

The Bagpiper

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The Bagpiper 1910-1911 G 367

Andre Derain



Biography

André Derain (1880-1954); was considered by leading critics in the 1920s to be the most outstanding French avant-garde painter and at the same time the upholder of the classical spirit of French tradition.

Andre Derain's position as one of the masters of 20th century art is secured based solely on the vibrant colored Fauve* paintings of his youth. Yet

Fauvism was a brief chapter of some two to three years of his life. He experienced impressionism, divisionism, the style of Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh, and Vlaminck and Matisse's techniques by applying them to his own work. He copied in the Louvre and traveled a great deal in France to paint its various landscapes.

The art dealer Ambrose Vollard signed a contract with Derain in 1905, and the following year the artist went to London to paint some scenes of the city commissioned by Vollard. Derain's *Westminster Bridge* is one of his Fauve masterpieces.**

About 1908 Derain became interested in African sculpture and at the same time explored the work of Paul Cézanne and early cubism. He became a friend of Pablo Picasso and worked with him in Cataluña in 1910.

In Derain's work, which comprises landscapes, figure compositions (sometimes religious), portraits, still life, sculptures, decors for ballets, and book illustrations, various periods can be discerned, all of which are distinguished by masterpieces. About 1911, he was attracted by Italian and French primitive masters he also admired the "primitive" art of Henri Rousseau. After World War I, during which Derain served at the front, he studied the masters of the early Renaissance and then Pompeian art; all these left traces in his work. Finally he emerged as a realist and intensified his contact with nature. In rejecting the cerebral art of cubism and abstraction, he defended the return of the human figure to painting. His development as an artist was dramatic, and although Picasso called him a *guide de musées*, in other words, not an innovator but a traditionalist, Derain's best work will survive many of the experimental attempts of his contemporaries because of its inherent painterly qualities.

Toward the end of his life Derain lived, practically forgotten, in his country home at Chambourcy. The retrospective exhibition in Paris in 1937 was the climax of his fame. He died in Garches on Sept. 2, 1954. The large retrospective exhibitions organized from 1955 to 1959 established a new appreciation of Derain as a major artist.

The Bagpiper

In 1911 Derain did not go to the south of France to paint in the summer but spent July in Serbonne, August in Boulogne and London, and September in Camiers. The landscapes of that year are a departure from previous works; the viewpoint shifted to allow a panorama with a long horizon and

expansive sky, which is lyrical rather than architectural. Among them the key work is *The Bagpiper*. The landscape in *The Bagpiper* is not a study of a particular motif, as most of Derain's landscapes continued to be, but an "artificial" landscape composed from studies of several motifs at Camiers and Serbonne and from his trip to Beauvais the year before. The landscape is self-consciously archaic. The overlapping curves, the use of light and shade to create self-contained forms rather than a continuous spatial extension; and the conjunction of separate vignettes bring to mind the tradition of Franco-Flemish illumination.

The Bagpiper revives Derain's attachment to Renaissance painting and is inspired by a painting in the Louvre, Perugino's piping contest between Apollo and Marsyas***. The simplification of the figure is Cezanniste, extending the qualities of the landscape into the palette and drawing of the figure. The face is flat, wistful and has an air of detached poetic reverie.

Label

Although Derain had helped found Fauvism and had been an early adherent of Cubism, he increasingly fell away from both aesthetics, feeling their obsession with technique had supplanted the content of their work. Derain, instead, began to turn toward the Old Masters, even as he kept pace with the spirit of his own time. Thus, while *The Bagpiper at Camiers* owes much to Cézanne in color, brushwork and composition, a great debt to the Old Masters is also evident, especially the Arcadian scenes peopled with shepherds and musicians by Titian, and Derain's countryman, Claude Lorrain. *The Bagpiper at Camiers* became one of Derain's best known pre-war pictures and its lyrical and romantic feeling established him as an artist in the "grand tradition" of large formats and timeless subjects.

MIA Catalog

Derain spent the summer of 1911 painting and sketching near the village of Camiers. After his return to Paris, he painted *The Bagpiper* which is said to have been inspired by the memory of a shepherd piper who had strolled past as Derain was painting the village below. Derain may have been working on *The Road at Camiers*, which the background of this painting closely resembles. A few years before this, Derain had left the Fauve movement because "He came to the conclusion that most modern painters, himself among them, were too much taken up with technique; were less

concerned with what to say than how they wanted to say it; in short, allowed the body to outride the spirit. “Malcolm Vaughan says of *The Bagpiper* that it is "quiet, tender, Arcadian in mood, it is the most purely lyrical picture he (Derain) has ever painted, a straight enchantment, the sort of thing that walks into your heart without so much as knocking to come in. Feeling its spell and remembering the circumstances in which it was done, you are inclined to agree with Wordsworth that 'poetry is emotion remembered in tranquility.

Derain at the MIA

London: St. Paul's Cathedral seen from the Thames 1906 G371



Derain painted this scene in the winter of 1906-1907 during his second trip to London. It is the last painting of his Fauve period. During this period, Derain, like the other Fauves, avoided descriptively naturalistic colors and chose instead bright, unaltered pigments applied flat to the canvas. He also altered traditional perspective: the barges are seen from above but St. Paul's is seen at eye level. During the summer following the completion of this painting, Derain came under the influence of Picasso and Cubism. His series of Thames scenes are considered his best work up to that time. "They sum up for us the character and influence of his career to date. We see that (a) their atmospheric effects are remnants of the impressionist interest in light; (b) the forceful drawing and strong-knit linear designs are hangovers from post-impressionist emphasis on strong construction; (c) the decorative rhythms come from Matisse; (d) the expressive coloring of the forms, from van Gogh; (e) the colors themselves—bold, "raw" yellows and blues and reds—from Gauguin; (f) the dot-dash brushwork or pointillist technique, from Seurat and Signac; and (g) the attempt to bring all these jostling components into harmonious unity, from the old masters. Important to add, the overarching manner is his own."

Portrait of the Artist 1914-1916 G367



In this portrait Derain has captured himself in the middle of the act of painting with brush and palette in his hands. He is wrapped in darkness like a wizard in the process of doing magic. Only his face and hands are illuminated. The face is typified and appears firm and marked, as if it were carved out of wood. It doesn't have much in common with the artist's real face, but harks back to the painting of the earlier times such as El Greco's

figure compositions. The facial expression is serious and the gaze is inward-turned as an indication that he gathers material for his art from his inner world.

"The artist's spirit is an inner emanation, which fuses the inner emanation of nature", Derain wrote in a note.



***Fauvism**

At the 1905 *Salon d'automne*, Derain shared the same gallery as Matisse, Vlaminck and Van Dongen. A critic, noticing a sculpture by Albert Marque in the middle of these vividly colored paintings, remarked: "Mais c'est Donatello parmi les fauves!" ("Look, it's Donatello among wild beasts!"). The phrase caught on and gave origin to the word "Fauvism". Rather than being a structured movement, Fauvism was a point of agreement between young painters for whom pure color was to serve as the expressive and emotional transcription of the world rather than a means to create the illusion of reality.

Fauvism was short-lived but provided the transition between figurative painting and the main movements in 20th-century painting, which were to move further and further into abstraction. Derain thus declared: "Painting is too beautiful to be reduced to images which may be compared with those of a dog or horse. It is imperative that we escape the circle in which the realists have trapped us."

****Charing Cross Bridge also known as Westminster Bridge**

1906

Oil on canvas

H. 81; W. 100 cm

Paris, Musée d'Orsay



Perugino's Apollo and Marsyas 1346
Musée du Louvre
Oil on Wood

