

ELEMENT.

not

pagan, talon, aliment, penance, scraps, trout, caper, *coup*, hectagon, parch, akimbo, sloth, gutter, crave, carve, drivel, whence, woe, bang, speech, pare, parergon, posture, porous, proof, number, obstacle, doz., occasion, obviate, occident, incident, och, tmesis, estragon, organon, origin, ornament, ligament, omadhaun, omasum, logarithm, index, technic, fan-tan, farl, blurb, omelette, omen, ombre, olio, peal, peccable, pudding, peat, phonetic, elastic, purchase, purpose, ragout, rage, mineral, revolt, immediate, refuse, lees, refute, relent, relic, relish, remblai, remanent, stir, sting, stipend, strip, surface, surtout, estrade, krill, *comme ça*, mention, terrine, text, there, various, discus, exempt, varmint, vector, axiom, radius, transcript, position, mercy, electric, puzzle, pitch, flow, form, luff, éclair, blast, blink, sting, jump, ichor, solvent, solution, dissent, thus, sound, fish, fissure, ajar, *coudé*, fill, congruence, frugal, once, thrice, profuse, prolix, rhesus, gun, again, knife, revolver, weapon, more, at sea, skedaddle, skew, skid, infection, explicit, infield, infest, infill, decimal, essence, cud, mere, cull, ante, *diseur*, antacid, minaret, annular, blurt, decal, anoa, anode, cathode, electrode, physics, tithe, instrument, cactus, gravity, fling, sachet, mire, minuet, anon., anon., answer, anoxia, ante-room, antepandial, cacoepey, antiphon, antiphony, antigen, baton, battledore, baud, *battue*, copious, correction, corrasion, point, erosion, crank, cram, crease, credit, suffice, subject, stodge, stolid, stoma, mouth, salve, salvor, sluit, weld, zeugma, zetetic, zing, vlam, zenana, milometer, zinc, milt, zoot, interdict, zoic, zugzwang, mute, zonda, trepan, tramontane, transalpine, corrosive, antimony, half-life, aorta, molybdenum, ptisan, sequence.

MATISSE AND THE EARLIEST THEORY OF GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM

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for Mark Rosso

One early criticism advanced against the paintings of Matisse, by contemporaries such as Gide and Maurice Denis, was that his work looked like the demonstration of a theorem. Maurice Denis, in particular, whilst recognizing in Matisse the most extreme reaction against neo-impressionism, insisted that his painting was bad because it was too theoretical.¹ In Germany no such charge was levelled and, by a paradox, it was the courage of Matisse's theorizing, especially his collection of observations and thoughts in the 1908 *Notes d'un peintre*, which had a fundamental impact on the earliest critical writing which attempted to define the work of the young generation of German painters around 1910 who were in open revolt against every aspect of Impressionism.²

To chart the relation of Matisse to German artists in this period one can begin fruitfully with students at the Académie Matisse, Greta and Oskar Moll, and Hans Purrrman.³ The portrait of Greta Moll commissioned by her whilst a student exemplifies perfectly his conception of painting as a registration of coloured sensations, and his equation of the expressive and the decorative. It was this proposition of Matisse: 'expression et décoration ne sont qu'une seule et même chose, le second terme étant condensé dans le premier',⁴ which was taken up by his German students and became the currency of revolt. Matisse was seen as having revolutionized the tradition of

peinture idéiste. The doctrine of a picture as a view upon the world framed in the most convenient and logical way was self-consciously laid aside, and elements which previously might have been regarded as extrinsic to a painting now helped determine the internal visual character of a picture. In the portrait of Greta Moll the swirling pattern behind the head and shoulders, like a roving sky-scene with a definite clockwork movement, rhymes against the arabesque of the body, initiated by the protruding left hip, and emphasizes the ornamental character of the whole picture. In an emphatic sense the expressive as decorative is decisive for the composition, 'la composition est l'art d'arranger de manière décorative les divers éléments dont le peintre dispose pour exprimer ses sentiments.'⁵

In 1908 Matisse, on the invitation of Hans Purrmann, visited Germany.⁶ The *Notes* were translated by early Summer of the following year and appeared in the periodical *Kunst und Künstler*.⁷ Within a year the twenty-one year-old critic Max Raphael published his first article, under the pseudonym M.R. Schönlank, and argued for the centrality of Matisse and Cézanne for current painting practice in his review of the Sonderbund Exhibition in Düsseldorf.⁸ In over sixteen articles he teased out the implications of Matisse's theories, culminating in his developing the first theoretical *exposé* of expressionist painting, in his 'Der Expressionismus' which was published in September 1911. Raphael's thinking on Matisse was intensified by his contact with Max Pechstein, who had first met the artist in Paris in 1908, and whose paintings clearly exhibit a Matissean influence, especially in the years 1911-12.⁹ From Pechstein Raphael received the invitation to write the introduction to the third Neue Secession exhibition.¹⁰

As Donald Gordon has argued it was in 1910 that a unified Expressionist movement was born in Germany.¹¹ In the published responses to the Sonderbund Exhibition, the beginning of a theoretical position for this movement is advanced. Walter Cohen, whose review in the *Kunstchronik*¹² takes up the position of the catalogue essay by Dr Wilhelm Niemeyer, describes Matisse as the choir leader of the French painters exhibited, and is enthusiastic about the 'farbig klingenden großen Gemälden' from the Folkwang Collection.

It was Dr Niemeyer, who had been teaching in the Düsseldorf Kunstgewerbeschule since 1905, and had a specialist interest in the relation of French and German Impressionism, who clarified the implications of the French artists exhibited, and argued that from Matisse and the other French painters, in a fundamental reaction to the art of Van Gogh and Cézanne, the

concept of painting would now be identical with the concept of the life of colours in themselves.¹³

It was clear that the German variety of Impressionism had not achieved any level of originality, and that from Matisse and Derain, Vlaminck, Braque, the new 'modern' was to be a wholesale rejection of this style. In 1910 Pechstein, who had been the first member of Die Brücke to exhibit at the Berlin Secession, led the breakaway movement, and became president of the Neue Secession, having spent the summer of that year with Kirchner and Heckel in Moritzburg, and later joining with Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff at Dangast. This was the core group of exhibitors at the Neue Secession and at the third exhibition held between February and April 1911. Max Raphael's accompanying essay describes the exhibitors as being among the young artists of all countries who were no longer taking their rules from the object, or the practice of pure painting; rather, he argues, they thought in terms of the wall and for the wall, purely in colours :

they no longer want to reproduce nature in each of its transient manifestations, rather, they condense their personal sensations of an object, they compress them into a characteristic expression, in such a way that the expression of personal sensations is strong enough to produce a wall painting. A coloured decoration... Areas of colour are placed side by side in such a way that the incalculable laws of balance imposed by colour quantities [create] a new personal freedom of movement and expansion of available space...¹⁴

M. Werenskiold describes Raphael as being at a loss for a suitable name for the new art movement and believes he simply called it 'Die neue Malerei', or 'Dekorativer Impressionismus'.¹⁵ Raphael published his article *Der Expressionismus* in the early September issue of *Nord und Süd* in reply to Lovis Corinth's article,¹⁶ which had appeared in the periodical *Pan* in May that year. In that article Raphael takes up the polemical dismissal of Corinth, where Corinth says that the younger artists are merely the apes of Cézanne, Van Gogh and others, and heavily criticizes their love of copying works of African art. Raphael distances himself from the classicizing aesthetic of Adolf von Hildebrand, best seen in *Das Problem des Form in der bildenden Kunst*, and insists that for the modern artist it is no longer a question of seeking the absolute from the relative of appearance and nature, but rather to make the relative clear and to show its necessity.

World of forms emerged from the conflict between a creator and the very world of objects. In direct contrast to the Impressionists, the Expressionists sought greater simplicity, and clarity, chiefly by ignoring the movement of the atmosphere as their starting point, and also by showing a

greater commitment to abstraction, such as one finds in Byzantine art, and by the same token, to the 'primitive'. Above all else they shattered the stranglehold of mimesis as the chief characteristic of the visual arts by their insistence on clarity of sensation, the notion of the picture in itself, and their quest for the thiness of coloured sensation. It was clear that Raphael, influenced by his reading of Bergson, also insisted the artist had the capacity to obtain direct awareness of his or her durational being and that this made of the artistic act an expressive event.¹⁷

These were the main ideas behind the first theoretical reflections on German Expressionism. In 1914 when Paul Fechter's book, *Der Expressionismus*,¹⁸ appeared – Fechter had also been a friend of Pechstein's – a new view came to dominate the thinking of intellectuals, and expressionist art was viewed, thanks indeed to the influence of Fechter and Wilhelm Worringer,¹⁹ as anti-classical, metaphysical and essentially Northern or Teutonic, the first revision of Expressionism as irrationalism which has dominated most subsequent interpretations.

- 1 Roger Benjamin, *Matisse's 'Notes of a Painter'*, Studies in the Fine Arts, *Criticism*, no.21, Donald B. Kuspit (Series ed.) (Ann Arbor, Michigan).
- 2 Patrick Healy and Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs (eds), *Max Raphael, Die frühen Schriften, 1910–1913, das schöpferische Auge oder die Geburt des Expressionismus* (Gesellschaft für Kunst u. Volksbildung: Wien 1992).
- 3 See Margrit Hahnloser, 'Matisse und seine Sammler', in *Henri Matisse, Kunsthaus, Zürich, 15 October 1982–16 January 1983*, pp.41–64.
- 4 'Expression and decoration are one, the latter being contained in the former'.
- 5 For a full discussion on these reflections, the best treatment is still Max Imdahl, *Farbe* (Wilhelm Fink Verlag 1988), especially p.143ff.
- 6 *supra*, 3.
- 7 Henri Matisse, 'Notizen eines Malers', *Kunst und Künstler*, vii, May 1909, pp.335–47.
- 8 M.R. Schönlink, 'Der Sonderbund in Düsseldorf', *Nord und Süd*, xxxv, October 1910, pp.154–7. For further details on the exhibition, see Magdalena Moeller, *Der Sonderbund* (Rheinland Verlag 1984).
- 9 Jürgen Schilling, *Max Pechstein* (Druck Verlag Kettler: Bönen 1989). Pechstein saw the Matisse exhibition in the Berlin Gallery of Paul Cassirer. See Schilings, p.17n.21, for further details.
- 10 Max Raphael Ms. Autobiographie, Schaeffer Archive, Paris. I would like to thank Professor Claude Schaeffer for supplying me with a photocopy of this unpublished manuscript.
- 11 Donald E. Gordon, *Expressionism: Art and Idea* (Yale University Press 1987).
- 12 Magdalena Moeller, *Der Sonderbund*, see footnote 61 for details of reviews and a bibliography.

- 13 Wilhelm Niemeyer, *Denkschrift des Sonderbunds auf die Ausstellung 1910* (Düsseldorf 1911). 'Der Begriff Malerei wird wieder identisch mit dem Begriff vom Leben der Farben an sich'.
- 14 *Katalog der Neuen Secession Berlin. III. Ausstellung. Gemälde. Februar–April 1911* (Berlin : Wm. Baron Verlag 1911).
- 15 For a discussion of Werenskiold's position, see the important Ron Manheim, 'Expressionismus – Zur Entstehung eines kunsthistorischen Stil- und Periodbegriffes', in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, II, 1989, pp.73–91.
- 16 L. Corinth, 'Die neueste Malerei', *Pan*, May 1911, pp.432–7.
- 17 This can be followed in : M.R. Schönlink, 'Henri Bergsons Schriften', *Nord und Süd*, XXXV, September 1911, pp.429–32; 'Malerei und Persönlichkeit', *Die Aktion*, I, September 1911, pp.1006–7; 'Der Expressionismus', *Nord und Süd*, XXXV, 138, September 1911, pp.360–5.
- 18 Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus* (München 1914).
- 19 For a full discussion of Worringer, see Magdalena Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik und die expressionistische Kunst* (Verlag Silke Schreiber : München 1990).



