

**Press Release**  
New Exhibition  
8 May to 7 September 2014

# Morrice and Lyman in the Company of Matisse



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Parc des Champs-de-Bataille  
Québec (Québec) G1R 5H3

418 643-2150  
1 866 220-2150

mnbaq.org

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**Press Contact**

Linda Tremblay  
Media Relations Officer

418 644-6460, ext. 5532  
linda.tremblay@mnbaq.org

**Québec City, Tuesday 6 May 2014** □ From Venice to Paris, North Africa to the West Indies, Dieppe to Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Québec City to Lake Massawippi, visitors to the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec from 8 May to 7 September 2014 will travel the globe in the company of two pioneers of modern Canadian art, **James Wilson Morrice** (1865-1924) and **John Lyman** (1886-1967). The exhibition *Morrice and Lyman in the Company of Matisse* is a novel exploration of the work of these two Montreal artists who both knew and worked alongside the illustrious French painter **Henri Matisse** (1869-1954).

The three men first crossed paths in Paris in the early years of the twentieth century, in the midst of the effervescence of the avant-garde movements in which Matisse was an active participant. This was an age when art was reinventing itself at a frantic pace. Morrice and Lyman blossomed in the creative ferment of the French capital, light years from the conservative atmosphere of the Canadian artistic scene. In Matisse

they saw the freedom and authenticity they were seeking. Lyman studied with the French master at the Académie Matisse in 1910, while Morrice and Matisse, of the same generation, became friends during sojourns in Tangier in 1912 and 1913. These encounters were a significant influence on the work of the two Québec artists, and their impact was even felt on this side of the Atlantic in diverse artists' associations working on behalf of a universal and modern form of expression without nationalist or regionalist aims.



This exhibition will be the first opportunity since the retrospectives devoted to Morrice and Lyman twenty-five years ago to discover a substantial body of work by these two major figures in Canadian art. The 131 paintings brought together for the exhibition (oils on canvas, wood and cardboard), drawn from public collections in Canada, several Canadian, American and European museums and 42 private collections from Vancouver to Montréal in Canada and from London and Paris abroad, will reflect the relations among the three artists. The choice works ranging across more than six decades – iridescent landscapes, powerful nudes and portraits, luminous beach scenes – enter into an aesthetic dialogue on painting, revealing artistic complicity between decided sensibilities. Each shines light on a crucial episode in our modern age.

### *A Few Essential Works*

Among the exceptional works that must be admired is Morrice's *View from the Window, Tangier* (1913), which has not been seen in Canada for decades. This painting is considered the most important work to arise out of Morrice and Matisse's stays in Tangier in the winters of 1912 and 1913. Morrice's *House in Santiago, Cuba* (1915), a decorative and modernist work, was acquired by the Contemporary Art Society in London, England in 1916 and then donated to the Tate Gallery in 1924. This piece is a fine example of the work on which Morrice's international reputation was built in his lifetime.

Lyman's masterpiece from 1929-30, *On the Beach (Saint-Jean-de-Luz)*, is a mature work that sums up what the painter had learned in the twenty years when France was his home (1907-1930). The painting *Jori Smith in Costume* (around 1935), a powerful portrait by Lyman of this Québec woman painter, was shown at the Valentine Gallery in New York in May 1936 and even reproduced in the American press, testifying to the international presence of Lyman's work.

Finally, *Palm Leaf, Tangier* (1912), a spontaneous painting by Matisse, is being shown for the very first time in Canada. This essential work demonstrates Matisse's influence on Morrice's West Indies paintings a

few years later. *Nude on a Yellow Sofa* (1926), a painting intended by Matisse for the National Gallery of Canada, was executed the same year that he was writing his recollections of Morrice, a text that revealed the close connection between the two artists.

Through the exhibition's varied themes – *The Lights of Exile, The Decorative, Invitation to a Journey, The Extraordinarily Fine Quality of the North African Light, The Endless Summer – Bermuda and the Caribbean, The Marvel of Water* and *The Homeland* – visitors will have the pleasure of appreciating three destinies, three singular paths, which echo one another. A memorable voyage to a place where “all is order and beauty, splendor, peace and pleasure” to quote Baudelaire, a voyage filled with sumptuous light.

An abundantly illustrated 256-page catalogue, a reference volume on a historic exposition edited by Michèle Grandbois, brings together the varied research of six specialists. It will delight art lovers and complements a full range of cultural activities – family and adult workshops, public talks, music, films, etc. – developed especially for the exhibition. Consult the Musée's website to learn more: [www.mnbaq.com](http://www.mnbaq.com).

*The exhibition Morrice and Lyman in the Company of Matisse is organized by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, with the generous support of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Canada. It will be presented at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, from 4 October 2014 to 5 January 2015.*

## The exhibition

### *The Lights of Exile*

*“He [Matisse] warned us against wanting to find tricks to do modern painting. You had to seek the truth, you had to learn how to walk before risking the tightrope. Matisse said that cutting down was not synthesizing, that simplifications too rapidly obtained lacked density and character.”*

— John Lyman, 1959

Morrice and Lyman each lived nearly 35 years outside of Canada. Independently wealthy, they cultivated a supreme freedom that shines through in the universal values and modernist expression of their works. Their conception of painting found no echo in Canada, where the art world preferred an academic approach or nationalist and regionalist expressions.



Our painters’ exile was thus steeped in a feeling of exclusion and the need to travel. Lyman recounts that “Morrice said that he would never be understood in Canada, and as for me, it would be best if I never went back.” While Morrice’s wanderings continued until his death in Tunis in 1924, Lyman’s ended in 1931 when he settled again in Montréal at the age of 45, where he took up a demanding crusade on behalf of modern art.

The works brought together here were created in the early part of the twentieth century. Morrice had by then achieved notoriety in Europe, in particular with his iridescent views of Venice. Lyman, for his part, put into practice what he had learned from Matisse, seeking authentic expression at the expense of an objective use of colour: his 1918 *Self-Portrait* shocked the Montréal critics, even those most open to modern art.

## *The Decorative*

*“The simplest means are those which best enable an artist to express himself.”*

— **Henri Matisse, *Notes of a Painter*, 1908**



The still lifes, nudes and portraits in this section suggest decorative harmonies conceived in studio painting. Henri Matisse saw the terms “expression” and “decoration” as one and the same thing. Fascinated by Persian carpets, Oriental fabrics and North African textiles, by the form of objects and by contrasting textures, he saw the composition of a painting as “the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter’s command to express his feelings.”

In the decorative arts, nothing is secondary or isolated; everything nourishes the overall effect and everything is nourished by it. This conception is diametrically opposed to the reductive quality that the notion of decorative painting has today.

The principle championed by Matisse is present throughout this exhibition, whatever the genre in question. The decorative breaks with realist and naturalist painting, and even with Impressionist painting, to capture the essence of the form, or what the painter “saw below the surface, beyond appearances, what is permanent and durable,” John Lyman remarked, following his master.

## *Invitation to a Journey*



Morrice and Lyman lead us to the shores of the Maghreb in the 1910s and 20s.

Morrice was the first to cross the Strait of Gibraltar, fleeing the Québec winter in 1912 for Tangier, Morocco. Matisse was already there and the two artists fraternized. They met up there again the following winter. As for Lyman, he chose Hammamet in Tunisia as his home port in the early 1920s.

Because of the weight of tradition, local models were very hesitant to pose for the painters, making this group of figures even more exceptional. Out of the picturesque and exotic qualities of the djellabas, turbans, burnous, sirwals and darboukas, Morrice and Lyman succeed in conveying the authenticity of each individual, imparting to them “the deep gravity that persists in every human being,” as Matisse wrote about the portrait, the painting genre which interested him the most.

The dancer in Tangier, the Tunisian girl and her brother, Habiba and the philosopher: they all invite us to cross over the Rock of Gibraltar to discover “the extraordinary fine quality of the light” of their land, Al-Maghrib, the “setting sun” of the Arab world.

### *The Extraordinarily Fine Quality of the North African Light*

*“... you know the artist [Morrice] with the fine eye, taking delight with touching tenderness in conveying landscapes with close colour values. As a man, he was a true gentleman, a good companion with lots of spirit and humour...”*

— **Henri Matisse, 1926**

Thinking of Tunisia, Lyman later recalled the “character of its towns, so different from those we live in, their architecture and inhabitants . . .” Most of all, he remembered the light: “. . . one understands it only gradually. It amazes you at first, because you had pictured an Orient painted in bright colours – but it isn’t at all. The light in North Africa is full of nuanced hues, made up of a thousand pearlescent, fine reflections to which your eye becomes sensitive only after a certain period of time.”



Matisse described this light as “delightfully delicate, so very soft and incredibly mellow.”

Morrice, for his part, spent several weeks in Tangier in 1912 and 1913, observing the city and its teeming life. Flâneur that he was, seated at the table of a café, often in the company of Matisse, he would discreetly take a small box from a pocket of his suit in which he kept a wooden board on which he painted. Slowly, with an extreme economy of gestures, he captured the subtleties of form and composition, the shades of light and the nuances of the atmosphere.

Morrice’s many return visits to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria between 1912 and 1924, as well as the large quantity of sketches he brought back from his travels, demonstrate his deep sympathy for these Maghreb lands. It was there, at the age of 59, that death caught him unawares and where he still rests.

## *The Endless Summer - Bermuda and the Caribbean*

*“A painter should go south; it cleans your palette for you.”*

— **James W. Morrice, undated**



The archipelagos of the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea were true sanctuaries for our painters in their quest for light and warmth. Lyman was the first to make the journey, following the scandal caused by the exhibition of his paintings in Montréal in 1913. The pale pink light of the Bermudas changed his way of looking at things and gave him a fresh desire to paint. At the end of his life, he settled in the Barbados, inspiring him to create dazzling paintings.

February 1915: war is roaring through Europe. Morrice sets sail for the “American Mediterranean” and, in Cuba, discovers Havana’s cafés, Santiago’s colonial architecture and the exotic and luxuriant nature of the largest island in the Caribbean. He brings back from his trip a large quantity of material — drawings, sketches, photographs and postcards — which he used as sources for his work until his second and final Caribbean voyage, to Trinidad, in 1921. The freshness of the light and the

calligraphic synthesis and sketch-like quality of his paintings of this period are evocative of Matisse’s work in Tangier. One sees numerous connections between Matisse’s remarkable painting *Palm Leaf, Tangier* and Morrice’s *The Pond, West Indies*, which Lyman acquired.

## *The Marvel of Water*

Water, whether ocean, sea, river flowing to the sea, lake or river, creates a spectacle with endless motifs. Our artists honoured it throughout their peregrinations, from the English Channel to the Mediterranean and from the Atlantic seaboard to the shores of the Windward Islands.

Lyman admired the way in which his fellow countryman painted it: “In every climate,” he wrote, “Morrice will evoke the *marvel of water*; at every stage of the master’s oeuvre, water brings to life with its presence — and many times again with its atmosphere — his finest paintings, which fill up with its colour and its mists.”

This fascination with the marine element also took hold in Lyman, who was struck by the expressive power of beach scenes teeming with bathers, striped cabanas and colourful beach umbrellas and parasols. He modified his vision in search of order and balance, which he attained by means of trying out numerous chromatic combinations in his preparatory sketches.

Matisse did not lag behind, as can be seen in his *Seated Woman, Back Turned to the Open Window*, depicting a Mediterranean Sea on which full-sailed regatta frolic. As Matisse himself remarked, the purely decorative space of the scene neutralizes the perception of interior and exterior, creating a harmonious unity. This quest runs through all of Matisse’s art. Morrice and Lyman took it up in turn.

## *The Homeland*

*“I felt more and more that I belonged to Canada. Despite all the friends I had in France, I remained a foreigner. The French landscape called the French painters to mind. One couldn’t look at Aix without thinking of Cézanne, whereas here the landscape was mine, everything was mine. I could do with it what I wished.”*

— John Lyman, 1959

Although they had chosen exile as a way of life, Morrice and Lyman remained attached to their homeland. Morrice, in fact, was nicknamed “Notre-Dame-des-neiges” (“Our Lady of the Snow”) for having shown only snowy Canadian landscapes, inspired by his visit to Québec a few months earlier, at the Salon de la Nationale in Paris in 1906. The



following year, at the same Salon, the young Lyman experienced an aesthetic shock when he encountered *The Ferry, Quebec* by his compatriot, whom he did not yet know.



When he returned to settle in Montréal in 1931, Lyman took back possession of the Canadian landscape while rejecting the nationalist ideas of the Group of Seven, which he liked to define as “home-grown exoticism.”

The Canadian stopover in this final section shows works grouped together according to visual connections which break with chronological order, suggesting that the true concerns of these paintings are the qualities of pictorial simplification and synthesis.

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## Credits

The Exhibition *Morrice and Lyman in the Company of Matisse* is organized by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, with the generous support of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Canada.

### Curatorship

Michèle Grandbois  
Curator of Modern Art  
MNBAQ

### Exhibition Design

Guillaume Lord

### Graphic Design

Sophie Lafortune, Klaxon

### Video

*Conceived and directed by*  
Étienne Paquette

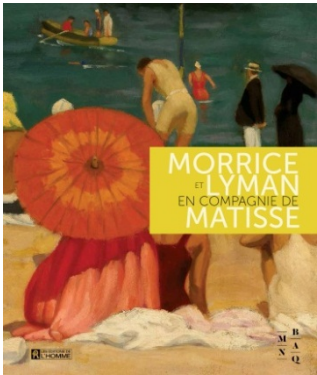
*Animation and editing*  
Étienne Tallard

*Original music and sound design*  
Javier Sebastián Asencio

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## Publication

The abundantly illustrated catalogue *Morrice and Lyman in the Company of Matisse* (256 pages) revisits the singular careers of two pioneers of modern art in Canada, James Wilson Morrice and John Lyman. In their search for an art of freedom and authenticity, they found themselves in Paris, in the midst of the artistic effervescence of the Belle Époque, where they knew and worked alongside the famous painter Henri Matisse.



The exhibition’s curator, **Michèle Grandbois**, who holds a Ph.D. in art history and is curator of modern art at the MNBAQ, has brought together the varied research of six specialists from diverse backgrounds: **Lucie Dorais**, art historian and specialist in the work of James W. Morrice; **Richard Foisy**, independent scholar in literature and art history; **François-Marc Gagnon**, emeritus professor of the Université de Montréal; **Marc Gauthier**, doctoral candidate in art history at Université Laval; and **John O’Brian**, professor of art history at the University of British Columbia. Alongside these authors’ essays can be found an in-depth chronology tracing the itinerary of the three artists and four profusely illustrated portfolios leading us through Europe, North Africa, Québec and the West Indies. This reference publication, co-published by the MNBAQ and Éditions de l’Homme, is on sale at the Musée’s Boutique and in numerous bookstores throughout Québec at a cost of \$49.95.

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## General Information

### OPENING HOURS OF THE MUSÉE

**Until 31 May 2014 and  
from 3 September 2014**  
Tuesday to Sunday, from 10:00  
a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Wednesday until 9:00 p.m.  
Closed Mondays (except May 19)

**1 June to  
1 September 2014**  
Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Wednesdays until 9:00 p.m.

### ADMISSION

Adults: **\$18**  
Seniors (65 years and over): **\$16**  
18 to 30 years: **\$10**  
13 to 17 years: **\$1**  
12 years and under: **free**  
Members: **free**  
Wednesdays from 5:00 p.m.  
to 9:00 p.m.: **half price**  
Reduced rates for groups

### CONTACT US

418 643-2150 or  
1 866 220-2150  
[www.mnbaq.org](http://www.mnbaq.org)

Page 1 - John Lyman, *On The Beach (Saint-Jean-de-Luz)*, 1929-1930. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 45.6 x 55.5 x 2.4 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Gift of the Marx Stern Estate, 1988, in accordance with his wishes. Photo: NGC

Page 2 - William Notman & Son, *James Wilson Morrice, Montréal, QC, 1900*. Gelatin dry plate, 17 x 12 cm. McCord Museum, purchase of Associated Screen News Ltd. Photo: McCord Museum // *John Lyman, 1905*. Photography taken from the film *Je vis par les yeux* (1959). National Film Board of Canada

Page 4 - James Wilson Morrice, *Venice, Looking out over the Lagoon*, c. 1904. Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum, 60.6 x 73.9 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of the James Wilson Morrice Estate © Photo: Brian Merrett, MMFA

Page 5 - John Lyman, *Orientale*, c. 1924. Oil on canvas, 66 x 85.1 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo: NGC

Page 6 - James Wilson Morrice, *Fruit Market, North Africa (Tunis)*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 50.4 x 61.3 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. David R. Morrice Bequest. Photo: MMFA

Page 7 - John Lyman, *Hammamet*, 1920. Oil on canvas, 40.7 x 32.2 cm. Private collection. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // James Wilson Morrice, *The Pond, West Indies*, c. 1920-1922. Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 54.8 cm. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of the Louise and Bernard Lamarre family © Photo: Brian Merrett, MMFA

Page 9 - James Wilson Morrice, *The Ferry, Quebec*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 62 x 81.7 cm. Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, Ottawa. Photo: NGC