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***Maurice de Vlaminck: Modern Art Rebel***

September 14, 2024 – January 12, 2025

Museum Barberini, Potsdam

**Unmixed colors, vehement brushwork, abstracted forms: in the early twentieth century, a group of artists shocked the public with paintings that radically diverged from accepted artistic norms. Described as “*fauves*” or “wild beasts,” these artists – in particular Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958) – paved the way for modern art. Initially celebrated as a pioneer of French Expressionism, Vlaminck’s last retrospective in Germany took place almost a century ago. Now for the first time since 1929, the exhibition *Maurice de Vlaminck: Modern Art Rebel* offers an overview of Vlaminck’s entire oeuvre, focusing especially on his prolific period before World War I along with a selection of later pieces. The point of departure for the exhibition, which brings together seventy-three works and is organized in cooperation with the Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, are the nine paintings by Vlaminck in the Hasso Plattner Collection. The show also includes loans from museums such as the Tate Modern in London, the Museo nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Centre Pompidou and Musée d’Orsay in Paris, the Museum Folkwang in Essen, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.**

**The First Avant-Garde Movement of the Twentieth Century**

From 1903 on, the Salon d’Automne in Paris offered French and international artists a platform to exhibit their work in opposition to the conservative policies of the Salon de Paris. In 1905, a group of young, unknown painters showed there for the first time and were described by the critic Louis Vauxcelles as “*fauves*.” Their number included Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Kees van Dongen – as well as Maurice de Vlaminck. With their brilliantly colored paintings, focused entirely on expression and emotion, they founded Fauvism as the first avant-garde movement of the twentieth century. Although they were perceived as a collective, the artists were not bound by a manifesto; what united them was the rejection of all previous conceptions of art and the assertion of the complete freedom of the artist. Maurice de Vlaminck presented himself as an impetuous young painter: an autodidact without academic training, he cultivated the image of a “wild man” whose work was marked above all by its expressiveness. As early as 1905, the art dealer Ambroise Vollard purchased most of the works in Vlaminck’s studio, enabling him to embark upon a career as a professional artist.

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### **A Pioneering Autodidact**

Maurice de Vlaminck found his way to art through a chance encounter with André Derain, who encouraged the violinist, racing cyclist, boxer, and writer to pursue painting. Influenced by Vincent van Gogh, Vlaminck's Fauvist work was defined by an emphasis on color, which served as a means of passionate expression. Like the Impressionists, Vlaminck was fascinated by the landscape along the Seine River, capturing it in impasto brushwork and brilliant hues. In his use of pure, unmixed colors, sometimes applied to the canvas straight from the tube, Vlaminck followed in the footsteps of his role model Van Gogh. In the period before World War I, Vlaminck developed an Expressionism that recalls the work of the artists' group "Die Brücke" in Dresden. From 1906 on, his explosive color gave way to darker, more muted tones, and Paul Cézanne took the place of Van Gogh as his source of inspiration.

### **Vlaminck in Museum Collections**

In the years before World War I, Maurice de Vlaminck's work enjoyed international notoriety. In 1912, he participated with six works in the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne; the same year, he also showed at Herwarth Walden's gallery "Der Sturm" in Berlin and the following year was represented at the Armory Show in New York. The Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal, cooperation partner for the exhibition *Maurice de Vlaminck: Modern Art Rebel*, likewise integrated Vlaminck into its collection early on:

"The Von der Heydt-Museum is one of the German institutions that was able to exhibit works by Maurice de Vlaminck at an early point in time. August Freiherr von der Heydt acquired a still life at the Salon d'Automne in Paris already in 1911, and other works followed in 1912 and 1913. Purchases like these established the museum's reputation as a singular venue for European avant-garde art. Against the background of our collection history, it makes perfect sense for us to mount the first posthumous retrospective on the artist together with the Museum Barberini, and we are delighted to be able to present the full stylistic range of his work to a broader public," says Roland Mönig, director of the Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal.

Vlaminck also plays a prominent role in the Hasso Plattner Collection, which has been on view at the Museum Barberini since 2020 and affords visitors a more comprehensive overview of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist landscape painting than any other collection. "The Hasso Plattner Collection holds nine works by Vlaminck, including four key paintings from his Fauvist phase. They constitute the third largest group among all the artists in the collection and represent the largest holding of Vlaminck's work in any museum in German-speaking Europe. In the context of the Potsdam collection,

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the exhibition presents Maurice de Vlaminck as an artist who carried Impressionism into the twentieth century in both style and motif, reinterpreting it in brilliant color,” states Ortrud Westheider, director of the Museum Barberini.

Daniel Zamani, curator of the exhibition at the Museum Barberini: “Maurice de Vlaminck’s work marks a significant link between Impressionism and Expressionism. We are delighted to be able to explore his artistic evolution with such an opulent retrospective. We are particularly pleased about the numerous brilliantly colored works that have arrived from US collections, including incunabula of Fauvist painting from the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Another highlight are the numerous major works from international private collections that are otherwise not accessible to the public.”

### **Late Oeuvre and Propagandistic Collaboration**

Although World War I led to personal disillusionment for Vlaminck and marked a caesura in his oeuvre, his painting lost none of its fascination for contemporaries in the interwar years. In 1919, the Galerie Druet in Paris organized a solo show of his work, and in 1929 the Galerie Alfred Flechtheim in Düsseldorf mounted the first and hitherto only major solo exhibition of his art in Germany.

As a result of Nazi cultural policies after 1933, Maurice de Vlaminck’s work was denounced as “degenerate” and removed from the collections of German museums. Despite this fact and despite his rejection of militarism and nationalism in his younger years, he participated in a trip to Germany at the invitation of the German propaganda ministry in November 1941. Subsequently, he published two articles openly praising Nazi art and cultural policies; in another text, he polemicized against the French avant-garde as manifested in the painting of Picasso. He had his portrait made by Arno Breker, Adolf Hitler’s declared favorite artist, and participated in a committee for an exhibition of Breker’s work in Paris in 1942. The former artist-rebel who had styled himself an anarchist and revolutionary became a reactionary polemicist and denouncer of modern art.

Vlaminck’s late oeuvre has received little scholarly attention, probably due in part to his political stance. His late work is dominated by bleak, threatening landscapes, beyond any avant-garde movements of the time. In 1955, Vlaminck participated in *documenta I*, and the same year he was accepted into the Académie royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique as an associate member. His late work forms the last chapter of the Potsdam exhibition. Despite the focus on Vlaminck’s early Fauvist painting, the show thus also calls attention to the contradictions in the artist’s biography.

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As Ortrud Westheider states: “Our exhibition presents Vlaminck’s work from its beginnings to his late landscapes, in which he reinterpreted Monet’s grainstacks and Van Gogh’s wheatfields. These paintings show the former rebel’s retreat from the avant-garde, his critique of modernism, and his pessimistic worldview. In 1942, after traveling to Germany, he wrote newspaper articles in praise of Nazi cultural policies. We think it is important to mention this collaboration. His art, however, bears no resemblance to the Nazi aesthetic; while the latter portrays farm laborers as heroes, in Vlaminck’s late landscapes the human person appears isolated and existentially vulnerable.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a 220-page catalogue published by Prestel. The catalogue was preceded by a symposium held in Potsdam in December 2023; as the first major study of Vlaminck published in Germany, it offers new insights that promise to provide impetus for further research on Vlaminck.

### **Fifty Lenders from Twelve Countries**

Curated by Daniel Zamani, Potsdam, and Anna Storm, Wuppertal, the exhibition brings together seventy-three works by Maurice de Vlaminck from fifty international collections including the Albertina, Vienna, the Artizon Museum, Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo, the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, the Kunsthalle Hamburg, the Kunsthalle Mannheim, the Museum Folkwang, Essen, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, the Tate, London, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

An exhibition of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam, and the Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal.

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## Also Hosted by the Museum Barberini

Alongside the exhibition *Maurice de Vlaminck: Modern Art Rebel* and in cooperation with the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Museum Barberini presents a small selection of prints by Camille Pissarro. The show is presented in honor of the 150th anniversary of Impressionism and complements the exhibition *A Different Impressionism: International Printmaking from Manet to Whistler*, on view concurrently at the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. This “different Impressionism” focuses on the multifaceted effects of light and shadow in the black-and-white medium of printmaking.

Pissarro was one of the few Impressionists to produce a significant graphic oeuvre. He learned the technical skills of printmaking and experimented with them as vigorously as he did with painting. The artist created etchings, drypoints, aquatints, lithographs, and monotypes, exploring the potential of each medium.

The selection of twenty-six prints offers a foretaste of the major retrospective *The Honest Eye: Camille Pissarro's Impressionism*, to be presented at the Museum Barberini in the summer of 2025.