

QUICK VIEW:

Synopsis

Fauvism was the first twentieth century movement in modern art. Inspired by the examples of van Gogh, Gauguin, and Neo-Impressionists such as Seurat and Signac, it grew out of a loosely allied group of French painters with shared interests. Henri Matisse was eventually recognized as the leader of *Les Fauves*, or The Wild Beasts as they were called in French, and like the group, he emphasized the use of intense color as a vehicle for describing light and space, but also for communicating emotion. The style proved to be an important precursor to Expressionism, and an inspiration for other, painterly modes of abstraction.

Key Points

- Fauvism never developed into a coherent movement in the manner of Impressionism or Surrealism, but instead grew from the work of several acquaintances who shared common enthusiasms. Many, such as Matisse, Marquet, and Rouault, had been pupils of the Symbolist Gustave Moreau, and admired his stress on personal expression.
- The Fauves generally rejected the fantastic imagery of the Post-Impressionists, and returned to the more traditional subjects once favored by the Impressionists, such as landscapes, cityscapes, and scenes of bourgeois leisure.
- Rather than extend the quasi-scientific investigations of artists such as Seurat and Signac, Fauves such as Matisse and Derain were inspired by them to employ pattern and contrasting colors for the purposes of expression.
- The Fauves became renowned for using pure and unmixed colors which they intensified further by applying thick daubs and smears.
- Although the Fauves were not well-versed in academic color theory, they sought out

unique and unnatural color combinations in their paintings with the purpose of evoking a variety of emotional responses; in that sense, color was used arbitrarily and was subject to the painter's own emotional response to the canvas.

DETAILED VIEW SECTION

Beginnings

In the opening years of the twentieth century, Post-Impressionist painters such as Signac, Gauguin, Seurat, and Cézanne were considered the leaders in avant-garde art. Collectively, their experiments with paint application, subject matter, form and, most importantly, pure unmixed color, were the seeds that brought forth Fauvism.

Henri Matisse, born in 1869, was the oldest of the Fauves. After moving to Paris from the north of France in 1891, he began studying under the romantic, Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Moreau's teachings were very influential on Matisse, who was taught that personal expression was among the most important attributes of a great painter. In turn, Matisse turned away from using subtle hues of mixed paints and began applying bright, unmixed color to his paintings, which introduced considerable distortion.

By 1899, Matisse had left the school; younger painters who would later adopt Fauvism, such as Georges Braque, Raoul Dufy, and Othon Friesz, were still studying there; and André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck, also important contributors to the style, were sharing a studio space in the Paris suburb of Chatou. Separately, these artists developed similar painting techniques that included the use of broad brushstrokes coupled with intense, vibrant colors. In 1905, Matisse invited Derain to visit him in the fishing port town of Collioure in the south of France, where he had made his home after leaving Paris. The two men spent the summer working there, maturing their new painting and establishing themselves as leading figures among the Fauves.

Later in that same year, the Salon d'Automne held an exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris. Included were several works by Matisse, Derain, de Vlaminck, Albert Marquet and Henri Manguin. Although they received a tepid response from the public, the paintings on display were unequivocally distinctive, particularly in their uses of bold, vivid color and heavy brush work. In the exhibition was an Italian-like bust by Albert Marquet, and its proximity to the Fauve paintings prompted the critic Louis Vauxcelles to describe the scene as that of "Donatello parmi les fauves" ("Donatello among the wild beasts"). Hence the group got its name.

Concepts and Styles

The Fauves remained a disparate group of artists. Their identity as a group only grew over time, and almost as soon as it was recognized, they sundered. Neither did they produce a manifesto defining their artistic aims, although Matisse's "Notes of a painter", written in 1908, echoes many of their concerns.

What united them was their explicit focus on the use of color as a means of emotive expression. André Derain once said, "I used color as a means of expressing my emotion

and not as a transcription of nature." Likewise, Matisse once said, "There is nothing more difficult for a truly creative painter than to paint a rose because before he can do so he has first to forget all the roses that were ever painted." Together these quotes comprise the basic tenets of Fauvism.

The Fauves' preoccupation with surface effects, color, and personal expression, meant that they were less concerned with the individuality of their subject matter. The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists had concerned themselves with locating and depicting scenes of modern life, such as the cafes and alleyways of Paris, and the Expressionists would do likewise in the years to follow, painting street scenes in Berlin and portraits of prostitutes and other social outcasts. The Fauves, much like van Gogh and Cézanne, wanted to paint what they saw and turn that act of painting into an emotional and often spontaneous journey; each journey was defined by the colors and evident brush motions on the canvas.

Later Developments

Despite some hostility from critics, many of the Fauves enjoyed commercial success following the 1905 Salon d'Automne exhibit. And additional exhibits were held in the following years, notably at the Salon des Independants in 1907, where the main attraction was a large room dubbed "The Fauves' Den." However, by 1908 the Fauves were beginning to go in separate directions. Braque began to move towards Cubism, Derain also experimented with the style, and Vlaminck darkened his palette.

Matisse would also change direction under the influence of Cézanne. Rather than focusing on color, he aimed to create strikingly simple forms, carefully balanced. This technique would be a major influence on Hans Hofmann and his development of the "push/pull" theory. And the influence of Matisse on Hofmann would be important in introducing Fauvist ideas into the milieu of Abstract Expressionism, which was more inclined towards Surrealism and Cubism. Prior to this, however, Fauvism provided an important example for a range of early modern styles and movements. In particular it impressed the German Expressionists, led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff.

Quotes

"One can talk about the Impressionist school because they held certain principles. For us there was nothing like that; we merely thought their colours were a bit dull."

-Kees van Dongen



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Key Artists:



Henri Matisse

Henri Matisse was a French painter and sculptor who helped forge modern art. From his early Fauvist works to his late cut-outs, he emphasized expansive fields of color, the expressive potential of gesture, and the sensuality inherent in art-making.



Maurice de Vlaminck

A principal figure in the Fauve movement, de Vlaminck created his most famous work in the first years of the 20th century.



André Derain

André Derain, co-founder of Fauvism with Henri Matisse, was a French artist whose paintings exhibit the writhing energetic lines and bright colors characteristic of the movement.



Georges Braque

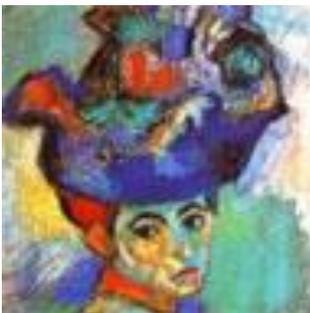
Georges Braque was a modern French painter who, along with Pablo Picasso, developed analytic Cubism and Cubist collage in the early twentieth century. Before Cubism, between the 1905 and 1908, Braque was inspired and became a member of the Fauves.



Raoul Dufy

Raoul Dufy was a French painter primarily associated with the short-lived Fauvist movement. Dufy's colorful outdoor scenes, depicting gardens, social events and busy seascapes were among the most important modern paintings of the early 20th century.

Works of Art:



Title: *Woman with a Hat, Paris*

Artist: Henri Matisse

Description: This painting was a major centerpiece at the 1905 Salon d'Automne exhibit. The public's initial reaction to this and other works by Matisse was generally unfavorable, and the canvas was largely dismissed as deliberately confounding. What caught a few discerning eyes, however, was the way in which Matisse carefully applied and balanced colors. Brother and sister art collectors Leo and Gertrude Stein purchased *Woman with a Hat* after viewing it at the Grand Palais, which was a triumph in young Matisse's career; having a work purchased by the highly respected Steins was an affirmation in its own right.

Year: 1904-05

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Title: *Mountains at Collioure*

Artist: André Derain

Description: As Derain once famously said, he used "color as a means of expressing my emotion and not as a transcription of nature." *Mountains at Collioure* was made while Derain and Matisse were summering together in Collioure in 1905, and was later included in the Salon d'Automne show. In this painting Derain used long, thick and uneven brushstrokes of pure color, creating a natural landscape composed of non-representational, almost unnatural colors. Derain approached his canvases much in the way Cézanne did: composing complex scenes using the simplest components imaginable, which in this case were line and color, and nothing more.

Year: 1905

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Title: *Jeanne dans les fleurs*

Artist: Raoul Dufy

Description: In the early stages of Dufy's career he painted several garden scenes, inspired by his family's home in Le Havre, yet this is the only one from that period that contains a human figure. Like the Impressionists, Dufy was fond of painting gardens and

flowers, but his vast range and intensity of colors, and the tight frame in which he contained *Jeanne dans les fleurs* made this a highly personal and expressive work of art. In particular, Dufy's unorthodox uses of green are what give the painting a visual and distinctly Fauvist harmony.

Year: 1907

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Musee Malraux, Le Havre, France