

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## THE "WILD BEASTS": FAUVISM AND ITS AFFINITIES

### MAJOR SPRING EXHIBITION OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The Fauves, the group of artists led by Matisse who revolutionized the art of painting by the extraordinary brilliance and purity of color of their work in the early years of this century are the subject of the major spring exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, from March 26 through June 1. The "Wild Beasts": Fauvism and Its Affinities, the first comprehensive exhibition of Fauvist art to be seen in this country for more than 25 years, was directed by John Elderfield, Curator of Painting and Sculpture, who has also written the accompanying book.\* The exhibition has been made possible by grants from SCM Corporation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The exhibition consists of more than 100 paintings and related graphic works and sculptures, most of which were borrowed from collections all over the world. Several important paintings by Matisse and Derain, among others, have not previously been shown in this country. The exhibition will travel, later this year, to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Kimball Art Museum in Fort Worth.

When Matisse and his friends first exhibited their paintings together in 1905, it was to shocked and surprised reactions and, they were called "les fauves" or "wild beasts". But, as Mr. Elderfield notes, "Genuinely new art is always challenging....shock and surprise quickly disappear. To look again at these exquisitely decorative paintings is to realize that the term Fauvism

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\*THE "WILD BEASTS": FAUVISM AND ITS AFFINITIES by John Elderfield. 168 pages, 206 illustrations (24 in color). \$15.00 clothbound; \$7.95 paperbound. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Distributed to the trade by Oxford University Press, New York, Toronto.

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tells us hardly anything at all about the ambitions or concepts that inform Fauvist art."

The main section of the exhibition contains the classic Fauve paintings of 1905 - 1907 by each of the principal Fauve artists, including particularly important works by Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck, as well as major paintings by Braque, Dufy, van Dongen, Friesz, Manguin and Marquet.

If Fauvism did seem shocking in 1905, it was only to those not yet adjusted to earlier avant-garde art, as the works in the introductory orientation galleries of the exhibition make clear: paintings of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist traditions that influenced the development of Fauvism; so-called "proto-Fauve" works made by the Fauve painters themselves; and paintings by artists outside France who later worked in the Fauve style. Shown here together for the first time are Matisse's study and definitive version of Luxe, calme et volupté (1904-1905) and Derain's L'Age d'or (1905), their important multi-figure compositions representing a poetic, ideal world and painted in the Neo-Impressionist style. Derain's panoramic The Turning Road, L'Estaque (1906), which opens the exhibition, shows the vivid, decorative culmination of the same theme.

The works in the main galleries of the exhibition reveal that Fauvism passed through three fairly distinct stylistic phases: First, the early Neo-Impressionist-derived manner of Derain's Effects of Sunlight on the Water and Charing Cross Bridge (1905) gave way to a mixed-technique style of blocks and areas of flat, pure and often arbitrary color and loose, sketch-like drawing. This style properly emerged in the summer of 1905, when Derain and Matisse worked together at the small Mediterranean seaport of Collioure. Matisse's The Open Window, Collioure and Matisse's and Derain's landscapes of that summer typify the first Fauve style. Manguin's The Vale, Saint-Tropez

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(1905), Dufy's The Railway Wagon (1905) and Vlaminck's "block and swirl" landscapes of 1906, such as The Bridge at Chatou and The Houses at Chatou, show amended versions of this style as practiced by other Fauves.

In 1906, the mixed-technique style gradually gave way to a more consistent use of flat areas of color. If the Neo-Impressionists and van Gogh lie behind the first Fauve style, Gauguin influenced the second. Although Matisse continued to use the mixed-technique style in 1906, and to remarkably various effect, in such masterpieces as Girl Reading (La Lecture), The Gypsy, and "Oriental" Rugs, he concurrently began painting in the flat-color-area style.

In the winter of 1906-1907, he produced The Young Sailor, II, a lyrical decorative work that looks forward to the idealized forms of his post-Fauvist art. Derain, in contrast, worked consistently in the flat-color-area style in 1906, as seen in Charing Cross Bridge, the strongly Gauguinesque Hyde Park, Landscape at L'Estaque and the panoramic The Turning Road, L'Estaque which show how he brought this method to fruition.

Most of the other Fauves came to artistic maturity in 1906, producing their versions of this second Fauve style. Vlaminck, however, avoided it by and large, preferring the more excited effects of a heavily impastoed broken-touch method. Nevertheless, one of his very rare flat-color-area works, The Village, is among the most impressive of Fauve paintings. Van Dongen's Fauve work can best be related stylistically to the style of 1906 -- though in fact he worked in this manner right through his Fauve period. His development was largely independent of the others', and his preferred subjects, portraits and scenes of entertainment, differ sharply from the others' bias towards landscape. The vivid coloring and flattened forms that appear in his art, from "Cautchouc" at the Cirque Medrano of 1905 to Modjesko, Soprano Singer of 1908, represent a particularly individual path, parallel to, but somewhat apart from, that followed

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by the Matisse circle, whose members were now working side by side on similar subjects.

Early in 1906 Dufy worked beside Marquet at Sainte-Adresse, and there they painted the companion works, Sainte-Adrese -- The Jetty and The Beach at Sainte-Adresse in a modified mixed-technique style. Dufy then moved on to paint in a highly structured version of the flat-color-area method, in which he produced his most impressive Fauve paintings, such as Sunshades and Old Houses at Honfleur. The latter work bears comparison with Braque's Canal Saint-Martin, Paris (1906), equally structured and stable in format. In the summer of 1907 Braque worked beside Friesz at La Ciotat. While Friesz extended the decorative aspects of Fauvism by the addition of almost Art Nouveau drawing, Braque's companion painting, Landscape at La Ciotat, though still highly decorative, reveals the influence of Cézanne, whose work had a crucial impact on French painting that year.

A new interest in Cézanne, enhanced by the large memorial exhibitions of 1907, accompanied the final period of Fauvism. Cézanne's influence is most strongly felt in some of the late Fauve figure compositions of 1907, which are shown together in the concluding gallery of the exhibition. Matisse's Blue Nude and Derain's Bathers are shown together for the first time since the Salon des Indépendants in the spring of 1907. Both these works show, in different ways, the influence of Cézanne. Derain's was preceded by another little-known work, The Dance of 1906, the concluding painting in his decorative Fauve style, after which his color progressively darkened as his interests turned to sculptural, Cézannist forms, and his affiliation with Fauvism was ended. Matisse, in contrast, extended Fauvism in a new way: His painting, Le Luxe, I of 1907, prepares for the grand decorative style of his post-Fauve years.

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 Photographs, color transparencies, additional information available from  
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