

# Art: Manguin, Matisse and Fate

By JOHN RUSSELL

Nothing in the plays of Anton Chekhov is more true to life than the moment in "The Seagull" in which Trigorin, the storyteller, foresees that no matter how hard he tries, people will still say of him: "Pretty good, but not as good as Turgenev." To be good but not quite good enough is the fate of almost everyone; and it is particularly the fate of painters who were around at the time of a spectacular breakthrough by one or more of their contemporaries.

For generations, people have been saying, for instance, of Henri Manguin (1874-1949) that he was "pretty good, but not as good as Matisse." For it was Manguin's fate (and also his good fortune, by the way) to be close to Matisse in the first years of this century. Together with Albert Marquet, Georges Rouault and Charles Camoin, Matisse and Manguin were fellow students in the class of Gustave Moreau before 1900. And in 1905, when Matisse joined with André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck to give color its freedom at the Salon d'Automne in Paris, Manguin was right in there with them.

So there is every reason to welcome the Manguin show that is on view through Oct. 10 at the New York Cultural Center. (Strictly speaking, it opens Wednesday,) but I doubt if you will be clubbed to the ground if you try to get in sooner. Manguin was nearly five years younger than Matisse, but there is evidence at the Cultural Center that from 1898 onward he and Matisse matched stride for stride.

Everything is there: the large and earnest still-life (1893), the study of the nude model on the stand (1903), the two-part study of St. Tropez hung with flags in the summer of 1905, the full-face seated portrait of Manguin's young son in 1908 and the plain sculptural painting of a woman's bare back (1909). Every one of these has a parallel in Matisse, just as Manguin's black-ink drawings of 1903 have their parallel in Albert Marquet.

But keeping in step is not everything in art. The affinities I have listed are deeply knowing to us because we as-



Henri Manguin's "Portrait of Jean Puy," painted in 1905, is at the New York Cultural Center.

sociate them with some of the most exhilarating moments in the history of European painting. But they also set a cruelly high standard. If we think back to Matisse's, Manguin's paintings of the naked human body tend to look chalky and unrealized. When Manguin lets color go free it tends to look both raucous and repetitive.

When the exhilarations of 1905 had to be consolidated, as they were in the huge ornamental still-lives that Matisse sent to his patrons in Moscow, Manguin took up the challenge like the stout-hearted craftsman he was. But in his "Still Life With Oriental Tablecloth" (1912) there are areas that are perfunctory, and other areas that are patently effortful; the inspiration comes and goes, whereas we can adapt a phrase of Ralph Waldo Emerson's and say of Matisse, "the hero is the man who is immovably centered." But to be considered at all, in that company, is something to boast of.

As of tomorrow, the exhibition called "Gods, Heroes and Shepherds" at the Mu-

seum of Modern Art (it's there through Nov. 10) will be supplemented every day at 1 P.M. by a series of readings and elucidations of classical literature. "Myths Understood" is in effect an informal graduate seminar at which nongraduates are welcome, and it is an innovation to be watched with interest. As the books on exhibit include Ovid's "Metamorphoses," Aristophanes's "Lysistrata," the "Satyricon" and Longus's "Daphnis and Chloë," there need not be a dull moment. The images (by Picasso, Derain, Bonnard, Matisse and others) are pretty frisky, too.

At the Whitney Museum of American Art, where Thomas C. Armstrong takes over as director this weekend from John I. H. Baur, the paintings of Jack Whitten are on view through Sept. 22. They are well worth a visit. What Mr. Whitten does is to rake across a richly prepared paint substance with a 12-foot-wide instrument of his own devising. It is, as he says himself, a gambling situation, and sometimes the gamble doesn't come off; but in the best pictures the immediacy is captured intact.