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HENRI MATISSE

(Le Cateau-Cambrésis 1869-1954 Nice)

EUROPE, 1947

Graphite on paper.

20 x 12.5 cm; 7 7/8 x 4 7/8 in.

Signed 'H. Matisse' lower left and dated January 1947.

This work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Wanda de Guébriant, no. I 60 - 6804, dated 14.09.1998, and it is registered in the artist's archive (N° M 248).

Provenance

Estate of the Artist;
Private Collection, France.

LONDON

NEW YORK

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Europe (1947) is a delicate and graceful graphite drawing, infused with Henri Matisse's mature technique of concise, fluid draftsmanship. Executed in a rapid and yet precise manner, the work employs minimal lines to delineate a profile in a poised, upward gaze. The present work has situated within a broader group of four or five allegorical depictions of continents that may include *Asia*, *Oceania*, *America*, *Africa*, and *Europe*. The set underscores Matisse's engagement with universal themes in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

The drawn inscription, "L.R.", has occasioned varied interpretations. There is evidence suggesting that the second letter might be read as "D," thereby identifying the sitter as Lydia Delectorskaya (1910-1998). Delectorskaya was one of Matisse's principal models and studio assistants for an extended period, especially during the 1940s. Multiple portraits from this era feature her, supporting the possibility that *Europe* was created in dialogue with her frequent presence in the artist's studio - see this comparable example from the same year (Fig. 1).

Stylistically, *Europe* belongs to Matisse's mature phase, in which he employed a refined economy of line. This approach reflects a deliberate effort to distil visual experience down to essential contours, thereby conveying expression and form without extraneous detail. While earlier works by Matisse often featured bold colour or extensive shading, his late drawings focus on directness and clarity, as can be seen in the present drawing.¹ The profile's emphasis on the arch of the neck, the outline of the hair, and the shape of the nose stresses this pursuit of simplified yet precise representation. The year 1947 was particularly significant for Matisse, as it also saw the publication of *Jazz*, a groundbreaking illustrated artist's book that expanded his reputation for innovative graphic art.

¹ See John Elderfield's *The Drawings of Henri Matisse* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), particularly pages 108 onwards.

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Fig. 1. Henri Matisse, *Tête L.R.*, 1947, Charcoal on paper, 52.07 x 40.64 cm. Auctioned at Christie's London, Feb 03, 2010, Lot 236.