



Fauvism

(Academic Script)

Fauvism

Fauvism has its roots in the post-impressionist paintings of Paul Gauguin. It was his use of symbolic color that pushed art towards the approach of Fauvism. Gauguin proposed that color had a symbolic language which could be used to visually translate a variety of emotions. In 'Vision after the Sermon' where Gauguin depicts Jacob wrestling with an angel, he paints the backdrop a flat red to emphasize the feel and subject of the sermon: Jacob's spiritual battle fought in a blood red field of combat. Gauguin believed that color had a mystical excellence that could express our feelings about a subject rather than simply describe a scene. By breaking the well-known descriptive role that color had in painting, he inspired the younger artists of his day to experiment with new possibilities for color in art.

At the start of the 20th century, two young artists, Henri Matisse and André Derain formed the foundation of a group of painters who enjoyed painting pictures with shockingly bold colors. The group was nicknamed 'Les Fauves' which meant 'wild beasts' in French. Their title was coined by the art critic **Louis Vauxcelles** who was amused by the overstated color in their art. At the Salon d'Automne of 1905 he entered a gallery where Les Fauves were exhibiting their paintings. Surprised by the contrast of their work with a classic renaissance sculpture that stood in the middle of this room, he exclaimed with irony, "Donatello au milieu des fauves!" (Donatello surrounded by the wild beasts!). The name stuck.

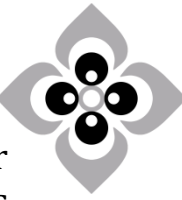
The fauves believed that color should be used to express the artist's feelings about a subject, rather than simply to describe what it looks like.



In 1905, Matisse and Derain went to stay in the port of Collioure in the south of France and the paintings that they painted there revolutionized attitudes towards color in art. The utter joy of expression that they achieved through their unconventional approach to color was a shot in the arm for the art of painting. In Matisse's painting, 'The Open Window, Collioure', **(plate.3)** color is used at its utmost intensity. The window frames, clay flower pots and masts on the yachts have all been painted in a shining red. These are a bold complement to the variety of greens that punctuate the painting. In order to organize a variety of colors of the work into an effective composition he creates a counterchange between the greenish wall on the left and its reflected color in the right hand window, with the purple wall on the right and its reflected color in the left hand window. To unite the interior/exterior relationship of space, the opaque spectrum of colors used inside the room is echoed more carefully in the distant view through the window.

At first look, the apparent freedom of his style seems to deny any skill or technique, but when you begin to analyze his efficient use of visual elements you start to understand that there is an instinctive sensibility at work. The key to his success in using such exaggerated colors was the realization that he had to simplify his drawing. He understood that if he intensified the quality of color for expressive effect, he must reduce the amount of detail used in drawing the shapes and forms of the picture. By applying the same kind of simplification and impulsiveness to his drawing and brushwork, Matisse was amplifying the sense of joy that he had achieved through color. **He wrote, "We move towards serenity through the simplification of ideas and form.....Details lessen the purity of lines, they harm the emotional intensity, and we choose to reject them. It is a question of learning - and perhaps relearning the 'handwriting' of lines. The aim of painting is not to reflect history, because this can be found in books. We have a higher conception. Through it, the artist expresses his inner vision."**

In 1906, after the success of the Salon d'Automne exhibition of the previous year, **André Derain was commissioned by Ambroise Vollard, the French art dealer, to produce a series of paintings about London.** The subject had been earlier tackled by Whistler and Monet who had focused on the hazy atmosphere of the industrial city. Derain's vision was an essential departure from this conventional view as he painted the capital in a palette more suited to a Mediterranean holiday resort. Altogether he produced thirty paintings in what has become a very popular series depicting many views along the Thames.



Derain manages to balance the expressive and descriptive qualities of color in 'The Pool of London'. He uses the conflict between warm and cool colors to convey the noise and activities of this busy dockyard. An illusion of depth in the painting is created by using stronger and warmer tones in the forefront, which slowly become weaker and cooler towards the background. This organized arrangement of tones in a landscape is called Aerial Perspective. The drawing of the image is characteristically simplified into shapes and forms whose details are conveyed by unmodified brushstrokes of almost the same size. This gives the painting an overall harmony that you would not expect in a composition of such conflicting colors.

Another most important Fauve was Maurice de Vlaminck (French, 1876–1958), who might be called a “natural” Fauve because his use of highly intense color corresponded to his own enthusiastic nature. Vlaminck began painting in his late teens, taking lessons from a local Parisian artist named Henri Rigalon. He also doubled up as a musician after his father trained him to play the violin at a young age; but **his main interest was painting, mainly after he met Derain by chance following a train accident in 1900. The two painters set up a studio in Paris together from 1900 to 1901.** This was the most important turning point in Vlaminck's style of painting, which took place after he saw Van Gogh's Post-Impressionist paintings exhibited in France. The powerful brush strokes and passionate use of unnatural colors by Van Gogh soon became his trademark, as witnessed in one of his first exhibitions held in 1905 at the Salon des Indépendants, jointly with Derain and Matisse.

Further members of the group - nicknamed fauves by Vauxcelles - included the Dutch-born figurative artist Kees van Dongen (1877-1968), the lyrical artist Georges Rouault (1871-1958), the painter of 'waterways' Albert Marquet (1875-1947), the subtle colorist Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), the Cubist-in-waiting Georges Braque (1882-1963), the Le Havre artist Othon Friesz (1879-1949), the Neo-Impressionist Louis Valtat (1869-1952), the versatile Henri-Charles Manguin (1874-1949), the Impressionistic Charles Camoin (1879-1964) another friend of Matisse from Moreau's class at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and Jean Puy (1876-1960) a participant at the original 1905 Salon d'Automne show.

The paintings of the Fauves were characterized by seemingly wild brush work and loud colors, while their subject matter had a high degree of simplification and abstraction. Fauvism can be classified as an extreme development of Van Gogh's Post-Impressionism merged with the pointillism of Seurat and other Neo-Impressionist painters, in particular



Paul Signac. **Additional key influences were Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin**, whose employment of areas of saturated color—particularly in paintings from Tahiti —strongly influenced Derain's work.

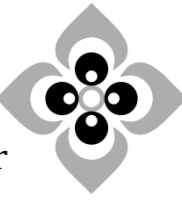
Gustave Moreau, a controversial professor at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and a Symbolist painter, was the movement's inspirational teacher. Moreau taught Matisse, Marquet, Manguin, Rouault and Camoin during the 1890s, and was viewed by critics as the group's philosophical leader until Matisse was recognized as such in 1904. Moreau's broad-mindedness, uniqueness, and affirmation of the expressive potency of pure color was inspirational for his students.

Derain and Matisse worked collectively through the summer of 1905 in the Mediterranean village of Collioure, and afterward that year displayed their highly innovative paintings at the Salon d'Automne. The bright, unnatural colors led the critic Louis Vauxcelles to derisively dub their works as les Fauves, or "the wild beasts", which the artists then appropriated as the title for their movement. The painting that was singled out for special condemnation, Matisse's *Woman with a Hat*, was then bought by the foremost patrons of the avant-garde scene in Paris, Gertrude and Leo Stein.

How Henri Matisse founded an eccentric movement on the back of an art world scandal?

They called the room VII Cage Centrale. The paintings on exhibit here, within the Salon d'Automne at Grand Palais in Paris, 18 October - 25 November 1905, were so violently bright in their color choices and primitive in their brush strokes that they constituted a willful offend to even sophisticate European art connoisseurs who had absorbed the innovations of Impressionism some years before. Critics were surprised, collectors demurred, and some of Paris's cultured class even visited the show to laugh at 'the preposterous pieces' on display .

The bright, misplaced pigments used by Henri Matisse, Andre Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, were breaking rules on faithful chromatic representation that had remained in place ever since the renaissance (plate.9). The Salon d'Automne was an annual avant-garde exhibition which had begun a few years earlier. However, much of the art on display, by the likes of Manet and Ingres, was far from shocking, even when judged by early 20th century standards. By contrast, the orgy of misplaced primary colors on display in room VII still make for wild viewing, more than a century after they were first unveiled.



This was deliberate. The artists on show in room VII had exhibited together before, six months earlier, at the Salon des Indépendents, which Matisse – the most senior painter within the group – had helped oversee. Though, at this earlier show, works by these avant-gardists had been interspersed among pieces by six hundred or so other artists.

Initially, Salon d'Automne's committee had advised Matisse against submitting some of his more unnatural paintings, such as the shocking portrait of his wife, *Woman in a Hat*. However, the co-founder of the salon, painter Georges Desvallières, was a friend of Matisse's, and he not only ensured Henri and his acolytes' works went into the show, but that they were also grouped mutually, heightening the impact.

These bright canvasses aside, Room VII also included a few straightforward neoclassical sculptures (plate.11), and it was this curatorial choice, that led the Parisian critic Louis Vauxcelles to explain the display as "un Donatello parmi les fauves", or "Donatello among the wild animals". Vauxcelles made the remark to Matisse, at first as a kind of friendly aside; yet he later published the line in a newspaper article regarding the show, and so the term '**Fauvism**' stuck.

That line, the friendship and the provocative grouping of artists jointly, led **the British historian Richard Cavendish to describe Fauvism as the first art movement to benefit from a scandal.** In fact, this wilful provocation should not be underestimated. **Though, while the paintings were contentious, the artists were honestly trying to innovate their form.** As included in *Art In Time*, **Fauvism was "an attempt to represent the sensations of looking and experiencing a scene or event."**

Indeed, unlike later, more disruptive artistic movements such as Futurism or Surrealism, **Fauvism was not a movement with a manifesto. In its place, its key participants were close friends, who sincerely wanted to move painting on from the former innovations of Impressionism.** In this aptitude they succeeded; Wassily Kandinsky visited the show and was properly impressed; Sonia Delaunay, who arrived in Paris in 1905, was an earlier follower of this school; Gertrude Stein bought *Woman in a Hat*; and the prominent collector Ambroise Vollard patronised Derain and Vlaminck.

In fact, it wasn't public outrage that brought Fauvism short run to a close, but the intensity of the work itself. Georges Braque, a painter who worked in a Fauvist manner, later said that one cannot live in a constant state of crisis, and, by 1908, had discarded the wild vibrant styles for an equally



challenging, though possibly more sombre style of painting : Cubism. But that's another story.

Fauvism was a very short lived movement, lasting only from 1905 to about 1910, but the art works created in those five years influenced Western art for the rest of the 20th century , redefining composition and taking a key step towards freedom of color.

Characterstics of fauvism

A late example of Post-Impressionist painting, Fauvism was the first actual avant-garde art of the 20th century, even though it had no agenda, no manifesto, no decided set of aesthetics: just a wide group of friends with similar thoughts about painting, and their strong belief in the expressive power of pure colour to evoke emotional feeling .

Fauvism was not a formal movement with a policy of rules and regulations. It was more an inherent coming together of artists who wished to express themselves by using bold colors, easy drawing and expressive brushwork. 'Les Fauves' simply believed that color had a sacred quality which linked directly to your emotions and they loved to use it at the peak.

Those works and others exhibited at the Salon d'Automne art show in 1905 defined the distinctiveness of Fauvist paintings as such:

- simplified outlines and composition based on bold colors
- vivid, brilliant,dazzling and unmixed colors (except for some of Derain's London views)
- intense brushwork, or even paint applied directly from the tube
- the colors that do not match the colors of real world
- real subjects, mostly landscapes, also included portraits

The Most Fashionable Style of Painting

At its famous launch in the Salon d'Automne of 1905, the new style caused shock and amazement among the art critics and public, but collectors and dealers were much more excited, and **Fauvist paintings quickly became the most fashionable and desirable works on the market.** Adding up to French dealers like Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939) and Berthe Weill, the new style attracted large number of foreign buyers including the Russians Ivan Morozov (1871-1921) and Sergei Shchukin (1854-1936): it must be



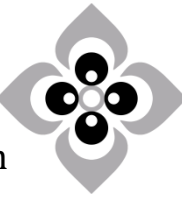
the one reason why there are so many Fauvist works in the Hermitage Gallery in Russia.

By 1906, **Fauvism was seen as the ultimate refinement in French painting (plate.25)**, and another reminder that Paris remained the unquestionable centre of world art. Derain created a set of London landscapes - featuring the bridges and docks of the River Thames- after similar works by Claude Monet . Except that, while Monet's London paintings had been all about light and environment, Derain's were an abandoned celebration of color . Other Fauves, like Kees van Dongen and Albert Marquet began producing some of their best works, while Vlaminck painted his greatest landscapes .

However by the end of the year, the real novelty and enthusiasm of the movement was over, even though the Fauvist style influenced a number of visiting artists from Belgium, Holland, Poland and Russia, and had a major impact on the nascent expressionist movement, which was beginning to emerge in Germany. **By 1907, many Fauvists had moved on to discover other styles.** Van Dongen joined the expressionist group Die Brucke in Dresden; Derain drew closer to Picasso before favouring a more classical style of art; Vlaminck ultimately exchanged his Fauvist palette for a more subdued style of realist expressionism. **Matisse remained fascinated by colour for the rest of his life**, though he dabbled with several different styles, including symbolism and abstract art, before producing his eternal series of Blue Nudes at the advanced age of 83 . As the leading colourist in modern art, he continues to be an inspiration for numerous twentieth century artists.

Legacy of Fauvism

Despite being superceded by Cubism and, perhaps, overshadowed by expressionism, **Fauvism was the most essential trend in art for more than 30 years.** And though somewhat short-lived, **it had an enormous affect on the apparent value and role of colour in painting.** In particular it resonated powerfully with exponents of German Expressionism: see, for example, works like Portrait of Gerda (1914) by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) , and the 'Heads' series by Alexei von Jawlensky (1864-1941) . Fauvist paintings were exhibited along with German expressionist works at the influential Sturm Gallery in Berlin, founded by Herwarth Walden (1879-1941). It also exerted a important influence on French expressionist painters from the Paris School, inspiring contemporary movements such as Orphism (1910-13) and Rayonism (1912-14). Fauvism was introduced to Scotland by the Scottish Colourists, a group of four painters - Samuel John



Peploe (1871-1935), Francis Campbell Boileau Cadell (1883-1937), John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961), and George Leslie Hunter (1877-1931) - who were strongly influenced by Matisse and many other Fauves while painting in France before the First World War.

Fauvist Still Life

'The Egyptian Curtain' is a magnificent example of Matisse's still life painting at the height of his powers. It is an art work whose colour radiates sunshine. Matisse understood that the more you reduced and simplified the drawing of an image, the more you could raise the expressive power of its colour. He would take out a few of key colours from a scene and use them to strengthen our experience of the subject. Matisse also realized that the simplification of his drawing and the slackness of his brushwork added to the joy and vivacity of the work.

Even though 'The Egyptian Curtain' is a simplified and stylized image, it is still a precise reflection of the way we look at things. If you stand inside a room on a sunny day and stare through the window at something outside, your eyes become attuned to the brightness of the sunlight. Then, when you turn to look at something inside the room, you are to some extent blinded while your eyes adjust to the change of light. By contrasting the sunlit objects in 'The Egyptian Curtain' with its dark interior, Matisse uses the same optical occurrence to increase the luminance of his colour to an extreme pitch. The palm outside explodes in a sunburst against the black window frame and the vitality of its brushstrokes emphasise the energy of its light. This colorful drama continues inside the room through contrasts of the fruit bowl and curtain with the dark interior.

The tone and colour of the painting, elements conventionally used by artists to describe form and depth, are simplified and compressed to amplify their expressive power. To balance this abstraction, Matisse returns to traditional methods in order to define the organization of space in the painting. The illusion of depth is conveyed by the shape of the table, the ellipse on the bowl of fruit and the proposition of a wall to the left of the window, whose angles all roughly match to the rules of perspective drawing.

The "Primitivism" of the Fauves

Today, "primitivism" is considered an offensive term, connoting the Twentieth Century Western attitude towards the presumed "inferiority" of



non-Western art. “Primitivism” refers to the abiding belief that non-Western cultures and peoples of color were, by definition, “primitive” and uncultured and in need of the civilizing influences of European powers. “Primitivism” has become equated with imperialism and colonialism and the exploitation of the Other by the West. A more respectful term has replaced primitivism: “Tribal Art,” indicating an indigenous art by non-Western people. **Though, it is important to note two little discussed facts: first, that the so-called “native” art came from colonized peoples and second, this art was often made specifically for the tourist trade and/or had been altered by Western influences.** The tribal art so admired by Parisian artists was likely to be both “African” and inauthentic. By the beginning of the Twentieth Century, fully eighty-five percent of the world was dominated by a small group of European nations.

Art critic, Robert Hughes, called the aesthetic pillaging of non-Western art by Western artists “cultural imperialism”—an apt phrase, given that the artistic looting was paralleled by extensive colonization of the globe. The artists were fascinated by the freedom with which the African artists treated the human body. Instead of an anatomically idealized Classical ideal, the African body was not perceptual but conceptual or symbolic in appearance. The huge mask like faces, the generalized bodies and the stunted arms and legs suggested anything but beauty and beauty and art had long been co-dependent in Western art. The idea that the body could be stylistically and vividly deformed and that the face could be grotesque and morphologically transformed encouraged artists in Paris to re-conceptualize the human form.

As the book, *Primitivism, cubism, abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, put it

In their own time, the Fauves inherited the Nineteenth Century’s fear of anarchism and political chaos and were called barbarians (or wild beasts), indicating a baleful anti-authoritarian attitude. The Fauves may have been seeking new artistic ideas but they had no intention of overthrowing any governments. To the establishment mind, any feints, no matter how remote, against the prevailing powers, was a threat and had to be countered with cries of childishness, youthfulness, and dangerous waywardness. The possible Dionysian attitudes of the Fauves and their rollicking colors seemed quite possible compared to the regal and serene murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, painted in cool cerebral colors. But the Fauves were more interested in stripping modern art of tradition and in finding new ways to draw and new reasons to paint than in importing tribal art into their art world. What drew them to African art was the



powerful urge to withdraw from an over industrialized landscape into something more simple, hence “primitive,” and primal: the lost atavistic golden age.

The “Primitivism” of the Fauves could be found in their choice of subjects—the nudes bathing in landscape with a new treatment of the human body . As compared to Emile Bernard’s painting of nudes in a landscape **(plate.42)** in 1097 in which the artist specifically contrasted the women to nature, **the Fauve nude is part of landscape and is co-extensive by nature** . The nude and the landscape are drawn and colored and painted without hierarchy, with impartiality. There is no humanistic center, only a reduction of the painting to a frame of mind. There is no combined action and there is no exterior determinant or reason for the picture to exists other that the figures that fill the frame. The forms are psychologically dissimilar to each other and the figures are rendered unimportant by the random cutting of the edges by Derain and Vlaminck. In the fantasy world of Matisse, nudity acknowledged as being a signifier of harmony between humans and bucolic nature in a rustic landscape .

The Fauve artists simplified their lines, often leaving them incomplete or forgotten about, as if a child had been distracted by another task **(plate.45)**. Also child-like (in the sense that Friedrich Schiller meant it) is the use of large areas of pure and undifferentiated color, hovering unanchored by perspective. In addition to their appreciation of children’s art and the naïve art of Henri Rousseau, the Fauves were not concerned about the conventional subtleties of drawing and attempted to find simplicity (primitivism). The artists wanted to converse directly with the spectator by replacing the world of objects with basic human emotions (considered “primitive” by authoritarian regimes). Some of the more immature artists, such as Vlaminck were dependent upon aggressive effects of color and upon the sensationalism of deliberate dissonance, but Fauvism sought just a return and renewal of a more direct way of living and of self-expression. **The “primitivism” of Fauvism was a means to an end, not the end itself.**

In the end, after a few short exciting years, the influence of Fauvism far outweighed its duration. Even though the art of Matisse suggested that the logic of form or reality could be created throug color, this liberation of color did not immediately affect Twentieth Century art, due to the monochrome of Cubism. But for the more conventional art world, lagging behind the avant-garde, there were educational consequences. The bright colors helped painters to leave Impressionism and to come to terms with Post-



Impressionism. **The late Cézannist period of Fauvism united a Western structure and geometricism with “primitivism” by 1907.**

Formally speaking, “primitivism” led the Fauves and those influenced by them to find an all-over production through color. Bold representation, simplicity, directness of means and a search for the basic elements of art, stripped of conventions—all were hallmarks of Fauvism .