

## Is Matisse's *Bathers with a Turtle* a Cubist Painting?

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Fig. 1. Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 181.6 x 221 cm. Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr. 24:1964. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The answer to the question posed in my title—I'm happy to give it away up front—is *no*, but that doesn't make the question invalid or any less

interesting. It is a valid question if we understand one of the central contributions of Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's collaboration in the period 1908–12 to be a

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\* I presented an early version of this paper in the Midwest Art History Society session "Icons of the Midwest," held at the College Art Association Annual Conference in Chicago, February 2014. I thank Simon Kelly, the session chair, for soliciting my contribution, and Judy Mann for her encouragement.

visual argument about the arbitrary nature of signs—that these painters were engaged in an exposure and manipulation of the artistic conventions for making pictorial meaning. This disruptive candor about pictorial convention has long been accepted as a hallmark of their Cubism. The question is interesting because Henri Matisse's painting *Bathers with a Turtle* (Fig. 1) contains just such a visual argument about conventions of signification, as I will demonstrate. As seen in the painting, this argument is not programmatic, it is not central to the painting's expressive content, and it may not even have been intentional at the time of its making. But *Bathers with a Turtle*, just as surely as a Cubist painting does, asserts the arbitrariness and inherent ambiguity of the visual sign, and it does this with the help of an ambiguity in a verbal sign, in the very role of the word "bathers" in this and related compositions. To show this I will consider some other bathers paintings by Matisse and other artists, and review briefly the dominant iconographic mode of approach to *Bathers with a Turtle*, because the kinds of questions that most authors have asked about this painting require the viewer to look outside it, to seek sources for Matisse's enigmatic imagery in anterior stories that might illuminate

the artist's intentions. This will not be my approach.

To ask if *Bathers with a Turtle* is a Cubist painting entails looking in a different direction, away from sources, iconography, and comparanda. Rather than seek to solve the puzzles of meaning in this painting—the unexplained presence and significance of three nude female figures, in a featureless landscape, clustered around a turtle—I intend to illuminate and accept its formal ambiguities. I will focus on what the painting shows us and how it shows that, revealing ambiguities not in the painting's meaning, but in its painted language of representation, with special consideration of how transparency can be represented in oil paint. The actuality of Matisse's work on the canvas produced a visible uncertainty about what is transparent and what is opaque that cannot be resolved. And this means attention to an externality that is not a source or an iconographic precedent. When we look outside *Bathers with a Turtle*, I believe that one of the most productive comparisons that can be made is with a painting from the same year that has no figures in it, that has no iconographic tradition, and that is routinely asserted to be the first Cubist painting. That painting is Georges Braque's *Houses at L'Estaque* (Fig. 2).





Fig. 2. Georges Braque, *Houses at L'Estaque*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Bern, Hermann and Margrit Rupf Foundation. © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



Elsewhere I have written about how the ambiguities and enigmas in *Bathers with a Turtle* and related artworks contributed to Matisse's ongoing elaboration of a decorative aesthetic, how the anti-narrative quality of such a composition stopped time and refused to refer to anything outside itself, in accord with one of the artist's stated goals for his art.<sup>1</sup> Matisse's directive that a work of art must contain its complete significance is to be found in his foundational theoretical text, "Notes of a Painter," which he wrote in late 1908, a few months after completing *Bathers with a Turtle*.<sup>2</sup> In an entirely appropriate defiance of this polemical and patently impossible claim of hermeticism for a work of art, scholars have made strenuous efforts to link *Bathers with a Turtle* to things outside itself, to sources both textual and visual, in what I suspect is a never-ending impulse to dispel the intellectual discomfort produced by the enigma of three female nudes gathered around a small creature on the ground.

These efforts have taken three principal forms:

(1) Considering *Bathers with a Turtle* as a link in a chain of moves made by Matisse and Picasso in the period 1906–10 with the growth of each artist's consciousness of the other, specifically their challenges to traditions of representing the

female figure. This interpretive field unfolds events in the historical present—that is, Matisse's and Picasso's present time.

(2) Linking the painting to a variety of textual sources, principally antique in origin, that feature a nude woman, or women, or bathers, or goddesses, or nymphs, or dryads. These efforts are in long-term retrospection, and they project their ancient textual sources into contemporary concerns, in this case both the present of Matisse and Picasso and the recent time of acts of interpretation.

(3) Connecting Matisse's composition to a tradition of painting female figures, nude or semi-clothed, in a landscape near water. This involves a largely short-term retrospection into earlier modern artworks and their treatment of the theme of bathing women.

With respect to the first area of interpretation, the relationship between Matisse and Picasso has been thoroughly explored in recent decades in books by Françoise Gilot and Jack Flam, and in the two exhibitions devoted to this dueling duo: the enormous show at New York's Museum of Modern Art and sites in London and Paris in 2002–3, organized by a team of prominent Picasso and Matisse scholars; and Yve-Alain Bois's remarkable exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum in 1999,

conceived in the shadow of the tri-national juggernaut but managing to pierce through with bright and fresh interpretive gambits that both theorized and complicated the artistic relationship between these two central figures of modern art.<sup>3</sup> Both exhibitions were accompanied by important publications.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the key elements in this relationship in the period that concerns us here are found in the call-and-response sequence initiated by Matisse's *Joy of Life* (1905–6; Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia), followed by his about-face in the primitivizing *Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)* (1907; Baltimore Museum of Art), through Picasso's higher-stakes *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York), then via *Bathers with a Turtle* to both Matisse's and Picasso's further distortions of the female form in numerous reclining and standing nudes in 1908 and 1909. Variations on this sequence are key features of most accounts of their relationship in this period. These and other canvases (and sculptures by both artists) constitute a productive dialogue between the two artists, in a back-and-forth, tit-for-tat ratcheting up of each artist's challenges to the other.

We turn now to the second interpretive context for *Bathers with a Turtle*, focusing on the subject of bathers and its alleged antecedents. Most efforts in the pursuit of iconographic sources in ancient texts have focused on variations of the birth of Aphrodite from the sea. Part of the impetus for this exploration of themes from antiquity comes from the sense expressed by many viewers of *Bathers with a Turtle* that the setting is timeless or primeval, or in any case is vague and empty enough that it may be filled with elements of any number of origin stories. License for this approach also comes from acknowledgement of Matisse's high level of learning and his respect for the art and culture of the past, evident even in periods of extreme innovation in his art. Such themes were also important components of the European academic tradition at the time of Matisse's formation as an artist, as in paintings by Alexandre Cabanel, William-Adolphe Bouguereau, and Jean-Léon Gérôme, among other Salon stalwarts.

As for the tradition of paintings of bathers or women near water *not* obviously authorized by ancient literature, the modern archetype is the repeated treatment of this theme by Paul Cézanne, who was acknowledged by many artists, including Matisse

and Picasso, as a kind of father figure. Cézanne's bathers have the awkward, enigmatic character that endorses their parentage of Matisse's no less strange figures. And Matisse felt a particular affinity for Cézanne, to the point of buying a painting of bathers by him (Fig. 3) when he could ill afford it, and cherishing it over many years as a source of sustenance amounting to a kind of trust. But bathing women were a pervasive stock theme in

the nineteenth century, featured in the art of Paul Baudry and (again) Bouguereau, among others on the academic side, while also engaging such independent artists as Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean-François Millet, and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes.<sup>5</sup>

Featuring most elements of these approaches, and adding the first focused study of the painting's patronage context, the most concentrated occasion of



Fig. 3. Paul Cézanne, *Three Bathers*, 1879–82. Oil on canvas, 55 x 52 cm. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, Gift of M. and Mme. Henri Matisse, 1936.

research and thought about *Bathers with a Turtle* was presented in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin*—sadly the last appearance of this fine publication. Even while attempting to peel away layers to reveal a core of meaning, its three articles added several more layers to the onion surrounding Matisse’s painting. Laurie Stein’s essay on the painting’s first owner, Karl Ernst Osthaus of Hagen, Germany, includes a great deal of new material, based on original research in German sources, on this fascinating collector.<sup>6</sup>

In his contribution, Yve-Alain Bois places great stock in the relationship of Matisse’s painting with Cézanne’s, showing how Matisse’s Cézannism plays out in a series of his paintings up to 1908.<sup>7</sup> This leads to a rehearsal of the more elaborate theses of his Kimbell exhibition catalog. Along the way Bois makes several stabs at accounting for the turtle—in fact his text begins and ends with the role this animal plays in the painting—all of them suggestions, some of them probably not serious. His strongest thrust is to assert that the turtle reinforces his claim that “the painting is about an irremediable absence of communication, about the impossibility of telling stories.”<sup>8</sup> Matisse’s painting begs for interpretation, but thwarts it, a

bait-and-switch process that both acknowledges academic traditions and defies them, but more subtly than Picasso had just done in the equally monumental *Demoiselles d’Avignon*.

John Elderfield comes to a similar conclusion in his essay—he characterizes Matisse’s painting as a “failed allegory,” a husk for a story without a nourishing message. Like Bois, Elderfield is utterly convincing on this point about frustrated interpretation, but he arrives there by different means than Bois’s.<sup>9</sup> For Elderfield, as for other interpreters, the myth of Aphrodite was the origin of Matisse’s composition of women posed near water; but the artist later suppressed this antique source, leaving a latency that is deflected by the presence of the turtle. Elderfield then proposes mythological sources that may plausibly explain the turtle’s presence. Finally, he gives close attention to the physical alterations Matisse made in his representation of the women, especially the central figure, and he attributes this process to Matisse’s suppression of the outward signs of Aphrodite and the introduction of the turtle, which the changes appear to accommodate. The most difficult questions here are why the suppression, and why a turtle? Elderfield’s intricate iconographic study



does not offer satisfying answers to these questions. Like Bois, Elderfield attributes Matisse's motivation for making this large painting in the first place to his rivalry with Picasso, as a response to that artist's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, an echo of that painting's interpretive challenges.

As indicated above, I propose to move the examination of *Bathers with a Turtle* in a different direction. To this end, I would like to ask a very Bois-like question: what is the sense of the position of the proper right arm of the central figure? The extensive pentimenti in this area, evidence of the difficulty Matisse had with the size and placement of this body, which he revised repeatedly, compel us to acknowledge something that I believe has never been remarked upon: that this arm is represented simultaneously as part of a figure who stands at some distance away from the water, and as a limb immersed in the water itself (see Fig. 4). However illogical, this is what the painting shows. I am not using this observation in the service of a claim that this dual condition of the elbow collapses the space of the painting, snapping the bands of land, water and sky together into modernist flatness. It does do this, very effectively, but that is not really my concern here. I would also not claim that Matisse set out to



Fig. 4. Henri Matisse, *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908 (detail).

create this dual sense of the arm. It is obvious that he reworked this passage extensively, as he did elsewhere in the painting, repeatedly moving the figures, notably the central figure, into different positions.<sup>10</sup> In many areas of revision, most obviously in the channel separating the crouching figure at the



left from the central figure, Matisse “vigorously opaqued”—this is Elderfield’s phrase—the areas of correction.<sup>11</sup> But the top paint layer is much thinner over the arm, only veiling the elbow, conspicuously leaving it visible through the film of lighter blue pigment. The water, represented as opaque across most of its expanse, has here been allowed some transparency. The duality of the central woman’s elbow is an artifact of this process of revision, but Matisse accepted it as he did all the other laboriously worked areas, as part of “a mindful practice of incorporating change,” in the words of Stephanie d’Alessandro, one of the most recent interpreters of the painting.<sup>12</sup> That elbow is represented as being in two places at once, but what does that mean? Is it just another enigma?

Both before and after *Bathers with a Turtle*, Matisse was uncertain about how to show the limb of a figure dipped in water, as is evident in awkward passages of paint in other bathing subjects (see Fig. 5). In *Nude Washing Herself*, of 1907, Matisse’s representation of the water in the tub fails to envelop the figure’s legs convincingly. Here the artist had considerable trouble rendering in opaque oil paint any sense of the water’s transparency. But he seems to have embraced this representational challenge

arising from the variable visual character of water, because he returned to the motif repeatedly. And his explorations of such material duality weren’t confined to water. A dialogue between transparency and opacity, with translucence as a sometime middle term, is a feature of Matisse’s work at many moments in his long career, right down to his insistence on both transparent and translucent yellow glass in the windows for his Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, in southern France.

A few examples of Matisse’s ongoing interest in both representing and signifying transparency with oil paint are instructive. In *Goldfish and Palette* (1914–15; Fig. 6), extensive revisions and the resulting pentimenti play a central role, as they do in *Bathers with a Turtle*, and the assigned meaning of areas of blue paint is slippery.

In the course of its execution, Matisse reduced what was once a complete figure of an artist at work to a residual artifact of a thumb inserted into the painter’s palette. The color blue, apparently representing both the sky outside the window and the goldfish’s water inside, spreads transgressively across several surfaces and spaces, shuttling arbitrarily between opacity and transparency. But Matisse also rendered the water seen through the side of the goldfish



Fig. 5. Henri Matisse, *Nude Washing Herself*, 1906–07. Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Private collection.  
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Archives Henri Matisse, all rights reserved.

bowl in white (it had previously been blue), an alternative sign of transparency, since it does not occlude the fish within.

The dialogue between the transparent and the opaque is especially pronounced, even playful, in the later tapestry design called *Window in Tahiti* (Fig. 7). The curtain at the left is opaque across the balustrade and the quay of the port of Papeete below, seen from the artist's upper-floor hotel room; sheer against the tree on the quay; and opaque again to obscure the horizon and the shoreline of the neighboring island of Moorea—and everywhere the curtain is a blue of the same color as the water below, a consistency that abets this transition from opacity to transparency, and back again. Such visual legerdemain reveals Matisse's heightened sense of the conventionality of representation, and how easily it may be disrupted.

The challenge of representing transparency in the context of figures with limbs dipped in water intrigued many painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and informs a subset of bathers pictures more generally. In fact, these partial immersions might as well be called “dippers” rather than “bathers.” That all such paintings are considered to show “bathers,” however, indicates just how conventional this assignment

of meaning is. Such figures are bathers even when they are not bathing. Matisse's figures are bathers even though they are nowhere near the water—except for that disruptive elbow. (As an aside, it is significant that calling Matisse's figures “bathers” brings a temporal element in by the back door—such figures being assumed either to have already bathed or to be about to bathe.)<sup>13</sup> Matisse's fellow Fauve Henri Manguin practically made such tentative or incipient bathing a subspecialty (see Fig. 8). But Manguin's representations of water around limbs, and limbs in water, are more straightforward and unilateral than Matisse's. Manguin played by the rules of pictorial representation. In *Bathers with a Turtle*, Matisse did not.

To return to the disruption of spatial logic made by the central figure's elbow, I propose that what this passage of paint does is to question the very process of representation. In other words, this elbow dipped in water and at the same time part of a body dry and far away from it challenges the viewer to acknowledge the conventionality of the usual rules for how objects and the relations between objects and their surroundings are shown in a painting. And it does this just as surely as the kind of painting that is usually credited with this kind of questioning of the



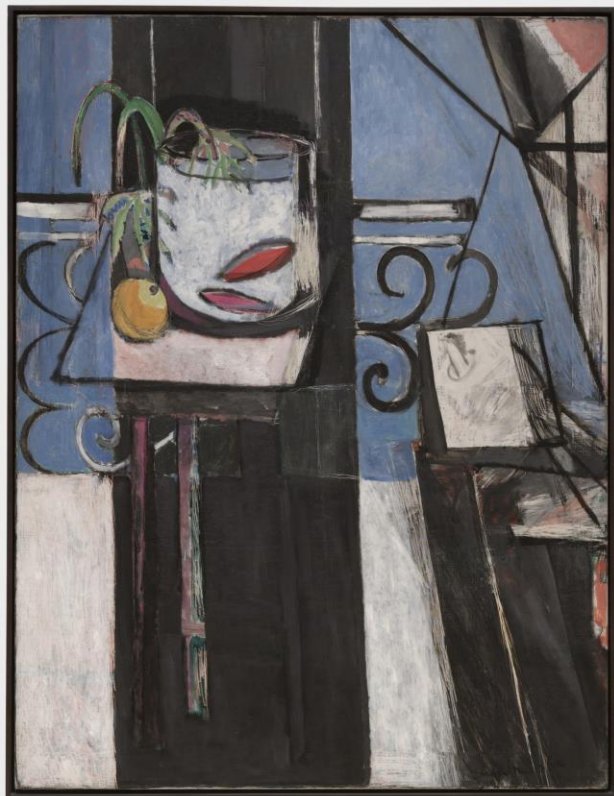


Fig. 6. Henri Matisse, *Goldfish and Palette*, 1914–15. Oil on canvas, 146.5 x 112.4 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift and Bequest of Florene M. Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Fig. 7. Henri Matisse, *Window in Tahiti* (or *Tahiti II*), 1936. Cartoon for a tapestry for Marie Cuttoli (never woven). Gouache on canvas, 238 x 183 cm. Musée départemental Matisse, Le Cateau-Cambrésis, Gift of the artist, 1952. Photo: Claude Gaspari. © 2022 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Archives Henri Matisse, all rights reserved.



rules of representation—that is to say, Cubism—and at the same moment. There are other ambiguities in the painting, as many observers have remarked—what, for instance, could the woman at the right be sitting on? But the area of the standing figure’s elbow is conspicuous in its central position and its beckoning downward in descent like a slightly shaky plumb line leading to the turtle itself. The elbow exhibits, to re-use a phrase by John Onians, writing about Michael Baxandall’s work on Cubism, “the attention-grabbing power of ambiguous forms,” a power at the heart of Cubism’s visual syntax.<sup>14</sup>

So now to Cubism we go, but not to Picasso—let’s give him a rest—instead to Braque’s *Houses at L’Estaque*. This painting and Matisse had an interesting relationship, which helped to give rise to the very idea of Cubism. It was one of Braque’s submissions to the Salon d’Automne in 1908. All of his canvases were rejected by the Salon jury, of which Matisse was a member. Until this year, Braque had been associated with Matisse and the other Fauves, and his new manner, exemplified in *Houses at L’Estaque*, was widely recognized as a shift in his allegiance toward Picasso. Pointedly snubbed by Matisse and the other Salon d’Automne jurors, Braque then included the painting in his solo

show at Kahnweiler’s gallery in November 1908, where it prompted the first published reference to “cubes” in painting, by the critic Louis Vauxcelles, who had also baptized Matisse and other expressive colorists as “Fauves” in the Salon d’Automne of 1905, three years earlier. Another version of the origin story of the word “Cubism” has Matisse, piqued by Braque’s defection from his orbit, uttering the epithet in Vauxcelles’s presence.<sup>15</sup> In any case, Braque and Matisse were in a prickly relationship of mutual awareness, if not a dialogue.

If *Houses at L’Estaque* shows what the title asserts, then the painting immediately poses a potent representational ambiguity. As in *Bathers with a Turtle*, the crucial passage of paint in *Houses at L’Estaque* is served up by its prominent position close to the center of the canvas, by being framed in various ways, and by its brightness. I mean, of course, the large house form immediately beyond the curve of the tree. About this house we have to ask: how could two walls, meeting to form a convex, projecting corner of the exterior, be in shadow, while adjacent areas of both walls are brightly lit? Such a doubly shadowed corner should, logically, be concave. Braque’s deployment of the painterly signs of shadow in an



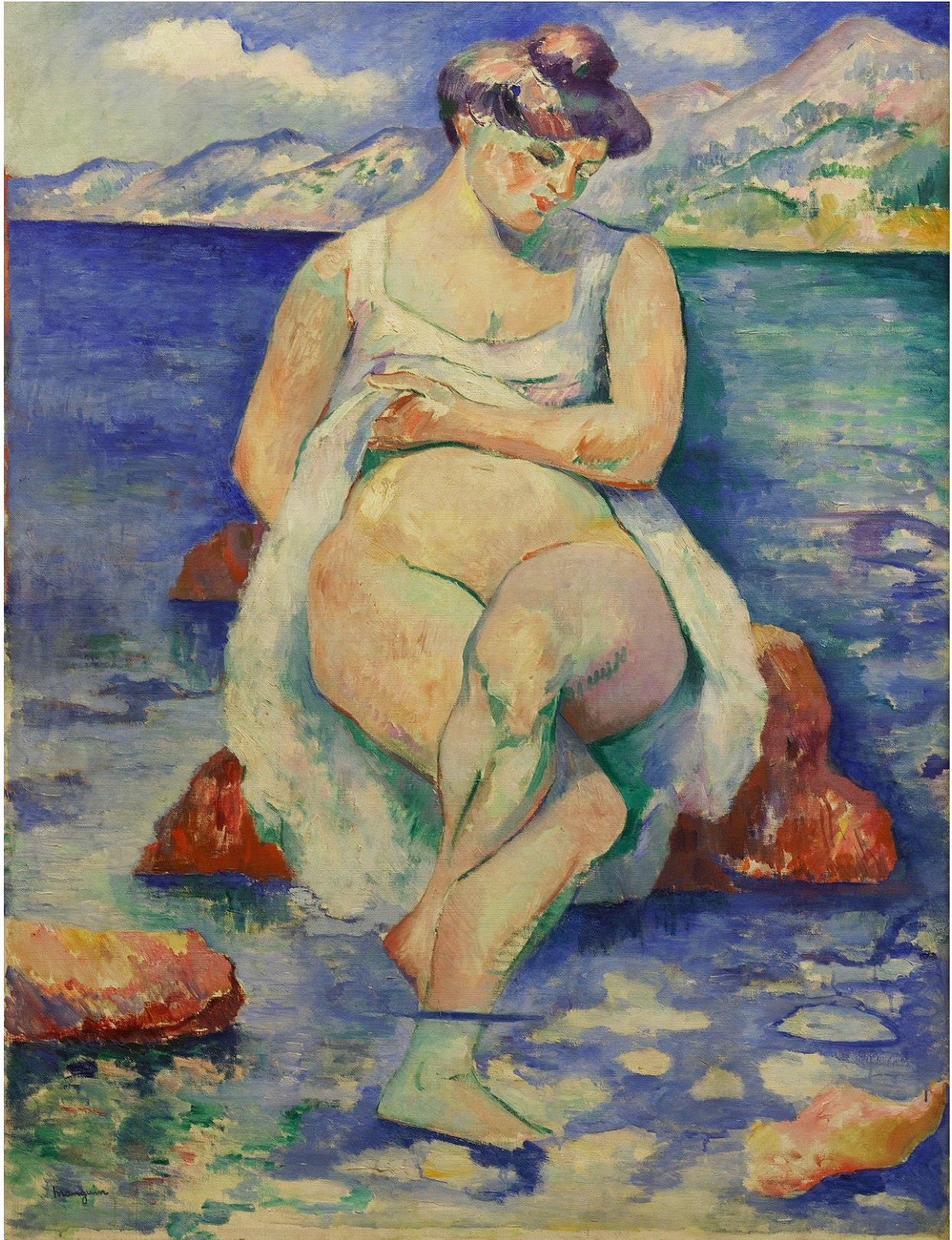


Fig. 8. Henri Manguin, *Bather at Cavalière*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 116.5 x 89.5 cm. Musée de Grenoble, Agutte-Sembat Bequest, 1923. Photo: Ville de Grenoble/Musée de Grenoble-J.L. Lacroix.



area where it is not possible to have a shadow, if you are playing by the rules, acknowledges the conventionality and arbitrariness of this formal element in a system of representation.<sup>16</sup> Impossible in nature, but possible in art, and once deployed, such deviations might seem imperative, a declaration of pictorial self-consciousness. By extension, Braque's illogical shadows call out *all* conventional elements of representation.

It is widely acknowledged that Matisse did have a Cubist period, generally speaking the four or five years from 1913–17, when he pondered and essayed in his painting and sculpture what he later called “the methods of modern construction.”<sup>17</sup> During this period he worked and reworked paintings with the same intentness as in *Bathers with a Turtle*, none more thoroughly than *Bathers by a River* (1909–17; Art Institute of Chicago), whose composition was originally intended to form the third in a series of paintings for Matisse's Moscow patron, Sergei Shchukin. Here in this monumental painting, even in the face of the artist's extensive revisions, at least one of the figures can reliably be said to be bathing. The other figures, nearby but neither dipped nor immersed, conform to the conventional association between women and water in natural

settings, even if no actual bathing is taking place.

Matisse's engagement with Cubism, which may have reached a peak of directness with *Bathers by a River*, was profound and lasting. It has not been generally acknowledged that Matisse was also engaged in some of the major pictorial ideas of Cubism before there was Cubism. This is really what the elbow shows. And the elbow disrupts in yet another way. Whoever heard of a bather going into the water elbow first? This deviant immersion, in both narratological and signifying capacities, asserts that what is going on here is not bathing, and that this non-bathing occurs in ambiguous space, which is not the same thing as modernist flatness; and in ambiguous time, which is not the same thing as being timeless. In *Bathers with a Turtle* Matisse was working hard, without grasping all the implications of his efforts, on artistic matters more profound than Aphrodite iconography, or generic bathers in art, or the challenge posed by a younger rival.

Finally, a few words about the “turtle” of the painting's title. First, practically everyone who has written about *Bathers with a Turtle* has assumed, or argued, that the turtle was a late addition, with various interpretive implications flowing from that idea of revision to

introduce a new element. For some scholars, the turtle was an agent of the occlusion of a comprehensible narrative; others have sought iconographic explanations for the introduction of the reptile. But a recent technical examination demonstrates convincingly that the turtle was there from the beginning of Matisse's conception of the painting, because initially he painted it directly on the prepared ground.<sup>18</sup> All the iconographers need to go back to the drawing board.

Second, "turtle" is the common name—that is, what is in use in everyday language—for both terrestrial and aquatic or semi-aquatic creatures of the order *Tes-tudines*. Judging by the way Matisse has represented his turtle, with a raised and deeply segmented carapace, this creature is technically a tortoise, that is, a terrestrial reptile. That in both French (*tortue*) and English a single word conventionally comprises animals of this order from both habitats testifies to a convenience in usage. As with "bathers," we are faced with another ambiguity in a verbal sign, an ambiguity that gives way to a convention born of convenience. It is part of the perennial allure of *Bathers with a Turtle*, attracting many interpreters over many years, that it is replete with both verbal and

visual ambiguities that engage the attentive viewer.<sup>19</sup>

Over many years of showing this painting to students in the Saint Louis Art Museum, or as a slide in a classroom, and asking them what the woman at the left is doing with respect to the turtle, I have found that 100% have said that she is feeding the animal. Not a single person has responded that she is teasing the turtle, or that she is taking food away from it. And yet, strictly from the point of view of what the painting shows, all three actions are equally plausible. Convention tends to prevent us from considering any action other than—well, the conventional one. Violation of the convention produces ambiguity and, therefore, inconvenience that leads to interpretive uncertainty. An ambiguity is firmly weighted to one side so that alternatives are eclipsed by that convention. Unraveling the conventions brings the ambiguities back into the light. So it is with Matisse's bather's wet-not wet elbow and Braque's strangely shadowed house.

*The 2014 CAA meeting in Chicago included a session on the Matisse painting from the Saint Louis Art Museum. When possible, the society selects works from the location of the upcoming MAHS annual meeting which, in 2014, was St. Louis.*

<sup>1</sup> John Klein, *Matisse and Decoration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 46–49.

<sup>2</sup> Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” in Jack Flam, ed., *Matisse on Art*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 37–43.

<sup>3</sup> Françoise Gilot, *Matisse and Picasso: A Friendship in Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); Jack Flam, *Matisse and Picasso: The Story of Their Rivalry and Friendship* (Cambridge, MA: Westview, 2003). To these one could add the Matisse-Picasso chapter of the more recent book by Sebastian Smee, *The Art of Rivalry: Four Friendships, Betrayals, and Breakthroughs in Modern Art* (New York: Random House, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Cowling et al., *Matisse Picasso* (London: Tate, 2002); Yve-Alain Bois, *Matisse and Picasso* (Paris: Flammarion; Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> For bathing in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century paintings on the theme of Arcadia, see Joseph J. Rishel, ed., *Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse: Visions of Arcadia* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Laurie A. Stein, “The History and Reception of Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle* in Germany, 1908–1939,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 50–73.

<sup>7</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, “Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 8–19.

<sup>8</sup> Bois, “Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” 11.

<sup>9</sup> John Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite: On the Genesis of *Bathers with a Turtle* by Henri Matisse,” *The Saint Louis Art Museum Bulletin* NS 22, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 20–49.

<sup>10</sup> This revision process is thoroughly analyzed by Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite,” 33–42.

<sup>11</sup> Elderfield, “Moving Aphrodite,” 40.

<sup>12</sup> Stephanie d’Alessandro, catalog entry for *Bathers with a Turtle*, in Stephanie d’Alessandro and John Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 71 n. 16.

<sup>13</sup> A thoughtful, more “front door” approach to the temporal implications of the painting—that the abundance of pentimenti testifies to labor over time—was presented by Camran Mani in “‘A Moment of the Artist,’ a Moment of the Viewer: The Pentimenti in Matisse’s *Bathers with a Turtle*,” at the College Art Association Annual Conference in Chicago, February 2014.

<sup>14</sup> John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 183.

<sup>15</sup> For Vauxcelles’s characterization of Braque’s “geometric diagrams with cubes” in his short review of Braque’s exhibition, see William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 33. For several versions of



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Matisse's role, see Rubin, 354–55 and 435–36 n. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Matisse may have recognized what Braque was doing in flouting pictorial logic in this way, because he said that in another Braque painting from that year “the drawing and values were decomposed,” and he retrospectively associated this disjunction with Cubism (“Statements to Tériade: Matisse Speaks” [1951], in Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 204).

<sup>17</sup> The most thorough and intelligent consideration of this period of Matisse's work is d'Alessandro and Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention*.

<sup>18</sup> d'Alessandro and Elderfield, *Matisse: Radical Invention*, 67–71.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent example of this fascination, see Sebastian Smee, “Mysterious Matisse: What Are These Three Strange Figures Doing?,” *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2020; URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/entertainment/herri-matisse-bathers-with-a-turtle/>.