



Color, Chaos and Matisse: The Cleaning Lady’s ‘Work of Art’ in A.S. Byatt’s “Art Work”*

Renk, Kaos ve Matisse: A. S. Byatt’ın “Sanat İş”nde Temizlikçi Kadının
‘Sanat Yapıtı’

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Abstract

British writer A.S. Byatt is known for her fictions foregrounding descriptions of art and artists. Published in 1993, *The Matisse Stories*, a collection of three stories, is a good example of her fascination with art as each narrative is inspired by a painting of French artist Henri Matisse. Of the three, “Art Work” thematizes art and color as reminiscent of Matisse and Byatt creates her story through a tension between Robin, the father, and Mrs Brown, the cleaning lady of the house who are both Matisse-inspired artists in different approaches. Robin embraces a rigid color theory based on harmony and pureness and he is completely obsessed with his works ignoring his wife, Debbie’s personal sacrifices. Unlike Robin, Mrs. Brown represents a more colorful, creational and even experimental practices derived from her ethnic origins as well as abilities of knitting and collaging unusual materials. Besides her own creativity and free spirit, Mrs. Brown gets the material and ideas from the household like pieces of fabric or the vacuum cleaner but recycles and transforms them in such a flamboyant and innovative way that it gains a showing in a gallery and her exhibit becomes an overnight success. Her colorful, chaotic and collage work of art does not just serve as an embodiment of Matisse’s art but she also finds an artistic medium of expression to transplant her emotions as a servant or woman as her personal endeavor and talent turn into a secret work of art addressing certain inequalities of gender, class and race.

Keywords: Art, color, Matisse, Byatt, collage, creative, woman.

Öz

İngiliz yazar A.S. Byatt sanatı ve sanatçıları ön plana çıkaran anlatıları ile bilinir. 1993 yılında yayımlanan ve üç öyküden oluşan Matisse Öyküleri yazarın sanata olan ilgisine iyi bir örnek oluşturur zira her bir öykü Fransız ressam Henri Matisse’e ait bir resimden esinlenmiştir. Üç öyküden biri olan Sanat İş’nde sanat ve renk hikayenin temelini oluştururken, Byatt farklı yaklaşımlar benimsemelerine rağmen Matisse’den esinlenmiş iki karakter, evin babası Robin ve temizlikçi kadın Bayan Brown arasındaki gerilim üzerinden hikayesini oluşturur. Robin, uyum ve yalınlık üzerine kurulu son derece katı bir renk teorisi benimseyen, karısı Debbie’nin kişisel fedakârlıklarını tamamen görmezden gelerek sadece kendi çalışmalarıyla ilgilenen biridir. Robin’in aksine Bayan Brown ise, etnik kökeni ve farklı materyalleri bir araya getirip, sentezleme kabiliyetleri ile çok daha renkli, karmaşık hatta deneysel bir yaklaşım sunar. Bayan Brown on yıldır çalıştığı evde biriktirdiği kumaş parçaları, hatta elektrik süpürgesini dönüştürerek son derece renkli, yenilikçi ve özgür ruhlu bir sanat yapıtı üretir. Nitekim Bayan Brown’un bu son derece yaratıcı çalışması bir sanat galerisinde sergilenir ve bir gecede ona ün getiren bir başarıya dönüşür. Dolayısıyla, Bayan Brown’ın birçok renk ve materyali bir araya getirerek oluşturduğu yapıtı sadece Matisse’in sanat anlayışını yansıtmaz

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aynı zamanda onun bir hizmetçi ya da kadın olarak hislerini aktarabileceği sanatsal bir alan oluşturur zira bu evdeki emeği, kişisel girişim ve yeteneği sadece ona başarı getiren gizli bir sanat işinden öteye geçerek sınıf, ırk ve cinsiyet ayrımlarını da işaret eder.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sanat, renk, Matisse, Byatt, kolaj, yaratıcı, kadın.

Introduction

“Art Work” is one the three stories of *The Matisse Stories* published in 1993. Each story evokes a painting by Matisse in that *Le nu Rose* in “Medusa’s Ankles”, *Le Silence habite des maisons* in “Art Work” and *Le porte noire* in “Chinese Lobster” are referred to and related to the stories. Each story in the collection is somehow inspired by Matisse and also connected to his style and vision which might have played a role in constructing the narratives and shaping the characters for Byatt. Byatt’s fondness and great knowledge of painters enlightens why she has chosen Matisse as a touchstone for her stories that foreground characters inspired by the French artist’s art forms. What unites those stories is also the fact that Matisse is “almost entirely obliterated by the conspicuous presence of impressive women characters that dominate the action” (Fernandes 205). In “Art Work”, Matisse has omnipresence in the story, through Robin, who is a loyal follower of the artist, and particularly Mrs. Brown, whose unusual, flamboyant style, knitting skills and love for color are reminiscent of the French artist. The modes of representation, art and artistic creativity through the characters Mrs. Brown and Robin are at the center of the story and through the tension created between them, Byatt on one hand pays great tribute to Matisse by textualizing his visual imagination on the other hand, addresses certain inequalities of gender, class and race through Mrs. Brown whose art work is an embodiment or synthesis of Matisse’s art, casts a light on her character and enables her to transplant her emotions as a servant and woman.

Main Body

Over recent years, the growing critical pursuit in A. S. Byatt is not just limited with academic studies as it has also fostered a corresponding scope of interest among scholars of art. From the focus on paintings and portraits in *The Shadow of the Sun* and *The Frederica Quartet*, to her non-fictional works such as *Passions of the Mind* (1991) and *Portraits in Fiction* (2001), Byatt has contemplated issues like the ‘real’, perception, language and transformation into shapes, colors and into the verbal equivalents. Byatt is fascinated by the relationship between the visual and the verbal and she has written “catalogue essays for various art exhibitions, produced art journalism for newspapers and magazines, commented on painters and art exhibitions in her broadcasting work and woven discussions of art into her literary criticism (as indeed into her fiction)” (Alfer and Campos 140). She has great knowledge of paintings and painters as proven by her engagement with Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin in *Still Life*, Velazquez in *Elementals: Stories of Ice and Fire* and Henry Matisse in *The Matisse Stories*.

Identified with the fauvist (wild beasts) art style and later with paper cut-outs, Matisse experimented with color and line throughout his art career. His love of color probably comes from an interest in his predecessors, the impressionists and also Fauvism which was born within French painting at the turn of the century and broke ties with older, traditional ways of perception by means of sharing a spontaneous approach to nature with vivid, bold brushstrokes. In her account of the movement, Nathalia Brodskaiia wrote: “Fauvism received its name in 1905. In October of that year, a number of young painters - about ten altogether - presented their works at the Salon d’Automne in Paris. Their unusually bright works vibrant with colour were assembled in a single hall”(8). Along with Derain, Vlaminck, Van Dongen, Camoin, Puy, Marquet, Manguin, Rouault, Dufy, Friesz, Valtat and a few others, Matisse is generally associated with *fauves* (wild beasts). During the last decade of his life, Matisse developed the technique cut-out. Charles W. Millard mentions that Matisse began using cut and pasted paper in the 1930s as a convenient method of studying the compositions of decorative projects such as book covers, stage curtains and scenery, tapestries and stained glass windows. Then, in 1941, a serious illness and a subsequent operation forced him to remain in bed which resulted in the assembled paper cuts being his principal medium of expression (320). Colorful cut outs are basically collaged using a scissors by cutting

the paper into different shapes. Exploring color in new ways begetted a collaboration with young French artist André Derain (1880 – 1954) and that “led to a new freedom in creating art: the use of color to express the feeling of a place” (National Gallery of Art 42). For Matisse that place could be a view from window or memory of a vacation and in time cutting colourful papers in different shapes were also meant to remind of those particular places.

“Art Work” opens with Lawrence Gowing’s black and white reproduction of Matisse’s 1947 painting *Le silence habité des maisons*, which translates as ‘The Inhabited Silence of Houses’ featuring a mother and child sitting by the window:

Two people sit at the corner of a table. The mother, it may be, has a reflective chin propped on a hand propped on the table. The child, it may be, turns the page of a huge white book, whose arch of paper makes an integral curve with his/her lower arm. In front, a vase of flowers. Behind, six huge panes of window, behind them a mass of trees and perhaps sunlight. The people’s faces are perfect blank ovals, featureless. Up above them, in the top lefthand corner of the canvas, level with the top of the window, is a chalked outline, done as it might be by a child, of a round on a stalk, above bricks. It is a pity there are no colors but it is possible, tempting, to imagine them... (31-32)

Byatt repeats the phrase “we may imagine it”, opening up the painting to the reader’s creative mind, and she closes her description of the painting with a question, “who is the watching totem under the ceiling?” (32). The painting presents presumably a mother and a child with blank oval faces reading a blank book sitting at a table. As obvious from the narrator’s detailed description what is ekphrastically evoked is the relevance of the painting with the story itself. Byatt displays a verbal rendering of a domestic interior inhabited by a mother, father and two children. What Matisse does with color and art finds equivalence in Byatt’s use of words, images and imagination. In Pokhrel’s words, this is filling in or restoring “the missing colors Matisse leaves out of his paintings- a spatial representation- via a textualization” (412). Byatt notes that in the “Le Silence” painting, “the people’s faces are perfect blank ovals, featureless” (31). The selection of this particular painting and the ensuing short story pushes the reader into participation with Matisse as he or she fills in the blanks Matisse leaves for the viewer (31). Byatt in a sense tries to emulate Matisse as the way Matisse experiments with color is the same with Byatt’s own narratives featuring imagery and language at the same time. Somehow a Matisse painting finds verbal equivalent in Byatt’s story evoking Matisse’s conception of art, transposing his visual forms into words. Byatt does not just open her story with an ekphrastic gesture as the painting is also the source to generate the story.

The family’s home space actually echoes Matisse’s painting with an inhabited silence however it is not the silence of a real voice but the noises that mostly inhabit that house:

There is an inhabited silence in 49 Alma Road, in the sense that there are no voices, though there are various sounds, some of them even pervasive and raucous sounds, which an unconcerned ear might construe as the background din of a sort of silence. There is the churning hum of the washing-machine, a kind splashy mechanical giggle, with a grinding note in it, tossing its wet mass one way, resting and simmering, tossing it the other. (32)

The house is full of sounds like the washing machine, the thumping dryer, the children’s television with no one watching, the electric trains of the young son, Jamie, and the muffled teen music of daughter Natasha, heard through earphones... (32-33). The words *inhabited* and *silence* transport the readers from Matisse to the Dennison family suggesting the ennui of failed ambition, the dull habitualness of domesticity and the life of a bored and unfulfilled couple: Robin and Debbie Dennison who are passionate artists with different tastes and approaches. But equally significant is the flamboyant, eccentric house cleaner Mrs. Brown who has been with the family for ten years.

The name Mrs. Brown might be alluding to Virginia Woolf’s 1924 essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”. In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, Woolf analyses modern fiction by comparing two generations of writers. Woolf’s discussion revolves around an anonymous woman she has observed on a train journey, whom she names ‘Mrs. Brown’. Woolf says she is “capable of appearing in any place, wearing any dress;

saying anything and doing heaven knows what” (128). She examines the various literary methods that could be employed to capture Mrs. Brown’s character and the world she inhabits. New forms must be explored if writers are to capture the rapidly changing modern world. Inspired by Matisse and possibly Woolf, Byatt creates her Mrs. Brown whose outer appearance, sense of style is vibrant and exploring her character and the house she inhabits foreshadows new forms in art as well.

Mrs. Brown had a skin which was neither black nor brown but a kind of amber yellow... She had a lot of wiry. . . soot-coloured hair, which rose, like the crown of a playing-card king, out of a bandeau of flowery material, tied tightly about her brow, like the toweling of a tennis star, or the lace cap of an old fashioned maid. Mrs. Brown’s clothes were, and are, flowery and surprising, jumble sale remnants, rejects and ends of lines, rainbow-colored jumpers made from the ping-pong-ball sized unwanted residues of other people’s knitting. (39)

The way Byatt portrays Mrs. Brown sets a revealing example to omnipresence of Matisse in the story, how his love of color and artistry are essential in Byatt’s depiction of the protagonist Mrs. Brown. She is portrayed as someone who is not a prototype of feminine beauty reminding of Matisse’s women and according to Sarah Gardam, those women do not directly resemble real women -in that they are usually oddly proportioned, remarkably featureless, and flat in colour and dimension. She even suggests that these distortions matter in an ethical sense because they imply what real women mean to real men (120). In that sense while shaping her characters and constructing her plot especially on women, Byatt finds the critical eye in Matisse. Even while describing how Natasha, the daughter of Dennisons, is lying on the bed, she says “like one of Matisse’s empty and beatific models” (33). Byatt’s words overlap with Matisse’s eyes as both artists’ perspectives on the perception of women unites them on a common ground. Matisse’s visually (mis)represented women and Byatt’s mistreated women are complementary in that both The story raises feminist issues, since both of the women characters are resourceful and intelligent, and in different ways they are both misused by men (White 223). Mrs. Brown and Debbie are victims of their husbands. Mrs. Brown is physically abused by her husband “Hooker”, and Debbie is subject to her husband’s yellings when things are moved in his studio. It is worth noting that Debbie was a wood engraver and used to illustrate children’s books but obviously she had to sacrifice her talent in order to make a living with a commercial job. She now works in a magazine ironically called “A Woman’s Place”. In the story, it is not just Debbie whose place as a woman in her own house is open to debate, but the cleaning lady whose existence and help is crucial for Debbie in order to set things right in the house but a major distress for Robin not only because of the noise she makes or the spaces she intrudes in while cleaning, but also her entire existence, her whole appearance which is in total opposition to his vision and taste.

Mrs. Brown’s conspicuous love of color, unconventional appearance reminds of Matisse’s women with hats and feathers. According to Laurence Petit, Mrs. Brown seems to have come straight out of a Matisse painting, a cross between the painter’s rainbowlike “Woman with a Hat,” 1905; his series of 1919 “feather-hat” paintings featuring his model, Antoinette, wearing extraordinarily inventive and decorative hats; and his conception of the “plane-tree woman”, or “flower-bouquet woman” (401). Byatt even likens Mrs. Brown’s face to “a primitive mask” (40) perhaps referring to the fact that she is of Irish and Guyanese descent, a black, working class, immigrant woman. Matisse was heavily influenced by art from other cultures having seen several exhibitions of Asian art, and having traveled to North Africa. He incorporated some of the decorative qualities of Islamic and African art into his own style. “His visit to the large exhibition of Islamic art in Munich in October, 1910, his trip to Moscow in 1911, where he discovered and admired the icons, his prolonged stays in Andalusia, and Morocco during the winters of 1910 to 1913” (Leymarie, Read and Lieberman 13) stimulated him and confirmed his direction. The idea of primitivism could be attributed to Mrs. Brown’s “multi-colored outfits, her innate and enigmatic sense of wisdom, and her naturalistic, sensual and exotic qualities”, (Petit 402) which is also so dear to Matisse. According to Joshua I. Cohen a substantial literature has emerged taking up Matisse and the Fauves as “primitivists”(155). Primitive art is often equated with tribal or indigenous art alluding to the attitude

toward the presumed non-Western, uncivilized art. Along with Matisse, the Fauves and other European avant-garde artists often studied African wooden masks and statues. The way Matisse combined his traditional females with the influence of primitive sources like unusual bodies and mask-like faces paying homage to African sculptures overlaps with Mrs. Brown and her appearance that is far from idealized classical beauty forms.

In echoing Matisse, Mrs. Brown and Robin become the key figures for Byatt as the tension created between them is also the central point of the story. Robin generally opts to go for a mimetic representation in terms of pure line and color; and mainly pursues harmony and balance. In his work "The Achievement of Matisse", Donald Stone enlists some of Matisse's prominent, distinguishing characteristics like his preference of expressing himself in pure color, gravitating to harmony and looking for order and pattern (154). Robin is a full time artist, dedicated to his own works, and does not feel an obligation to make money as his wife has taken over that task. Both as a man and artist, Robin is obsessed with his own work, even to the point of leaving the burden of the house to his wife Debbie, the breadwinner. Isabel Fernandes writes "this reminds of Matisse's own self-absorption in his work and of his relinquishing of any domestic duty or worry to the women around him, his wife and his beloved daughter Marguerite, both of whom strove to protect him all the time from eternal trouble and any disturbance to his work" (207). Torn between her roles as a caregiver and career woman, Debbie is caught in stagnation and repetition. "Her husband increasingly appears to her as a child to be protected" (Campbell 172). Robin ignores his wife's efforts to keep the household running; without any feeling of responsibility he has dedicated himself to his own art in his studio in spite of having the crisis of repeating himself, going around same, rigid rules on colors.

While talking about his art, Robin reveals to his wife that he owes much of his theory to Matisse's 1904 foremost work *Luxe, calme et volupte* (1904) in which Matisse opts for primary colors like blue, green, yellow and orange. Matisse takes the title from Baudelaire's poem "L'invitation au voyage" where the poet invites his mistress to leave the ordinary world and go with him, and love him in an ideal land that resembles her" (Elderfield 33). When Matisse exhibited that work at the Salon des Independants, he was singled out by the critic Louis Vauxcelles as "the leader of a school" (Falm 5). Robin also wants to single out with his minimalist works that "are not about littleness but about the infinite terror of the brilliance of colour" (70). Debbie remembers their holiday in the South of France, how Robin had "tried putting great washes of strong colour on the canvas, a la Matisse a la Van Gogh, and it came out watery and feeble and absurd, there was nothing he could do" (55). "He painted what he saw, metal surfaces, wooden surfaces, plaster surfaces, with hallucinatory skill and accuracy. He painted expanses of neutral colors (never...anything alive)" (51). Jack Stewart observes that Robin clings to his original vision in color which is inspired by Matisse's geraniums and goldfish bowls but it is etiolated and cannot grow (243). "Essentially a miniaturist, he is attached to small objects and plain surfaces. His fetishized vision of bright objects against muted backgrounds suggests his limited range of expression and disproportionate desire for distinction" (Gardam 243). Limited in ingenuity, Robin collects objects as "pure representations of single colors" (63). Although Robin is stuck around the same art and color forms desperately looking for new muses in his personal, spacious studio, he feels an urge of lecturing another woman in the house, the cleaning lady Mrs. Brown.

Robin tells Mrs. Brown that "the blue rim makes the yellow colour single out because colours are complementary" (59) and he often "stands an orange and a lemon amongst the things to make the colours complete, and Mrs. Brown's habit of moving these, or even throwing them away when they begin to soften and darken and grow patches of sage-green, blue-speckled mould, is one of the things that makes Robin see red and roar" (61-62). Despite Robin's wiseacre preachings, Mrs. Brown seems to have her own color theory which is based on her own beliefs like the fact that God makes and mixes all the colors in the world.

They always told us, didn't they, the teachers and grans, orange and pink, they make you blink, blue and green should not be seen, mauve and red cannot be wed, but I say, they're all there, the colours, God made 'em all, and mixes 'em all in His creatures, what exists goes together somehow or other, ..." (58)

As an antithesis to Robin's minimalist approach, Mrs. Brown has an extravagant taste in mixing and matching colors and textures. She blends colours and materials in an egalitarian, celebratory way that contrasts sharply with Robin's hierarchical notions of social and artistic arrangement (Gardam 127). Robin's mimetic representation of Matisse's art is presented in opposition to Mrs. Brown's experimental art that "mixes high art, such as Matisse's paintings, with everyday objects" (Pokhrel 408). The key element about Mrs. Brown's artistic labour is the fact that rather than working in a private studio and experimenting on a canvas, all she has is this house she has been cleaning and tidying for ten years and her own imagination and skills. For instance, she makes all her own clothes, "out of whatever comes to her hand, old plush curtains, Arab blankets, parachute silk, his own discarded trousers. She makes them flamboyantly, with patches and fringes and braid and bizarre buttons" (57). She even makes some presents for the inhabitants of that house out of the discarded pieces of fabric, old, shabby clothes Debbie gives and many other household materials, yet much to the dislike and rejection of Robin.

Robin's antagonism to Mrs. Brown is, also in part, an automatic expression of his inherited contempt for people supposedly beneath him in rank and gender: "His father... behaved in much the same way, particularly with regard to his distinction between his own untouchable 'things' and other people's, especially the cleaning lady's 'filth'". (White 224). Robin's peevish and unapologetic attitude towards Mrs. Brown and his wife in particular might be stemming from the artistic burnout or exhaustion he has been feeling but for him, Mrs. Brown is also "chaotic and wild to look at... and represents... filth" (56). Robin associates her with chaos and violence especially because of the machines she wields while cleaning. For Gardam, that disgusted reaction to Mrs. Brown also reveals the kind of male horror of monstrosity that Byatt seems so devoted to exploring in these stories (127). This could be a revulsion revealing "a longstanding, underlying male demand that women be pleasant, comforting, peaceful, and above all, beautifully fleshed" (122). Debbie shares a mutual passion and interest in art with Robin but she is the one who had to abandon her personal interest in order to support her family and let Robin pursue his own works. When it comes to Mrs. Brown, as well as the physical labour that she puts in in the house she is also as reliable as seeing Debbie through the depression after her son, Jamie's birth. "Mrs. Brown is therefore not just the literal provider of physical order within the space of the house but also is metaphorically the one who holds everything, and in particular her employers' lives, together" (Petit 405-406). Debbie knows she is essential for her to maintain an order in the house. They know each other's problems, yet keep a formal distance. In Eagleton's words, there is a genuine alliance between Debbie and Mrs. Brown brokered around gender but, equally, because of class difference, this alliance has its limitations (53). It takes Debbie a long time to find out about Mrs. Brown's two sons and their abusive father, Hooker, against whom Mrs. Brown gets a court injunction after he beats her up.

Interestingly, the crisis of the story occurs when 'caregiver', 'comforting' Debbie arranges a gallery owner to view her husband's works. However, instead of him the twist ending of the story reveals that it is Mrs. Brown who somehow manages to influence the gallery owner. Obviously Matisse becomes a primary source of energy and inspiration not just for Mrs. Brown's own style but it finds form in the work she creates. As Petit remarks:

Art Work comes to epitomize Mrs. Brown's unique theory and practice of color, in which British history and Greek mythology, fairy tales and the Bible, European art and contemporary interior design, popular culture and African artwork coexist in a derisive and self-derisive allegory of modern-day housecleaning. (406)

Accordingly, Mrs. Brown's 'Art Work' is an embodiment of color and seemingly unadaptable, impractical materials attributed to different art forms. The centerpiece is an Aladdin's cave of bright, soft sculptures, including deconstructed female bodies and a broken doll-like figure entrapped by washing, "twisted brassieres and demented petticoats," with only half a face, guarded by a dragon who is also a vacuum cleaner, "inert and suffocating" (77). There is a chained lady "St George and Princess Saba, Perseus and Andromeda" (76). Completing the story of the chains of the imprisonment of women's bodies by domesticity are two versions of the ineffectual male rescuer, a tiny toy knight and a toy soldier, both of which have "obviously been through the wheel of the washing-machine, more than once" (81). The walls

are hung with huge tapestries, partly knitted, partly made like rag rugs, swaying crocheted cobwebs hang from the ceiling, inhabited by dusky spiders and swarms of sequined blue flies with gauzy wings. On a similar note, Pokhrel remarks that the central metaphor in the story is the web or Mrs. Brown's art work in other words (414). She bases her argument on the fact that Mrs. Brown goes beyond Matisse's color and forms with her unique "bricolaged art" (414) and two key elements which are "the commodification of art and women's laboring bodies" (415) are directly interlinked in her practice as well as her representational skills.

Matisse's art was important in endorsing the value of decoration in modern art and although he is popularly regarded as a painter devoted to pleasure and contentment, his use of color and pattern is often deliberately disorientating and unsettling. For Spurling, this is rooted in Matisse's intimate acquaintance with violence and destruction, a sense of human misery sharpened by years of humiliation, rejection and exposure- which could be neutralized only by the serene power and stable weight of art (423). "Mrs. Brown's art expressively conveys her anger as a woman and a domestic servant, but it does so lightly, inventively and with wit. Her art unites a feminist point of view with an unconventional but authentic aesthetic purpose" (White 223). According to Katy Deepwell, what is central to feminist critique has been the identification of feminine/feminist stereotypes which seek to create separate categories for 'women' and 'Art'(7). Feminism is still a tool through which women empower themselves, assume the right to name and describe their perspectives and take part in a self-reflexive, developing, open-ended set of debates about what it means to be women in a patriarchal culture (Deepwell 5). One way to deal with this challenge is to refuse to image the body of woman at all, in order to thwart its misappropriation by the male gaze, and also to begin to build other forms of visual pleasure and new forms of representing women's experiences (Robinson 289). In a similar manner, Mrs. Brown's artwork makes a feminist comment on the lives and experiences of women primarily in domestic context. The whole cavern, tapestries, cobweb and her artistic objects actually echo the house and her duties while she was working and who she is as a woman and servant.

As Sarah Fishwick suggests art, paintings could be used to reveal a protagonist's identity, casting light on their traits, attitudes and self-image (54). Byatt herself remarks in *Portraits in Fiction* "they act as temporary mirrors allowing the protagonists to see themselves with a difference (5). Matisse is also known for his expressive language of colour and drawing, his experimental and innovative works with colors, lines and strong brushwork turn into vehicles of expressing emotions for the artist. Mrs. Brown has also literally written, or "inscribed" herself, within the visual structure of her work in the form of a "series of letters, gold on rich chocolate" that are placed by someone "on a kind of hi-tech washing-line with tiny crimson pegs" (81). Those letters spell out: "Sheba Brown Work in various material 1975-1990" (78). For the first time in the story, Mrs. Brown's full name is revealed as she seems to have literally found her voice. The now-famous Sheba literally finds her voice either in television interviews or magazines like the one Debbie works for. "Well, it all just comes to me in a kind of coloured rush, I just like putting things together, there's so much in the world, isn't there, and making things is a natural enough way of showing your excitement..."(82). As well as her own creativity and free spirit, Mrs. Brown gets the material and ideas from the household like pieces of fabric or the vacuum cleaner but recycles and transforms them in such a flamboyant and innovative way that her exhibit becomes an overnight success. For Matisse, fame and success came after he found his own style, often delighting and surprising the viewers with his signature elements of saturated colors, strong lines, pictorial spaces and most remarkably his subjects were scenes from his own studio, the figures were his family and friends in rooms and landscapes. In a sense, Matisse revelled in life and portrayed it in glowing colour and Mrs. Brown is a "knitter who subverts the color rules that Robin lectures her on and creates outrageous rooms, caverns and tableaus from knitted, patched, crocheted recycled materials and found objects"(Thomas 126). Mrs. Brown is truly a self-made artist creating an original, colorful work of art and when she has them successfully exhibited in a gallery, the entire life of the Dennison family changes.

Obviously those three people prompt each other artistically and profoundly much to the dislike of Robin and Debbie however, they also end up with a long lost inspiration as they both seem to be in an impasse in terms of artistry. As a woman struggling to find her voice in the Dennison house, Debbie "feels

something else, looking at Sheba Brown's apparently inexhaustible and profligate energy of colorful invention. She feels a kind of subdued envy which carries with it an invigorating sting. "She thinks of the feel of the wooden blocks she used to cut" (79). Debbie begins a series of woodcuts, illustrations for fairy tales, using the faces of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Stimpson, the new housekeeper, as the models for the bad and good fairies. As Jane Campbell comments, Robin, predictably, views the exhibit as a theft but he is jolted into acquiring a new interest; he reads about oriental mythology and paints, with "a new kind of loosed, slightly savage energy" (90). The revitalizing effect Mrs. Brown leaves on Robin is undeniable as that chaotic or violent impression might have prompted Robin to create Kali the Destroyer with the face of Mrs. Brown in the form of a painting. Kali is one of the most well-known Hindu goddesses, mostly because of her immense power and responsibility. Although she is more commonly known as the goddess of death and time and often associated with violence and sexuality, she is sometimes considered to be a strong mother-like figure. Although it has the face of Mrs. Brown in a dark, destructive, in a very unflattering way, it is a new painting and new energy for Robin. The striking point is the fact that Mrs. Brown's labour is not just vital to make an order in the house or begets a work of art that creates a new way of life for her, it also causes dramatic changes for Robin and Debbie. In "Art Work", "characters who have been trapped in repetitious lives are freed in an unexpected way, by art" (Campbell 171). Both Dennisons have been released into creative expression of their anger which invigorates inspiration and motivation for them in their own practices of art.

Conclusion

Byatt creates a story and characters mainly infused through Matisse in order to put an emphasis especially on the representation of women. Although Matisse is the primary source of inspiration for both Robin and Mrs. Brown, the way they interpret, apply his art makes them foil to each other. While Robin is obsessed with light, color and same art forms, Mrs. Brown seems more experimental, vivid and daring in her choices of color and outlook. She represents a feminine, more colorful, recreational aspect of art which obviously triumphs over Robin who goes for a pure, structured, cold style. What connects Mrs. Brown to Matisse's vision is not just the color obsession or the primitive, chaotic quality but employing domestic materials for artistic purposes and aestheticizing everyday, ordinary reality. Mrs. Brown metamorphoses unwanted materials with her skills of knitting, sewing and collaging and her art work goes beyond the notion of pure representation. In that sense, Mrs. Brown is the embodiment of real Matisse as she projects a synthesis of Matisse's love of color, mixing art with everyday objects making collages out of unusual materials. Matisse's artworks find narrative equivalents in Byatt's story as rather than focusing on specific paintings, Matisse's depictions of women as a whole becomes the point of reference for Byatt in giving voice to Mrs. Brown. In that sense, "Art Work" as a text surpasses certain pictorial interpretations as through the character Mrs. Brown, class, gender and sex based biases and mistreatments are referenced and above all else, Mrs. Brown finds a medium of conveying her emotions through an art that epitomizes Matisse's conception of art and aesthetic priorities.

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