ART 239 - MATISSE AND PICASSO: A RIVALRY

Tuesdays, 7:00 - 8:50 pm; June 23 – July 28, 2015

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Suggested Readings:
Statements/writings by Matisse and Picasso

Jack Flam, *Matisse and Picasso: the Story of Their Rivalry and Friendship*

Grade Options and Requirements:

- **No Grade Requested (NGR)**
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
  - Score will be determined by student attendance and participation.

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  - Students taking the course for letter grade are required to attend at least four of the classes and to write a 4-5 page paper, in consultation with the instructor.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

Tentative Weekly Outline:


Matisse and Picasso met through Gertrude Stein and her family, who collected the artists’ first game-changing works. Twelve years apart in age, they became friends and rivals, responding to each other’s work in both style and theme.

*Reading: Flam, Preface & ch 1-4*

2. June 30. CUBISM AND MATISSE’S RESPONSE

Both artists had absorbed lessons from Cézanne’s art, but Picasso pushed further, creating fragmented forms and indeterminate space. While Picasso’s work emphasized intellect, Matisse remained faithful to
A visual sensation, adapting Cubist geometry to produce a clearer, calmer order. The onset of World War I (1914-1918) brought a somber sobriety to the artists’ work.

Readings: Matisse, “Notes of a Painter” (1908); Flam, ch 5-6

3. July 7. CONSERVATISM AND RENEWAL

During the war and its aftermath, both artists turned to greater naturalism. For Matisse, this often appeared in decorative domestic scenes, while Picasso pictured a stable world of ancient archetypes. Their imagery of women ranged from amorous and sensual to anxious, conflicted, and even bitter.

Readings: “Picasso Speaks” (1923); Flam, ch 7

July 14. No class.

4. July 21. SURREAL PARIS, TRANQUIL NICE

In the 1930s, the artistic dialogue between Matisse and Picasso revealed itself in a series of exhibitions. Picasso painted his loves and then moved to tragic expressions of the violence and terror of rising fascism and the approach of World War II (1939-1945). Matisse returned to the purity of artistic means that recurred throughout his career.

Readings: “Conversation with Picasso” (1935); Flam, ch 8


The Second World War and approaching old age caused a preoccupation with death on the part of both artists. In designs for two chapels, they tackled big themes: war and peace, nature and Christian emblems. Matisse sought to transcend death and affirm life in large colorful cut paper works. Picasso paid homage to his friend and rival following Matisse’s death, and he confronted death and decay and embraced carnal desire in his last works.

Readings: Matisse, “Exactitude is Not Truth” (1947); Flam, ch 9-10