



HENRI MATISSE

(Le Cateau-Cambrésis 1869–1954 Nizza)

Nymphes. 20 May 1945.

Charcoal on paper.

Signed and dated lower left: HMatisse 20 Mai 45.

48 x 37.4 cm.

The authenticity of the work has been confirmed based on a photograph by Georges Matisse, Archive Matisse. This work is registred in the Archive. On request a certificate can me made at the buyer's expense. Provenance: - Galleria La Bussola, Turin (with stamp and archive number on the reverse). - From an exquisite Ticino private collection, acquired on 8 May 1953 at the above gallery. Exhibition: Turin 1971, Il Cavaliere Azzurro (Der Blaue Reiter), Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna. Literature:

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Schneider, Pierre: Matisse, Munich 1984, p. 150, no. 181 (with ill.). The present work "Nymphes" is a wonderful example of Matisse's mature drawing style. It dates from 1945 and draws from the extraordinary increase in creativity and artistic production that Matisse experienced in the 1940s. Drawing in general gained importance for Matisse in his later years and represented for him "a painting executed with restricted means". "I have always seen drawing not as the exercise of a particular skill, but above all as a means of expression of ultimate feelings and states of mind, but a means that is condensed in order to give more simplicity and spontaneity to the expression which should be conveyed directly to the spirit of the spectator" (quoted in The Drawings of Henri Matisse, exh. cat., The Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1984, pp. 11 and 14). This spontaneity is manifested in the heavily worked surface and the dynamically curved lines that form the present work. Matisse employed charcoal to create a range of textures and densities of black and creamy white, using those shades and the luminosity of the sheet itself as the equivalent of a palette. The drawing is a combination of robust, boldly sketched lines interspersed with areas of mixed charcoal. His mastery of the "estompe technique" — darkening the charcoal with a stump or even a finger to allow for a wider range of tonal variations — helped Matisse to soften the hard lines. By employing this technique, Matisse successfully created a looser physical form and subtle variations of light and shadow. By the 1930s Matisse was intensively engaging with mythological themes, especially the nymph and the faun, with which he created several large-scale works. Matisse produced an entire series of etchings for Poésies by Stéphane Mallarmé, published in 1932. Based on these etchings, an important drawing later emerged that, connected with several paintings, eventually culminated in the large-scale canvas "Nymph in the Woods" (1942). The work offered here is a preparatory drawing for the door painting "Leda and the Swan" from 1945. The faceless, round-formed and almost abstract nymphs are characteristic of the late works of Matisse and already anticipate the subsequent cut-outs.

CHF 120 000 / 180 000

€ 123 710 / 185 570

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