

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Don't forget the painting competition! You still have plenty of time to create a 'Local Landscape' in any medium with the possibility of winning a cash prize. The closing date for entries is June 30th and you should submit a picture file to eric.drewery@virgin.net. The competition will be judged by Ronnie Ireland and all entries will be displayed on the Society website.

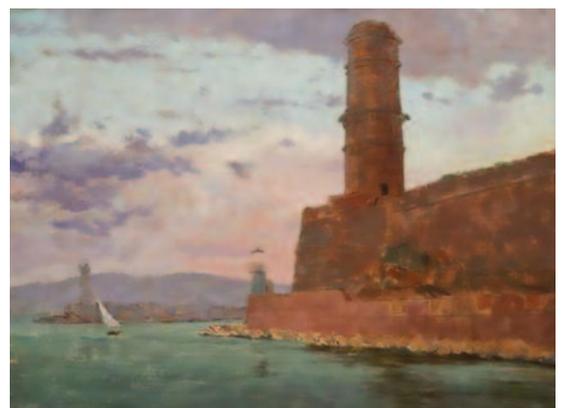
When will we be allowed to go on holiday again? When will we be able to sit in front of our favourite view at the seaside or in the country with our sketch books or with our paints? The truth is nobody knows at the moment – but 'no-time-soon' is the best guess. In the meantime maybe a 'virtual' amble along the sun-drenched Mediterranean coast of France in the footsteps of some of the most influential painters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might be a welcome distraction and may even encourage you to re-visit some of your favourite places with paint and brush from the comfort of your own home.

This will be an occasional series of articles traveling from Collioure in the far south-west to Menton next to the Italian border in the east. Much more information is available on www.studiosofthesouth.com.

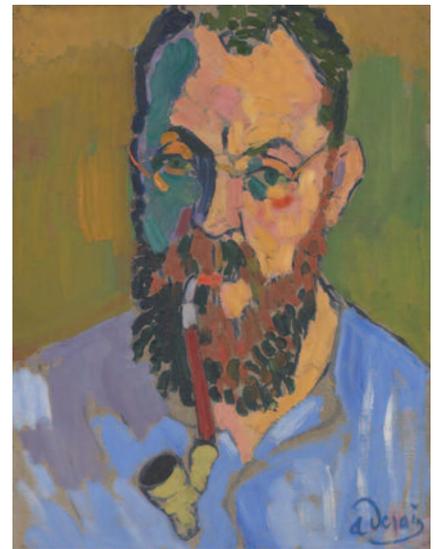
COLLIOURE

This is a delightful Catalan town close to the border with Spain and its origins date back to the time of the Greeks and Romans. Since then it has been subject to the comings and goings of warring factions, plundering pirates and ambitious monarchs, finally coming under French control in 1659. Its importance has also ebbed and flowed and at the turn of the twentieth century it's principal claim to fame was as a thriving fishing port but that was about to change with the arrival of some unlikely characters.

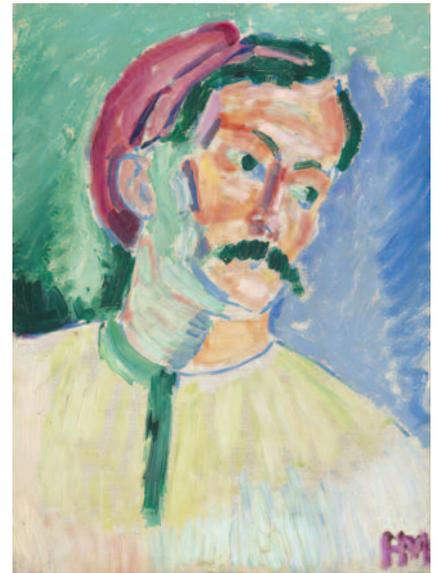
The picturesque but 'gritty' and hard-working qualities of the town had already attracted some painters from the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements such as Paul Signac and Henri Rouart who painted *Vue de Collioure* in 1891. However, there were more radical visitors in 1905 in the shape of Henri Matisse and André Derain who arrived from Paris seeking to harness the heat, light and atmosphere of the Mediterranean coast in their experiments with the use of pure, often non-representational, colour – truly ground-breaking ideas!



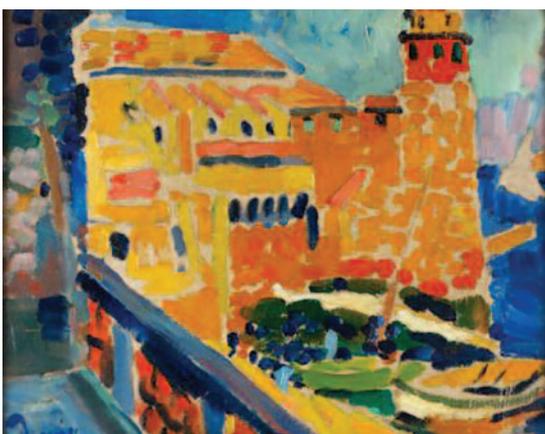
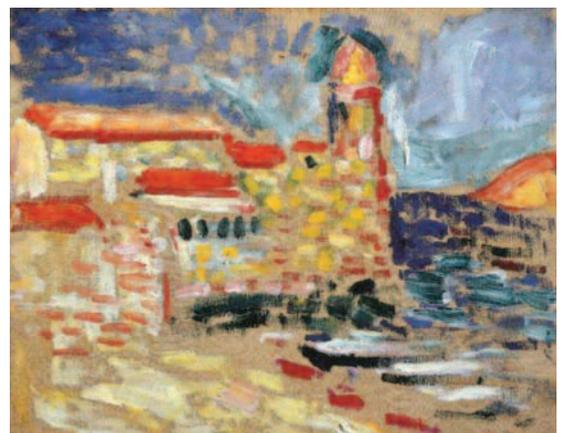
Matisse was the older of the two painters, born in 1869 in northern France, the son of a store-keeper. His early life held no suggestion that he would be an artist but a period of ill-health led him to find solace in drawing and painting – and that changed everything. He moved to Paris and enrolled at the École des Arts Décoratifs in 1892 and then various studios in the city and soon became involved with other artists in the hothouse of new ideas looking to take painting beyond Impressionism. Throughout his life he was constantly seeking to push the boundaries of technique and interpretation and it was at one of these pivotal moments that he spent the summer months in Collioure with his friend and like-minded colleague André Derain. The portrait shown is by Derain, painted in 1905 and is in the Tate collection.



Derain was born in 1880 in the well-heeled suburbs of Paris and his education was a 'no-expense-spared' affair and his father had high expectations that he would follow him into the world of business. However his interests were elsewhere – painting, music and sport and he left school at 16 with no academic qualifications. In 1900 he entered the Academie Carrière where he met Matisse and the older man became a key figure in his development as an artist and was instrumental in convincing Derain's parents to allow him to continue his career as a painter. He was a naturally gifted and committed painter and one who absorbed ideas from those around him, including Matisse. And so it was that he adopted the pure colour palette favoured by his mentor and the resulting endeavours culminated in the work carried out in Collioure in 1905. The portrait is by Matisse, painted in 1905 and is in the Tate collection.



On their return to Paris they exhibited at the Salon d'Automne with other like-minded artists such as Vlaminck and Marquet and their work had a scandalous reception, so much so that they were labelled as fauves or wild beasts and Matisse was seen as the leader of the group. Although Fauvism was a short-lived movement, its explosion of light and colour remained an illuminating element in the work of Matisse for the rest of his life but for Derain its influence soon faded as did his contribution to the development of modern art. The artists died within weeks of each other in 1954.

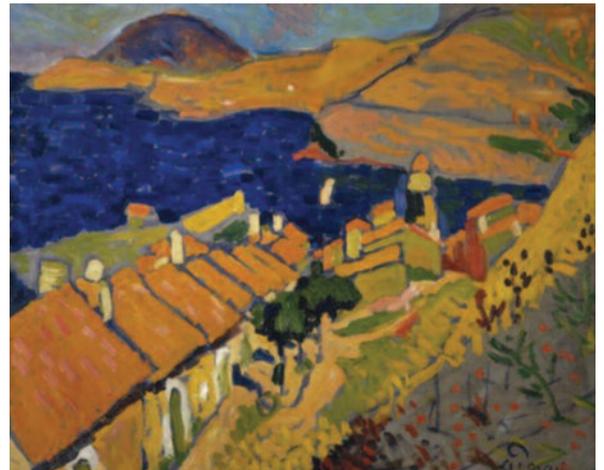


Collioure is a delight to walk around and although there have been many changes over the past century, Matisse and Derain would still find much unchanged and would recognise views they committed to canvas all those years ago. At various places around the town there are panels showing paintings by the two artists who would often paint close to one another and it is interesting to compare their very distinctive interpretations of a similar scene. The painting above is *Vue de Collioure, l'église, été* by Matisse (Private collection) and to the left is *Le phare de Collioure* by Derain (Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris).

The first painting shown to the right is *Les toites de Collioure* by Matisse (State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg). To quote the artist himself “*Everything must be created anew: both object and colour ...*” and this is eloquently illustrated in the painting. The physical reality of the scene, although easily recognisable, has been adapted, distorted and re-imagined to suit the artist’s intentions and the use of colour is definitely non-representational in places. The whole effect is a scintillating evocation of the seaside town aglow in the dazzling Mediterranean light.



A different atmosphere is conjured up in Derain’s *Collioure, le village et la mer, été* (National Galleries Scotland) but could that deep, deep blue of the sea be anywhere other than the Mediterranean? The colours are more representational but have been flattened and shapes are juxtaposed to achieve an interesting surface pattern while, with a nod to conventional perspective, the sense of looking down on the scene from a high vantage point is maintained. Interestingly, Derain made two visits to London the following year and created a series of dramatic paintings of the River Thames using the same vibrant palette.



No survey of the work of Matisse would be complete without referring to *La Fenêtre ouverte, été* (National Gallery of Art, Washington). This was painted from an upper floor window looking down on fishing boats drawn up on the beach which seem to enter the room and become part of the same space as the objects in the foreground. Conventional perspective is abandoned with greater emphasis placed on surface pattern and the arrangement of colours that Derain described as ‘*sticks of dynamite*’. Matisse’s imperative was to ‘*interpret nature and submit it to the spirit of the picture.*’ To quote the gallery website – “*The vista may look out to a small French fishing port – but, really, this window opens on the future of painting in the twentieth century.*”

Another member of the Fauve group of artists who had been a friend of Matisse since they were room-mates together in Paris, was Albert Marquet. His palette was always more subdued and eventually he came to paint in a more naturalistic style. He was much influenced by his friend and this is very evident in *Vue de Collioure* painted in 1912 and now in a private collection. The viewpoint is almost identical to Matisse’s but the atmosphere is very different with its emphasis on the geometry of the roofscape and the dramatic use of light and shade.



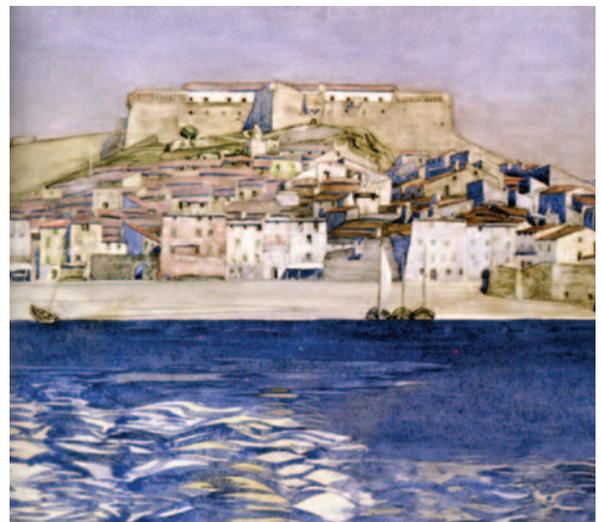
The attraction of the town as a subject for painters persisted and Henri-Jean Guillaume Martin found inspiration for several works. Although a contemporary of Matisse, he was a very different artist and was a highly regarded member of the Neo-Impressionist circle. He was more of an establishment figure and was awarded the Legion of Honour and given commissions for murals in Paris and Toulouse. The painting shown is *La Port de Collioure*, 1920 (Private collection). Other notable visitors include Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso and Jean Miró as well as lesser-known painters like Jacques Martin-Ferrières and Pierre Boudet.



Finally, a rather surprising name to be added to the list is Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He must rank as one of the most influential architects and designers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was a pivotal figure in the development of modernism in Europe. However, his reputation went into decline in his native Scotland and in England during the early years of the century. His health suffered and with the encouragement of his wife Margaret he turned away from the world of architecture and design in favour of painting. This would lead him to create a series of stunning watercolours, the subjects of which would be the landscape of south west France, including the town of Collioure.



The couple visited the town in 1924 where they rented rooms and spent time in the company of two other English artists called Ihlee and Hereford. No doubt they met at 'Le Café des Sports' now known as 'Les Templiers' which was the hub of the art community and even today the walls are covered by works by artists of repute and more obscure. After a brief return to England the couple moved on to nearby Port Vendres which became their home until Charles had to return to England for cancer treatment. He died in 1928 and his wife later scattered his ashes at the harbour of Port Vendres.



The two paintings shown are *A Southern Town*, 1924 (Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow) and *Collioure*, 1924 (Art Institute of Chicago).

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Many of you already appear in the Members' Gallery on the Society website (www.moleseyartsociety.co.uk) and why not refresh your selection. If you don't have anything in the gallery, why not submit some image files and get yourself noticed. If you would like to send new files or get any advice on how to submit image files then please contact Eric Drewery by email on eric.drewery@virgin.net.