

Fauvism

Fauvism was the first of the avant-garde movements that flourished in France in the early years of the twentieth century. The Fauve painters were the first to break with **Impressionism** as well as with older, traditional methods of perception. Their spontaneous, often subjective response to nature was expressed in bold, undisguised brushstrokes and high-keyed, vibrant colours directly from the tube.

Henri Matisse and André Derain introduced non naturalistic colour and vivid brushstrokes into their paintings in the summer of 1905, working together in the small fishing port of Collioure on the Mediterranean coast. When their pictures were exhibited later that year at the Salon d'Automne in Paris (Matisse, *The Woman with a Hat*), they inspired the critic Louis Vauxcelles to call them *fauves* ("wild beasts") in his review for the magazine *Gil Blas*. This term was later applied to the artists themselves.

The Fauves were a loosely shaped group of artists sharing a similar approach to nature, but they had no definitive program. Their leader was Matisse, who had arrived at the Fauve style after earlier experimenting with the various Post-Impressionist styles of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne, and the Neo-Impressionism of Seurat and Signac. These influences inspired him to reject traditional three-dimensional space and seek instead a new picture space defined by the movement of colour planes.

Another major Fauve was Maurice de Vlaminck, who used highly intense colour. Vlaminck took the final step toward embracing the Fauve style after seeing the second large retrospective exhibition of Van Gogh's work at the Salon des Indépendants in the spring of 1905, and the Fauve paintings produced by Matisse and Derain in Collioure.

Derain had worked with Vlaminck in Chatou, near Paris, intermittently from 1900 and spent the summer of 1905 with Matisse in Collioure. In 1906-7, he also painted some twenty-nine scenes of London in a more restrained palette.

Other important Fauvists were Kees van Dongen and Georges Rouault. These were joined in 1906 by Georges Braque and Raoul Dufy.

For most of these artists, Fauvism was a transitional, learning stage. By 1908, a revived interest in Paul Cézanne's vision of the order and structure of nature had led many of them to reject the emotionalism of Fauvism in favour of the logic of Cubism. Braque became the cofounder with Picasso of Cubism.

The Fauvist movement has been compared to German Expressionism, both projecting brilliant colours and spontaneous brushwork, and indebted to the same late nineteenth-century sources, especially Van Gogh. The French were more concerned with the formal aspects of pictorial organization, while the German Expressionists were more emotionally involved in their subjects.