

# Research on Matisse's painting artistic style

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**Abstract:** The subject of this study is Henri Matisse, focusing primarily on his painting artistic style. Matisse is the undisputed leader of Fauvism. In France, following Impressionism, a new force emerged that made painting more straightforward and widespread. This paper dives into Matisse's painting language, analyzing various influencing factors. The research aims to dissect Matisse's formal language in painting, combined with the context of his era, from aspects such as color and form, to explore the role this language played in his artistic creation. The study of Matisse's paintings will aid in continuing practice and innovation in future artistic endeavors, enriching my own painting style while seeking a suitable personal expression method.

**Key words:** Matisse's painting; artistic style; language characteristics

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## 1 The evolution of Matisse's painting style

Henri Matisse, a French painter, achieved worldwide fame before the age of 40, closely linked to Eastern art. Under the influence of Cézanne's style and color usage, he focused on depicting subjects and themes, emphasizing personal perceptions more than his predecessors. He used color freely and abundantly, excelling with dense application. Additionally, his frequent use of tight, decorative lines broke conventional composition by reconstructing three-dimensional space on the canvas. In his early works, instead of using lines for expression, he drew from the European traditional painting techniques, producing numerous portraits with bright colors and brisk brushwork. Matisse's painting "Carmelina" created with Pointillism in 1903, lacked individuality despite improvements over previous methods. Against the Western tradition of rational object expression, Matisse blazed a new trail by incorporating Eastern aesthetic principles into his paintings. To express object dynamics, he adopted Ukiyo-e line-drawing techniques and replaced planes with lines. Influenced by Cézanne, who was in turn influenced by Chinese representational painting, Matisse's color choices were also indirectly affected by Chinese art. After shifting to line-driven composition, works such as "Dance" and "Music" used traditional Chinese soft and delicate lines, combined with freehand coloring methods, resulting in vibrant colors and succinct lines. From then on, Matisse established his painting style, known as "Fauvism", although it was not the final word on his artistic style but rather the beginning. As Matisse's style matured, he sought to express internal joy, focusing less on tangible objects and more on the unseen. "The Two Women" showcases Matisse's emotive brushwork with indulgent, random, and natural lines, still employing deep colors typical of Chinese painting. Matisse yearned for art that was balanced, pure, and peaceful, devoid of unsettling or distressing subjects. During this period, he aimed for simplicity and flatness in his work while pursuing visually decorative effects. In his figure paintings, he focused on portraying joyful and delightful scenes. The formation of Matisse's artistic style did not signify an end to its evolution.

In Matisse's later artistic style, built upon his early style, he pursued the depiction of inner joy rather than limiting himself to the depiction of visible elements, focusing also on portraying the invisible. Taking "The Two Women" as an example, Matisse's lyrical brushwork utilized unrestrained, free-form lines, while coloration continued to employ dense and profound tones associated with Chinese painting. Matisse has been quoted as saying, "I aspire to an art of balance, purity and serenity, devoid of disquieting or depressing subjects", which makes it evident that his painting was aimed more at 'instructing the heart' rather than 'imitating nature'. During this time, his work not only maintained the simplicity and flatness but also endeavored to achieve a decorative visual appeal. In his depiction of figures, Matisse focused on creating images brimming with happiness and pleasure [1]. The development of Matisse's artistic style was not an indication of stagnation, but rather an ongoing process.

The distinctiveness of Matisse's painting style did not signify that it would remain unaltered. In his later years, due to illness, Matisse shifted the focus of his creative work to paper cutouts. This medium made his creations more flat and simplified the imagery to its utmost. Utilizing colored paper, he cut out various abstract shapes of plants and figures, while also infusing his unique sense of complementary colors into his paper cutout art. His cutouts are highly abstract works that integrate order, further abstracting the figures set upon the grass. These works continued to utilize large blocks of color in contrast, not seeking the realism of the objective world, but rather exploring subjective and comforting color sensations - this is a form of comfort and happiness different from that of the objective world. In his final years, Matisse studied Chinese folk paper cutting, abstracting objective forms to a high degree in his works and no longer portraying individual likenesses. In terms of visual form, Matisse was not constrained by individual representation, absorbing the best of various traditions, combined with his unique artistic insights, breaking through the European traditional painting method of modeling surfaces, and ultimately developing his distinct personal artistic style.

## **2 Artistic characteristics of Matisse's painting works**

Matisse's works often feature lines and curves, with the length of the lines representing the rhythm of the artwork, and in his later works, the lines assumed an exaggerated function. In a painting, the thickness, softness, and pace of the lines can evoke a spectrum of visual emotions from joy to sorrow in the viewer. Matisse's application of lines elevated the significance of lines to a new height, with the various transformations of lines rendering a unique artistic effect and forming an independent aesthetic. In his art, Matisse's lines do not seek formal accuracy but focus on emphasizing visual tension within the image. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, during the intense collision of old and new thoughts, the function of lines shifted gradually from basic compositional tool to a means of figurative expression. By the end of the 20th century, with the rise of the avant-garde, there was a signal for lines and other composite arts like sculpture to seek a breakthrough, aspiring to show an alternative beauty through rebellious forms. In Matisse's paintings, one can see the profound influence of the avant-garde movement. During this process, Matisse also absorbed many foreign art elements, thus forming the distinct, oriental-influenced lines characteristic of Matisse. Throughout the painting process, people's active cognition and response to the forms of nature are carried through lines – the most common and simplest form of expression. During the evolution of painting, lines carry the rich emotions and thoughts of the artist, making lines an expressive object with strong artistic power. Matisse's "The Joy of Life" is an early oil painting of his, with a pastoral ambiance on the canvas. The beautiful rhythm of flute music, captivating scenery, and entrancing characters compose a relaxed and pleasant scene. He employed a blend of traditional and modern elements in the painting, yet in some ways, transcended traditional techniques.

Matisse's paintings place a strong emphasis on the use of color. Influenced by Van Gogh, Matisse favored monochromatic painting as a means to manifest his subjective desires, thereby increasing the visual impact of his work.

For example, in "Madame Matisse: The Green Line", the structure is minimalist but generates a powerful visual impact with significant color contrasts, dividing the face in two. Color changes in portraiture aim to depict facial structures, yet in this portrait, the green stripe stands out markedly. Evidently, the painting does not render human features, but instead achieves a unique visual effect – obviously an intentional consequence of Matisse's work. Each face is in a solid color, in sharp contrast with the multicolored background, presenting a striking visual shock to viewers and commanding admiration for Matisse's lavish use of color. Matisse was unconstrained in his selection of colors, not adhering to traditional experiences but expressing his individual emotional perceptions first and foremost.

Matisse does not base his work on traditional experience but prioritizes the expression of his individual subjective sensations. Color can be used to represent the emotional strength within art, and this is something that Matisse fully embodied in his modern artistic form. He said, "Color becomes more persuasive; a blue imprints on your soul, a red dyes your bloodstream... It's a convergence of music, at the start of a new era" [3]. When one's inner emotions need external expression, they can utilize these vibrant colors to convey their mood. This understanding made Matisse realize that simple colors could better express one's inner emotions. For example, a certain yellow, with a faint hue, feels like a soft knock. The charm of red and the power it carries to convey emotion can be thoroughly expressed in painting, while Matisse often used blue to emphasize objects or connections [2].

Matisse's painting continues the philosophy of Cézanne, refining the form and structure of objects, thus freeing his works from being confined to objective reality. He formed his own views on composition and his unique ways of representation [3]. In "Harmony in Red," Matisse transformed the method of depicting three-dimensional space into a flat representation through the patchwork and combination of colors, creating a rhythmic canvas that displayed his emotions. A good painting can often evoke a sense of joy in the viewer, and different compositions can elicit varied psychological responses. For instance, a triangular composition provides a feeling of stability, while an S-shaped composition evokes a sense of profound beauty. Matisse especially appreciated works featuring diagonal lines for their elasticity and dynamic effect, particularly capturing the audience's eyes. "The Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)" uses diagonal lines to extend the scene, making the nude's figure appear relaxed, and the diagonal method adds fullness and steadiness to the painting.

Every painting by Matisse is distilled from life rather than mimicking nature. His art, with its straightforward lines and monochromatic colors, evokes a unique emotional resonance. Matisse's creation does not seek meticulous lines and composition, but rather the release of his own emotions and the pouring out of his artistic sensibility. The characters he creates, though seemingly exaggerated, are distinctive and full of life's beauty - simple, clear, and vivid. His work features exaggerated models, particularly of women. In "The Pink Nude", for instance, the female form is extremely exaggerated with a small head, wide hips, and arms nearly as long as the body, a "small head, large body" proportion that feels uncoordinated. Exaggeration in itself is an art form with a potent expressive force. To enhance his painting language, Matisse incorporated traditional Eastern brushwork techniques, embracing elements from music, dance, and other art forms. "The Dance" and "The Music", two pieces with similar themes and forms, feature highly distorted human body outlines and lines, which are free-flowing and convey a musical effect. Matisse broke free from the constraints of natural primary colors, using blue for the sky, green for the earth, and cinnabar for human bodies, discarding the gloomy tones common in early paintings [2].

### **3 Conclusion**

Henri Matisse was an eminent 20th-century painter whose artistic philosophy greatly benefits my own creations. Throughout his lifetime, he pursued novel means of modeling and purity of color, striving to organically integrate elements such as lines, colors, and composition to find a harmonious and tranquil feeling in the gestalt, without compromising an

element's expressive power. Rather than creating exact replicas of subjects, he preferred to communicate his ideas in a more simplified manner. His expertise in color and form has raised his practice to a higher level, his influence across the development of modern painting is significant, and Matisse's work has profoundly impacted both his contemporaries and future generations of artists. His dedication to his craft and artistic creativity is truly respectable; his works are epochal, showing authenticity to his spirit and the world around him, holding up to the scrutiny of history, and exhibiting extraordinary intelligence and a spirit of bold exploration. Rather than attempting to replicate objects with precise detail, Matisse preferred a simpler approach to conveying his thoughts. He brought the use of color to a new height, favoring bright and pure hues paired with straightforward, bold brushstrokes. His delicately composed and visually rich paintings express profound emotions. Matisse's contribution to the language of painting has significantly influenced the development of contemporary art, offering the world a fresh perspective. His works have deeply affected his contemporaries and successive generations of artists.

Matisse's artistic pursuits and experiences are worthy of immense respect; his work carries historic significance [4]. He had the rare ability to authentically depict the spirit and real-life world in his paintings, which have withstood the test of time, revealing extraordinary wisdom and a bold spirit of exploration. We have much to learn from Matisse's passionate love of life, his innate appreciation for the beauty of color, his poetic longing, and his active and optimistic outlook on life. In our competitive world, it's natural to sometimes feel bewildered, but we must also strengthen our artistic and cultural literacy. As creators, we must continually engage in reflection and innovation in our art, propelling contemporary art forward.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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