

HENRI MATISSE & JONAS WOOD

February 14–March 12, 2023

Tarmak22, Oeystrasse 29, 3792 Saanen, Switzerland

GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND—Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to present *Henri Matisse & Jonas Wood*, an exhibition at Tarmak22 in Gstaad, on view **February 14 through March 12, 2023**, that brings together artworks by the venerated French modernist Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and the celebrated Los Angeles–based contemporary artist Jonas Wood (b. 1977) for the first time. Separated by nearly a century and across continents, the pairing of works illuminates thematic and formal unities as well as an abiding connection to art history.

Marking the gallery’s first collaboration with Wood, the exhibition will present paintings and drawings by the contemporary artist, including four new paintings from 2022, alongside modern paintings by Matisse. The presentation will also be accompanied by a catalogue, featuring a text written for the occasion by curator and art historian Helen Molesworth.

A parallel focus is apparent in this display of works, as both Matisse and Wood extract their subject matter from the quiet moments of daily life. These compositions are populated with leisurely quotidian scenes, verdant tropical foliage and potted plants, and casement-framed views of the exterior landscape. Yet, realistic illusion was never the intent, as both artists emphasize aesthetic harmony over pictorial exactitude. Their shared penchant for modernist aesthetics is reflected in the bold interplay of color, space, and pattern that characterizes their respective compositions. In the domestic settings, figuration is given equal weight to the pulsating, abstracted patterns of wallpaper, textiles, and wood; the geometric planes of furniture and door moldings; or the anthropomorphic contours of philodendra. The palpable relationship between these bodies of works highlights the fundamental impact of Matisse’s stylistic innovations throughout Wood’s practice.

The distinct processes by which these paired compositions materialized reveal their temporal and geographical differences. For Matisse, they were sketched and painted from life within the realm of his staged, salon-style apartment studio in Southern France, and the forms and subjects were revisited and reworked throughout his oeuvre. His process was laid bare upon the surface through a variety of visible brushstrokes, fleshy and tactile or translucent and loose. Wood, on the other hand, translates his paintings from curated photo-collages and preparatory drawings. Rather than capturing his subjects in real time, he amasses snapshots of the people and places familiar to him, interspersed with an array of source imagery with which he visually resonates. His use of photo-collage is reflected in the solid and graphic forms that characterize his aesthetic. Despite differing approaches and techniques, the artists’ saturated, densely patterned, and compressed depictions are equally the result of a meticulous process of careful selection, construction, and execution.

Spanning the greater part of Matisse’s long and productive career, this selection of the artist’s paintings dates between 1920—after he gained Fauvist notoriety and settled in the Côte d’Azur—and 1947—just prior to his final, quintessential series of paper cut-outs. Ranging from more naturalistic renditions to his distinctive sinuous contours of the model and drapery, the interior scenes feature Matisse’s experimentation with technique, figural form, and decorative motifs while showcasing his groundbreaking use of color and

composition. These works exemplify the defining ideas of one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century who charted the course for modern painting.

Such influence is tangible a century later in the featured works by Wood, created between 2008 and 2022. Matissean innuendos are latent in his interior-exterior views and emphasis on the decorative arts. Moreover, he quotes Matisse's paintings forthright: *Mini Red Pot #1* (2016) and *Mini Red Pot #8* (2018) transform Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911) and *Interior with Black Fern* (1948), respectively, as the decorative surfaces of ceramic pots. Tongue-in-cheek referents to the broader tenets of modern art can likewise be found in the teetering arrangement of wooden toy blocks set before an Alexander Calder-inspired drawing in *Momo's Playroom #2* (2012), the cubistic, gray-scaled squares that adorn the back wall of *Shio and Robot* (2008), and the fractured perspectival views of *Calais Drive Two* (2012).

This play on art within art and appropriation can likewise be found in Matisse's works: a Roman copy of a Greek marble torso is prominently featured in *Figure assise et le torse grec (La Gandoura)* (1939), and an embroidered-tapestry imitation of a North African screen is recast in *La Leçon de piano* (1923). In addition, Matisse's interiors wittily extract and dismantle the pictorial elements of a traditional genre originating in seventeenth-century Dutch domestic interiors and nineteenth-century French realist paintings.

The revered history of domestic painting and Matisse's outsized role in the trajectory of modern and contemporary practice are not lost on Wood. His introspective interior scenes cleverly lay bare the influence of his artistic predecessors while humbly adopting and reinterpreting a traditional genre for contemporary audiences. He not only acknowledges but also revels in these recursive art traditions through subtle formal allusions and overt references, as in his appropriation of Matisse's meta rendering of the modern master's own hallowed art studio.

"Wood is pulling back the curtain and revealing which pictures are underneath his pictures. . . . he bares himself by making an image of his aesthetic DNA. And surely Matisse provides a lot of the DNA for Wood," writes Helen Molesworth in the accompanying exhibition catalogue. She continues, "both Matisse and Wood suggest that in order to create believable pictorial space (be it abstract or mimetic), the artist must be engaged with the long durée of painting. . . . What makes a work contemporary, modern, or of its time is the artist's ability to render the deep time of painting's history with the everyday time of the painter's world."

The self-referential nature of the artists' practices is further apparent in their respective self-portraits on view. Matisse presents himself from behind, seated at an easel and wearing his signature striped pajamas in *L'Artiste et le modèle nu* (1921), while Wood renders his figure shirtless, peering in from a pool deck through fractured windowpanes in *Calais Drive Two* (2012). Less aggrandizing portraits than records of lived experiences, the artists' self-depictions are unpretentious, humble, quirky, and familiar. Importantly, they portray themselves at work—intensely looking—and, ultimately, demonstrate the resolute dedication to their craft that they share.

The seven modern and ten contemporary works on view in ***Henri Matisse & Jonas Wood*** bridge art historical references and transform artistic vernacular into personal expressions of the artists' everyday lives. Through a parallel representational theme and common approaches to composition and color, the exhibition highlights the legacy of twentieth-century modern painting in contemporary practice.