Selected influences in painting

Barbara Fox

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SELECTED INFLUENCES IN PAINTING

By

Barbara Fox

May 1981
I, Barbara Fox, prefer to be contacted each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address.

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Date: 5/22/81
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Which of us is not flesh?
Last and first, in that common cause.
Beyond this--I would like
to be able to say... to say more.

Kenneth Patchen
Acknowledgements

These two years have flown by, as I knew they would. Being able to have them has been wonderful and I feel very privileged. Thank you Fred, and thank you Judd for your sensitivities, your criticisms, and your good teaching.

My thanks also to Karen, Robin, and most especially to Laddie—for so very much.
Photographs

1. Motherhood
   1980 Oil 56" x 28"
2. The Conversation
   1980 Oil 32" x 48"
3. The Professor
   1980 Oil 56" x 28"
4. Talisman II
   1981 Oil 4' x 3'
5. Blue Woman (With Room)
   1981 Oil 4' x 3'
6. Oh Egon!
   1981 Oil on Paper 26" x 20"
7. Viennese Couple
   1981 Oil on Paper 22" x 30"
8. Studio View
   1981 Oil on Paper 20" x 26"
9. Studio Thoughts (Plant)
   1981 Oil on Paper 35" x 26"
10. Studio Thoughts (Plant and Chair)
    1981 Oil on Paper 35" x 31"
11. Place (Without Cars)
    1981 Oil on Paper 35" x 26"
12. Self Portrait
    1981 Oil on Paper 35" x 26"
Introduction

When I first began to take my art seriously I experienced a great frustration. It was a sense of being inarticulate while at the same time having great numbers of images that wanted to be put down with paint and pencil. I didn't know quite how to formulate two-dimensionally what was churning in my thoughts. The solution for me (which is by no means fully resolved) was to turn to art history for help and information. I searched for kindred spirits, for those who shared what I saw but couldn't express, and before too long I found them. It was as if I shared the same world with these painters, only they were better at talking about it, i.e. translating what they saw, than I was. Others have come along as I continue my search, but I seem always to return to these silent mentors: Edouard Vuillard, Henri Matisse, and Egon Schiele. The range of works I find myself particularly drawn to (generally spanning the years 1890-1918) is that which was produced by Vuillard, and the Nabis in general, in the 1890s, by Matisse from 1909 to 1913, and Schiele for most of his productive years, which only lasted from approximately 1908 to 1918 when he died.

I admit they are an odd trio, and I have given many hours to trying to understand why each draws me. Their
works are very different from each other, yet I believe there are connections and ties between them. Vuillard and Matisse present very tranquil, lanquid worlds, though in Matisse there is often an intense sensuality. Never in Vuillard. The third, Schiele, depicts an overt obsessive sexuality and strongly stylized figures. Not only did Schiele paint nudes, his model was often himself – tormented, compromised, always intense. The pictures he painted and left for us to examine in minutaes were truly his world, his life, his relationships. In this way he is very different from his French colleagues. Vuillard showed us his family but never as expressions of anything more than typical bourgeois life. Matisse is closer to Vuillard in this regard His paintings are not meant to upset us or to cause us to question the status quo, or to consider the relationship between artist and model. Vuillard almost always paints interiors, clothed people, day to day domestic scenes while Matisse and Schiele often drew and painted nude people. All three can be seen as distorting and abstracting images. Interestingly, it was Vuillard, who, given the very mundane, bourgeois life he painted, subscribed to the philosophy of the Nabis--"A picture—before being a war horse, a nude, or an anecdotal subject—is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." (Preston, p. 23)
Perhaps these artists can be understood more graphically by describing a continuum starting out with tranquility (Vuillard) on one side and franticness on the other (Schiele) with Matisse moving back and forth along the line depending on the degree of languidness or sensuality depicted.

Along with explaining their connections to each other, this paper will attempt to examine their contributions to painting, the sources of their inspirations, as well as their historical contexts.
Part I

If I were ever forced to choose another era in which to live, it would be in the era of the fin-de-siecle, up to the beginnings of World War I. And of course, I would want to have been in Europe: in Paris, Vienna, or London. There must have been a great spirit in the air, an expectation of the dawn of modernism, the possibilities of the machine age, which though anticipated hadn't yet created a culture gap. It was an age also of endings; the endings of empires and aristocracies—democratic ideas had permeated the western world.

Within these influences art flourished and touched more people than it ever had before. Even the subject matter of art had changed, allowing artists to discover the commonplace; their own breakfast table became an acceptable object for painting, or the streets they watched from their studio windows. The Impressionists in the 1870s had helped free art from the age old constrictions of realism, and even the development of the camera had changed artists' views of composition. Guaguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne had already broken their respective grounds, helping to create an atmosphere of innovation and further departures from tradition. Matisse himself has referred to Cézanne as the
"master of us all." (Marchiori, p.13) The Symbolists and the Art Nouveau Movement had introduced swirling lines into Western Art. They had stressed the importance of organic decorative forms. It must have seemed like the whole world was involved in these artistic developments, certainly many European artists and artisans were heavily involved in producing more and more arts and crafts which fell within the classification of Art Nouveau.

And what of Vuillard and Matisse during this time? (Schiele had only been born in 1890.) Let us begin with Vuillard, since he was involved with the Nabis (the word Nabi in Hebrew means prophet) in the 1890s, which was just before the beginning of Matisse's prolific time. This prestigious group of painters included Bonnard, Denis, Valloton, Serusier, and others, as well as Vuillard. They were heavily influenced by the literature and the spirit of their time: Mallarmé, a leading Symbolist poet, had taught English at the Lycée which Vuillard had attended. (Ritchie, p.9) The Symbolist Movement was at its height then, with its emphasis on the importance of the expression of the artist's inner world. Gauguin, who according to Ritchie (p. 10) was the major Symbolist painter, felt strongly that art was too heavily influenced by literature. He felt it was his duty to remind painters to paint, that their inner
world had to be expressed "pictorially and vigorously."

(Chassé, p.19) Gauguin became the chief philosopher and theorist of this group with Serusier being his disciple. Serusier has been described as St. Paul to Gauguin's Christ. (Ritchie, p.10) In any case, the group supported Gauguin's ideas and agreed that the artist's responsibility was not to reproduce nature, but to provide a painter's description of what one felt in the presence of nature. Any imbalance, they felt, was a source of suffering. Colors must not shock, but instead, must harmonize. Serusier's proselytizing was influential in cementing the Nabis together as a group. They met often to discuss their theories of art, painting, literature, and religion, though Vuillard "was largely indifferent to theory and would remain silent while his friends heatedly discussed the nature of art." (Preston, p.35) He was not totally immune to their ideas, however, and his work during the early 1890s is obviously a result of Gauguin's dictums regarding design, color and the flattening of subject matter.

Gauguin had been very much impressed with Japanese woodcuts. From these he incorporated into his own work, and expounded to his students, the importance of the flat planes and outlines, the asymmetrical and diagonal compositions, the twisting, serpentine lines, the use of non-natur-
alistic color harmonies. "Serusier returned in 1888 from a summer in Brittany [with Gauguin], bringing with him a cigar box lid on which he had demonstrated Gauguin's principles of flat, boldly outlined [or cloissonéed] areas of color, signifying by their transformation and deformation of natural forms and colors the liberty of the individual artists to interpret nature according to his expressive needs." (Chassé, p.24) The painting is entitled "The Talisman", clearly indicating the student's Symbolist Roots. Gauguin's advice to Serusier, "How does that tree look to you? Green? All right, then use green, the greenest green on your palette. And that shadow, a little bluish? Don't be afraid. Paint it as blue as you can!" (Ritchie, p.12) The result was no foreshortening or modeling; European art had become abstraction. For the Nabis, even the subject matter of the Japanese prints was easy to accept--street scenes and interiors, actors and entertainers, an array of urban life not very different from their own. Guaguin had also stressed the resulting intimacy which the Japanese artists attained, and the Nabis absorbed these elements into their own works.

The subject matter in Vuillard's work of this period can almost always be said to be intimate. Even the occasional outdoor scenes achieved this quality--a bourgeois,
gentle, quiet life of raising children, enjoying small pleasures, sharing rituals and daily chores with loved ones. This genre was not unusual at that time; intimacy as subject matter had been exploited by Van Gogh in his painting of old shoes, Cézanne with his card players and Carriére's maternity studies, as well as the works of other Nabis. But Vuillard painted almost exclusively in this way. Later when these works were shown publicly for the first time, he claimed, "It's dreadful, revealing all these secrets!" (Preston, p. 36) There are no secrets, only his delicate slice-of-life portrayals which leave one not so much interested in the people or their relationships with one another as in the construction of the painting itself. The possible exception, it seems to me, is "Mother and Sister of the Artist" which depicts Vuillard's sister in a checked dress either pushing herself away from, or being absorbed into, the patterned wall. She is, in either case, totally eclipsed by the psychological power of the figure of the mother. This picture is posed, unlike most others, and is perhaps more emotionally expressive than any of the others of this period, though one must assume the artist didn't mean for it to be.

"He uses human beings in the composition of his still life pieces, but the fact that they are human beings is not
the important thing in the composition. All things seem to serve him merely to enrich his palette. No artist has ever so suggested the soul of an interior—the sense of habitation." (Meier-Graefe, in Russell, p.98) Perhaps part of the effect of intimacy can be explained by the device of cutting off objects at the top or sides of a canvas, which creates a sense of eliminating unnecessary elements, of zeroing-in on exactly the important parts one means to stress, almost the way a photographic image often would. Vuillard was, in fact, known to have kept "son Kodak" handy and would often quietly place it on the back of a chair and snap the shutter, without even looking into the viewfinder. (Salomon, p.3) One can only speculate on the influence those photographic compositions had on his work. But ultimately, unity for Vuillard had more to do with his arabesques and his beautiful patterns. (Chassé, p.22) The sinuous and twisting lines helped fuse the model to the environment as well, I believe, as providing dynamism in what might otherwise have proven to be very boring canvases. Mirror reflections also play an important part in his compositions because he used them as a means of linking his models to their possessions. "No matter how commonplace such subject matter may be, Vuillard transfigures it, weaving diverse, varicolored elements into exquisite compo-
sitions whose asymmetry derives from the artifice of Japanese prints." (Preston, p. 36) There is a magic in these intimist paintings which is still able to affect us, Preston feels, causing us to see the patterns before we see the subjects, enabling us to ignore the banal activities of the subjects. There is "nothing less than the rarest elegance epitomized in the pose of Madame Vuillard [the artist's mother] leaning over her stove." (p. 36)

At this point in his development he distrusted modeling and relief painting, as did his colleagues, and therefore he painted flatly, preferring instead to overlap planes and fuse depths so that space becomes distorted. His palette became more and more subdued as he preferred to evoke "mystical possibilities of an infinite gradation of color hues to extract the subtlest overtones, toning down his earlier juxtaposition of bright areas of color to an almost whispered chorus of low notes in a minor key reminding one of the lines from a poem of Verlaine's:

Car nous voulons la nuance encore
Pas la couleur, rien que la nuance
..............................
Et tous le reste est litterature.\(^1\) (Ritchie, p.13-14)

\(^1\)"For what we still desire is the nuance. Not the color, nothing but the nuance. And all the rest is literature."
By 1900 the Nabi movement had virtually disappeared. Gauguin had left for Tahiti in 1890 and Mallarmé had died in 1898. Vuillard continued to paint until his death in 1940, but he had become increasingly involved in portraiture and can be said to have lost the beauty and understated power of the work done in the 1890s. Except for his relationship with Bonnard, Vuillard had disassociated himself from his former colleagues and with any newly developing avant-garde art movements. His conservativism was, in fact, used by Proust as the model for his artist-character, Elstir, in Remembrance of Things Past. (Preston, p.44) "Critics explain the withering of his imagination by arguing that he found himself out of his depth in rich bourgeois society [in which he was very much involved after 1900]; that he could only do justice to people and scenes he knew profoundly, and that his intimism ill suited fashionable sitters to whom he was mostly indifferent." (Preston, p.46)

This paper, however, is concerned only with the artist's accomplishments from 1890 to 1900, and "when the totality of Vuillard's decorative work of the '90s is properly appreciated, he may well be considered, in addition to his symbolist contribution, one of the outstanding art nouveau painters of his time." (Ritchie, p.22)

By 1900 Matisse had been painting for 10 years and con-
sidered himself still a student. He had, in fact, only
discovered the Impressionists, Cézanne, and other avant-
garde movements three years earlier. These influenced him
in his painting "La Desserte" or the "Dinner Table", which
was strongly criticized at the Salon de la Nationale of
1897. His teacher, Moreau, defended it, however, prophe-
sying, "You are going to simplify painting." But he was
not to go beyond Gauguin's accomplishments in that direction
until 1908 when he was 39 years old. (Barr, pp. 36-40)
Indeed, one can see the influence of Gauguin's "Still Life
with Puppies" with its interchanging tablecloth and wall
paper on Matisse's "La Desserte."

The content of Matisse's paintings, particularly from
1908-1913, depict a world not too different from Vuillard's
--full of domesticity, quietude, joy, security. Indeed the
two can be seen in many ways to have sprung from the same
well. Close in age, born in the same country, growing up
in the same cultural spirit. Both had been students of
Bougereau, and both had rebelled for similar reasons against
him. When Matisse discovered avant-garde art, it was the
same general movement in which Vuillard already existed.
Both of them had flirted with Impressionism and Pointillism
and with Seurat's scientific theories, but neither painter
was able to allow that kind of limitation to inhibit his
work. Both were influenced by the general de-emphasis on classical art—from the Renaissance period to neo-classical revivalism. The New Wave painters of fin-de-siecle France wanted eclecticism in the arts. They demanded stylistic alternatives to the traditions of the past. (Welsh-Ovcharov, p. 67) Gauguin himself had cautioned his Pont-Aven group against following his own style too closely.

During those first few years of the century, Matisse's skills as a painter and innovator were strengthened and sharpened, and his philosophy concerning his work is clearly stated in "Notes of a Painter" published in 1908 in "Le Grande Revue." "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity, serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter... a soothing calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." (Matisse, in Flam, p. 38) He believed a painter should paint only what is seen "and even when [one] departs from nature, [one] must do it with the conviction that it is only to interpret [it] more fully." (Matisse, in Flam, p. 39)

Having been a leader of the Fauves, Matisse gave up that style completely after 1908, and began a series of still lifes and interiors which marked him as a true innovative genius. He passed through Fauvism, he went beyond
Cézanne and Gauguin, to develop a style of composition and color application that is still influencing painting. Barnes and deMazia feel that the mark of a genuine artist is seen in the interpretation of the visions of others; the interpretation must be more penetrating, more selective. It must distinguish itself in its modification, and in its transformation into a new personal contribution to art (p. 12). Matisse has done this in his transformations of Gauguin's colors and arabesques, by heightening the effect of movement with more dramatic contrast, and by his use of more exotic colors as well as his more extensive use of bare canvas. Matisse's debt to Van Gogh and Manet is seen in the brush strokes which help unify the canvas often with a mosaic feeling. (p. 50) But it was to Cézanne, who had made the strongest impression on him, and who continued influencing him throughout his career, that he owed his greatest debt. "His constantly accentuated planes and his hatchings of color are largely from this source, though the color is less rich, weighty, and organic." (Barnes and deMazia, p. 74)

Matisse's style of this period can be characterized as containing overall decorative patterns and the flattening of objects painted, and the ignoring of light or shadow. In many of the still lifes of this period, he has set up a thoughtfully complex, yet visually simplified world; he
often paints the entire composition in an overall color and the decorative arabesques of patterns are made to move from one depth to another (as in "Harmony in Red", "Still Life in Venetian Red"), planes are tilted, and visual information is not always provided about edges of planes or the beginnings of walls.

"Matisse's chronic struggle between all-over pattern and modeled forms, between two and three dimensions, between 'decoration' and 'reality' is well seen in these still lifes of 1908 and 1909. The conflict was to continue through the years to come and was often to be enriched by the struggle between the active and the static and between simplification and elaboration." (Barr, p.127)

If, as Moreau had predicted, Matisse's mission was to simplify painting, the connection with reality is never completely severed. Even in his most abstract paintings, as in "The Moroccans" or "The Piano Lesson", he restructures the world he observes with his new abstract-decorative spatial environment. In 1947 Matisse is quoted as having said "Exactness is not truth." (Marchiori, p.100) Anticipating that are his statements in "Notes of a Painter" of 1908 which can be generalized from nudes to all his other subjects:

"Supposing I want to paint the body of a woman: first of all I endow it with grace and charm but I know that something more than that is necessary. I try to condense the meaning of this body by drawing its essential lines. The charm will then become less apparent at first glance but in the long run it will begin to emanate from the new image. This image at the same
time will be enriched by a wider meaning, a more comprehensively human one, while the charm, being less apparent, will not be its only characteristic. It will be merely one element in the general conception of the figure." (Matisse, in Flam, p. 36)

The ways in which the artist condenses his subject matter aids in the overall qualities of flatness which he is able to project, as well as enhancing the decorative possibilities—"an adventure which has given us the richest and most varied arrays in decorative forms to be found in the work of any painter not interested also in the deeper forms of expression." (Barnes and deMazia, p. 23)

New influences imposed themselves on Matisse towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century—African and Middle Eastern art became important in his growing abstract vision. In fact, it was Matisse who showed Picasso his first piece of African art. (Barr, p. 85) These new visions provided ways for him to treat space in a screen-like way, to contrast bright and drab colors which are as much Persian in origin as they are Japanese, and in creating decorative designs in which figures are treated more as units of an overall color pattern.

It is ironic that despite his desire for tranquillity as a product of his canvases, Matisse saw himself as an expressionist. For him expressionism was an integral part of the arrangement of a painting. "The position taken up
by bodies and the empty spaces surrounding them, the proportions— all these things play their part." In order to express one's feelings the artist uses "composition as the art of arranging in a decorative manner the different elements available to the painter." (Marchiori, p.37)

Obviously, color too was important. "I thought of a celebrated canvas Matisse once produced of blue tomatoes. 'Why blue?' he was asked. 'Because I see them that way, and I cannot help it if no one else does,' he replied." (Flam, p.52) Color is to serve the painter's expressive needs, as is composition, and it does so in an instinctive way, on the part of the painter. It simply happens, if one is a good painter, by "observation, feeling, and experience." (Marchiori, p.40) But composition and color were not enough;

"To copy objects in a still life is nothing; one must render the emotions they awaken...The emotion of the ensemble...the specific character of every object— modified by its relation to the others...the tear-like quality of this slender fat-bellied vase— the generous volume of this copper must touch you..."
(Noted by Sarah Stein, in Barr, p.127)

Surely those are the words of a true expressionist, but with the possible exception of his time as a Fauve, Matisse is not usually thought of as belonging to that school. He never projected aggression, mysticism, or anguish on his canvases.

The roots of Expressionism can be traced far back in
history to Byzantine and Gothic works as well as to Giotto’s “The Mourning Over Christ”, Rembrandt’s self portraits and to Goya’s etchings, to name just a few works. (Denvir, p.3) It found its greatest exponents, however, in Germany just after the turn of the century. The movement towards expressive art was not a unified one, but rather one that was idiosyncratic from city to city. In Dresden Die Brücke was organized in 1905 by Kirchner, Heckel, and Schmidt-Rottluff. In Munich Kandinsky, Marc, and Müller, and Jawlensky organized Die Neue Künstlervereinigung, and later Der Blaue Reiter group. In Berlin, the Neue Sezession was organized which published “Der Sturm” in 1910. This group included Nolde, Kollwitz, Barlach, and Beckman, as well as Die Brücke members who had come to Berlin. The same forces were active in Austria. In Vienna, Gustav Klimt organized the Vienna Secessionist group, influencing such people as Max Oppenheim, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele.

Though each group was separate and had organized for their own purposes, there was contact between them, including exhibitions of the works of each other group. In addition, they showed the work of Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin and the Nabis, Matisse and the Fauves, as well as the Impressionists and, of course, Japanese woodcuts. Both Impressionism and Post-Impressionism had come to Germany at the same time,
and not surprisingly, had caused strong reactions. The groups of German artists had been more strongly drawn to the Post-Impressionist work, particularly to Van Gogh and to the Fauves. (Dube, p.15) That influence can be seen in the Germans' colors and brush work, as well as subject matter in many cases, which proceeded after their exposure to the avant-garde movements in France.

The artistic turmoil that was occurring in France and Germany, and in England, can be seen as resulting from the reaction against the academy, against traditionalism, and even a response against Impressionism, but it was also as a response to the new industrial age. The Arts and Crafts movement, begun by Rosetti, Burne-Jones, and Crane, was an attempt to "combat the standardizing effects of mass production through craftsmanship." (Dube, p.14) The intellectual sources of this influence cannot be overlooked either.

"The revolutionary mysticism of Kierkegaard, the existentialism of Heidegger, the tortured social preoccupations of Ibsen and Strindberg, the febrile anguish of Swinburne and Whitman, the aggressive Dionysian myths of Nietzsche, all created a climate of intellectual violence which intoxicated the young. The discoveries of Darwin reduced the status of man in the scale of life, and emphasized his relationship to other, more instinctual creatures. The theories of Marx suggested that [we were] the toys of history rather than its master. The researches of Freud, which made their impact felt most clearly in those countries where Expressionism flourished, suggested that our actions are not motivated by those processes of conscious thought on which we had placed such reliance. Bergson stressed the subjective nature of perception,
and the flow and flux between nature and the minds of people. In developing humanism, [Western] society had begun to alter [Western] notions of humanity." (Denvir, p.4)

Egon Schiele can surely be considered one of those individuals affected by the times in which he lived. The subject matter of his art, while often explicitly erotic, was also filled with his explicit psychic pain and German angst. While "the preoccupation with self was, of course also traditional with Northern European artists from Durer to Van Gogh," Schiele's poverty contributed to his need to use himself as his most used model. (Comini, p.51) One cannot help but assume, however, that he might have done as many self-portraits and self-studies in any case, but the stylizing which he developed externalized his thoughts and his sense of guilt; amputated limbs, painted in colors of blood or putrification symbolizing a powerless man, or a masturbating Schiele blatantly looking out at the viewer. Even in his commissioned portraits he used "formal features such as the extended shoulder, or emphasized symmetry, suggestions of 'mutilation,' and astral body glow, and the projection of the sitter against a void that at the most symbolized the realm of the psyche and at the least melancholic isolation." (Comini, p.78)

His early work, from 1908-10 was very much influenced by Klimt and the Jugenstil/Secessionist movement. He was
even dubbed the "Silver Klimt" for his efforts. However, "in deriving from the more lavish style of Klimt and in recoiling from its easy and ornamental sensuousness, Schiele stripped away the excesses to be found in the art of his secessionist elders while at the same time retaining the essential inner forms of that style." (Kramer, 1978) Differences can also be noted in the emotional content of their figurative pieces. Klimt's portraits are reflections of his world; ornamented, bejeweled women--beautiful and fanciful facades. Schiele's work digs into his subjects, undresses them, flays them almost, in his demanding investigations.

The style can be characterized by the importance of line in his work. Even his watercolors can be called "tinted" drawings, the line created tension, energy. His graphic style admits only the essentials, and very dramatically at that. It has been noted that once Schiele began a drawing he never raised his pencil until it was completed, and he never applied an eraser. His bold strong line knew where it wanted to go. After 1910 Schiele's major problem was the combining of color and line. (Kallir, p.25) He preferred to use his paint thinly, applying it within a linear structure, often swirling it, creating gnarled surfaces, adding purple or green to accent a skin tone--again creating strong, unremitting tension. His figurative work stops just
short of caricature.

By the time he died at 28, during the Spanish flu epidemic, his work developed to the point of his having been able to paint "mature" pictures. While still maintaining drama, the paint was now used to create substance and depth, and the sitters were to be found in their own familiar settings; in a study surrounded by familiar books, or in a familiar chair. Comini describes this as a change from an expressive content to an expressive form. (Comini, p. 182) Kramer sees Schiele as "the end of an era" and an artist, who had he lived, would have had to make gigantic changes to have been able to function in a new world.
Part II

The historical connections between my three enduring heroes, Matisse, Vuillard, and Schiele can be clearly seen. The influences of Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, and the Japanese printmakers were acknowledged by all of them. The formal elements that connect their works seem to fall in right behind the historical. Their use of senuous lines in their compositions, a flatness of depth to their pieces, a sense of intimacy of the subjects dealt with; even a photographic sense of composition is a common element. It is in the area of their individual styles of painting that Vuillard, Matisse, and Schiele may appear to be different from each other. But there too they maintain a shared quality; while each of them can be considered a realistic and figurative painter, their interpretations of that reality is not an attempt at imitation. They each clearly have distorted and abstracted their worlds, but none have abstracted beyond recognition. What started out as a nude ends up as one, though it may have undergone severe transformations along the way.

Obviously their styles are different. Their concerns are different, and their results are different. It was mentioned in the introduction that Vuillard was lacking in sensuality, while Schiele was obsessed with it. Perhaps that
should be amended to indicate that while Vuillard never painted subject matter that might be labeled sensuous, his use of patterns as flat objects, overlapping and interacting with each other, might be considered a form of sensuousness. The very fullness and richness of those patterns suggest that those compositions were not the product of a man lacking in passion. Perhaps they were the work of a man who never overcame his inhibitions concerning public displays of emotion—or passion.

Vuillard's opposite, Schiele, strove to display the very things Vuillard shied away from. Rather than using pattern, however, Schiele generally used line to achieve sensuality and overt sexuality. Schiele's work often left the subject alone on the canvas, devoid of a "place" with which to be identified. But that technique doesn't eliminate an environment. It merely allows us, the viewers, to create one from our imaginations, particularly in our interaction with such powerfully presented figures who command our attention. This is perhaps not too different from a sculptural approach. The environment that is created is one of the viewer imagining a world around these unknown characters, bringing one's own experiences and fantasies. Of course, the viewer is helped along by Schiele who sets the stage with his colors, which are designed to demand responses from us; by his
faces which confront us with a range of emotions; by his compositions of asymmetrical figures leaning hard to one side, or leaving the canvas at an arbitrary place. Schiele's figurative works were rarely without anguish or intensity. If Vuillard displayed too much peacefulness, Schiele displayed too little. How many tortured self-portraits can one look at without becoming disinterested? How many tortured self-portraits can one paint without becoming bored with oneself?

Matisse seems to move back and forth between these two painters in his displays of sensuality, though he never shows passion in his subject matter. His passion is manifest through his painting techniques, through his use of colors, and through his transformations of reality. I find Matisse's "Gold Fish and Sculpture" done in 1911, or the 1911 "Notre Dame", each with their fresh looking overall paint application, and the abstraction of the walls and architecture far more sensuous than his later paintings of nudes with their arms over their heads. In many of his paintings there is a certain languidness which prevents the description of sensuality. One almost feels a physical heat in the atmosphere which makes the figure too warm to want to be anything but immobile.

Of the three painters, Matisse can be said to be the
most comprehensive and innovative in the range of compositions and techniques he developed and employed. He was certainly the most prolific of the three. It may not be fair to accuse Schiele of being too one-sided since he died so young, with so much potential left unexpressed—and there is evidence that he was becoming more well rounded in his approach. It is that very intensity which draws me, which is expressed in those strong lines, and the figurative distortions. It is the strong drawing quality, while remaining painting, which I admire so much. It is that quality which I seek to develop in my own work.

Part of what I am attempting is the integration of drawing with painting. My way of doing that is to work on a sized, stretched linen, which allows the natural color and texture of the fabric to be exposed, and on Arches Cover Stock Beige paper, which I protect from oil paints with an acrylic spray. Often these surfaces are drawn on with pencil or paint and left exposed. This allows me to create a focal point of the drawing, or it can be used as a flat area to contrast with a more fully painted one. In either case the area is a fully integrated part of the composition. Though in the past I have often left areas of a canvas unfinished, the viewer was likely to see the underpainting or gesso. It is only recently that it is the canvas itself one observes.
The use of the canvas, or paper, as the case may be, to highlight the drawing while remaining within the context of a painting has developed as a pleasing technique.

This process has also been useful in increasing my spontaneity which makes for more interesting brush strokes, use of color, and distortion of subject matter. It is Matisse whom I admire in this area. Though Moreau claimed Matisse would simplify painting, I think that what he really accomplished was the simplification of shapes. He has been able to transform a gothic cathedral into a silhouette, to create monochromatic rooms, and figures with single strokes of his brush. Along with this simplification was a genius for the composing of a picture and for the choice of colors. These elements combined give us pictures with a strong sense of spontaneity, of freshness, and of taste. Matisse often drew with his paint, using his simplistic devices—leaving out areas of color, or leaving out lines, providing scanty information. But that which was given was the essential.

Vuillard is the least draftsmanlike of the three, and my attraction for his work has to do with his compositions and patterns. Both of these elements aid in the quality of flatness that is achieved. There are paintings by Vuillard, whose parts look like an assembled jigsaw puzzle—areas are outlined, with little modeling, pieces seem to fall on top
of each other to create any depth, rather than a use of classical foreshortening or perspective for that purpose. These are painterly concerns, and these are the elements that draw me to Vuillard.

While all three painters are found in art history books, and are generally well thought of, it seems to me that the era of 1890 to 1918 is undervalued in considering art history—at least the importance of realistic painting is undervalued. The era was perhaps overshadowed by the general developments in the area of abstraction; Cubism, Orphism, Futurism, etc. My proclivities are, however, with that period just prior to, and somewhat parallel with, the explosion of abstraction, the period when distortion and simplification, was developing. Certainly there are later painters who have made use of these innovations, e.g., Milton Avery, Alex Katz, even Richard Diebenkorn. But while flatness and distortion may be used now, it is rarely combined with sensuous lines and arabesques, nor is it often seen in intimate compositions. It is my hope to be able to use these elements, along with my drawing and with open areas of canvas or paper to create paintings I love.
Bibliography


