The Fauves “Discovery” Of African Art

Introduction

A small group of French artist began the 20th century with Matisse at the helm of a new movement in art. Although it wasn’t until 1907 that the fauves named was attached to the movement. The Woman With The Hat was originally submitted into the 1905 Salon d’Automne by Henri Matisse along with eight oil paintings and two water colours. The Salon saw a group of artist exhibit works of art which shocked audiences and critics with its “radically daring and undulled colours” . I will be discussing the fauves most striking characteristics of unrealistic application of colour challenged the art community before moving on to the resemblance the paintings bare to the faces of sculptures from Non-European countries that had been seen on artworks by such artists as Gauguin and Munch.

Matisse, His Style and His Influences

French artist Henry Matisse (1869-1954) studied under William-Adolph Bouguereau at the school Académie Julian in Paris in 1891. Bourgereau Taught matisse the techniques of the Old Masters, a subject which matisse had little interest. It was Moreau at École des Beaux-Arts who “gave Matisse lisecnce to explore his own individuallity” . Here Matisse studied the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements. The Influence of van gogh had on his work was the growing intensity he could create by using colour as light. He learnt from studying cezannes still lifes the importance the blank canvas was to create a balance against elements of 3 dimensional form, and most importantly to the fauvism movement, Allowing colour to lead the painting over any other element. Cathy Locke wrote “From studying Cezannes work he learnt how to let go of the details and allow colour to become the dominate factor.” It was perhaps this study of cezanne that lead Matisse to paint his wife in states of fragility, not just in the pose but the application of paint and style he created with colour. In 1904 Matisse and Paul Signac together studied colour using Michel Chevreuls 1855 colour wheel.

The Salon d’Automne

Matisse was experimenting with pointillism on a painting called Le Port D’Abaill when he received harsh criticism from his mother, in response he destroyed the painting and started The Woman With The Hat to give as a gift to her. George Hagman spoke of the painting “one of the most notorious of the fauve paintings, a radical piece and, at the time, bizarre creation of clashing colors and rough, violent brushwork. The fact that this painting was executed for his mother so as to undo her earlier rejection speaks to the way in which his mother’s aesthetic (at least in Matisse’s mind) support the highly subjective method which he had been engaged in.” It was interesting to know that Matisses mothers family worked at the Bohain Textiles industry creating colourful silk fabrics, perhaps influencing matisse and his love of colour.

The Salon d’Automne that showcased and launched the fauvist artist was not well received by critics, In fact Franz Jourdain, the president of the salon tried to persuade Matisse into not showing The Woman In The Hat. It was Louis Vauxcelles, a reviewer of the Salon who first use

the word fauves to describe the unusually coloured works, he wrote about Matisses' "He has courage, because of his entry — and he knows it — will have the fate of Christian virgin delivered to the wild beasts (fauves) at the circus" he continued his review by commenting on the sculpture by Albert Marque which had the fauvist paintings surrounding it "The candor of these bust is surprising, in the midst of the orgy of pure color: Donatello among the wild beasts [fauves]"

All of Matisses paintings were created months prior to the opening on October 15th in 1905. Flam poetically described The Woman With The Hat as a "spiritual and psychological portraiture here: devoid of sentimentality, softness or clichéd notions of 'femininity' the painting has a force and shock of brutally honest confrontation."

The Woman With The Hat compared against manets Berthe Moriset With A Bunch Of Violets (1872) shows the clear influence Manet had on Matisse. The similaries between poses and costume, even Amelie Matisse was dressed in a black dress, hat and gloves, almost exactly as manets the only colour in her attire was a red ribbon that wrapped around her neck. Matisse even translated the chiaroscuro used in Manets painting from Light/Dark to Warm/Cool Colours.

The socio-history of Africa and France and the African Sculptures, specifically Mask, Fang Culture (b1905) influenced the members of the fauvism movement.