

<p>Henri Matisse Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra) <i>(Remembering Biskra)</i> 1907, oil on canvas, 92 x 140 cm (36 x 55")</p>	<p>initial analysis</p>	
<p>A naked female figure lying in a garden. Two kinds of flowers to the left and below. Three palm-like plants above. The figure has her left arm raised and bent so that her hand rests on her hair just above her forehead. Her right arm rests on the ground.</p> <p>The painting was controversial in 1907. Some of the publicised facts can be useful: 'Matisse was working on a sculpture, <i>Reclining Nude I</i> [see photograph below], when he accidentally damaged the piece. Before repairing it, he painted it in blue against a background of palm fronds. The nude is hard and angular, both a tribute to Cézanne and to the sculpture Matisse saw in Algeria. She is also a deliberate response to nudes seen in the Paris Salon – ugly and hard rather than soft and pretty. This was the last Matisse painting bought by Leo and Gertrude Stein.' The painting influenced the preparations for the façade of Picasso's <i>Les Femmes d'Alger</i>. This was not exhibited in public until 1916 and was sold in 1924.</p>	 <p>The pigments used are deliberately different from direct perception, particularly in the use of blue for parts of the naked figure. The colours used in the depicted plants recur in the depicted human figure. The stem in the palm uses the same red used in the human red nipples and lips. The pink in the human figure recurs in the base of the palm. The blue shadow on the human figure recurs on the grass. The overall effect brings to the fore the contradictions of the work, its use of tradition and its modernism, its decorative effects and its primitivism.</p> <p>Matisse uses a recurrence of shape in the painting to enhance its composition. The curve of the buttock rhymes with the hollow under the palm fronds. The 'v' form in the palm fronds recurs in the joint of the thigh and the leg calf,</p>	<p>The description of the figure is outlined with a firm brush mainly in blue but occasionally in black and in one place, on the right foot, with a red line. Similar brushed lines describe the flowers and palms. The body is mainly pink with strong indications of shadows in blue and grey. The hair is short and black.</p> <p>The emphatic outlining is indicative of Expressionist practice that conceptualises or produces an image of the figure separate from direct perception. In <i>Blue Nude</i> Matisse uses both conceptualisation and direct perception, but this perception is of a small table-top sculpture. Direct perception is confirmed by the changes in drawing decisions, such for the upper right arm and left breast. Discrepant or incomplete drawing has been left in place, such as the left hand and left buttock .</p>
<p>The Biskra in the title refers to a city in Algeria.</p> <p>In 1905 Matisse and Derain exhibited work in the salon d'automne in Paris, The critic Louis Vauxcelles, on seeing their paintings there, named the artists 'les fauves' ('the wild beasts').</p>		<p>The painting is now in the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art. The sculpture of <i>Reclining Nude I</i> is in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. The sculpture measures 35 x 50 x 28 cm (14 x 20 x 11").</p>