

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

Influence of Fauvism

Although Fauvism lasted for only a very short period, it was "nothing less than the convulsion during which twentieth-century art was born," according to John Elderfield, director of The "Wild Beasts": Fauvism and Its Affinities.

"Within this period we see an emphasis upon the autonomy of color almost entirely new in Western art, a concern with directness of expression that countenances mixed techniques and formal dislocations for the sake of personal feeling, and a truly youthful bravado that in its search for the vital and the new discovered the power of the primitive. We also see a rendering of external reality that found pleasurable stimulus in the 'vacation culture' subject matter of the Impressionists, but that pushed it at times either to the verge of a vernacular urban realism or towards a more ideal celebration of the bonheur de vivre. Finally, and perhaps most basic of all, is a belief in both individual and pictorial autonomy, which found a remarkable balance between the concern for purely visual sensation and for personal and internal emotion, and in so doing rediscovered a tradition of high decorative art that has provided some of the most sublime as well as expressive paintings of this century."

Except in Matisse's art, however, such a tradition was not generally followed. In 1907, Mr Elderfield writes, all of the Fauves turned to "something more rational and classical in form. To all except Matisse, this meant a repudiation of color as well. With the emergence of the Cubist tradition, and its entrenchment as the dominant pictorial style of the first half of the twentieth century, color took second place to form in most subsequent painting; and so it remained, with isolated exception, until comparatively recent times."

The "Wild Beasts": Fauvism and Its Affinities and its accompanying publication are made possible by grants from SCM Corporation and the National Endowment for the Arts.