

In 1914, the combination of Henri Matisse's move to Paris and the beginnings of World War I in Europe created a new period in his art that involved more subtlety and analysis and less of the experimentalism he was known for. This transition was made particularly evident with his piece *View From Notre Dame*, which utilized an analogous color scheme, clear lines of perspective, and a rough mark making technique in order to portray a detached yet thoughtful narrator viewing the Notre Dame.

The first thing that sticks out about *View From Notre Dame* is the color. Composition-wise, the piece is made up of a blue atmosphere containing thin black lines, which suggest perspective and create a constructed environment for the scene. In the upper left, white scratches and black shadows suggest the shape of a building, possibly one with two towers which are represented as 3-dimensional. A green shape is in the front of the structure, which is probably the first place where a viewer's eye will be drawn to, as it is the only real pop of color.



While the colors maintain an analogous and cool tone, the linework is a little more varied. The black lines, which are used to suggest planes and buildings, are relatively thin and follow a clear path. As far as lines of motion go, *View From Notre Dame* is a fine example simply because of the aforementioned black lines. The other presence of lines is in the small white scratches that Matisse used to indicate the towers of the building depicted. All of the lines in the drawing feature some sort of experimental element to them, whether it be scratchiness, sketchiness, or smudginess.

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The relationship between the line and color is perhaps the most interesting part of the work. This could be because of the very dynamic contrast that the black on blue creates, especially when it is also spliced with whites, greens, and very faint tinges of gold. Aside from this, another interesting feature is the texture and technique, which both display very rough and visible mark making. Complex structures are indicated by nothing more than a black cloud-like smudge and some white scratch marks. The atmosphere that the painting creates feels almost unreal, or far away.

This coldness could be because of what Matisse felt at the time of painting this. He was undergoing a huge transformation in his life: he had just moved to Paris, was having marital troubles with his wife, and seemed to be entering some kind of overworked state of psychosis. He also struggled with the popularization of modernism and his newfound friendship-turned-rivalry with Pablo Picasso. The rest of the world was undergoing a transformation as well, as World War II had finally exploded in Europe. Matisse was desperate to join, but could not because of his weak heart. While this initially devastated him, he eventually found the rejection to be inspiration to not only paint more often but also to work harder to capture France in his pieces. With all this in mind, it's easier to see why the subject of the Notre Dame cathedral was chosen. It's also easier to speculate that perhaps the cold colors and the unfinished quality of the lines were a part of his feelings of disconnect from his country because of his inability to fight for it. It would certainly be unsurprising if Matisse was using his expressive mark making and rough texture to depict his feelings on living in a country whose future was unknown thanks to the threat of war.

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Besides the disassociation and unfamiliarity that Matisse expresses through *View From Notre Dame*, he also hints at something more. The green shape, which has a black line coming into it from the bottom center of the painting, could have been the center of Matisse's focus at the time of painting this. The green could suggest life or the future or growth. Whatever it is, it is clearly important to Matisse, who literally draws his line of sight straight to it.

Whatever Henri Matisse was trying to get across with *View from Notre Dame*, it cannot be denied that the painting is full of raw emotion and deep thoughtfulness. The atmosphere Matisse creates is one of a detached but not hopeless nature. In transferring this emotions onto what could have just been a simple painting of a cityscape, Matisse created an incredibly important and inspiring piece that transcended artistic movements, as it is often pinned down as a mix of abstraction, avant-garde, and experimental techniques. This transcendental nature is why Henri Matisse will always be regarded not only as a master but also as a pioneer for expressive painting.