The Red Studio was painted in 1911, when Henri Matisse (1869–1954) was forty-one years old and still a highly controversial figure. The poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire had recently described him as among the “most disparaged” artists of the time. In creating The Red Studio, Matisse nevertheless undertook one of the most complex experiments of his career, a monochrome-but-not, flat-yet-deep composition that served as a proving ground for his radical rethinking of modern painting.

This exhibition unfolds in two parts. The first gallery reassembles the gathering of artworks that Matisse portrayed in The Red Studio. These works have not been together for more than a century, as they each departed the studio not long after the painting was completed. The second gallery documents The Red Studio’s circuitous journey from the place it depicted to the The Museum of Modern Art. The painting’s early history of inscrutability and rejection illustrates that it was hardly assured, or even likely, that The Red Studio would ultimately become one of the most renowned and influential landmarks of modern art.