Matisse and the Boundary Between Art and Decoration

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Introduction.

Children in elementary level art classes are taught the exercise of collage, which requires that students of the practice making cut out pieces of paper and affixing them to a surface. By virtue of this assignment, the children and the art-admiring public alike are lead to believe that the product created by the cut-out paper is art. The legitimacy of the young artist and the child's subsequent work is not questioned or scrutinized by parents, teachers, or critics; rather, the student is likely celebrated for his or her creative achievements. But when acclaimed artists employ the cut-out technique, the authority of the pieces of paper becomes the subject of debate and criticism.

Artist Henri Matisse experimented with the cut-out medium towards the end of his career and life. A seemingly simple practice, the creation of cut-out works of art involved the cutting of paper into shapes by the artist, who then attached the geometric forms to a background. Matisse's body of works is punctuated by paintings with decorative motifs; some pictures exemplify the cut-out practice, while others are more classically conceived. Although decoration is often read as low art, Matisse's pictures were considered to be high art forms. But later in his career, the validity of Matisse's cut-outs began to be questioned. The artist's cut-outs signify his lack of hesitation in merging genres and spawn debate as to whether these pieces are art, decoration, or something in between.

Art is defined conceptually as a piece "…created primarily for aesthetic reasons and not for functional use."[1] For the purpose of this argument, art will be perceived as fine or high art. This genre of categorization, as understood within the confines of classical

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[1] Oxford Art Online. "Fine Arts."
http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e716?q=art&search=quick&source=oao_t4&pos=17&_start=1#firsthit.

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conventions of painting, tends to favor oil and acrylic mediums, rather than paper. It is important to understand what is meant by art in this context in order to comprehend the classification of Matisse's cut-outs. Common works of fine art include paintings, drawings, and sculptures by artists, such as Michelangelo, Claude Monet, and Edgar Degas, among others.

Similarly, it is just as important to understand how decoration is defined. Decoration is interpreted as an object created with the "use of media considered beneath the dignity of fine art."[2] While art is considered to have more intrinsic depth, the aesthetic integrity of decorative items is relegated to the surface level of the piece. To define a work as decorative, rather than to denote it as art, is to attack and belittle the artistic value of the composition. Decoration is categorized differently than art and receives less recognition from critics, collectors, and patrons of the arts. Decorative pieces may include items such as posters, wallpaper, and snapshots.

However, art often includes decoration as one dimension of the media. This is of consequence, since decoration is considered less prestigious than art; thus the conceptualization of the terms is noteworthy. In addition to colliding in semantics, the two terms coincide in Matisse's work. The conflict of art and decoration arises in the artist's late cut-outs. Matisse crafted these pieces in a manner not unlike the elementary art students; however, the artist's compositions were not readily accepted as art as exhibited by the reception of the young students' pictures. The substandard reviews from art critics elucidate the importance of understanding these two concepts, and in distinguishing the line between

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[2] Oxford Art Online. "Decorative Arts."
http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0135.

the two genres. But to establish a clear boundary between art and decoration is challenging.

Thus, my argument commences: do Matisse's late cut-outs fit into one of these categories or

fall somewhere in between them?

To examine this question I will focus on *Madame de Pompadour* [1951] (plate 1)

and *Blue Nude II* [1952] (plate 2), also known as *Standing Nude*. I selected these two works

after attending at the "Matisse on Paper" exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

in February 2008. Viewing the color lithograph of *Madame de Pompadour* and the

silkscreen of *Blue Nude II* provoked an interest in this exploration. Although the originals

and the prints differ, the act of seeing the prints and the subsequent analysis supports my

contention.

This essay is divided into three sections: a historical discussion of Henri Matisse's

career; formal consideration and analysis, which poses the question as to why the cut-out is

different from the collage; and the third section, which discusses the overall conundrum of

art versus decoration. These sections will include a comparison between Matisse's cut-outs

and his earlier paintings and drawings. Moreover, the exploration will consider collage and

the works of other artists who have set precedents for and parallels to Matisse's cut-out

works, and which similarly lay on the boundary between art and decoration. This

examination will lead to my conclusion as to whether or not Matisse's late cut-out work is

art, decoration, or something in between.

Art is either plagiarism or revolution. –Paul Gauguin

History.

Henri Matisse rejected traditional academic training but enjoyed representing the human figure and learning the history of art.[3] In the 1890's, modern art captured Matisse's attention and furthered his interest in the art world.[4] It was an attack of appendicitis that prompted the artist to forgo his interest in the law and pick up a paintbrush. While ill, he was introduced to the director of a textile factory who, in turn, introduced him to the world of art.[5] Matisse's first formal training began at L'Ecole Quentin Latour where he worked under a draftsman who designed textiles.[5] Working with textiles ultimately expanded Matisse's creativity and ideas on art and design. Despite his attempt to further his studies at L'ecole des Beaux Arts, he was unable to pass the entrance exam and found himself working in Gustav Moreau's art studio. Moreau was a French Symbolist painter best known for incorporating mythological imagery into his work. He was a "cultivated man who stimulated his pupils to see all kinds of painting, while the other teachers were preoccupied with one period only, one style."[6] With Moreau as his mentor, Matisse began to experiment with myriad mediums and styles.

This experimentation provoked Matisse's interest in the decorative arts, which emerged after his five-year apprenticeship with Moreau during classes at L'Ecole des Arts Decoratifs.[7] Moreau encouraged his students to expand their artistic repertoire, which likely

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[3] Elderfield, John D. *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective*. (The Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1992-93), 81.
[4] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 81.
[5] Flam, Jack D. *Matisse On Art*. (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1973), 20.
[5] Flam, *Matisse*, 3.
[6] Flam, *Matisse,* 131.
[7] Flam *Matisse,* 20.

stimulated Matisse's innovation. The artist continued to explore the medium while working

as a decorative painter in the Grand-Palais for the Exposition Universelle of 1900.[8] It was

during this time that the line between what was art and what was decoration began to blur

for Matisse.

During the 1890's the decorative arts were allied with the fine arts, making the query

as to whether or not cut-outs are art or decoration all the more fascinating; it also invites the

question as to why this form of expression has been deemed "experimental."[9] Late 19th

century manifestoes from Art Nouveau and Arts and Crafts were closely allied with respect

to art and design. However, with the introduction of non-representational abstract art in the

early 20th century, the difference between abstract artistic form and decorative design began

to gain importance. In particular, this led artists and art critics to make a clearer distinction

between the pure forms of high art and the decorative patterns of design. The separation

continued to intensify in the 1940's and 1950's and became a matter of concern.[10] As

Matisse began to experiment with the cut-outs, the question as to which category he was

attempting to fit into was thus an issue for critics, art patrons and collectors.

Matisse was living in France during France's Fourth Republic. From 1946 to 1958

France was a country recovering from World War II and battling immediate threats, to its

power such as the Algerian Independence Movement.[11] Despite the political position of the

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[8] Flam, *Matisse,* 3.
[9] Flam, *Matisse,* 32.
[10] The Bauhaus School [1919-1933], a school of applied arts and design, was also experimenting with this boundary by bringing together art and daily life, and also blending high and low art forms.
[11] During the Fourth Republic France attempted to gain control of Indochina. This resulted in the First Indochina War. After their struggle with Indochina, France was engaged in the conflict with Algeria. The debates over whether or not to keep control of Algeria almost led the country to civil war. These were two important and prevalent issues in France from 1946-1958.

country and the violence associated with the epoch, Matisse did not produce work that was congruent with the dominant post-war atmosphere. Typical works produced in this era were often relatively dark in tone, presenting themes and motifs with likewise melancholy connotations. Thomas Hess, managing editor of Art News and author of the book *Willem De Kooning*, wrote that post-war art could be described as "…a shift from aesthetics to ethics; the picture was no longer supposed to be Beautiful, but True – an accurate representation or equivalence. If this meant that a painting had to look vulgar, battered, and clumsy – so much the better."[12]

Pablo Picasso Matisse's contemporary aligned himself with the trends of the post war era, unlike Matisse. His work during this period often exudes a somewhat tormented feel, as seen in his painting *Woman Flower* [1946] (plate 3). Picasso's method of depicting a female nude differs greatly from Matisse's, as the composition of *Woman Flower* suggests. This painting portrays an image of a flower with the features of a woman, such as a feminine face, breasts, and the leaves in an arrangement that represents hair. The arrangement of the flower to look like a female appears as a wilting flower. This feeling arises because everything on the figure points downwards; from the frown on the face to the triangular arms that face toward the ground.

Woman Flower is composed so that the figure appears in a discomforting manner. The piece emits such uneasiness through the facial expression of the figure, and the drab colors used in the image. The colors included are off white, blue, green and black. The colors are matte, and emit a sad tone from the image. The sadness arises since the flower is

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[12] Hess, Thomas B. *Willem De Kooning* (Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1968), 45.

dark due to the colors used, and because of the shape of the figure. The stem of the flower is extremely narrow, while the breasts, arms, and hair are all large. The size difference gives the feeling that the flower is not inviting or enjoying viewership. The overall image exudes a sense of sadness and distress, without using intentional political references.

In stark contrast, however, Matisse was producing colorful and seemingly happy cut-outs, soliciting disapproval and criticism from a number of his critics. It was clear that, despite these critiques, Matisse's failure to respond to, acknowledge, or embrace the political events surrounding him was deliberate. He said, "I have found the cut-out to be the simplest and most direct way to express myself."[13] It was during this time that Matisse created several well-known works including the *Blue Nude* series, *Madame de Pompadour*, the stained glass windows maquettes for the Chapel of the Rosary at the Church of Vence [1948-1952] (plate 4), the cut-out designs for the book *Jazz* [1947] (plate 5), large murals such as *Swimming Pool* [1952] (plate 6), and *L'Escargot* [1952] (plate 7)*,* one of his final compositions. Each of these works employs ranges of color and shape, and they illustrate the development of Matisse as an artist and the cut-out as an art form.

The Chapel of the Rosary at Vence is one of Matisse's earliest and largest cut-out projects. He began working at Vence in 1946 with a series of painted interiors, such as *Interior in Venetian Red* (plate 8), *Interior in Yellow and Blue* (plate 9), and *The Rocaille Armchair* (plate 10). It has been suggested that these were Matisse's last works as a painter.[14] Matisse became involved with this project because of his relationship with Sister Jacques-Marie. He met Sister Jacques-Marie in 1942 while he was ill and confined to a

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[13] Kevin Salantino [Curator at LACMA], e-mail message to author, September 2, 2008.
[14] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 415.

hospital bed.[15]   Prior to becoming a nun, Sister Jacques-Marie was a nurse who bonded with

Matisse while caring for him. The two developed a friendship, and knowing how important

the church was to his friend, Matisse accepted the project.   Matisse ensured that everyone

involved in the project understood that he accepted the commission for his acquaintance.

His work at the Vence Chapel led the artist to develop stained glass windows, which were

created using cut-outs as stencils. He used only the colors red, yellow, and blue to represent

fire, sun and water.[16] The Vence Chapel is "important…for consolidating paper cut-outs as

his major medium of expression in his last years…"[17] After the completion of this project in

April 1947, Matisse declared that instead of participating in future painting commissions he

would "concentrate instead on decorative projects,"[18] and he was true to his word.

Matisse used his designs from *Jazz* to help him solve a design problem with one of

the stained glass windows.[19] *Jazz*, a compilation of twenty color cut-outs, was printed in

September 1947 along with Matisse's handwritten text. The book has been reproduced as an

unbound collection with twenty pochoir plates in a slipcover. Pochoir is the French word

for stencil, and is a **"**highly skilled stencil technique practiced in a specialized workshop and

used for making multicolor prints, for tinting black-and-white prints, and for coloring

reproductions and book."[20] The incorporation of text within the work was another significant

step towards Matisse's exclusive concentration on cut-outs, and furthers the debate about

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[15] Billot, Marcel. *The Vence Chapel: The Archive of a Creation* (Houston, Menil Foundation Inc, 1999), 11.

[16] Matisse Chapel at Vence. "The Chapel at Vence." http://www.south-of-france.com/matisse-chapel-at-vence/.

[17] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 155.

[18] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 415.

[19] Billot, *The Vence Chapel,* 16.

[20] Oxford Art Online. "Pochoir (stencils)." http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t4/e1330?q=pochoir&search=quick&pos=2&_start=1#firsthit.

whether they are art or decoration. Text is included on many of the pages to the left of the

image on the horizontal page. The artist's later works, notably *Swimming Pool*, is a large

scale cut-out, measuring fifty-four foot long and over seven feet high, and is made of

gouache on paper, cut and pasted on white painted paper on burlap.[21] *L'Escargot,* a cut-out

that was published as a lithograph, depicts a spiral of colored shapes that circle like the shell

of a snail, illustrating his total transformation and devotion to the cut-out medium. Matisse

felt this "evolution [the transition from painting to cut-outs] was a metaphor which

embodied universal movement," and it showed that Matisse was able to accept and complete

all forms of commissions even though he was "painting with scissors."[22]

In determining whether cut-outs are art, decoration, or something in between, two

pieces will be the main subject of analysis in this thesis: *Madame de Pompadour*, 1951 9 1/4

inches by 12 1/2 inches and *Blue Nude II*, 1952 44 3/8 inches by 29 inches. Reproductions

of both these images are created based on the original pictures by the artist. These

subsequent prints are intended for mass-production and distribution. Aspects of the original

artwork are often lost in reproduction, as the printed images no longer reflect the texture or

boldness of colors exhibited by the initial piece. *Madame de Pompadour* was originally

composed of painted paper that was cut into shapes and pasted on a surface. This image was

then also printed as a color lithograph on wove paper. American museums such as the

LACMA and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City hold prints of this piece.

Similarly, *Blue Nude II* was originally constructed of cut and pasted painted paper and was

printed as a silkscreen. The original image is currently on display at the Museum of

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[21] Lanchner, Carolyn. *Henri Matisse* (New York, MoMa, 2008), 38.
[22] Jack Cowart et al., *Henri Matisse Paper Cut-Outs* (New York: St. Louis Museum of Arts and DIA, 1977), 244.

Metropolitan Art in New York City. The two cut-outs contrast each other's purpose. In *Madame de Pompadour* Matisse arranged the cut-out pieces of paper to depict a woman and objects around her; with a more decorative feel and purpose. *Blue Nude II*, however, is more akin to Matisse's earlier paintings. It often appears as one of a series, blending itself as part of an artistic project.

Madame de Pompadour is a unique subject particularly because eighteenth-century artists, such as François Boucher and François-Hubert Drouais, often depicted her in the Rococo style. Madame de Pompadour was a popular motif, for she was well known as a courtesan and mistress of King Louis XV of France. She was extremely accomplished and involved both in the affairs of the French court as well as in porcelain manufacturing. It is possible Matisse revived her image as a result of cultural references to the subject seen in 1950's icons like Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, and James Dean.

It is important to note, however, that while the painting is titled *Madame de Pompadour*, there is little connection to the subject depicted and the actual Madame de Pompadour. The outline used for the courtesan's face in Matisse's piece is rather generic. It is depicted in many drawings and paintings such as *Face of Young Woman and Bowl of Three Fish* [1929] (plate 11), *Dedication* from John Antoine Nau's Poesies *Antillaises* [1948-1953] (plate 12), and the frontispiece for *Pasiphae Chant de Mino* [1943] (plate 13).[23] The face is comprised of a thick black outline that includes hair, a hint of a neck, and semi-circular shape for the outline of the lower jaw and facial structure. The eyes, nose, mouth and eyebrows are also depicted by a black outline and appear extremely feminine.

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[23] Susan C. Jones, editor. *Matisse: Minnesota Celebrates Matisse* (Minnesota: Minneapolis Institute of Arts), 18, 19, 20.

Madame de Pompadour highlights Matisse's use of pure colors and shapes by portraying a mix of warm and cool hues to translate his interest in the subject matter onto paper. Matisse also uses white to establish a border and to act as a barrier between the different colors. This helps to illuminate the shapes in the piece, as well as to create a space for the artist to incorporate text. The text box attracts the viewer's attention and leads the eye to wander up the vertical image, and, while the eye travels upward, arabesque shapes appear. Abstract figures fill the rest of the background and add a decorative effect to the cut-out. Matisse uses a bow-like shape where one would imagine the neckline of Madame de Pompadour's dress. He moves from the bow to four triangular objects that develop into a shape similar to a collar on her dress. These pieces of paper are all the same shade of pink. The manipulation of color accentuates the outline of a woman's dress. The generic female face used is presumably that of Madame de Pompadour. Matisse drew the face directly on to the piece as opposed to cutting it out, as in other areas of the work. The incorporation of the non-specific face serves as a direct link between Matisse's decorative beginnings and his artistic abilities. The cut-out was originally designed for the Bal de l'Ecole des Arts Decoratifs (Annual Ball of the School of Decorative Arts). This serves as the basis for the text in the image that provides the date, time and place of the event: "Madame de Pompadour, reçoit le mardi 20 novembre 1951, au pavillon de marson, à 22 heures."[24]

Blue Nude II, or *Standing Nude* makes a contrast to the decorative cut-out of *Madame de Pompadour* because of its particularly artistic look. *Blue Nude II* is one of a series of cut-outs that, at first glance, looks like Matisse's paintings. However, the cut-out not only resembles a painting, but it also appears similar to Matisse's earlier works, making

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[24]Madame de Pompadour receives Tuesday, November 20, 1951, at the Marson Pavilion at 10 p.m.

Blue Nude II particularly relevant for my argument. Furthermore, *Blue Nude II* most closely references Matisse's odalisques of his Nice period in the 1920's, and as well as later 1930's. One specific example of this is *Large Reclining Blue Nude* [1928] (plate 14), a work in which he begins to develop a radical flatness in his paintings. The development of flatness is directly associated with the artist's move towards cut-out work. *Blue Nude II* is a manifestation of this formal tendency: the piece shows a frontal image of the female nude, who is cut-out in blue paper on a white background. The legs and arms are not connected to the torso and the white background separates them. The figure's arms are raised and bent behind the female's head. This creates the appearance of the female's breast facing sideways. Although the figure is standing rather than reclining, this is extremely reminiscent of the odalisques.

Blue Nude II and *Madame de Pompadour* are images that aid in the exploration of how the cut-out should be viewed by exemplifying two different approaches that Matisse uses in his late work: the decorative and the artistic. Through comparisons with Matisse's earlier works, I show he was moving towards pushing the boundary of art and decoration throughout his career.

I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way—things I had no words for. –Georgia O'Keeffe

Formal: Why is cut-out different from collage?

What is the difference between the cut-out and collage? It is imperative to understand the difference between the methods of cut-out and collage, which are often thought of as the same genre. Why is the distinction significant? It is necessary to distinguish the two methods in order to explore the idea that Matisse was experimenting with the boundary between art and decoration rather than seeking to create work that was purely artistic. These terms are derived from the French phrases "papiers collés," and "papiers découpés, literally translating as "stuck paper" and "cut-out paper."[25] Collage, which Clement Greenberg explains as "the new art of joining two-dimensional forms in three-dimensional space," played a pivotal role in the development of Cubism.[26] Pablo Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Canning* [1912] (plate 15) exemplifies this concept. Picasso attached oil and oilcloth on a canvas with a rope frame.[27] This was Picasso's first collage, and it appears as though the items included in the image are all resting upon chair canning. This image reflects Rosenberg's definition of a collage as a "technique…consisting of introducing one or more pieces of paper (newspaper, wallpaper, labels, and ordinary sheets of paper) into a pictorial composition."[28] Picasso did this by combing oil painting and found pieces of paper and objects, such as the rope used to frame the collage.

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[25] Rosenberg, David. *Art Game Book* (New York: Assouline, 314).
[26] Greenberg, Clement. "The Pasted Paper Revolution." In *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 65.
[27] Harden, Mark. "Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Canning*." www.artchive.com/artchive/P/Picasso/chaircan 3/20/09.
[28] Rosenberg, *Art Game Book*, 314.

The collage technique differs from that of the cut-out, which involves the creation of "forms by cutting shapes directly out of the paper and gradually putting them together."[29] The cut-out artist does not necessarily outline and fill in the image, as a painter would, they are able to cut-out the image out directly from colored paper. Matisse simply draws with a pair of scissors instead of paintbrush. He would cut-out his shapes and then apply them to a canvas, as opposed to painting them directly on the surface. Matisse's cut-outs are also called "gouaches decoupées." This process describes paper painted with gouache to look as though no paint was applied, and then the figures are cut from this painted paper. Matisse felt his cut-outs were "a new kind of monochrome painting."[30] This is shown through *Blue Nude II*. Matisse cut-out the figure from paper painted with blue gouache and attached it to a white surface, making it look similar to a painting executed with a single color. The cut-outs often appear aesthetically similar to painting, as a result of the flatness of the surface. Thus, to many viewers the cut-outs and paintings are indistinguishable.

Although often indistinguishable, understanding the difference between the cut-out image and the painting is crucial to analyzing Matisse's cut-outs. Collage pieces are recognized as more artistic, serving as the foundation for cubism; as a result, collages are considered to be works in their own right. Conversely, cut-outs are usually thought to be of value, not in themselves, but as artistic tools. Matisse first used the cut-out method in the form of a stencil while working on *La Danse II* (plate 16) for the Barnes Foundation Mural in 1932, further exemplifying the anomaly of the cut-out.[31] It is not widely practiced as an

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[29] Rosenberg, *Art Game Book*, 314.
[30] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 413.
[31] Matisse originally created *La Danse*, however, he had incorrect measurements and had to re-create the image. Thus, the reason it is called *La Danse II.*

art form, preventing the cut-out from becoming mainstream. Establishing the difference between the cut-out and the collage is problematic, and poses a new question of whether a stencil-like method can be considered art.

Jean (Hans) Arp and Willem de Kooning aid in addressing this question. Arp is credited with setting a precedent for Matisse's cut-out work, whereas de Kooning's paintings are seen as a contemporary parallel of Matisse's cut-outs. Arp was aware of Matisse's work, as evidenced by Arp's organization of the Moderner Bund in Lucerne in 1911, an exhibition that featured Matisse's art, as well as that of Pablo Picasso, Paul Gauguin and others.[32] Matisse emulated Arp's general premise; but, their techniques differ. Arp's formal art training began in 1900 at the Strasbourg Kunstgewerbeschule, a school of decorative arts.[33] At the same moment Matisse was creating art that was strongly influenced by Cezanne, with a body of works featuring drawings, etchings, and sculptures.[34] Unlike Matisse, Arp rejected traditional artistic practices before he was an established artist; this is documented in an anecdote where he recalls:

> Even in my childhood, the pedestal enabling a statue to stand, the frame enclosing the picture like a window, were for me occasions for merriment and mischief, moving me to all sorts of tricks. One day I attempted to paint on a windowpane a blue sky under the houses that I saw through the window. Thus the houses seemed to hang in mid-air. Some times I took our pictures of their frames and looked with pleasure at these windows hanging on the wall. Another time I hung up a frame in a wooden shack, and sawed a hole in the wall behind the frame, disclosing a charming landscape animated by men and cattle.[35]

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[32] Les Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg. "Art is Arp." http://www.art-is-arp.com/en/index.php?page=elements_biographiques&menu=1.
[33] Hatje, Verlag G. *Arp 1886-1966* (New York: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1987), 32.
[34] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 85.
[35] Hatje, *Arp*, 32.

Although Arp was younger than Matisse, he still provides a precedent in the cut-out category due to his early experimentation with the medium. Arp's trials with the cut-out arose from his Dada work. Jane Hancock, curator of the *Arp 1886 to 1966* exhibition, explains, "Arp gave renewed and fully conscious attention to the 'laws of chance,' whose potential for stimulating artistic creativity he had first explored in the Dada period."[36] Arp's Dada phase began in Zurich in 1916. Zurich was where many artists who were disgusted by the horrors of World War One got together; some artists were part of an anti-war movement. Arp's work established an important precedent for Matisse's cut-outs.

Matisse was painting and transitioning to a more naturalistic style while his predecessor was experimenting with the Laws of Chance through the cut-out. Arp's Laws of Chance were experiments where he would let fragments of paper fall randomly on a horizontal sheet of paper, and then fix them in place where they happened to fall. Arp's most notable Laws of Chance works include *Paper Picture (According to the Laws of Chance)* [1916] (plate 17), *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* [1917] (plate 18), and *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* [1917] (plate 19). The collages began in a grid-like format, then, over time, were composed according to chance arrangement. This is shown through the evolution of Arp's three notable works. *Paper Picture (According to the Laws of Chance)* is composed of squares that were noticeably cut from a paper cutter. The squares are arranged vertically and appear rather geometric. *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, which is the most published of the three images, uses squares that appear torn, and are arranged in a less geometric format. Arp used the colors blue, grey, and white to emphasize the Laws of Chance. The third image,

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[36] Hatje, *Arp*, 14.

Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance, appears as a combination of the first two images. The squares are similar in form to those in the first piece, but are arranged in a similar way to *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance.* The artist used a dark palette for this work, which included brown, black, orange and a hint of green. Arp was adapting collage to his theory of the laws of chance, which differs from Matisse's theory of the cut-out.

Although Arp and Matisse's theories differ it appears as though Matisse borrowed from Arp's Law of Chance. One example that provides evidence Matisse adopted Arp's practices is *L'Escargot*, a work similar to Arp's *Square Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*. *L'Escargot* is comprised of different color squares that are arranged on a white background. If one did not know the title of the piece, one could on seeing it in reproduction, think it was a work by Arp because of the similar technique employed. *L'Escargot* and *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* differ because Matisse arranged *L'Escargot* according to his interpretation of a snail's movements; however, they are aesthetically congruent.   Arp, nevertheless, was working in the early 1920's, about thirty years before Matisse began experimenting with the cut-out, and provides a precedent for the use of attaching separate cut fragments of paper to a canvas.

Clement Greenberg praises Arp's collages, even though he does not often celebrate the genre of the collage or cut-out. In his essay "Paper Pasted Revolution," Greenberg explains: "After cubism the development of collage was largely oriented to shock value. [Arp] grasped its plastic meaning enough to make collages whose value transcends the piquant, but the genre otherwise declined into montage and stunts of illustration, or into

decoration pure and simple."[37] Here Greenberg foreshadows his reaction to Matisse's late work. Greenberg claims that the collage eventually became decoration, which he did not classify as art. Furthermore, Arp's images were on a smaller scale than Matisse's work, as seen with *Collage Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, which measures 19 1/8 inches by 13 5/8 inches, a piece that is significantly smaller than *Swimming Pool*, *Blue Nude II*, and the majority of Matisse's cut-out pieces.

Willem de Kooning [1904-1997] worked later than Arp. Willem de Kooning's work in the 1940's and 1950's can be read as parallel to Matisse because he was working at the moment historically when Matisse was experimenting with cut-outs. There are significant similarities, even though the artists' aesthetics differ. De Kooning's education is also parallel to Matisse's. De Kooning attended the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts and Techniques, where becoming an Artist, with a capital 'A,' was not the main priority. Students of the time were educated in the fine arts as well as the applied arts. This led de Kooning's art having a creative ambiguity, as did Matisse's education in textiles and decorative arts.[38] How does one classify creative ambiguity? Creative ambiguity is directly aligned with the issues at stake in classifying Matisse's cut-out work. This was revealed during De Kooning's first gallery appearance, in which the exhibition was chosen by John Graham and created for the decoration firm McMillan Inc. in January 1942.[39] Graham also featured Matisse in the exhibit. This is significant because the exhibit opened before Matisse began working with the cut-outs. Prior to his intentionally playing with the boundary between art and decoration, a decorating firm was already interested in Matisse's

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[37] Greenberg, "The Pasted Paper Revolution," 65.
[38] Hess, *Willem De Kooning*, 15.
[39] Hess, *Willem De Kooning*, 18.

paintings and drawings. De Kooning and Matisse's work includes a mixture of chance and deliberation, using the cut-out as a technique for composition. Thomas Hess explains de Kooning's practice:

> [de Kooning] will do drawings on transparent tracing paper, scatter them one on top of the other, study the composite drawing that appears on top, make a drawing from this, reverse it, tear it in half, and put it on top of still another drawing. Often the search is for a shape to start off a painting, and in *Attic* you can still see signs of the sliced drawings that supplied the motif.[40]

It is possible to speculate that Matisse worked with similar principles. Despite the difference in styles of the two artists, there are comparable processes being used.

Interestingly enough, Matisse's cut-outs appear closest visually to the paintings and silkscreens of Patrick Heron because of the similar colors and shapes employed by the two artists. Patrick Heron was an English painter, writer, and designer. The artist's early work is said to show the influence of Cezanne, analogous with Matisse's early influences. Much of Heron's work, specifically *Gouache for St. Ives Window* [1978] (plate 20) and *January 1973:14* [1973] (plate 21), appears to the untrained eye as though it has been created using the same medium, and possibly even by the same artist, when situated next to *Madame de Pompadour*. The motifs in *Gouache for St. Ives Window* are extremely simplified and abstract, and are composed of pink, yellow, green, orange, and blue. *January 1973:14* utilizes the same colors, and also has abstract forms. However, the abstract forms are different in shape then the ones in the former image. Heron's images incorporate arabesques and a feeling of spiral movement throughout the image, as well as bright color and abstract shapes; all of which are found in Matisse's myriad cut-outs.

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[40] Hess, *Willem De Kooning*, 47.

Heron was born in 1920 and began working after Matisse was already well established. The fact that the two works by Heron were created in the 1970's suggests that he was influenced by Matisse's cut-outs. It seems probable to assume that Heron interpreted the cut-outs as art. This conjecture proceeds from the fact that Heron was working in a common and acceptable artistic medium. Furthermore, that in the 1970's, after the minimalist and pop art explosions of the 1950's and 1960's, the line between art and decoration became more fluid.

Patrick Heron is a prototypical example of an artist who distinguishes between cutting and drawing. It is imperative to define this difference in order to establish whether cut-outs are art or decoration. Drawing is considered a basic and standard art form that has been used and accepted for centuries. But to understand why the cut-out is thought of as different we must first explore examples of Matisse's decorative works.

The cut-out is regarded as different because it moves away from traditional art forms, which art critics see as a move towards decoration. However, Albert Barnes, for whom Matisse executed a series of decorative murals, states that Matisse's artwork in general has an ingrained decorative motif. Barnes does not express concern about Matisse's early work with which decorative aspects were incorporated into the image. In fact, he claims that "critics constantly confuse extraneous associations and gusts of irrelevant emotion with insight into artistic realities; they do so either from indolence or from the lack of any method discerning the objective qualities which make a painting an authentic work of

art."[41] Thus by Barnes' expectation and standards, Matisse's cut-outs would be considered art.

Since Matisse claims that making cut-outs was done by 'drawing with scissors,' one would assume that the artist himself did not see a difference between the two media.[42] The Barnes Foundation Mural *The Dance II* [1931-1932] is an example that traces Matisse's use of 'drawing with scissors.' In 1930, Dr. Albert C. Barnes commissioned Matisse to design a mural for the central gallery of his museum in Philadelphia. Matisse began this painting by using cut-out pieces of paper as stencils. Although it was used as a tool, this is the first documented time Matisse worked with cut-out pieces of paper. The mural appears as if it was drawn with stencils, due to the fact that the figure seems identical through its various movements, an effect most easily achieved through the use of a stencil. He then painted over the sketches to develop the three-panel oil on canvas mural. The mural consists of continuous and flowing images of a woman dancing in various positions and formations. The colors used in the mural are soft shades of blue and pink and black. These colors make the movement of the figure appear delicate and graceful. The free flowing movement of the female's body is similar to the way Matisse depicts the female form in his *Blue Nude* series. The late switch of media from drawing to cutting allowed Matisse to depict the female figure in a similar manner, yet to make the figure appear in two different ways.[43] Matisse himself claims that there is no difference in his mind between drawing and cutting:

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[41] Barnes, Albert and De Mazia, Violette, *The Art of Henri-Matisse* (New York, London: C. Scribner's Sons, 1933), 3.
[42] Elderfield, *Matisse*, 158.
[43] Matisse's earlier works of *La Danse* [1910] & *La Musique* [1910] are both flat simple images with solid blocks of color, and have figures against plain background. These early works foreshadow the flatness Matisse eventually arises at with his late cut-outs.

> There is no separation between my old pictures and my cut-outs, except that with the greater completeness and abstraction, I have attained a form filtered to its essentials and of the object which I used to present in the complexity of its space. I have preserved the sign which suffices and which is necessary to make the object exist in its own form and in the totality for which I conceived it.[44]

Similarly, Matisse also discusses the issue of the human element when explaining the Barnes Foundation Mural to the Soviet art critic Alexandre Romm. The idea of the human element is extremely relevant to Matisse's work since in both his drawings and his cut-outs, a large number of his works involve the female nude. Matisse considers the *La Dance II* an architectural painting, due to the fact that is 13 meters by 3.50 meters and was constructed over three doors that are six meters tall.[45] Matisse claims that in order to successfully paint an architectural work the human element needs to be extracted:

> In architectural paintings, which is the case in Merion, it seems to me that the human element has to be tempered, if not excluded.[46] I, who let myself always be guided by my instinct (so much so that it manages to overcome my reason), had to avoid it, for it led me away from architectural problem each time it appeared on my canvas. The expression of this painting should be associated with the severity of a volume of whitewashed stone, and an equally white, bare vault. Further, the spectator should not be arrested by this human character with which he would identify, and which by stopping him there would keep him apart from the great, harmonious, living and animated association of the architecture and the painting.[47]

Matisse realized that removing oneself from the human element was necessary in order to accomplish the task at hand when creating art, and carried this notion throughout his career. With *Madame de Pompadour*, for example, Matisse used a generic face. Thus, he eliminated the specific human element to accomplish his goal of creating an invitation for the Beaux Arts Ball, and properly addressing his commission.

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[44] Flam, *Matisse,* 137.
[45] Flam, *Matisse, 67.*
[46] Merion, Pennsylvania is where the Barnes Foundation is located.
[47] Flam, *Matisse, 69.*

As in the debate over whether or not *Madame de Pompadour* is art, decoration, or something in between, Matisse considers *La Danse* as decoration. The artist refers to the mural as "the first decoration" in a letter to Soviet art critic Alexandre Romm.[48] Oil painted murals are a widely accepted art form, so for the artist to refer to it as decoration is noteworthy. This shows that Matisse used the terms "art" and "decoration" interchangeably, at least on this occasion, and that he was ignoring the difference.

The incorporation of artistic principles such as flatness to the cut-out suggests that Matisse truly did not think the cut-out was vastly different from other mediums. Matisse painted the *La Danse II* in an extremely flat manner, to the extent that it appears to have no texture and could be constructed as a cut-out. This is one example of how Matisse deviates from traditional artwork and moves towards his cut-outs. More specifically he uses two kinds of flatness. The first way is achieved through not distinguishing the figure from the background, which does not allow for depth in the image. In the second, he uses blocks of plain color. The flatness of the pictures leads one to recognize the difference between the direct and indirect contrast in Matisse's work. The way in which Matisse plays with the figure ground contrast varies from piece to piece. Since the cut-out images are so flat, they create the illusion of having very little differentiation between the figure and the ground. *Blue Nude II* appears as though there is no edge or painterly mark; the lack of edge arises from the flatness of the cut-out piece that is pasted on the background. The flatness, and lack of distinction between the figure and ground, is in direct contrast to Matisse's beginnings with cut-outs as stencils. Matisse managed to escape the decorative stencil-like effect of the cut-out and turn it into an artistic image. This shows a transformation that leads

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[48] Flam, *Matisse, 69.*

to an artistic creation. Matisse did not use the cut-out as a stencil as he had done in the past. Rather, he adapted the cut-out to become the art itself. He modified the cut-out in such a way that it had flatness like his paintings, resembling Matisse's more artistic work.

Matisse began developing a sense of flatness in his paintings in the 1920's, which he further explores in his late cut-outs. This idea is also evident because at the end of his career, he was solely creating paintings as cut-outs as John Elderfield noted: "eventually, cut-outs and brush drawings formed virtually his only means of expression. But before this happened, his painting came to a dazzlingly original conclusion. He made his final studies…more flatly and brightly painted than ever before."[49] *Blue Nude II* is composed from an extremely bright blue color, however, it is constructed so flat to the surface that it appears as if it was painted. Matisse's cut-outs have a sense of flatness that eliminates the question of why the cut-out is not equal to drawing. The *Blue Nude* series is also an example of the way Matisse incorporated aspects of painting and drawing into his cut-outs.

Similar to the *Blue Nude* series is Yves Klein's work with the color International Klein Blue. Klein, a French artist who worked after Matisse, also depicted blue nudes in a manner extremely different from that of any artist prior to him. Klein, like Matisse, pushed the boundary of art. This is most evident in Klein's *Anthropometries Experiment* [1960]. This project involved Klein having live nude female models paint themselves with International Klein Blue, and roll on a canvas, making themselves literally 'blue nudes.' Simultaneously, he played his symphony, which was composed of one note and silence.[50]

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[49] Elderfield, *Matisse,* 413.
[50] International Klein Blue was patented by Yves Klein, and is still patented by his estate today. IKB is a deep blue hue, and was the color that Klein felt best represented the concepts he aimed for as an artist.

Klein invited an audience, wore a suit, and filmed the event; this turned his art into a performance. While the music was playing, the models were turning themselves into brushes, which was Klein's version of experimentation, similar to that of Matisse's exploration of 'painting with scissors.' The artists vary since Klein was performing in a way that differed from Matisse's decorative direction; however, they are similar because both artists were depicting blue nudes that departed from drawing standard nudes. The fact that the models acted as the brushes developed an entirely different sense of what it meant to paint. The process incorporated aspects of painting and drawing among other forms of art.

Matisse, like Klein, was redefining painting; for example, the way Matisse modifies the edges and traces of his hand on the individual blue nudes in the series. This is exemplified when comparing *Blue Nude II* with other images in the series, such as *Blue Nude VI* (plate 22). The background of *Blue Nude VI* is filled with pencil lines, suggesting that Matisse sketched with pencil on the image before cutting it out. This, along with the deliberate roughness of the edges of the figure, makes the image appear more artistic. This is due to the fact that pencil marks and roughs edges are all elements often included in paintings and drawings. On the other hand, in *Blue Nude II* Matisse is meticulous with the edges of the figure; the relatively smooth edges give the image a decorative feeling. The smoother edges, when comparing *Blue Nude II* to *Blue Nude VI*, make the cut-out appear as a reproduction. This makes it difficult to see the trace of the artist's hand, though if one looks very closely, there is a slight roughness around the edge. The combination of these elements in a single series of work makes it difficult for a viewer to determine if the cut-out is a cut-out or a painting.

The variations of edges in most of the *Blue Nude* series align painting with the cut-out images. The different edges make the images appear similar to freehand drawings, providing them with a sense of the artist's touch and making it difficult to identify the medium of origin. If a viewer is unable to distinguish between what is painted and what is cut-out, then the mediums should be aligned. The two mediums accomplish the same effect: they should highlight Matisse's capabilities. However the issue is not seeing the cut-outs just as decoration. Strengthening this point, certain paintings can be considered decorative. When paintings are created in an extremely flat and un-textured manner they appear flat, similar to the cut-out. Thus, if paintings are questioned in the same way that cut-outs are when they appear to be decorative, then why are the cut-outs not classified as art to begin with, as paintings are?

There is no must in art because art is free. –Wassily Kandinsky

Context: Art or Decoration?

Matisse is known for creating art with a decorative character. Prior to his creating cut-outs Matisse's works were not questioned and were accepted as art. Matisse's cut-outs are on the boundary between art and decoration, so what does he create? Matisse's creations arise from his strong education, and his exposure to influential writers such as Henry Havard, author of *La decoration,* which is believed to be the inspiration for *Notes of a Painter.*[51] Matisse has an "abiding interest in decoration and decorative art …throughout his life Matisse expressed this interest in his constant use of decorative objects (rugs, tapestries, screens, vases etc) as motifs for his paintings and drawings)," and even created designs for a carpet book and magazine covers, including his own exhibition catalogues.[52] One of his more decorative artistic pieces was the mural, *La Danse II.* The decorative tone of the murals appeals to a wider audience than the fine arts, perhaps a source of motivation for the artist. Likewise, *Madame de Pompadour*, a decorative poster, will have more viewers than *Blue Nude II*, which will be hung in a museum or private home. Decorative objects reach wider audiences for various reasons: they are mass-produced, shown in public spaces, and are available to spectators of all financial means. The difference in intended audience exacerbates the distinction between the two genres. This understanding and projected viewership determines how a work is created. A poster will be designed to be decorative

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[51] Note of a Painter is "a major statement of Matisse's principles as a painter, composed soon after he was established as the leader of the 'Fauve' tendency in French painting. The artist took the opportunity to defend himself against criticism from the self-styled Sar Peladan, a Symbolist painter and Rosicrucian. The 'Notes' provide an important reference for modern concepts of artistic expression. Originally published as 'Notes d'un peintre' in La Grande Revue, Paris, 25. December 1908." Harrison, Charles & Wood, Paul. *ART in Theory 1900-1990*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 72.

[52] Elderfield, *Matisse,* 158.

whereas a private commission will have more precise formal guidelines. This distinction widens the boundary between the two degrees of formality and style.

Conversely, art historian Christine Poggi contrasts fine art and decoration through her discussion of the invention of wallpaper. Poggi contends that it was invented as a substitute for mural paintings or tapestries.[53] Wallpaper of the 20th century became a way to mass-produce fine art and to create a picture of a picture in a given context. Used as a play on decorative surfaces, wallpaper allows what once was only available in luxury homes to be attainable to a larger population. Thus, images of fine art became available to the masses, just as in the case of *Madame de Pompadour*. Poggi suggests that with wallpaper the masses were able to view images that previously were kept from the general population. Was the wallpaper art, as it was in its original context, or now decoration due to the fact that Matisse designed some of his cut-outs with the intention of reproducing them as prints to be used in a decorative manner?

The artistic implication of wallpaper reproductions directly correlates with the problematic of whether the cut-outs are art, decoration, or something in between. Matisse himself examined the practice of creating wallpaper in his decorative commission from Zika Ascher for *Océania, le Ceil* [1946] (plate 23) and *Océania, la Mer* [1946] (plate 24). These two works mark the first instance in which Matisse used the cut-out to make a large scale work.[54] The artist cut-out the images and then silkscreened them on linen. *Océania, le Ceil* and *Océania, la Mer* are seen as akin to wallpaper; while working on the pieces, the images hung as wallpaper in his studio on the Boulevard du Montparnasse in Paris. Similarly,

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[53] Poggi, Christine. *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 135.
[54] Elderfield, *Matisse,* 415.

Matisse also hung his cut-out *Swimming Pool* on his wall. This is congruent with Poggi's assertion, as these images exemplify private commissions reserved for a private home, yet as wallpaper displays they became accessible to the public.

The construction of wallpaper supports this argument, which is posed on an argument relating to the resurrection of the decoration conundrum; the question is not concerned as to where an image is painted or cut-out, but rather focuses on the intentions of cut-outs, such as *Madame de Pompadour* and the stained glass windows at the Church of Vence and whether they were designed to be reproduced. *Madame de Pompadour* was a commission from L'Ecole des Beaux Arts; therefore, cutting out the pieces of paper for the image, Matisse was aware that it would be recreated for mass distribution. If *Madame de Pompadour* was a commission from a school of the decorative arts and was to be mass-produced, should it be considered decoration?

This practice is similar to that employed by Andy Warhol. Although Warhol was working after Matisse had passed away, he was also challenging the boundary defining high art and deliberately creating decorative artwork. Known for his participation in the Pop Art movement, Warhol designed pure patterns that were similar to wallpaper. The artist's image entitled *Flowers* [1964] (plate 26) as well as the *Cow Wallpaper* [1966] (plate 27) exemplifies this claim. Warhol created copious amounts of flower images, ranging in color, shape, and size. Certain renderings of the *Flowers* have four brightly colored flowers; others have two colorful flowers with black backgrounds; and some are titled *Ten-Foot Flowers*, which are ten-feet high and have the same composition. Warhol generated the idea

for this series from a photo by Patricia Caulfield.[55] The artist used the photograph as the subject and modified the image in various ways. He would then silkscreen his versions of the image onto different surfaces. Some were printed in multiple editions on paper, and others were imprinted individually on canvas using silkscreen in or enamel. Warhol, like Matisse, was aware that he was creating an image for mass production. The Pop artist used a flower, which is often seen as a decorative object, to create art.   Warhol was also knowingly combing the idea of art and decoration.

Warhol creates art through the decorative medium of wallpaper. This is in keeping with Poggi's notion of wallpaper serving as a vehicle for the mass-production of fine art. Warhol designed *Cow Wallpaper* in 1966, sheets made up of a repeated image of a cow with a solid color background; the color of the cow and the background vary. The cow was designed for the purpose of wallpaper, and thus was only created in this format. The wallpaper was exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966 and in the Whitney Museum of America Art 1971, both located in New York City. The Whitney Museum used the wallpaper as such, and hung the artists other images on top of the wallpaper.

In order to produce copies of the floral image, Warhol used the processes of silk-screening and lithograph. Prior to the introduction of the silkscreen in 1962, Warhol used stencils for his artwork. Both methods of producing art require machines and mechanical reproduction. Warhol's techniques are applicable to Matisse's cut-outs because it shows how Matisse's "painting with scissors" helped to create a wider acceptance of artistic forms for artists, as happened in the case of Warhol. Matisse's work was questioned because he

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[55] Bastian, Heiner. *Andy Warhol Retrospective* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 296.

utilized what was known to artists as a stencil and transformed the practice into his late cut-outs; whereas Warhol used silk-screening and lithographs to develop his decorative art. Like Matisse's work, Warhol's Pop-Art was originally questioned, however, it was widely accepted during his lifetime. Had it not been for Matisse's innovation with the boundary between art and decoration, this may have not been possible for Warhol. Since Warhol's work is no longer questioned as to whether it is art or decoration, does this imply that Matisse's play with the same boundary should no longer be a question either?

The same understanding is applicable to the stained glass windows. Matisse was creating maquettes, which Paul Bony then transformed into the purest forms of magnificent stained glass windows. The idea of creating an image for the purpose of reproduction has decorative implications as well as serving as a means to create flatness. The flatness of the cut-out medium is preferable when crafting mass copies, as the reproductions do not need to recreate the appearance of texture. Perhaps Matisse intentionally moved toward flatness because he regarded the cut-outs as decorative.

The image of *Madame de Pompadour* addresses on a similar contention. As previously discussed, the cut-out was originally created as an invitation for a ball, and was then mass-produced as a poster to announce the event to a broader audience. Should one classify this according to what it was as a cut-out in its original context, which is questionable, or as the mass produced decorative poster it soon became?

Ellsworth Kelly is an abstract artist, whose work aids in the exploration of the classification of *Madame de Pompadour*. Kelly's motifs, although they are abstract and focus on the fundamentals of geometric forms, function in a similar way to those of Matisse.

Kelly, who worked after Matisse, used blocks of color and silhouette-like shapes to create images. Matisse's cut-outs and Kelly's work both utilize abstract shapes to create images. Although Kelly's final pictures are more abstract than Matisse's, the artists work in similar ways. Kelly, like Matisse, was creating art that departed from that of other artists of his period. Kelly's abstract minimalist paintings were not readily accepted, just as Matisse's cut-out were not when they were first introduced. While Kelly's images are abstract, they are analogous to the work of Matisse due to the fact that they also play on the boundary between art and decoration.

Matisse rests on a delicate line between the two genres, and although his work appears decorative it has a stronger sense of design than decoration. The cut-outs have a decorative aspect, as well as simultaneously removing a decorative element. Pieces, such as *Jazz*, the Chapel at Vence, *Madame de Pompadour*, and his exhibition catalogue cover amongst others, have a decorative element, as they were created with the intention of being reproduced. These reproductions intended to serve decorative purposes; for example, *Jazz* was developed as a decorative book and the windows at Vence were developed to add decoration to the church windows, as well as the interior and exterior of the building. This sense of decoration arises since these cut-outs have a specific purpose and designated location. Art often does not have a single required space; thus Matisse designed these particular cut-outs as decoration.

Matisse was very conscious that his works were being produced for reproduction. While discussing *Jazz* Matisse himself claimed, "The result matters more than you would

imagine."[56] Matisse claimed that *Jazz* was "a flop," because it did not turn out the way he had imagined it. Matisse was disappointed over "…the loss of power in transposing the originals to reproductions." [57] This suggests that *Jazz* did not measure up to what he expected from a reproduction of the cut-out medium. The fact that Matisse admitted he was unsatisfied with this entire series shows that he did have artistic ambitions for his reproductions. Matisse's defense of his artwork signifies his classification of the collection as art; he would not feel compelled to protect a decorative piece.

On the other hand, the cut-outs were not seen as entirely decorative, since Matisse was a known artist and not a decorator. As previously established, Matisse's work had a decorative feel throughout his career. Many of Matisse's drawings and paintings provide a sense of decoration through particular decorative elements that are included within the images. For example, in *The Window, Interieur au myosotis* [1916] (plate 25) Matisse includes the details of a rug, floor paneling, flowers on a tabletop, and an open window. He highlights these decorative objects by painting them with distinctive colors, whereas the remainder of the image is painted with a teal blue color. This image suggests that Matisse was aware of the dissimilarity between decorative and artistic objects. The artist had formal training in decoration and art, lending to the hypothesis that the artist was aware of the difference. It can also be said that in order to create art an artist must be familiar with decoration; this knowledge is necessary for the artist to know how to distinguish between art and decoration.

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56 Billot, *The Vence Chapel,* 13.
57 Billot, *The Vence Chapel,* 13.

As a result of his art education, which began at a school of decorative arts, Matisse understood the concept of decoration. The artist also grasped the concept of formal art due to his later training with Gustav Moreau. Matisse's knowledge of both methods of picture making allowed him to transition between art and decoration without differentiating between them. It appears that Matisse did not attempt to interchange the subjects, but that he was content moving between the two artistic forms. While transitioning from one formal ideology to the other, the artist was discretely moving his viewers along the boundary as well.

Art critic Clement Greenberg saw Matisse as a true artist, but he was not a fan of his decorative phase. Greenberg had been a strong advocate of Matisse's work except for his later work, which he found to be too decorative. Out of his respect for Matisse, Greenberg would only allude to his lack of appreciation for this phase and evade the subject by making ambiguous statements such as "his latest work is a great surprise,"[58] or by suggesting "the cut-outs have an elemental and static simplicity of design that makes them pieces of decoration rather than pieces of art."[59] Greenberg considered Matisse's cut-outs to be problematic, though he tried to rescue Matisse's reputation by claiming that "the individual does not achieve what the group as a whole does." The critic implies that he was not a fan of the cut-out pictures, but that Matisse was a credible artist nonetheless.[60] If distinguished art critics find these works to be too decorative, one might examine how Matisse himself classified his cut-outs.

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[58] Greenberg, Clement. "Review of an Exhibition of Henri Matisse." In Collected Essays, Vol. 2, 292-294 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 294.
[59] Greenberg, "The Pasted Paper Revolution," 247-48.
[60] Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Henri Matisse," 294.

Seeing Matisse's late paintings in conjunction with his cut-outs, helps one to postulate Matisse's classification of his cut-outs. The artist's late paintings were not a source of debate and were readily accepted as art; simultaneously, he began to experiment with the less accepted cut-outs. These flat, geometric images veer from the formal artistic genre due to the fact that they do not adhere to classical conventions of oil paintings. This rose as an issue in the 1940's and 1950's with the emergence of high art as paintings; if pieces of art were not painted in oil, then acrylic paint was seen as acceptable. The cut-outs were developed without the use of these materials. Rather, cut-outs were made using paper painted with gouache, by Matisse or an assistant, to appear as though they had not been painted at all, as brushstrokes or other traces of the artist were not visible. As a result, the cut-outs appear flat in texture and in color, directing the image toward decoration. Matisse's meticulous cutting skills also eliminate roughly cut edges, furthering contributing to the flatness of the image.

Conversely, elements of the cut-outs deviate from decoration and appear artistic. Awareness that the cut-outs are made by pasting pieces of paper onto a white ground, and that the cut-out sections have a different texture from the ground makes the cut-out similar to collage. As mentioned above, collage is a widely accepted art form. Thus, the parallel between the cut-out and collage would generate an understanding that a cut-out was an accepted art form. Each of Matisse's cut-outs is unique. The subject matter of the cut-out may be similar, however the designs vary. The distinct individuality of the works is in keeping with fine artwork, and the ideals associate with such practice. Artwork cannot be impeccably reproduced by hand, and neither can the cut-out. The inability to duplicate the pieces also moves the cut-out in the direction of art. The individuality of each cut-out piece

likens it to art and makes it less like design, which can be reproduced. A silkscreened image

can produce multiple renderings of the same picture; a piece cut-out or drawn by hand can

never be exactly duplicated.

Conclusion.

If the uniqueness of each individual cut-out likens it to art, then the cut-outs should be thought of as art. Or perhaps Matisse created decorations intending for them to be art. This is made evident through understanding how art and decoration apply to one another in Matisse's body of work. The original cut-out of *Madame de Pompadour*, and the reproductions of the piece as a poster, highlight this point. With the former, one can still see the layering of paper when viewed at close proximity. However, when *Madame de Pompadour* is presented as a poster, it loses this effect and becomes purely decorative. This is also the case in the *Blue Nude* series due to the fact that the differing edges and marks of Matisse's hand on some of the cut-outs makes some appear more are artistic while others seem more purely decorative. Thus, the cut-out is in fact both art and decoration.

Through the examination of texts, comparisons, and varying interpretations, it is evident that Matisse created art from a decorative perspective, as he did in his painting *The Window*. It appears that the artist did not agree with the art critics who considered his late cut-outs to be mere decoration. From the beginning of his career, Matisse included elements of decoration in his art and thus was aware of the difference between the two categorizations. Matisse created what he deemed as art, and did not follow the standard definition of art. Since he did not believe in traditional artistic conventions, he merely created his own rules and formatted his own definition**.**

This definition arose from the fact that Matisse had always played with the boundary between art and decoration. He almost refused to choose between the two, by falling exactly on the line connecting the genres. The cut-out might be the simplest form of expression for Matisse, because he considered it as art regardless of the formal rules or

characteristics of art. Matisse expresses his opposition to the idea that there are rules in art in his *Notes Of a Painter*. Matisse responds to Joséphin Péladan, a French novelist, who believed "there was only one way to paint well … and often spoke of the rules of art" by claiming that the most honest painters are ones who create their own rules, and paint what they believe not what is academically acceptable.[61] Roger Benjamin, editor of Matisse's *Notes of a Painter*," states:

> The only 'rules' in art are those which may be deduced from the works of individuals. Therefore, by implication, Matisse sees the honest painter as the one who respects only the 'rules' prompted by his own temperament… such an argument reflects Matisse's belief in the value of the individual artistic personality as opposed to that of the academic system, with its belief in an aesthetic ideal transmissible by a fixed set of precepts.[62]

Matisse pushed the limits of convention to create a new style. The artist went against the academic standards and rules of art, similar to other avant-garde artists. As well as not following rules, Matisse's particular experiments were designed to make people re-think the boundary of art and decoration, and not merely to break the rules of art. Matisse deliberately created decorative works in order to prompt critics, patrons, and viewers of his work to become serious the decorative dimension of art.

Matisse did not think the cut-outs were an unacceptable artistic medium. He equates the cut-outs to the work of his entire career:

> From [when] … I was thirty-five then—to this cut-out—I am eight-two—I have not changed; not in the way my friends mean who want to compliment me, no matter

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[61] Benjamin, Roger. *Matisse's "Notes of a Painter": Criticism, Theory, and Context, 1891-1908.* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), 170.
[62] Benjamin, *Matisse's "Notes of a Painter"*, 170.

what, on my good health, but because all the time I have looked for the same things, which I have perhaps realized by different means.[63]

The artist himself implies that the cut-out is art, as he is trying to express the same realizations as when he had been working with traditional fine art mediums. Matisse's close contemporary Pablo Picasso classifies Matisse as an artist. The Museum of Modern Art claims the "cut-outs culminated in a highly original series of works made of paper cut-outs which continued his reputation with Picasso as one of the major artists of the 20th century."[64] It is evident that, to Matisse, the colored cut-out pieces of paper do not read as abstract areas but are actual bits of paper with texture that is different from that of the background on which they are pasted. In other words, the actual substance of the elements Matisse uses is important, in the same way that the texturing of surface through brushwork is in his paintings is deliberate. This explains Matisse's claim that he was striving for the same objectives with every medium he experimented with. Throughout his career, with both paint and paper, Matisse produced what he believed to be art. Matisse's cut-outs reflect art with a decorative perspective and follow the linage of the artist's body of work.

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[63] Flam, *Matisse*, 136.
[64] The Museum of Modern Art. "Henri Matisse."
http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=3832.

Plate 1. Henri Matisse, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1951, gouache on paper, reproduced as color lithograph on wove paper
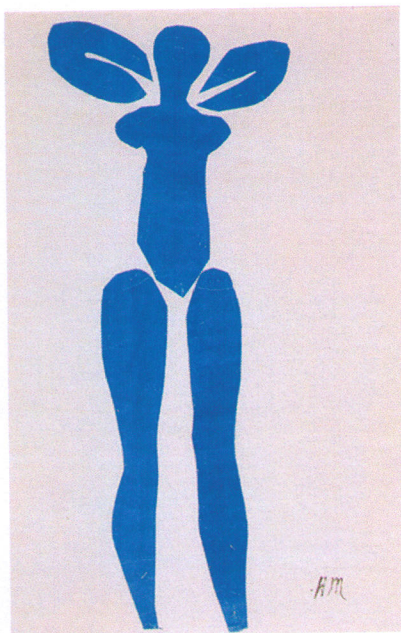
Plate 2. Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude II (Standing Nude)*, 1952, gouache on paper, reproduced as lithograph
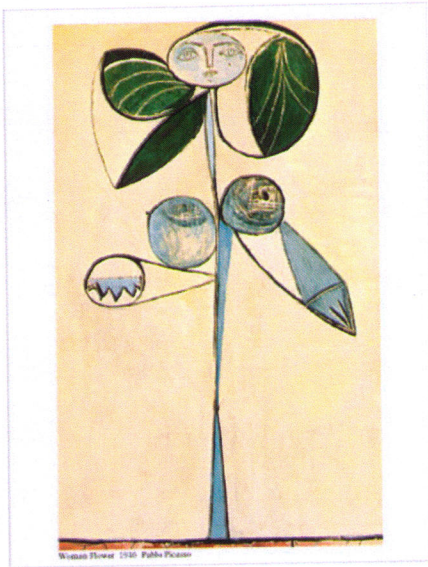
Plate 3. Pablo Picasso, *Woman Flower*, 1946, oil on canvas
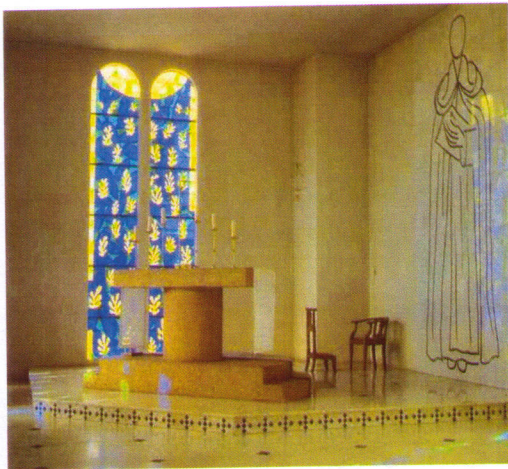
Plate 4. Henri Matisse, Chapel of the Rosary, Church of Vence, France 1946-1951, paper cut-out maquettes

Plate 5. Henri Matisse, Cover of *Jazz*, 1947, gouache on paper
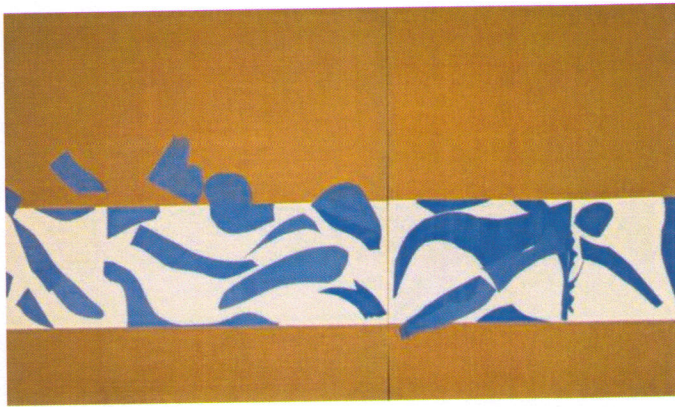
Plate 6. Henri Matisse, *Swimming Pool*, 1952, gouache on cut-and-pasted paper mounted on burlap

Plate 7. Henri Matisse, *L'Escargot (The Snail)*, 1953, gouache on paper cut and pasted on white paper
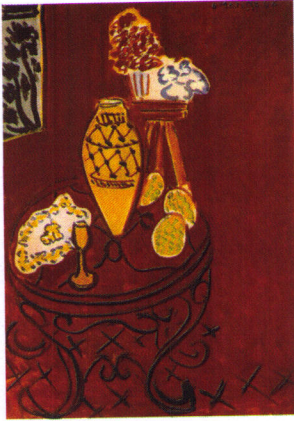
Plate 8. Henri Matisse, *Interior in Venetian Red*, 1946, oil and enamel on canvas

Plate 9. Henri Matisse, *Interior in Yellow and Blue*, 1946, oil on canvas

Plate 10. Henri Matisse, *The Rocaille Armchair*, 1946, oil on canvas
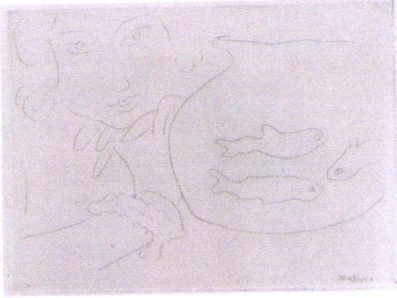
Plate 11. Henri Matisse, *Face of a Young Woman and Bowl of Three Fish*, 1929, etching
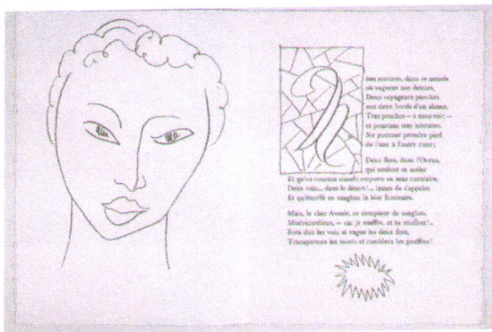
Plate 12. Henri Matisse, *Dedication*: From John Antoine Nau's *Poésies antillaises*, 1948-1953, lithograph and reproductions of drawn ornaments

Plate 13. Henri Matisse, front piece for *Pasiphae Chant de Mino*, 1943, Linoleum cut
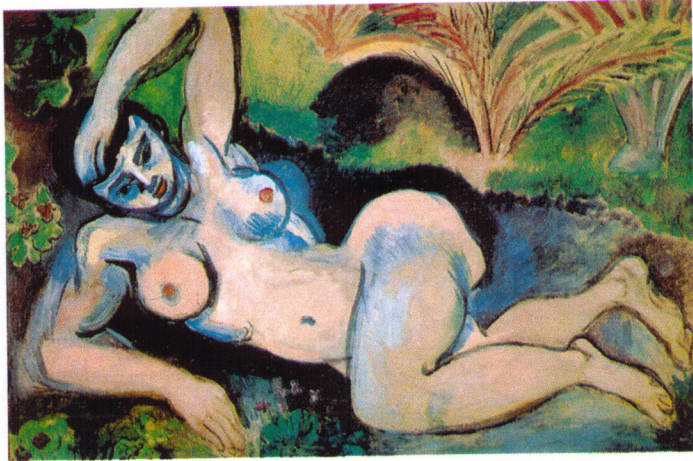
Plate 14. Henri Matisse, *Large Reclining Blue Nude (Blue Nude)*, 1928, oil on canvas
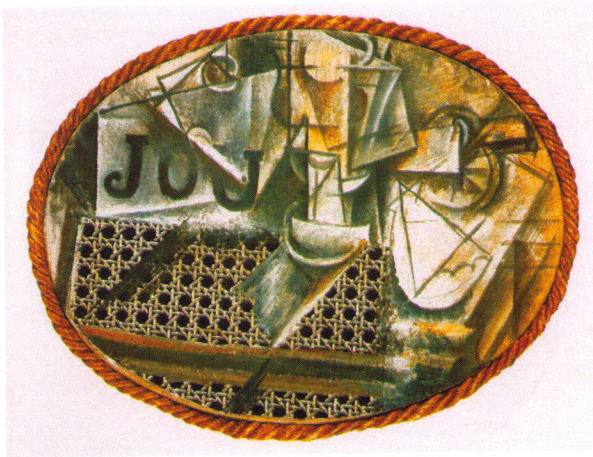
Plate 15. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Canning*, 1912, oil and oilcloth on canvas
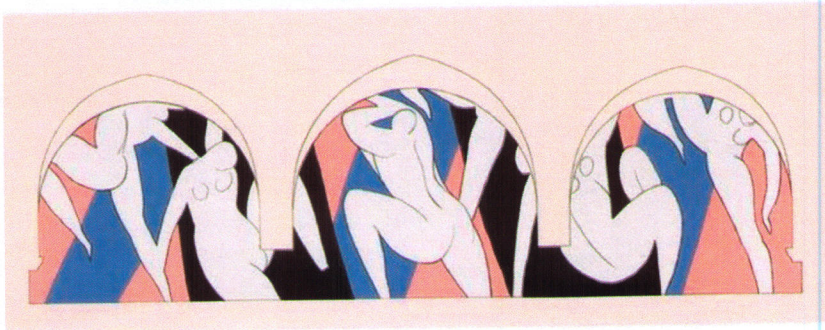
Plate 16. Henri Matisse, *La Danse*, Barnes Foundation Mural Merion, Pennsylvania, 1932, oil on canvas
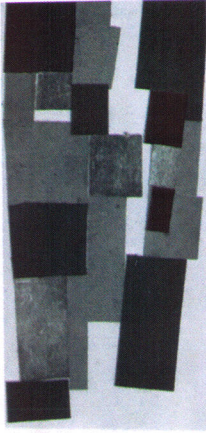
Plate 17. Jan (Hans) Arp, *Paper Picture (According to the Laws of Chance)*, 1916, collage with cut-out papers
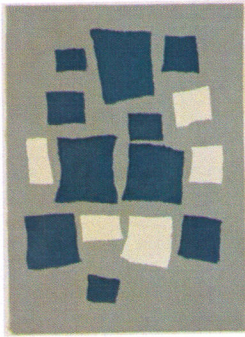

Plate 18. Jan (Hans) Arp, *Collage Arranged According to Laws of Chance*, 1917, collage with cut-out papers
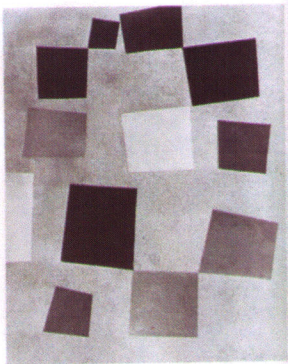
Plate 19. Jan (Hans) Arp, *Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance*, 1917, collage with cut-out papers

Plate 20. Patrick Heron, *Gouache for St. Ives Window*, 1978, silkscreen
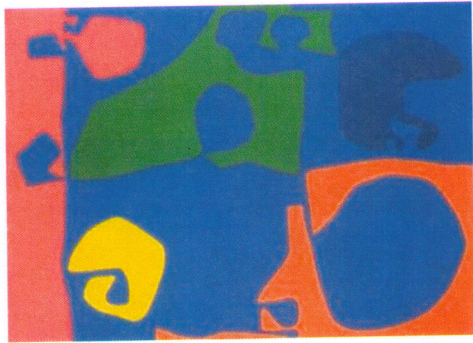

Plate 21. Patrick Heron, *January 1973:14*, 1973, silkscreen

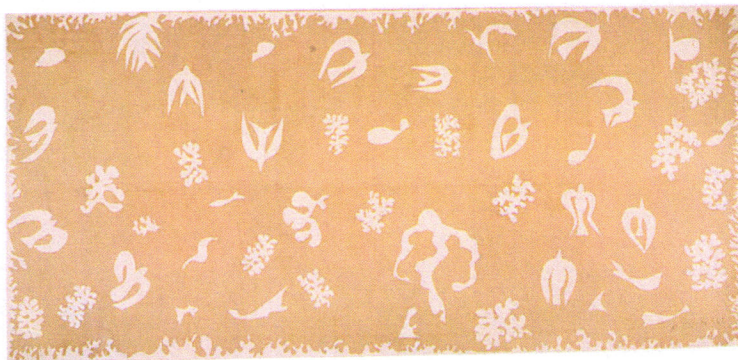Plate 22. Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude IV*, 1952, gouache on paper

Plate 23. Henri Matisse, *Océania, le Ciel*, 1946, cut-outs on linen

Plate 24. Henri Matisse, *Océania, la Mer*, 1946, cut-outs on linen

Plate 25. Henri Matisse, *The Window, Interieur au myosotis,* 1916, oil on canvas

Plate 26. Andy Warhol, *Flowers*, 1964, silkscreen

Plate 27. Andy Warhol, *Cow wallpaper (detail)*, 1966, silkscreen

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