



Matisse in the East

Dive into the fantastical world of Henri Matisse at a new exhibit exploring his Orient-inspired works. **Tiffany Parks** has the scoop.

Sometimes the most priceless treasures can be found in the most unlikely places, and that is certainly true for the Scuderie del Quirinale. A building that was once nothing more than a stable house (albeit a royal stable house) was restored and converted in 1999 to one of the most prestigious exhibitions spaces in the city. With at least three major shows a year, the Scuderie hosts some of Rome's most anticipated cultural events, and their new show more than lives up to the hype.

The dazzling works of Henri Matisse are the subject of the Scuderie's spring show, and in particular, those paintings that were in some way inspired by the Orient. Matisse first came into contact with the East as a student at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris during a time when many Orientalists were among

his classmates. Later, while attending the World Exposition of 1900, he became fascinated by the pavilions dedicated to Muslim countries like Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Persia. But it was his own travels to Russia, Morocco, Algeria, and further afield that provided inspiration for his work, and allowed him to escape the constraints of 19th-century European traditions. "The revelation came to me from the Orient," he wrote simply in 1947. The arabesques, geometric designs, and undulations of the Byzantine and Ottoman styles introduced Matisse to new compositional schemes which endowed him with a modern artistic language with which to create his own style. Over one hundred paintings are on display, including a few absolute masterpieces in Italy for the first time, on loan from the world's major museums. Opens 4 March (p57).