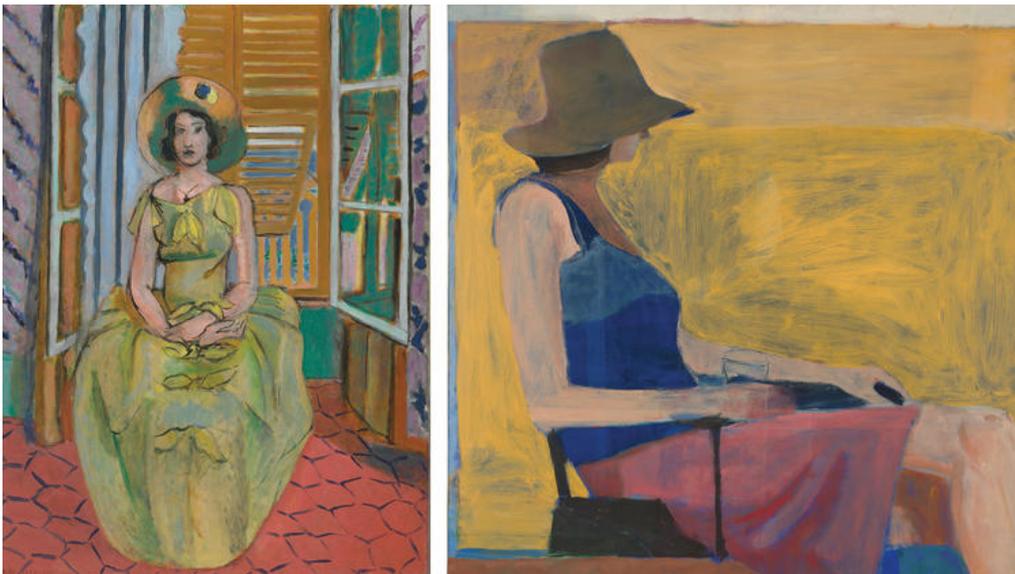


VAN DOREN WAXTER



New BMA exhibit showcases Matisse paintings alongside works of one of his heirs, Diebenkorn



At left, Henri Matisse's early 20th-century painting "The Yellow Dress." At right, Richard Diebenkorn's 1967 work, "Seated Figure with Hat."
Henri Matisse. The Yellow Dress. 1929-31. The Baltimore Museum of Art ©2016 Succession H. Matisse / ARS NY Richard Diebenkorn. Seated Figure with Hat. 1967. National Gallery of Art. Washington, D.C. ©2016 The Richard Diebenkorn Foundation - Original Credit:(Matisse: Succession H. Matisse/ARS NY. Diebenkorn: National Gallery of Art)

By Mary Carole McCauley | October 21, 2016

The studios used by the painter Henri Matisse and one of his most illustrious heirs, Richard Diebenkorn, were separated by not quite half a century and nearly 5,400 miles.

Yet the similarities between the artworks depicting these two very different rooms — Matisse's studio in northwestern France in 1916 and Diebenkorn's workplace in Berkeley, Calif., in 1963 — nearly leap off the canvasses.

Both paintings will be on view Sunday at the Baltimore Museum of Art as part of the illuminating exhibit "Matisse/Diebenkorn."

"Richard Diebenkorn was more inspired by Henri Matisse than by any other artist," says the show's co-curator, Katy Rothkopf. "Though that link is well-known, this is the first major show in which the two artists have ever been shown together."



Henri Matisse's 1916 painting of his French Studio.

029.tif User Upload Caption: Henri Matisse. Studio, Quai Saint Michel. 1916. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. ©2016 Succession H. Matisse / ARS NY - Original Credit: (Succession H. Matisse / ARS NY)

Most people today have heard of Matisse; he and Pablo Picasso are widely acknowledged as the two foremost artists of the first half of the 20th century. Diebenkorn hasn't yet achieved the same penetration into popular culture.

But Rothkopf, who co-curated the show, says that art world cognoscenti rank Diebenkorn with such seminal painters as Mark Rothko or Clyfford Still.



Diebenkorn's "Studio Wall, 1963" (Courtesy of Baltimore Museum of Art)

Though Diebenkorn died in 1993, his paintings continue to fetch a lot of money. In 2014, the artist's "Ocean Park #89," an abstract image of a sunset he created in 1975, sold at auction in New York for \$9.68 million.

"My father was a tremendous fan of Matisse's for his whole life," says Diebenkorn's daughter, Gretchen Diebenkorn Grant. "He would be very pleased that their work is being shown together. My father never stopped seeing, never stopped working, never stopped thinking about what he was doing."

Juxtaposing the old master with the younger one can be illuminating.

For instance, both paintings of the artists' workspaces — Matisse's "Studio, Quai Saint-Michel" and Diebenkorn's "Studio Wall, 1963" — feature one or two chairs in front of a dark wall, on which are tacked up examples of the artists' recent work.

Matisse's studio contains a nude woman reclining on a red bedspread and posing for the unseen artist. Diebenkorn's studio has no live model, but one wall sketch shows a naked woman posed nearly identically to Matisse's subject.

But Diebenkorn's nude is noticeably more erotic. Where Matisse is relatively circumspect in depicting the female anatomy, the later painter is detailed.

Artists who paint their studios are making both an intensely personal statement and a declaration of ambition. Diebenkorn couldn't have expressed his intentions more clearly: He planned to follow the artistic path originally blazed by Matisse. But he would forge ahead in his own way.

Christopher Bedford, who recently became the new head of the Baltimore Museum of Art, described the show as "a gift-wrapped present for an incoming director" and said the exhibit presages the direction in which he hopes to guide the institution.

"This is a model of what museums can achieve when they invest in the curators who are their brain trusts," Bedford says. "This is a bicoastal partnership that has been in gestation for 15 years and which is grounded in original research."

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