauves, in his seventies and eighties, had largely stopped painting. Though this is not to say that he was not creating art; in fact, it was one of his most prolific and controversial periods of productivity. Instead of painting, Matisse was cutting out pieces of colored paper and gluing the cut-outs together to create deceptively simple collages of pure form and color. He referred to this as "painting with scissors," and named the technique "gouaches découpés."

Though the technique was akin to the type of art that school-children create, it was nonetheless important or controversial. His work of the time (which was on a very large scale, more often than not wall-sized collages) was oft met with harsh criticism or complete dismissal of any artistic merit, being taken as nothing more than the last putterings of an aging artist. Though, there were those who could still see the great Matisse sense of style come through in the works, and in 1947, at nearly 80 years old, he published a compendium of prints of his paper cut-outs, along with his thoughts concerning them, called "Jazz."

Taschen's *Henri Matisse: Cut-Outs – Drawing With Scissors* by Gilles Néret, Xavier-Gilles Néret, and Henri Matisse is a big and beautiful double-hardcover collection of Matisse's paper cut-outs. The red book, *Cut-Outs*, is a documentation of the history surrounding this period of creation by Matisse. It reveals the back-story in depth and detail, and offers insight into Matisse's life and thought process from an outside, and analytical perspective. The blue book, *Jazz*, is a facsimile of Matisse's original, and highly original, publication of the same name. It is the finest representation of *Jazz* that there is, save for having access to an actual copy from Matisse's print-run.

Cut-Outs documents Matisse's later life, beginning with his travel to Tahiti, going through his variety of medical troubles, and fading out with analysis of and thoughts on, both by Matisse himself, and not, his work. Peppered throughout are prints, including centerfolds, of his paper cut-out work in all of its diversity. There are also intimate photographs of Matisse living and working, the most powerful of which show him in his home surrounded by his favorite artwork, offering a glimpse into what he drew his inspiration from.

Jazz opens up to be an unbound folder with unbound pages, paying homage to the format of the original. Though the touch is nice in a manner that stays true to the artist and author of *Jazz*, it can make the book rather cumbersome to handle, even when taking it out of the slip case the first time, and, thus, a bit more taxing to read, seeing as one has to make an effort to do something about the order and organization of the pages. However, this becomes less than a minor annoyance, especially when the possible ideas behind it become more apparent. *Jazz*, the musical genre, is spontaneous and free, and the art in *Jazz*, the cut-outs, share obvious earmarks of those traits, and, therefore, it makes sense that the pages are not bound in a particular order, to be viewed in only one way. Rather, the content of *Jazz* is left to be arranged, or not, in a manner that is pleasing to the viewer, much like the strips of paper that Matisse created his Cut-Outs from were arranged, making the book itself an intrinsic extension of Matisse's art, as opposed to a binding that simply contains it. *Jazz* is a paper cut-out just as much as the gouaches découpés within. The content of the pages of *Jazz* consists of prints of some of the best of Matisse's cut-outs, as well as his hand-written thoughts and doodles concerning them. And, while, in the cut-outs, it is apparent that his technical skill, the level of craftsmanship, and dexterity had degraded in his late age, it is also still clear that he had a masterful eye and mind for composition, form, and color. The technicality, the craft, takes a back seat to the creativity, the art, and the art has not degraded in the least, and has in fact only expanded, progressed, and continued to manifest. Matisse's creativity obviously stayed with him, and sprang from him, until death.

Henri Matisse: Cut-Outs – Drawing With Scissors is an inspirational and ever-relevant volume about an inspirational and ever-relevant artist.

Reviewed by Jordan Dacayanan