

Matisse towards Expressionism - Seminar 2

How Matisse revealed dance through depicting dance

Beth Taylor - 18 March 2010

WAHG

Lecture Notes N°2

The imaginative journey towards *La Danse*

This week we will consider some of the visual influences which contributed to the making of *La Danse* for Matisse's Russian patron Sergei Shchukin in 1910:

- ❖ Matisse discovers the oriental
- ❖ The impact of primitive art
- ❖ His textile collection
- ❖ His exploration of sculptural form
- ❖ Gaining a Russian patron – Sergei Shchukin
- ❖ Painting *La Musique and La Danse*

Orientalism

Cross cultural art – the work of Europeans inspired by the Near East and North Africa. Matisse visited North Africa as a professional artist committed to exploring new pictorial sensations. For Matisse Islamic art was one of the great expressions of the decorative

Primitivism

The term used to describe the interest of early modern European artists with what was then called 'primitive art'. This included tribal art from Africa, the South Pacific and Indonesia, as well as prehistoric and early European art, folk art and the art made by children.

Objects made outside the West had begun to appear in ethnological museums in the nineteenth century as a result of the

colonial expansion of western nations. Artists found in this 'primitive art' attributes of simplicity, authenticity, directness of expression and a more instinctive nature in comparison with western art. These values were thought of as guiding principles for alternative ways of making art in contrast to the western academic tradition. It pointed the way to systems of representation other than the naturalism that dominated academic art.

André Derain placed a Fang mask in his studio in Paris where it was seen by both Matisse and Picasso. Matisse bought his first piece of African sculpture in 1906 and his paintings of a young sailor with their simplified features demonstrate a link with African sculpture.

Matisse and textiles

Matisse collected fabrics all his life, from scraps bought from Parisian flea markets when he was a student to tapestry fragments, cottons, curtains, North African embroidered wall hangings and, in the 1930s, haute couture gowns. He took the collection everywhere, draping them over furniture or hanging them on walls as "*my working library*" The arabesques and repeated floral patterns in textiles provided Matisse with a repertory of forms and a way in which to provide rhythmic structure.

Matisse and sculpture

Matisse made over 80 sculptures, the majority of which dated from his early career. Sculpture enabled Matisse to organise his thoughts about the volume, density, weight of the human body. It also allowed him freedom of anatomical interpretation through manipulation of the figure into a variety of poses. Encouraged by the influence of

African art, he used exaggeration and distortion for his own compositional needs.

Matisse spoke about the necessity for the artist to internalise the bodily structure and pose of the model, i.e. to feel the pose and the internal structure of the subject.

The Decorative

For Matisse the decorative meant that painting could be meaningful by the way its own forms and colours were organised rather than because of the story that could be attached to its depicted subject matter. This view accorded visual art an expressive power akin to that of sound in music. *“When I put colours together they have to join in a living chord or harmony of colour, like a musical chord or harmony”*

Matisse’s art by 1910

La Danse and its companion painting *La Musique* were considered primitive, barbaric and grotesque when they were exhibited in the 1910 autumn Salon. In his **Notes of a Painter** published in 1908 Matisse had sought to explain his art. He said *“What I am after, above all, is expression.....I want to reach that state of condensation of sensations which makes a painting....[have] a truer, more essential character”*

“The public is against”, wrote Shchukin from Moscow,
“but the future is yours”



Nu couchée (Reclining Nude I) 1907 34.3 x 50.2 MOMA



Baigneuses a la tortue (Bathers with a Turtle)
179.1 x 220.3 St. Louis Art Museum



Henri Matisse *The Snail* 1952. Gouache découpée,
Tate Modern Collection

Matisse Lecture 2

List of paintings and sculpture

- La Liseuse* 1894 61.5 x 47.9 Musee National d'Art Moderne, Paris
- Bonheur de vivre* 1905-6 174 x 238 Barnes Foundation, Merion,
Pennsylvania
- Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* 1906 94 x 140 Baltimore Museum of Art
- Marguerite* 1907 Musee Picasso, Paris
- Le Jeune Marin II* 1907-8 100x 80.9 Private collection
- Harmony in Red* 1908 180 x 200 Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg
- Nu couchee (Reclining Nude I)* 1907 34.3 x 50.2 Museum of Modern Art,
New York
- Les deux negresses* 1908 49.9 high Baltimore Museum of Art
- La Serpentine* 1909 56.5 high Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Baigneuses a la tortue (Bathers with a Turtle)* 179.1 x 220.3 St. Louis Art
Museum
- La Musique* 1910 258.1 x 389.8 Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg
- La Danse* 1909-1910 260 x 391 Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg