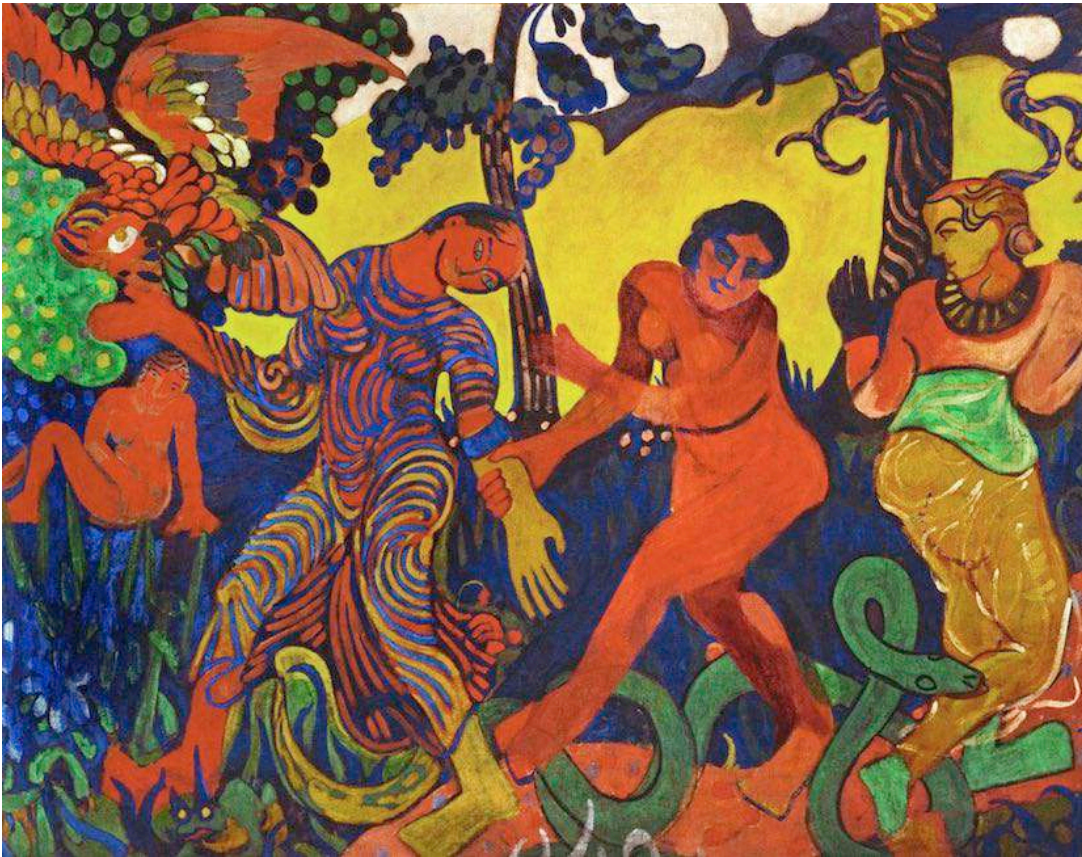


Oil Painting Class. Sadie Murdoch

Fauvism: How to paint like a Wild Beast



Andre Derain, The Dance, Oil on canvas, 1906

Today we are going to look at a type of Oil painting, which wasn't a movement as such. The term Fauvism, like Impressionism and Cubism, was originally a kind of insult. Cubism - it's all just cubes and rectangles right?.. Even the term Impressionism, was a kind of minor slur implying that the artist captured a 'mere' impression.

A Fauve is French for a "Wild Beast", and there were three main 'beasts'. Andre Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck and Henry Matisse. Raoul Dufy is sometimes referred to as a Fauve, but his work is much more idiosyncratic in my opinion. A strange combination of Fauvism, Impressionism and a linear graphic style - we will look at his paintings anyway because they are lovely.

Here's one, The Wheatfield from 1929:



Raoul Dufy, The Wheatfield, Oil on canvas 1929

You can also try to make some Fauvist paintings at home - and I'll tell you how!

But first, a bit of history; the Fauves were wild and beastly because they rejected academic European painting with their audaciously bright colours. Their work caused shock and harsh criticism. The chromatic intensity of the work is pretty eye popping even now. Gardens hum with vivid hues and interiors positively sing with vibrant tones.



Maurice de Vlaminck, Autumn Landscape, 1905



Henri Matisse, Red Studio, 1911, Oil on canvas

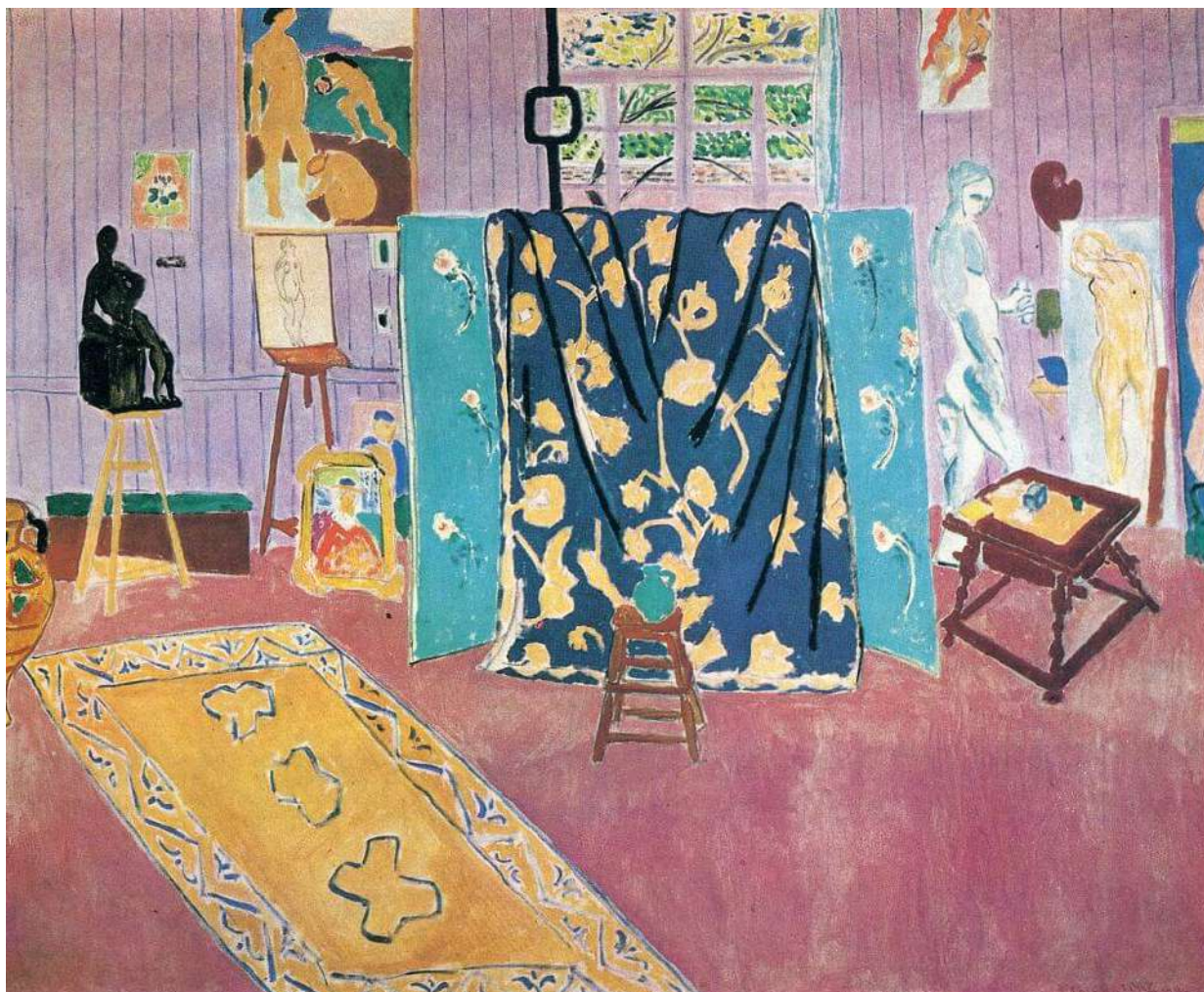
Matisse's Red Studio is probably the most famous Fauvist painting. It is amazing to think that this painting was made in 1911. The Red Studio is also a kind of visual poem, where forms, colours and shapes echo each other. Even the plant tries to get in on the act, bending its form to mirror the white chair opposite. Matisse took this idea from Georges Seurat. Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte" (1884-86) is a good example to look at in this respect. See if you can spot the visual rhymes.



Georges Seurat, "Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte, Oil on Canvas, 1884-86

All artists borrow from each other. Pablo Picasso is widely quoted as having said "Good artists copy, great artists steal". Whether he really said this or not is a contentious issue, as is the statement itself in a way. All artists to some extent 'borrow' elements from other artists work and use it to their own devices. Questions of originality and borrowing have been much debated in art history and criticism. 'Theft' is a recurring theme in modern art, as we saw with the Picasso and his use of the visual structures of African masks and sculptures. But, as American artist Elaine Sturtevant once said, "Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine - that's the way to go." There is an interesting BBC article about this: [1](#).

Matisse also made other 'studio' paintings - this theme enables the artist to include her or his own works in the picture. "The Pink Studio" in which a creamy yellow appears like a series of points on a map holding the whole painting together:



Henri Matisse, The Pink Studio, Oil on canvas

It was Maurice Denis (not a Fauve but his work is similar) who said in 1890, "Remember that a painting - before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort - is essentially a flat surface covered with colours, put together in a certain order."

Okay, How to Paint Like a Fauve.

A favourite Fauve theme is the view through the window, something we have all been experiencing quite a lot of recently! The window allows the introduction of two types of space into your painting, both in term of distance and in terms of character. Indoors is a space we are familiar with and have control over. Outdoors is less predictable, the light is always changing, people going by etc. You can arrange things in the room to provide visual correspondences or echoes - like we have seen in Matisse's "Red Studio". Here is a lovely Matisse painting and a Dufy painting showing a room with a view:



Henri Matisse, Open Window Collioure, 1905, Oil on canvas



Raoul Dufy, Interieur a La Fenetre Ouverte, Oil on canvas, 1915

Think about the interior and exterior and how much you want to distinguish them. In fact, in Fauvist painting the interior often blends with the exterior. Matisse used to work in series - try doing more than one version of the same scene

Oil painting can be difficult to do at home because it requires solvents for cleaning, so it may be better to use water soluble paints such as acrylic or gouache; you can even use watercolour like Dufy did in paintings such as "Le Coeur, Le Palais et Le Ventre de Paris" - "The Heart, The Palace and the Belly of Paris" from 1920.

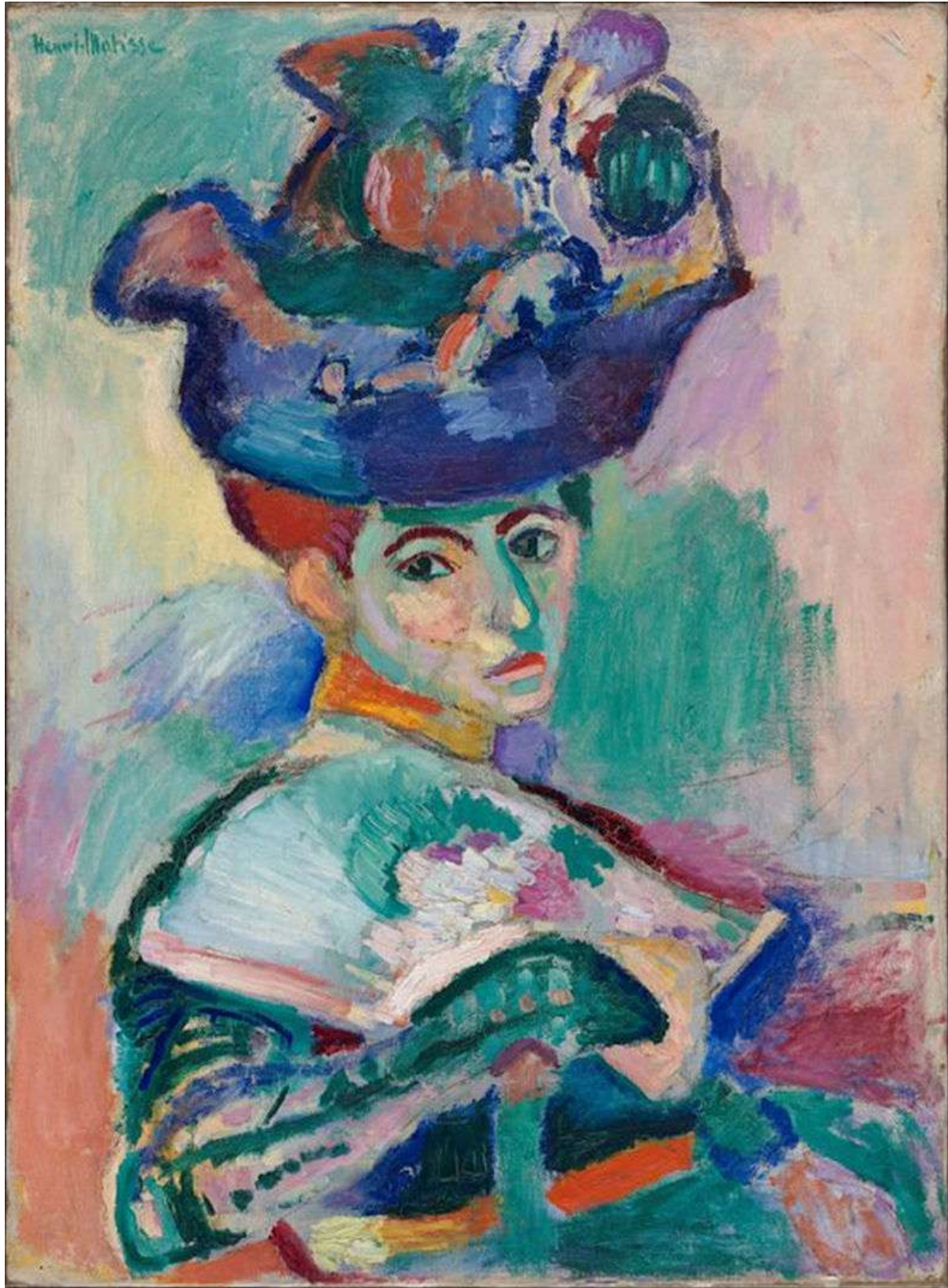
Revel in the everyday. Pop out to the park and do some sketches in colour then bring them back home and make a painting.



Raoul Dufy, The Heart, The Palace and the Belly of Paris, watercolour on paper, 1920

Portraits are also good for fauvist painting. Get a sitter who doesn't mind keeping still for a while, or do quick sketches in coloured pencil or pastel and then work into a painting.

Okay are you ready? Use bright, saturated colours. Place paint on a palette or an old light-coloured dinner plate will do. One good tip is to choose a colour and mix a tiny little bit of it into every mix of your paint. Although it looks like the Fauves just used the colour straight from tube to canvas, they carefully and often minutely adjusted colours in relation to the scene and other colours on the canvas. Then jump straight in! Apply paint in areas - see them like countries on a map. These patches of colour will join together across the whole of the canvas or paper, to form 'continents' of colour. Don't worry about creating the illusion of deep space. The Fauves were less concerned about space than using colour for its emotional and expressive power. The colours in a Fauve painting are of similar saturation and intensity, so the pictorial space will appear flatter, with objects appearing to be 'closer' to the surface of the painting.



Henri Matisse, Woman with a Hat, Oil on canvas

Never use black paint to darken your colours when you are trying to create shadows. It adds a kind of 'sooty' blue-ish tinge which plays havoc with yellow (it goes green) and reds go a kind of dirty mauve. Blues just curl up and die, and as for orange, you just get a type of brown. Add the complementary colour. So, for a shadow in orange zones use a touch of blue, for shadows in green zones a touch of red, etc etc. Here's a quick reminder for those complementaries:

Red - Green

Purple - Yellow

Blue - Orange.

Use complementary colours next to one another. This is very dynamic and creates visual impact and focus. Don't blend your brushstrokes - make them visible, bold, and energetic. Don't feel like you have to fill in every space on the painting surface. Use a wild Fauvist brush stroke..! These marks may, or may not reveal the painting surface underneath -this is fine as it creates a lively pictorial surface. Another tip is to create a ground colour - this works best for acrylics. Just paint a flat monochrome colour – any will do - all over the canvas or paper. Using a ground colour with water colour can create a muddy effect, so best avoid this. Then background colour will appear through your brush strokes like rivers or lakes, creating a vivid, sparking effect.

Okay have fun!

1. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20141112-great-artists-steal>