

Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
Prof. Soumik Nandy Majumdar
Department of History of Art, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan Visva-Bharati
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture - 06
Fauvism & Matisse

Welcome viewers to MOOC's online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art. Today is the second week in the first lecture of second week devoted to the study of fauvism and Matisse. Matisse spear headed the movement called fauvism in early 20 century, and that is why it sounds logical to look at the achievements of Matisse in the context of fauvism as well as outside it.

Now as we have discussed that each and every art movement in the context of modern art in the west try to innovate something new and at all a new feature or a new idea or a new aspect towards the development of modern art. If impressionism and post impressionism made a big contribution by invoking the aspect of light in a radical way in the paintings, fauvism would now try to liberate color from its earlier functions and roles.

So, in a sense fauvism is understood as a movement that emancipated color, that make color an independent entity in the art of painting.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:59)



The Fauvism as a movement for short lived from 1904 to 1908, but its impact was immense. Though the movement began around 1908, Fauvism left a great impact on particularly the art of painting, and it changed the way painters perceived color before. Fauvism became a tool to liberate color from its earlier function and roles.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:34)

The Movement

- The paintings of the Fauves were made by seemingly wild brush strokes and strident colors, while they had a high degree of simplification and abstraction. It appears to be random in application but in reality Fauvism emerged as a careful yet intuitive method of color juxtaposition -- to a large extent overruling the representational logic of color!

Henri Matisse's Portrait of Madame Matisse

A portrait painting by Henri Matisse of his wife, Madame Matisse. The painting is characterized by bold, vibrant colors and visible brushstrokes, typical of the Fauvist style. Madame Matisse is depicted from the chest up, wearing a red garment with a white collar. The background is a mix of green, blue, and red.

When you look at the Fauves painting may be for the first time, the paintings of the Fauves they were made by it seems that were made by seemingly wild brush strokes and strident colors, while they had a high degree of simplification and abstraction. It appears to be random in application, but in reality Fauvism emerged as a careful, yet intuitive method of color juxtaposition, to a large extent overruling the representational logic of color. And this is crucial to the understanding of Fauvism.

That Fauvist artists and Fauvism in general as a movement try to overrule the representational logic of color. Try to overrule the idea that the color of a particular object should represent that object, as if to put it simply a color does not have an independent value or independent entity. It is always tied up with object. Now Fauvist painters like Matisse Andre, Derain, Vlaminck and others they change the role of color the way the color is perceived, by the painters on that went a huge change. And that is one of the reasons why Fauves paintings often look very arbitrarily.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:02)

- Fauvism, French Fauvisme, style of painting that flourished in France from 1898 to 1908; **it used pure, brilliant color, applied straight from the paint tubes in an aggressive, direct manner** to create a sense of an explosion on the canvas. **The Fauves painted directly from nature as the Impressionists had before them, but their works were invested with a strong expressive reaction to the subjects they painted.**

Now interestingly the term fauve in French fauvism style of painting that flourished in France from 1898 this is what is usually say, but really speaking from 1904 we get to see fauvism is a kind of expressing itself, in a big way in very big way and it used one type the of his painting actually use they used pure brilliant color, to applied straight from the paint tubes in an very aggressive way in the direct manner to create a sense of an explosion on the canvas. The fauves painted directly from nature as the impressionists had done before, but their works were invested with a strong expressive reaction to the subjects they painted. So, there is an element of subjectivity in the way the fauvists approached their paintings.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:05)

Between 1901 and 1906, several comprehensive exhibitions were held in Paris, making the work of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Paul Cézanne widely accessible for the first time. For the painters who saw the achievements of these great artists, the effect was one of liberation and they began to experiment with radical new styles. Fauvism was the first movement of this modern period, in which color ruled supreme.

Now, between 1901 and 1906 several comprehensive exhibitions were held in Paris making the work of Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cezanne. Widely accessible for the first time for the painters who saw the achievements of these great artists the effect was one of liberation. And they began to experiment with radical new styles which included the exploration of a new role of color. And this is what fauvism is all about exploring or experimenting with a new role of color.

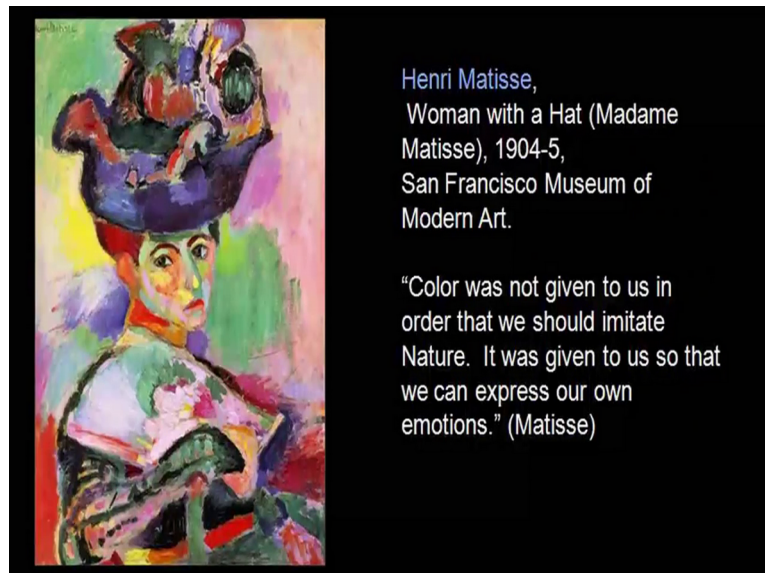
So, it is in that sense the fauvism was the first movement of this modern period in which color ruled supreme color played a dominant role, not only in terms of its application, but also in terms of composing the entire painting.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:02)

The Fauves represented the first break with the artistic traditions of the past. The movement's emphasis on formal values and expressive use of color, line, and brushwork helped liberate painting from the representational expectations that had dominated Western art since the Renaissance. Fauvism was the first explosive 20th-century art movement.

The fauves represented the first break with the artistic traditions of the past, the movements emphasis on formal values and expressive use of color line and brushwork helped liberate painting from the representational norms that had dominated western art since. The renaissance fauvism was the first explosive twentieth century art movement.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:29)

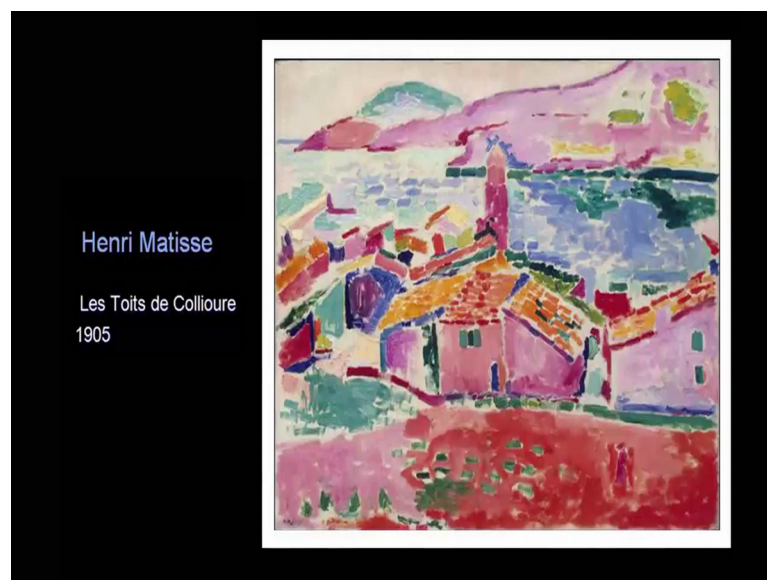


To the extend that lot of critics they thought that this paintings which today now we consider as or acknowledge as fauvist paintings and with great we put a high regard on them. These paintings where it looked at with a great amount of suspicion to the extent

that lot of critics thought these are the paintings, which look like assume they were done by some wild beasts. And this is what exactly the term fauve means in French wild beast.

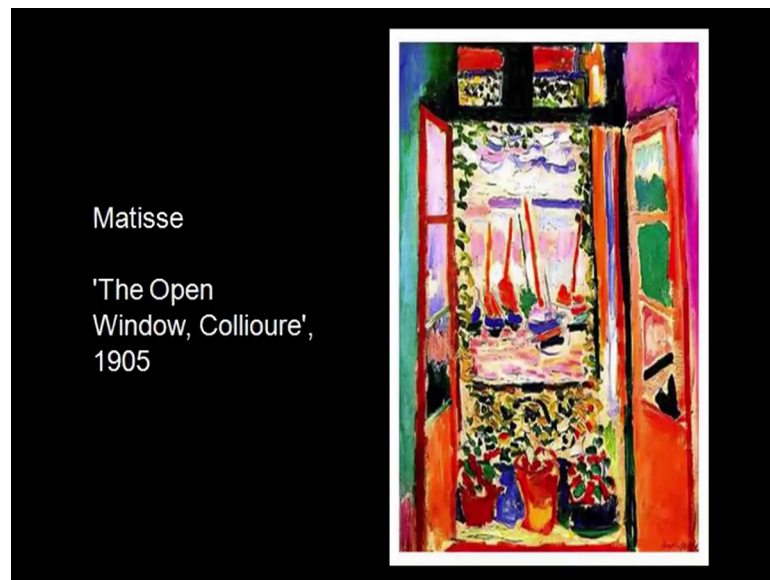
So, it is basically a derogatory term. Derogatory term applied by the art critics to criticise the now famous fauvist paintings, but ironically what was initially used as a derogatory term that is fauvism or fauve or wild beast became a great name a nomenclature for the movement fauvism initiated in the early part of twentieth century. So, look at this painting by Henry Matisse titled women with a hat Madame Matisse painted in 1904 and 5. Now as Matisse himself as say that color was not given to us in order that we should imitate nature. It was given to us that we can express our own emotions; this is a very important statement that Matisse made here.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:06)



Because for Matisse and for all the fauvist painters color is not something that is pre conceived or pre mediated something that is already given, artist is there or the painter is there only to follow it no it is not the role of color. Color or the role of color or the very value and definition of color in a painting could be altered and revolutionised by inventing the color. Not decision pigment, but by innovating the notion of color.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:54)



And this is what these people try to do throughout this movement. And secondly, usually until fauvism color played a slightly subservient role, in the sense that contour lines defined the form first followed by color.

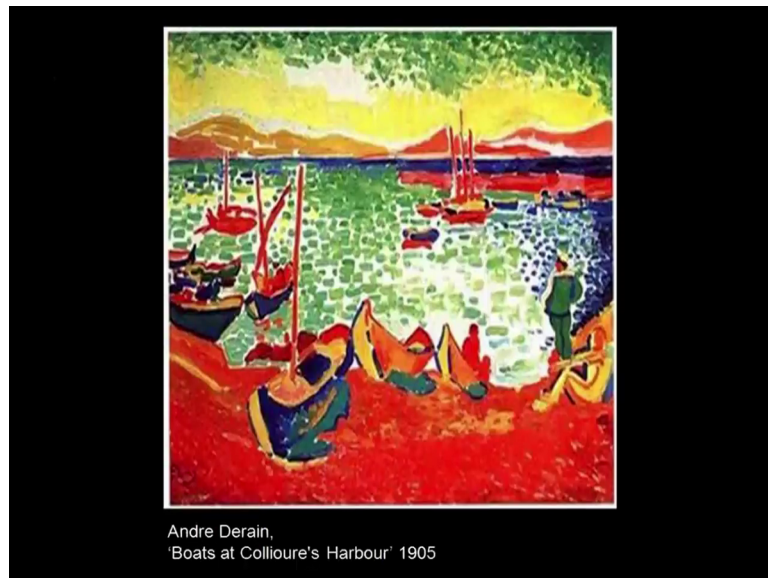
But in the fauvist paintings you see just the reverse is happening. Colors take the body of colors, the pigments, the presence of the colors, these things are playing the defining role for the forms, and lines might be followed. It or lines may be completely absent, it does not matter. But colors are playing the role of defining the form giving an in-between to the form giving a status a visual status to the forms, for that matter if you look at this painting called the open window by Matisse. You can see what exactly fauvism were trying to do develop to a kind of aesthetics where color will play not only a dominant role, but color will play the role of defining the forms establishing the forms, visualising the forms.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:04)



Color will become and it take becoming the hands of the fauves painters the principle tool for a painting.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:29)

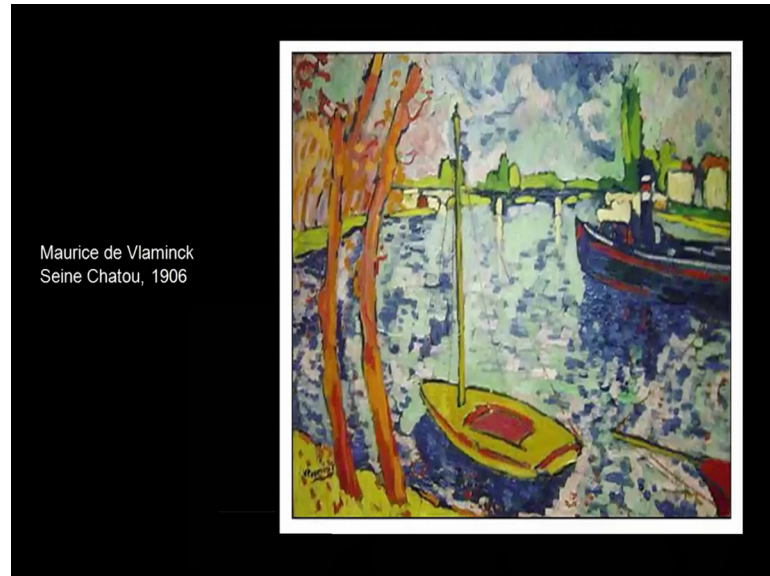


Andre Derain,
'Boats at Collioure's Harbour' 1905

Now, apart from Henry Matisse, there were other painters as I have already mentioned like Andre Derain. His style was slightly different from Matisse, but they all share this common concept of color, where color will play the dominant role. Color will have an independent existence, color can the way you apply color in a fauves painting it may look that the color has become very arbitrary, illogical, but no matter what. As far as the

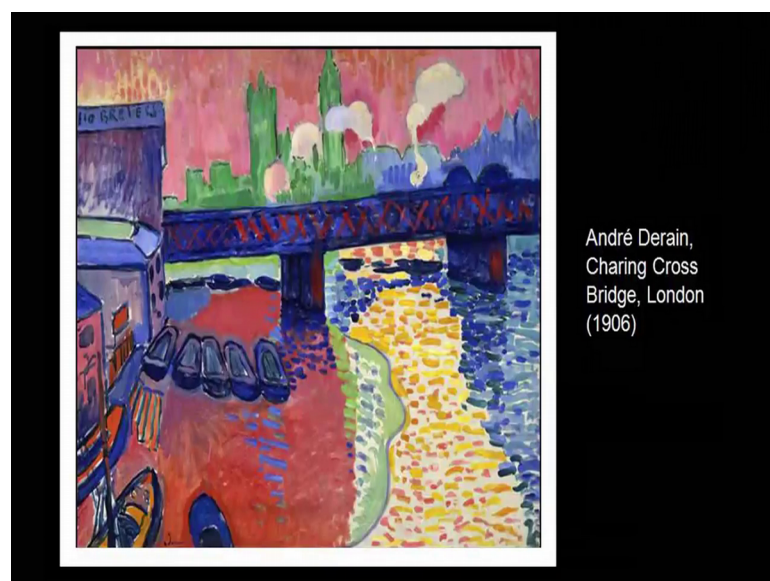
responses are concert, in order to liberate color from its earlier subservient role you need to use color at least in the beginning quite radically.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:28)



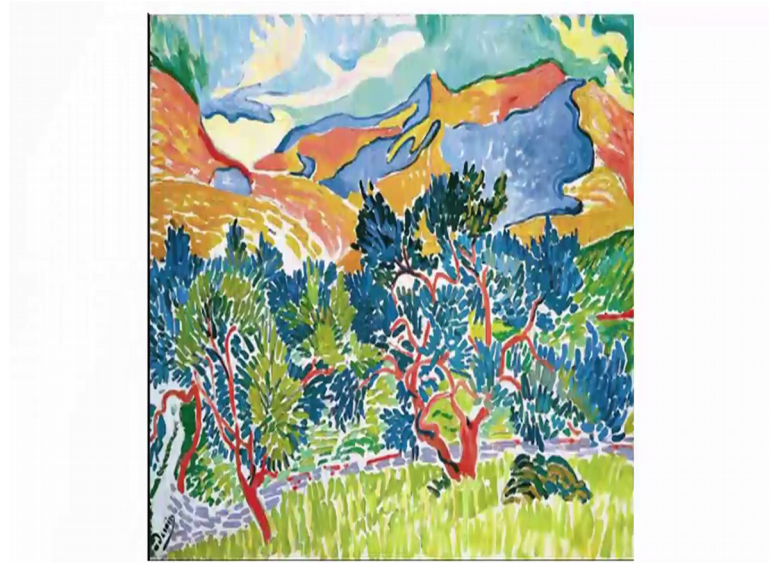
So, what looks arbitrary is actually not arbitrary because an artist like Derain and Vlaminck figured out a certain intuitive way of juxtaposing various colors; however, illogical it might look at the face value they are not actually logical. They have their own reason, own logic, and own intuitive rationality.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:58)



And this is something that the fauvists built up over the years through their many drawings and paintings mainly paintings. And a consistent practice, this was difficult really speaking for the fauvists as well as for the viewers. To receive these kind of painting where colors seems to be ruling a mock and creating a kind of havoc in the painting where age old And time tested visual elements like line, perspective, space, everything has become if not totally relevant, but very significant.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:45)

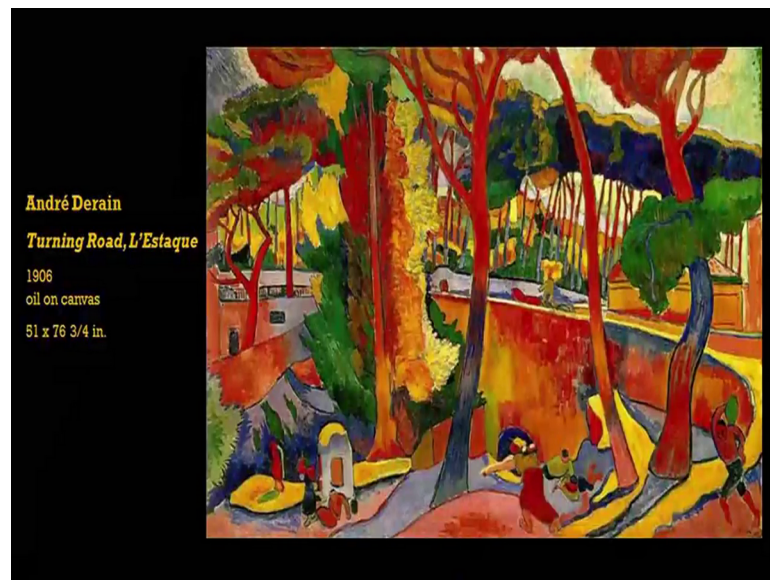


And color has become the principle visual element in these paintings like this one is well.

So, repeatedly you can see this is what these fauves painters are continuously trying and they are able to do it very successfully, that is trying to push color up as the principle visual element in a work of art so much So that there might be areas in a work of art in a painting from the point of view of fauves painters, where the color may not necessarily conform to the identity of the object. You may apply a color or put a color which is different or in contrast to the identity of that object.

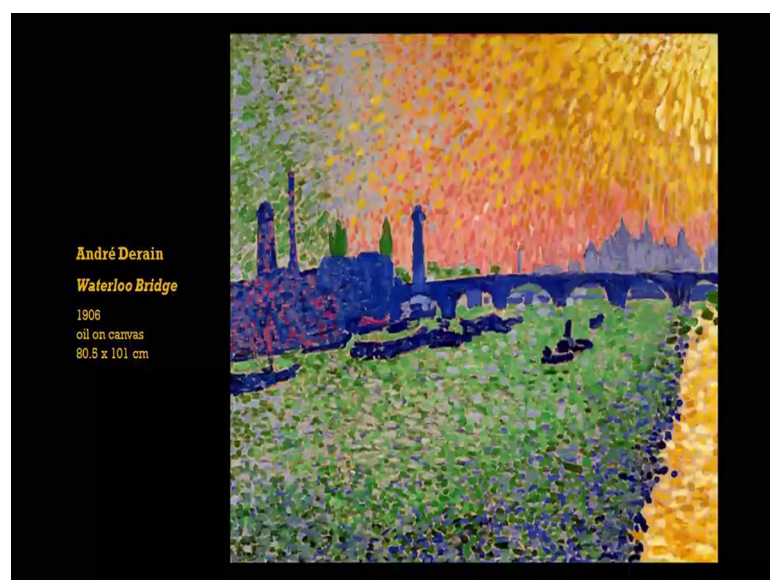
So, fauvism in that sense opens up a new visual language possibility, by providing a new liberation a new freedom to the color.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:58)



And all these painters like Derain Vlaminck and Matisse realised it very soon that what they are doing or something revolutionary, because even if we have seen arbitrary color concept, apparently arbitrary color concept in previous history like in the pre renaissance period like gothic painting and all. Even there is color at least had some symbolic value color had some iconographic value, color carried some religious value.

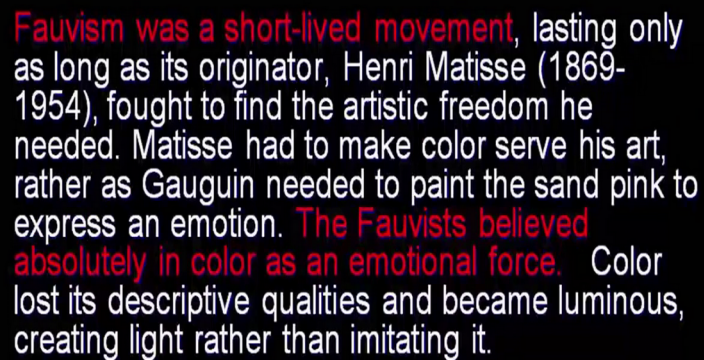
(Refer Slide Time: 14:52)



But here color is reflecting and inbounding personal value. Painters own intuitive choice and intuitive selection is actually defining the color palate shaping the color scale of the

paintings. More you look at these fauves paintings this role of color this dominant role of color gets clearer.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:12)



Fauvism was a short-lived movement, lasting only as long as its originator, Henri Matisse (1869-1954), fought to find the artistic freedom he needed. Matisse had to make color serve his art, rather as Gauguin needed to paint the sand pink to express an emotion. The Fauvists believed absolutely in color as an emotional force. Color lost its descriptive qualities and became luminous, creating light rather than imitating it.

Now, it is true that fauvism was a short lift movement lasting only as long as it is originator. Henry Matisse only from 1869 to 1954 fought to find the artistic freedom he needed.

So, fauvism in that sense as a movement as a practice was a told to gain more artistic freedom, and for a painter like Matisse, who really not only enjoyed, but somebody who understood color better than most of the painters of his time, he had to make colors serve his art rather as Gauguin needed to paint the sand pink to express an emotion. So, this emotional content of a color not just identity content, but emotional content of color, expressive content of color, intuitive faculty of a color, these elements become increasing important not only for Matisse and other fauvists, but also for later painters in modern western art.

The fauvists believed very, very strongly and absolutely in color as an emotional force. Color lost it is descriptive role and became luminous creating light rather than imitating it. And we can add to that that beside losing it is descriptive quality color also lost it is a lower position in the hierarchy of visual elements.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:04)

Fauvism became a style in 1900 and beyond 1910 but it was only popular for only three years from 1905 to 1907 in which the movement had three exhibitions. Henri Matisse was a leader in the movement and was inspired when his teacher John Peter Russell a former friend of Vincent Van Gogh and a famous impressionist painter showed him one of Van Gogh's Post-Impressionist paintings and Matisse quickly fell in love with the movement

So, it rows up, the ladder of hierarchy and became a very, very important visual element for a painter who wanted to privilege color over everything else. And fauvism eventually became a style in early 20th century and beyond also 1910, but it was only popular as a movement for 3 years 3 to 4 years in which movement had 3 exhibitions.

Matisse was a leader in that movement and was inspired when his teacher john peter rassell, a former friend of his Vincent van Gogh and a famous impressionist painter showed him one of van Gogh's post impressionist paintings and Matisse quickly fell in love with the movement.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:49)



So, somewhere it was connected to Matisse love for color, and his conviction that color which is possible for a painter to allow color to shape the entire painting. And that is why Matisse could say to quote him when I put a green it is not grass, when I put a blue it is not the sky.

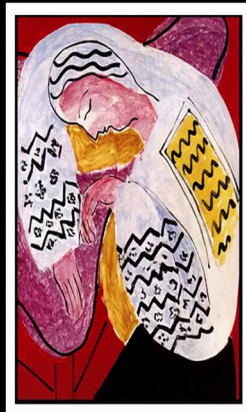
(Refer Slide Time: 18:29)



So, not only that is altering the identity and role of the color, he is providing new meaning new existence. New significance to the color in the context of a painting, and repeatedly in most of his paintings and in paintings by other painters also not only within

fauvism, but outside fauvism who were greatly influence and inspired by fauvism. We can see this same thing happen in again and again. Kinds of confidence where you can actually use color in a so called arbitrary way, but eventually you are a loving color to play an independent role.

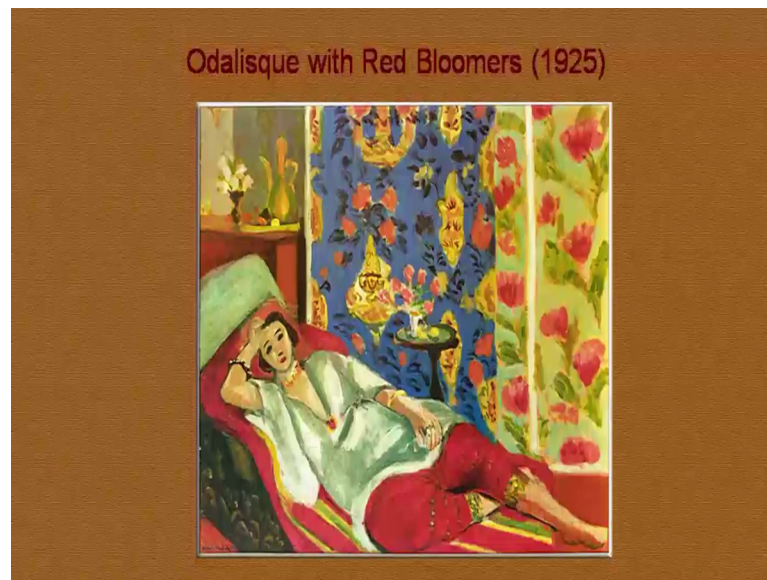
(Refer Slide Time: 19:09)



The Dream

Now, in order to perceive and explore this idea, Matisse and the other painters and particularly Matisse, they were painting subject matters which one also very simple. Interestingly subject matters in Matisse paintings are never very complex, what makes in his paintings very complex is his construction and particularly color construction. It is here that fauvism played a very important role in shaping Matisse as a painter.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:48)



In fact, if you look at a painting like this by Matisse odalisque with red bloomers. In fact, in this painting has references to classical painting classical motive, even they client women figure also has some kind of elusion to the part start, but then once you have notice these things next what you are bound to notice is a very strong presence of radiant colors came within the painting. To the extent that you do not look at the counter lines, you do not even look at the details of the objects in figures, but you look at how several colors various colors or wholes the range of colors is actually constructing and constructing the painting. And playing a very vital role in the formation of the painting the total image.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:52)



So, for example there is one when you look at this painting called the blue window, again what we see here is a statement in color. No matter what the subject matter is. So, to make a statement in color by applying very, very bold strong and vivid color was not easy.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:11)



And it is for this reason that fauvism is considered to be a hugely important movement; however, short-lived it was in the context of modern western art. So, he Matisse titled this painting the red studio, but here as you can now easily see the red color of this studio in

the painting may not literally refer to the actual physical red color of the studio in real life.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:33)

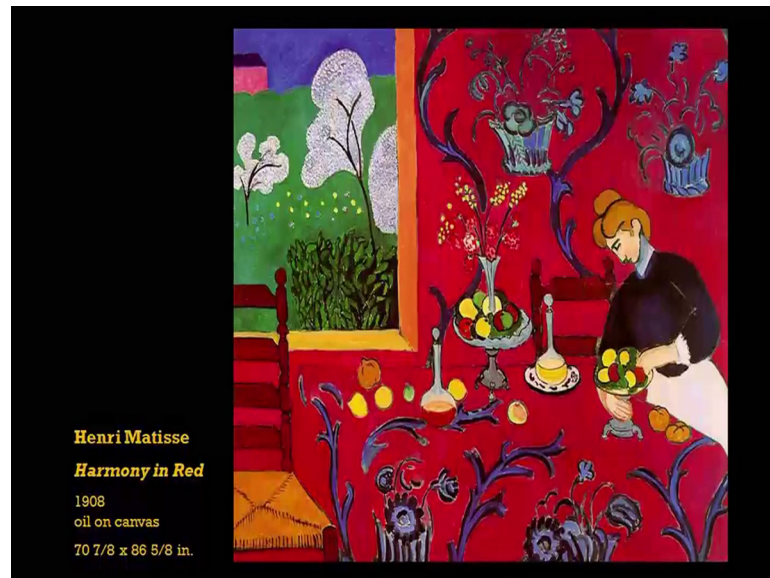


Red color here is not the identity of the studio, but it is a reflection of the way Matisse has perceived this composition.

So, we will be making a mistake a serious mistake if we can think that this red color, on the table on the table cloth, on the floor or on the wall or in other objects in the studio. This red color is actually the identity of these objects if we think so we will be making a mistake. This is not the way we should be looking at this kind of paintings; obviously, all these objects cannot have or cannot share the same red color and same red tone. So, this is a very clear suggestion that in this painting like many other paintings, the red color has an independent identity in spite of the fact that this red color is also at the same time connected to various objects painted in the paintings. Now it is difficult even for the viewers like us to perceive understand and accept this.

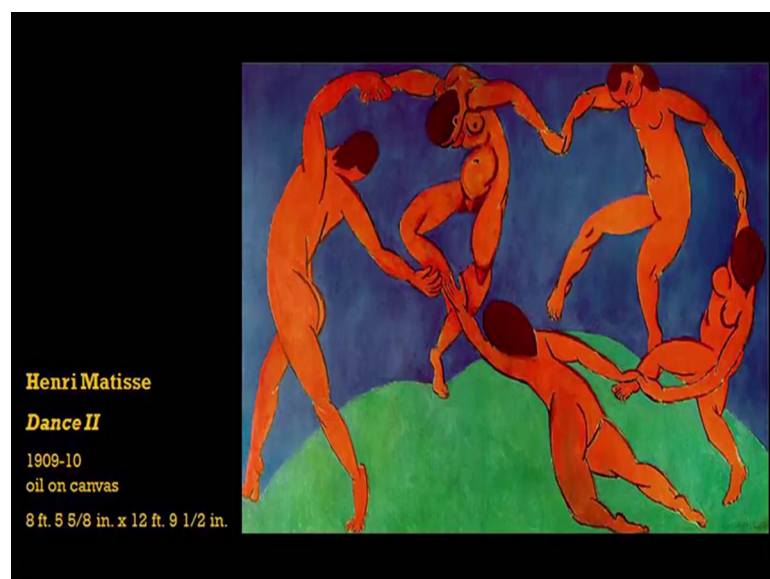
Because generally speaking in a normal life in a waking life, we are also habituated with a similar notion of color like the traditional art where we expect that a color ideally should always be playing the role of identity of the object. But when we encounter a painting like this then we actually encounter a different notion of painting and particularly color, where color is smoothly playing the identity of the object.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:51)



For example this one also, color is playing an independent role. And marginally it is also there as a part of the identity of the object though we know from these paintings and in the previous one that a few lines contour lines few divisions within the painting at there to clarify the differences between the table, and the wall and the chair, chair and the table back again, but otherwise this dominance of a particular color, inside the room dominance of an another color, outside the room. They have an independent entity, and once we are able to respond to that then we are ready to actually enjoy and appreciate fauves paintings.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:51)



Here also this painting has a very simple title called dance 2, but really speaking more than and of course this painting does evoke a sense of joy a sense of celebration. But there is a nothing more in treat as much require mean if you are looking at the details if you want to see more details at the who these people are why they are dancing, what is the physical context of this dancing.

Now, this picture will not give you any such detail. What you are suppose to enjoy and appreciate and notice in this kind of paintings is first of all a very strong presence of color. And secondly, what Matisse eventually achieves after having kind of negotiated with color in a very different way through his practice is a sense of rhythm. So, in Matisse paintings you see the presence of an independent entity of color along with a very strong presence of rhythm it is paintings. And this rhythm is again nothing to do with a real rhythm in real life, which is again integral to an intrinsic to the language of painting.

So, from this very early movements art movements from early twentieth century like fauvism, which will be followed by futurism, Dadaism, surrealism and all that. All these movements art movements one of that the other all of them are actually altering the premises the foundations of art language. Impressionism has already down that and now you have fauvism doing that once again, but for fauves painters color is that hold whereas, for impressionists it was light, for futurism it would be something else.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:25)



So, this is how the entire impact of fauvism not only on other painters, but also on Matisse himself can be seen present throughout his artistic area, even when he was doing this beautiful collage paintings. There again you see both these 2 things. One a strong presence of colors which is playing a very formative role in the painting, and second a sense of rhythm in the composition.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:13)



Otherwise if you look at this works this works really do not have anything very complex of complicated in terms of subject matter. It is only the way you arrange them, the way you compose them the way you make them behave in a particular work of art.

And this is what exactly Matisse achieves, and through his hands the language of painting becomes an independent act. Not necessarily always tied up with specific subject matter or topic. So, this is where fauvism becomes a very significant movement, which will be followed by other equally important movements, all happening in the early part of twentieth century.

Thank you.