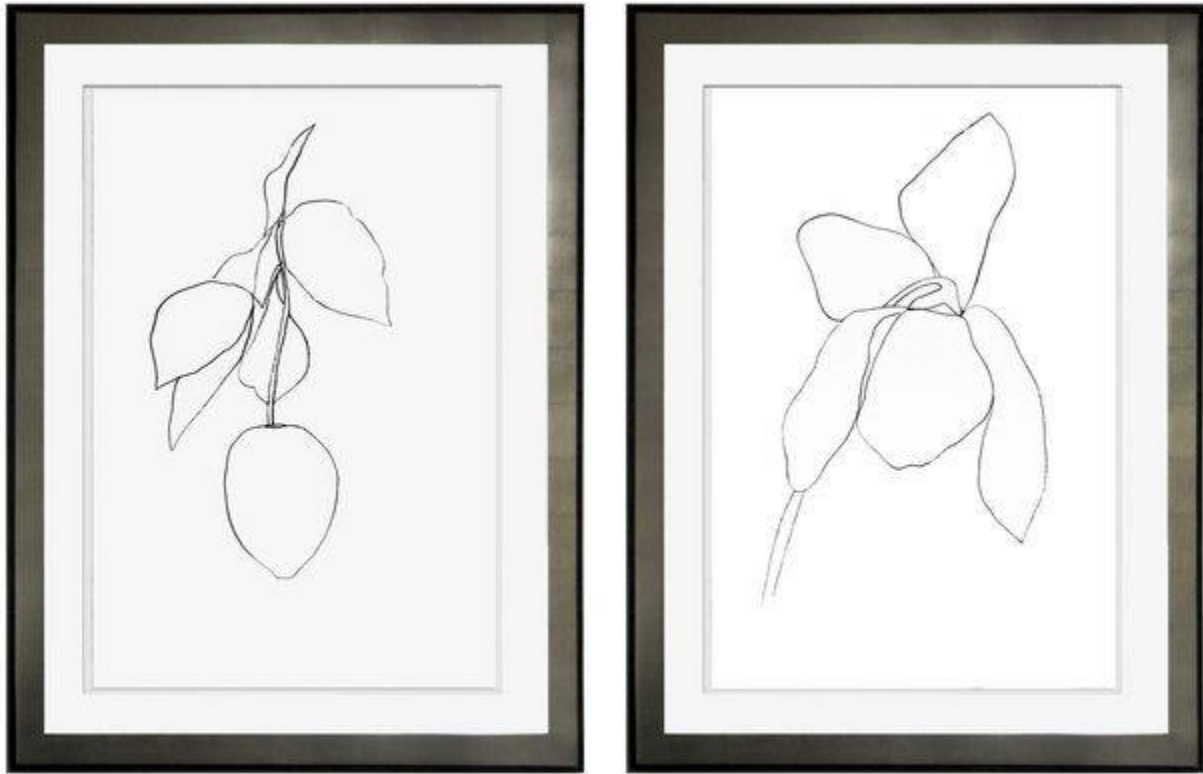


Henri Matisse drawings on display at Mount Holyoke



A pair of Henri Matisse drawings now on exhibit at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley.



By [Kathryn Roy | Special to The Republican](#)

on November 13, 2014 at 5:00 AM, updated November 13, 2014 at 5:09 AM

Visitors to the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum in South Hadley have the rare opportunity to get an up-close look at a variety of drawings created by renowned French painter Henri Matisse over a 50-year period.

The exhibition, “Matisse Drawings: Curated by Ellsworth Kelly from The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation Collection,” is a unique grouping personally selected by the contemporary artist, Ellsworth Kelly.

John Stomberg, Florence Finch Abbott Director of the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, said Matisse drew throughout his life.

“It was one of his favorite things to do,” Stomberg said. “He drew morning, noon and night, in charcoal, graphite and pen and ink. He always had a drawing instrument in his hand, and was a restless innovator with a pencil. If you look closely at the drawings you’ll see he didn’t have one way to draw an ear or one way to draw an eye.”

Stomberg said the exhibition is quite unique in that it was not put together by a curator. Instead, Stomberg asked artist Ellsworth Kelly, now 92, to select pieces for the show.

“I asked an internationally acclaimed artist to curate the show for me, and the reason for that is Ellsworth Kelly also draws every day,” Stomberg said. “This is the art world version of fantasy football.”

Stomberg said he worked with Kelly as his assistant, so he had a close look at Kelly’s process.

“Kelly as an artist was very interested in those revealing moments in Matisse’s work when you see the artist thinking through a problem,” he said. “So, almost a third of the drawings in the exhibition are sketches.”

It is unusual for a large art museum to show sketches, as they favor finished, “museum quality” pieces.

“A lot of drawings in this show are a dozen lines, where he tried to figure out a window, or a pair of lips, or a leg,” Stomberg said. “One of the revelations of this show was to get to see Matisse thinking. That was one of the great things that Ellsworth Kelly brought out – to see a great genius thinking through a problem, visually with a pencil.”

The exhibition does not include any text, per Kelly’s directions, which is also different.

“He wanted all of us to just look at the drawings and not worry about whether it was made in 1913, 1933 or 1945,” Stomberg said. “As a historian, I would organize them chronologically or make a big deal about the dates, but he wasn’t interested in that.”

There is a guide as a visitor’s service to help people who view the artwork, but it is available after the fact.

The artwork is also presented differently.

“We had to reframe every single drawing, so that every single frame is proportionate to the piece of paper,” Stomberg said. “As an abstract artist, Kelly wanted an arrangement of rectangles, so the installation itself is an abstract sculpture. It’s very minimalist and keeping with Ellsworth Kelly’s aesthetic.”

Typically, art museums use standard-sized frames and adjust the mattes so that the artwork appears more uniform on the wall.

Stomberg said this is a unique opportunity for art enthusiasts to see Matisse’s work.

“These are held by a foundation, so most of these are not on view – most have not been published,” he said. “It’s such a treat. There’s something intimate about seeing drawings from an artist you know very well. They let you into the mind of an artist in a very personal way.”

Stomberg said while folks line up for hours in New York City art museums and pay \$25 a person to see Matisse’s work, they have this opportunity right here at home.

“Our museum is free and open to the public,” he said. “All of us colleges in the Valley and Mount Holyoke especially see this as something we do to give back.”

The exhibition runs through Dec. 14. The gallery, located on Lower Lake Road, is open Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 5 p.m., and Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Mondays, the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, and on Thanksgiving Day. For more information, visit www.mtholyoke.edu/artmuseum or call 413-538-2245.



Letters to the Editor: Matisse exhibit at Mount Holyoke a hidden treasure



Pablo Picasso's painting "Girl Before a Mirror" hangs at left as Henri Matisse's 'Dance' is seen in the background at right as part of a new exhibit Thursday, Oct. 6, 2011 in Atlanta. (David Goldman/Associated Press)

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By [Letters to the Editor](#)

on November 03, 2014 at 1:20 PM, updated November 03, 2014 at 1:21 PM

Matisse ignored? Incredible! Where is the coverage of the single most important art event to glorify our valley in years? Every art student and art lover should run, not walk, to the fabulous exhibit of Matisse drawings now being shown at the Mount Holyoke College Museum of Art through December. Deceptively simple, a Matisse figure drawing or portrait reveals form, volume, position in space and personality in a few quick strokes. No longer do we have to travel the world to study works of this 20th century artistic genius. He is right here under our noses. Go now!

Please note that I am a local art lover and student of art history and have no connection to Mount Holyoke College or its art museum.

