

# 7

## Fauvism

**D***onatello au milieu des fauves!* “Donatello among the wild beasts!” was the ready quip of Louis Vauxcelles, art critic for the review *Gil Blas*, when he entered Gallery VII at Paris’s 1905 Salon d’Automne and found himself surrounded by blazingly colored, vehemently brushed canvases in the midst of which stood a small neo-Renaissance sculpture. With this witticism Vauxcelles gave the first French avant-garde style to emerge in the twentieth century its name, thereby provoking one of modernism’s classic “scandals.” It should be noted, however, that Vauxcelles was generally sympathetic to the work presented by the group of young painters, as were other liberal critics.

The starting point of Fauvism was later identified by Henri Matisse, the sober and rather professorial leader of the Fauves, as “the courage to return to the purity of means.” Matisse and his fellow painters—André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Georges Rouault, Raoul Dufy, and others—allowed their search for immediacy and clarity to show forth with bold, almost unbearable candor. While divesting themselves of Symbolist literary aesthetics, along with *fin-de-siècle* morbidity, the Fauves reclaimed Impressionism’s direct, joyous embrace of nature and combined it with Post-Impressionism’s heightened color contrasts and emotional, expressive depth. They emancipated color from its role of describing external reality and concentrated on the medium’s ability to communicate directly the artist’s experience of that reality by exploiting the pure chromatic intensity of paint. Fauvism burst on to the Parisian art scene at a time when the heady pace of change in the arts, as in society as a whole, was coming to be seen as part of the new, modern world order. Moreover, as artists from many different countries and backgrounds were drawn to Paris, seeking contact with the exciting new developments in art there, Fauve paintings made a deep impression on the new generation of avant-garde artists who were also coming to terms with the possibilities for painting opened up by Cézanne.

Inevitably, the Fauves’ emphasis on achieving personal authenticity meant that they would never form a coherent

movement or issue the kind of joint theoretical manifestos produced by many subsequent avant-garde movements. But before drifting apart as early as 1907, the Fauves made certain definite and unique contributions. Though none of them attempted complete abstraction, as did their contemporaries Vasily Kandinsky or Robert Delaunay, for example, they extended the boundaries of representation, based in part on their exposure to non-Western sources, such as African art. For subject matter they turned to portraiture, still life, and landscape. In the last, especially in the art of Matisse, they revisualized Impressionism’s culture of leisure as a pagan ideal of *bonheur de vivre*, the joy of life. Most important of all, the Fauvist painters practiced an art in which the painting was conceived as an autonomous creation, delicately poised between expression derived from emotional, subjective experience and expression stimulated by pure optical sensation.

### “Purity of Means” in Practice: Henri Matisse’s Early Career

Henri Matisse (1869–1954) was born only two years after Bonnard (see chapter 3) and outlived him by seven years. These two contemporaries had much in common as artists. They were among the greatest colorists of the twentieth century, and each learned something from the other. Yet Matisse, one of the pioneers of twentieth-century experiment in painting, seems to belong to a later generation and to a different world. Like Bonnard, he at first studied law, but by 1891 he had enrolled in the Académie Julian, studying briefly with the academic painter Bouguereau, who came to represent everything he rejected in art. The following year he entered the École des Beaux-Arts and was fortunate enough to study with Gustave Moreau (see fig. 3.12), a dedicated teacher who encouraged his students to find their own directions through constant study in museums, as well as through individual experiment. In his class, Matisse met Georges Rouault, Albert Marquet, Henri-Charles Manguin, Charles Camoin,



**7.1** Henri Matisse, *La Desserte (Dinner Table)*, 1896–97. Oil on canvas, 39¼ × 51½" (99.7 × 130.8 cm). Private collection.

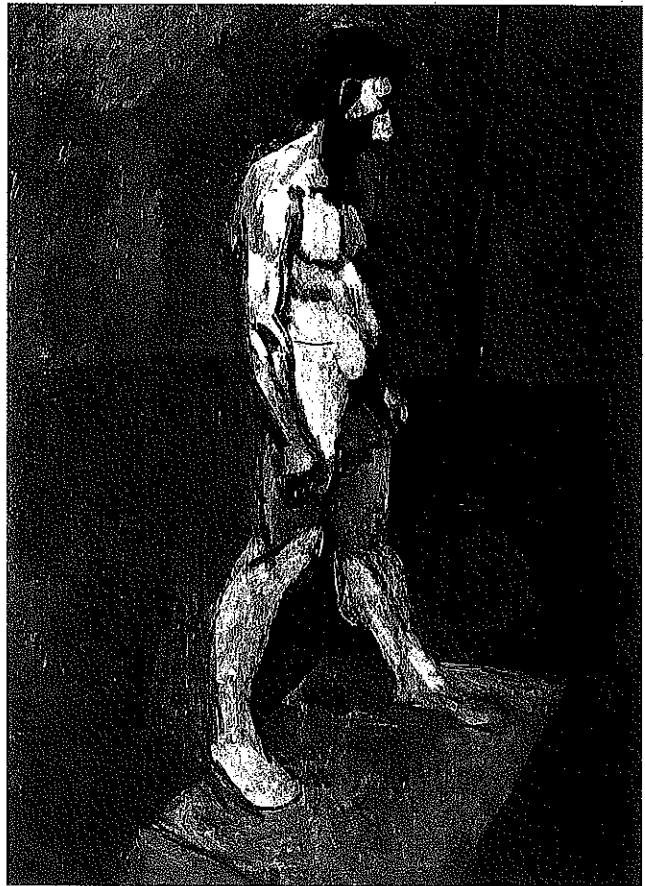
and Charles Guérin, all of whom were later associated with the Fauves.

Matisse's work developed slowly from the dark tonalities and literal subjects he first explored. By the late 1890s he had discovered Neo-Impressionism and artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec and, most importantly, Cézanne. In about 1898 he began to experiment with figures and still lifes painted in bright, nondescriptive color. In 1900, Matisse entered the atelier of Eugène Carrière, a maker of dreamily romantic figure paintings. There he met André Derain, who introduced him to Vlaminck the following year, completing the principal Fauve trio. Around that time, Matisse also worked in the studio of Antoine Bourdelle (see fig. 6.14), making his first attempts at sculpture and demonstrating the abilities that were to make him one of the great painter-sculptors of the twentieth century.

### Earliest Works

Among the paintings that Matisse copied in the Louvre during his student days under Moreau was a still life by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Jan Davidsz. de Heem. Matisse's version was a free copy, considerably smaller than the original. In 1915, he was to make a Cubist variation of the work. At the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (known as the Salon de la Nationale) of 1897, he exhibited his own composition of a still life, *Dinner Table* (fig. 7.1), which was not favorably received by the conservatives. Though highly traditional on the face of it, this work was one of Matisse's most complicated and carefully constructed compositions to date, and it was his first truly modern work. While it still depended on locally descriptive color, this painting revealed in its luminosity an interest in the Impressionists. The abruptly tilted table that crowds and contracts the space of the picture anticipated the artist's subsequent move toward radical simplification in his later treatment of similar subjects (see fig. 7.11). *Male Model* of about 1900 (fig. 7.2) carried this process of simplification and contraction several stages further, even

to the point of some distortion of perspective, to achieve a sense of delimited space. The modeling of the figure in abrupt facets of color was a direct response to the paintings of Cézanne, whose influence can also be seen in *Carmelina*, an arresting, frontalized arrangement in which the nude model projects sculpturally from the rectangular design of the background. With his own face reflected in



**7.2** Henri Matisse, *Male Model (l'Homme Nu; "Le Serf" Academie bleue; Bevilacqua)*, Paris, 1900. Oil on canvas, 39¼ × 28¾" (99.3 × 72.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



7.3 Henri Matisse, *Luxe, calme et volupté*, 1904–5. Oil on canvas, 37 × 46" (94 × 116.8 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

the mirror behind the model, Matisse introduced two themes—the studio interior and the artist with his model—to which he often returned in the course of his life, as if to restate the modernist's abandonment of direct attachment to the outside world in favor of an ever-greater absorption in the world of art.

Between 1902 and 1905 Matisse exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants and at the galleries of Berthe Weill and Ambroise Vollard. The latter was rapidly becoming the principal dealer for the avant-garde artists of Paris. When the more liberal Salon d'Automne was established in 1903, Matisse showed there, along with Bonnard and Marquet. But most notorious was the Salon d'Automne of 1905, in which a room of paintings by Matisse, Vlaminck, Derain, and Rouault, among others, is supposed to have occasioned the remark that gave the group its permanent name.

### The Fauve Period

The word *fauves* made particular reference to these artists' brilliant, arbitrary color, more intense than the "scientific" color of the Neo-Impressionists and the nondescript color of Gauguin and Van Gogh, and to the direct, vigorous brushwork with which Matisse and his friends had been experimenting the previous year at St. Tropez and Collioure on the Riviera in the south of France. The Fauves accomplished the liberation of color toward which, in their different ways, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh,

Seurat, and the Nabis had been experimenting. Using similar means, the Fauves were intent on different ends. They wished to use pure color squeezed directly from the tube, not to describe objects in nature, not simply to set up retinal vibrations, not to accentuate a romantic or mystical subject, but to build new pictorial values apart from all these. Thus, in a sense, they were using the color of Gauguin and Seurat, freely combined with their own linear rhythms, to reach effects similar to those which Cézanne constantly sought. It is no accident that of the artists of the previous generation, it was Cézanne whom Matisse revered the most.

Earlier in 1905, at the Salon des Indépendants, Matisse had already exhibited his large Neo-Impressionist composition *Luxe, calme et volupté* (fig. 7.3), a title taken from a couplet in Baudelaire's poem *L'Invitation au voyage*:

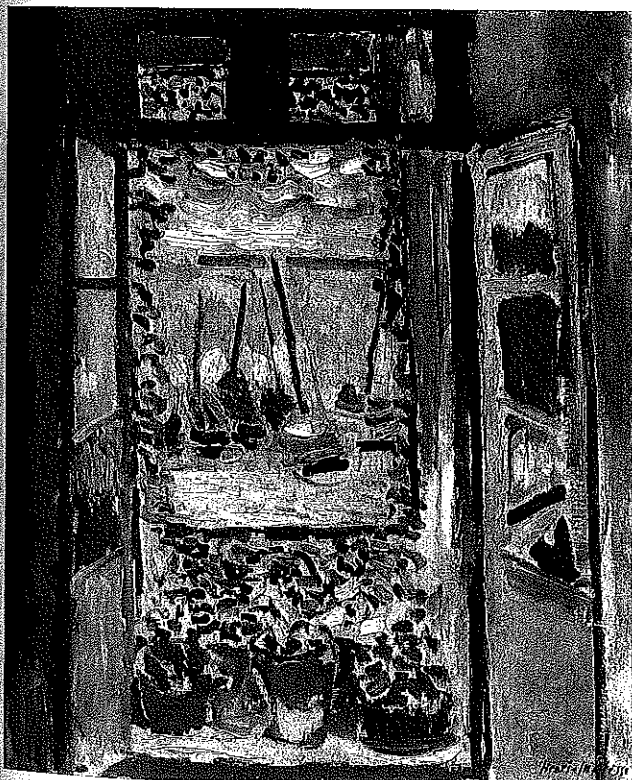
*Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,  
Luxe, calme et volupté.*

"There, all is only order and beauty/Richness, calm sensuality."

In this important work, which went far along the path to abstraction, he combined the mosaic landscape manner of Signac (who bought the painting) with figure organization that recalls Cézanne's many compositions of bathers (see fig. 3.11), one of which Matisse owned. At the left of this St. Tropez beach scene, Matisse depicted his wife

Amélie, beside a picnic spread. But this mundane activity is transported to a timeless, arcadian world populated by languid nudes relaxing along a beach that has been tinged with dazzling red. With *Luxe*, therefore, Matisse offered a radical reinterpretation of the grand pastoral tradition in landscape painting, best exemplified in France by Claude Lorrain and Poussin (see fig. 1.10). As in many of the paintings that postdate this work, his idyllic world is exclusively female. Matisse was wary of all theories in art, and though this bold painting could hardly be considered an orthodox example of Neo-Impressionism, his experimentation with the staccato strokes of that style gave way to other modes.

At the Salon d'Automne of 1905, Matisse also exhibited *The Open Window* (fig. 7.4) and a portrait of Madame Matisse called *Woman with the Hat*. *The Open Window* is perhaps the first fully developed example of a theme favored by Matisse throughout the rest of his life. It is simply a small fragment of the wall of a room, taken up principally with a large window whose casements are thrown wide to the outside world—a balcony with flowerpots and vines, and beyond that the sea, sky, and boats of the harbor at Collioure. It was at this Mediterranean port, during the summer of 1905, that Matisse and Derain produced the first Fauve paintings. In *The Open Window* the inside wall and the casements are composed of broad, vertical stripes of vivid green, blue, purple, and orange, while the outside world is a brilliant pattern of small brushstrokes, ranging from stippled dots of green to broader strokes of pink,



**7.4** Henri Matisse, *The Open Window*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (55.2 × 46 cm). Collection Mrs. John Hay Whitney, New York.

white, and blue in sea and sky. This diversity of paint handling, even in adjoining passages within the same picture, was typical of Matisse's early Fauve compositions. Between his painterly marks, Matisse left bare patches of canvas, reinforcing the impact of brushstrokes that have been freed from the traditional role of describing form in order to suggest an intense, vibrating light. By this date, the artist had already moved far beyond Bonnard or any of the Neo-Impressionists toward abstraction.

In Neo-Impressionism, as in Impressionism, the generalized, all-over distribution of color patches and texture had produced a sense of atmospheric depth, at the same time that it also asserted the physical presence and impenetrability of the painting surface. Matisse, however, structured an architectural framework of facets and planes that are even broader and flatter than those of Cézanne, suppressing all sense of atmosphere; internal illumination, the play of light within a painting that suggests physical depth, is replaced with a taut, resistant skin of pigment that reflects the light. Rather than allowing the viewer to enter pictorial space, this tough, vibrant membrane of color and pattern draws the eye over and across, but rarely beyond, the picture plane. And even in the view through the window, the handling is so vigorously self-assertive that the



**7.5** Henri Matisse, *Portrait of Mme Matisse/The Green Line*, 1905. Oil and tempera on canvas, 15 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (40.3 × 32.7 cm). Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

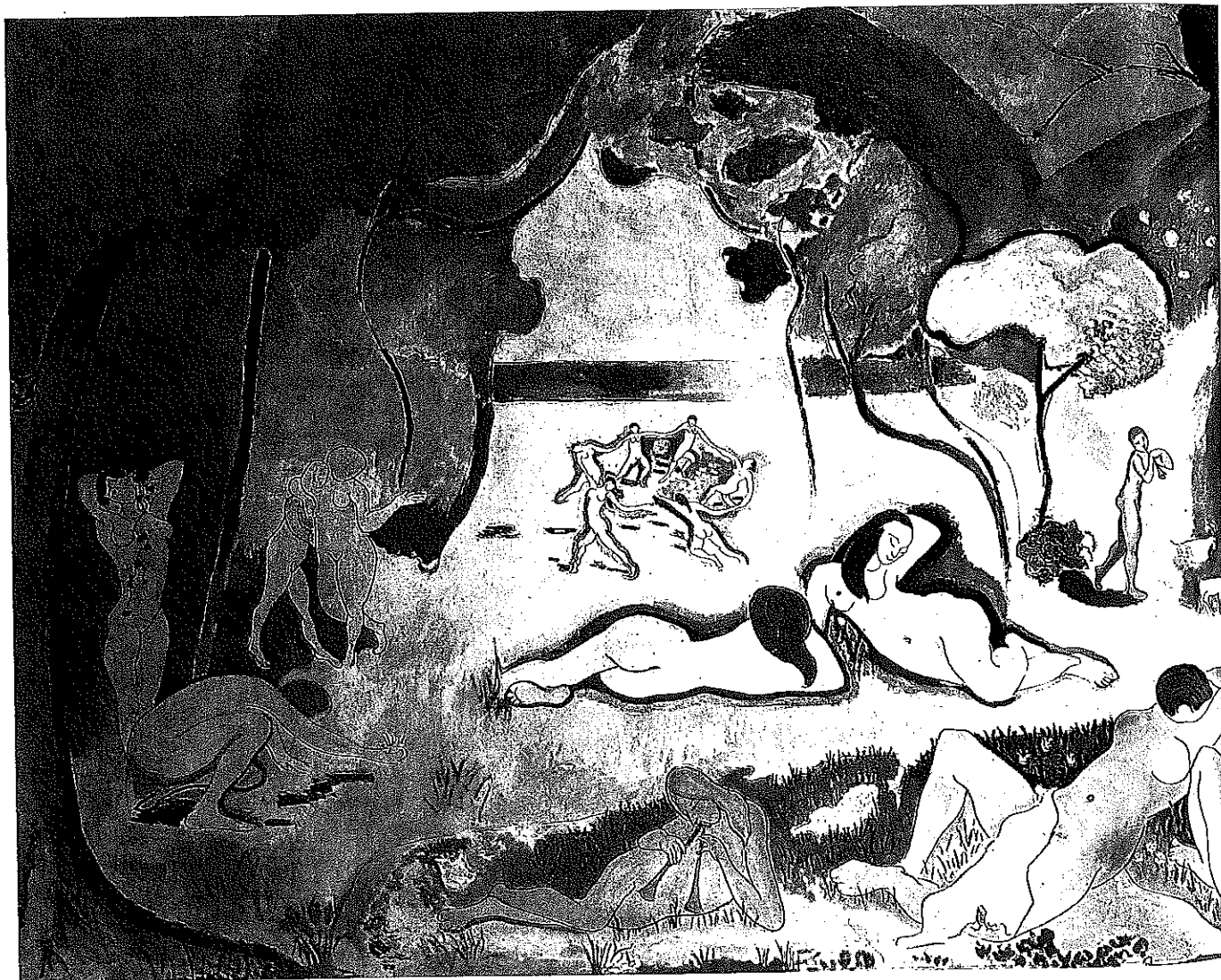


scene appears to advance more than recede, as if to turn inside out the Renaissance conception of the painting as a simulacrum of a window open into the infinite depth of the real world. As presented by Matisse, the window and its sparkling view of a holiday marina become a picture within a picture. This is a theme the artist often pursued, transforming it into a metaphor of the modernist belief that the purpose of painting was not to represent the perceptual world but rather to use visual stimuli that would take the viewer beyond the perceptual reality—or the illusion of perceptual reality—that was the stock in trade of earlier Western art.

Matisse's *Woman with the Hat* caused an even greater furor than *The Open Window* because of the seemingly wild abandon with which the artist had applied paint over the surface, not only the background and hat but also in the face of the sitter, whose features are outlined in bold strokes of green and vermilion. Paradoxically, much of the shock value sprang from the actual verisimilitude of the

painted image, its closeness to a recognizable subject providing an obvious measure of the degree of distortion imposed upon reality by the painter. At a later, more developed state of abstraction, modernist art was to become so independent of its sources in the material world as to seem less an attack on the familiar than an autonomous and thus a relatively less threatening, purely aesthetic, object. In 1905 Matisse could liberate his means mainly by choosing motifs that inspired such freedom—the luminous, relaxed holiday world of the French Riviera, a flag-decked street, or one of the period's fantastic hats.

Shortly after exhibiting *Woman with the Hat*, Matisse painted another portrait of Madame Matisse that in a sense was even more audacious, precisely because it was less sketchlike, more tightly drawn and structured. In *Portrait of Mme Matisse/The Green Line* (fig. 7.5), the sitter's face is dominated by a brilliant pea-green band of shadow dividing it from hairline to chin. At this point Matisse and his Fauve colleagues were building on the thesis put forward



**7.6** Henri Matisse, *Le Bonheur de vivre* (*The Joy of Life*), 1905–6. Oil on canvas, 5'8½" × 7'9¼" (1.74 × 2.4 m). The Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania.

by Gauguin, the Symbolists, and the Nabis: that the artist is free to use color independently of natural appearance, building a structure of abstract color shapes and lines foreign to the figure, tree, or still life that remains the basis of the structure. Perhaps Matisse's version was more immediately shocking because his subject was so simple and familiar, unlike the exotic scenes of Gauguin or the mystical fantasies of Redon, in which such arbitrary colorism seemed more acceptable. With its heavy, emphatic strokes and striking use of complementary hues, the painting is actually closest to portraits by Van Gogh (see fig. 3.21).

The artist's experiments with arcadian figure compositions climaxed in the legendary *Le Bonheur de vivre* (fig. 7.6), a painting filled with diverse reminiscences of past art, from *The Feast of the Gods*, by Giovanni Bellini and Titian, to Persian painting, from prehistoric cave paintings to a composition by Ingres. In this large work (it is nearly eight feet, or 2.5 m, wide), the artist has blended all these influences into a masterful arrangement of figures and trees in sinuous, undulating lines reminiscent of contemporary Art Nouveau design (see chapter 5). *Le Bonheur de vivre* is filled with a mood of sensual languor; figures cavort with Dionysian abandon in a landscape that pulsates with rich, riotous color. Yet the figure groups are deployed as separate vignettes, isolated from one another spatially as well as by their differing colors and contradictory scales. As Matisse explained, *Le Bonheur de vivre* "was painted through the juxtaposition of things conceived independently but arranged together." He made several sketches for the work, basing his vision on an actual landscape at Collioure, which he painted in a lush sketch without figures that still contains some of the broken color patches of Neo-Impressionism. The circle of ecstatic dancers in the distance of *Le Bonheur de vivre*, apparently inspired by the sight of fishermen dancing in Collioure, became the central motif of Matisse's painting from 1909–10, *Dance (II)* (see fig. 7.19). *Le Bonheur de vivre* is an all-important, breakthrough picture; it made a considerable impression on Picasso, whose *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* (see fig. 10.6), produced the following year, came about partly in response to it. Though radically different in spirit and style from Picasso's notorious picture, Matisse's painting was, like *Les Femmes d'Alger*, intended as a major statement, a kind of manifesto of his current ideas about art. While Picasso's canvas was not exhibited publicly until 1937, *Le Bonheur de vivre* was bought immediately by the American collectors and writers Gertrude and Leo Stein, who introduced the two men to one another, and whose apartment was eventually filled with work by them and other avant-garde artists. In their collection, Picasso could study *Le Bonheur de vivre* at length.

### The Influence of African Art

In 1906 Matisse, Derain, and Vlaminck began to collect art objects from Africa, which they had first seen in ethnographic museums, and to adapt those forms into their art.

Of all the non-Western artistic source material sought out by European modernists, none proved so radical or so far-reaching as the art of Africa. Modern artists appropriated the forms of African art in the hope of investing their work with a kind of primal truth and expressive energy, as well as a touch of the exotic, what they saw as the "primitive," or, in Gauguin's word, the "savage." Unlike the myriad other influences absorbed from outside contemporary European culture—Asian, Islamic, Oceanic, medieval, folk, and children's art—these African works were not only sculptural, as opposed to the predominantly pictorial art of Europe, but they also embodied values and conventions outside Western tradition and experience. Whereas even the most idealized European painting remained ultimately bound up with perceptual realities and the ongoing history of art itself, African figures did not observe classical proportions and contained no history or stories that Europeans understood. With their relatively large, masklike heads, distended torsos, prominent sexual features, and squat, abbreviated, or elongated limbs, they impressed Matisse and his comrades with the powerful plasticity of their forms (mostly unbound to the literal representation of nature), their expressive carving, and their iconic force.

When finally examined by such independent artists as Matisse and Picasso (first introduced to African art by Matisse), the figures seemed redolent of magic and mystery, the very qualities that European progressives, from Gauguin on, had been struggling to recover for new art. Obviously, such objects, once they reached Europe, had been stripped of their original contexts and functions, often as a result of European colonization of the very people who made them. The response on the part of progressive Western artists, who had virtually no understanding of the original conditions that shaped these works, was largely ethnocentric. They assimilated African forms into a prevailing aesthetic determined by their search for alternatives to naturalism and for a more stylized, abstract conception of the figure.

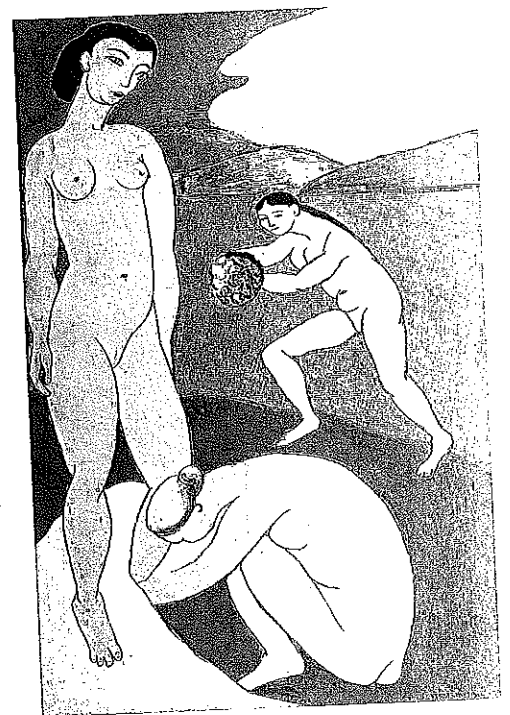
An early example of African influence in Matisse's art occurred most remarkably in *Blue Nude: Memory of Biskra* (fig. 7.7), which, as the subtitle implies, was produced following the artist's visit to Biskra, a lush oasis in the North African desert. The subject of the painting—a reclining female nude—is a dynamic variation of a classic Venus pose, with one arm bent over the head and the legs flexed forward. Matisse had made the reclining nude central to *Le Bonheur de vivre*, and such was the interest it held for him that he then restudied it in a clay sculpture (see fig. 9.3). Now, working from memory and his own sculpture, and evidently encouraged by the example of African sculpture, he abstracted his image further. These influences produced the bulbous exaggeration of breasts and buttocks; the extreme contrapposto that makes torso and hips seem viewed from different angles, or assembled from different bodies; the scarified modeling, or vigorously applied contouring in a brilliant, synthetic blue; and the masklike character of the face. But however much these traits reveal



**7.7** Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude: Memory of Biskra*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 56 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (92.1 × 142.5 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art.

the impact of African art, they have been translated from the plastic, freestanding, iconic sculpture of Africa into a pictorial expression by means of the Cézannism that Matisse had been cultivating all along. This can be seen in the dynamic character of the whole, in which rhyming curves and countercurves, images and afterimages, and interchanges of color and texture make figure and ground merge into one another.

In its theme, *Blue Nude* belongs to the tradition in nineteenth-century painting of the odalisque, or member of a North African harem (see fig. 1.13). This subject of the exotic, sexually available woman, exploited by Delacroix, Ingres, and countless lesser Salon artists, was destined for visual consumption by a predominantly male audience. But the level of abstraction Matisse imposes on his subject, as with Cézanne's bathers, moves the figure beyond the explicitly erotic. Responding to the charges of ugliness made against *Blue Nude*, Matisse said: "If I met such a woman in the street, I should run away in terror. Above all, I do not create a woman, *I make a picture.*" Inspired by the example of what he called the "invented planes and proportions" of African sculpture, Matisse did not restructure the human face and figure in the overt, aggressive manner of Picasso. Rather, he used these sources in his own subtle, reflective fashion, assimilating and synthesizing until they are scarcely discernible.



**7.8** Henri Matisse, *Le Luxe II*, 1907-8. Casein on canvas, 6'10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 4'6" (2.1 × 1.38 m). Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.

With *Le Luxe II*, a work of 1907–8 (fig. 7.8), Matisse signaled a move away from his Fauve production of the preceding years. It is a large painting, nearly seven feet (2.1 m) tall, that Matisse elaborately prepared with full-scale charcoal and oil sketches. The oil sketch *Le Luxe I* is much looser in execution, and closer to Fauvism than are the flat, unmodulated zones of color in the final version. Though *Le Luxe II* explores a theme similar to that of *Luxe, calme et volupté* and *Le Bonheur de vivre* (see figs. 7.3, 7.6), the figures are now life-size and dominate the landscape. Coloristically, *Le Luxe II* is far more subdued, relying on areas of localized color bound by crisp lines. Despite the artist's abandonment of perspective, except for the arbitrary diminution of one figure, and modeling in light and shadow, the painting is not merely surface decoration. The figures, modeled only by the contour lines, have substance; they exist and move in space, with the illusion of depth, light, and air created solely by flat color shapes that are, at the same time, synonymous spatially with the picture plane. The actual subject of the painting remains elusive. The crouching woman, a beautiful, compact shape, seems to be tending to her companion in some way (perhaps drying her feet?), while another rushes toward the pair, proffering a bouquet of flowers. Matisse may have implied a mythological theme, such as Venus's birth from the sea, but, typically, he only hints at such narratives.

### "Wild Beasts" Tamed: Derain, Vlaminck, and Dufy

André Derain (1880–1954) met the older Matisse at Carrière's atelier in 1900, as already noted, and was encouraged by him to proceed with his career as a painter. He already knew Maurice de Vlaminck, whom Derain in turn had led from his various careers as violinist, novelist, and bicycle racer into the field of painting. Unlike Vlaminck, Derain was a serious student of the art of the museums who, despite his initial enthusiasm for the explosive color

of Fauvism, was constantly haunted by a more ordered and traditional concept of painting.

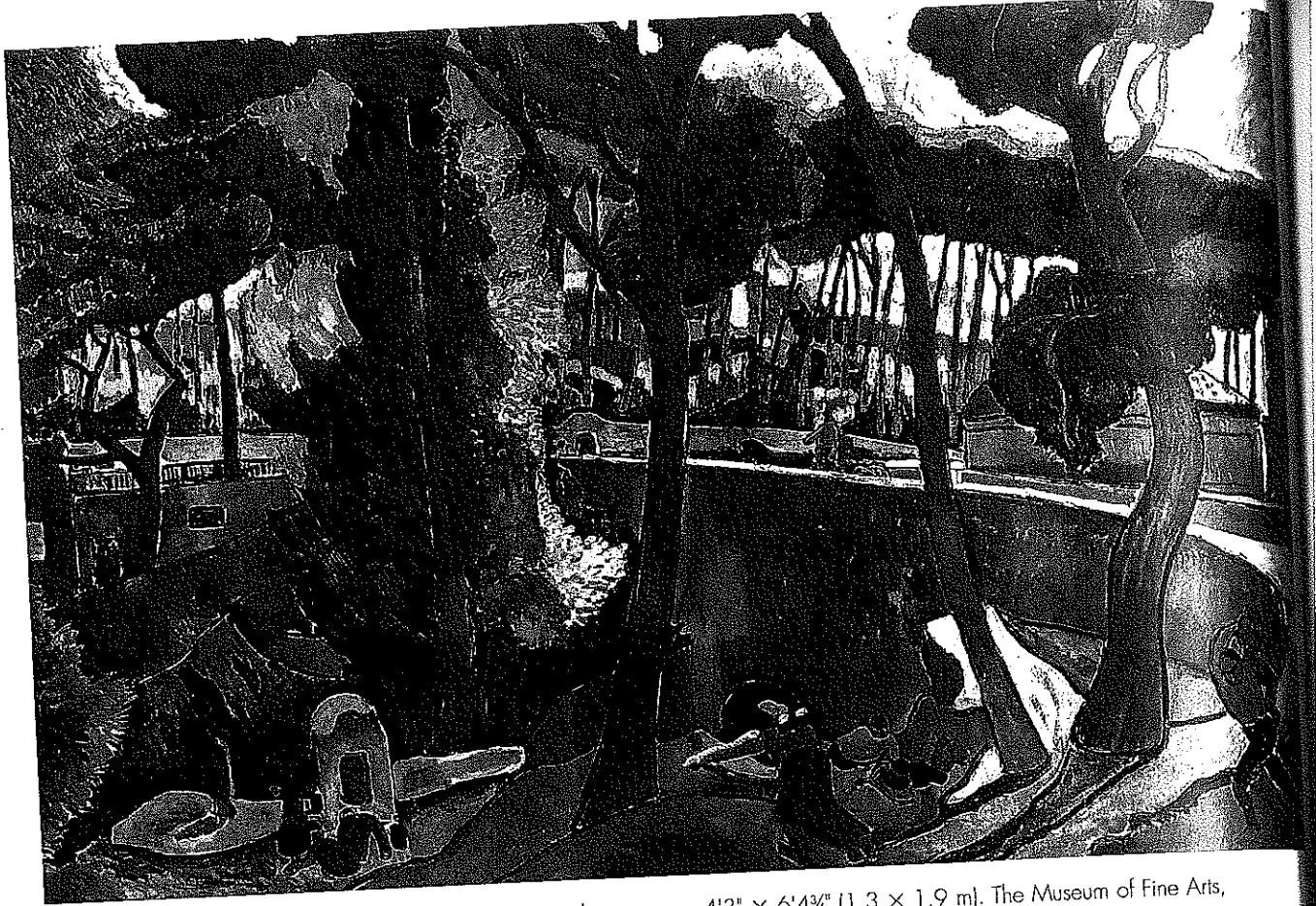
Although Derain's Fauve paintings embodied every kind of painterly variation, from large-scale Neo-Impressionism to free brushwork, most characteristic, perhaps, are works like *London Bridge* (fig. 7.9). It was painted during a trip commissioned by the dealer Volland, who wanted Derain to make paintings that would capture the special atmosphere of London (Claude Monet's many views of the city had just been successfully exhibited in Paris). To compare Derain's painting with the Impressionist's earlier work, *Bridge at Argenteuil* (see fig. 2.28) is to understand the transformations art had undergone in roughly thirty years, as well as the fundamental role Impressionism had played in those transformations. While in London, Derain visited the museums, studying especially the paintings of Turner, Claude, and Rembrandt, as well as African sculpture. Unlike Monet's view of the Seine, his painting of the Thames is a brilliantly synthetic color arrangement of harmonies and dissonances. The background sky is rose-pink; the buildings silhouetted against it are complementary green and blue. By reiterating large color areas in the foreground and background and tilting the perspective, Derain delimits the depth of his image. In the summer of 1906, several months after the trip to London, Derain spent time in L'Estaque, the famous site of paintings by Cézanne (see fig. 3.6). But his grand panorama of a bend in the road (fig. 7.10) takes its cue from Gauguin (see figs. 3.17, 3.19) in its brilliant palette and the evocation of an idealized realm far from the urban bustle of London's waterways. With this work Derain travels to new extremes of intensity and antinaturalism in his color, a world in which the hues of a single tree can shift dramatically half a dozen times.

Derain was essentially an academic painter who happened to become involved in a revolutionary movement, participated in it effectively, but was never completely happy in the context. In 1906 he became a friend of



7.9 André Derain, *London Bridge*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 26 × 39" (66 × 99.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.





**7.10** André Derain, *Turning Road, L'Estaque*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 4'3" × 6'4½" (1.3 × 1.9 m). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Picasso and was drawn into the vortex of proto-Cubism (see chapter 10). But throughout the years of World War I (1914–18), in which Derain fought, and later, when Picasso and Braque were expanding their discoveries in Synthetic Cubism and exploring alternative styles, Derain was moving back consistently from Cézanne to that artist's sources in Poussin and Chardin. His direction was away from the very experiments of the twentieth century he had helped to develop, back through the innovators of the late nineteenth century, to the Renaissance. Derain's return to optical realism formed part of a larger "call to order" around World War I, when a number of French artists and writers sought to renew their art through the more classical forms of Western art. Picasso's classicizing work from the second half of the 1910s and early twenties belongs to this phenomenon (see figs. 14.18, 14.20–23), as does, in the preceding chapter, the work of Maillol (see fig. 6.13). Perhaps most indicative of this gradual but thoroughgoing change in Derain's outlook is that in 1930 he sold several African sculptures from his collection to buy Renaissance and antique artworks. His new conservatism resulted in a very uneven output of landscapes, nudes, still lifes, and portraits and a serious decline after World War II in his reputation, which is now being reexamined.

The career of **Maurice de Vlaminck** (1876–1958) presents many parallels with Derain's, even though the

artists were so different in personality and in their approach to the art of painting. Vlaminck was born in Paris of Flemish stock, a fact of considerable importance to him personally and one that may have contributed to the nature of his painting. Impulsive and exuberant, he was a

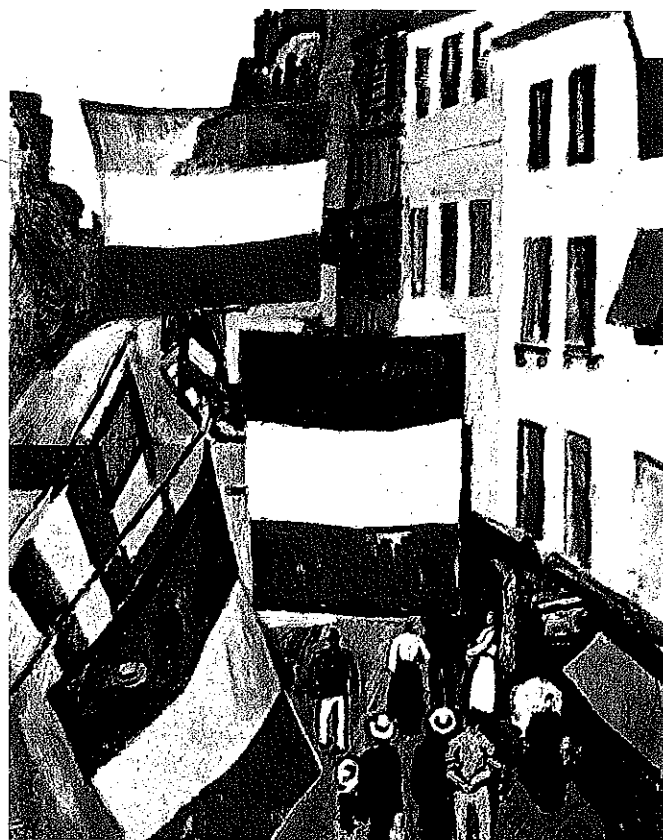


**7.11** Maurice de Vlaminck, *Picnic in the Country*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 35 × 45½" (88.9 × 45.6 cm). Private collection.

self-taught artist with anarchist political leanings who liked to boast of his contempt for the art of museums. From the time he met Derain and turned to painting, he was enraptured with color. Thus the Van Gogh exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris in 1901 was a revelation to him. At the Salon des Indépendants in the same year, Derain introduced him to Matisse, but it was not until 1905, after exposure to the work of both artists, that Vlaminck's work reached its full potential, despite his false claims to have been the leader of the Fauves. Van Gogh remained Vlaminck's great inspiration, and in his Fauve paintings Vlaminck characteristically used the short, choppy brushstrokes of the Dutchman to attain a comparable kind of coloristic dynamism, as in *Picnic in the Country* (fig. 7.11). Two figures are isolated within a coil of swirling color patches; they are foreigners from the world of nature, picnicking in a forest of paint. His small but dramatic *Portrait of Derain* (fig. 7.12) is one of several likenesses the Fauves made of one another. Vlaminck has here moved beyond the directional, multicolored daubs of *Picnic in the Country* to a boldly conceived image in which Derain's face is predominantly an intense, brilliant red with black contours, yellow highlights, and a few strokes of contrasting green shadow along the bridge of



7.12 Maurice de Vlaminck, *Portrait of Derain*, 1906. Oil on cardboard, 10 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ " [27.3 × 22.2 cm]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



7.13 Raoul Dufy, *Street Decked with Flags, Le Havre*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ " [81 × 65.7 cm]. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

the nose, recalling Matisse's *Portrait of Mme Matisse/The Green Line* (see fig. 7.5).

By 1908 Vlaminck too was beginning to be affected by the new view of Cézanne that resulted from the exhibitions after Cézanne's death in 1906. And although for a time he was in touch with the new explorations of Picasso and Braque leading toward Analytic Cubism, and even used various forms of simplification based on their ideas, in actuality he, like Derain, was gradually retreating into the world of representation by way of Cézanne. By 1915 Vlaminck had moved toward a kind of expressive realism that he continued to pursue for the rest of his life.

Raoul Dufy (1877–1953) was shocked out of his reverence for the Impressionists and Van Gogh by his discovery of Matisse's 1905 painting *Luxe, calme et volupté*, when, he said, "Impressionist realism lost all its charm." In a sense, he remained faithful to this vision and to Fauve color throughout his life. His *Street Decked with Flags, Le Havre* (fig. 7.13) takes up a subject celebrated by the Impressionists, but the bold, close-up view of the flags imposes a highly abstracted geometric pattern on the scene.

Influenced by Georges Braque, his fellow painter from Le Havre, Dufy after 1908 experimented with a modified form of Cubism, but he was never really happy in this vein. Gradually he returned to his former loves—decorative color and elegant draftsmanship—and formulated a personal style based on his earlier Fauvism. His pleasurable

subjects were the horse races and regattas of his native Le Havre and nearby Deauville, the nude model in the studio, and the view from a window to the sea beyond. He maintained a rainbow, calligraphic style until the end of his life, applying it to fabrics, theatrical sets, and book illustrations as well as paintings.

For Matisse, Fauvism was only a beginning from which he went on to a rich, productive career that spans the first half of the twentieth century. Derain and Vlaminck, however, did little subsequently that had the vitality of their Fauve works. It is interesting to speculate on why these young men should briefly have outdone themselves, but the single overriding explanation is probably the presence of Henri Matisse—older than the others, more mature and, ultimately, more gifted as an artist. But in addition to Matisse and Rouault (see below), there was also Georges Braque, who, after discovering his first brief and relatively late inspiration in Fauvism, went on to restudy Cézanne, with consequences for twentieth-century art so significant that they must await a subsequent chapter on Cubism.

### Colors of the Spiritual Eye: Georges Rouault

The one Fauve who was almost exclusively concerned with a deliberately Expressionist subject matter is perhaps not to be considered a Fauve at all. This is **Georges Rouault** (1871–1958), who exhibited three works in the 1905 Salon d'Automne and thus is associated with the work of the group, although his paintings were not actually shown in the room with theirs. Throughout his long and productive career, Rouault remained deeply religious, deeply emotional, and profoundly moralistic. He came from a family of craftsmen, and he himself was first apprenticed to a stained-glass artisan. In the studio of Gustave Moreau he met Matisse and other future Fauves, and soon became Moreau's favorite pupil, for he followed most closely Moreau's own style and concepts.

By 1903 Rouault's art, like that of Matisse and others around him, was undergoing profound changes, reflecting a radical shift in his moral and religious outlook. Like his friend the Catholic writer and propagandist Léon Bloy, Rouault sought subjects to express his sense of indignation and disgust over the evils that, as it seemed to him, permeated bourgeois society. The prostitute became his symbol of this rotting society. He depicted her with a fierce loathing, rather than objectively, or with the cynical sympathy of Toulouse-Lautrec—who, it must be added, represented individuals rather than Rouault's general types. Rouault invited prostitutes to pose in his studio, painting them with attributes such as stockings or corsets to indicate their profession. In many of these studies, done in watercolor, the woman is set within a confined space, to focus attention on the figure (fig. 7.14). Some of the poses and the predominantly blue hues of these watercolors stem in part from Rouault's admiration for Cézanne. The women's

yellow-white bodies, touched with light-blue shadows, are modeled sculpturally with heavy, freely brushed outlines. Here the masklike grimace of the face is reflected in the mirror, like a twisted paraphrase of the classical Venus, who contemplates her beauty in a looking glass. It was perhaps not until the twenties, with the work of the Berlin artist George Grosz, who bore witness through his art to the moral failings of postwar German society, that prostitutes were interpreted with comparable vehemence.

Rouault's moral indignation further manifested itself, like Daumier's, in vicious caricatures of judges and politicians. His counterpoint to the corrupt prostitute was the figure of the circus clown, sometimes the carefree nomad beating his drum, but more often a tragic, lacerated victim. As early as 1904 he had begun to depict subjects taken directly from the Gospels—the Crucifixion, Jesus and his disciples, and other scenes from the life of Christ. He represented the figure of Christ as a tragic mask of the Man of Sorrows deriving directly from a crucified Christ by Grünewald (see fig. 1.7) or a tormented Christ by Bosch. Rouault's religious and moral sentiments are perhaps most movingly conveyed in a series of fifty-eight prints, titled *Miserere*, that was commissioned by his dealer Volland (whose heirs the artist later had to sue to retrieve the contents of his studio). For years, Rouault devoted himself to



**7.14** Georges Rouault, *Prostitute before a Mirror*, 1906. Watercolor on cardboard, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (70.2 × 53 cm). Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris.



**7.15** Georges Rouault, *The Old King*, 1916–36. Oil on canvas, 30¼ × 21¼" (76.8 × 54 cm). Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

the production of the etchings and aquatints of *Miserere*, which were printed between 1922 and 1927, but not published until 1948, when the artist was seventy-seven. Technically, the prints are masterpieces of graphic compression. The black tones, worked over and over again, have the depth and richness of his most vivid oil colors.

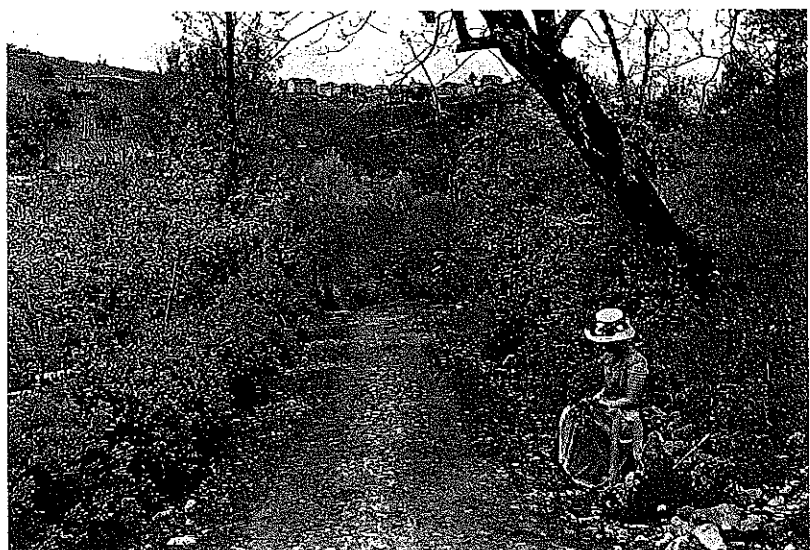
The characteristics of Rouault's later style are seen in *The Old King* (fig. 7.15). The design has become geometrically abstract in feeling, and colors are intensified to achieve the glow of stained glass. A heavy black outline is used to define the rather

**7.16** Lumière brothers, *Young Lady with an Umbrella*, 1906–10. Autochrome photograph. Fondation Nationale de la Photographie, Lyons, France.

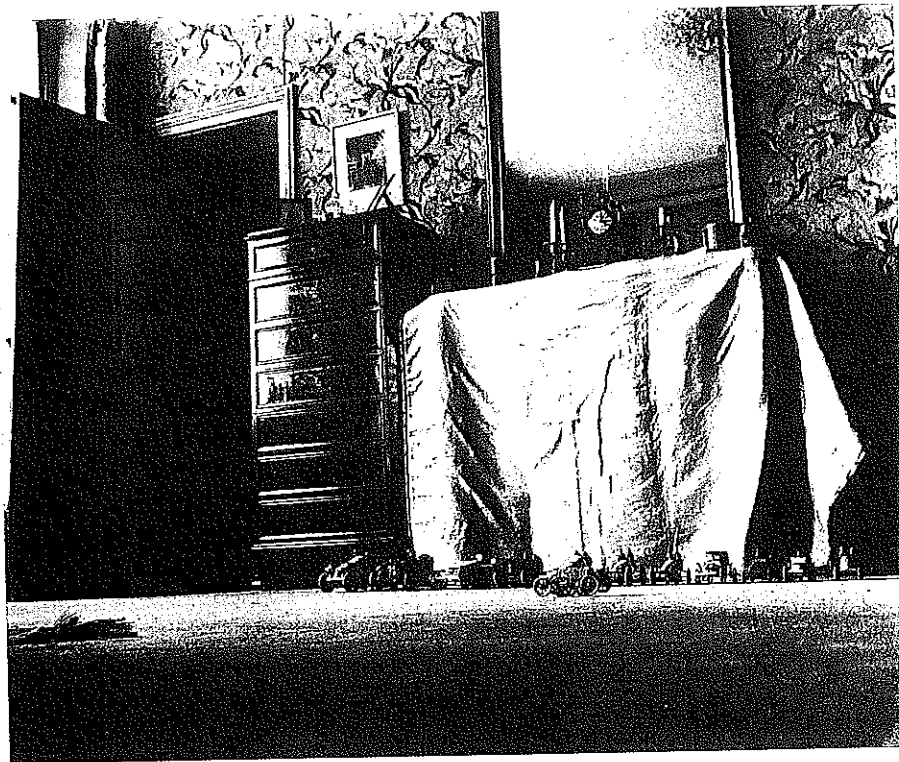
Egyptian-style profile of the king's head and the square proportions of his torso. Paint is applied heavily with the underpainting glowing through, in the manner of Rembrandt. Rouault also captures some of the Dutch master's mood in this serene image of a world-weary ruler, who clutches a flower in his hand, one of the few traces of white in the entire painting. Although Rouault never entirely gave up the spirit of moral indignation expressed in the virulent satire that marked his early works, the sense of calm and the hope of salvation in the later paintings mark him as one of the few authentic religious painters of the modern world.

### The Belle Époque on Camera: The Lumière Brothers and Lartigue

Developments in photography contemporary with the years of Fauvism include the first photographers to take up a color process, after one was finally made public in 1904 and commercially feasible in 1907 by **Auguste and Louis Lumière** (1862–1954; 1864–1948) of Lyons, France (fig. 7.16). By coating one side of a glass plate with a mixture of tiny, transparent starch particles, each dyed red, green, or blue (the three primary photographic colors), and the other side with a thin panchromatic emulsion, the Lumières created a light-sensitive plate that, once exposed, developed, and projected on a white ground, reproduced a full-color image of the subject photographed. The Autochromes—as the Lumières called the slides made by their patented process—rendered images in muted tonalities with the look of a fine-grained texture, an effect that simply heightened the inherent charm of the bright subject matter. This was especially true for a Fauve generation still entranced with Neo-Impressionism. Their invention was







7.17 Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *In My Room: Collection of My Racing Cars*, 1905. Gelatin-silver print, 5 1/8 × 7" (13.7 × 17.8 cm).

immediately taken up by professional photographers, especially the so-called Pictorialists, such as Edward Steichen, as well as amateurs around the world.

Dufy's privileged, Belle Époque world of regattas and racecourses was also celebrated by the French contemporary photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue (1894–1986), once the fast-action handheld camera had been introduced in 1888 and then progressively improved. Such developments encouraged experimentation and enabled this affluent child artist (he began making photographs at age seven) to capture not only his family and friends at their pleasures, but also the gradual advent of such twentieth-century phenomena as auto races and aviation. At his death in 1986 Lartigue, who was a painter professionally, left behind a huge number of photographs and journals that document a charmed life of holidays, swimming holes, and elegantly clad ladies and gentlemen. He was eleven when he aimed his camera at the toy cars in his bedroom (fig. 7.17), and his image adopts a child's angle on the world. The tiny cars, at eye level, take on strange dimensions, all of which is compounded by the mysteriously draped fireplace that looms above them. Owing to his view of photography as a pursuit carried on for private satisfaction and delight, Lartigue did not become generally known until a show at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1963, when his work took an immediate place in the history of art as a direct ancestor of the "straight" but unmistakably distinctive vision of such photographers as Brassai and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

## Modernism on a Grand Scale: Matisse's Art after Fauvism

Fauvism was a short-lived but tremendously influential movement that had no definitive conclusion, though it had effectively drawn to a close by 1908. The direction of Matisse's art explored in *Le Luxe II* is carried still further in *Harmony in Red* (fig. 7.18), a large painting destined for the Moscow dining room of Sergei Shchukin, Matisse's important early patron who, along with Ivan Morozov, is the reason Russian museums are today key repositories of Matisse's greatest work. This astonishing painting was begun early in 1908 as *Harmony in Blue* and then repainted in the fall, in a radically different color scheme. Here Matisse returned to the formula of *Dinner Table*, which he had painted in 1896–97 (see fig. 7.1). A comparison of the two canvases reveals dramatically the revolution that had occurred in this artist's works—and in fact in modern painting—during a ten-year period. Admittedly, the first *Dinner Table* was still an apprentice piece, a relatively conventional exploration of Impressionist light and color and contracted space, actually more traditional than paintings executed by the Impressionists twenty years earlier. Nevertheless, when submitted to the Salon de la Nationale it was severely criticized by the conservatives as being tainted with Impressionism. In *Harmony in Red* we have moved into a new world, less empirical and more abstract than anything ever envisioned by Gauguin, much less the Impressionists. The space of the interior is defined

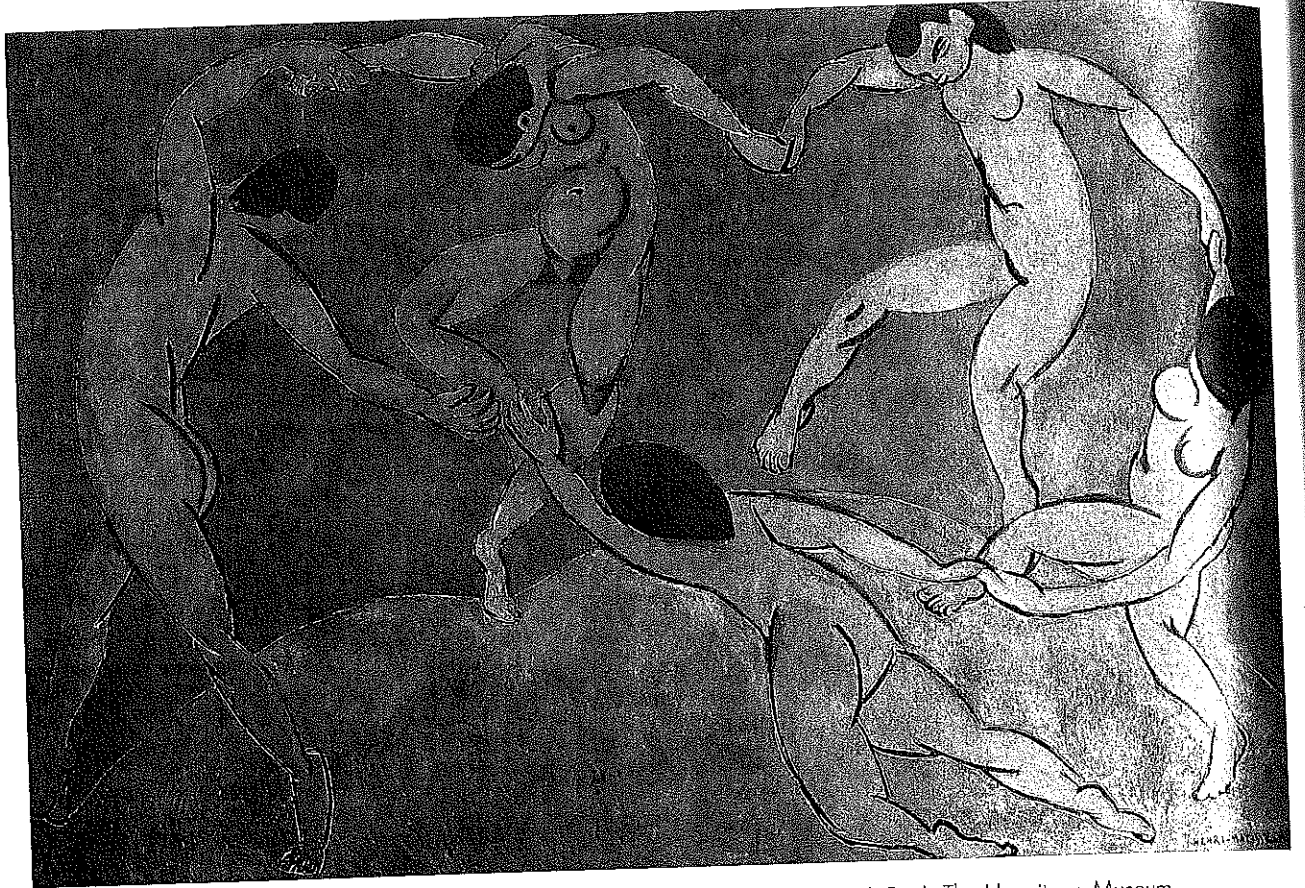
by a single unmodulated area of red, the flatness of which is reinforced by arabesques of plant forms that flow across the walls and table surface. These patterns were actually derived from a piece of decorative fabric that Matisse owned. Their meandering forms serve to confound any sense of volumetric space in the painting and to create pictorial ambiguities by playing off the repeated pattern of flower baskets against the “real” still lifes on the table. This ambiguity is extended to the view through the window of abstract tree and plant forms silhouetted against a green ground and blue sky. The red building in the extreme upper distance, which reiterates the color of the room, in some manner establishes the illusion of depth in the landscape, yet the entire scene, framed by what may be a window sill and cut off by the picture edge like other forms in the painting, could also itself be a painting on the wall. In essence Matisse has again—and in an even greater

degree than in *Le Luxe II*—created a new, tangible world of pictorial space through color and line.

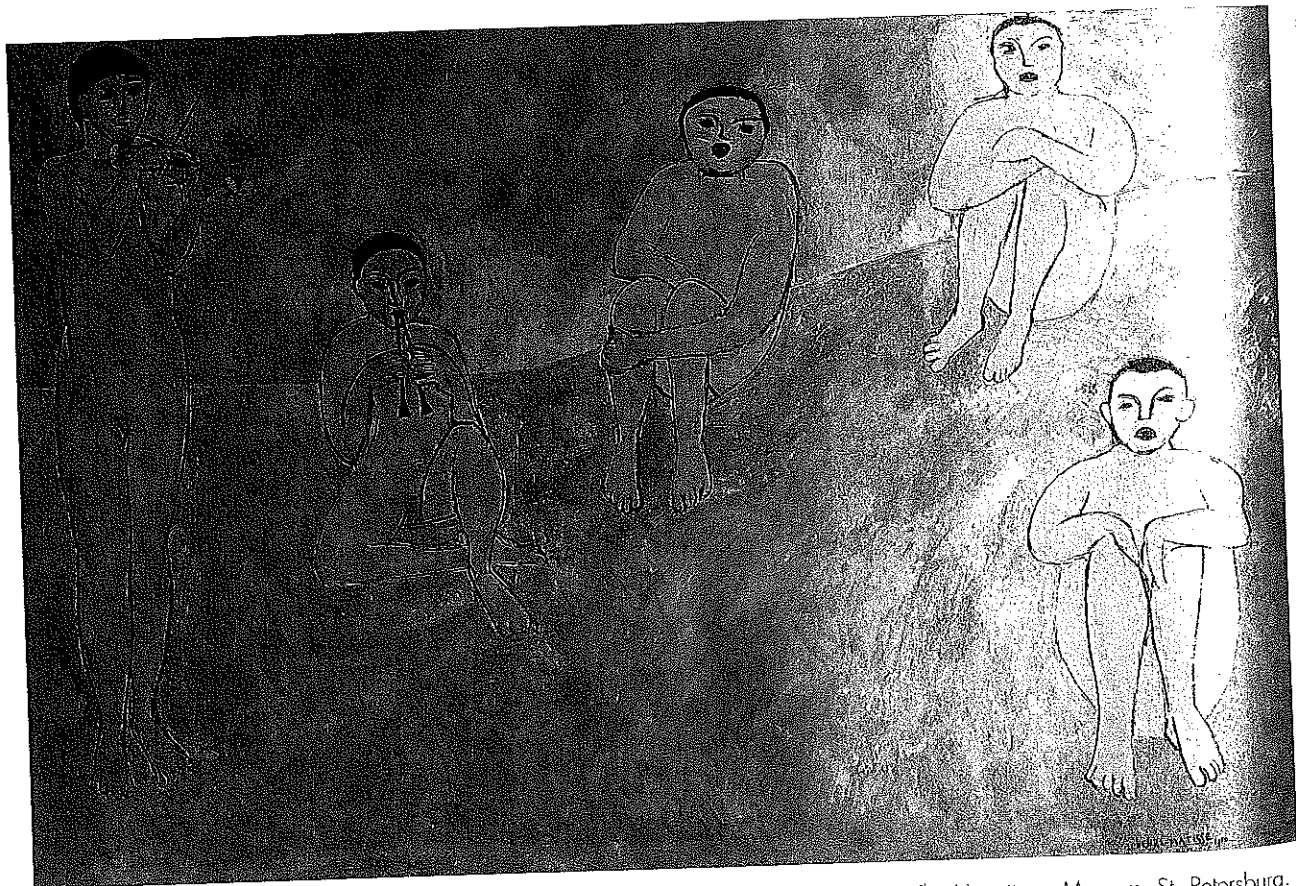
In two huge paintings of the first importance, *Dance (II)* and *Music*, both of 1909–10 (figs. 7.19, 7.20), and both commissioned by Shchukin, Matisse boldly outlined large-scale figures and isolated them against a ground of intense color. The inspiration for *Dance* has been variously traced to Greek vase painting or peasant dances. Specifically, the motif was first used by Matisse, as we have seen, in the background group of *Le Bonheur de vivre*. In *Dance*, the colors have been limited to an intense green for the earth, an equally intense blue for the sky, and brick-red for the figures. The figures are scaled into the foreground by the color areas of sky and ground, and by their proximity to the framing edge and their great size within the canvas, but they nevertheless dance ecstatically in an airy space created by these contrasting juxtaposed hues and



7.18 Henri Matisse, *Harmony in Red (The Dessert)*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 5'10 $\frac{7}{8}$ "  $\times$  7'2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (1.8  $\times$  2.2 m). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



**7.19** Henri Matisse, *Dance (III)*, 1909–10. Oil on canvas, 8'5½" × 12'9½" (2.6 × 3.9 m). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

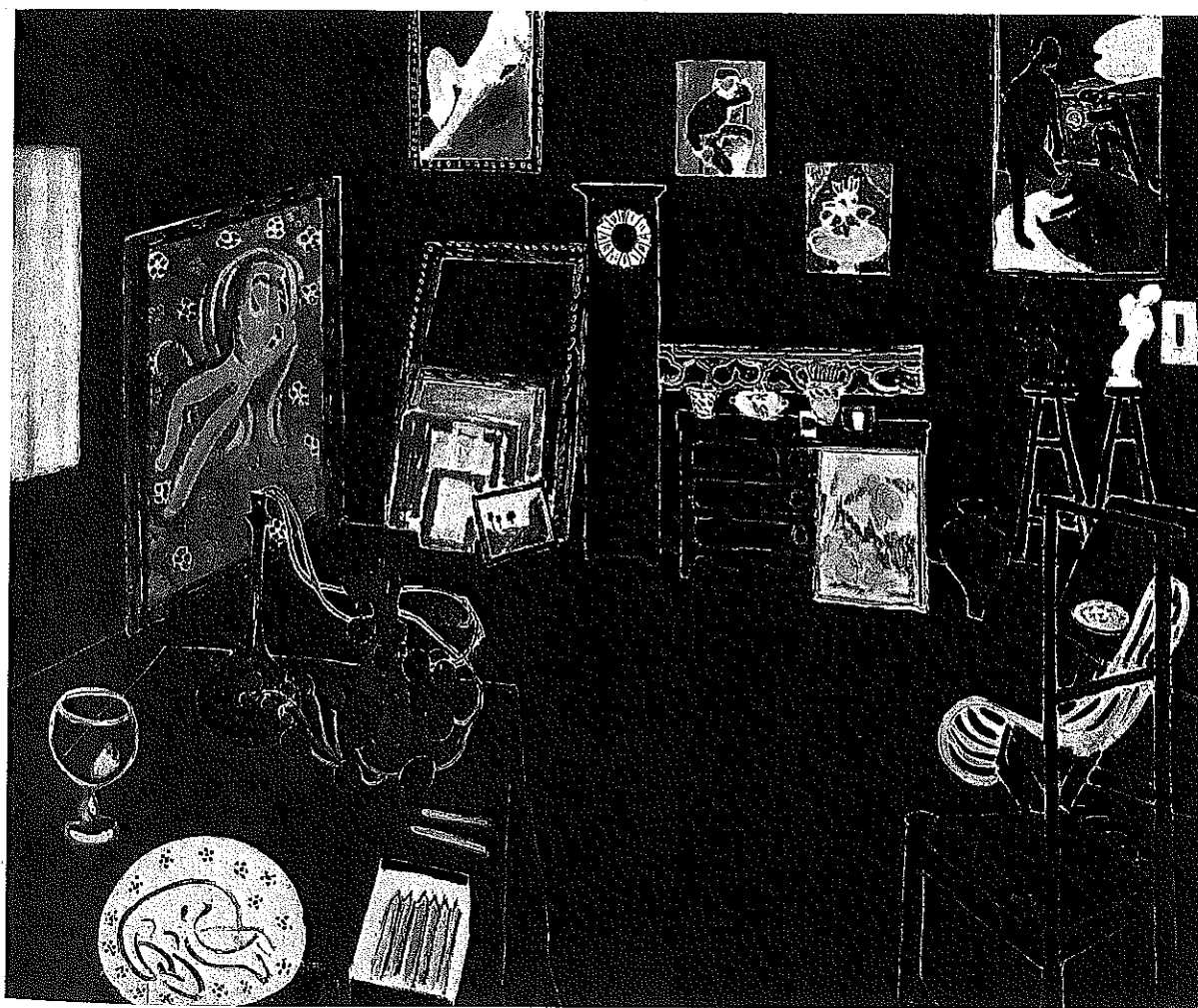


**7.20** Henri Matisse, *Music*, 1909–10. Oil on canvas, 8'5½" × 12'9½" (2.6 × 3.9 m). The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

by their own modeled contours and sweeping movements. The depth and intensity of the colors change in different lights, at times setting up visual vibrations that make the entire surface dance. *Music* is a perfect foil for the kinetic energy of *Dance*, in the static, frontalized poses of the figures arranged like notes on a musical staff, each isolated from the others to create a mood of trancelike withdrawal. Matisse's explanation of Fauvism as "the courage to return to a 'purity of means'" still holds true here. In both paintings the arcadian worlds of earlier painters (see fig. 1.10) have been transformed into an elemental realm beyond the specificities of time and place. When they were exhibited in the 1910 Salon d'Automne, these two extraordinary paintings provoked little but negative and hostile criticism, and Shchukin at first withdrew his commission, though he soon changed his mind. These monumental works further show Matisse locating his art in relation to the grand classical tradition. Modernist in conception, they nevertheless aligned Matisse with the elite world of wealthy patronage that had previously sustained (and indeed still sustained) conventional academic art. Other modernist artists—notably Picasso—were to tread a comparable path,

simultaneously becoming respected public figures while retaining, at least to a degree, the avant-garde ability to disconcert conventionally minded viewers.

In *The Red Studio* (fig. 7.21), Matisse returned to the principle of a single, unifying color that he had exploited in *Harmony in Red*. The studio interior is described by a uniform area of red, covering floor and walls. The space is given volumetric definition only by a single white line that indicates the intersection of the walls and floor, and by the paintings and furniture lined up along the rear wall. Furnishings—table, chair, cupboard, and sculpture stands—are dematerialized, ghostlike objects outlined in white lines. The tangible accents are the paintings of the artist, hanging on or stacked against the walls, and (in the foreground) ceramics, sculptures, vase, glass, and pencils. (*Le Luxe II* can be seen at the upper right.) By 1911, when this was painted, Picasso, Braque, and the other Cubists, as we shall see, had in their own ways been experimenting with the organization and contraction of pictorial space for some five years. Matisse was affected by their ideas, but sought his own solutions. Later works by Matisse are discussed in chapter 13.



7.21 Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, Issy-les-Moulineaux, 1911. Oil on canvas, 5'11¼" × 7'2½" (1.81 × 2.2 m). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.