

Matisse and the Fauves

20 September 2013 – 12 January 2014

Fauvism is the first and briefest avant garde movement of the 20th century. It lasted only three years, from 1905 to 1907/8. The designation is derived from the description of their works in a critique of the legendary Paris Autumn Salon of 1905. Henri Matisse, the chief member of the group, and his friends André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck and Henri Manguin were defamed in it as "Fauves", wild animals or beasts. In fact, Matisse and his friends revolutionised the conception of art.

They liberated painting from the dictates of the imitation of nature. The artists captured their motifs with arbitrarily selected and intensely brilliant colours, sketchy brushstrokes and unmodeled colour areas. They were provided with important impulses by Van Gogh and his pastose brushstroke, by Cezanne and his unfinished canvasses, as well as by the scientific colour theories of Paul Signac. They were reinforced in their new aesthetic by the sculptures of Africa and Oceania.

At seven stations, the Albertina provides insight into these impressive years of the incipient avant garde: at the start of the exhibition, the visitor submerges into the prehistory of Fauvism, into the years 1900-1905, while Matisse, Marquet and Manguin were searching for their places in the contemporary avant garde.

This is followed by a selection of high quality works painted by Matisse and Derain in the summer of 1905 in Collioure in southern France, and then exhibited in the following October in the Autumn Salon. Highlights of this section and of the exhibit as a whole are the *Open Window* by Henri Matisse, views of Collioure by Matisse and Derain and portraits of one another painted by the two artists.

At the same time, Maurice de Vlaminck arrived at similar results in northern France while painting untouched and hidden landscapes in the vicinity of Paris. With Raoul Dufy, Emile-Othon Friesz and Georges Braque, a younger generation also finds its voice in the exhibit. They were originally from Le Havre and would join the Fauves only a few months after the legendary Autumn Salon of 1905.

Beyond this, the exhibit dedicates a chapter to the drawings and watercolours of the Fauves: the exceptional importance of the works on paper for Fauvism is recreated on the basis of 60 large scale examples. The sketchiness, the white paper background also incorporated into the representation and the intense application of paint anticipate the liberties taken in the paintings on canvas.

Finally, another chapter treats the influence of African sculptures on the Fauves. Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck were the first artists, with the exception of Picasso, to collect non-European artefacts. These encounters with African art, for example, in the case of Derain during his stay in London and after a visit to the British Museum, set the direction for the future. The exhibit brings together rare examples of African sculpture from the estates of Matisse, Vlaminck and Derain.

The most important series of landscape paintings of Fauvism also originated in the British capital. The Albertina is showing eight central works of Derain, which he painted in response to Monet's Impressionist interpretation of diffuse light in London.

The next-to-last chapter addresses the bronze sculpture so important to Fauvism. The Albertina is showing an important cross-section of bronzes created by Matisse between 1901 and 1909, with which he freed himself from traditional sculpture and the Impressionist model.

Finally, the two loners of Fauvism, Georges Rouault and Kees van Dongen, are represented with impressive paintings. Both artists influenced Fauvism with individual solutions and highly autonomous methods.

With 160 works from more than 50 lenders from around the world, the Albertina exhibit is the first broadly based show in Austria to comprehensively pay tribute to this important avant garde movement. It was curated by Heinz Widauer in Vienna and Claudine Grammont in Paris; an extensive catalogue summarises the important aspects of Fauvism for the first time in German.