

ART OF THE EXTREME

ALSO BY PHILIP HOOK

NON FICTION

Rogues' Gallery

Breakfast at Sotheby's

The Ultimate Trophy

Popular Nineteenth Century Painting

FICTION

An Innocent Eye

The Soldier In the Wheatfield

The Island of the Dead

The Stonebreakers

Optical Illusions

1905-1914
**ART
PHILIP HOOK
ROBERT
THE**

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Introduction: A Tumultuous Decade

On 22 March 1905 Paula Modersohn-Becker, a twenty-nine-year-old German artist on her second trip to Paris, visited the exhibition of the famously radical Salon des Indépendants. 'The walls are covered in burlap and there the pictures hang, with no jury in sight, alphabetically arranged in colourful confusion,' she reported. 'Nobody can quite put a finger on exactly where the screw is loose, but one has a strange feeling that something is wrong somewhere.' To the young German imagination, torn between innate orderliness and a guilty urge to experiment, the loosening screw is both an ominous and an exciting metaphor. Modersohn-Becker's artistic antennae have picked up a warning that a defence is about to give way. What would be unleashed? No one was quite prepared for the deluge that broke over the European art world through the next ten years, a deluge of modernist invention that would shake traditionalist convention to its foundations.

The year 1905 marks the beginning of a decade widely regarded as the most momentous in the history of modern art, quite possibly the most important in post-Renaissance art history. In quick succession, works of art were created that defined the direction of modernism. New movements poured out after each other with a chaotic volatility, like water gurgling in a bottleneck: Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Orphism, Rayonism, Vorticism, plus the breaching of the final frontier of Abstraction in 1913. But only in retrospect does their significance become clear. And it is easy to forget that these avant-garde movements, central to all the art history of the

period written later, occupied only a small minority of painters operating at the time. There was a conventional majority, oblivious to modernism, who continued to paint pictures in the traditional manner to please rather than challenge the public.

The pace of life was perceived to have quickened in the new century. Trains, automobiles, telephones and the cinema all contributed to that acceleration. Advanced artists were responding to it, not least in the tempestuous way that they were applying paint to canvas. But there was an intensification of activity in other parts of the art world too. The ten years leading up to the First World War saw a huge boom in the market for old master pictures, as American moguls became rich to an unprecedented degree and found that what they wanted more than anything else was to surround themselves with trophies of the great European art of the past. This early form of money laundering, putting your new wealth into old art and thereby transforming it into old money, was a seductive and inflationary process. The highest price ever paid for an old master stood at £100,000 in 1905. In 1914 the world record had risen to £310,000. [Approximate Exchange Rates 1905–14: £1 = 5 US Dollars = 25 French Francs = 20 German Marks = 10.5 Austrian Crowns = 9 Russian Roubles] But as more and more impoverished European aristocrats waved goodbye to their treasures in exchange for comforting quantities of dollars, a threat was perceived to the cultural heritage of Europe. Pertinent new questions began to be asked about the role of museums and the importance of national collections.

What was the artistic temperature across Europe in the first days of 1905? At the latter end of the nineteenth century, there had been widespread reaction against the entrenched conservatism of the official academies and the traditional art that they encouraged. In France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Scandinavia artists had set up their own breakaway organisations in order to provide outlets for exhibiting to the public (and selling) the more advanced art that they were producing. In the German-speaking world, these were known as Secessions. In France the

Salon des Indépendants, in opposition to the official Salon, had been established by the artists Georges Seurat and Odilon Redon in 1884. Membership was open to all, and a degree of anarchy prevailed. Funds were mercilessly raided by members wanting fishing rods for use on the nearby Seine. At one point the cashier had to defend himself with a revolver. More recently, in 1903, the radical Salon d'Automne had also come into existence as an alternative to the alternative. There was a selection jury, but that jury comprised artists of strong modernist persuasion. Thus at the Salon d'Automne there was a sharper and more intelligible focus on modernism.

Indeed one of the features of the new century in Europe was the increasing frequency and reach of art exhibitions. In the mid nineteenth century the only shows of contemporary art that people took seriously were the official ones, such as the Salon des Beaux Arts in Paris, the Royal Academy in London and the Academy in Berlin. The emergence of the 'alternative' Paris salons and the German Secessions at the turn of the century was followed by a proliferation of exhibitions of modern art. They were facilitated by the increasing efficiency of communication and transportation, and they came thick and fast, large, small, conventional, subversive, international, progressive, held not just in museums and official institutions, but in dealers' galleries and even in private houses. It should not be forgotten, however, that even in 1905 far more art lovers attended the official, conventional shows at the Salon and the Royal Academy than patronised the avant-garde. And of those who did venture, experimentally, into galleries showing advanced work, the reaction of the majority was still either derision or outrage.

So what, in 1905, did artists think a painting should be; what should it do? The majority, the traditionalists, still felt that its primary objective remained the creation of beauty, and that as far as possible it should tell an uplifting or at least amusing story. But the much smaller number of largely younger artists who comprised the European avant-garde were in rebellion against these ideas. They knew their priorities were different, that – in

the words of Kandinsky – ‘it couldn’t go on like this’. At the beginning of the year 1905, however, they were having difficulty in formulating a coherent definition of the purpose of painting. Recent ideas that had driven artistic experiment were running out of steam. The Impressionist credo that a painting should be a perfect replication of the optical impression made on the eye had been pushed as far as it could go. It was now entering its final cul-de-sac in the shape of neo-Impressionism, which imposed on the picture surface a quasi-scientific divisionism of dots or dashes of unmixed colour. Plenty of artists were asserting their modernity by painting in a pointillist style, in Paris and across Europe: from Prague to Brussels, from Munich to Milan. But for the innovators on the most cutting edge of experiment, the search for a new direction was on. The Secessions were looking a little tired. In June 1905, a Whistler retrospective opened in Paris. It was attacked by critics as old-fashioned: Maurice Denis declared, ‘Impressionism is finished; one has even come to doubt that it ever existed.’ On his first visit to Paris that summer Paul Klee offered the following considered assessment of Renoir: ‘Facile,’ he called him in his diary, ‘so close to trash and yet so significant.’

Observers spoke of a mood of stagnation. Where to turn now? One way forward was the expression of mood or emotion in a picture. Already in the 1890s some painters had been turning inwards, in reaction against the interminable surfaces of Impressionism, and seeking the subject matter of their dreams and the wilder shores of their imagination. For an artist such as the angst-ridden Edvard Munch, this meant nothing less than the pictorial dissection of the soul. The lessons to be learned from the great post-Impressionists, van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne, were also in the process of assimilation. Was it legitimate to paint trees red or horses blue? Was a picture best understood as primarily a decorative arrangement of coloured shapes? In what new directions might the analysis of form now be pursued?

Across Europe, new ideas were simmering and from 1905 onwards began to boil over. Thereafter an unprecedented

succession of transformative innovations cascaded forth year by year, up to the First World War, against the backdrop of an increasingly baffled, outraged and unyielding conventional art. First came Matisse-led Fauvism in Paris, mirrored in Dresden and Berlin by the German Expressionists – Kirchner, Heckel, Schmidt-Rottluff and Pechstein – who called themselves *Die Brücke* and shared a Fauve desire to distort nature and exaggerate colour. In 1907 Paris felt the early stirrings of Picasso-led Cubism, which for the next seven years dominated European modernism with its revolutionary deconstruction of form. In 1910, the coming together in Munich of Kandinsky and Marc, Macke and Klee triggered the formation of *Die Blaue Reiter* group, a second wave of German Expressionism, whose colour and mysticism opened a route towards total abstraction. Meanwhile Kokoschka and Schiele were ratcheting up their own powerful and neurotic version of Expressionism in Vienna, and in Milan, Futurism, dreamed up by the poet Marinetti, was gathering pace; by 1912 Boccioni, Balla, Carra and Severini were spreading its message of conflict and energy across Europe. In 1913–14 invention intensified still further: there was Delaunay and Orphism in Paris, Larionov and Rayonism in Moscow, and Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism in London. For the frenzied avant-garde art world the Great War came as something of a respite.

To illustrate the gulf between modernism and conventional art in these years, and the huge changes undergone by modernism in the same period, here are four contrasting paintings, two from 1905 and two from 1913.

The first of the two painted in 1905 is by the popular Austrian painter Eugène de Blaas, and the second by Matisse. The de Blaas shows a pretty Venetian flower seller standing by a canal with an overflowing basket of choice blooms. Painted with great technical proficiency to a high degree of finish, the young woman is a pleasingly accessible image of youth and beauty. Like its subject, the painting will only answer back in an unthreateningly pert and charming way. It's an image to promote joy and well-being



1. Eugène de Blaas, *Venetian Flower Seller*, 1905



2. Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905

in the viewer, and would have delighted any number of conventional art lovers at the annual ‘establishment’ exhibitions. The Matisse, on the other hand, is a challenge. It is scratchy, ill-drawn, and painted in smears of violent and unrealistic colour. It shows a woman in a hat looking back at the spectator over her shoulder. She appears anxious, or downright cross. Most early twentieth-century spectators, offered a choice between the two to hang on the wall of their drawing room, would have opted unhesitatingly for the de Blaas. Matisse’s *Woman with a Hat* was bought by a mad American recently arrived in Paris, Leo Stein, for 500 francs. De Blaas’s *Venetian Flower Seller* would have sold for five times that amount.

Towards the end of 1913 Picasso painted his late Cubist masterpiece *Femme en Chemise*. It is immediately clear that something extraordinary has happened at the cutting edge of modern art in the nine years since Matisse’s *Woman with a Hat*,



3. Émile Vernon, *Under the Lemon Tree*, 1913



4. Picasso, *Femme en Chemise*, 1913

the most advanced painting of 1905. Fauvism with its non-naturalistic colour has given way to Cubism and its even more radical formal upheavals. Picasso has in turn progressed through Analytical Cubism, a grey, ascetic style of painting bordering on the abstract, and emerged into the Synthetic phase of the movement, a more colourful, sensual regime. Indeed such was the sudden erotic charge that the critic Guillaume Apollinaire felt in front of *Femme en Chemise* that he said it made him want to take the subject's blouse off, which couldn't have been claimed of the Analytical Cubist portraits that had gone before. Émile Vernon's *Under the Lemon Tree* was also painted in 1913. The appeal of Vernon's girl to the artist's traditionalist admirers is much the same as that of Eugène de Blaas's saucy *Venetian Flower Seller* of 1905. Nothing has changed in the way pretty young women are depicted at the official Paris Salon, but it speaks volumes for the speed of change and innovation among the avant-garde that the

Picasso and the Matisse – also both portraits of women – look so different from each other. And while there would have been a similar demand in 1913 for an Émile Vernon as for a Eugène de Blaas in 1905, there had been significant developments in the market for modernism. Picasso had moved on, thanks to the artist's dealer Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler, who had been nudging his prices up. The small but growing international coterie of collectors of his work would have been asked to pay around 10,000 francs for *Femme en Chemise*.

What happened to art in the years 1905–14 is of immense importance. A generation of pioneers emerged to orchestrate modernism: not just artists themselves, but critics and proselytisers such as the poets Apollinaire and Marinetti, the art impresario Sergei Diaghilev and the lone British advocate Roger Fry; dealers such as Ambroise Vollard and Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler in Paris, and Paul Cassirer and Herwarth Walden in Berlin; and collectors such as the Americans Leo and Gertrude Stein and the Russian Sergei Shchukin. These are legendary figures. Their story occupies ground well and expertly trodden by historians, critics and museum curators ever since. Given the abundance of books, articles and exhibitions focused on these years, can there be anything new to say?

I believe there is. I have been lucky in that, through involvement in their sales, I have been able to study in depth a number of the works illustrated in this book. My art market experience – encompassing some great works of art of the period (and quite a few less great) – has given me some different angles on the story of the years 1905–14. For instance, I believe that the revolutionary art of the period must be seen in the context of the conventional art being created simultaneously; that what people were prepared to pay for both new and old art offers fresh insights into this fascinating decade, particularly in the way that rising demand for old art intensified issues of national heritage, and the way that national heritage in turn became weaponised by international tension; but above all, that this was a decade when artists changed, becoming more individualistic,

more solipsistic, more temperamental, more in touch with their instincts. The twenty-first-century cry of ‘Look at me, I’m an artist!’ found its first expression a hundred years earlier. And finally, in among the extraordinary number of modernist masterpieces created in these years, I believe that there is a lighter side to all this striving. The art world – artists making art, critics criticising it, dealers selling it, collectors collecting it, museums acquiring it, the public misunderstanding it – has always been a rich source of material for the human comedy.

PART I

RELEASING CONTROL

CHAPTER ONE

Basic Instinct

What changed, to make so much happen in just ten years?

Some time towards the end of the nineteenth century a balance shifted. Up till that point most artists painted pictures whose primary aim was to give pleasure to other people. Then at the turn of the twentieth century there emerged a new group of young artists – the avant-garde – painting pictures whose primary aim was to give fulfilment to themselves. They were in touch with their instinct; and remaining true to that instinct transcended all other considerations. Intuitive improvisation was good; calculation and control was bad. If this produced art that was less immediately accessible to the public, then so be it. The public must adapt. And meanwhile the artist preserved his integrity. In other words, having been the servant of the public, the avant-garde artist reinvented himself as its master. ‘I am an artist so I aim to delight your eye and your imagination’ was replaced by ‘I am an artist so you must be interested in the expression of my instincts and the motions of my soul’. The extent of the modern artist’s self-obsession can be measured in Paul Klee’s declaration: ‘In creative moments I have the great privilege of feeling thoroughly calm, completely naked before myself, not the self of a day but the whole sum of self, totally a working instrument.’ Is it possible to imagine Alma-Tadema, or Bouguereau, or Anton von Werner, or any other of the traditionalist academicians exulting in their nakedness before the whole sum of themselves?

In trying to uncover the thinking behind the new art, there is one man it is impossible to avoid. For the generation reaching

intelligent adulthood at the turn of the century, and particularly for its artists, Friedrich Nietzsche set the agenda. Although he had died in 1898, and had been insane for ten years before that, Nietzsche's writing struck a powerful chord in the early twentieth century. God was dead. Human beings needed to adopt a Dionysian approach to life, to become supermen through engaging with the pure life force. His advocacy of the vitalistic power of nature as regenerator of art and society was an idea that swirled seductively through the studios of a number of young painters. It led in the following years to all sorts of nudism, sun-worship, and other acts of dotty-minded anarchism. But on one point Nietzsche was absolutely clear. 'Genius resides in instinct,' he wrote; 'goodness likewise. One acts perfectly only when one acts instinctively.'

The primacy of instinct was the belief underlying most modern art of 1905–14. It was understood to underlie all human experience. Its centrality was emphasised by Freud, who was in no doubt that 'the deepest essence of human nature consists of instinctual impulses, which are of an elementary nature, which are similar in all men and which aim at the satisfaction of certain primal needs'. For an artist, therefore, his first priority was to be true to his instinct. Where those instincts were sexual, Freud said, there was the potential for an artist to sublimate them into producing even greater art. The connection between the sex instinct and creativity was a constant fascination to all concerned.

Here is Matisse describing how he painted the revolutionary *Woman with a Hat* of 1905: 'I put down my colours without a preconceived plan. I discover the quality of colours in a purely instinctive way.' Francis Carco, a young writer friend of Picasso, commented perceptively in front of *Woman in a Hat*: 'You had the impression that the artist had been much more preoccupied by his own personality than he was with the model's.' Exactly. You had to be true to your temperament. In the Impressionist generation, Zola had described modern art as 'nature seen through a temperament'. This was now inverted, so that what

was being painted was a temperament seen through nature. The artist became more important than his subject. This in turn opened the way to distortions of natural form and colour in order that the artist might more truthfully express himself.

The premium on the instinctive in the artistic process, on the artist remaining spontaneous, meant that creation must be uncontrived, uncalculated and unselfconscious. 'The quicker a painting is done, the better it is', decided Nolde. In a letter to his friend and patron Hans Fehr in 1909 he added: 'In art I fight for unconscious creation. Labour destroys painting.' This was not in itself a new idea: it echoed the artistic precepts of the Romantic era a century earlier. 'Posez, Laissez', Baron Gérard instructed his pupils. Your first touch should not be reworked. It will be your best because it is the most spontaneous. What differentiated modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century from the Romanticism of the early nineteenth was the lengths to which it permitted instinct to be extended. 'Instinct' is a word that recurs in the statements of young artists. Its indulgence was the key to unlocking the mysteries of human behaviour and passion. Scribbled in the corner of one of Modigliani's early Parisian sketchbooks in the artist's hand are the words: 'What I am seeing is not the real and not the unreal but rather the unconscious, the mystery of the instinctive in the human race.'

The prioritising of instinct led to a reinterpretation of the art of the past. 'The art instinct is permanently primitive', declared Wyndham Lewis in his magazine *Blast*. The art of early civilisations and primitive peoples was prized for its simple directness. No one could get enough tribal masks from Africa, carvings from the south seas, Egyptian antiquities, or mosaics from Ravenna. There was a modernist reappraisal of the Italian Renaissance, too. After the Die Brücke exhibition in September 1907, Max Pechstein set out from Dresden to refresh his eye among the Italian masters. Like Matisse, who had been to Florence a few months earlier, he rejected the art of the High Renaissance in favour of Giotto, Mantegna and Botticelli. These earlier artists spoke to the new twentieth-century sensibility

because they were more instinctive, less mired in mannerist artificialities.

Thus the evolving template for the avant-garde artist insisted that expression must be spontaneous, sincere and instinctive. This involved a release of control: Kokoschka, writing in Herwarth Walden's journal *Der Sturm* in 1912 declared: 'We must harken closely to our inner voice ... All that is required of us is to RELEASE CONTROL ... All laws are left behind. One's soul is a reverberation of the universe.' It was a template crossing boundaries between the arts: the composer Arnold Schoenberg, a close friend of Kandinsky, announced: 'Art belongs to the *unconscious!* One must express oneself! Express oneself *directly!* Not one's taste or one's upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these *acquired* characteristics, but that which is *unborn, instinctive.*' He took the words straight out of Kandinsky's mouth.

But there was understood to be a danger inherent in this pursuit of the instinctive. What must be avoided was the formulaic imitation of other people's spontaneity. It was no good trying to be primitive simply by reproducing the forms of tribal art, nor striving for instinctive self-expression by the mechanical replication of van Gogh's brushstroke. In 1906 Matisse painted *Le Bonheur de Vivre*, which took a step beyond the Fauvism that he had orchestrated with Derain in the previous summer. The human figure was now more prominent. It was a very large canvas, in which the colours of the landscape were flat and distorted and vibrant, and the brushwork had cast off all its neo-Impressionist moorings. The surface was more restful as a result, and Matisse achieved his declared ambition 'to make the colours sing'. It was of course greeted with public derision and incomprehension when exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants. Matisse accepted that, as he did most of the antagonistic reaction that his work provoked. But one criticism touched him on the quick and he reacted instantly to counter it.

The painter and theorist Maurice Denis denounced the work as formulaic and artificially constructed. Wrong, Matisse



5. Matisse, *Le Bonheur de Vivre*, 1906

told him. It was the product of instinct, not calculation. Instinct again: that most highly prized motivator of the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. To be formulaic and calculated and therefore artificial was the biggest sin you could commit, whether you were Matisse or Derain or Picasso, Kirchner, Munch or Heckel.

But Matisse – who was a brooder – went on pondering the question. In 1911 he wrote to his wife Amélie: ‘I get worked up too easily. To give yourself completely to what you’re doing while simultaneously watching yourself doing it – that’s the hardest of all for those who work by instinct.’ This admission is important: in the process of working by instinct a total surrender of control is to be avoided. ‘Simultaneously watching yourself doing it’ implies that some sort of stepping back from the maelstrom of instinct to exert surveillance and even direction is necessary in order to achieve the greatest art. This question was bothering Apollinaire too. Was unfettered instinct

too random? In 1912 he decided, 'Kandinsky carries Matisse's theory on obeying one's instinct to an extreme, and ends up obeying no more than chance.' Apollinaire has reached the conclusion that there has to be some sort of editorial control on instinct for its expression to constitute a meaningful work of art.

As a touchstone by which to measure creativity, instinct was given further impetus by the French philosopher Henri Bergson in 1907. Bergson was the superstar of French philosophy, lecturing at the Collège de France to packed houses of intellectuals and society women (a distinctively Gallic combination: in Britain a society woman wouldn't have been seen dead in the same room as an intellectual, unless she was Lady Ottoline Morrell and the room was a bedroom). In this year Bergson published his *Creative Evolution* in which he asserts that evolution is not a purely mechanistic process; creativity is endowed with something that is not predictable in advance, 'an energised will, a force, an *élan vital*'. Mere knowledge does not penetrate to the instinctual stream of consciousness that surges beneath it. Intuition alone brings us into immediate contact with the true reality. Intuition, according to Bergson, is 'instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of considering its aims'. Making contact with the movement of life was only to be achieved by intuition, and this was what constituted the 'aesthetic faculty'. 'You must take things by storm,' exhorted Bergson. 'You must thrust intelligence outside itself by an act of will.' 'To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration.' Duration is an important Bergsonian concept, a recognition of the mobility of time which in turn frees up and enables creativity, particularly artistic creativity. 'Duration equals invention, creation of forms, continuous elaboration of the absolutely new,' said Bergson. The 'absolutely new' had become the holy grail of the modernist artist in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Bergson is prospecting in the same territory as Nietzsche, who charged his vitalism with the seductive idea (to artists) that superior individuals (often artists) could surpass themselves and become supermen, to the overall benefit of humanity. And

Bergson also shares ground with Freud and his basic instincts, those 'continuously flowing sources of stimulation', to which artists were particularly responsive, and whose sublimation when sexual – according to Freud – had the capacity to generate great art. This privileging of intuition over analysis, of instinct over intellect, was very exciting to progressive young artists and writers of the early twentieth century. 'Taking things by storm' gave them carte blanche to express themselves freely, to live eccentrically, rebelliously and self-indulgently, and generally behave rather badly. The battle cries of political anarchism were echoed in the artistic avant-garde.

Intuition, as Bergson made clear, was perception driven by instinct rather than intellect. To modern artists it took on a specific relevance to the challenge of portraiture. Kokoschka wrote that the aim of his method was 'to intuit from the face, from its play of expressions, and from gestures, the truth about a particular person, and to recreate in my own pictorial language the distillation of a living being that would survive in my memory'. This was a new kind of portraiture, as Carco had grasped in 1905 looking at Matisse's *Woman in a Hat*. It was less a record of the sitter than a record of the artist's instinctive response to that sitter.

Instinctive response was what mattered. The bicycle wheel that Marcel Duchamp attached to a stool in his studio in late 1913, thus creating the first 'ready-made', was a statement of his disenchantment with painting. It was also a gesture to underline that the modernist artist still had only one duty: to remain true to himself and his instinct. The same year Arnold Schoenberg conducted a new atonal piece. At its conclusion he bowed only to the musicians in the orchestra, not to the audience. If the public didn't get it, then that was their loss.

CHAPTER TWO

The Guiding Lights: Van Gogh – Gauguin – Cézanne

A long tapering fuse smouldered through the 1890s, and as the twentieth century dawned it began setting off a series of increasingly incendiary bombshells among the new generation of modernists. It was called van Gogh. The first major explosion took place in the galleries of the Paris dealers Bernheim-Jeune in 1901, in the form of an exhibition of seventy-one works by the hitherto largely unknown Dutch artist. In fact it was the first ever show of his work in Paris, eleven years after his suicide in 1890. This was a significant moment in the artist's discovery, a discovery that had huge repercussions across Europe. What the young French painter Maurice Vlaminck wrote of his reaction to that exhibition reflects the excitement:

Up to that date I had not known of Van Gogh. His work impressed me as final ... I was glad of the certainties that he brought me, but I had received a heavy blow! I found in him some of my own aspirations. The same Nordic affinities, perhaps. And with that a revolutionary feeling, an almost religious feeling for the interpretation of nature. My soul was in turmoil when I left that exhibition.¹

Vlaminck brought along to the show a young fellow artist, André Derain, who was similarly impressed. The pure, unmixed colour of van Gogh and the vigour of its application was a revelation to both of them. Vlaminck goes on:



6. Vlaminck, *Wooded Landscape*, 1905

I heightened all my tone values and transposed into an orchestration of pure colour every single thing I felt. I was a tender barbarian, filled with violence. I translated what I saw instinctively, without any method, and conveyed truth not so much artistically as humanely. I squeezed and ruined tubes of aquamarine and vermilion, which, incidentally, cost quite a lot of money at the paint shop at the Pont de Chatou where I used to be given credit.²

Here are the origins of the movement that later in 1905 would become known as Fauvism, for Vlaminck and Derain also met Matisse at the Bernheim-Jeune exhibition. Matisse remembered: 'I was moved to see that these very young men had certain convictions similar to my own.' What hastened the advent of Fauvism was the 'show within the show' at the Salon des

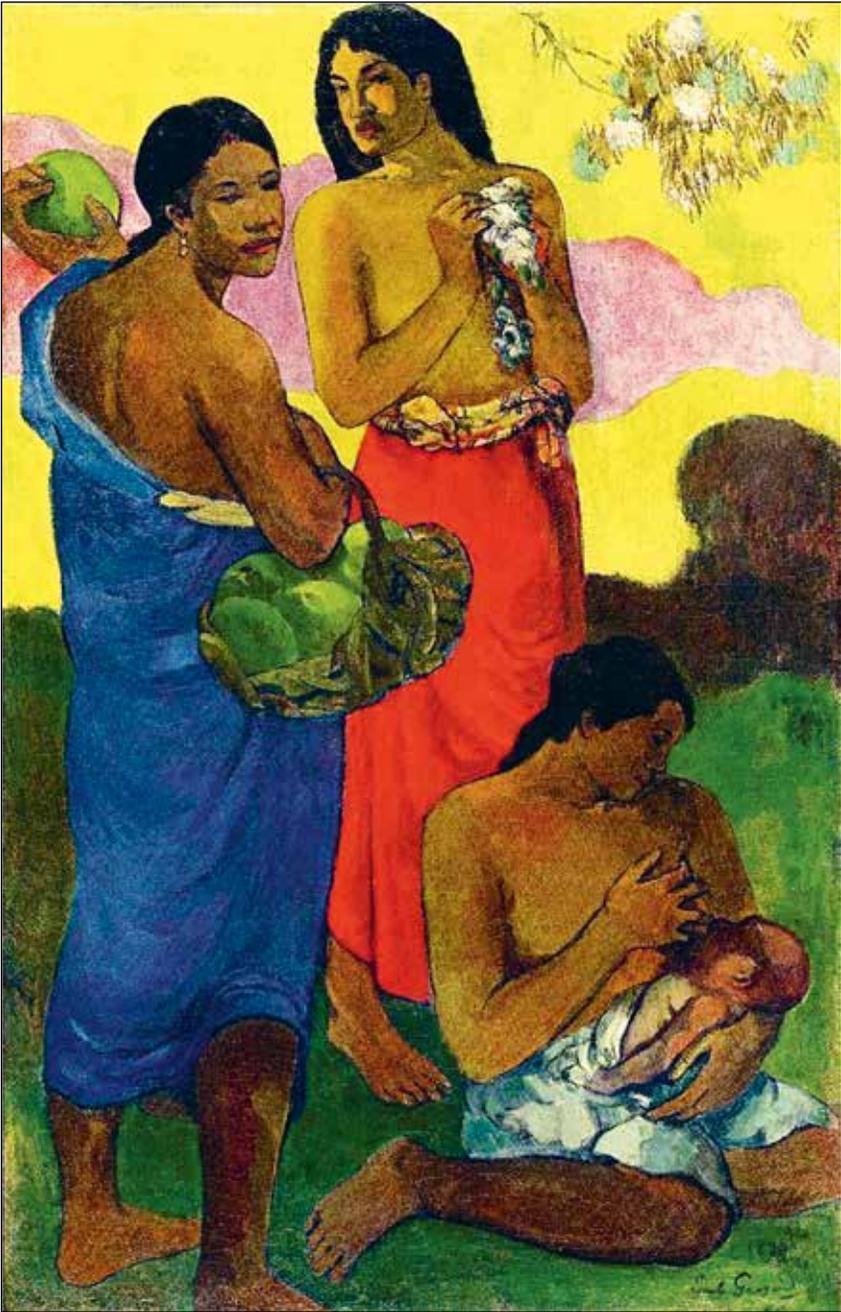
Indépendants in the spring of 1905 of a van Gogh retrospective, forty-five works assembled by Paul Signac with the help of Matisse; it was the first official exhibition of the artist held in Paris, and it reinforced the impact van Gogh had made at Bernheim in 1901. It prompted the man of letters Paul Léautaud to write in his diary on 24 March 1905:

[Van Gogh is one of those] extraordinary people, a little mad, standing outside the social framework and all the mediocrity of everyday existence. They are none too common. When we meet one we must not grudge them our attention and our love. They jolt us out of the humdrum and inevitable routine and turn us away from the artists and writers who have become steeped in professionalism.³

Individualism, independence, standing outside the social framework: this was what the avant-garde of 1905 particularly prized in its artists; artists who had not become steeped in routine and the calculation of professionalism; artists, in a word, who were in touch with their instinct.

Van Gogh was making even more of an impact in Germany. For the members of Die Brücke, a crucial moment in their evolution was the arrival in Dresden on 26 October 1905 at the Gallery Arnold of a van Gogh show (fifty-four paintings which had come on from exhibition at Cassirer's Hamburg gallery). Revelation of a way forward had been brought to their doorsteps. Heckel went out and painted a view of the Elbe that was directly inspired by van Gogh. The water of the river is still handled in neo-Impressionist dabs; but the sky swirls away in dynamic gouges of pure pigment. It was intoxicating stuff.

The Berlin dealer Paul Cassirer was central to the discovery of van Gogh in Germany. He had entered into a commercial relationship with van Gogh's sister-in-law, the business-like Mrs Bonger in Holland, who was doing an excellent job of feeding the contents of Vincent's studio on to the art market at gradually increasing prices. At the beginning of 1905 Cassirer was



7. Gauguin, *Maternité (II)*, 1899

buying from van Bonger at about 1,500 marks per canvas, and aiming to sell on at prices between 2,000 and 3,000 marks. An exceptional example such as the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (see p. 117) had been sold by Cassirer to the modernist pioneer Harry Kessler in July 1904 for a modest 2,000 marks. All in all, in 1905 Cassirer sold twenty works by van Gogh, almost all of them to German buyers. Besides a small but growing number of modernist collectors there was a generation of extraordinarily advanced young museum directors in Germany who were also eyeing van Gogh. The first example to enter a German public collection was in 1910.

On 7 July 1905 a Gauguin exhibition opened in Weimar organised by the indefatigable Harry Kessler, who was now director of the Weimar Museum. It lasted till 15 September, and one visitor on whom it made a big impact was Emil Nolde. Paintings, drawings and a wood sculpture were included from the south seas and Brittany periods. There were loans from the small band of Gauguin enthusiasts in France, collectors such as Gustave Fayet and Daniel de Monfried. Gauguin had died in 1903, a painter of instinct par excellence and a trailblazer for Primitivism, simplification, and the power of primary colours unleashed from their descriptive function and allowed to roam free to express emotion. In the last letter he wrote to the critic Charles Morrice, from the Marquesas Islands in April 1903, he declared 'I am a savage'. Why was it necessary to regress to such a state of nature? Because in recent years 'artists, having lost all of their savagery, having no more instincts, one could even say imagination, went astray on every path'. Gauguin, too, was in the process of discovery by the avant-garde, who were further seduced by the drama of his back story, the way he had thrown everything over in Europe for a new life in the liberating paradise of the south seas: there was a gathering appreciation in 1905 for artists who had lived 'outside society'. The Primitivist dream lingered on in Nolde's imagination, and he too set off to paint in the south seas in 1913. Max Pechstein departed on a similar mission a year later.