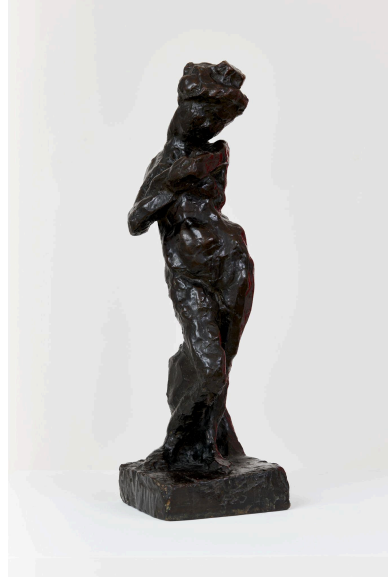


## **Formal Analysis of Madeleine II**

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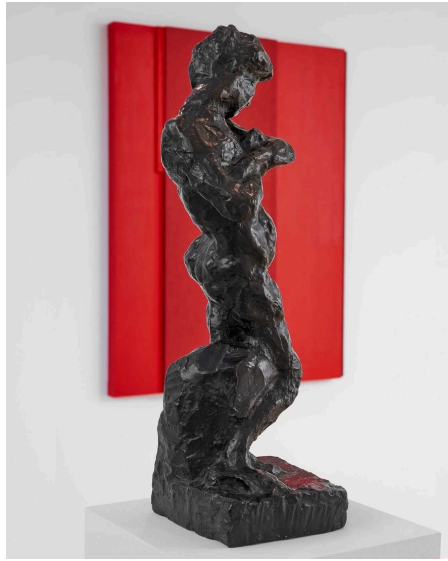


Henri Matisse, *Madeleine II*, 1903.  
Bronze cast, 23 ¼ x 7 ½ x 7 ½ inches (59.1 x 19.1 x 19.1 cm)

Henri Matisse is one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century as he altered the course of modern art as a whole. In 1903, Henri Matisse created his *Madeleine II* which was the second piece of a series of bronze sculptures depicting his model, Madeleine. Through his use of movement, texture, and proportions in *Madeleine II*, Henri Matisse succeeds in removing the personality of the depicted figure which leads to a severed connection between the art and the viewer.

This sculpture depicts a woman-like figure standing on a pedestal with crossed arms and locked knees in a very vibrant pose. In the photograph, the piece appears to be very large, but stands at just under two feet tall. This piece is one of over seventy small freestanding sculptures made by Matisse. At first glance, the viewer would assume that the model this piece is based off was dancing as Matisse captured her pose. Through this position, the piece conveys a sense of constant movement which causes the viewer's eyes to start at the feet and be led upwards

towards her head due to the flowing curve in the woman's stance. Simultaneously, one could see



Installation view, *The Sea, the Sky, a Window*.

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this piece as a woman hiding or shielding her body. This idea is reinforced by the lack of color and defined facial features. In the exhibition *The Sea, the Sky, a Window*, the piece is paired with *Fluid Red Tone* by Jennie C. Jones which was created using acrylics, acoustic panels, and architectural felt. Artist Sarah Crowner paired these two pieces together in a listener and performer like relationship. She believes that the pose of *Madeleine II* suggests that she is listening to music. She also believed that *Fluid Red Tone* is a loud piece that implies a flurry of loud sound, and by juxtaposing *Madeleine II* with *Fluid Red Tone*, it becomes evident that *Madeleine II* is attuned to the sounds emanating from *Fluid Red Tone*.

Henri Matisse was born on December 31st, 1869 in the French city Le Cateau-Cambrésis to a very wealthy grain farmer. Matisse started his career studying law and working as a court administrator in Paris. After he was struck with appendicitis, his mother gifted him art supplies

and his desire to become an artist flourished. Just four years after the start of his law career, Matisse began to study art at Academie Julian in Paris under William-Adolphe Bouguereau. Throughout his career, Matisse was heavily influenced by Jean Simone Chardin, Nicolas Poussin, and Edouard Manet as well as broader categories such as Japanese, Islamic, and Moorish art. Matisse made *Madeleine II* relatively late in his career at the age of 60. Matisse created the first bronze cast of Madeleine in 1901, but made this version of the cast in 1903.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the vibrance of her pose, her blurred face hides emotion and leaves it up to the viewer to determine if the woman is exhibiting negative or positive emotion based on her posture. This feeling of uncertainty represented by the blurred face takes away the interiority of the figure and severs the connection between the viewer and the piece. This separation between the viewer and the piece is further reinforced by the scale. Due to the small size of the piece, the viewer can begin to see the person depicted as less than human. An individual would have more of a connection to larger sculpture because it appears more realistic. Matisse was said to have not been able to “abide the formal conventions, the tricks and gimmicks by which the nude was to be realized almost mechanically (by life casts or calipers) in sculpture.”<sup>2</sup> With this, it is clear that Matisse was not able to follow typical sculpture conventions and could not settle on a set style for *Madeleine II*.

The blurred face and other characteristics of *Madeleine II* create a separation between the piece and the viewer. One could believe that the separation has both its positives and negatives. As the viewer looks at the piece for longer, they begin to ask themselves questions such as: What is the meaning behind the pose? What emotion is her pose showing? In some cases, this

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<sup>1</sup> Magdalena Dabrowski, “Henri Matisse (1869–1954),” The MET, October 2004, [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mati/hd\\_mati.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mati/hd_mati.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Elsen, “THE SCULPTURE OF MATISSE, PART II,” ARTFORUM, <https://www.artforum.com/features/old-problems-and-new-possibilities-211006/>.

disconnect could lead to detachment from or disinterest in the piece. For many, this separation prompts the viewer to lean in, finding the purpose and meaning behind this work.

## Citations

Dabrowski, Magdalena. "Henri Matisse (1869–1954): Essay: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, October 1, 2004. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mati/hd\\_mati.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mati/hd_mati.htm).

Elsen, Albert. "The Sculpture of Matisse, Part II." Artforum, September 26, 2023. <https://www.artforum.com/features/old-problems-and-new-possibilities-211006/>.