



# EXPRESSIONISM

EUROPEAN ART  
AFTER  
POSTIMPRESSIONISM



# Introduction

## WHAT

After the experiences of Paul Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh and Edvard Munch, European artists wanted to go beyond the realistic depiction of things, by abolishing perspective and traditional composition rules.

Artists grouped and acted in many different movements, periods and areas; therefore, Expressionism is a label we use to define those movements.

## WHERE AND WHEN

Norway, France, Germany, Austria; end of XIXth century, first years of the XXth century.



# Introduction

## WHO

It is possible to indicate certain artists and some movements, for example:

- Edvard Munch (Norway);
- Die Brücke, 1905. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Emil Nolde (Germany).
- Der Blaue Reiter, 1911; Vasilij Kandinskij, Franz Marc (Germany).
- Austrian Secession (around last years of XIXth); Gustav Klimt.
- Austrian Expressionism (first quarter XX century); Oskar Kokoschka, Egon Schiele.
- Fauves, 1905; André Derain, Henri Matisse (France).



# Introduction

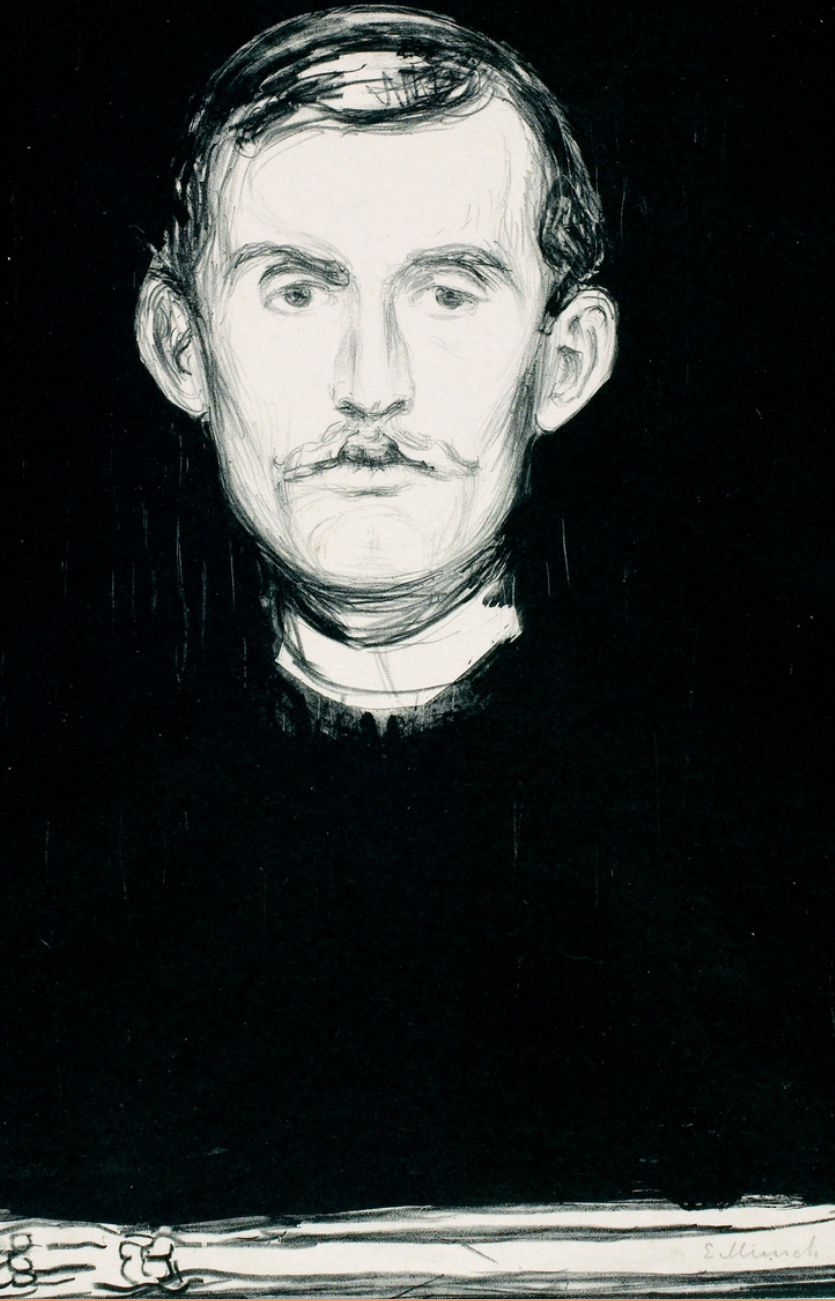
## STYLE

Even though it is not possible to define the same style for every movement or artist, there are **common traits**:

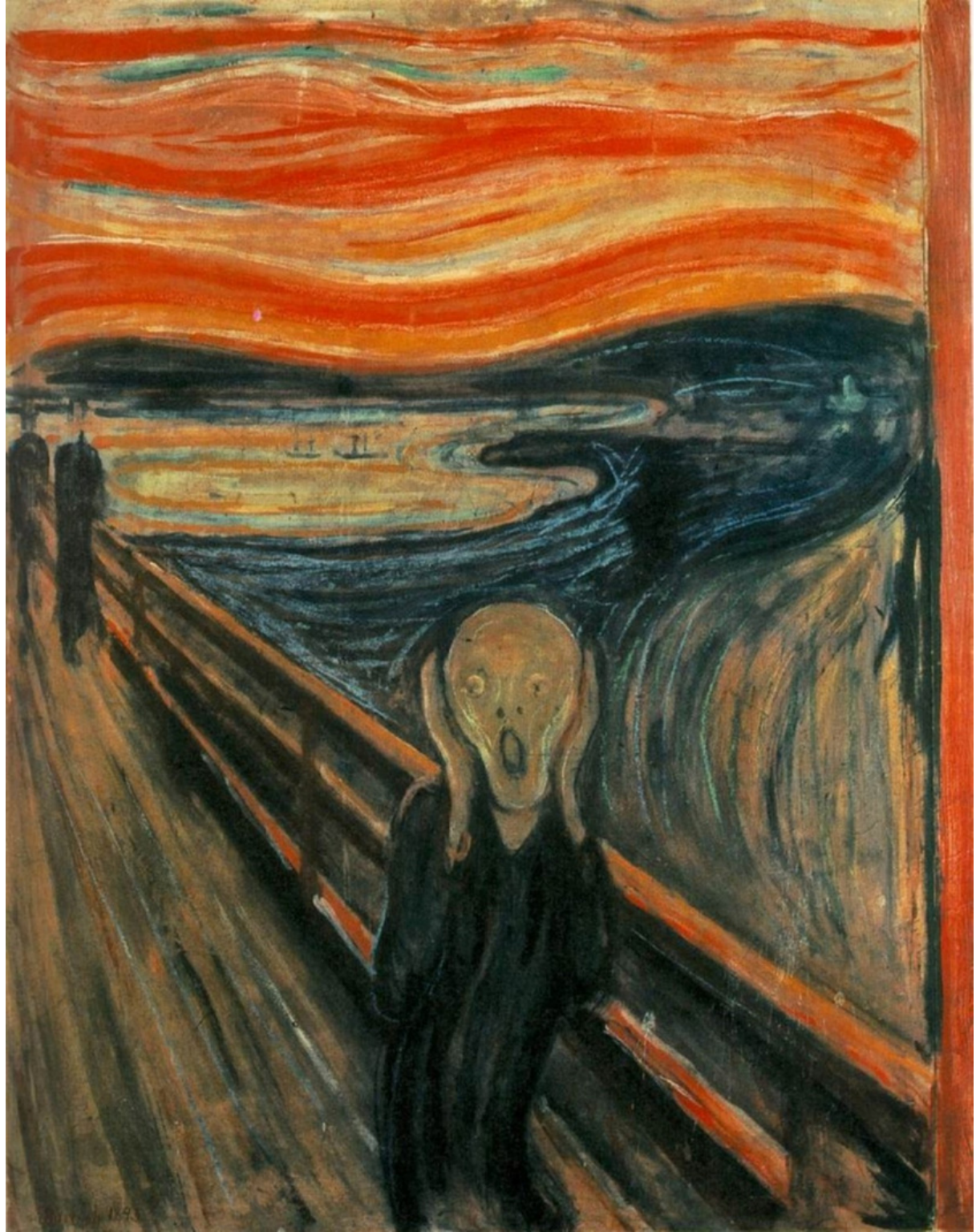
- style is always personal, to express the artist's feelings
- colors are rarely balanced, most often **pure**; usually **brightly violent**, or **dull and dark**
- rough **brushwork** is quite common, as well as **heavy outlines**
- **unrealistic setting, colors, space**: things are often not characterised by their "real" colors and proportions, and are placed in spaces that do not look realistic

# Edvard Munch

## (1863-1944)



- Precursor of Expressionism from Norway; his style is aimed at communicating the feelings of the artist rather than depicting in a realistic way.
- Fan of Gauguin, deeply affected by family losses, suffered several mental issues, allucinations, worsened by alcohol addiction. He actually recovered and died quite old, known by the many.
- His artworks reflect the condition of despair, sadness, anxiety, contrast between man and nature, loss, death.



The background of the slide is a reproduction of Edvard Munch's painting 'The Scream'. It depicts a figure in the foreground covering their ears with their hands, looking distressed. The sky is filled with vibrant, wavy bands of red, orange, and yellow, suggesting a storm or a moment of intense emotional pain. The water below is dark and turbulent. The overall mood is one of anguish and despair.

# Edvard Munch, "The scream", 1893-10

## Features:

- serie of paintings concerning the same subject realized in different moments and techniques
- the character covers his ears surprised by the scream of nature. Separation between man and nature is the main meaning
- deformation, non realistic appearance, violently contrasting colors are used to express anguish and despair



# Austrian Secession

- In Wien, in 1897, a group of artists separated from the local academy hosted at the Kunstlerhaus and founded an independent artistic association, who published a magazine (“Ver Sacrum”) and had a beautiful building designed by the architect Joseph Maria Olbrich; the main artist and founder was Gustav Klimt (1862-1918).





DER ZEIT IHRE KUNST.  
DER KUNST IHRE FREIHEIT.

VER SACRVM



# Joseph Maria Olbrich, Secession building, 1898

## Features:

- gallery for Secession artists
- partially designed and decorated by Gustav Klimt
- original style and details: the dome is entirely made out of golden leaves



The painting 'The Kiss' by Gustav Klimt depicts a man and a woman in a romantic embrace. The man is on the left, wearing a white shirt with black and yellow horizontal stripes and a black vest. The woman is on the right, wearing a white dress with a colorful, circular pattern. They are surrounded by a golden, textured background. The bottom of the painting features a dense field of colorful flowers in shades of purple, blue, and yellow. The artist's signature 'GUSTAV KLIMT' is visible in the bottom right corner.

# Gustav Klimt, "The kiss", 1907-1908

## Features:


- oil and gold leaf on canvas
- decorativism more than actual description of reality
- symbolism: rectangles for the man, circles for the woman

# Austrian Expressionism



- The two main artists following the generation of Klimt and his fellows were **Egon Schiele (1890-1918)** and **Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980)**. Both pupils of the great master and founder of the movement, they later moved in their own direction getting to a deeply personal and struggled style. Deformation of the bodies, rough brushwork, stretched anatomy and heavy feelings are features common to the both of them.



The painting 'The Family' by Egon Schiele depicts a family of four with highly distorted, elongated, and somewhat grotesque features. The father stands in the background, his body stretched and his face pale with wide, staring eyes. The mother is seated in the center, her body also elongated and her face pale. She is holding a small, dressed child in her lap. The child is the only one who appears normal, wearing a blue and yellow outfit. The overall mood is one of intense emotional suffering and physical exhaustion, reflecting the artist's personal experience with the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918.

# Egon Schiele, "The family", 1918

## Features:

- portrait realized before the death of the wife (Spanish flu, 1918)
- depiction of unborn child
- protection: Schiele embraces his wife, that embraces the baby
- bodies are stretched and tired, only the baby is dressed. The woman's body resembles an egg





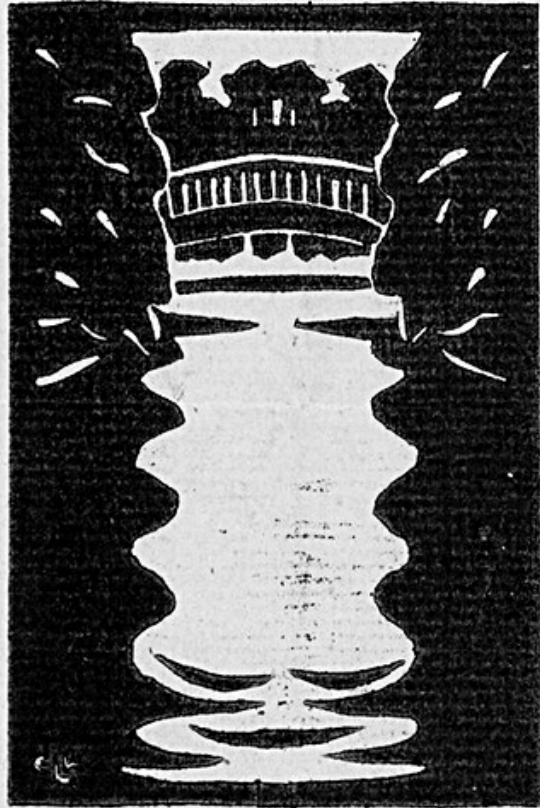


# Oskar Kokoschka, "Bride of the wind", 1914

## Features:

- allegorical portrait of the artist with Alma Mahler, his girlfriend for a short period
- rough technique, symbolizing pain and suffering
- after Kokoschka broke up with Alma, he voluntarily went fighting in WW1, where he was injured to the head

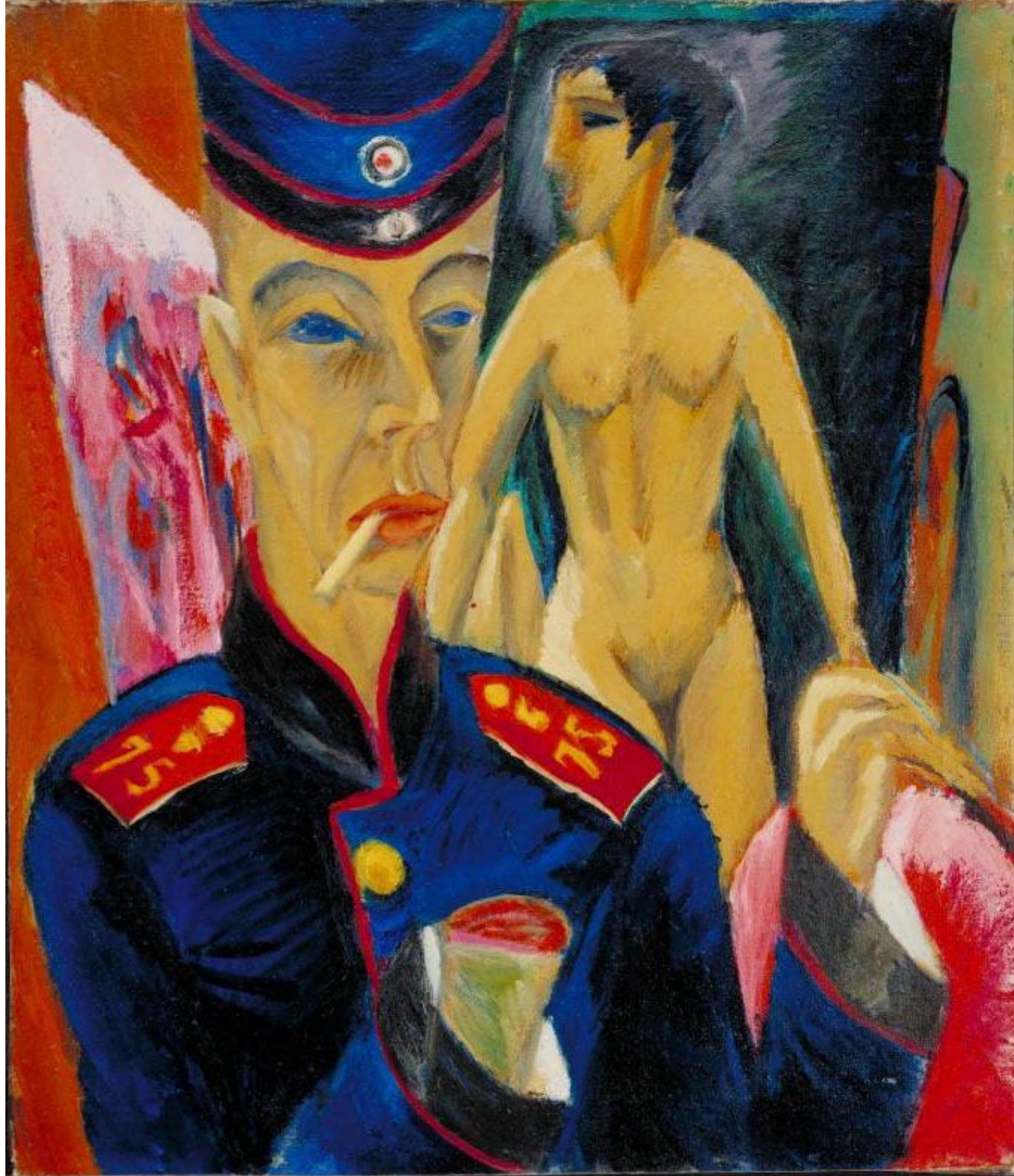
KÜNSTER  
GRUPPE



BRÜCKE

## Die Brücke (Dresden, 1905)

- This group aim was to **renew art function and language**, restrained by strict rules, to break with illusionistic depiction of reality, using also **traditional techniques** like xylographic printmaking (or woodcut), used for its **great contrast**.
- The main artists involved in the group were **Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938)** and **Emil Nolde (1867-1956)**, that used very **bright and violent colours**, **fragmented and harsh lines**, **deformed and unrealistic pictures**. The group expressed their ideas in a famous manifesto.





# Ludwig Kirchner, "Self portrait as a soldier", 1915

Features:

- in this painting Kirchner represents himself with the right hand missing as a result of an injury, as a **metaphor**: he is not able to paint anymore, since his hand is missing, even though he is surrounded by symbols of art (the painting on the left, the model on the right). As a **soldier**, he is useless for art.



The painting 'Dance around the golden calf' by Emil Nolde (1910) depicts a scene with a golden calf in the center, surrounded by figures in a primitive, expressive style. The colors are vibrant and saturated, with a focus on yellow, red, and blue. The brushwork is thick and visible, creating a sense of movement and energy. The overall composition is dynamic and somewhat abstract, reflecting Nolde's interest in primitive art and his use of strong, bright colors.

# Emil Nolde, "Dance around the golden calf", 1910

Features:

- biblical subject (Old Testament)
- primitive taste, acquired watching the items in the ethnographic museum in Dresden;
- deformation and simplification of shapes as an expressive synthesis of nature; strong and bright colors.

# Der Blaue Reiter (Munich, 1911)



- Heir of Die Brücke, this movement started around Vassilij Kandinskij and Franz Marc; differently from Die Brücke, these artists didn't write a manifesto, but expressed their ideas on a magazine, Der Blaue Reiter Almanach. Each artist of the group) wanted to express a **poetical and joyful** view of life, seeking the **spiritual** side with references to **primitive and middle ages art**.
- Blue □ Kandinskij's favourite colour
- Horse □ Marc's favourite animal







Vassilij Kandinskij,  
"Murnau landscape with  
mountains"

Features:

- bright colors, "real" subject depicted in an unconventional way;
- expression of joy and pleasure



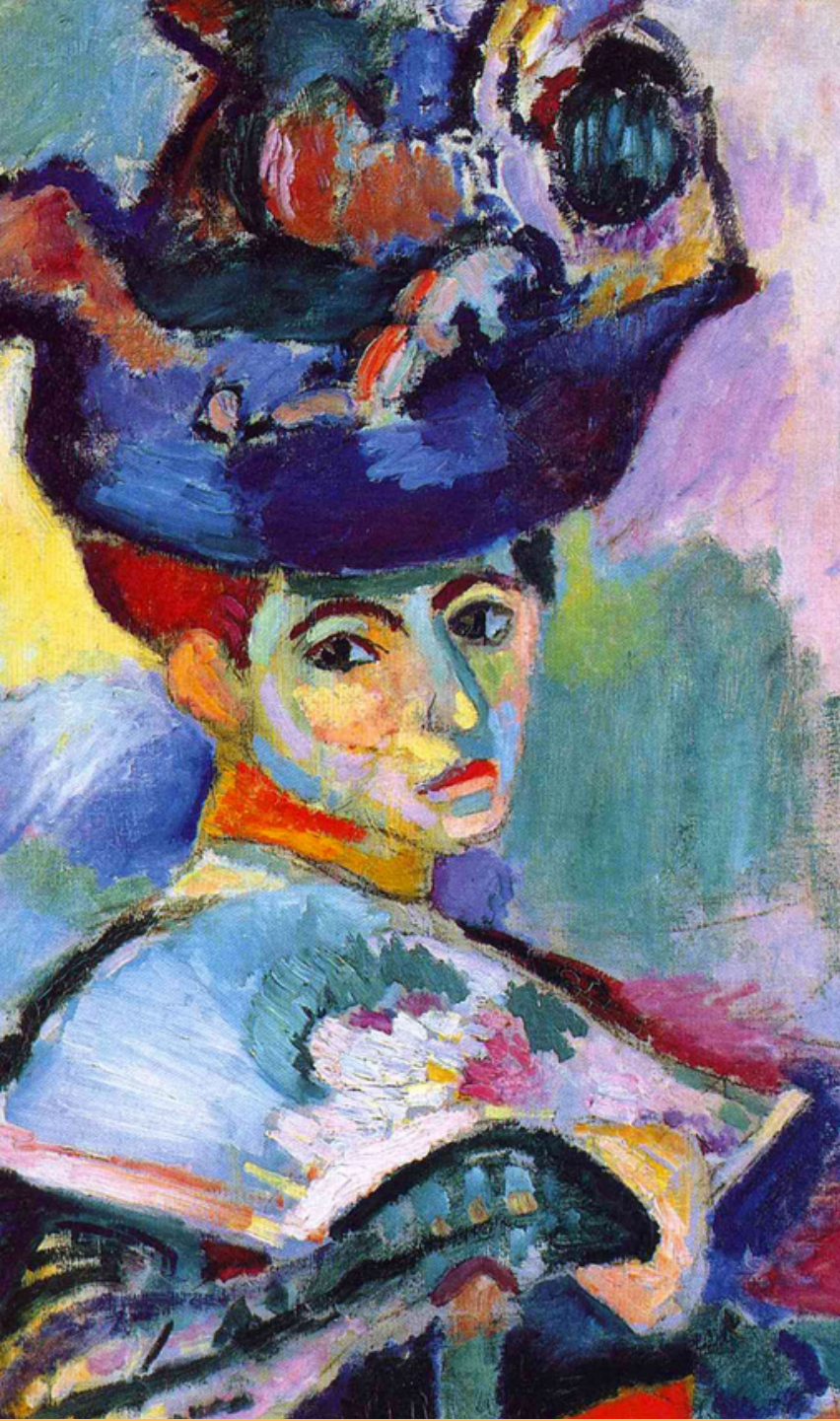
The painting 'Blue Horse' by Franz Marc depicts a horse in a vibrant, non-naturalistic setting. The horse is rendered in shades of blue and grey, standing on a ground of red and green. The background consists of broad, curved bands of color, including blue, yellow, and red, suggesting a stylized landscape or sky. The overall style is characteristic of Die Brücke, emphasizing primary colors and expressive brushwork.

# Franz Marc, "Blue horse", 1911

Features:

- unrealistic setting;
- blue as a color of expression, more than a realistic feature of the subject;
- "primitive" and simple subject

# Fauves (France, 1905)



- In 1905, at Salon d'Automne in Paris, a group of artworks were exposed in the same room; the artists involved, mainly **Henri Matisse (1869-1954)**, **André Derain (1880-1954)**, and others, didn't actually mean to start an artistic movement. They didn't have a magazine, nor they didn't write a manifesto. They looked for a new way of expressing a joyful and colorful view of life, through the use of very bright and pure colors (sometimes “explosive”), large brushstrokes, unusual placing and choice of colours and shapes. The art critics at first attacked them regardlessly, but the movement gained fame and was considered the most important until 1907, when the movement started to fall apart.





# André Derain, "Woman in a chemise", 1905

Features:

- unrealistic colors;
- "flat" organization of space
- broad outlines and "mosaic-style" brushstrokes



# Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

- Shy and elegant man, started a career as a lawyer, turning to art quite late compared to other artists. Regarded as the founder and soul of the Fauves, he considered himself heir to Cézanne and started a deep research that led him from a postimpressionist beginning to something new. The main feature of his work is the **synthesis of shapes and lines**, goal that he achieves in many years of work.
- To him, art is a synthesis that refuses depth and other tools of illusion, in favour of a decorative and dynamic view of nature, expressing joy and simplicity.

*“To find joy in the sky, in the trees, in the flowers. There are flowers everywhere for those who really want to see them”*



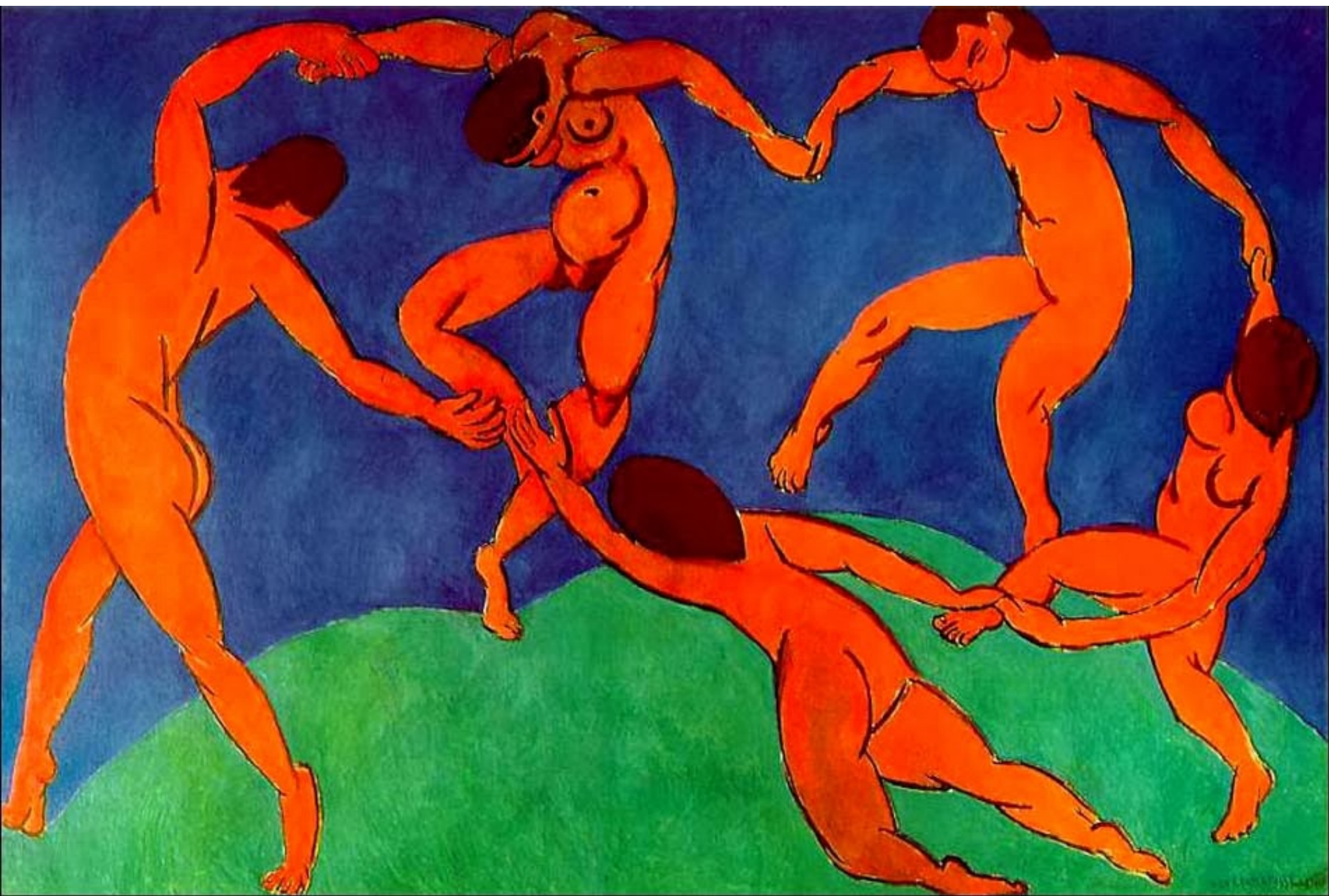




# Henri Matisse, "Harmony in red", 1908

Features:

- main subject is the harmony between colors;
- "flat" organization of space
- childish appearance



The painting 'The Dance' by Henri Matisse, 1910, depicts five nude figures in a circular arrangement on a green hill against a dark blue sky. The figures are rendered in vibrant, flat colors of orange, red, and brown, with bold black outlines. Their poses are dynamic and expressive, capturing a moment of movement. The composition is balanced and rhythmic, with the figures' limbs creating a continuous line around the circle.

# Henri Matisse, "The dance", 1910

## Features:

- strong composition created by the bodies;
- "flat" organization of space but contrast between ground and sky
- childish appearance but dynamic at the same time