**Fauvism**

French Fauvism (c. 1904-1907) comprised a loosely-formed group of painters whose mentor, Henri Matisse (1869-1954), argued for a new approach to painting, integrating the chromatic lessons of Neo-Impressionism, the Symbolist evocation of sensation through colour and form, and the expressive nature of the artist. The style was not programmatically theorized until it was essentially over, and yet Fauvism fundamentally shifted the course of modern painting, anticipating Cubism, Orphism and abstract painting. Fauvism incorporated bold, brash colours, often applied directly from commercially produced tubes of paint; gestural and broken brush-work; lack of finish; and colour used for expression rather than description, resulting in flattened and distorted perspectives that radically diverged from mimetic representation. While its pictorial advances shocked conservative critics and audiences of its time, Fauvism – like many early avant-garde movements – maintained an appreciation of historical painting and its iconographies (landscape, cityscape, still life, and portraiture). Similar to Expressionism, Fauvism differed significantly from the German schools *Die Brücke* (Dresden, 1905-1913) and *Der Blaue Reiter* (Munich, 1911-1914) in its stress on pleasing decorative and synthetic effects.

The Fauves crystallized around the older, influential, and articulate Matisse, although practitioners – who included the French artists Charles Camoin (1879-1965), André Derain, (1880-1954), Othon Friesz (1879-1949), Henri-Charles Manguin (1874-1949), Jean Puy (1876-1960), Georges Rouault (1871-1958), and Louis Valtat (1869-1952), the Flemish Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958), and Dutch-born Kees van Dongen (1877-1968) – interpreted Fauvist concepts to personal ends. Georges Braque and Raoul Dufy joined late in 1906.

Historians rank Matisse as preeminent, due to his brilliant synthesis of colour and form, the rational and the irrational, symbolic poetry and material reality. His breakthrough canvas, *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* [*Luxury, Calm and Pleasure,* 1904-05], executed during a summer spent in St. Tropez with his friend the Neo-Impressionist Paul Signac, stands as Matisse’s preamble to Fauvism proper. Exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants exhibition in the spring of 1905 (one of two showcases for anti-Academic art), the painting comprises a tessellation of pointillist dots in high-key colours that model three-dimensional forms through tonal gradation and delicate linear patterns. The title - a nod to Charles Baudelaire’s *L’Invitation au voyage* [*Invitation to the Voyage,* 1857] - summons ties to the Romantic symbolism of the late nineteenth century with its embrace of sensual pleasure, modernity, and a return to mythic origins, balanced against a classical composition.

Link: http://www.henri-matisse.net/paintings/ala.html

In 1905, the Fauves also participated in the annual Salon d’Automne in Paris, where art critic Louis Vauxcelles gave the group its pejorative moniker in his review (*Gil Blas*, 17 Oct 1905). Remarking on the incongruity of Italianate sculptural busts alongside discordant canvasses by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck and others, Vauxcelles described the display as Donatello among *les Fauves* (wild beasts). Matisse and his circle defiantly embraced the label. Drawing on the Symbolist poetics of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Gustave Moreau (who taught Matisse, Rouault, Camoin, Marquet and Manguin), Fauvism invoked the impetuous decadence of fin de siècle culture. Fauvists admired the sinuous curves of Byzantine art, the simplified planes of African objects, and the exoticism that so-called ‘primitivist’ art implied, while seeking to break new aesthetic ground through the emancipation of colour. If Moreau stressed that “Art [was] the relentless pursuit of the expression of inward feeling by means of simple plasticity,” than works such as Matisse’s *Femme au chapeau* [*Woman with Hat*, 1905], his *Portrait of Madame Matisse* (also known as *The Green Stripe,* 1905), Georges Braque’s *Landscape near Antwerp* (1906), and Vlaminck’s *Red Trees* (1906) fulfilled such a prescription, ushering in a bold formalism. While the anarchist Vlaminck tended toward unbridled chaos, in the hands of Matisse, Derain, and Braque, Fauvism approached a compositional classicism, with a concern for structure following Cézanne and foreshadowing Cubism. Some of Derain’s finest canvasses, executed during visits to London in 1905-06, reveal his exuberant use of saturated colour juxtaposed within a tightly controlled picture plane (*London Bridge, Winter* *1906*).

Matisse defined Fauvist principles retrospectively in his “Notes of a Painter”, stressing colour’s relationship to music: “Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the various elements at the painter’s disposal for the expression of his feelings. . . . A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety” (*La* *Grande Revue*, Paris, December 25, 1908). Fauvism yoked external reality to the artist’s interiority, offering a glimpse into the realm of the unconscious, a critical theme of early twentieth-century art. Nonetheless, the posthumous and widely celebrated memorial of Cézanne’s work at the 1907 Salon d’Automne hastened Fauvism’s end. Most of the group gradually abandoned the free application of colour in favor of linear structure. Matisse successfully re-invented his style as he turned to large, lyrical studio pictures that married his interest in Islamic, African, and decorative arts. Derain, Friesz and Braque met Picasso, and in Paris explored a newly subdued colour palette, analytical perspectives, and a return to order.

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