The Wild Beasts

In the fall of 1905, Matisse and Derain showed their paintings at an important exhibition in Paris called the Salon d’automne. People were shocked by the bold brushstrokes and strange color combinations. Many laughed at the paintings. One art critic nicknamed the artists fauves (the French word for “wild beasts”) because of their expressive brushstrokes and loud colors. Matisse and Derain inspired many artists to explore color in new ways.
Two Views of Collioure

Matisse and Derain do not show Collioure as it looked in real life. Instead, the artists conveyed the intensity and energy of Collioure’s blazing sunshine by painting with dazzling colors.

Look at Open Window, Collioure, Matisse’s view of the town port. Visible through the window, small boats bob on pink waves under a sky banded with turquoise, pink, and periwinkle. Vibrant outdoor light pours through the window and onto the flower pots on the sill, coloring the windows mauve, azure, and pink.

Turning from the sea in Mountains at Collioure, Derain painted the olive groves with the steep hills of the Pyrenees in the background. Notice how Derain used a variety of brushstrokes to paint this rugged landscape. Examine how the twisting red lines form the trunks of the olive trees. Derain’s bold, separated stripes of blues, grays, and greens create a rhythmic pattern of leaves ready to wave in a breeze. Broad, sweeping strokes of color form the mountains rising behind the trees and reaching to the sky.

“When I realized that every morning I would see this light again, I couldn’t believe how lucky I was.” Henri Matisse
Matisse enjoyed staying in warmer places during the winter months, and he liked to watch sunlight shimmering on the sea. After his summer with Derain, he returned to Collioure and vacationed at other seaports on the French coast of the Mediterranean Sea. He also visited Italy, North Africa, and Tahiti. *Beasts of the Sea* is a memory of his visit to the South Seas.

Many years after creating his *fauve* paintings, Matisse developed a new form of art: the paper cut-out. Still fascinated by the power of color, the artist devoted himself to cutting painted papers and arranging them in designs. “Instead of drawing an outline and filling in the color . . . I am drawing directly in color,” he said. Matisse was drawing with scissors!

What shapes do you recognize in *Beasts of the Sea*? Find shapes that remind you of

After cutting shapes that reminded him of a tropical sea, Matisse arranged the pieces vertically over rectangles of yellows, greens, and purples to suggest the watery depths of an undersea world.

Create a colorful collage

Use colored papers, or like Matisse, make your own colored paper by painting entire sheets of white paper in one color. Paint on heavy cardstock so the paper doesn’t curl as it dries. Next, find a theme for your work. Like Matisse, choose a view from your window or a memory from vacation. Use scissors to cut the paper into different shapes that remind you of that place. Arrange your cut-out shapes on a large piece of colored paper. Move the pieces around and experiment with layering until you are satisfied with the design, then glue your shapes in place.

While creating the cut-outs, Matisse hung them on the walls and ceiling of his apartment in Nice, France. “Thanks to my new art, I have a lush garden all around me. And I am never alone,” he said.