Kids @ CAM – At Home Family Projects
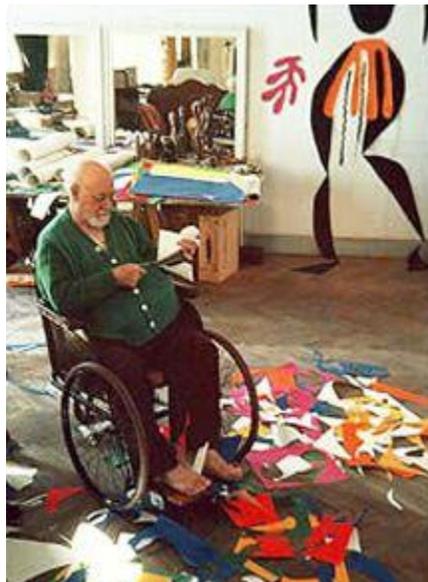
Spotlight on Art History

Henri Matisse

About the Artist:

"Cutting into color reminds me of the sculptor's direct carving."

Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954) was a draughtsman, printmaker, and sculptor, but is known primarily as one of the most important French painters of the 20th century. He was the leader of the Fauvist movement and he pursued the expressiveness of color throughout his career. The intense colorism of the works he painted between 1900 and 1905 brought him notoriety as one of the Fauves (wild beasts). Many of his finest works were created in the decade or so after 1906, when he developed a rigorous style that emphasized flattened forms and decorative pattern. In 1917, he relocated to a suburb of Nice on the French Riviera, and the more relaxed style of his work during the 1920s gained him critical acclaim as an upholder of the classical tradition in French painting. After 1930, he adopted a bolder simplification of form. When ill health in his final years prevented him from painting, he created an important body of work in the medium of cut paper collage.

The cut-outs were created in distinct phases. The raw materials—paper and gouache—were purchased, and the two materials combined: studio assistants painted sheets of paper with gouache. Matisse then cut shapes from these painted papers and arranged them into compositions. For smaller compositions, the artist worked directly on a board using pins. For larger compositions, Matisse directed his studio assistants to arrange them on the wall of his studio. Subsequently, cut-outs were mounted permanently, either in the studio or in Paris by professional mounters.

ART AT HOME – CUT OUT COLLAGE

What You Will Need:

- Large paper for the background (color of your choosing)
- Multi-colored construction paper
- Glue
- Scissors

Look at the cut out works of Matisse before you begin for inspiration. Notice his color choices, shapes, sizes and composition. Before you begin, brainstorm what type of image you want to create. Will it be primarily shapes, or will it tell a story with abstract figures?

- Step 1 – Cut out a variety of shapes of many different colors. Be sure to have a selection of large, medium and small shapes, and a selection of geometric shapes, organic shapes, and shapes that resemble specific objects and figures.
- Step 2 – Begin to arrange the shapes onto the background paper. Take into consideration how the colors look together and what the overall composition looks like. Continue to move them all around until you have found a design that makes you happy.
- Step 3 – If you have shapes that are overlapping, glue down the shapes that are on the bottom first. Then glue down the top layer of shapes.
- Step 4 – Place your collage somewhere safe to dry and place something heavy on top to make sure the shapes dry flat.
- Step 5 – Clean up your work area.

Tips:

- Cut out plenty of shapes - you need to include them all in the collage. It's nice to have lots of options!
- As you cut out the shapes, pay attention to the leftover paper – you may find great shapes in the scraps.
- Apply the glue evenly so that all the shapes dry flat.

Questions to Ask One Another:

- When you were creating your collage, did you have a theme or story in mind, or did you create your pieces randomly and let them come together organically?
- Matisse referred to his collage cut outs as "drawing with scissors". Is that how this felt to you?
- What was the most enjoyable part of this project? What was the most challenging part?
- Give your collage a title. Write a paragraph describing your collage.

Follow Up Project Idea:

- Matisse hand painted his paper and then cut them into different shapes. Do the same project but instead of using colored construction paper, paint white paper using gouache or watercolor. Let them dry, then cut them out into different shapes and create your collage.