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| Artist | Henri Matisse |
| Title | Goldfish |
| Date | 1912 |
| Medium | Painting, oil on canvas |
| Scale | 146 x 97 cm |
| Scope/s | French Still Life |
| Style | Late Fauvist  |
| Patron | Not Applicable  |
| Location | Issy-les-Moulineaux (village near Paris) |
| Function |  |

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| Formal features/How ‘Modernist’? |
| Composition | This work is made up of a cylinder-shaped glass bowl, which holds four goldfish inside. The bowl is placed on a circular table. Around the table, there are various coloured plants of all shapes and sizes.  |
| Colour or texture | The goldfish immediately attract our attention due to their bright orange colour, which contrasts with the subtle pinks and greens that surround the fishbowl. The colours blue and orange (depicted in the metal bench and goldfish), and red and green (seen in the flowers in the top right corner, as well as the leaves), are complementary colours which means that when placed next to each other, appear even brighter.  |
| Light & tone | Matisse uses light to play with the idea of movement, seen especially in the glass fishbowl. The plants and flowers are also painted in a decorative manner. The background section of the painting resembles a patterned wallpaper composed of flattened shapes and colours. |
| Space & depth or relief | The fish are seen simultaneously from two different angles- from the front and from above- creating tension. The table top is tilted upwards, making it appear flat, yet we can still see the thin legs it balances on. Here, Matisse was playing with the concept of depth. When viewed though the transparent glass surface, the plants are also made to appear distorted compared to the plants in the background.  |
| Line or brushwork | Matisse uses unrefined brushstrokes- a characteristic which was typical to the Fauvist style, as well as Matisse’s own personal style at the time.  |

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Critical text quote:

Edouard Manet said, ‘a painter can say all he wants with fruits or flowers, or even clouds.’

Matisse once wrote that he dreamt of “an art of balance of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art that could be […] a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue.”

Influence from technological factors:

Around the early 20th century, travel and transport began developing rapidly, meaning that Matisse was presented with many opportunities of experiencing various different cultures. This had a very profound impact on Matisse’s work, an example being his trip to Morocco, North Africa.

Influence from political factors:

However, Matisse did not paint ‘Goldfish’ in Morocco, he painted it at home, near Paris, in a town he had recently moved to in hopes of escaping the pressures of Parisian life. This means that everything depicted here –the plants, furniture, and fish tank- was inspired by Matisse’s own belongings and a calm serenity away from Paris.

Use or development of materials, techniques & processes:

Although in comparison with some of his previous works, here Matisse softened his palette, the bold orange tones are reminiscent of his Fauvist years, which continued to influence his technique and use of colour throughout his career.

Stylistic comment and artistic influence:

Gauguin’s ‘Still Life’, 1891

Cezanne’s ‘Still Life with Apples and a Pot of Primroses’, 1890

Influence from cultural/social factors:

Matisse’s own trip to Tangier, North Africa, from January to April of 1912. He admired the Moroccans’ lifestyle, which appeared relaxed and contemplative to him. For Matisse, the goldfish came to symbolize this tranquil state of mind, and at the same time, became evocative of a paradise lost, a subject -unlike goldfish- frequently represented in art.