



The Unknown Matisse

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Although the paintings of Henri Matisse's have been thoroughly examined, not much is known about his early years because Henri Matisse was very protective of his privacy. In her research, Hilary Spurling discovered a great deal of information about the first four decades of Matisse's life. Until the publication of *THE UNKNOWN MATISSE: A LIFE OF HENRI MATISSE: THE EARLY YEARS: 1869-1908*, such information was not readily available.

She explains clearly that Matisse had to overcome extremely negative reactions to his early paintings. He was ridiculed as an incompetent painter because he chose not to conform to the conventions of late nineteenth-century French academic painting. His brilliant use of bright colors to create new types of pictured space was viewed as incomprehensible and foolish by French reporters. Matisse developed a thick skin and learned to ignore negative criticism.

Hilary Spurling's major contribution to Matisse scholarship is her discovery of a political and financial scandal which reduced Henri Matisse's parents-in-law to abject poverty. Influential French investors, the Humberts, stole over 100,000,000 French francs from their own bank in 1902. Henri Matisse's father-in-law was both an investor and an employee of the Humberts. When the Humberts fled with the stolen money, thousands of French people lost all their savings. Matisse's father-in-law Armand Parayre was even arrested, but charges were later dropped against him. The French government covered up this scandal because so many high government officials had accepted bribes from the Humberts. This scandal and the cooperation of reporters in protecting political corruption made Henri Matisse very protective of his privacy. After the Humbert Affair, he did not trust reporters.

Sources for Further Study

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