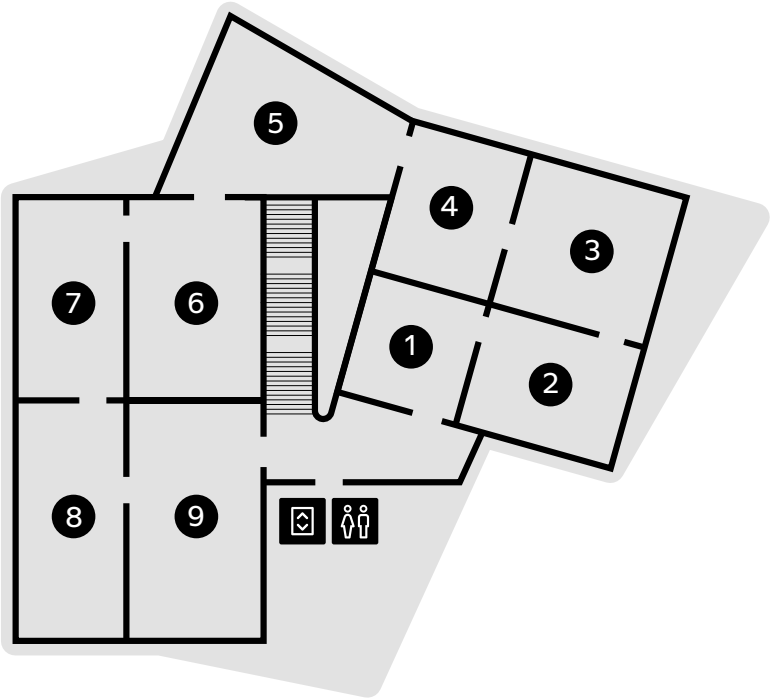


MATISSE, DERAIN AND FRIENDS

THE PARIS AVANTGARDE 1904–1908

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The Fauves were the twentieth century's first avant-garde movement. With the works they produced between 1904 and 1908, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Georges Braque, and their friends shaped the discourses on painting in modernism and beyond. Women played a vital, though rarely acknowledged, role in the Fauve circle. What united the different creative minds was the effort to wrest the picture free of rigid academic rules.

The designation Fauves (wild beasts) was coined by a critic in response to the expressive application of paint and the unusual color combinations in this novel art. The artists worked in a variety of settings and different constellations. Their motifs range from harbor and street scenes to intimate family pictures, from nocturnal revelries to subjects from consumer culture. The loose group of young artists started disintegrating after only a few years. Some of them moved into the Bateau-Lavoir, a studio building in Montmartre where Pablo Picasso was working. They took an interest in a new style that would later be canonized as Cubism. During the short period of the group's existence, however, the Fauves created a remarkable profusion of revolutionary works of art.

1 THE STUDENTS OF MOREAU

Fauvism has its origins at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the class of Gustave Moreau. Here, a number of young artists came together in the 1890s to form a circle of friends consisting of Henri Matisse, Albert Marquet, Charles Camoin, Jean Puy, and Henri Manguin. After their studies were completed, the artists continued to work together before the model. In the resulting nudes, they experimented with moving away from a naturalistic rendering of colors and with new ways of representing the human figure. During one such collaborative session, on a gloomy winter day in a gray-walled studio, Matisse painted *Nu aux souliers roses* (1900). Puy described this work as a colorist breakthrough: "But Matisse and, behind him, Derain represented this gray as a thick heavy blue and the forms of the model orange. It was striking but completely out of touch with reality. ... Matisse at that moment did not hesitate to distance himself so far from reality that it verged on cruelty to the eye." The stylistically heterogeneous paintings manifest signs of a deep engagement with Neo-Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting. The two still lifes by Matisse and the painting from Saint-Tropez in particular bear witness to Paul Signac's influence.

2 CHATOU AND COLLIOURE

In 1900, André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck became friends and soon rented a studio together in the Paris suburb of Chatou, where they had both grown up. They went on extended excursions together in the surrounding countryside. The artists tried out new possibilities of coloration on the banks of the Seine. From 1901 to 1904, Derain served in the military, but he and Vlaminck remained in close contact and continued working together after Derain's return. In the winter of 1904, Matisse visited the two in Chatou and realized that they were pursuing pictorial strategies similar to his own. The following summer, on Signac's recommendation, Matisse traveled with his family to the remote Southern French fishing village of Collioure near the Spanish border. Derain joined them and worked side by side with Matisse. Here, they developed a new visual language centered around the depiction of Mediterranean light and the negation of shadow. Matisse and Derain developed an impasto, expressive kind of painting that reconceptualized the relationship between light and shadow as well as foreground and background. The landscape paintings created at Collioure were groundbreaking for the further development of Fauvism and led to the Salon scandal of 1905.

Henri Matisse, *La Plage rouge*, 1905

This work is a characteristic example of Matisse's experimentation with color in Collioure. When the work was first presented to the public at Galerie Druet, Paris, in the fall of 1905, the artist remarked: "You're no doubt baffled to see a beach in this hue, in reality it consisted of yellow sand. I noticed that I had painted it in red, so the next day I tried yellow. But that didn't work at all, which is why I applied the red again." The red sand illustrates that Matisse no longer tied representational color to reality. The painter's objective was instead to render his personal perception of the landscape.

3 NORMANDY AND THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

In the wake of the Salon scandal, artists from Le Havre, namely Georges Braque, Raoul Dufy and Othon Friesz, sought to be close to the Fauves. The young painters went on excursions—often in pairs—and took advantage of the rapid expansion of the railroad network during the Belle Époque. They were pioneers in the development of tourism in Southern France. The paintings produced during this time bear witness to the close exchange between the artists. For their travels, they sought out destinations that had already been painted by the Impressionists, whether in the Parisian countryside, in Normandy, or in the South of France. Derain, Braque, and Friesz repeatedly traveled to L'Estaque, a village near Marseille closely associated with Paul Cezanne (Camoin maintained personal contact with him). In terms of subject matter, the focus was on coastal landscapes and seaside resorts. The artists depicted bourgeois consumer society, drawing on the emerging advertising industry and the culture of tourism and leisure. Because of their rapid painting style and the two-dimensional effect of the pictures, art critics denigrated them as «*affichistes*» (poster artists). They dispensed with priming the canvas, used mostly unmixed colors, combined different forms of paint application, or painted directly from the tube.

Albert Marquet, *Affiches à Trouville*, 1906

Around 1900, the seaports of Normandy were popular destinations for affluent bourgeois vacationers from Paris. In this work, Marquet's interest is focused on the large and colorful posters on billboards towering over the beach, emblems of the expanding advertising industry and the nascent mass consumerism. The structured and planar arrangement of the posters is broken up by the visible brushwork and the boldly colorful palette.

4 STILL LIFE AND FAMILY SCENES

Contrary to their reputation as «young savages», the painters produced family scenes and still lifes. Amélie Matisse-Parayre often modeled for her husband. She was a key member of the Fauve circle of artists. Without the financial resources provided by the income from her millinery business, Matisse would not have been able to pursue his artistic endeavors. Madame Matisse was also painted by Derain, Marquet, and Camoin—the latter portrayed her knotting a tapestry based on a design by Derain, which was exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1905. Vlaminck and Derain painted dark interiors imbued with the spirit of the previous century. Robert Delaunay and Dufy turned images of flowers and conservatories into bright patterns and planes of color. In this way, they simultaneously condensed and opened up the picture plane. Among the paintings are some portraits of children and teenagers. Their faces exemplify the revolutionary use of color. The Fauves had a great interest in the experiential spaces of children, in their drawings and their unconventional, open perception of the world.

Charles Camoin, *Madame Matisse faisant de la tapisserie*, 1904

This portrait by Charles Camoin shows Amélie Matisse-Parayre at work. Henri Matisse's wife was a gifted modiste who ran her own fashion shop from 1899 until 1902. Before her husband was successful with his art, her business was vital to supporting the family, which by then numbered five. As the painting records, she was often dressed after the latest fashion. The loose-fitting garment, a kimono, did not constrain her at work; by contrast with the bodice, it was regarded as a symbol of—physical and personal—freedom. Camoin's detailed rendition of the fabrics reflects his interest in artisan craftwork, which did not command the same prestige as painting.

5

Émilie Charmy, *Berthe Weill*, 1910

In 1901, Berthe Weill opened her own art gallery in Paris, one of the first women to do so. Within months, in February of 1902, she mounted an exhibition of works by Matisse and Marquet, putting herself on the map as an important patron of the Fauves. She remained close with many of them over the years and repeatedly exhibited their art. She also promoted young women artists: she and Émilie Charmy, who painted her portrait in 1910, struck up a long-lasting friendship. Marie Laurencin, too, had work in several group shows hosted by Weill. The programming of her gallery, which continued to showcase young and as yet obscure artists, made her a pioneer of the trade in modernist art.

6 CITY AND NIGHT LIFE

Many of the Fauves' paintings were produced in Montmartre, which was both an artists' quarter and the center of Parisian nightlife and prostitution. Camoin, Derain, and Kees van Dongen had their studios near the infamous concert halls, *variétés*, and dance halls. The Fauves painted numerous portraits of sex workers, singers, and dancers. As revolutionary as the new painterly means appeared, the relationships between the sexes were deeply patriarchal. The works bear witness to asymmetrical power relations and to a sexualized perspective on the female body. Derain's series of London Paintings (1906–07) occupies a singular position within Fauvism: on the initiative of the art dealer Ambroise Vollard, Derain traveled to London to paint cityscapes. It was a calculated undertaking: in 1904 Claude Monet had mounted an exhibition of London paintings at the Parisian Galerie Druet that enjoyed considerable commercial success. Although Derain's paintings are based on urban life and the banks of the Thames, they have a life of their own with regard to their coloration. The majority of the works were completed in the studio in Paris and are marked by a critical engagement with the Impressionist tradition.

Émilie Charmy, *Autoportrait*, 1906

In 1906, it was far from normal for a woman to paint herself in a lascivious pose baring one breast. She risked being regarded as licentious, at a time when women were judged by their compliance with strict standards of modesty. Charmy used the sexualized pose to stage her body on her own terms and without regard for social norms. For the artist, who also painted pictures of prostitutes, it was a powerful demonstration of her rejection of the patriarchal society in which she had grown up.

Kees van Dongen, *Modjesko, sopranieste*, 1908

In this picture, van Dongen portrays the African-American drag performer Claude Modjesko, who toured Europe in the early years of the century. The *sopranieste*, captured in profile, occupies the entire pictorial space. Her mouth is wide open, her shrill voice projecting far beyond the frame. Modjesko performed at cabarets under the stage names “Black Patti” and “Patti Créole,” a role that frequently inflamed audiences’ racist and heteronormative prejudices. The press described Modjesko sometimes as a man, sometimes as a woman, but always emphasized his skin color.

7 PASTORALS AND IDYLLS

Continuing in the French pictorial tradition of the pastoral—which the Fauves absorbed through the works of artists such as Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Cezanne—the artists created symbolically charged counter-worlds to city life. In these idyllic, idealized landscapes, they blended greatly varied iconographic references, from subjects referencing anarchistic pictures, to figures from medieval Arthurian legends, to Cambodian temple friezes and Oceanic ornaments. The images are riddled with cultural appropriations and imagined appeals to a «national» medieval history. They testify to an escapism that uses arresting color to evoke associations of places that are both temporally and geographically remote. Henri Rousseau and Paul Gauguin were thus important artistic predecessors for the Fauves. The exoticist references are part and parcel of the ideology and infrastructure of French colonialism at the turn of the century. The Fauves are considered the first painters to buy African masks.

Maurice de Vlaminck, *Nu rouge*, 1905

In 1905, Maurice de Vlaminck acquired a Fang mask from Gabon, which he later sold on to Derain. For *Nu rouge*, Vlaminck appears to have taken inspiration from the mask—we can make out formal borrowings in the depiction of the woman's face, which is rendered in simplified geometric features. A few outlines sketch her body, which is lent an extraordinarily flat aspect by the monochrome red. The background composed of blues and greens suggests a landscape. With its emphasis on the figure's sexual attributes and the unusually masklike face, the picture is informed by an exoticist gaze.

Marie Laurencin, *Diane à la chasse*, 1908

Marie Laurencin was known by the nicknames "la biche parmi les fauves" ("the hind among the Fauves") and "la fauvette." As Georges Braque's fellow student and partner of Guillaume Apollinaire, she was admitted to the avant-gardist circle yet kept down by its male members. In *Diane à la chasse*, she combines the worlds of animals and plants in an ornamental pattern set before a blue background. Diana, the goddess of the hunt and the artist's alter ego, presents herself at the center, borne by a deer. The woman with windblown hair shines forth from the picture and fixes us with her gaze—a self-assured ruler of her realm.

8 CERAMICS, SCULPTURE, AND WORKS ON PAPER

The artists questioned the academic conventions of representation not only in the medium of painting, but also in printmaking and sculpture: a series of hand-sized sculptures made between 1904 and 1909 attest to how important the exploration of the human figure was in Matisse's work. The tactile manipulation of the material is emphasized, and at the same time this rough working of the modeling clay is contrasted by the fragility and grace of the small figures. The search for novel figural representation is also conveyed in the graphic works. Using the technically simple printing process of the woodcut, Derain and Matisse experimented with new configurations that make the distinction between Fauvism and Cubism seem obsolete. The interest in the experimental loosening of time-honored techniques and materials is also evident in their exploration of ceramics. The Fauve artists produced faience objects in the studio of André Metthey in Asnières. The vases, plates, and bowls testify to the interest in an aesthetic transformation of their immediate living environment. In retrospect, the ceramics shown

by the Fauves at the 1907 autumn Salon can be described as the final high point of the loose group of artists.

9 INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Fauvism played a central role in the international development of modern art in Europe; at the same time, it was not an isolated phenomenon, but took place in a transnational context. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Marianne von Werefkin were also in Paris at the same time and sometimes exhibited in the salons. The members of the German artists' association *Die Brücke* were simultaneously concerned with similar issues and in some cases also explicitly referenced the paintings of the Fauves. The works of Matisse inspired particularly intense engagement and received all the more attention from 1908 onward, when the artist opened his own private academy whose students were mostly international. At the same time he published his *Notes d'un peintre*. The text is a theoretical defense of his conception of painting, which was translated into numerous languages. Fauvism/Post-Impressionism also had a broad reception in the United Kingdom and the United States—facilitated in England not least by the artist and critic Roger Fry, and in the US by the collectors Leo, Sarah, and Gertrude Stein as well as the artist Max Weber.

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