

Green Stripe (Madame Matisse)

1905; Oil and tempera on canvas, 40.5 x 32.5 cm (15 7/8 x 12 7/8 in); Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Copenhagen

Henry Matisse was probably the more outstanding contributors to the Fauvist movement. He also was the artist that carried most interest to it and his associates. One of his most famous pieces was Madame Matisse: The Green stripe. It provides an exceptional illustration of his artistic aspiration, which was primarily the bold application of colour to communicate and convey human emotions. The composition in question is comprised of a portrait in the foreground of Madame Matisse and a background explicitly separated into several apparent regions of colour. This explicit division in the background is evident in the concurrence of the orange, pale purple and blue green, with the foreground of the portrait being 'dichotomised' mainly by the green line itself. The stripe runs down the middle of the face of Madame Matisse and hence the composition is split in accordance with an almost perpendicular axis. Both the background and foreground, nevertheless, are portrayed as being more or less entirely two dimensional. A main consequence of this is that the fore- and backgrounds appear to incorporate one another, and Madame Matisse gives the impression to becoming a slight recognition of a portrait within a portrait. The space in the portrait is relatively flat, accompanied only by a subtle allusion of depth which is exemplified by the dark area of shading above the subject's left shoulder. The perspective of the composition is wholly anterior, as her torso is slanting to the left complimented by her head, tilted vaguely to the right.

Colour is the focal point and primary element of painting. The artist has employed a bold use of colour here to convey a sense of the emotions he feels for his wife. These kinds of tones are quite vivid and voluminous; orange, red, yellow, light purple and bright green. These colours are juxtaposed by the use of a cooler, more insipid black and bluish-green. The amalgamation of these colours is rendered, in a sense synthetic and depicts an evocative contrast that is effortlessly perceptible to the viewer. Moreover there is a tangible sense of emotion incorporated into this evocative exploitation of colour, present, that almost emphasises them through their arrangement, i.e. the innovative use of brushstrokes.

The piece is devoid of an actual light source. Nonetheless, Madame Matisse's two sides of her face are seemingly illuminated via the use of bright, warm colours. This leads the viewer to presume the presence of a fire or a window through which natural light beams. In a similar way, the dark, shaded zone her left shoulder is almost paradoxical as it alludes to a source of illumination to the right and to where she is facing, when there is a lack of shading on her face in accordance with it. Nevertheless it could be said that this simply conforms to the wider Fauvist ideas of not strictly agreeing with the 'mechanics' of the image. From a physical aspect, Matisse's use of shape and line offer an additional function within the work as they help in conjunction in the initiation of some sort of a compositional balance. The presence of natural and geometric structures, with the natural shapes symbolising the subject's bodily figure in the foreground and the geometric sense of the background, materialising the division of colour, both work to provide a simple contrast and balance to the work.

The lines in the work are both dominant outlines on her shoulders, hair, and left neckline, and blurred lines like the details on her garments and the contour of her right cheek and chin. Painting technique can be described as the use of several layers of oil paint on canvas with visible brush strokes and some texture.

In addition, it could be said that the artist's use of colour evokes a definite sense of emotion. Able to communicate a love of his wife through the precisely chosen arrangement of colours, as well as the different aspects of his wife's personality, Matisse sensitively explores how colour relates to the mood, range of human emotions and sense of aesthetics. This is apparent in her face, where the yellow appears to render a harder, impassive personal characteristic. This is juxtaposed with the warmer pink and orange, which release an affectionate or loving warmth, opposite the dividing green line. The line itself seems to serve as a neutral point in the composition at which the two personalities are divided. At the same time, the warmer colours that are placed on the yellow side of the face perhaps express her vivacious, passionate disposition evident from time to time. Here, the contrast may signify that her character was one of varying degrees of self-expression, ranging from love and energy to composed, unemotional coldness.

The use of colours in the piece also echoes the Fauve movement in general, which centres on colour and its expressional and lyrical function. In fact, Matisse was the leading artist in the movement and is largely responsible for its overall impact, the avant-garde exhibitions and ways of thinking. Additionally, the Fauves as a group strongly advocated the liberated and poetic use of colour and the right to falsify it instead of mirroring nature exactly. The Fauves also exploit tone and colour to form flattened out spaces and figures, like Madame Matisse in this portrait. The works they created were frequently centred upon observation, such as portraiture and natural forms as a subject.

All of these elements were a factor in Matisse's impressions about art, in which he took and developed them to a new level and so affected the view of art for generations to come.

From a historical and social context, Matisse began his professional career as a lawyer and did not discover painting and art until he bought a set of watercolours at some point before 1892. After he did discover his love of art he began to study in Paris. In 1892 and spent much time in the south of France, which to a great extent affected the style of his work.

In conclusion, the painting *Madam Matisse: The Green Stripe* is a quintessence of all that Matisse himself and the Fauve movement stood for: the expressive use of colour to create an art of balance, tranquillity, and purity. He was adept at using the initial ideas created in the Fauve movement and advance them beyond what any other artist in the period had done previously or after. In fact, one might say that Matisse was the artist who ensured the lasting impression of Fauvism on artistic expression and that it would not be what it is today without his influence.

