

# Expressionism: Fauvism, The Bridge and the Blue Rider

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Fauvism, The Bridge, and The Blue Rider were all significant groups and artistic movements for the artistic style known as Expressionism. This lesson covers:

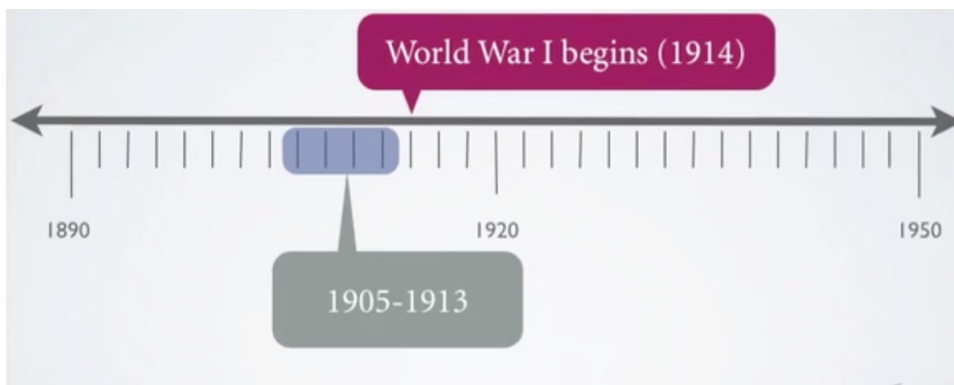
## 1. Period and Location: Expressionism



### BIG IDEA

**Expressionism** was an artistic movement that explored the expression of human emotion and the artist's unique point of view.

This lesson covers artwork from the years between 1905 and 1913, as shown in the timeline below. You will explore artwork from Paris, France, where the Fauvists revealed their new works of art at the Autumn Salon of 1905. You will also learn about artwork from Dresden, Germany, home of the Expressionist group The Bridge. Finally, you will see artwork from Munich, Germany, home of The Blue Rider, another Expressionist group.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Expressionism

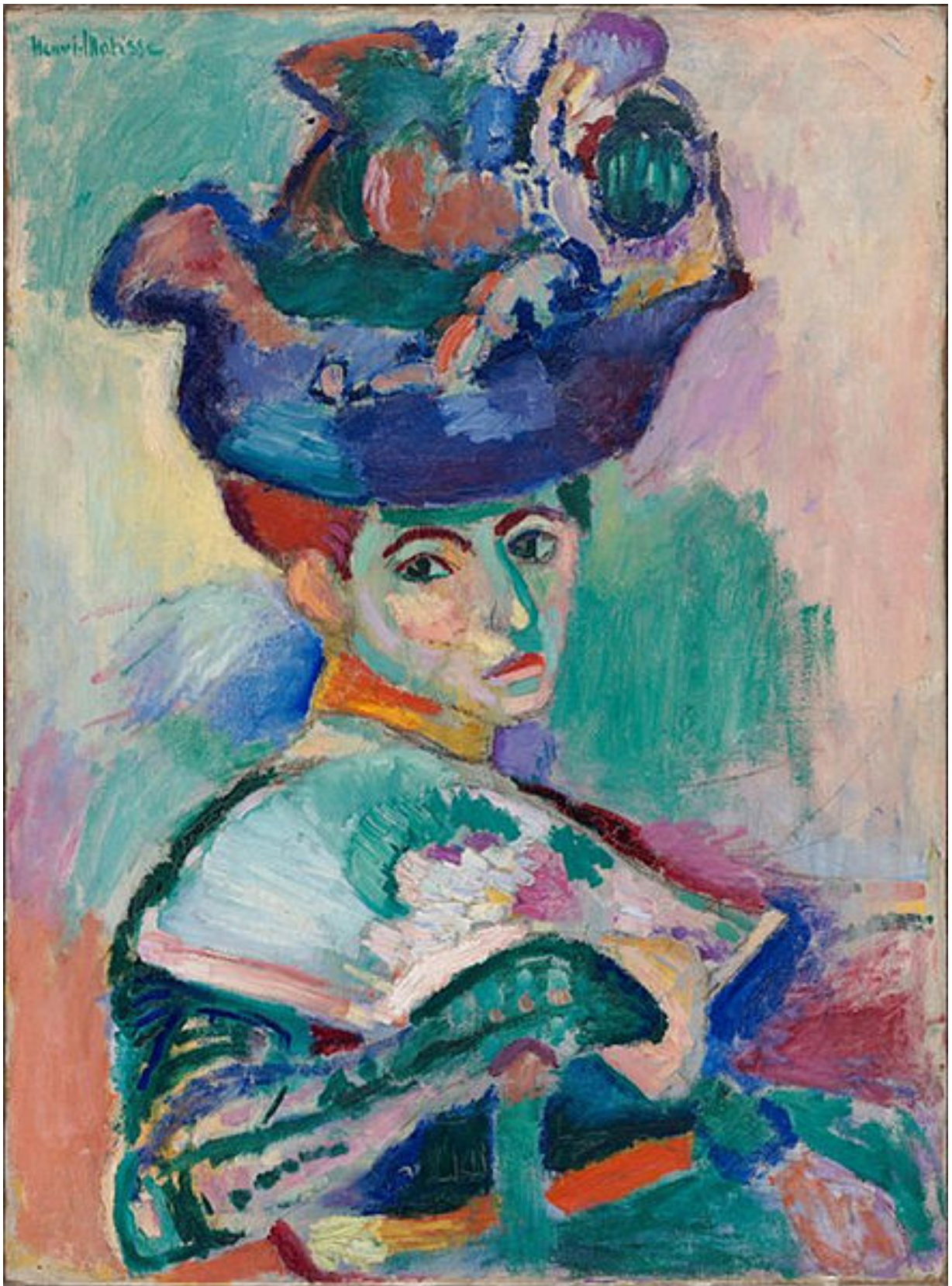
An art movement that is characterized by exaggerated and distorted forms and colors used by artists as a technique to increase an emotional reaction from the viewer.

## 2. “Woman with a Hat”

Henri Matisse's work was unique for many reasons, but his experimentation with forms of painting is largely unequaled. His visual style was broad, which had as much to do with his provincial upbringing as it did with his academic training. In time, his experimentations led him to develop a style negatively dubbed **fauvist**, or wild, by critics due to its unorthodox painterly approach to color application, depictions of space, and appearance of brush strokes.

Similar to the Impressionists, Fauvists embraced their title. Matisse's work within this genre of painting was incredibly influential and was largely credited with the development of the Expressionist style that spread throughout Europe in the early 20th century. This contributed to Matisse's widely held reputation among historians as one of the most important, if not the most important, French painters of the 20th century.

➤ **EXAMPLE** Below is a painting of Matisse's wife, "La Femme au Chapeau" ("Woman With a Hat"):



Woman with a Hat by Henri Matisse

1905

Oil on Canvas

This painting, along with several others of a similar style, was presented at the Autumn Salon of 1905 in Paris, and it was genuinely abhorred by critics of the time. However, it marks an important stylistic change in Matisse's work. He was emphasizing the use of color and brushstroke, much like the Impressionists and Post-

Impressionists that preceded him. Matisse began using these elements to evoke an expression of human emotion from his own unique point of view.

This technique strays from Impressionist artists' use of color and brushstroke to depict the observable effects of light. In other words, Impressionists were externally influenced while Expressionists were internally influenced.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Fauvism

A 20th-century experimental art movement, deriving from the French word “fauve,” meaning “wild beast”; distinguished by the use of boldly colored landscapes and portraits.

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## 3. “Portrait of Madame Matisse” (“The Green Stripe”)

The second painting by Matisse is also of his wife, and it is another example of his use of color to define features and evoke a feeling.

➞ EXAMPLE Below is “Portrait of Madame Matisse,” originally titled “La Raie Verte,” which translates to “The Green Stripe” or “The Green Line.”





Portrait of Madame Matisse (also known as The Green Line) by Henri Matisse

1905

Oil and tempera on canvas



#### DID YOU KNOW

Using color to define features and evoke a feeling became a central theme in Expressionist artwork that followed, particularly with The Blue Rider group from Munich, Germany.

Notice the flatness to the work above, which recalls the work of Cezanne and Gauguin. A green stripe down the middle of her face breaks the form into two sides: one cooler and the other warmer. Rather than play with

the color value, as one would in a realistic portrait, Matisse substitutes the colors outright. He doesn't use a naturalistic palette because this isn't an interpretation of what he sees but rather his interpretation of the emotion being projected.

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## 4. The Bridge and The Blue Rider Group

In Germany, two Expressionist groups formed within about five years of each other and shared the common goal of expression in art, but each emphasized different areas. These two groups were:

- **The Bridge**
  - Formed in Dresden, Germany in 1905
  - Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, co-founder
- **The Blue Rider Group**
  - Formed in or around 1911
  - Anchored by co-founders Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian immigrant, and Franz Marc of Germany.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### **The Bridge**

In German, Die Brücke; a 20th-century German Expressionist art movement consisting of a group of artists whose work is characterized by distinctively bold colored landscapes and portraits.

#### **The Blue Rider**

In German, Der Blaue Reiter; an informal group of early 20th-century artists associated with Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc whose work was recognized for using abstracted forms and colors.

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## 5. “Street, Dresden”

This particular painting by Kirchner, titled “Street, Dresden,” is an example of the type of subject matter The Bridge artists concerned themselves with.





**Street, Dresden by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner**

**1908**

**Oil on canvas**

The name The Bridge refers to the fact that these artists saw their work as a bridge between the past and the future. Members lived a more Bohemian lifestyle, which they felt was a sharp contrast to that of the bourgeoisie. They were interested in Primitivism, such as Oceanic art and German folk art, and traveling to remote areas of Germany on retreats.

They revived the woodcut, but they emphasized rough, broad lines in this medium instead of trying to hide them. With this particular example, Kirchner uses color and form to explore themes of anxiety and tension he felt were the alienating experience of modern life in the city. The technique is effective, as the overall sense from the painting isn't particularly positive. Although the image is full of people, there's no intimacy or interaction between figures.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Compare the above painting with this painting of the city by Renoir:



Dance at Le moulin de la Galette) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

1876

Oil on canvas

While it is not of the same city, the effect is like night and day. Renoir's painting evokes joy and companionship while Kirchner's evokes isolation. Both examples depict people existing in close proximity to each other, yet Kirchner's painting is comparatively, but intentionally, vapid.

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## 6. "Fate of the Animals"

Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky were co-founders of the group that came to be known as The Blue Rider. Like Kandinsky, Marc was a spiritual person. His paintings of the early 20th century were predominantly of animals, which he felt were spiritually closer to nature. However, as the feeling of impending war loomed over many people in Europe, Marc included, his work began to take on a less optimistic feel.

➞ EXAMPLE Below is the painting by Franz Marc titled "Fate of the Animals."





Fate of the Animals by Franz Marc

1913

Oil on canvas

Marc was a deeply religious person, and he spoke about how he began to see the less glamorous aspect of humanity present in animals. He noticed how animals were subject to an apocalyptic cleansing just like humans. This is an important shift because animals had once represented all that was pure in nature for Marc.

This shift is evident in his visual style as well as the sharp geometric shards, inspired by Cubism, that separate and isolate the animals represented within the picture. This new style seemed to replace the more tranquil and communal imagery from previous years. “Fate of Animals” is an example of this shift and likely Marc’s most famous painting.

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## 7. “Improvisation No. 28”

Kandinsky’s work has a positivity and optimism in it that some find appealing. Kandinsky is widely considered one of the first artists to explore pure abstraction in his paintings. He was a spiritual person, and he sought to express the internal rather than respond to the external. He felt his work could inspire those that sought to achieve greater spiritual awareness.

His work also explored the possibilities of depicting a visual expression of music. He’s believed to have had the condition known as **synesthesia**, in which there is some cross-talk between the senses in the brain.



DID YOU KNOW

Some people with synesthesia may experience a certain taste upon reviewing shapes, and thus specific shapes would literally taste different. Kandinsky's particular condition may have been communication, or cross-communication, between his visual and auditory centers, being able to visualize sound. This condition of synesthesia may very well explain his affinity for Expressionism as well as his naming scheme for his paintings, which follow that of classical music, using such words as Composition and Improvisation.

➔ **EXAMPLE** His painting "Improvisation 28" was considered by Kandinsky himself to be his first purely abstract work of art.



Improvisation 28 (second version) by Wassily Kandinsky

1912

Oil on canvas



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Synesthesia

The experience of one sense as another, for example visually sensing sound.



#### SUMMARY

Expressionism was an art movement characterized by exaggerated and distorted forms and colors used by artists as a technique to increase an emotional reaction from the viewer. Fauvism, The Bridge, and The Blue Rider were all significant artistic movements that affected this movement. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of Expressionism**.

You explored **the Bridge and the Blue Rider Group**. Remember, the Blue Rider Group was an informal

group of artists whose work in the early 20th century was recognized for using abstracted forms and colors. The Bridge was a 20th-century German expressionist art movement wherein artists' work is characterized by distinctively bold-colored landscapes and portraits.

Finally, you took a look at examples of Expressionism and artwork of this movement, including: **“Woman with a Hat”, “Portrait of Madame Matisse” (“The Green Stripe”), “Street, Dresden”, “Fate of the Animals”, and “Improvisation No. 28”**

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR IAN MCCONNELL.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Expressionism

An art movement that is characterized by exaggerated and distorted forms and colors used by artists as a technique to increase an emotional reaction from the viewer.

### Fauvism

A 20th-century experimental art movement, deriving from the French word “fauve,” meaning “wild beast”; distinguished by the use of boldly colored landscapes and portraits.

### Synesthesia

The experience of one sense as another, for example visually sensing sound.

### The Blue Rider

In German, Der Blaue Reiter; an informal group of early 20th-century artists associated with Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc whose work was recognized for using abstracted forms and colors.

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