



The Dance by Henri Matisse, first version dating 1909, oils on canvas 8ft x 12 ft.

Exhibition of 100 masterpieces from the Hermitage

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In the year of the Jubilee, Rome and Italy are taking pride in being able to offer visitors from all over the world an exhibition of extraordinary quality with the cooperation of St Petersburg's Hermitage Museum and the Russian Ministry of Culture.

The exhibition which is hosted at the *Scuderie Papali al Quirinale* traces the roots of the evolution of the language of western art through celebrated works that have played a substantial role in the development of the European visual alphabet.

A 268-page catalogue published by Mondadori Publishing House, complete with critical commentaries on the works, accompanies the exhibition. This exhibition which is estimated to be visited by approximately 6,000 people per day, is considered to be the most important cultural event of 2000.

The exhibition seeks to develop the traditional ties between Russia and Italy, and between St Petersburg and Italy, and paves the way for their continuation in the 21st century, the new millennium. Some of the works exhibited are images that form an integral part of the symbolic universe of the West. Many of the works are on display outside Russia for the first time.

After nearly 300 years, this splendid Roman Palazzo, which is part of the property attached to the presidency of the Italian Republic and joins Palazzo della Consulta to complete the extraordinary

setting of the Piazza del Quirinale, takes a new role as a major internationale cultural centre, as stated by Luiga Zanda, president of the Rome Agency for the Jubilee Preparations.

With a surface area of 30,000 square metres, the *Scuderie* has remained unused for the last 20 years. The president of the republic has granted Romè city council permission to use it temporarily as a centre for art exhibitions during the Holy Year.

The premises were converted complete with the latest safety conditions. The restoration work was planned by the architect Gae Aulenti and directed by the Rome Superintendency of the Environmental and Architectural Heritage.

The 100 key works are drawn from the astonishing collections of the Russian dealers Sergei Shchukin and Ivan Morozov who, with extraordinary taste, document the essential features of the crucial period in French art that stretches from Impressionism to movements of the 20th century.

These works on show are landmarks in art history and without them there can be no understanding of the art period in question or of the expressions that came

from the later generations.

The artists represented in the exhibition are Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Eugene Boudin, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Odilon Redon, Henri Rousseau, Maurice Denis, Edouard Vuillard, Pierre Bonnard, Felix Vallotton, Louis Valtat, Albert Marquet, Henri Manguin, Maurice de Vlaminck, Maurice Utrillo, Kees Van Dongen, Andre Derain and Henri Matisse. Their works have left the visitors speechless.

The highlight of the exhibition is Matisse's *The Dance* executed in 1910, a fairly large canvas of 102 feet by 154 inches, which has become the symbol of 20th century aesthetics. The work is regarded to be the artist's answer to the Picasso's important work, *Les Femmes d'Alger* produced a few years earlier in 1906-07.

With reference to *The Dance*, Matisse had stated that he wanted to achieve a flying dance in a circle up on the hill all obtained with the fewest and simplest means, so that he could express his inner vision to the full.

This exhibition in the rooms of the *Scuderie*, a new venue for culture, is an opportunity to ponder and reflect on the origins of modern art and all that followed. It also indicates that time has demonstrated the farsightedness and divine gift of impeccable taste of these collectors.