SMARTHISTORY OF ART IXA- MODERNISMS 1900 TO ~1945



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SmartHistory of Art IX: Modernisms 1900-1980

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1.1: An Introduction to photography in the early 20th century

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK

Page ID 188123

Photography undergoes extraordinary changes in the early part of the twentieth century. This can be said of every other type of visual representation, however, but unique to photography is the transformed perception of the medium. In order to understand this change in perception and use—why photography appealed to artists by the early 1900s, and how it was incorporated into artistic practices by the 1920s—we need to start by looking back.



Figure **1.1.1**: Eastman Kodak Advertisement for the Brownie Camera, c. 1900

In the later nineteenth century, photography spread in its popularity, and inventions like the Kodak #1 camera (1888) made it accessible to the upper-middle class consumer; the Kodak Brownie camera, which cost far less, reached the middle class by 1900.

In the sciences (and pseudo-sciences), photographs gained credibility as objective evidence because they could document people, places, and events. Photographers like Eadweard Muybridge created portfolios of photographs to measure human and animal locomotion. His celebrated images recorded incremental stages of movement too rapid for the human eye to observe, and his work fulfilled the camera's promise to enhance, or even create new forms of scientific study.

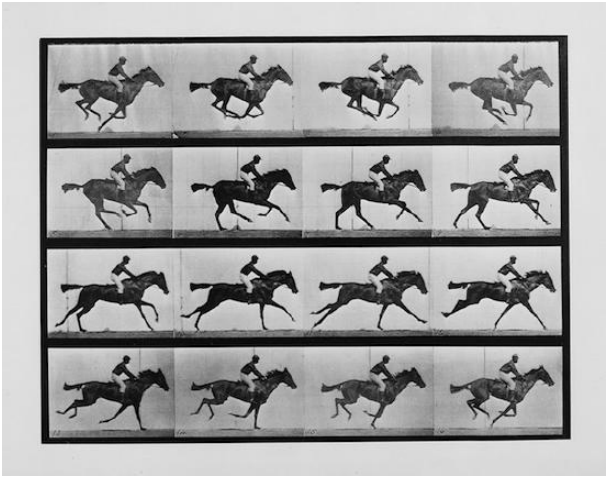


Figure **1.1.2**: Eadweard Muybridge, "Thoroughbred bay mare 'Annie G.' galloping," from *Human and Animal Locomotion*, plate 626, 1887

In the arts, the medium was valued for its replication of exact details, and for its reproduction of artworks for publication. But photographers struggled for artistic recognition throughout the century. It was not until in Paris's Universal Exposition of 1859, twenty years after the invention of the medium, that photography and "art" (painting, engraving, and sculpture) were displayed next to one another for the first time; separate entrances to each exhibition space, however, preserved a physical and symbolic

distinction between the two groups. After all, photographs are mechanically reproduced images: Kodak's marketing strategy ("You press the button, we do the rest,") points directly to the "effortlessness" of the medium.



Figure **1.1.3**: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Terminal*, photogravure, 1892

Since art was deemed the product of imagination, skill, and craft, how could a photograph (made with an instrument and light-sensitive chemicals instead of brush and paint) ever be considered its equivalent? And if its purpose was to reproduce details precisely, and from nature, how could photographs be acceptable if negatives were "manipulated," or if photographs were retouched? Because of these questions, amateur photographers formed casual groups and official societies to challenge such conceptions of the medium. They—along with elite art world figures like Alfred Stieglitz—promoted the late nineteenth-century style of "art photography," and produced low-contrast, warm-toned images like *The Terminal* that highlighted the medium's potential for originality.



Figure **1.1.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Still-Life with Chair Caning*, 1912, oil, oilcloth and pasted paper on canvas with rope frame, 10 5/8 x 13 3/4″ (27 x 35 cm.) (Musée Picasso, Paris)

So what transforms the perception of photography in the early twentieth century? Social and cultural change—on a massive, unprecedented scale.Like everyone else, artists were radically affected by industrialization, political revolution, trench warfare, airplanes, talking motion pictures, radios, automobiles, and much more—and they wanted to create art that was as radical and "new" as modern life itself.

If we consider the work of the Cubists and Futurists, we often think of their works in terms of simultaneity and speed, destruction and reconstruction. Dadaists, too, challenged the boundaries of traditional art with performances, poetry, installations, and photomontage that use the materials of everyday culture instead of paint, ink, canvas, or bronze.



Figure **1.1.5**: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-1920, collage, mixed media, 90 x 144 cm (Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

By the early 1920s, technology becomes a vehicle of progress and change, and instills hope in many after the devastations of World War I. For avant-garde ("ahead of the crowd") artists, photography becomes incredibly appealing for its associations with technology, the everyday, and science—precisely the reasons it was denigrated a half-century earlier. The camera's technology of mechanical reproduction made it the fastest, most modern, and arguably, the most relevant form of visual representation in the post-WWI era. Photography, then, seemed to offer more than a new method of image-making—it offered the chance to change paradigms of vision and representation.



Figure **1.1.6**: August Sander, *Disabled Man*, 1926 (Left); *Pastry Chef*, 1928 (Center); *Secretary at a Radio Station*, Cologne, 1931 (Right)

With August Sander's portraits such as *Disabled Man*, *Pastry Chef*, or *Secretary at a Radio Station*, *Cologne*, we see an artist attempting to document—systematically—modern types of people, as a means to understand changing notions of class, race, profession, ethnicity, and other constructs of identity. Sander transforms the practice of portraiture with these sensational, arresting images. These figures reveal as much about the German professions as they do about self-image.



Figure **1.1.7**: Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare St. Lazare*, 1932

Cartier-Bresson's leaping figure in *Behind the Gare St. Lazare* reflects the potential for photography to capture individual moments in time—to freeze them, hold them, and recreate them. Because of his approach, Cartier-Bresson is often considered a pioneer of photojournalism. This sense of spontaneity, of accuracy, and of the ephemeral corresponded to the racing tempo of modern culture (think of factories, cars, trains, and the rapid pace of people in growing urban centers).

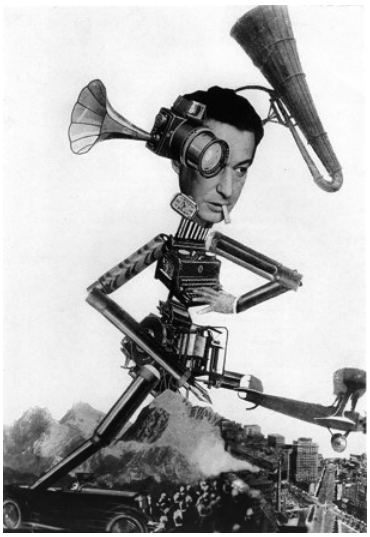


Figure 1.1.8: Umbo (Otto Umbehr), *The Roving Reporter*, photomontage, 1926

Umbo's photomontage *The Roving Reporter* shows how modern technologies transform our perception of the world—and our ability to communicate within it. His camera-eyed, colossal observer (a real-life journalist named Egon Erwin Kisch) demonstrates photography's ability to alter and enhance the senses. In the early twentieth-century, this medium offered a potentially transformative vision for artists, who sought new ways to see, represent, and understand the rapidly changing world around them.

Additional resources:

Dorothea Lange's Documentary Photographs (Getty Video)

George Eastman House Photography Collections Online

For instructors: related lesson plan on Art History Teaching Resources

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1.2: Contemporary Art, an introduction

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

"Getting" Contemporary Art

It's ironic that many people say they don't "get" contemporary art because, unlike Egyptian tomb painting or Greek sculpture, art made since 1960 reflects our own recent past. It speaks to the dramatic social, political and technological changes of the last 50 years, and it questions many of society's values and assumptions—a tendency of postmodernism, a concept sometimes used to describe contemporary art. What makes today's art especially challenging is that, like the world around us, it has become more diverse and cannot be easily defined through a list of visual characteristics, artistic themes or cultural concerns.



Figure **1.2.1**: Girl Looking at: Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962, synthetic polymer on 32 canvases each 20 x 16″ (The Museum of Modern Art) (photo: Steven Zucker)

Minimalism and Pop Art, two major art movements of the early 1960s, offer clues to the different directions of art in the late 20th and 21st century. Both rejected established expectations about art's aesthetic qualities and need for originality. Minimalist objects are spare geometric forms, often made from industrial processes and materials, which lack surface details, expressive markings, and any discernible meaning. Pop Art took its subject matter from low-brow sources like comic books and advertising. Like Minimalism, its use of commercial techniques eliminated emotional content implied by the artist's individual approach, something that had been important to the previous generation of modern painters. The result was that both movements effectively blurred the line distinguishing fine art from more ordinary aspects of life, and forced us to reconsider art's place and purpose in the world.

Shifting Strategies

Minimalism and Pop Art paved the way for later artists to explore questions about the conceptual nature of art, its form, its production, and its ability to communicate in different ways. In the late 1960s and 1970s, these ideas led to a "dematerialization of art," when artists turned away from painting and sculpture to experiment with new formats including photography, film and video, performance art, large-scale installations and earth works. Although some critics of the time foretold "the death of painting," art today encompasses a broad range of traditional and experimental media, including works that rely on Internet technology and other scientific innovations.

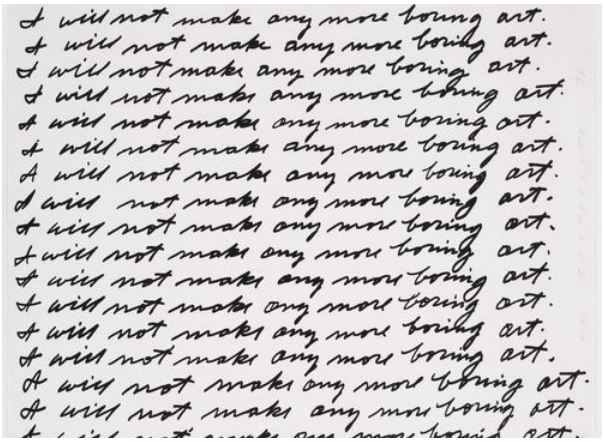


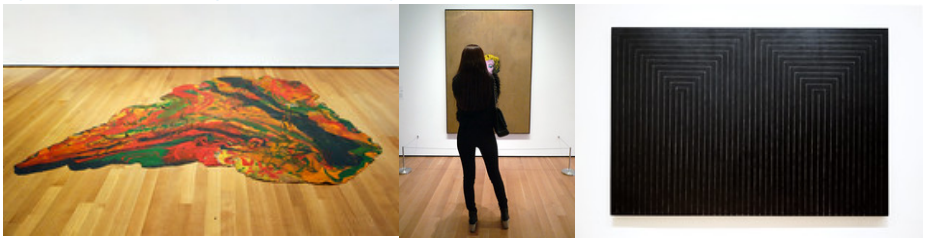
Figure 1.2.2: John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, 1971, lithograph, 22-7/16 x 30-1/16″ (The Museum of Modern Art). Copyright John Baldessari, courtesy of the artist.

Contemporary artists continue to use a varied vocabulary of abstract and representational forms to convey their ideas. It is important to remember that the art of our time did not develop in a vacuum; rather, it reflects the social and political concerns of its cultural context. For example, artists like Judy Chicago, who were inspired by the feminist movement of the early 1970s, embraced imagery and art forms that had historical connections to women.

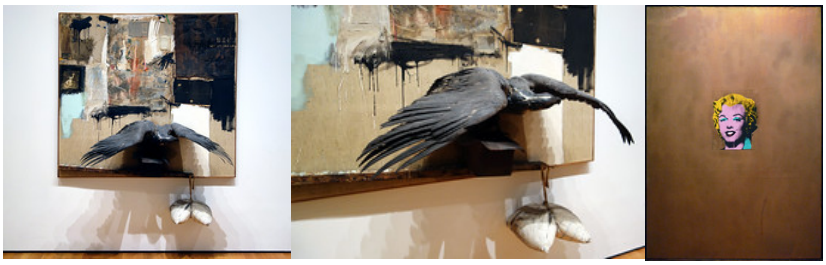
In the 1980s, artists appropriated the style and methods of mass media advertising to investigate issues of cultural authority and identity politics. More recently, artists like Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., and Richard Serra, who was loosely associated with Minimalism in the 1960s, have adapted characteristics of Minimalist art to create new abstract sculptures that encourage more personal interaction and emotional response among viewers.

These shifting strategies to engage the viewer show how contemporary art's significance exists beyond the object itself. Its meaning develops from cultural discourse, interpretation and a range of individual understandings, in addition to the formal and conceptual problems that first motivated the artist. In this way, the art of our times may serve as a catalyst for an on-going process of open discussion and intellectual inquiry about the world today.

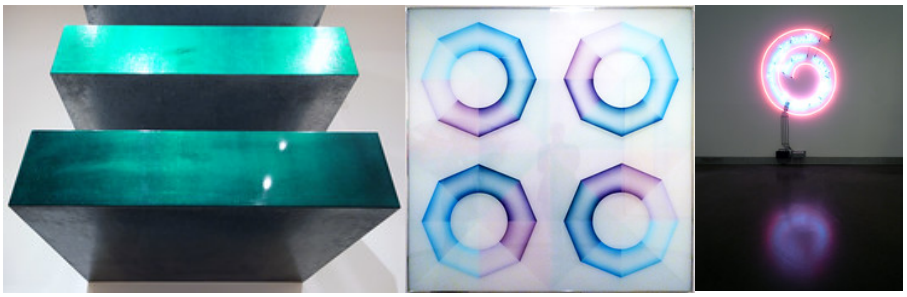
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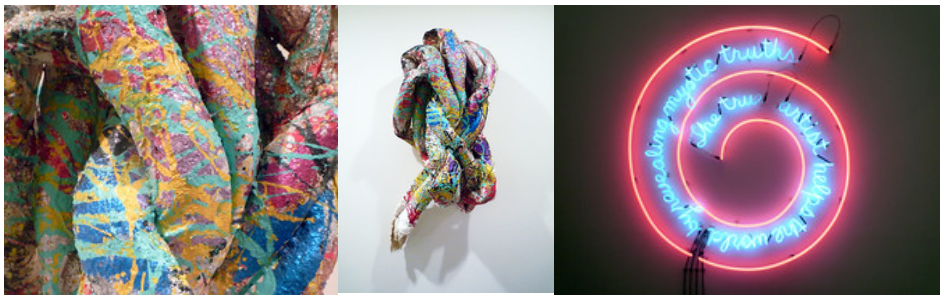
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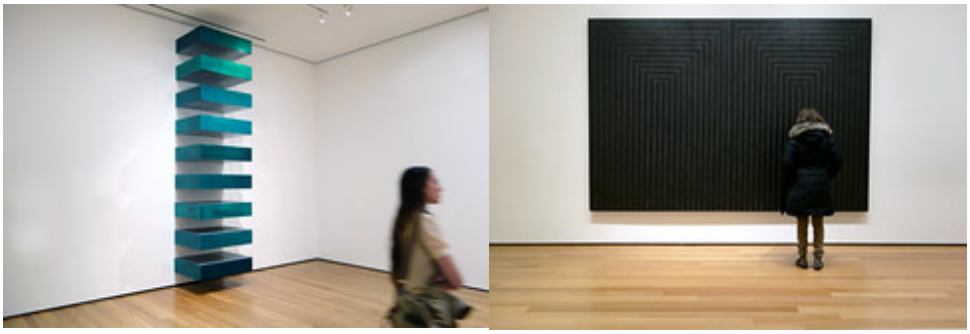
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1.3: Representation and abstraction- looking at Millais and Newman

by SAL KHAN, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Vir Heroicus Sublimus, 1950-51 (MoMA)

What's "heroic" about a painting that looks like a craft project on HGTV? This comparison suggests an answer.

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1.4: Art and context- Monet's Cliff Walk at Pourville and Malevich's White on White

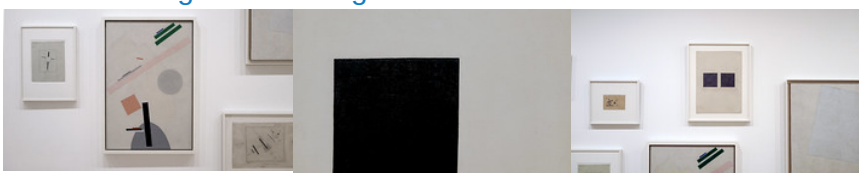
by SAL KHAN, DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **1.4.1**: Claude Monet, *Cliff Walk at Pourville*, 1882, oil on canvas, 26-1/8 x 32-7/16 inches (66.5 x 82.3 cm) (Art Institute of Chicago), and Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 31 1/4″ (79.4 x 79.4 cm) (MoMA)

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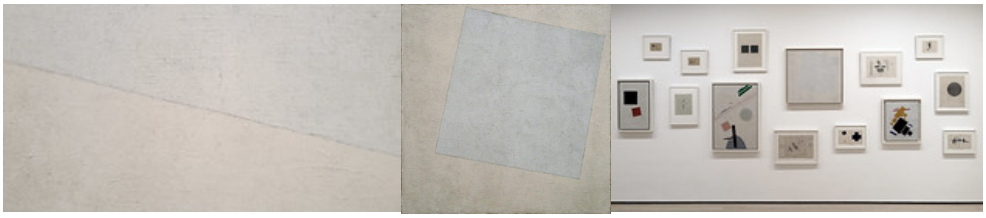
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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Key concepts

2.1: Modern art and reality

2.2: Expression and modern art

2.3: Primitivism and Modern Art

2.4: Formalism I- Formal Harmony

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2.1: Modern art and reality

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **2.1.1**: Left: Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind: The Farewells*, 1911, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 96.2 cm (MoMA); Right: Norman Rockwell, *Breaking Home Ties*, 1954, oil on canvas, 112 x 112 cm (private collection)

If asked, most people would probably say that modern art is not true to reality. Indeed, modern art is practically defined by its bizarre distortions of reality; this is one reason why Norman Rockwell, whose work is more recent than Umberto Boccioni's, is not considered a modern artist. But looking like reality — what art historians call "naturalism" — is only one way of being true to reality. As we shall see, the attempt to create art that was more true to reality than traditional naturalism was the motivation for some of the most radical modern art, even including Boccioni's *States of Mind: The Farewells*.

Impressionism and optical realism

When the Impressionist style first appeared on the art scene of the 1870s, many hostile viewers dismissed it as art by "lunatics" whose color perception was questionable and who did not have the technical skills to properly finish their paintings. Some critics claimed, however, that Impressionist paintings were more accurate than traditional naturalistic representations. **Their argument** was that the Impressionists represented their perception of objects rather than the objects themselves, and that the colors we perceive are often not identical to an object's actual or "local" color.



Figure **2.1.2**: Left: Claude Monet, *Rouen Cathedral (The Portal and the Tour d'Albane in full Sunlight)* also called *Harmony in Blue and Gold*, painted 1893, dated 1894, oil on canvas, 107 x 73 cm (Musée d'Orsay); Right: *Rouen Cathedral, Portal, Morning sun*, 1893, oil on canvas, 92.2 x 63.0 (Musée d'Orsay)

In the 1890s, Monet created dozens of paintings of Rouen Cathedral at different times of day and in different weather. At dawn, the cathedral was tinged with blue light; in the late-afternoon, it was radiant with oranges and yellows; while on cloudy days it was a duller grayish tan. By recording how the appearances of objects are affected by different lighting conditions, the Impressionists

argued that their paintings were more accurate representations of the way we see the world. What appears at first sight to be a radically unrealistic style is in fact more true to the way things actually look.

Discarding artificial conventions



Figure **2.1.3**: Top: Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784, oil on canvas, 3.3 x 4.25 m (Musée du Louvre); Bottom: Edgar Degas, *The Race Track: Amateur Jockeys near a Carriage*, between 1876 and 1887, oil on canvas, 66 × 81 cm (Musée d'Orsay)

The Impressionists recognized that much traditional art was accepted as true to reality only because it was familiar, not because it was accurate. For example, methods of composition taught in Academies tended to emphasize a central focus, equal balance on both sides, and a clear depiction of spatial recession, as in David's *Oath of the Horatii*. Such compositions are, in fact, very artificially staged. When we move through the world, we are more likely to encounter scenes like the one represented in Degas's *The Race Track*: awkwardly unbalanced, abruptly cropped, and spatially ambiguous. Critics who supported the Impressionists argued that artists like Degas were correcting artificial conventions and making art more true to reality.

Although the Impressionist style was new, this form of argument was not. In the sixteenth century artists and critics tried to draw a distinction between a true naturalism and a false naturalism (often derogatorily called "**Mannerism**"). False naturalism involved copying the work of other artists, and thus understanding nature only at second hand. The solution, some felt, was to discard the conventions of art and return to a more careful study of the original source, nature itself, just as the Impressionists did.

Is naturalism true to nature?

Impressionist artists sought greater truth to nature through more careful observation, but there is a sense in which our eyes inevitably distort the objects they perceive. Three ways they do so are embodied in the artistic techniques of linear perspective, diminution, and foreshortening.

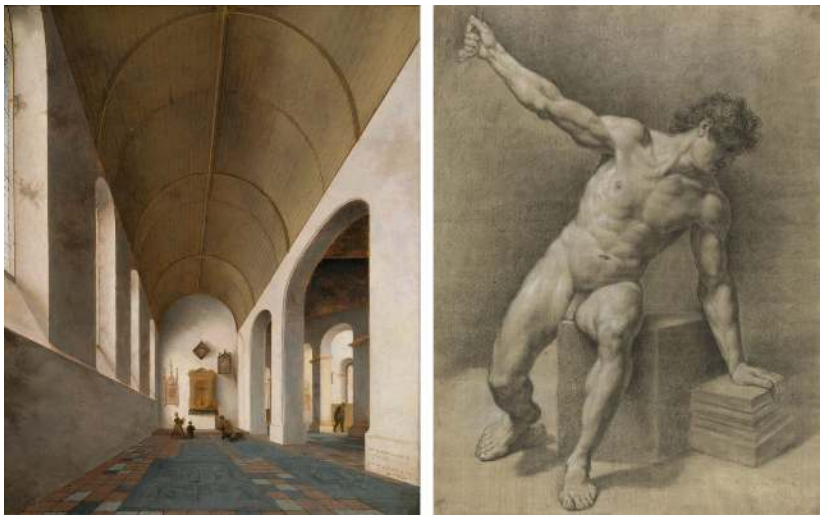


Figure **2.1.4**: Left: Pieter Saenredam, *St Antoniuskapel in St Janskerk, Utrecht*, 1645, oil on panel, 41.7 x 23 cm, (Centraal Museum, Utrecht); Right: Anton von Maron, *Academic nude study*, late 18th or early 19th century, black and white chalk on paper, 52.7 x 39.4 cm (private collection)

In **linear perspective**, what are actually parallel lines in real life (such as railroad tracks or the edges of floor tiles) converge in the representation. This effect, seen above in the Saenredam painting of a church interior, is integral to what is popularly considered a realistic style, but it is obviously not true to reality. Each of the tiles on the floor is in fact square. Similarly, with diminution, objects appear to get smaller the farther away they are, but this is just an optical trick; each of those windows is in reality the same size.

Foreshortening occurs when we view an object from an angle at which it recedes away from us, so that the object appears to be contracted, shorter than its actual length. In the Academic figure study above on the right, the two thighs appear to be of different lengths and shapes simply because one is viewed parallel to the picture plane while the other is receding sharply away from it. In actual reality, of course, both thighs are very similar (mirror images) in length and shape.

Correcting for perceptual distortion

The style we colloquially call “realistic” is not literally true to reality, then. It is only a record of our perception of reality, from one angle, at one distance, at one moment in time, and in one kind of light, and all of these factors can distort the object. Some Modern art movements sought a representational system that would be more accurate to the true shapes of objects, rather than representing them deformed by perception.



Figure **2.1.5**: Jean Metzinger, *Le Goûter*, 1911, oil on cardboard, 29 7/8 x 27 5/8 inches (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Cubist paintings seem at first sight to be even more bizarrely distorted and unrealistic than Impressionist paintings. In the **Salon Cubist** Jean Metzinger's *Le Goûter*, objects appear to be twisted and broken up, but this is done in order to correct the distortions of perspective and foreshortening. Metzinger shows things from **multiple perspectives** so we can better understand their true shapes. The left side of the tea cup on the table is seen from the side at eye level, but from that angle you wouldn't be able to tell that the cup has a round opening, so the right side is seen from above to complete our understanding of the round lip and concave shape of the cup. Similarly, one of the woman's eyes is viewed in profile, while the other is seen facing us, and her left shoulder is seen from above, while the right is more straight on. Cubism doesn't "distort" objects; it shows them from multiple angles in order to give us more information about their true shapes than would be visible in traditional naturalistic representation.

Modernism and science

Another way of justifying the apparent distortions of modern art came in the form of appeals to science. Modern science provided a stream of new images that sparked artists' imaginations, as well as new theories that radically altered people's understanding of reality.

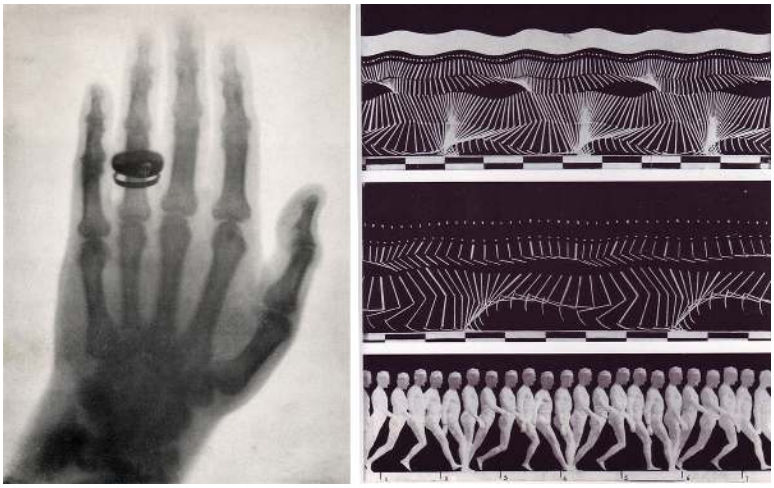


Figure **2.1.6**: Left: Wilhelm Röntgen, X-ray photograph of the hand of Albert von Kölliker, from *Eine Neue Art von Strahlen* (Würzburg, 1895); Right: Étienne-Jules Marey, photographs showing human locomotion, c. 1895

Beginning in the seventeenth century, new technologies based on the use of optical lenses provided evidence of microscopic and macroscopic worlds hitherto unsuspected. The discovery of wavelengths beyond the visible spectrum, including infrared and ultraviolet light as well as x-rays, gamma rays, and radio waves, made it clear that the human senses are very limited instruments for understanding the objective world. The visual culture of modern science provided new ways of representing and understanding reality. Stop-motion photography made rapid actions visible for study, and x-ray photography allowed peeks into the interior of solid forms, resulting in visions of reality beyond traditional naturalism.

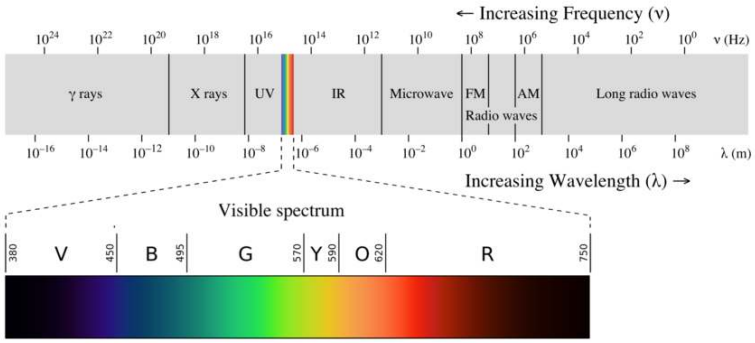


Figure 2.1.7: Diagram of the electromagnetic spectrum (image: **Philip Ronan, Gringer**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

One work that attempted to represent this new super-sensory reality was **Italian Futurist** Umberto Boccioni's *States of Mind: The Farewells* (1911). The only clearly legible feature in the painting is the number 6943 stenciled on what we gradually discern is the engine of a dark-gray train engine spewing steam in a station. The train is represented, Cubist-fashion, from multiple perspectives. The nose cone is in profile, while the body of the train recedes in a zig-zag toward the upper right then upper center of the canvas. In front of the train in green are a series of a couples saying goodbye (their two heads and embracing arms are clearest in the lower left) — or perhaps they are one couple, viewed multiple times in the manner of stop-action photography in order to show motion through time.



Figure 2.1.8: Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind: The Farewells*, 1911, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 96.2 cm (MoMA)

Two truss structures on the left suggest the radio towers that were constructed across Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century after the Italian Guglielmo Marconi harnessed radio waves for wireless communication. Correspondingly, the remainder of the composition is permeated with wave-forms in bright colors to suggest their high energy. Many forms of electromagnetic energy such as radio waves are invisible to the eye, but nonetheless permeate the world. Altogether, the work makes visible the new understanding of nature achieved by modern physics and presents a glimpse of reality beyond the limitations of the human senses.

Modernism and spiritualism

Modern artists' quest for truth to realities beyond human perception was also influenced by the explicitly non-scientific approaches of **spiritualism**. Although spiritual visions and discoveries are often seen as subjective, many modern artists saw them as revealing objective truths. They claimed their depictions of these discoveries were glimpses of a higher reality than that available to the human senses.



Figure **2.1.9**: Left: Hilma af Klint, *Group X, No. 1, Altarpiece (Altarbild)*, 1915. Oil and metal leaf on canvas, 93 1/2 x 70 11/16 inches (237.5 x 179.5 cm); Right: Piet Mondrian, *Composition*, 1929, oil on canvas, 45.1 x 45.3 cm (Guggenheim Museum)

The Swedish artist Hilma af Klint painted a series of works called *The Paintings for the Temple* between 1905 and 1915 based in part on mystical visions she received from a spiritual guide. Around the same time, the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian undertook a close study of nature to eventually discover what he felt were the basic **"building blocks"** of all natural and artistic form: the primary colors red, yellow, and blue; the primary values black and white, and horizontal and vertical lines. Although both of these artists produced some artworks that are entirely non-representational in the sense that they do not look like nature, both argued that their spiritual quest revealed a higher reality than that available to the senses.

These artists all remind us that what is popularly considered "realistic" in art is in fact only based on sense perceptions, which are inevitably partial, and which in many cases distort reality. By observing nature more closely, discarding artificial conventions, correcting for perceptual distortions, absorbing new scientific theories, and engaging in spiritual investigations, many modern artists rejected traditional naturalism in order to seek higher truths.

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2.2: Expression and modern art

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **2.2.1**: Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903-04 oil on panel, 122.9 x 82.6 cm (**Art Institute of Chicago**)

In his painting *The Old Guitarist*, Picasso made a series of choices to evoke feelings of pity. The guitarist is an old man, with gray hair. The fact that he is seated on the ground suggests that he is playing on the street for spare change. His emaciated state, torn clothes, and dejected posture show poverty and depression.

Furthermore, Picasso does not simply paint the old guitarist exactly as he would appear in real life; he deliberately distorts or exaggerates certain aspects of the scene in order to further intensify his intended expression. Most obviously, the entire work—except for the guitar—is in blue monochrome. This is clearly unrealistic, but it capitalizes on the melancholy emotional quality associated with that color.



Figure **2.2.2**: Left: Edouard Manet, *The Spanish Singer*, 1860, oil on canvas, 58 x 45 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**); right: Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903-04 oil on panel, 122.9 x 82.6 cm (**Art Institute of Chicago**)

When we compare Picasso's painting to one of a very similar subject by **Edouard Manet**, we can see other strategic formal distortions. Picasso's guitarist is in an improbable (if not impossible) pose that is cramped on all sides by the frame. He looks caged or trapped, where Manet's guitarist, already in a more dynamic pose with his energy thrusting upward, has room to move within the frame. Also, where the form of Manet's guitarist flows through organic, rounded curves, Picasso has exaggerated the hard angularity of his guitarist, who appears to be all jutting elbows, ankles, and tendons.

These two works exemplify the difference between naturalism and expression as artistic goals. One of Manet's primary goals was an accurate depiction of the appearance of the guitarist, what art historians call naturalism. As to how to feel about him, we are left largely on our own: it is equally probable that a viewer could pity his evident poverty (examine his worn shoes, five o'clock shadow, and simple meal), or admire his bohemian freedom. Picasso, by contrast, paints his guitarist in an expressive manner, explicitly directing our feelings through his stylistic choices.



Figure **2.2.3**: Left: Caravaggio, *Deposition (or Entombment)*, c. 1600-04, oil on canvas, 300 x 203 cm (**Vatican Museums**); right: J. M. W. Turner, T*he Slave Ship*, 1840, oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm (**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**)

Picasso's willingness to sacrifice naturalism in order to enhance the emotional impact of *The Old Guitarist* is what makes the painting exemplary of modern expression. Between the Renaissance and the nineteenth century (with some notable exceptions, such as **El Greco**), artists would primarily evoke emotions in ways consistent with naturalism.

In his ***Deposition***, the Baroque artist Caravaggio uses spotlighting, gritty earth colors, and body language to help express the emotional drama of the moment Christ's body is laid in the tomb, but nothing is too distorted. The work remains naturalistic; you could see such a scene in real life. Romantic artist **J. M. W. Turner** pushes the boundaries more in his *Slave Ship*, with obviously painterly brushwork and very intense color, but the painting still looks plausibly like a storm at sea, with the whipping spray and

blowing clouds backlit by the setting sun. The Baroque and Romantic periods both emphasized expression as an artistic goal, but both also largely stayed within the confines of naturalistic representation.



Figure **2.2.4**: Left: Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1910, tempera on board, 66 x 83 cm (**The Munch Museum, Oslo**); right: Joan Mitchell, *Rock Bottom*, 1960-61, oil on canvas, 198.1 x 172.7 cm (**Blanton Museum, Austin, Texas**)

Starting in the later nineteenth century, the expressionist art movements of the Modern period were increasingly willing to sacrifice naturalism in pursuit of more powerful expressive effects. Although Edvard Munch's *The Scream* does include expressive body language in the foreground figure, the painting's emotional charge is largely carried by its formal distortions. We react first of all to the expressive power of the work's acrid color, vertiginous recession, and nauseatingly undulating composition, which have been exaggerated to the point where the depicted scene is no longer plausible. Expression has superseded naturalism as the main aesthetic goal. The Modern period saw an increasing recognition of the expressive power of form — color, line, shape, composition, and so on. It is no great conceptual leap from Munch to Joan Mitchell, for whom pure form conveys pure expression, as the name of the Abstract Expressionist movement suggests.

Ex-pression as non-rational

The prefix "ex" means "out," so to ex-press literally means to push out, reconfirming the distinction between expression and representation or naturalism. In the latter, the motive for the work is out in the world, part of nature, and the artist just re-presents it. With ex-pression, the motive for the work is inside the artist, a mental or emotional state, and must be pushed out.

Expression in art history is generally associated with non-rational states of mind. It is not used to describe works that convey objective facts or for ideas arrived at through rational thought processes. In addition to emotions, the term expression is also used for works that convey spiritual content, such as Vasily Kandinsky's **apocalyptic paintings** of the 1910s, and subconscious content, such as the Surrealist André Masson's **automatic drawings** of the 1920s.



Figure **2.2.5**: Left: Vasily Kandinsky, *Small Pleasures*, 1913, oil on canvas, 110.2 x 119.4 cm (**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York**); right: André Masson, *Automatic Drawing*, 1924, ink on paper, 23.5 x 20.6 cm (**MoMA**)

Because it pertains to non-rational states of mind, expression is often associated with spontaneous or even involuntary creative processes, both mental and manual. While naturalistic art is generally acknowledged to require intensive training, the skills associated with expressionist art are often said to be innate. Correspondingly, rapid or unrefined execution is frequently taken as a sign of expressive intensity, as though the artist's hand were responding in automatic synchronization with the outpourings of the emotions or unconscious. This is not a universal stylistic characteristic of modern expressionist art, but it is common, as the examples above of Turner, Munch, Mitchell, Masson, and Kandinsky all demonstrate.

The stereotype of the expressionist artist

There is a stereotype of the expressionist artist that — not coincidentally — matches the qualities associated with expressionist art: almost pathologically irrational, careless of social conventions, and spontaneous to the point of being out of control. It seems that in order to express intensely, the artist has to live intensely. Many analyses of *The Old Guitarist* begin with the story of Picasso's own adversities at the time, when he was living in poverty in Paris and had just lost a close friend to suicide. Similar stories of the Post-Impressionist **Vincent van Gogh**'s madness, the German Expressionist **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner**'s wartime trauma, and the American Neo-Expressionist **Jean-Michel Basquiat**'s life on the streets are often used to validate the expressive authenticity of their art.



Figure **2.2.6**: Left: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe*, 1889, oil on canvas (**The Courtauld Gallery, London**); center: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69 x 61 cm (**Allen Memorial Art Museum**); right: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Self-Portrait*, 1984, acrylic and lipstick on paper, 98.7 x 71.1 cm (**Gagosian**)

We need to maintain a distinction between expression and self-expression, however. The term self-expression is reserved for works whose primary intent is to communicate something about the artist him- or herself. Most modern expressionist art had a broader goal than this. Even when modern artists drew from their own experiences, the intent was to create works that express something about the society or culture of their time, or about the wider human condition. Truly self-expressive works are of limited relevance to outside viewers; this is why art historians typically try to relate works to issues beyond the personal biography of the artists who created them.

Not all modern art is about expression

The concept of expression and the stereotype of the expressionist artist are probably the most commonly evoked justifications for modern art in the popular understanding. If the work does not look like reality, many people assume that it is because the artist was trying to express something, rather than depict something. However, expression of non-rational mental states is only one potential goal of art, and although it was a particularly prominent goal during the modern period, it is not the only motive for non-naturalistic art. We explore other broad answers to the question, 'Why doesn't modern art look like reality?' in the essays **The ambiguity of "realism"**, **Formalism I**, and **Formalism II**.

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2.3: Primitivism and Modern Art

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188130

Primitivism in art involves the appreciation and imitation of cultural products and practices perceived to be "primitive," or at an earlier stage of a supposed common scale of human development. This definition contains a basic contradiction: the primitive is admired and even seen as a model, but at the same it is also presumed to be inferior, because it is not fully developed. This paradox makes primitivism a concept that is both intellectually and morally complex.

Primitivism in a broad historical context



Figure **2.3.1**: Abraham Ortelius, *Typvs Orbis Terrarvm*, 1570

Primitivism was fostered during the modern period by two phenomena. First, the so-called Age of Discovery from the 15th through the 17th century brought Europeans into close contact with a wide array of previously unknown cultures from Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. As a result of the military and technological advantages of the West, the new social and economic relationships established with these cultures were often exploitative, including theft of raw materials, enslavement, and colonial rule.



Figure **2.3.2**: Luigi Persico, *Discovery of America*, 1844, white marble, 486.4 cm × 255.3 cm × 184.2 cm

The body language in Luigi Persico's *Discovery of America* exemplifies such relationships. The male European "discoverer" stands dominant, dressed in Renaissance-style metal armor and carrying a sphere that simultaneously represents the globe he has conquered and the "enlightenment" he brings, while the nearly-naked indigenous woman cringes, awestruck and submissive, by his side.

Second, primitivist attitudes were fostered by anxieties caused by the rapid social, economic, and political changes that accompanied the scientific and industrial revolutions of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.



Figure **2.3.3**: Philip de Loutherbourg, *Iron Works, Coalbrookdale*, lithograph from *Picturesque Scenery of England and Wales*, 1805, 31 x 38.7 cm

Within a few hundred years, cultural patterns based on religion and agriculture that had lasted for millennia were upended. Science was displacing faith, and machines were replacing human labor or creating lower-paying, unskilled jobs. Increasing numbers of people lived in cities rather than in villages and worked in factories rather than on farms. Primitivism was a sort of antidote to modernity itself, a nostalgia for an imagined "state of nature" when humankind is assumed to have lived more instinctually and in closer harmony with the natural and spiritual worlds.

The "noble savage"



Figure **2.3.4**: Avatar poster, 2009

One of the defining concepts of primitivism is that of the "noble savage," an oxymoronic phrase often attributed to the eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, although he never used it. Now recognized as a stereotype, the noble savage is a stock character of literature and the arts who may lack education, technology, and cultural refinement, but who lives according to universal natural law and so is inherently moral and good. Many popular books and films exemplify the concept of the noble savage, including *Tarzan*, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, *Dances With Wolves*, and *Avatar*.

In *Avatar*, for example, the indigenous, blue-skinned Na'vi are technologically inferior to the humans who come to mine their Eden-like world for resources, but they are morally superior and closer to nature. Although the Na'vi are loosely based on Native Americans, it is important to remember that the primitivist concept of the noble savage is essentially mythic, not documentary.

Tropical paradise

The late-nineteenth century French artist **Paul Gauguin** created some of the most enduring and influential images of the noble savage. Decrying the corruption of "putrified" Europe, Gauguin left France in 1891 for the South Pacific island of Tahiti, where,

> ***under an eternally summer sky, on a marvelously fertile soil…the…happy inhabitants of the unknown paradise of Oceania know only the sweetness of life.***
>
> *Paul Gauguin, letter to J. F. Willumsen, Pont-Aven, 1890, as translated in Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art (London, 1968), p. 79.*

Although aspects of Gauguin's paintings of Tahitian life have some basis in reality, they combine multiple cultural traditions, including South Asian and Egyptian as well as Oceanic. They are also carefully selected to reinforce pre-existing European stereotypes of a tropical paradise replete with colorful plants, succulent fruits, and quaint superstitions.

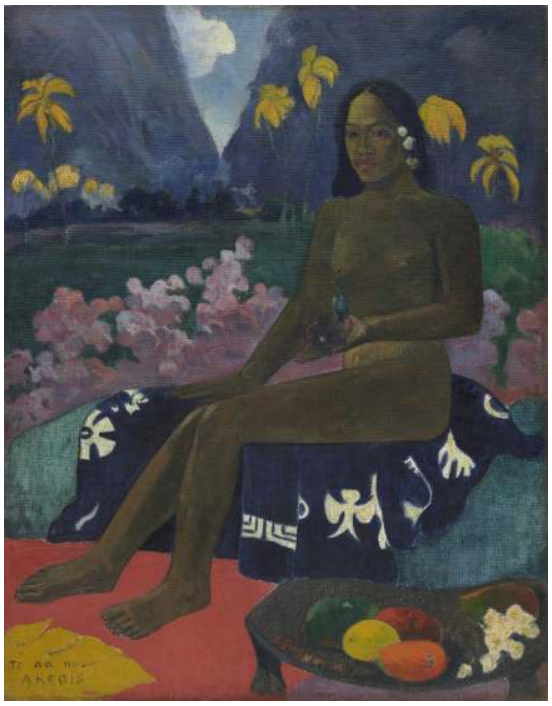


Figure 2.3.5: Paul Gauguin, *The Seed of the Areoi*, 1892, oil on burlap, 92.1 x 72.1 cm (MoMA)

Gauguin's paradise is populated largely with young, semi-nude women, promoting fantasies of sexual freedom as well as perpetuating a long-standing European convention that associated women with nature. The model for *The Seed of the Areoi* was a thirteen-year-old Tahitian girl who was soon to be pregnant with Gauguin's child. For many people today, Gauguin's exploitative relationship with the Tahitians outweighs the admiration he professed to be expressing, and perhaps even his artistic legacy.

Gaucherie and sincerity

Gauguin's primitivism extends to his style as well as his subject matter. He did not wish to represent "the primitive" second-hand, he aspired to live it and embody it. Notice the stiffness of the girl's pose, the reduction of her anatomy to basic geometric shapes, and the near-total absence of **chiaroscuro** or cast shadows.

Along with an appreciation for "primitive'" subject matter, many modern artists also cultivated a style that they saw as primitive. Prototypes of this style were found in children's art, folk art, and pre-Renaissance art as well as non-Western art. *Gaucherie* — awkwardness — was seen as a mark of sincerity and striving, which was preferable to the shallow facility of Academic art.

In addition, the naturalistic style taught in the Academic system was seen as being suited only to representing the surface appearances of material objects. Artists in search of alternatives to naturalism saw in primitive art and folk art a truly natural way to draw: one available without training, and one that is responsive to the richness of human subjective life: concepts, emotions, and spirituality, rather than a mere record of perceptions.



Figure **2.3.6**: Henri Rousseau, *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope*, 1905, oil on canvas, 200 x 301 cm (Fondation Beyeler, Basel)

Similar stylistic qualities are seen in French customs-inspector-turned-artist Henri Rousseau's *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope*. Rousseau lived most of his life in Paris, and his experience with primeval tropical environments was limited to trips to the zoo and botanical garden. However, his self-taught, naïve painting style meant he was widely admired as a modern primitive.

Cultural appropriation?

In 1907, a famous cross-cultural artistic encounter took place when Picasso went to see the African masks exhibited at Paris's Trocadero Museum of Ethnology. Shortly thereafter, he revised the ambitious painting of prostitutes that he was working on to include mask-like faces on the two rightmost figures. Thus began a two-year engagement with African art that contributed to the invention of Cubism.



Figure **2.3.7**: Left: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907 (MoMA); Right: Fang mask, Gabon, 19th century (Musée du Louvre)

In the end, Cubism became very different from African art, but Picasso's borrowings have raised concerns about cultural appropriation that are endemic to much primitivism. It is almost impossible to avoid consuming or using elements of other peoples' cultures — blue jeans, paper, and pizza were all invented by and specific to one particular culture at one time. The charge of "cultural appropriation" is generally only leveled when a member of a dominant culture gains money or cultural capital by appropriating artifacts of a non-dominant culture. The vast commercial success of white, blues-based rock-and-roll musicians when their black progenitors lived in relative poverty is a good example.

It is hard to determine exactly how much of Picasso's success is due to his cross-cultural borrowings, but certainly his enormous reputation and the astronomical prices commanded by his works at auction form a poignant contrast to the often literal anonymity of the mask-makers from Africa whose works helped inspire his artistic innovations.

Primitivism and industrialization

The German Expressionists were another group of artists who found inspiration in African art. Like Gauguin, they were motivated by an antipathy toward industrialization and the social and economic changes that it entailed, especially what they saw as a vain, shallow, and exploitative middle class.



Figure **2.3.8**: Erich Heckel, *The Bathers*, woodcut, 1923, 18 ½ x 13 7/8 inches, (Mills College Art Museum)

They found an antidote to modernity in a retreat to a pre-modern state of nature, as embodied in Erich Heckel's print of two women bathing in a mountain landscape. The women's nudity is a paradoxical mixture of eroticism and innocence. It combines the purity of humankind in Eden, when the body was not seen as sinful, with the presumed liberated sexuality of primitive people, which is denied to members of modern bourgeois society.

The intentional *gaucherie* (awkwardness) of Heckel's style, another aspect of the work's primitivism, is enhanced by the work's medium. Woodcut was an old-fashioned technique of printmaking, but it was revived by the **German Expressionists** in part because of the natural materials it used and the crude simplicity of the images it tended to produce. It was markedly different from more recent and higher-tech printmaking processes such as etching, lithography, and photography.

Primitivism and colonialism

It is no coincidence that primitivist art was created and consumed by Western nations that were at the same time practicing colonialism: occupying and plundering much of Africa, Asia, and the Americas for labor and resources.



Figure **2.3.9**: Firmin Bouisset, *Exposition Coloniale de Paris*, lithograph, 1906

European fascination with these cultures was reflected in dozens of "colonial" exhibitions during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. These often included what were essentially human zoos in which ethnic "specimens" would enact their cultural practices for curious spectators. The background of this poster for the 1906 Colonial Exhibition in Paris includes a pagoda, a North African mosque, and a Cambodian temple to display the widespread colonial holdings of France at the time. The foreground shows a living diorama of an African village, complete with mud and straw huts, ostriches, and a semi-nude woman with a child grinding grain against a backdrop of palm trees.

Although the work's naturalistic style and depiction of labor are notably different from the artworks we have been examining, this exhibition poster singles out many of the same primitivist qualities lauded by modernist artists. These qualities seem designed to exemplify how much more "advanced" European culture is. The mud huts would have formed a stark contrast to the vast, modern iron-frame architecture of the Grand Palais in Paris, on the grounds of which the colonial exhibition was held. The woman's task, grinding grain, was doubtless chosen in part to demonstrate her people's capacity for hard physical labor. This was, however, also one of the first forms of industrialized labor in the West, where mills driven by wind and water power replaced hand grinding.

The poster thus shows the very primitive state of technology in this woman's culture. Her semi-nudity also contrasts with the elaborate costumes worn by contemporary Parisian women, and would have promised a titillating attraction for the Belle Epoque visitors to the exhibition.



Figure **2.3.10**: Max Pechstein, *Killing of the Banquet Roast*, 1911, woodcut and watercolor, 24 x 29 cm (MoMA)

Even when these qualities are re-framed as positives — as antidotes to modern ailments such as overcrowded cities, runaway technology, emotional and sexual repression, and the loss of spirituality and of connection with nature — the stereotypes of primitivism are still problematic. Framing other cultures as “primitive” ultimately suggests the need for external aid and guidance, and thus helps to justify Western colonial practices. Primitivism is a peculiar mixture of admiration and denigration, appreciation and exploitation, elevation and repression. This is the paradox at the heart of the concept of primitivism; a paradox evident ever since the invention of the phrase “noble savage.”

Additional resources:

Explore MoMA’s 1984-85 exhibition, **“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern**

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2.4: Formalism I- Formal Harmony

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188131

When James McNeill Whistler first exhibited his painting ***Nocturne in Black and Gold*** in 1877, the prominent Victorian art critic John Ruskin accused him of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." Whistler sued Ruskin for libel, and over the course of the trial and beyond he articulated a defense of his work that is a famous example of a very influential modern theory of art called formalism.

Art as formal beauty



Figure **2.4.1**: James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket*, 1875, oil on panel, 60.2 x 46.7 cm (Detroit Institute of Arts)

Whistler's defense was that art is about beauty. Not the beauty of certain kinds of things — a swan, an idealized nude, or a picturesque landscape — but the beauty of certain color combinations in certain patterns: *formal* beauty. Denying that his *Nocturne* was an attempt to show an accurate view of a place, Whistler called it an "artistic arrangement," and said that his "whole scheme was only to bring about a certain harmony of color."[1] What we are intended to appreciate, then, is not the painting's likeness to a scene in nature (which happens to be a firework display over a river), but instead the asymmetric balance of the composition, the calligraphic quality of the painterly marks, and the way the orange flecks sparkle against the dark blue-greens.

Whistler frequently gave his paintings titles typical of musical compositions, such as symphony, harmony, arrangement, or nocturne, and listed their dominant color combinations as though they were the equivalent of a musical key. This analogy with music helps to divert our attention away from the subject matter of the painting to its form. When we hear a piece of instrumental music we do not expect it to imitate sounds from the real world. Instead, we just appreciate the way the sounds create pleasing harmonies. Why should visual art not be appreciated in the same way?



Figure **2.4.2**: Aubrey Beardsley, *The Peacock Skirt*, plate 2 of ten illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, 1893, black ink and graphite on white wove paper, 23 x 16.8 cm (Harvard Art Museums)

This theory of art was promoted by a late-nineteenth century literary and artistic movement called "Aestheticism," which included Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Aubrey Beardsley, as well as Whistler. Their motto, "art for art's sake," implicitly rejected the non-aesthetic goals commonly assigned to art, such as imitation of nature, moral instruction, spiritual exaltation, and emotional expression.

This idea of art was not entirely novel to the nineteenth century. The ancient Greeks had theorized that aesthetic harmony in both music and visual art resided in certain mathematical proportions. What is new here is the prominence that the Aesthetes granted this idea. For them, formal beauty was not just one of many potential goals for art; it was the pre-eminent and perhaps only quality the artist should strive for.



Figure **2.4.3**: James McNeill Whistler, *Note in Red: The Siesta*, 1883-84, oil on panel, 21.6 x 30.5 cm (private collection)

It was particularly shocking to Ruskin and Victorian England that the Aesthetes denied art's role in improving public morality. Whistler scorned people who look "not at a picture, but through it," to consider whether it will "better their mental or moral state." [2] He believed that art is not a vehicle for public reform any more than it is a means to reproduce the appearances of nature. We

shouldn't keep looking outside the painting for its purpose, but rather enjoy it for what it in fact is: a surface covered with harmonious arrangements of color.

Theories of art that concentrate on the sensory or material qualities of the work itself are called "formalist." Note that formalism is not a historical style or movement like Impressionism or Cubism. Rather, it should be considered a basic theory that tries to explain what art is or should be.

Formalism and modern art



Figure 2.4.4: Maurice Denis, *September Evening*, 1891, oil on canvas, 38 x 61 cm (Musée d'Orsay)

A number of modern movements emphasized the purely aesthetic qualities of art. In 1890 the Symbolist artist Maurice Denis famously asserted, "A painting — before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote — is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order."[3] Correspondingly, Denis's paintings read as surface patterns as much as (or even more than) representations of real-world spaces and objects.

In another famous statement, the Fauve artist **Henri Matisse** confessed in his *Notes of a Painter* (1909), "my ambition is limited, and does not go beyond the purely visual satisfaction such as can be obtained from looking at a picture."[4]



Figure 2.4.5: Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (MoMA)

Like Whistler, Matisse sought harmony in his works. He conveyed aesthetic pleasure not only through his choice of sensual and tranquil subjects — lounging nudes, picnics, dances, quiet domestic interiors — but also through form. In *The Piano Lesson* the painting's nominal subject of a boy practicing the piano is just a pretext for showcasing a complex pattern of vivid colors against cool gray, and for contrasting rectilinear shapes with the swirling black tracery of the balcony railing and music stand.

Clive Bell and "Significant Form"

For many modern artists (including Matisse and Denis), a concern with formal harmony was paired with other goals, such as emotional expression, spirituality, and social agency. Formalist art theory was therefore mostly developed by art critics, rather than by artists themselves.



Figure **2.4.6**: Left: Bowl with horsemen, late 12th – early 13th century, central Iran, Seljuk period (Cincinnati Art Museum, photo: **Wmpearl**, CC0); Right: Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation of Christ*, 1468-70, oil and tempera on panel, 58.4 x 81.5 cm (Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino)

The English art critic Clive Bell articulated a formalist theory of art in his 1914 book *Art*. He claimed that the purpose of art is to evoke a particular kind of feeling that he called "aesthetic emotion." This feeling is not caused by the subject, but by the form of the artwork:

> ***What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua, and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero della Francesca, and Cézanne? Only one answer seems possible — significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions.***
>
> *Clive Bell, Art, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1913), p. 8.*

Note that Bell's examples include architecture and craft as well as paintings and sculptures: any made object can be art if it exhibits significant form.



Figure **2.4.7**: William Powell Frith, *The Railway Station*, oil on canvas 116.7 x 256.4 cm (Royal Holloway, University of London)

By the same token, not all paintings and sculptures qualify as art, according to Bell. In a painting such as William Powell Frith's *The Railway Station*, the goal is accurate depiction. Certain anecdotes depicted in the work may arouse emotions, such as the mother embracing her child, but these are everyday emotions, not aesthetic emotions. The detail of the work may excite our admiration of the artist's skill, but for Bell that skill was misdirected: true artists are dedicated to evoking aesthetic emotion through significant form.



Figure **2.4.8**: Paul Cézanne, *The Blue Vase*, 1889-90, oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm (Musée d'Orsay)

Bell admired works by non-Western and pre-Renaissance artists, whose lack of concern with representational accuracy freed them to use line, shape, and color to create significant form. In Bell's view, certain recent artists such as **Paul Cézanne** had rediscovered art's true purpose as evoking aesthetic emotions, rather than merely copying the appearances of nature.

The autonomy of art

One of the hallmarks of formalist art theory is the idea that the work of art should be experienced in itself, and not in relation to anything else. We should not compare the work with nature to judge how true-to-life it is. It makes no difference whether the work is a portrait of a king or pure abstraction, and we need not inquire about the social context in which the work of art was produced,

whether it was second-century Rome, eighteenth-century Japan, or twenty-first century America. Everything we need to know about a painting is contained within the four edges of its frame. As Bell put it:

> ***To appreciate a work of art, we need bring nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation …***
>
> *Clive Bell, Art, (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1913), p. 25.*

For its proponents, the formalist theory of art has the benefit of elevating art and the artist above everyday utilitarian and social concerns. For its opponents, however, art is and has always been part of life, and abstracting it from life's concerns impoverishes its richness and diminishes its important social roles.



Figure **2.4.9**: Henri Matisse, *The Dessert (Harmony in Red)*, 1908, oil on canvas, 180.5 x 221 cm (The State Hermitage Museum)

Thus, while it is certainly possible to analyze and appreciate this Matisse painting solely in terms of its formal qualities, to do so would require overlooking significant questions about gender roles, social class, consumption, and domesticity that are also raised by the work. In recent decades, these broader social concerns have dominated the approaches of most artists, critics, and historians, and purely aesthetic concerns have become less important.

There is another type of formalist art theory that arose slightly later and became dominant in the mid-twentieth century: one that asks viewers to focus not on formal harmony or a special "aesthetic emotion," but instead on the properties of the materials or medium of which the work of art is made. We shall examine this aspect of formalism in **Formalism II: Truth to Materials**.

Notes:

1. "The Action," in James Abbot McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1892; reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1967), pp. 3, 8.
2. "Mr Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock'" (1885), in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, p. 138.
3. Maurice Denis, "Definition of neo-traditionism" (1890), in Jean-Paul Bouillon, ed., *Le ciel et l'arcadie* (Paris: Hermann, 1993), p. 5 (authors' translation).
4. Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," sixth paragraph.

Additional resources:

Read Clive Bell's *Art* at Project Gutenberg

Read James McNeill Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* at Project Gutenberg

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2.5: Formalism II- Truth to Materials

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188132

"Formalism" is the name given to a theory that locates the nature and purpose of art in its sensory, material properties or form. For the visual arts, this includes line, shape, color, composition, texture, and so on. In **Formalism I** we examine a branch of formalist art theory that sees the purpose of art as evoking specifically aesthetic feelings, such as beauty or harmony. Here, we turn to a later development of formalism that called for "truth to materials."

Truth to materials

In this branch of formalist art theory, the primary focus remains on the material qualities of the artwork, but instead of asserting that the artist's goal is formal harmony, some artists and critics begin to talk about art as a means of understanding and displaying the properties of the materials of which it is made.



Figure **2.5.1**: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Proserpina*, 1621-22, marble (Galleria Borghese, Rome, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Ever since the Renaissance, artists in pursuit of naturalism had attempted to transcend the limitations of their media. Sculptors such as **Gian Lorenzo Bernini** excelled at making hard, cold marble look like soft flesh and fluttering drapery.



Figure 2.5.2: Henry Moore, *Reclining Woman*, 1930, green Hornton stone, 59.7 x 92.7 x 41.3 cm (National Gallery of Canada, photo: Gbuchana, CC0)

Certain artists in the twentieth century, by contrast, chose to showcase rather than disguise their materials. In 1934, British sculptor Henry Moore put it this way: "Every material has its own individual qualities … Stone, for example, is hard and concentrated and should not be falsified to look like soft flesh … It should keep its hard tense stoniness."[1] This imperative to be 'true to one's materials' became an important critical tenet of twentieth-century art.

There are nineteenth-century roots to this idea, especially in architecture and design theory. The Victorian art critic John Ruskin made it an imperative for artists and craftspeople to "honor" their materials:

> *The workman has not done his duty, and is not working on safe principles, unless he … honours the materials with which he is working … If he is working in marble, he should insist upon and exhibit its transparency and solidity; if in iron, its strength and tenacity; if in gold, its ductility …\^{[2]}\)*

In part, this insistence on truth to materials arose in the nineteenth century because of the proliferation of low-quality, mass-produced manufactured goods. In furniture and interior decoration, cheap materials were often disguised to make them look more expensive, such as faux marbling, wood veneers, or imitation copper patina. Ruskin called such falsified use of materials "illegitimate and debased," [3] terms that reflect a moral imperative to use materials honestly.

Constructivism and the Bauhaus

The formalist principle of "truth to materials" was taken up in the second and third decades of the twentieth century by art and design movements such as Constructivism and the Bauhaus.



Figure 2.5.3: Vladimir Tatlin. *Counter-Relief*, 1913, wood, metal, leather (The State Tretyakov Gallery)

In this **Russian Constructivist** sculpture by Vladimir Tatlin, the materials themselves are the primary focus of the artist. An old wood panel is used as a tack board for scraps of found materials: leather, wire, stamped tin, a wooden dowel, and offcuts of copper sheet. Each of these materials has been manipulated in ways that show off its properties: the wood is pitted and weathered, the coarse-grained leather is stretched tautly between brass tacks, the copper sheet has been cut and bent into sharp, edgy planes, and the wire has been curled into tight spirals. There is no moral lesson or symbolism here; it is simply a sampler of materials displayed in ways that demonstrate their material properties.



Figure 2.5.4: Josef Albers giving a critique of student exercises in his introductory class, 1928

Influenced by ideas coming out of Russia, the German design school **Bauhaus** instituted a rigorous introductory course to familiarize students with basic design principles and the properties of various materials. A typical exercise in Josef Albers' class would help students to understand the qualities of paper through open-ended, independent experimentation, "a playful tinkering with the material for its own sake." [4] In the resultant student projects, we can see folds, rolls, cuts, tears, corrugation, notching — all sorts of ways of working with paper to develop an understanding of its nature and potential as a constructive medium.

Greenbergian formalism

In the mid-twentieth century, the influential American art critic Clement Greenberg consolidated the entire history of modern art around this idea of truth to materials. Attempting to account for what, if anything, such diverse-seeming styles as Impressionism,

Cubism, Constructivism, and Abstract Expressionism had in common, Greenberg concluded that all modern artists were attempting to be true to their materials, and more specifically to "purify" their respective media.



Figure **2.5.5**: Clement Greenberg in 1972

For Greenberg, each artistic medium, such as painting, sculpture, or literature, has an "area of competence" that it should stick to, as determined by its material properties:

> *It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure'…*[5]

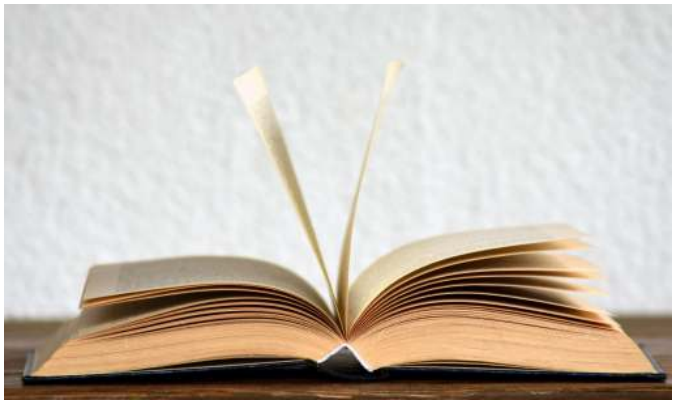


Figure **2.5.6**: Literature is a temporal medium

For example, literature is a temporal medium, since it is read sequentially, word-by-word and page-by-page. Hence story-telling, the development of events and characters through time, is within its area of competence.

A painting, by contrast, can only with great difficulty tell stories; it struggles to show more than a single moment in a single action. Hence narrative is not really part of painting's area of competence. The whole category of "history painting" (art depicting stories from history, literature, or mythology) is counter to what Greenberg believed was the true vocation of painting.



Figure **2.5.7**: Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1785, oil on canvas, 3.3 x 4.25m, (Musée du Louvre)

In addition, it is only with great difficulty that painting shows a third dimension. By using techniques such as **chiaroscuro** to suggest volume and perspective to suggest space, artists can give an illusion of a third dimension — but it is only an illusion, and it falsifies painting's true nature. Volume is properly within sculpture's area of competence, and space is within architecture's.

For Greenberg, painting's area of competence lies in three factors: the flatness of the surface, the shape of the support (typically a rectangular canvas), and the properties of the pigment or color that is put upon that surface. Of these three, Greenberg argued, the most unique to painting is flatness; consequently, he saw the entire history of modern painting as a gradual embrace of painting's flatness.

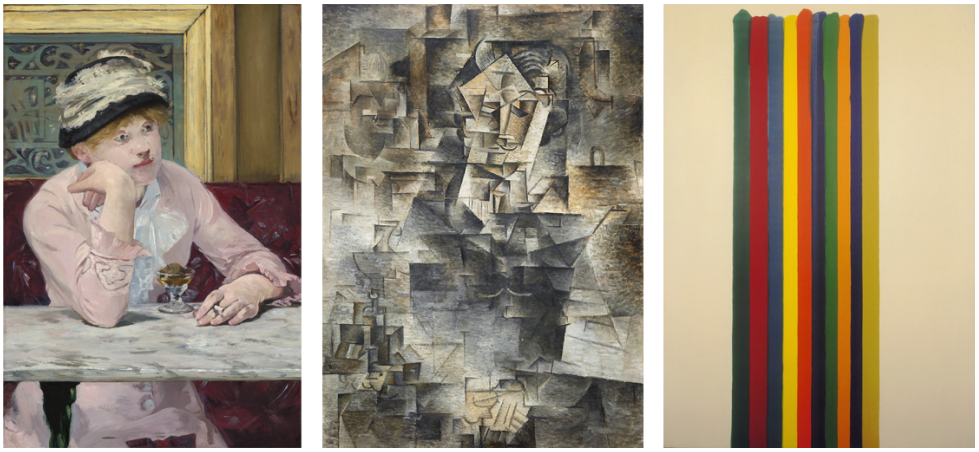


Figure **2.5.8**: Left: Edouard Manet, *The Plum*, 1877, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 50.2 cm (National Gallery, Washington DC); center: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910, oil on canvas, 39 9/16 x 26 9/16 inches (Art Institute of Chicago); right: Morris Louis, *Number 4-31*, 1962, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 210.2 x 147.6 cm (MoMA)

In Greenberg's view, modernist painting began with Edouard Manet's compression of space and use of a frontal light source that minimized chiaroscuro and denied the illusion of mass. Cubism continued this development, its slightly-angled facets, spread across the entire surface of the painting, defining only a very shallow space. The mid-century American modernists of Greenberg's own time finally embraced the true identity of painting as a flat surface covered with a colored design.

Backlash

Greenberg had enormous influence on art in the mid-twentieth century, as some artists attempted to fulfill his exacting criteria for formalist purity. Today, however, Greenberg's rigorous version of formalist art theory is almost completely discredited. Socially-conscious artists, critics, and art historians object to the way the formalist theory of art separates art from its social context. History, politics, spirituality, expression — all of these are irrelevant to the formalist theory of art.



Figure **2.5.9**: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

One *could* do an exclusively formalist reading of Picasso's ***Guernica***, and consider how the artist tastefully contrasted organic, curving shapes with hard-edged, angular shapes; or discuss how he rejected perspective and minimized modeling to assert the flatness of the painting's surface. However, to do so would be to ignore the clear desperation of the gesticulating characters, the horror of the event, the classical references, the powerful expression, and above all the urgent political message.

Formalism as a totalizing theory of art the way **Clive Bell** or Clement Greenberg imagined is largely an historical footnote. However, it is an important footnote, and ideas of formal harmony and truth to materials had a great deal of influence for many nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists. It is just as impossible to fully understand the history of modern art without acknowledging formalism, as it is to understand modern art using only formalism.

It is also important not to confuse the theory of formalism with the technique of **formal analysis**. With rare exceptions, works of art have a physical presence and formal properties that are integral to what they have to say, and we need to have a keen eye to discern those properties and describe how they affect the work's meaning(s). While formalism may be dead, formal analysis remains an essential skill for the study of art.

Notes:

1. Henry Moore, "Statement for Unit One," in Herbert Read, ed., *Unit One: The Modern Movement in English Architecture* (London, 1934), p. 29.
2. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1953), appendix 12: Modern Painting on Glass, pp. 391-92.
3. Ibid.
4. Josef Albers, "Teaching Form through Practice," *Bauhaus* vol. 2 no. 3 (1928), translated by Frederick Amrine, Frederick Horowitz, and Nathan Horowitz, 2005, albersfoundation.org/teaching...-albers/texts/ (accessed 13 February 2020).
5. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900-1990* (Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 755

Additional resources:

Learning with Itten at the Getty Museum

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Fauvism + Expressionism

These two movements opened the way for even greater experimentation with color and abstract form.

c. 1900 - 1930

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.1: Fauvism

Henri Matisse is the best known of this colorful, innovative group of painters.

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3.1.1: Women in the Interior I Museums Without Borders

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A seated woman in an interior setting is a common scene featured in artworks stretching across styles and mediums. In this episode, we look at two artworks–a painting by Henri Matisse from the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection and one by KG Subramanyan from MAP's collection, in an attempt to unpack this iconography.

Linking collections around the world, Museums Without Borders is a unique digital collaboration between MAP and institutions in India and across the world. Ranging from six to ten minutes, each episode in this series juxtaposes an artwork from MAP with an object from a partner museum exploring commonalities and differences in style, subject or narrative. Watch more episodes here: **https://map-india.org/museums-without…**

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3.1.2: Fauvism, an introduction

by DR. VIRGINIA B. SPIVEY

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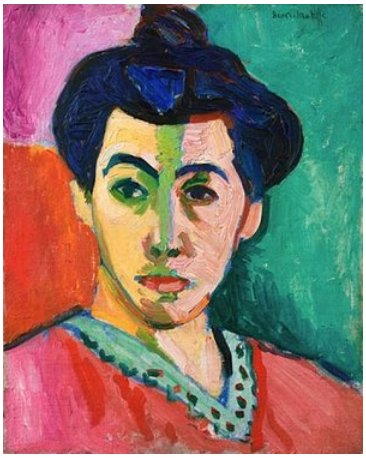


Figure **3.1.2.1**: Henri Matisse, *The Green Line*, 1905, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 32.5 cm (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen)

Distinctive brushwork

Fauvism developed in France to become the first new artistic style of the 20th century. In contrast to the dark, vaguely disturbing nature of much fin-de-siècle, or turn-of-the-century, Symbolist art, the Fauves produced bright cheery landscapes and figure paintings, characterized by pure vivid color and bold distinctive brushwork.

"Wild beasts"

When shown at the 1905 Salon d'Automne (an exhibition organized by artists in response to the conservative policies of the official exhibitions, or salons) in Paris, the contrast to traditional art was so striking it led critic Louis Vauxcelles to describe the artists as "*Les Fauves*" or "wild beasts," and thus the name was born.

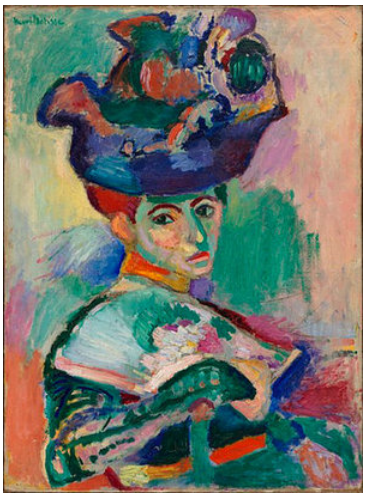


Figure **3.1.2.2**: Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905, oil on canvas, 79.4 x 59.7 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

One of several Expressionist movements to emerge in the early 20th century, Fauvism was short lived, and by 1910, artists in the group had diverged toward more individual interests. Nevertheless, Fauvism remains significant for it demonstrated modern art's ability to evoke intensely emotional reactions through radical visual form.

The expressive potential of color

The best known Fauve artists include Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice Vlaminck who pioneered its distinctive style. Their early works reveal the influence of Post-Impressionist artists, especially Neo-Impressionists like Paul Signac, whose interest in color's optical effects had led to a divisionist method of juxtaposing pure hues on canvas. The Fauves, however, lacked such scientific intent. They emphasized the expressive potential of color, employing it arbitrarily, not based on an object's natural appearance.

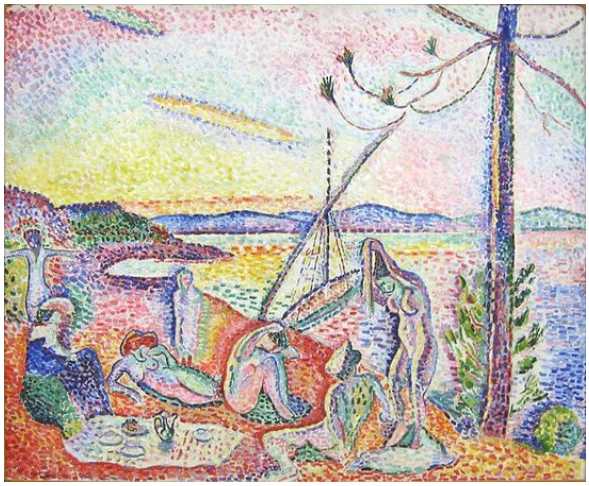


Figure **3.1.2.3**: Henri Matisse, *Luxe, calme et volupté*, 1904, oil on canvas, 98.5 x 118.5 cm (Museé d'Orsay, Paris)

In *Luxe, calm et volupté* (1904), for example, Matisse employed a pointillist style by applying paint in small dabs and dashes. Instead of the subtle blending of complementary colors typical of the Neo-Impressionist painter Seurat, for example, the combination of fiery oranges, yellows, greens and purple is almost overpowering in its vibrant impact.

Similarly, while paintings such as Vlaminck's *The River Seine at Chatou* (1906) appear to mimic the spontaneous, active brushwork of Impressionism, the Fauves adopted a painterly approach to enhance their work's emotional power, not to capture fleeting effects of color, light or atmosphere on their subjects. Their preference for landscapes, carefree figures and lighthearted subject matter reflects their desire to create an art that would appeal primarily to the viewers' senses.

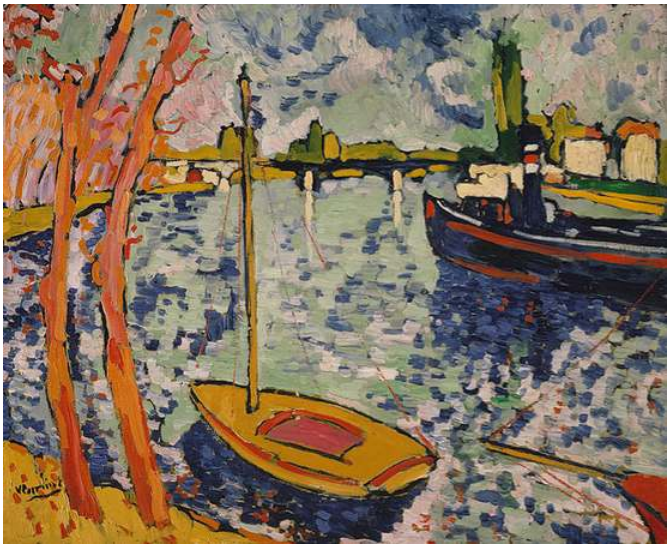


Figure **3.1.2.4**: Maurice de Vlaminck, *The River Seine at Chatou*, 1906, oil on canvas, 82.6 x 101.9 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Paintings such as Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre* (1905-06) epitomize this goal. Bright colors and undulating lines pull our eye gently through the idyllic scene, encouraging us to imagine feeling the warmth of the sun, the cool of the grass, the soft touch of a caress, and the passion of a kiss.

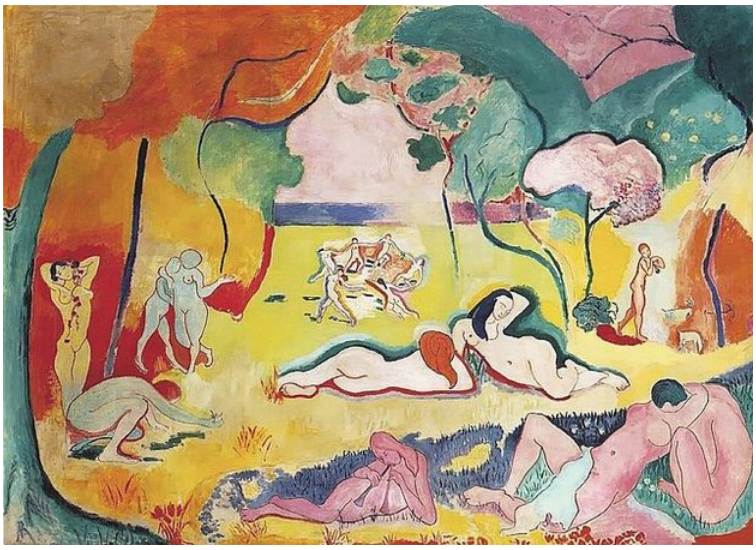


Figure 3.1.2.5: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-6, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

Like many modern artists, the Fauves also found inspiration in objects from Africa and other non-western cultures. Seen through a colonialist lens, the formal distinctions of African art reflected current notions of Primitivism–the belief that, lacking the corrupting influence of European civilization, non-western peoples were more in tune with the primal elements of nature.

Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra) of 1907 shows how Matisse combined his traditional subject of the female nude with the influence of primitive sources. The woman's face appears mask-like in the use of strong outlines and harsh contrasts of light and dark, and the hard lines of her body recall the angled planar surfaces common to African sculpture. This distorted effect, further heightened by her contorted pose, clearly distinguishes the figure from the idealized odalisques of Ingres and painters of the past.



Figure 3.1.2.6: Henri Matisse, *The Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 92.1 x 140.3 cm (Baltimore Museum of Art)

The Fauves' interest in Primitivism reinforced their reputation as "wild beasts" who sought new possibilities for art through their exploration of direct expression, impactful visual forms and instinctual appeal.

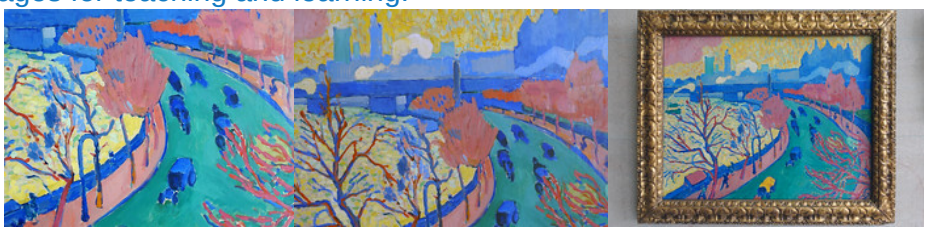
Additional resources:

Fauvism at theartstory.org

Fauvism at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

African Influences in Modern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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3.1.3: Fauve Landscapes and City Views

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **3.1.3.1**: André Derain, *Mountains at Collioure*, 1905, oil on canvas, 32 x 39 1/2 inches (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Bright color and simplified form

Varied patterns of brushstrokes define the landscape in André Derain's *Mountains at Collioure*. Vivid blues and greens burst like fireworks from the twisted red branches of two trees rising up from a field of yellow-green vertical brushstrokes. A flowing horizontal line of blocky lilac strokes suggests a path or wall behind the trees, and diagonal strokes of green indicate a field rising towards the foothills. The mountains in the background are roiling forms painted in bright red, yellow, and blue under a pale green and yellow sky. Colors do not fade with distance according to the rules of **atmospheric perspective**. Their undiminished intensity makes the scene appear flat and decorative, just colors arranged in patterns on the surface of the canvas.



Figure **3.1.3.2**: Henri Matisse, *Luxe, Calme et Volupté*, 1904-5, oil on canvas, 37 x 46 inches (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Made in the summer of 1905 when Derain was painting in the south of France with Henri Matisse, *Mountains at Collioure* is a quintessentially **Fauve** landscape with its bright, unmodulated color and simplified forms. Both painters developed styles that synthesized the work of their Post-Impressionist predecessors. Matisse had previously used a technique of regularized brushstrokes derived from the **Neo-Impressionists** in ***Luxe, Calme et Volupté***. He abandoned this technique for the more liberated and suggestive approach of *Landscape at Collioure*, in which the paint is applied in loosely patterned and widely separated brushstrokes to raw canvas.



Figure **3.1.3.3**: Henri Matisse, *Landscape at Collioure*, 1905, oil on canvas, 15 1/4 x 18 3/8 inches (**MoMA**)

A greater degree of abstraction

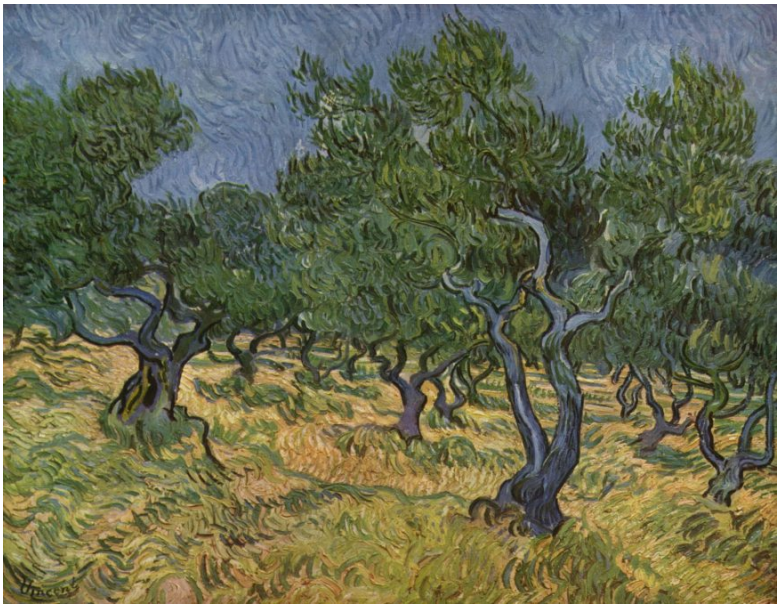


Figure **3.1.3.4**: Vincent van Gogh, *Olive Trees*, 1889, oil on canvas, 72.4 x 91.9 cm (Kröller Müller, Otterlo)

Derain's *Mountains at Collioure* is more carefully structured than Matisse's contemporary landscape. Both paintings use brilliant color and visible brushstrokes to create surface patterns, but Derain distinguished foreground from background by distinct differences in paint application. The foreground trees with their thickly painted, regular patterns of leaves were depicted in the style of van Gogh, while the undulating flat colored planes of the background mountains echoed Gauguin's abstraction of landscape forms.

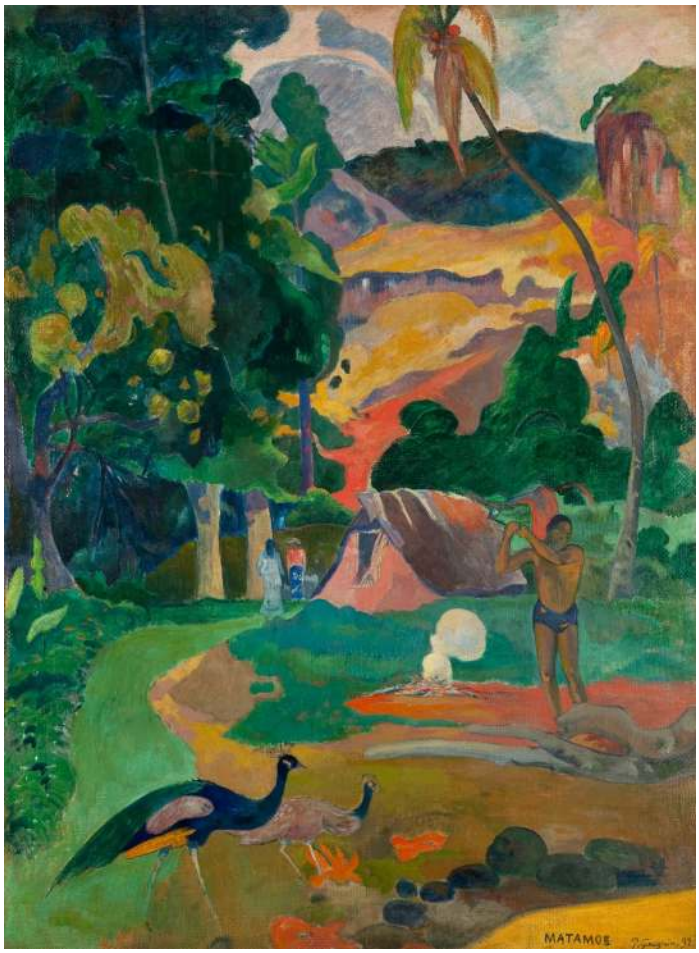


Figure 3.1.3.5: Paul Gauguin, *Matamoe*, 1892, oil on canvas, 115 x 86 cm (Pushkin Museum, Moscow)

Like the Post-Impressionists, Derain and Matisse intensified or even disregarded local colors in their landscapes while emphasizing surface patterns and textures. What distinguished their paintings from their predecessors and prompted an art critic to call them "Fauves" (wild beasts) was their use of more simplified color palettes, more liberated and inconsistent brushwork, and a greater degree of abstraction in both form and color.

Scenes of modern leisure

Landscapes and city views were the favored subjects of the Fauve painters. They followed the **Impressionists** and Post-Impressionists in depicting popular vacation spots and scenes of modern leisure. These included the Paris suburbs and beach resorts of Normandy favored by the Impressionists, as well as Mediterranean towns in the south of France painted by **Cézanne**, **van Gogh**, and **Gauguin**. Many of their compositions of these vacation spots are very similar to contemporary postcard views of the same locations. Their paintings are, however, far from photographic. All of the Fauve painters used a liberated style to create paintings that seem to celebrate the pleasures of painting as much as the pleasures of life. They embraced both the decorative qualities of painting — the abstract arrangement of colors and shapes—and the employment of liberated, expressive brushwork.



Figure **3.1.3.6**: Maurice Vlaminck, *Banks of the Seine at Chatou*, 1905-6, oil on canvas, 59 x 80 cm (**Musée d'art moderne de Paris**)

Maurice Vlaminck is often considered the most truly Fauve painter of the group. A close friend of Derain's, he was largely self-taught and a devoted admirer of van Gogh's work. He painted the small towns and landscapes near the Paris suburb of Chatou where he lived. His use of intense color, thick paint, and simplified forms is very similar to van Gogh's style. Vlaminck, however, applies paint much more randomly and chaotically than van Gogh, who meticulously organized his canvases into regularly textured patterns of repeating brushstrokes.

In Vlaminck's *The Banks of the Seine at Chatou*, the blocky red tree trunks rise up from ochre, red, and bright blue stripes of long grass. Small patches of vibrant color pepper the upper portion of the canvas like a mosaic suggesting a tangle of branches and leaves swirling above the gleaming river on a bright windy day.



Figure **3.1.3.7**: Maurice Vlaminck, *Bougival*, 1905, oil on canvas, 32 ½ x 39 5/8 inches (**Dallas Museum of Art**)

Fauve painters tended to use a limited range of colors, emphasizing the brightest shades of the primaries (red, blue, and yellow) as well as the secondaries green and orange. Vlaminck took this restricted palette further than Derain and Matisse, and often used his colors straight out of the tube without mixing them. In *Bougival* he organizes the landscape in broad color areas: red for the foreground field, yellow leaves for the middle ground, green trees in the background, and blue hills and water in the distance. The paint is applied with simple, blunt strokes to create a powerful image of a fall day in the countryside.



Figure **3.1.3.8**: André Derain, *Charing Cross Bridge*, London, 1906, oil on canvas, 31 5/8 x 39 1/2 inches (**National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.**)

Derain's *Charing Cross Bridge* is one of a series of paintings he was commissioned to make of London views. Claude Monet had recently exhibited an Impressionist series of London scenes, and Derain painted many of the same subjects in an aggressive Fauve style.



Figure **3.1.3.9**: Claude Monet, *Charing Cross Bridge*, 1899, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 80.6 cm (**Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid**)

Consistent with the Impressionist interest in recording specific atmospheric effects, Monet's *Charing Cross Bridge* depicts the boats, bridge, and buildings dissolving into a bright haze of foggy light and visible brushstrokes. Derain's painting, in stark contrast, makes no attempt to convey the effects of light in a realistic manner; instead, it is a riotous celebration of color and free brushwork. Bright reds, blues, and yellows dominate, with a glowing pale green shape indicating the distant Houses of Parliament.

Monet used delicate, textured brushstrokes to depict touches of light on the water, clouds of steam and swirls of fog. Derain's brushstrokes are like colored bricks representing the patterns of light and reflections on the water's rough surface. The sky, rendered with tightly packed vertical brushstrokes, is an apocalyptic orange-red, while the left side of the river is an even more intense shade of deep red with scattered light and dark blue strokes suggesting reflections.



Figure 3.1.3.10: Right: André Derain, *Charing Cross Bridge*, London, 1906, oil on canvas, detail (National Gallery of Art, Washington); left: Claude Monet, *Charing Cross Bridge*, 1899, oil on canvas, detail (Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid)

Deep and bright blues outline the boats and buildings, and the bridge itself is a deep blue marked with a row of red of X's that slashes across the upper portion of the canvas. An area of yellow and orange brushstrokes on bare canvas creates a visual path of light on the river flowing under the bridge to the distant horizon. Flat pale clouds of smoke rise above the bridge like cartoon bubbles. The subject is recognizable, but the colors and simplifications of form render it hallucinatory. Next to Derain's wildly exaggerated vision, Monet's Impressionist view looks extremely refined and even old-fashioned with its nuanced rendering of reflected light and color.

Busy street scenes



Figure 3.1.3.11: André Derain, *Regent Street*, 1906, oil on canvas, 26 x 39 1/8 inches (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Most of Derain's London paintings depict river views, but he also painted a crowded shopping street. In *Regent Street* the simplifications of color and form create a compelling image of the city's commercial district. Horse-drawn carriages, a bicycle, and pedestrians fill the roadway. We see shop signs and posters, flags and street lights. A man wearing advertising posters dominates the lower left corner, while fashionably dressed shoppers occupy the right as they move down the sidewalk towards us. Derain's Fauve colors and shapes are here an effective means to render the chaos of the modern city.



Figure **3.1.3.12**: Raoul Dufy, *Posters at Trouville*, 1906, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm (MNAM, Centre Pompidou, Paris)

Raoul Dufy painted many scenes of the beach resorts in Normandy with bright colors and simplified forms. Rather than using the intense, often non-naturalistic colors of the leading Fauves — Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck — Dufy chose subjects that were themselves brightly colored, such as advertising billboards and the flag-decorated streets of Bastille Day. His approach was closer to Impressionism, but like his fellow Fauves he embraced simplified form, brilliant colors and direct visible brushwork.



Figure **3.1.3.13**: Raoul Dufy, *The Street Decked with Flags*, 1906, oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm (MNAM, Centre Pompidou, Paris)

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3.1.4: André Derain, The Dance

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID

188138



Figure **3.1.4.1**: André Derain, *The Dance*, 1906, oil on canvas, 70 3/4 x 90 inches (Fridart Collection)

André Derain's *The Dance* is an ambitious and remarkably eclectic painting that combines references to multiple European and non-European sources. The highly saturated palette of the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow), with the addition of the secondary green, is characteristic of **Fauvism**, a pictorial style associated with wild and unrestrained expression. In its attempt to synthesize a disparate collection of sources and references, *The Dance* testifies to the multi-layered, hybrid approach modern artists adopted as they attempted to create art works imbued with so-called **primitive** qualities.

Exotic and primitive motifs

At seven and a half feet wide, *The Dance* is as large as Henri Matisse's Fauve masterpiece ***Bonheur de Vie/Joy of Life***, painted the same year. The subjects of the two paintings, female figures cavorting in an imaginary landscape, are similar, and both paintings suggest a fundamental union between humans and nature. Matisse's references are, however, classical and Arcadian, while Derain's are more exotic and primitive.



Figure **3.1.4.2**: Paul Gauguin, *Mahana no atua (Day of the God)*, 1894, oil on canvas, 26 7/8 x 36 inches (**Art Institute of Chicago**)

The Dance echoes the paintings of Paul Gauguin in both style and subject matter. Like Gauguin, Derain uses simplified forms and unmodulated areas of bright color in a composition that emphasizes flat, decorative qualities. The subject is overtly exotic with

nude and partially nude women displayed in a fantastic landscape along with a huge scarlet macaw and a green snake. These creatures allude to both their non-European native habitats and to an Edenic world where humans live in harmony with nature.

Derain also followed Gauguin in his eclectic combination of cultural references. However, unlike his predecessor, whose primitivist pastiches resulted from a sincere commitment to the discovery of universal symbols and spiritual forms, Derain's eclecticism is a more superficial adoption of varied exotic motifs. Art historians have identified references to Indian carved reliefs, African masks, Romanesque sculptures, European folk art, and Japanese prints in *The Dance*. The figure on the right is directly derived from another painting of "exotic" non-European women, **Eugène Delacroix's** *Women of Algiers*. The black woman on the right in Delacroix's imagined harem scene has become a racially ambiguous, mostly nude blonde woman with multi-colored skin in Derain's Fauve painting.



Figure **3.1.4.3**: Eugène Delacroix, *Women of Algiers*, 1834, oil on canvas, 180 x 229 cm (Louvre Museum, Paris)

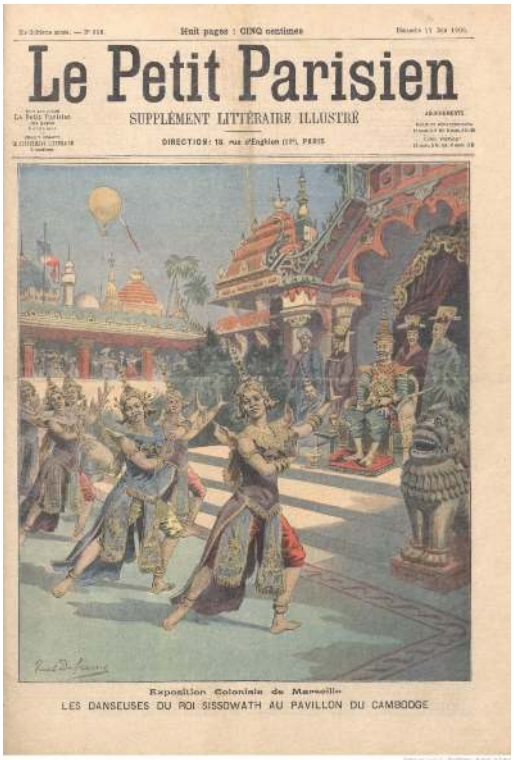


Figure 3.1.4.4: Cambodian dancers at the Colonial Exposition, Illustration for *Le Petit Parisien*, June 17, 1906

The Dance belongs to a well-established tradition of imagined primitivist scenes in European art that feature sexualized images of non-European women. It is also specifically of its time in its focus on dance. At the turn of the 20th century there was widespread interest in non-western dance forms. International expositions often included performances of traditional court and folk dances from non-western countries. Derain saw the Cambodian court dancers at the 1906 Colonial Exposition in Marseille around the time that he painted *The Dance*.

Modern dance also had its origins during this period. Dancers such as Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan rejected the stylized forms of classical ballet and focused on the body as a vehicle of direct, unfettered expression. Duncan saw her dancing as an expression of universal natural forces linked to **Ancient Greece**. Another popular dancer of the period, Ruth St. Denis, created "exotic" dances loosely based on Indian, **Egyptian**, and **Babylonian** mythology.



Figure **3.1.4.5**: Right: Isadora Duncan dancing, 1903. Right: Ruth St. Denis in *Radha*, c. 1906 (New York Public Library)

Fauvism and African art

Cultural eclecticism is a hallmark of European modern art in the early years of the 20th century, and Derain and his fellow Fauves Maurice Vlaminck and Henri Matisse were significant contributors to the trend. They were among the first modern artists to acquire African masks and sculptures, and Derain visited ethnographic collections in Paris and London to see non-western artifacts. These became increasingly available for purchase during this period as a consequence of Europe's escalating investment in its overseas colonies.

With its combination of references to many different cultures and styles, Derain's *The Dance* is a prime example of the period's cultural eclecticism. Aggressive primary colors, simplified non-naturalistic forms, and an emphasis on decoration combines with eroticized images of women in nature to signify the primitive.



Figure **3.1.4.6**: André Derain, *The Dance*, detail, 1906, oil on canvas, 70 3/4 x 90 inches (Fridart Collection)

For many modern artists the use of intense colors and rudimentary forms was considered a means to regain contact with the natural energies of the universe and express themselves directly. Their appreciation of the non-western works they collected was primarily formal (in other words, concerned with their appearance, and not their cultural context), and they adopted similar abbreviated and simplified forms in their own works.

Matisse remarked on the difference between the European approach to sculpting the human body and the African sculptures he saw in a Paris curio shop around 1905. European sculptors were interested in the naturalistic representation of musculature, while the African sculptures were "made in terms of their material, according to invented planes and proportions.[1]"

Primitivist styles and subjects

Both Matisse and Derain made sculptures of human figures that radically abstracted the body in response to the African sculptures they encountered. Derain's roughly-carved sandstone *Crouching Man* simplifies and reduces the human figure to a cube, using exaggerated forms to convey a mood of introspective despair.



Figure **3.1.4.7**: André Derain, *Crouching Man*, 1907, sandstone, 13 x 11 x 10 1/4 inches (**Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna**)

Matisse's more conventional *Reclining Nude* also uses simplification and exaggeration of body parts, as well as twisting the angle of the head, to explore alternative strategies for representing the human figure.



Figure **3.1.4.8**: Henri Matisse, *Reclining Nude I (Aurora)*, 1907, cast in bronze c. 1912, 13 11/16 x 19 3/4 x11 inches (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo)

Matisse's painting *The Blue Nude* was developed from similar formal concerns. The traditional European subject of the reclining nude, often associated with **Orientalist fantasies in the 19th century**, is here situated outdoors in a vaguely exotic setting suggested by the palm-like plants in the background. As in Matisse's sculpture, the shapes of the body are simplified and exaggerated to emphasize the buttocks and breasts.



Figure **3.1.4.9**: Henri Matisse, *Blue Nude (Memory of Biskra)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 56 1/8 inches (Baltimore Museum of Art)

Matisse's materials—paint on canvas—are emphasized, as is the artist's labor. We see his brushstrokes and, in places, the canvas underneath the paint. Matisse has not covered up changes he made to the figure, giving us the sense that we are seeing a work still in progress — further enhancing our awareness of the painting's materiality. Subtitled *Memory of Biskra*, after a town in Algeria Matisse had visited, the painting is the result of an encounter between European erotic fantasy and abstracted forms derived from African sculpture.

In *Blue Nude* and *The Dance*, Matisse and Derain used a liberated Fauve approach to color and form to depict female figures in an exotic setting. They combined what was considered a crude and primitive style with references to so-called primitive cultures. The paintings demonstrate how closely the Fauve painters' concerns were bound up with both primitivist fantasies of enjoying leisure and women in tropical landscapes and the formal qualities associated with primitivism — simplified drawing, flattened space, and bright decorative color.

Notes:

1. Quoted in Sarah Whitfield, *Fauvism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), page 161.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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3.1.5.3: Bonheur de Vivre

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3.1.5.1: Luxe, calme et volupté

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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188829



Henri Matisse, *Luxe, calme et volupté*, 1904, oil on canvas, 37 x 46″ (Museé d'Orsay, Paris)

Key points:

- *Luxe, calme et volupté* borrows from the Neo-Impressionist style in its brushwork, but does not adopt Neo-Impressionism's approach to color.
- Rather, this painting anticipates the Fauves's imaginative use of expressive color.
- Color and form are key ways that early 20th-century artists began to abandon representation for abstraction.

Painted while the artist stayed with the pointillist painter, Signac, at his home in Saint-Tropez on the Côte d'Azur. Matisse's title comes from Charles Baudelaire's poem, "L'invitation au voyage (Invitation To A Voyage)" from his collection, *The Flowers of Evil*. "Luxe, calme et volupté" translates just as it sounds in English: "Luxury, calm, and voluptuous(ness)."

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3.1.5.2: Open Window, Collioure

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188830



Figure **3.1.5.2.1**: Henri Matisse, *Open Window, Collioure*, 1905, oil on canvas, 55.3 x 46 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

An explosion of color

In Henri Matisse's *Open Window, Collioure* the casements of a large French window project toward us to reveal an explosion of brilliant Mediterranean color. The paint is applied very loosely; even in reproduction we can see almost every brushstroke. The painting looks as if it were made yesterday, and in some places (like the lower right where bare canvas is visible), seems unfinished. We can envision Matisse's working process brushstroke by brushstroke, and we are there with him responding with excitement to the wealth of color and light at a Mediterranean seaside town in summer.

Although the style implies a rapid or even slipshod painting process, *Open Window, Collioure* was carefully orchestrated in every aspect, from the composition to the color relationships and the paint application. The window is placed slightly off center to the left, which gives the composition a casual feeling, in keeping with the slapdash quality of the brushstrokes. Underpinning this seeming casualness, however, is a calculated structure of repeating and nested rectangles that creates both a strong surface pattern and a series of internal "windows."

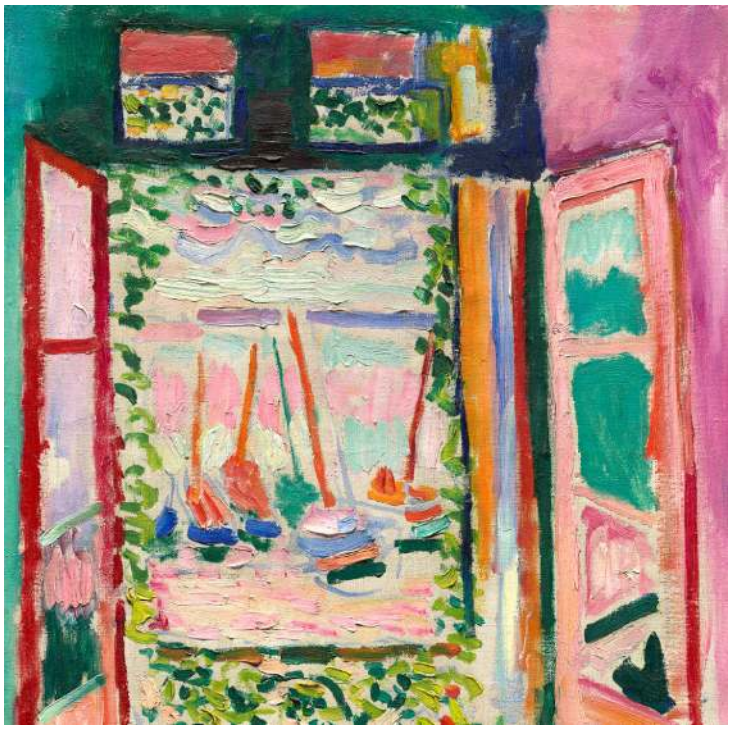


Figure **3.1.5.2.2**: Henri Matisse, *Open Window, Collioure*, detail, 1905, oil on canvas, 55.3 x 46 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

The brightest area of the painting, the central view of boats in harbor, is framed by some of the painting's darkest tones in both the literal window frame and a pattern of green leafy vines. Surrounding this central view are multiple subsidiary window panes. Two transom windows at the top frame more views of the porch window and vines. Glass panes in the casement windows reflect both the view outside the French window and the colors of the walls.

Brilliant colors ricochet and echo across the canvas. Matisse uses complementary color contrasts throughout, setting off his glowing reds and pinks with cool greens. The walls are fuchsia and green, and the upper window panes of the casements reflect the opposing wall's color, enhancing the intensity of the hues by contrast. A similar mutually intensifying contrast of colors appears where the vertical stripe of vivid orange paint, perhaps representing a curtain, is brushed next to the dark ultramarine strip of the window frame. Varied patterns of pale pink and turquoise brushstrokes represent sea and sky in the view out the window.

Denying the illusion of depth

Open Window, Collioure engages with, and ultimately undermines, the post-Renaissance conception of a painting being like a window. Matisse's drawing of the window emphasizes its role as a framing device located in a three-dimensional space. The casements open inward, creating a perspectival view leading to the window opening. The balcony with flower pots on the floor is a shallow intermediate space between the room and the view of the harbor, which reaches to the horizon. However, all of these indications of spatial depth are negated by color and paint application, which emphasize the flat surface of the canvas and fail to create a convincing illusionistic scene. We never forget that we are looking at a painting and not out a window.

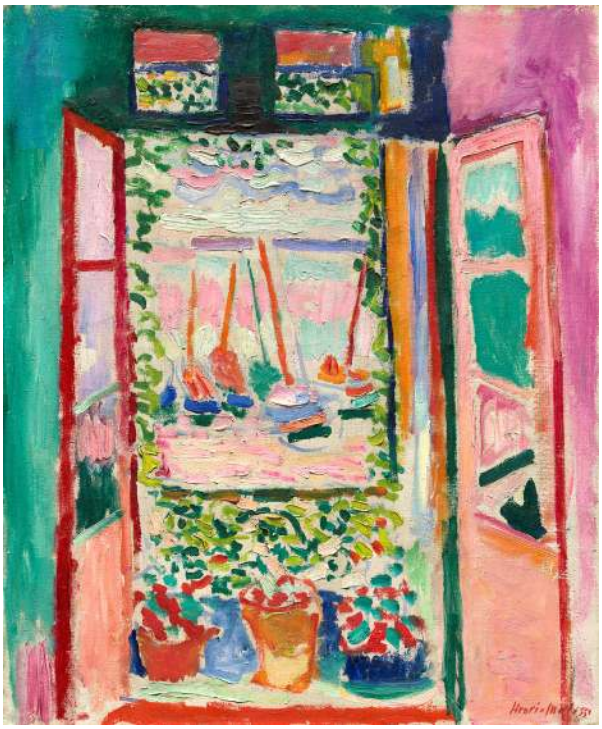


Figure **3.1.5.2.3**: Henri Matisse, *Open Window, Collioure*, 1905, oil on canvas, 55.3 x 46 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

The highly visible brushstrokes and areas of unpainted canvas are the most obvious way Matisse denies us the illusion of reality, but his use of color is also important. Not only is it extremely bright and flat, lacking the **chiaroscuro** modulations traditionally used to suggest volume and depth, it also repeatedly subverts clear differentiation of foreground and background. For example, the distant masts of the boats in the harbor and the much closer verticals of the window frames create a surface pattern of bright orange and red verticals. The more distant reds and oranges are not muted to indicate depth through atmospheric perspective. Similarly, the dark blue and green brushstrokes depicting the hulls of the boats are echoed by the dark blue and green paint strokes used to indicate edges of the window frames and various objects in the foreground.



Figure **3.1.5.2.4**: Gustave Caillebotte, *Man on a Balcony: Boulevard Haussmann*, 1880, oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm (Private Collection)

A glance at Gustave Caillebotte's compositionally similar *Man on a Balcony: Boulevard Haussmann* shows how completely Matisse undermines the depiction of perspectival depth. Caillebotte's naturalistic scene clearly distinguishes between the darker dominating foreground space of the balcony and the vista of sunlit buildings receding down the boulevard. In Matisse's *Open Window, Collioure*, the distant harbor view dominates, and it is framed by the window as if it were itself a painting. It has no defined spatial relationship to the foreground, unlike Caillebotte's vista down the boulevard where we can determine the relation of the balcony to the view with precision.

The 1905 *Salon d'Automne*

Open Window, Collioure was one of several paintings Matisse exhibited with a group of friends at the 1905 *Salon d'Automne* in Paris. A sympathetic art critic, Louis Vauxcelles, inadvertently named the group when he described the effect of their brilliantly colored paintings hanging on the walls surrounding two classicizing sculptures as being like **Donatello** among the *fauves* (wild beasts). The name came to reflect the extreme public reaction to the paintings, which were widely considered disturbing and outrageous. Conservative critics mocked the paintings in the press, but the **Fauve** painters ultimately profited from the notoriety and found dealers, critics and collectors who supported their work.



Figure **3.1.5.2.5**: Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905, oil on canvas, 80.6 x 59.7 cm (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

Matisse was the leader of the group, and his *Woman with a Hat* was considered the most scandalous painting in the "fauve cage" at the exhibition. The use of brilliant complementary colors, prominent brushwork and seemingly unfinished areas is very similar to *Open Window, Collioure*, but their effect in this traditionally-composed portrait of a woman was unsettling.



Figure **3.1.5.2.6**: Left: Berthe Morisot, *Summer's Day*, detail, c. 1879, oil on canvas, entire painting 45.7 x 75.2 cm (The National Gallery, London); Right: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*, 1899, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

The crude dabs of paint, harsh simplified features, and the rendering of the shadows on the face in brilliant turquoise were all startling, even for viewers used to the painterly abbreviations and bright colors of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. The faces in Morisot's Impressionist *Summer's Day*, and van Gogh's Post-Impressionist *Self-Portrait* lack realistic detail and call attention to the artists' brushstrokes, but the color used in both paintings remains well within the range of naturalistic depiction compared to Matisse's *Woman with a Hat*.

In addition to the aggressively non-naturalistic tones in the face, Matisse's style in *The Woman with the Hat* is raw and disjunctive. The painting looks unfinished and unresolved, with some parts painted in heavy impasto and others barely brushed in. The Salon jury tried to persuade him to retract the painting from his submission, but Matisse refused, indicating that he believed the painting to be finished and ready for exhibition.

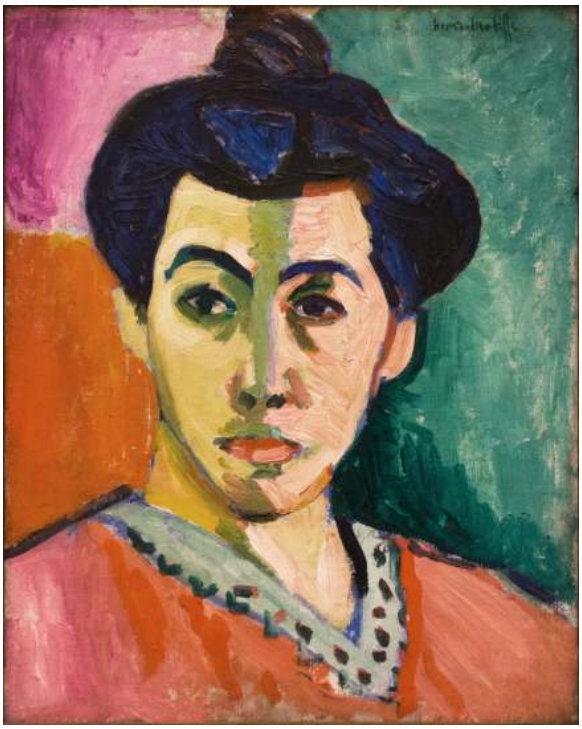


Figure **3.1.5.2.7**: Henri Matisse, P*ortrait of Mme. Matisse: The Green Line*, 1905, oil on canvas, 40.5 x 32.5 (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen)

Matisse's paintings in the 1905 *Salon d'Automne* with their disjunctive brushwork and tempestuous color were his most radical Fauve works. After the exhibition, Matisse continued to use bright non-naturalistic color, but his paint application became more consistent and his colors less chaotic. In *Portrait of Mme. Matisse: The Green Line* and ***Bonheur de Vivre*** the brilliant colors are organized into larger areas to maximize their intensity. Over the course of the next few years he became increasingly concerned with pictorial harmony.



Figure **3.1.5.2.8**: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

In his 1908 “Notes of a Painter” Matisse wrote:

> ***The entire arrangement of my picture is expressive . . .. Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the diverse elements at the painter’s command to express his feelings. In a picture every part will . . . play its appointed role. . . . A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety. . . .Henri Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” [1908] trans. J. D. Flam, in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., Art in Theory 1900-2000 (London: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 70-71.***

Throughout his career Matisse was dedicated to the expressive potential of color: “My choice of colors is based on observation, on sensitivity, on felt experiences. . . . I simply try to put down colors which render my sensation . . . a moment comes when all the parts have found their definite relationships . . ..”[1]

Although “Notes of a Painter” was written some years after Matisse painted *Open Window*, these passages indicate that he was balancing three different projects. He was attempting to be responsive to (1) the perceptual information he received from the motif, (2) the feelings that he got from it, and (3) the decorative formal qualities of the work of art itself. Keeping all three in play allows *The Open Window* to read simultaneously as a window into real space, a flat plane covered with harmonious color, and an expression of the joyful warmth of a Mediterranean day.



Figure **3.1.5.2.9**: Henri Matisse,*Open Window at Collioure*, 1914, oil on canvas, 116.5 x 89 cm (MNAM – Centre Pompidou, Paris)

The Open Window was one of Matisse's most radical Fauve paintings, but it is also an example of his enduring dedication to expressive color and pictorial harmony. Matisse painted many windows throughout his career, including ***The Blue Window*** and ***The Piano Lesson***, and they reflect the variations in his style over time. *The Open Window* of 1905 represents the barely restrained exuberance of his Fauve period, while a second version of *Open Window at Collioure* painted in September 1914 just after the start of World War I conveys the mood of those dark days.

Notes:

1. Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter" [1908], trans. J. D. Flam, in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., Art in Theory 1900-2000, (London: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 70-71.

Additional resources:

***The Open Window, Collioure* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC**

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3.1.5.3: Bonheur de Vivre

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188831



Figure **3.1.5.3.1**: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

The Joy of Life

In 1906, Henri Matisse finished what is often considered his greatest Fauve painting, the *Bonheur de Vivre*, or the "*Joy of Life*." It is a large-scale painting depicting an Arcadian landscape filled with brilliantly colored forest, meadow, sea, and sky and populated by nude figures both at rest and in motion. As with the earlier Fauve canvases, color is responsive only to emotional expression and the formal needs of the canvas, not the realities of nature. The references are many, but in form and date, *Bonheur de Vivre* is closest to Cézanne's last great image of bathers.



Figure **3.1.5.3.2**: Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906, oil on canvas, 210 x 250.8 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Matisse and his sources

Like Cézanne, Matisse constructs the landscape so that it functions as a stage. In both works trees are planted at the sides and in the far distance, and their upper boughs are spread apart like curtains, highlighting the figures lounging beneath. And like Cézanne, Matisse unifies the figures and the landscape. Cézanne does this by stiffening and tilting his trunk-like figures. In Matisse's work, the serpentine arabesques that define the contours of the women are heavily emphasized, and then reiterated in the curvilinear lines of the trees.

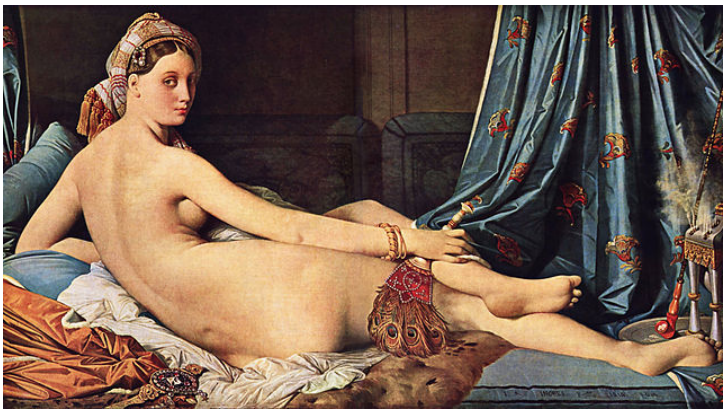


Figure **3.1.5.3.3**: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1814, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 162.56 cm (Museé du Louvre, Paris)

Matisse creates wildly sensual figures in *Bonheur de Vivre*, which show how he was clearly informed by Ingres's odalisques and harem fantasies.



Figure **3.1.5.3.4**: Titian, *Bacchananal of the Andrians*, 1523-26, oil on canvas, 175 x 193 (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

Additionally, Matisse references Titian. For like Titian's *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, the scene depicted in *Bonheur de Vivre* is an expression of pure pleasure. Here is a place full of life and love and free from want or fear. Instead of a contemporary scene in a park, on the banks of the Seine, or other recognizable places in nature, Matisse has returned to mythic paradise.

Radicalism, or how to color outside the lines

But do not be misled by his interest in myth—Matisse is not joining in with Bouguereau or any other Salon artist. This is the epitome of Fauvism, a radical new approach that incorporate purely expressive, bright, clear colors and wildly sensual forms. Matisse's painting s perhaps the first canvas to clearly understand Cézanne's great formal challenge, and to actually further the elder master's ideas. In fact, despite its languid poses, *Bonheur de Vivre* was regarded as the most radical painting of its day. Because of this, Matisse became known, briefly, as the most daring painter in Paris.



Figure **3.1.5.3.5**: Henri Matisse, detail, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

So what was daring about this canvas? Here is one key issue: unlike the paintings by Cézanne, Ingres, or Titian, Matisse's work does not depict forms that recede in the background and diminish in scale. If you study the figures in the foreground and the middle ground of *Bonheur de Vivre*, you will notice that their scale is badly skewed. The shift of scale between the player of the double flute (bottom center) and the smooching couple (bottom right) is plausible, if we take the musician to be a child, but what of the giants just behind them? Compared to the figures standing in the wings, who are obviously mature women (middle ground left), these center women are of enormous proportion. They are simply too big to make sense of within the traditional conventions of Western painting.

Perspective, patronage and Picasso

So why has Matisse done this? How could these shifts of scale make sense? Have we seen anything like this before? Well, in a sense we have. Cézanne's painting ruptured forms in order to accurately explore vision as experienced through time and space—in other words, forms look different depending on where we are in relation to them.

In fact, this exploration of vision through space is the key to understanding Matisse's work. By incorporating shifting perspectives, he brought this idea to a grand scale. Put simply, Matisse's shifting scale is actually the result of our changing position vis-à-vis the figures. As a result of his experimentation with perspective, the viewer relates differently to the painting and is required to "enter" the scene. It is only from the varied perspectives within this landscape that the abrupt ruptures of scale make sense.



Figure **3.1.5.3.6**: Henri Matisse, detail, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

The painting was purchased by a wealthy expatriate American writer-poet named Gertrude Stein and her brother, Leo Stein, who shared a home filled with modern art at 27 Rue de Fleurus, in Paris. This was also the location for Gertrude Stein's weekly salon. Here, Matisse, Apollinaire, the young and largely unknown Picasso and other members of the avant-garde came together to exchange ideas.

Stein was able to attract such a crowd not only because of her literary skills but because she often provided financial support to these nearly destitute artists. In fact, the Steins bought Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre soon* after its completion and hung it in their dining room for all to see. One person who saw it there was Picasso. By all accounts the painting's fame was too much for the terribly competitive young Spaniard. He determined to out do Matisse, and he did with his 1907 canvas, *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (MoMA).



Figure **3.1.5.3.7**: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.9 x 233.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Picasso turned Matisse's sensuality into violent pornography. Matisse in turn responds to the challenge of what was then called "primitivism" with his own brand of aggression in his *Blue Nude*.



Figure **3.1.5.3.8**: Henri Matisse, *The Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*, 1907, oil on canvas, 92.1 x 140.3 cm (Baltimore Museum of Art)

Additional resources:

This painting at The Barnes Foundation

The Fauves from the National Gallery of Art Online Tour

Matisse at MoMA

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3.1.5.4: Dance I

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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188832



Figure 3.1.5.4.1: Henri Matisse, *Dance I*, 1909, oil on canvas, 259.7 x 390 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

In 1909 Matisse received an important commission. An extremely wealthy Russian industrialist named Sergei Shchukin asked Matisse for three large scale canvases to decorate the spiral staircase of his mansion, the Trubetskoy Palace, in Moscow. The large and well loved painting, *Dance I* at MoMA, is somewhat disingenously titled. Although it is full scale and in oil, Matisse did not consider it more than a preparatory sketch. Yet a comparison between the initial and final versions is instructive. Matisse borrowed the motif from the back of the 1905-06 painting *Bonheur de Vivre*, although he has removed one dancer.



Figure 3.1.5.4.2: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 x 240.7 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

In *Dance I*, the figures express the light pleasure and joy that was so much a part of the earlier Fauve masterpiece. The figures are drawn loosely, with almost no interior definition. They have been likened to bean bag dolls because of their formless and unrestricted movements. The bodies certainly don't seem to be restrained by way. But don't let this childlike spontaneity fool you. Matisse works very hard to make his paintings seem effortless. Imagine for a moment, that instead of this childlike style, Matisse had decided to render this figures with the frozen density of Jacques Louis David. Would the sense of pure joy, the sense of play have been as well expressed? Matisse has done something that is actually very difficult. He has unlearned the lessons of representation so that he can create an image where form matches content.

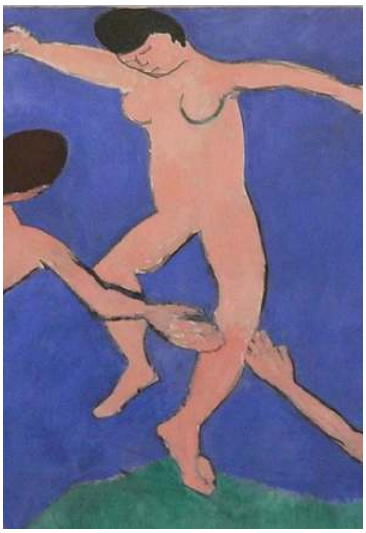


Figure **3.1.5.4.3**: Henri Matisse, detail, *Dance I*, 1909, oil on canvas, 259.7 x 390 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

The dancers inhabit a brilliant blue and green field. But what exactly does the green represent? Many people would quickly reply, “a grassy hilltop.” Okay, but what then is the blue intended to represent? If I were lecturing at MoMA, as I often do, many listeners would offer that “the blue is the sky that rises above the hill.” But others in my group might begin to look frustrated. One might then say, “that’s not what I see, the blue is really water moving back into the distance.”



Figure **3.1.5.4.4**: Henri Matisse, detail, *Dance I*, 1909, oil on canvas, 259.7 x 390 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

What Matisse has done here, even in seemingly simple rendering, is use spatial ambiguity to explore one of the key issues in modern painting, the conflict between the illusion of depth and an acknowledgment of the flatness of the canvas. One final point here, did you notice the break in the circle? The hands of the two front dancers are parted. Matisse has been careful to allow this break only where it overlaps the knee so as not to interrupt the continuity of the color. Why do this? The part is often interpreted in two ways, as a source of tension that requires resolution or, as an invitation to us the viewer to join in, after all, the break is at the point closest to our position.



Figure **3.1.5.4.5**: Henri Matisse, *Dance*, 1910, oil on canvas, 260 x 291 cm (The Hermitage, St. Petersburg)

The final version of *Dance* has a very different emotional character. It has been described as forbidding, menacing, tribal, ritualistic, even demonic. Drum beats almost seem to be heard as the simple pleasure of the original is overwhelmed. What causes these dramatic changes in mood? Beyond the color shift, which is pretty obvious, the figures of the 1910 canvas are drawn with more interior line, line which often suggests tension and physical power. See for instance, the back left figure. Another more subtle change occurs where the two back figures touch the ground. In the 1909 canvas, the green reaches up to the feet of the two back most dancers, in the 1910 canvas, something else happens, the green seems to compress under the dancer's weight. This subtle change creates either a sense of lightness or a sense of weight and contributes to the way we perceive each painting. So be careful before concluding that Matisse was actually drawing like a child, he knew exactly what he was doing.

Additional resources:

This painting at The Museum of Modern Art

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3.1.5.5: The Red Studio

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **3.1.5.5.1**: Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Speakers: Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris



Figure **3.1.5.5.1**: Henri Matisse, The Red Studio, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Dismantling spatial illusion

Since Manet (and Degas, Monet, and Cezanne), artists have sought to undermine the illusion of space that had ruled painting since about 1425. Spatial illusion was increasingly seen as a defect that reduced the integrity of painting. But as the earlier painters of the avant-garde have shown, ridding a painting of illusion is almost impossible. The audience is trained to expect three dimensional space and sees it given the opportunity. This is Matisse's challenge. He meets this challenge–the destruction of spatial illusion, in three stages.



Figure 3.1.5.5.2: Henri Matisse, *The Pink Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 221 cm (Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow)

The color red



Figure 3.1.5.5.3: Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Red is often thought of as the most aggressive color. It has the most punch, and that's what Matisse needed here. This canvas was a part of a series, there is, for instance, a *Pink Studio* too. But that canvas was concerned with different issues. Here, the red is an attempt to find a color that is forceful enough to resist the illusion of deep space by pushing to the surface. The red is, of course painted onto the flat canvas but actually fails to remain there visually. Instead, the red becomes the walls and furnishing of the room seen in space. Illusion triumphs–Matisse is thwarted.

Illusionism

This triumph of illusion is due in part to the linear perspective that defines the table, chairs, and the walls and floor of the studio. But look! Matisse has constructed some of the worst linear perspective ever seen. Receding lines should converge, but look at the chair on the lower right. The lines widen as they go back. And look to rear left corner of the room. The corner is defined by the edge of the pink canvas but above that painting, the line that must define the corner is missing! Matisse is literally dismantling the perspective of the room but it makes no difference, we still see the room as an inhabitable space. Illusion still triumphs.

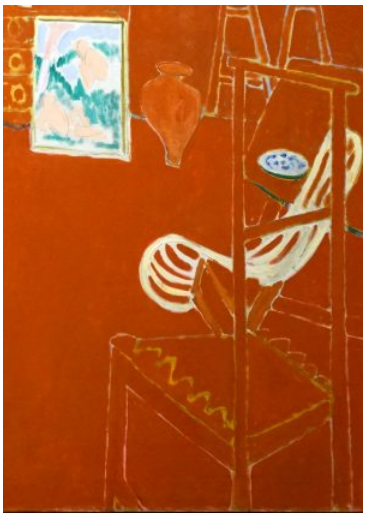


Figure **3.1.5.5.4**: Chair (detail), Henri Matisse, *The Red Studio*, 1911, oil on canvas, 181 x 219.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Figure-Ground Relationship

Although it is very difficult to see in reproduction, if seen in person at MoMA, it is clear that the whitish lines that define form in the red field are not painted on top of the red. Instead, they are reserve lines. In other words, the white lines are actually the canvas below. Matisse painted the red planes up to the line on either side, leaving a narrow gap of white canvas in between. This is really IMPORTANT. Stay with me on this. The white line is actually emerging from below the red. It is beneath. The red is of course painted on top of the white canvas.

Okay, now pay attention. Matisse has realized that illusion is almost certain to triumph no matter how aggressively he tries to undermine it. We, as the audience, will see space if given the slightest opportunity. So if we see illusion at such a basic level, what hope does Matisse have of destroying it? In fact, his reserve line are his really brilliant solution. The chairs, the dresser, the clock, each object, or figure in *The Red Studio* is constructed out of the canvas below. At the same time, the ground which supports those figures, is constructed out of a plane of red that is physically above the canvas. What Matisse has done then is reverse the figure ground relationship. He has made the figure out of the ground (the canvas) and made the ground out of the figure (the red paint on top). When seen in person, the recognition of this does finally destroy illusion, Matisse triumphs!

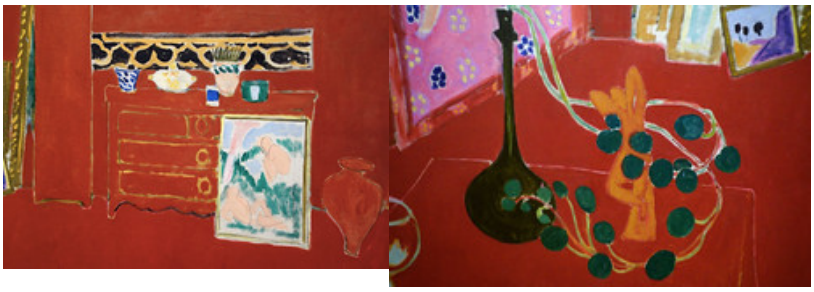
Additional resources:

This painting at MoMA

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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3.1.5.6: The Blue Window

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **3.1.5.6.3**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art.

Additional resources:

View this work in MoMA's collection

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3.1.5.7: Goldfish

by CHARLOTTE WILKINS

Page ID
188835



Figure **3.1.5.7.1**: Henri Matisse, *Goldfish*, 1912, oil on canvas, 146 x 97 cm (Pushkin Museum of Art, Moscow)

Goldfish were introduced to Europe from East Asia in the 17th century. From around 1912, goldfish became a recurring subject in the work of Henri Matisse. They appear in no less than nine of his paintings, as well as in his drawings and prints. *Goldfish*, 1912 belongs to a series that Matisse produced between spring and early summer 1912. However, unlike the others, the focus here centers on the fish themselves.

Color

The goldfish immediately attract our attention due to their color. The bright orange strongly contrasts with the more subtle pinks and greens that surround the fish bowl and the blue-green background. Blue and orange, as well as green and red, are complementary colors and, when placed next to one another, appear even brighter. This technique was used extensively by the Fauves, and is particularly striking in Matisse's earlier canvas *Le Bonheur de vivre*. Although he subsequently softened his palette, the bold orange is reminiscent of Matisse's fauvist years, which continued to influence his use of color throughout his career.

Golden age



Figure **3.1.5.7.2**: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 176.5 cm × 240.7 cm (Barnes Foundation, Lower Merion, PA)

But why was Henri Matisse so interested in goldfish? One clue may be found in his visit to Tangier, Morocco, where he stayed from the end of January until April 1912. He noted how the local population would day-dream for hours, gazing into goldfish bowls. Matisse would subsequently depict this in *The Arab Café*, a painting he completed during his second trip to Morocco, a few months later.

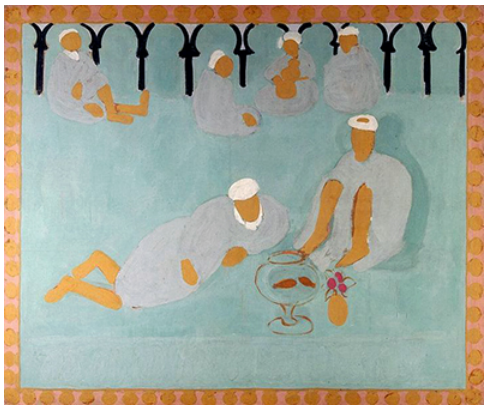


Figure **3.1.5.7.3**: Henri Matisse, *Le café Maure (Arab Coffeehouse)*, 1911-13, oil on canvas, 176 x 210 cm (Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg)

In a view consistent with other Europeans who visited North Africa, Matisse admired the Moroccans' lifestyle, which appeared to him to be relaxed and contemplative. For Matisse, the goldfish came to symbolize this tranquil state of mind and, at the same time, became evocative of a paradise lost, a subject—unlike goldfish—frequently represented in art. Matisse was referring back to artists such as Nicolas Poussin (for example, *Et in Arcadia ego*), and Paul Gauguin (who painted during his travels to places like Tahiti).



Figure **3.1.5.7.4**: Nicolas Poussin, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1637-38, oil on canvas, 87 x 120 cm (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

The paradise theme is also prevalent in Matisse's work. It found expression in *Le Bonheur de vivre (The Joy of Life)*, and the goldfish should be understood as a kind of shorthand for paradise in Matisse's painting. The mere name "gold-fish" defines these creatures as ideal inhabitants of an idyllic golden age, which it is fair to say Matisse was seeking when he travelled to North Africa. It is also likely that Matisse, who by 1912 was already familiar with the art of Islamic cultures, was interested in the meaning of gardens, water and vegetation in Islamic art—as well as symbolizing the beauty of divine creation, these were evocations of paradise.

Metaphor for the studio



Figure **3.1.5.7.5**: Paul Gauguin, *The Siesta (Atuona, Hiva Oa, Marquesas Islands)*, c. 1892–94, oil on canvas, 88.9 x 116.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

However, *Goldfish* was not painted in Morocco. Henri Matisse painted it at home, in Issy-les-Moulineaux, near Paris. Matisse had moved to Issy in September 1909 to escape the pressures of Parisian life. So what you see here are Matisse's own plants, his own garden furniture, and his own fish tank. The artist was drawn to the tank's tall cylindrical shape, as this enabled him to create a succession of rounded contours with the top and bottom of the tank, the surface of the water and the table. Matisse also found the goldfish themselves visually appealing. Matisse painted *Goldfish* in his garden conservatory, where, like the goldfish, he was surrounded by glass.

Contemplation

Matisse distinguished predatory observation from disinterested contemplation, the latter being his preferred approach. *Goldfish* invites the viewer to indulge in the pleasure of watching the graceful movement and bright colors of the fish. Matisse once wrote that he dreamt of "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art that could be […] a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair that provides relaxation from fatigue." This is precisely what Matisse wanted *Goldfish* to provide for the viewer.

Constructing pictorial space

The painting contains a tension created by Matisse's depiction of space. The fish are seen simultaneously from two different angles. From the front, the goldfish are portrayed in such a way that the details of their fins, eyes and mouths are immediately recognizable to the viewer. Seen from above, however, the goldfish are merely suggested by colorful brushstrokes. If we then look at the plants through the transparent glass surface, we notice that they are distorted compared to the 'real' plants in the background.

Matisse paints the plants and flowers in a decorative manner. The upper section of the picture, above the fish tank, resembles a patterned wallpaper composed of flattened shapes and colors. What is more, the table-top is tilted upwards, flattening it and making it difficult for us to imagine how the goldfish and flowerpots actually manage to remain on the table. Matisse constructed this original juxtaposition of viewpoints and spatial ambiguity by observing Paul Cézanne's still-life paintings. Cézanne described art as "a harmony parallel to nature". And it is clear here that although Matisse was attentive to nature, he did not imitate it but used his image of it to reassemble his own pictorial reality. Although this can be confusing for the viewer, Matisse's masterful use of color and pattern successfully holds everything together.

This painting is an illustration of some of the major themes in Matisse's painting: his use of complimentary colors, his quest for an idyllic paradise, his appeal for contemplative relaxation for the viewer and his complex construction of pictorial space.

Additional Resources:

The Pushkin Museum of Art

Matisse's Goldfish and Sculpture, MoMA

Matisse's *Young Woman before an Aquarium*, Barnes Foundation

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3.1.5.8: The Piano Lesson

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
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Video **3.1.5.8.1**: Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916 (MoMA)

Key points:

- With its austere geometries and structured sense of balance, *The Piano Lesson* is sometimes seen as Matisse's answer to Cubism.
- The composition opposes the sensual, suggested by the sculpture in the left foreground, to discipline and order, implied by the geometric image of a woman in the upper right.
- This painting could serve as an allegory on art making, which requires balance between emotional expression and intellectual understanding.

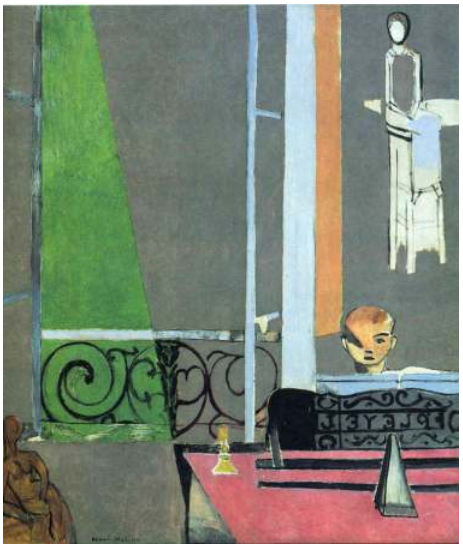


Figure **3.1.5.8.1**: Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

This highly abstract painting is important because of its relation to the Cubist grid developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, because of its biographical aspects, and especially due to its thoughtful iconography (symbolic content).

A nostalgic image

This large flat gray painting can be a bit confusing at first. Let's begin with the boy in the lower right. He is the artist's son, Pierre Matisse, who grows up to become a famous art dealer in New York in the 1940s. It's worth remembering that 1916 was during world war one, the most devastating conflict Europe had yet known. When Henri painted this image, Pierre was actually mobilized. The painter did not know if his son would return. In a way then, this is a nostalgic image, Matisse has painted his son much younger then he actually was, perhaps recalling happier times. Maybe happy isn't really the right word since Pierre looks pretty miserable. Maybe I'm just remembering my own childhood piano lessons, but his is a look of worried concentration. A portion of his face even seems to reflect that instrument of the devil, commonly known as a metronome. Pierre sits at the piano well off to the side, trapped in the house even as the open French window (a floor-to-ceiling hinged window that opens onto a wrought iron railing) beckons. Finally, what is that very abstract truncated triangle of green? Often it is interpreted as ray of sun reaching across the lawn outside.

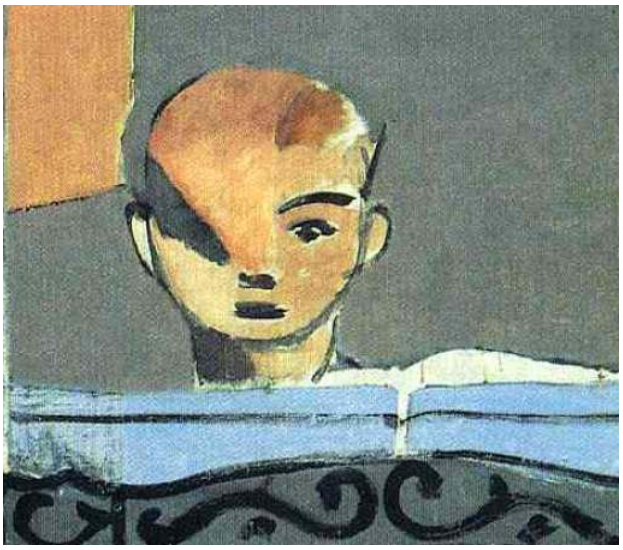


Figure **3.1.5.8.2**: Detail, Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

You can see why poor little Pierre is so attentive. His music teacher literally hovers above him, cold, distant, and aloof. What a wonderful contrast to the other female figure in the painting.While the teacher represents discipline through her rigid rectilinear form, the small bronze nude at the lower left is virtually all curves. This small sculpture by Matisse is meant to represent the creative spirit while the teacher represents discipline, and like two boxers between rounds, each is in her corner. But wait! Is the teacher really there? Space is so ambiguous that it is hard to tell if there is really a distant room for her to inhabit. In fact, there is not and she is not. This is Matisse's house in the suburb Issey-les-Moulineaux and this is a wall. The "teacher" is actually a painting by Matisse titled, *Woman on a High Stool (Germaine Raynal*), 1914 (MoMA).



Figure 3.1.5.8.3: Detail, Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

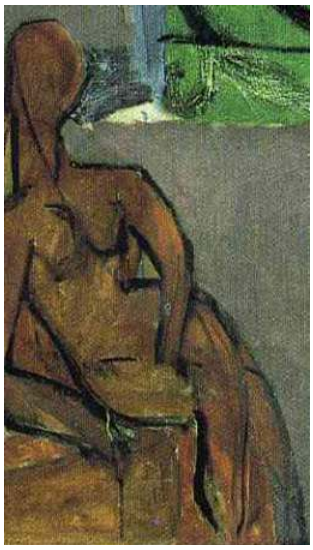


Figure 3.1.5.8.4: Detail, Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

Matisse has transformed the original painting in order that Raynal play the part of the strict instructor, Matisse often created variations on themes that he had already treated. So, in fact, Matisse has created a painting of a painting and a painting of a sculpture. This suggests that perhaps *The Piano Lesson* is not only about Pierre and his childhood experiences but more importantly, the act of creation itself. Is Pierre actually a stand in for Henri? After all, music is a common metaphor for the visual arts.

A visual equivalent of music

Is Matisse then saying that art is the result of both sensual creativity (the sculpture) and strict discipline (the painting)–is the metronome that swings between the two, a mediator? And then what of the odd inclusion of the carved music stand which contains the brand of the piano, “PLEYEL” (which is read backwards as we see it)?



Figure **3.1.5.8.5**: Detail, Henri Matisse, *The Piano Lesson*, 1916, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 212.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York City)

As you can see from the later and less abstract painting *Music Lesson*, Matisse has removed everything that is not essential from the 1916 canvas. So why then retain these letters? And why retain the playful swirling wrought iron fence? According to Jack Flam, a leading Matisse scholar and an old instructor of mine (and by the way, not very strict nor rectilinear), Matisse wants us to read the letters from right to left and then continue to read past the music stand by jumping to the curving iron fence which he believes to be an abstract expression or visual equivalent of the music (art) that is being produced.



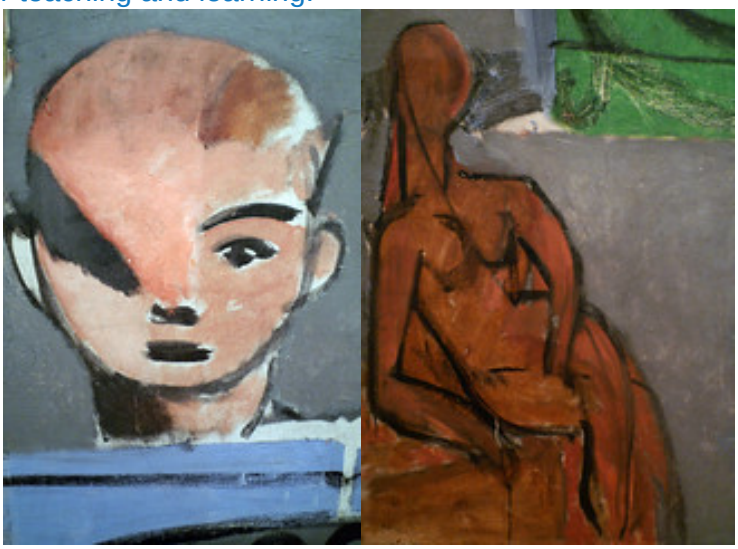
Figure **3.1.5.8.6**: Henri Matisse, *The Music Lesson*, 1917, oil on canvas, 245.1 x 210.8 (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

Additional resources:

This painting at MoMA

Audio on this painting from MoMA

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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3.1.5.9: The illustrated book Jazz

- *by THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART*

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Video **3.1.5.9.1**: Video from The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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3.1.5.10: The Dance at the Barnes Foundation

- by **BANK OF AMERICA**

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An opportunity to reclaim his position as a leading figure of modern art—and to do it publicly and on a grand scale—the commission of *The Dance* was a creative milestone in Henri Matisse's career. This graceful and harmonious mural was created at the request of the Barnes Foundation's founder, Dr. Albert C. Barnes, who asked the artist to fill the lunettes of the main gallery, giving him free rein to choose the subject matter. Learn more about Matisse and this work with Thom Collins, Neubauer Family Executive Director and President of the Barnes Foundation.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2: Expressionism

The term "Expressionism" first emerged as a way to classify new types of art that emphasized emotional impact over descriptive accuracy.

c. 1905 - 1914

3.2.1: Expressionism, an introduction

3.2.2: Expressionism as Nordic?

3.2.3: Der Blaue Reiter

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- 3.2.4.1: Self-Portrait As a Soldier
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3.2.5: Paula Modersohn-Becker, Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace, Half-Length I

3.2.6: Emil Nolde, Young Couple

3.2.7: Alexej von Jawlensky, Young Girl in a Flowered Hat

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- 3.2.8.2: Improvisation 28 (second version)
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3.2.9: Franz Marc and the animalization of art

3.2.10: Egon Schiele

- 3.2.10.1: Seated Male Nude (Self-Portrait)
- 3.2.10.2: Nazi looting- Egon Schiele’s Portrait of Wally
- 3.2.10.3: The Hermits
- 3.2.10.4: Wangechi Mutu on Egon Schiele

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3.2.1: Expressionism, an introduction

by SHAWN ROGGENKAMP

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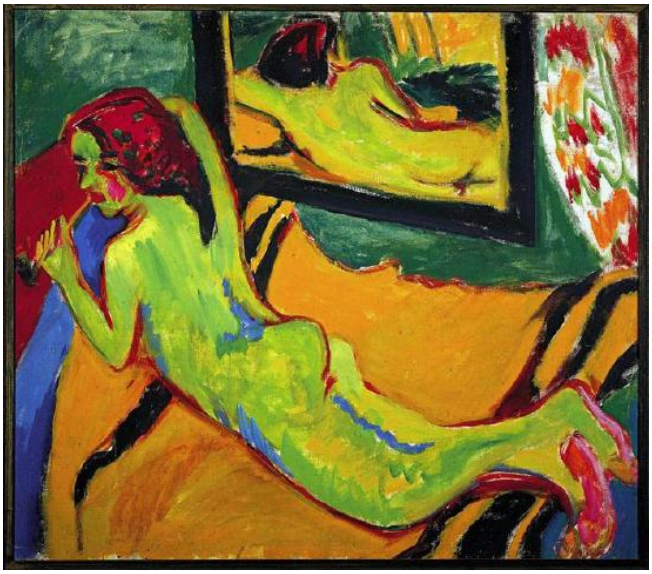


Figure **3.2.1.1**: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Reclining Nude in Front of Mirror, 1909-1910, oil on canvas, 83.3 x 95.5 cm (Brücke-Museum, Berlin)

Imagine a painting where the magentas scream, the greens glare, and coarse brushstrokes become more ominous the longer you look at them. Paintings like this, where the artist uses color, line, and visible techniques to evoke powerful responses from the viewer date from the early twentieth century but continue expressive traditions that can be found throughout art's history (see, for example, **work** by Francisco Goya). When capitalized as "Expressionism," however, the term refers more specifically to an artistic tendency that became popular throughout Europe in the early twentieth century. Like many categories in art history, Expressionism was not a name coined by artists themselves. It first emerged around 1910 as a way to classify art that shared common stylistic traits and seemed to emphasize emotional impact over descriptive accuracy. For this reason, artists like **Edvard Munch** straddle the line between **Post-Impressionist developments** in late 19th century painting and early 20th century Expressionism. Likewise, the **Fauves** in France exhibited similar characteristics in their work and are often linked to Expressionism.



Figure 3.2.1.2: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Manifesto*, 1906, woodcut, 28.8 x 22.2 cm, Künstlergruppe Brücke, Dresden

Though many artists of the early twentieth century can accurately be called Expressionists, two groups that developed in Germany, Die Brücke (The Bridge) and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), are among the best known and help to define the style. Influenced in part by the spiritual interests of **Romanticism** and **Symbolism**, these artists moved further from the idealized figures and smooth surface of 19th century academic painting that can be seen in paintings by **Lawrence Alma-Tadema**, for example. Instead of depicting the visible exterior of their subjects, they sought to express profound emotional experience through their art. German Expressionists, like other European artists of the time, found inspiration in so-called "primitive" sources that included African art, as well as European medieval and folk art and others untrained in Western artistic traditions. For the Expressionists, these sources offered alternatives to established conventions of European art and suggested a more authentic creative impulse.

Die Brücke

In 1905, four young artists working in Dresden and Berlin, joined together, calling themselves Die Brücke (The Bridge). Led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, the group wanted to create a radical art that could speak to modern audiences, which they characterized as young, vital, and urban. Drawn from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century German philosopher, the name "Die Brücke" describes their desire to serve as a bridge from the present to the future. While each artist had his own personal style, Die Brücke art is characterized by bright, often arbitrary colors and a "primitive" aesthetic, inspired by both African and European medieval art. Their work often addressed modern urban themes of alienation and anxiety, and sexually charged themes in their depictions of the female nude.



Figure **3.2.1.3**: Erich Heckel, *Fränzi Reclining*, 1910, woodcut, 35.6 x 55.5 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Their **first exhibition** was held in the showroom of a lamp factory in Dresden in 1906 for which they published a program of woodcut prints reflecting their interest in earlier traditions of German art. In the introductory broadsheet (above left), Kirchner made clear the group's revolutionary intentions. He proclaimed,

> ***With faith in progress and in a new generation of creators and spectators we call together all youth. As youth, we carry the future and want to create for ourselves freedom of life and of movement against the long established older forces.***[1]

This optimism was not long-lived. Internal squabbling caused the group to dissolve in 1913 just prior to the start of the First World War.

Der Blaue Reiter



Figure **3.2.1.4**: Vasily Kandinsky, Cover of *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac*, Piper Verlag, Munich, 1912

Based in the German city of Munich, the group known as Der Blaue Reiter lasted only from their first exhibition at the Galerie Thannhausen in 1911 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Created as an alternative to Kandinsky's previous group, the more conservative **Neuen Künstlervereinigung München** (New Artists Association of Munich or NKVM), Die Blaue Reiter took its name from the motif of a horse and rider, often used by founding member Vasily Kandinsky.

This motif appeared on the cover of the *Blue Rider Almanac* (left), published in May 1912, and reflects Kandinsky's interest in medieval traditions and the folk art of his Russian homeland. In contrast to Die Brücke, whose subjects were physical and direct, Kandinsky and other Die Blaue Reiter artists explored the spiritual in their art, which often included symbolism and allusions to ethereal concerns. They thought these ideas could be communicated directly through formal elements of color and line, that, like

music, could evoke an emotional response in the viewer. Conceived by Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the almanac included essays by themselves and other German and Russian artists, musical compositions by Expressionist composers, such as Arnold Schönberg, and Kandinsky's experimental theater piece, "Der gelbe Klang" (The Yellow Sound). This range of content shows Der Blaue Reiter's efforts to provide a philosophical approach not just for the visual arts, but for culture more broadly. These ideas would become more fully developed at the Bauhaus where Kandinsky taught after the war (Marc died during the Battle of Verdun in 1916).

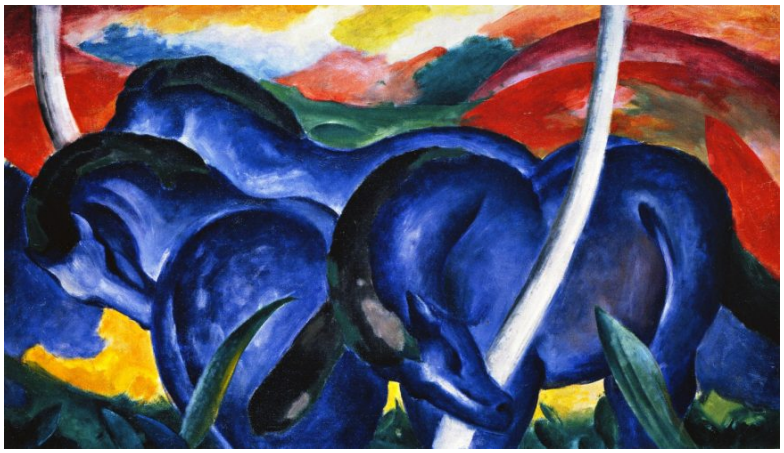


Figure **3.2.1.5**: Franz Marc, *The Large Blue Horses*, 1911, oil on canvas, 41.6 × 71.3 inches (Walker Art Center)

Austrian Expressionism

While the Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter groups had relatively defined memberships, Expressionist artists also worked independently. In Vienna, Oskar Kokoschka and Egon Schiele stand out for paintings that show intense, often violent feeling and for their efforts to represent deeper psychological meaning.



Figure **3.2.1.6**: Egon Schiele, *Self-Portrait with Chinese Lantern Plant*, 1912 (Leopold Museum, Vienna)

In the aftermath of the First World War, many artists in Germany felt that the forceful emotional style of Expressionism that had been so progressive before the war but had become less appropriate. **Neue Sachlichkeit** (New Objectivity) arose as a direct response to pre-war stylistic excess.

[1]Translated excerpt from Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993, page 65

Additional resources

Artists of Brücke: Themes in German Expressionist Prints (MoMA)

Der Blaue Reiter Almanac (MoMA)

The Blaue Reiter (Guggenheim)

Brücke Museum, Berlin (in German)

Fauvism on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

African Influences in Modern Art on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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3.2.2: Expressionism as Nordic?

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188141



Figure 3.2.2.1: Left: Edvard Munch, *Despair (Sick Atmosphere at Sunset)*, 1892, oil on canvas, 92 x 67 cm (**Munch Museum, Oslo**); Edvard Munch, T*he Scream*, 1893, pastel and tempera on cardboard, 91 x 73.5 cm (**National Art Gallery, Oslo**)

Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is recognized from Toledo to Timbuktu as a powerful visual expression of anxiety, but it had its genesis in a very specific place. As the artist recollected in a diary entry of 22 January 1892:

> *I was walking along the road with two friends – the sun went down – I felt a gust of melancholy – suddenly the sky turned a bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, tired to death – as the flaming skies hung like blood and sword over the blue-black fjord and the city – My friends went on – I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I felt a vast infinite scream [tear] through nature.*[1]

Munch was deeply affected by this incident and depicted it several times: first as *Despair* in 1892, and then in several different versions in different media under the title *The Scream*.

Munch's moment of anxiety occurred on a road along Ekeberg Hill overlooking Oslo. The wooden railing visible in the paintings and mentioned in his diary lined the steep cliffside of the fjord protecting Oslo's port. There is even some evidence that the famous blood-red, undulating sky that Munch associated with this feeling may also have been geographically specific. It closely resembles the pattern formed by polar stratospheric clouds visible almost exclusively in Northern Europe during the winter dusk.



Figure **3.2.2.2**: Paul Signac, *Houses in the Port of Saint-Tropez, Opus 237*, 1892, oil on canvas 46.5 x 55.3 cm (private collection)

Munch's vivid diary entry occurred in a very different location, however: Nice, in the south of France, where the artist was vacationing at the time. Even the relative warmth and bright sunshine of the French Mediterranean, evoked in this contemporary painting of Saint-Tropez by **Neo-Impressionist** artist Paul Signac, could not relieve Munch of the deep anxiety he remembered experiencing in the cold north.

Climatic determinism

This contrast between Norway and the south of France in terms of temperament as well as temperature illustrates what was once a commonplace of cultural geography: the idea that climate significantly shapes the psychological characteristics, not just of individuals, but of whole societies. Although this idea is currently discredited by its association with racist pseudo-science, it had widespread currency during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was commonly believed that there was a major cultural divide in Europe between the sun-filled south, associated with temperate, Classical rationality, and the cold north, which was riddled with spiritual angst and melancholy.

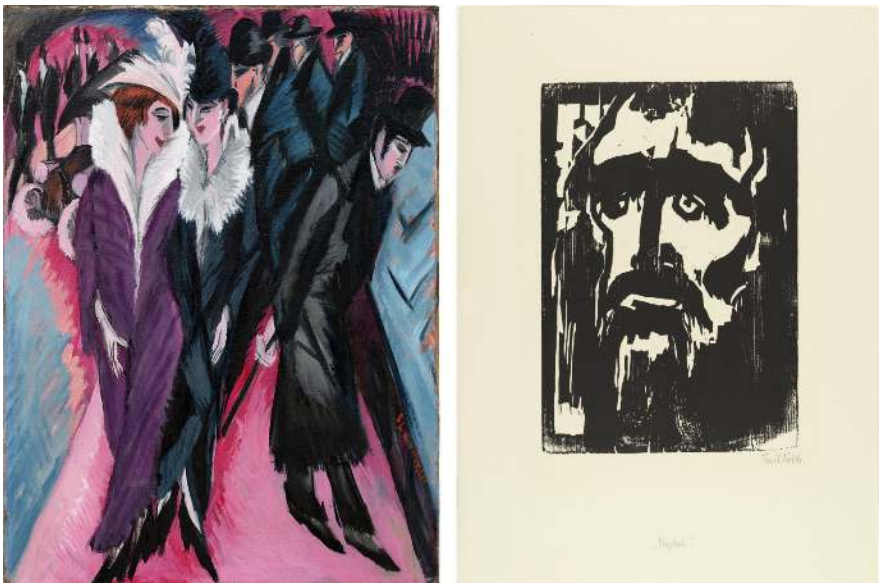


Figure **3.2.2.3**: Left: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Street, Berlin*, 1913, oil on canvas, 120.6 x 91.1 cm (MoMA); right: Emil Nolde, *The Prophet*, 1912, woodcut, 50 x 36.5 cm (MoMA)

Even today, Expressionist art is primarily associated with northern Europe. Many Scandinavian and German Expressionist artists took great pride in their Nordic or Teutonic heritage and attempted to define and revive a distinctly Northern European artistic tradition that was fundamentally different from Mediterranean Classicism.

Classical versus Gothic

One champion of this idea was the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer, whose book *Form Problems in the Gothic* (1910) provided an important theoretical framework for German Expressionism. For Worringer, the Gothic was more than just a late Medieval style. There was a "latent Gothic" in the art of the Germanic tribes (called Goths) that fought against Rome, running through the distinctively Northern versions of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and continuing into his own time. This tradition had, however, been overshadowed by Mediterranean Classicism, which had long been considered the aesthetic ideal. Northern Gothic art was seen as an incompetent attempt at naturalism, rather than a distinct tradition of its own.



Figure **3.2.2.4**: Left: Purse lid from the Sutton Hoo ship burial, early 7th century, gold, garnet and millefiori, 19 x 8.3 cm (British Museum, London); Right: Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, 1490, pen and ink wash over metalpoint on paper, 34.6 x 24.4 cm (Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice)

Worringer described Mediterranean Classical art as rational, beautiful, joyful, and tranquil, while he saw the Northern Gothic tradition as more spiritual and as having greater "depth, grandeur, and power."[2] In a particularly vivid passage, Worringer contrasts the type of line preferred by each of these traditions. Classicism tends toward "beautiful, round, organically tempered curves" where the Gothic prefers a "stiff, angular, repeatedly interrupted, jagged line of [the] strongest expressive force." This difference in style results from different temperaments of the Germanic versus Latin peoples:

> *As those line scrawls seem merely the release of an inner spiritual pressure, so the excitement, the convulsiveness, the fever, of northern drawing unquestionably throws a flashlight upon the heavily oppressed inner life of northern humanity.*[3]

For Worringer, artistic style reveals the inner, psychological state, not just of the individual artist, but of an entire culture.

Woodcut prints and Expressionism

According to Worringer, even Nordic artists who adopted some Italian Classical characteristics, such as the German Renaissance printmaker Albrecht Dürer, remain fundamentally Gothic in their approach. Dürer's woodcut prints embody the jagged, angular linearity and flat space that is characteristic of Worringer's Gothic.



Figure **3.2.2.5**: Left: Albrecht Dürer, *Four Horsemen*, from *The Apocalypse*, 1498, woodcut 14¼ x 11 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); right: Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Did Christ not appear to you?*, 1918, woodcut, 32 x 74.2 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

The German Expressionists deliberately revived the technique of woodcut printing because of this relatively crude, expressive style, as well as its nationalistic association with great German artists such as Dürer. Like Worringer, the German Expressionists saw a jaggedly angular, flat style as an authentic expression of their national tradition.

Both of these prints, furthermore, radiate the spiritual angst that Worringer associated with Nordic psychology. Dürer's shows the four horsemen of the Apocalypse wreaking havoc in the world, while Schmidt-Rottluff's Christ confronts the viewer with a face swollen and misshapen by torment. On his forehead the year 1918 is emblazoned in order to connect Christ's suffering with the contemporary state of the world, then enmeshed in the first World War.

Emil Nolde and Expressionist nationalism

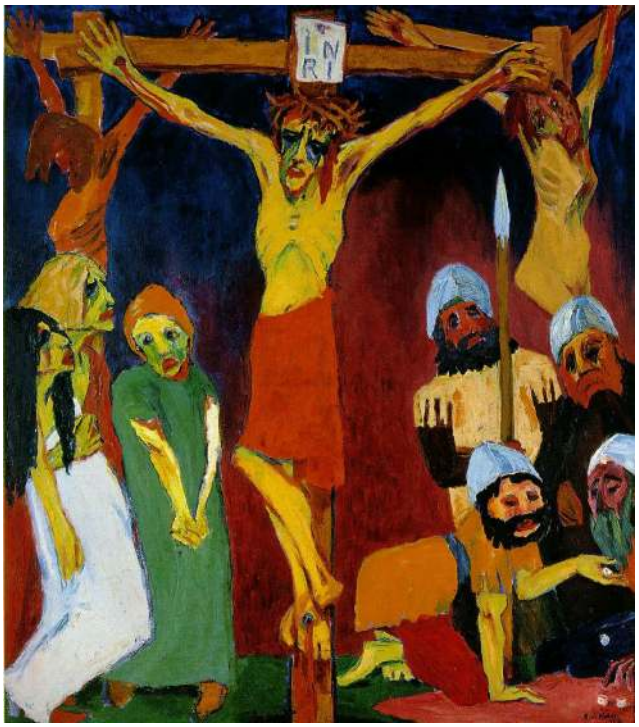


Figure **3.2.2.6**: Emil Nolde, *Crucifixion*, from *The Life of Christ* (polyptych), 1911-12 (Neukirchen, Stiftung Seebüll Ada and Emil Nolde)

The German Expressionist Emil Nolde was particularly explicit in linking himself to a Nordic tradition. In his autobiography, Nolde wrote:

> *Glory be to our strong, healthy German art. [I much prefer] the holy German madonnas, invested with the soul of Grünewald and others, over the Latin, superficially presentable paintings of Raphael . . . All the arts of all the Mediterranean people share certain qualities . . . Our German art has glorious qualities of its own. We respect the art of the Latins; German art has our love. The Edda, the Isenheim Altar, Goethe's Faust, Nietzsche's Zarathustra . . . these proud, sublime works of Nordic Germanic peoples! These are eternal truths.*[4]

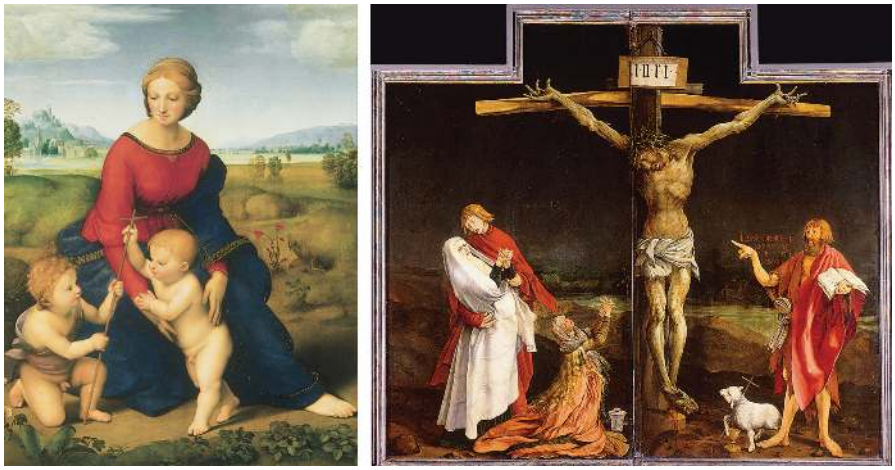


Figure **3.2.2.7**: Left: Raphael, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1506, oil on board, 113 x 88 cm (**Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna**); right: Matthias Grünewald, *Crucifixion* from the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512-16 (**Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France**)

The psychological contrast that Nolde suggests between Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* and a Raphael Madonna could not be more pronounced. Not only is the latter, showing a Virgin and Child in a meadow, an inherently more tranquil subject than Grünewald's harrowing *Crucifixion*, we can also recognize some of Worringer's distinctions between Latin and Gothic forms. Raphael's painting emphasizes deep space, soft curves, and idealization, whereas Grünewald's altarpiece features flattened space, jagged, angular shapes, and dark, gruesome realism.

Coda: Expressionism and National Socialism

It is one of the great ironies of art history that the best-known propagandists of German nationalism, the Nazi party of the 1930s and 40s, supported Mediterranean Classicism rather than the Northern "Gothic" artistic tradition identified by Worringer and the Expressionists. Far from being celebrated as a native hero by the Nazis, Emil Nolde was issued a *Malverbot* (German for "forbidden to paint"), and 27 of his works were featured in the **Degenerate Art** exhibition that Hitler sponsored in 1937.

It should also be noted that these distinctions between "Mediterranean" and "Gothic" style depend upon a careful selection of examples, and that the extrapolation of those distinctions into temperamental, spiritual, or "racial" differences tends to be ideologically motivated. Regional differences can be identified in the history of art, but art historians today more commonly attribute them to conventional cultural traditions, rather than innate or climatologically-determined psychological or spiritual differences.

Notes:

1. Edvard Munch, entry from the 'Violet Diary,' Nice, 22 January 1892, as translated by Ingeborg Owesen in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1815-1900* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 1044.
2. Wilhelm Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic*, unknown translator, (New York: G. E. Stechert, [1920]), pp. 43, 35.
3. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

4. Emil Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpf* (Berlin, 1934), as translated by Ernest Mundt in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, L.A. and London: University of California Press, 1968), p. 151.

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3.2.3: Der Blaue Reiter

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

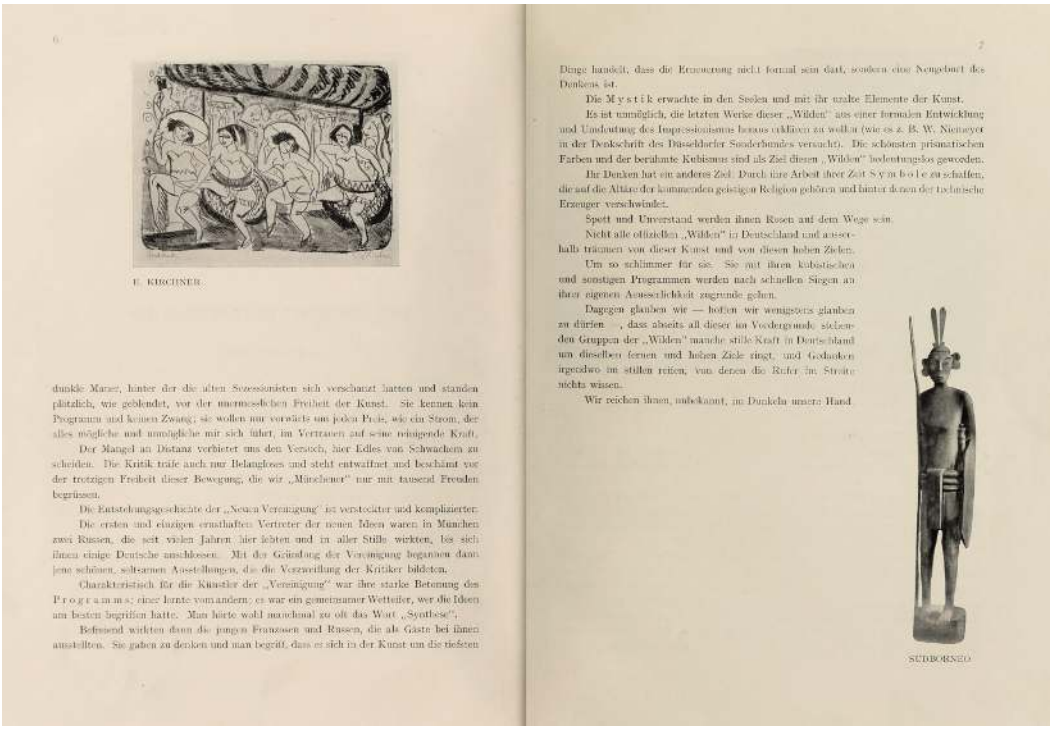
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Figure **3.2.3.1**: Vasily Kandinsky, *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac* cover page with St. George, 1912

The 1912 art book *Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider)* was originally intended to be a yearly "almanac" published by a Munich-based artists' collective of the same name. It is a fascinating document of the early-twentieth century **Expressionist** art scene, featuring a dozen essays on topics ranging from so-called primitive masks to the stage direction for an experimental "color-tone drama" called *The Yellow Sound*. Particularly interesting is the eclectic variety of its illustrations, which combine the work of modern artists such as **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner**, **Vincent van Gogh**, **Paul Cézanne**, and **Pablo Picasso** with **African** statues, **Chinese** ink painting, German folk art, **Renaissance woodcuts**, and Medieval sculpture.

An inner Renaissance



E. KIRCHNER

dunkle Mauer, hinter der die alten Sezessionisten sich verschanzt hatten und standen plötzlich, wie geblendet, vor der unermesslichen Freiheit der Kunst. Sie kennen kein Programm und keinen Zwang; sie wollen nur vorwärts ins jeden Preis, wie ein Strom, der alles mögliche und unmögliche mit sich führt, im Vertrauen auf seine reinigende Kraft.

Der Mangel an Distanz verbietet uns den Versuch, hier Edles von Schwachem zu scheiden. Die Kritik träfe auch nur Belangloses und steht entwaffnet und beschämt vor der trotzigen Freiheit dieser Bewegung, die wir „Münchener" nur mit tausend Freuden begrüssen.

Die Entstehungsgeschichte der „Neuen Vereinigung" ist versteckter und komplizierter.

Die ersten und einzigen ernsthaften Vertreter der neuen Ideen waren in München zwei Russen, die seit vielen Jahren hier lebten und in aller Stille wirkten, bis sich ihnen einige Deutsche anschlossen. Mit der Gründung der Vereinigung begannen dann jene schönen, seltsamen Ausstellungen, die die Verzweiflung der Kritiker bildeten.

Charakteristisch für die Künstler der „Vereinigung" war ihre starke Betonung des Programms; einer lernte vom andern; es war ein gemeinsamer Wetteifer, wer die Ideen am besten begriffen hatte. Man hörte wohl manchmal zu oft das Wort „Synthese".

Befreiend wirkten dann die jungen Franzosen und Russen, die als Gäste bei ihnen ausstellten. Sie gaben zu denken und man begriff, dass es sich in der Kunst um die tiefsten

Dinge handelt, dass die Erneuerung nicht formal sein darf, sondern eine Neugeburt des Denkens ist.

Die Mystik erwachte in den Seelen und mit ihr uralte Elemente der Kunst.

Es ist unmöglich, die letzten Werke dieser „Wilden" aus einer formalen Entwicklung und Umdeutung des Impressionismus herauszuklügeln zu wollen (wie es z. B. W. Nienmeyer in der Denkschrift des Düsseldorfer Sonderbundes versucht). Die schönsten prismatischen Farben und der berühmte Kubismus sind als Ziel diesen „Wilden" bedeutungslos geworden.

Ihr Denken hat ein anderes Ziel. Durch ihre Arbeit über Zeit Symbole zu schaffen, die auf die Altäre der kommenden geistigen Religion gehören und hinter denen der technische Erzeuger verschwindet.

Spott und Unverstand werden ihnen Rosen auf dem Wege sein.

Nicht alle offiziellen „Wilden" in Deutschland und ausserhalb träumen von dieser Kunst und von diesen hohen Zielen.

Um so schlimmer für sie. Sie mit ihren kubistischen und sonstigen Programmen werden nach schnellen Siegen an ihrer eigenen Aeusserlichkeit zugrunde gehen.

Dagegen glauben wir — hoffen wir wenigstens glauben zu dürfen —, dass abseits all dieser im Vordergrunde stehenden Gruppen der „Wilden" manche stille Kraft in Deutschland um dieselben fernen und hohen Ziele ringt, und Gedanken irgendwo im stillen reifen, von denen die Rufer im Streite nichts wissen.

Wir reichen ihnen, unbekannt, im Dunkeln unsere Hand

SÜDBORNEO

Figure **3.2.3.2**: Blaue Reiter pages with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Four Women Dancing* and South Borneo statue, pp. 6-7

One of the editors of the book, the Russian artist Vasily Kandinsky, wrote of *Der Blaue Reiter's* intent, "We aim to show by means of the variety of forms represented how the inner wishes of the artist are embodied."[1] This emphasis on the "inner" or subjective mental states of the artist, as opposed to the "outer" or objective experience of nature, is a central theme of Expressionist art theory.

In a preface to the group's first exhibition, Kandinsky similarly detects in his fellow artists "the signs of a new inner Renaissance."[2] The word "inner" distinguishes this new Renaissance from the **Italian Renaissance** of the 1400s, which saw the rise of a naturalistic style of representation that, many Expressionist artists contended, was only concerned with representing the outer appearances of material reality. The crude, almost childlike simplicity of the cover art for the *Almanac*, along with its Christian medieval imagery of the blue rider as Saint George, is a visual emblem of two of the groups' main themes that will be explored here: **primitivism** and **spirituality**.

An artists' collective

The members of the Blaue Reiter group, including Gabriele Münter, Franz Marc, Auguste Macke, Vasily Kandinsky, and Alexej von Jawlensky, banded together because they felt that the art establishment had shut them out of opportunities. In the modern period, like-minded artists would often form such cooperatives to sponsor their own exhibitions free from conservative art juries, as well as to provide for mutual support and the exchange of ideas. Among the art movements that got their start in this way were the **Impressionists**, the **Vienna Secession**, the **Fauves**, and another German Expressionist group, **Die Brücke**.



Figure **3.2.3.3**: Auguste Macke, *St. George*, 1912

The name Der Blaue Reiter, as Kandinsky later somewhat flippantly suggested, was chosen because fellow artist Franz Marc liked horses and Kandinsky liked riders, and they both liked the color blue. The group's emblem was the Roman Christian soldier Saint George, who slew a dragon that was demanding human sacrifices.

The figure of the Blue Rider thus embodied the spiritual focus of the group as well as their belief that art plays an important social role in the struggle between good and evil. The intensified color and simple, almost childlike rendering of the same story by Auguste Macke is characteristic of the group's style, although as Kandinsky noted above, they recognized the great variety of ways in which "inner" states could be expressed.

Primitivism and spirituality

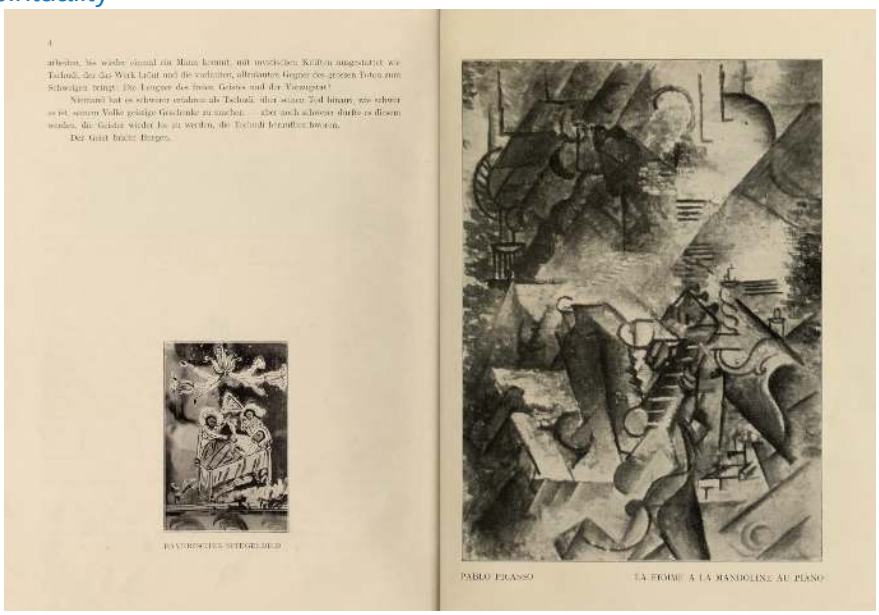


Figure **3.2.3.4**: Blaue Reiter pages with Bavarian glass painting and Pablo Picasso's *Woman with Guitar by the Piano*, pp. 4-5

In addition to work by its members, the *Almanac* and the group's exhibitions featured works by Medieval, non-European, and untrained folk artists — all of which would have been identified at the time as "primitive.'" For example, the illustrations accompanying the first essay, "Spiritual Possessions" by Franz Marc, include a 15th-century German woodcut, a Chinese painting of cats, two drawings by children, and a German folk art glass painting alongside a recent **Cubist** painting by Pablo Picasso.

As Kandinsky suggested, what all of these disparate works have in common is their rejection or lack of knowledge of the post-Renaissance Western tradition, with its emphasis on artistic naturalism, scientific knowledge, and technological progress. Starting in the 1700s, a growing number of artists and thinkers saw modern science, technology, and urban life as a threat to humankind's true spiritual vocation. The simple, even crude works of so-called "primitive" artists were seen as exemplars of an approach to both art and life that emphasized higher spiritual aims.

"I did not need nature to prompt me"



Figure **3.2.3.5**: Left: Alexei von Jawlensky, *Self-Portrait*, 1905, oil on cardboard, 52 x 38 cm, private collection; right: Alexei von Jawlensky, *Savior's Face: Martyr*, 1919, oil on linen-finish paper on board, 32.5 x 25.4 cm, private collection

Although he studied painting with the Russian Realist **Ilya Repin**, Alexei von Jawlensky deliberately rejected his training in favor of a childlike simplicity and directness in his later works. For example, his 1905 *Self-Portrait*, while painterly and simplified, is a convincing likeness of the artist, with naturalistic proportions and chiaroscuro modeling. The coloring is bright, but based on close observation — warmer red tones appear on the cheeks, nose, and forehead, and cooler tones define the eyes, temples, and jawline.

The later work, *Savior's Face*, was part of a series of portraits called "mystical" or "abstract heads," which the artist noted were not executed from nature:

> *I sat in my studio and painted, and I did not need Nature to prompt me. It was enough for me to immerse myself in myself, to pray and prepare my soul to attain a religious state.*
>
> *Cited in Jürgen Schultze, Alexej Jawlensky (Cologne, 1970), p. 39.*

Here, the childlike simplicity of the work serves as a guarantor of the artist drawing, with naive directness, from an inner, mystical vision he has of the savior's face, rather than depicting external appearances.

Folk art

Many of the Blaue Reiter artists were particularly interested in folk artists who had no professional training in art. Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter encountered a common Eastern European type of folk art, Bavarian glass painting, when they left Munich for the small town of Murnau.



Figure **3.2.3.6**: Gabriele Münter, *Still Life with St George*, 1911, oil on cardboard, 51.1 x 68 cm (Lenbachhaus, Munich)

Münter's *Still-Life with St George* is a composition of folk-art objects that she had collected. A theme of nature emerges in the flowers, chicken, and figurines of what appear to be walking peasants, while spiritual notes are sounded by the two statuettes of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ child, as well as Saint George in the upper left.

The style of the work reinforces these themes. Münter's blunt, heavy brushwork and crude drawing style matches the rough-hewn simplicity of the folk art objects she admired, while the highly saturated colors in the flowers, Saint George, and the rightmost Virgin Mary glow almost supernaturally against the dark, earthy tones of the rest of the work.

Music

The group's belief that art had to go beyond merely representing material reality also took inspiration from music. Several of the essays in the *Almanac* were about music, including one by experimental composer Arnold Schönberg, and the sheet music for three compositions was included at the end of the *Almanac*.



Figure **3.2.3.7**: Vasily Kandinsky, ***Improvisation 28*** (second version), 1912, oil on canvas 111.4 x 162.1 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Kandinsky in particular admired the way that music stirred inner emotional and spiritual states through abstract means, by combinations and sequences of sound, without attempting to imitate nature. Seeking a visual equivalent, Kandinsky theorized that painters could do the same by creating compositions of pure color and form. Although it would take several years before he was confident enough to produce pure-abstract works on this principle, Kandinsky gave his works musical titles such as "composition" and "improvisation" in order to encourage viewers to ignore their apparent subject matter and concentrate on their color harmonies.

The Blaue Reiter group was highly eclectic both in its influences and its output, but the core of the movement was based around the desire for a new Renaissance in art, one dedicated to expressing inner emotional and spiritual states, rather than simply reproducing

the outer appearances of material objects. “Primitive” folk art and abstract musical compositions provided key models for their quest.

Notes:

1. Translated in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 113.
2. Ibid.

Additional resources:

Read more about reverse-glass painting and Der Blaue Reiter artists

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.4: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner

3.2.4.1: Self-Portrait As a Soldier

3.2.4.2: Street, Dresden

3.2.4.3: Street, Berlin

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3.2.4.1: Self-Portrait As a Soldier

by SHAWN ROGGENKAMP

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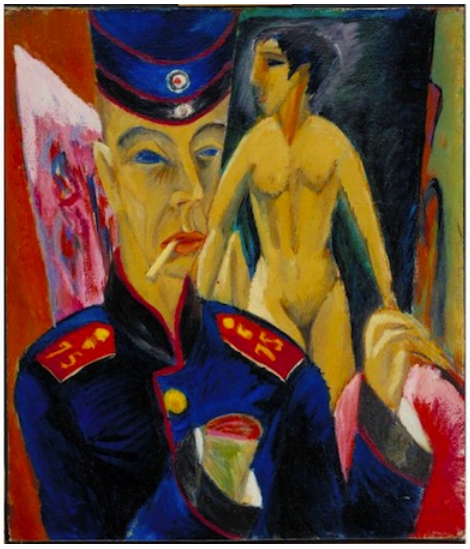


Figure **3.2.4.1.1**: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69 x 61 cm (Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College)

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self-Portrait As a Soldier* is a masterpiece of psychological drama. The painting shows Kirchner dressed in a uniform but instead of standing on a battlefield (or another military context), he is standing in his studio with an amputated, bloody arm and a nude model behind him. It is in this contrast between the artist's clothing and studio space that we can read a complicated coming of age for an idealistic young artist.

Die Brücke

In 1905, Kirchner, together with several other young artists from Dresden founded the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). Kirchner created their manifesto, a woodblock print that was to be widely disseminated as a call to arms: "We call all young people together, and as young people, who carry the future in us, we want to wrest freedom for our actions and our lives from the older, comfortably established forces."

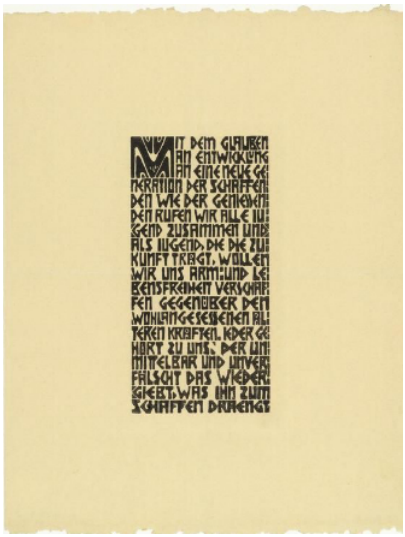


Figure **3.2.4.1.2**: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Untitled*, 1906, set of two woodcuts, 28.8 x 22.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Spurred on by their confidence and their belief that they lived in an age of great change, the *Brücke* artists set about creating an entirely new way of being artists. Kirchner was a great admirer of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche's book,

Thus Spoke Zarathustra uses the bridge as a metaphor for the connection between the barbarism of the past and the modernity of the future. The *Brücke* artists considered themselves the inheritors of this idea, and created art that looked to the past and the future at once.

Another important influence on the *Die Brücke* artists was so-called "primitive" art (art and ritual objects from ancient cultures or nonwestern societies, particularly in Africa and Central Asia). This art was perceived to be more honest and direct, more natural than work produced by artists from industrialized Western European nations. There was also interest in the so-called "folk art" of Europe, particularly the art and craft found among rural populations. It is important to note that Germany remained a major colonial power in Africa through the First World War. There is, therefore, a complex heirarchy that frames this cultural appropriation. While uncomfortable from the perspective of the 21st century, it is nevertheless undeniable that this "primitive" aesthetic (despite the fact that it is a modernist construction), had a strong impact on Expressionist art.



Figure **3.2.4.1.3**: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Striding into the Sea*, 1912, oil on canvas, 149 x 195 cm (Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart)

The *Brücke* artists were inspired to adopt the "natural" state that they perceived in "primitivism" in their lives and their art. Paintings created outside, in nature, together with the unidealized nudes were hallmarks of the group's work. The roughly sketched, long forms and tapered limbs of the nude model in *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* is representative of the style of Kirchner's nudes from this period and can be seen in his prints as well as paintings.

Although the *Brücke* disbanded in 1913, two years before *Self-Portrait As a Soldier*, each artist continued to develop individually and Kirchner's *Self-Portrait* dates from one of his most highly regarded periods of artistic production. Just a few years earlier he painted his iconic and dark Berlin street scenes (*Potsdamer Platz* and *Street, Berlin*), which employ a similar "primitive" style jarringly set into a modern metropolis. The young artist was coming into his own, but everything in Kirchner's world was about to be interrupted by a cataclysmic event: the First World War.

Kirchner and the War

Kirchner volunteered to serve as a driver in the military in order to avoid being drafted into a more dangerous role. However, he was soon declared unfit for service due to issues with his general health, and was sent away to recover. *Self-Portrait* was painted during that recovery. These circumstances distinguish the 1915 canvas from other avant-garde projects of the period such as Otto Dix's print series *The War* (1924), in which the artist depicted the horrors he had witnessed first hand. Kirchner never fought, and this painting is instead an exploration of the artist's personal fears.

The severed hand in *Self-Portrait As a Soldier* is not a literal injury, but a metaphor. This differentiates it in important ways from other depictions of wartime amputees, such as Dix's many representations of wounded veterans designed to shame politicians with a grotesque view of the soldiers who were abandoned when they were no longer considered "useful" to the nation. Kirchner's is a metaphoric, self-amputation—a potential injury, not to the body—but to his identity as an artist.



Figure 3.2.4.1.4: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait with Model*, 1907/26, oil on canvas, 150.5 x 100 cm (Hamburger Kunsthalle)

Self-Portrait As a Soldier can perhaps be best understood by comparing it with an earlier painting by the artist with similar subject-matter, his *Self-Portrait with Model* (1907/26). Here, a rounder, healthier-looking Kirchner stands confidently in his studio in a jaunty striped robe. He holds a brush and palette and seems to be wearing less clothing than the model seated behind him, clearly suggesting a sexual relationship. Even the warm colors give the work a sensuous atmosphere. This is the artist at the height of youthful confidence. Compare that with the sallow, angular artist we see in the *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*. The later painting features darker, colder colors, and the glassy-eyed model looks more like a carved statue than an actual person. Even the skinny, limp cigarette seems to stand in opposition to the robust pipe that the artist smokes in the earlier portrait. Kirchner the soldier stands impotently in his studio, surrounded with everything he would need to make art, were he able to do so.

The Aftermath

During the war, Kirchner suffered from alcoholism and drug abuse and for a time his hands and feet were partially paralyzed. In a sense his fears about the war were self-fulfilling. Kirchner recovered and his work was exhibited internationally to much acclaim during the interwar period.

Adolf Hitler persecuted artists who painted in a style that he considered outside of the Aryan ideal soon after he became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. The Degenerate Art (Entartete Kunst) exhibition of 1937 was a grand spectacle that the Nazis organized to mock the modernist art they hated. This was a humiliating time for Kirchner. At least thirty-two of his works were exhibited in the Degenerate Art exhibition. In addition, more than 600 of his works were removed from public collections. He committed suicide in 1938.

Additional Resources:

This painting at the Allen Memorial Art Museum

A biography of the artist from Oxford University Press at MoMA

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3.2.4.2: Street, Dresden

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK, DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
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Video **3.2.4.2.1**: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Street, Dresden*, oil on canvas, 1908 (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Key points:

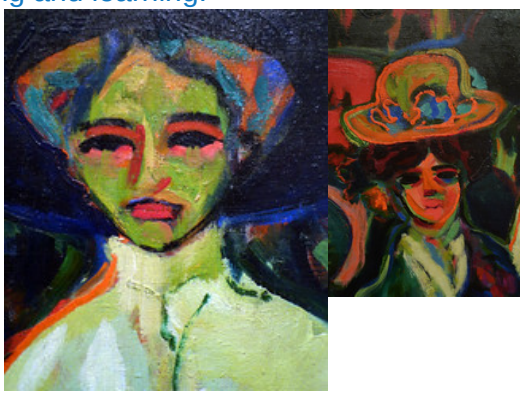
- *Street, Dresden* emphasizes the dynamism of urban life in Germany in the early twentieth century, depicting the swirling crowds and electric lights of the modern city.
- It recalls the isolation and psychological angst explored by earlier nineteenth-century artists, but reflects the twentieth-century move toward greater expressionism in color and open brushwork.
- Kirchner and other Die Brücke artists were influenced by Nietzsche's ideas about breaking apart morality and conventions in modern Germany.

Additional resources:

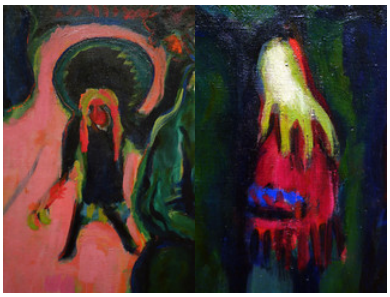
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Expressionism and city life from MoMAlearning

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Figure **3.2.4.2.93**: More Smarthistory images…

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3.2.4.3: Street, Berlin

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

Page ID

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Video **3.2.4.3.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

Additional resources:

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3.2.5: Paula Modersohn-Becker, Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace, Half-Length I

by **JOSEPH HENRY**

Page ID
188147



Figure **3.2.5.1**: Detail, Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Girl blowing a flute in birch forest*, 1905 (**Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen**)



Figure **3.2.5.2**: Otto Modersohn and Paula Modersohn-Becker in Worpswede (1904)

Otto Modersohn and Paula Modersohn-Becker in Worpswede (1904)

A first in art history

We don't usually hear of relationship dramas in art history, but on the night of February 23, 1906, the German artist Paula Modersohn-Becker secretly left her husband and stepdaughter in the German town of Worpswede and boarded a train for Paris. As she wrote the next day in her journal, "I left Otto Modersohn and I'm poised between my old life and my new life. I wonder what the new life will be like… Whatever must be will be."

During Modersohn-Becker's time in Paris between 1906 and 1907 she almost single-handedly invented a new genre in European modern art: the nude, female self-portrait. In doing so Modersohn-Becker depicted female self-understanding in a way never quite

seen before in the history of modern art—precisely at a time when European women were increasingly demanding their social and political independence.

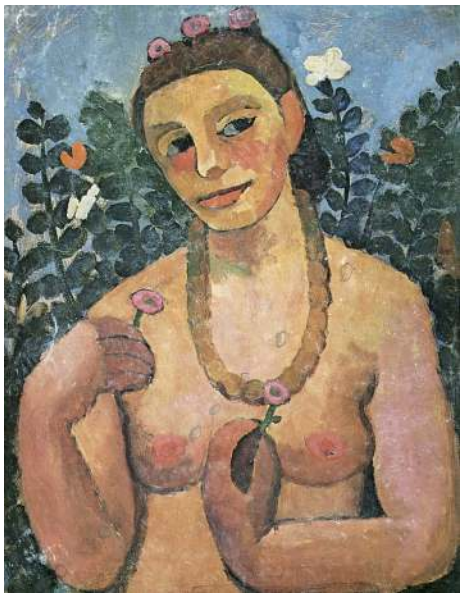


Figure **3.2.5.3**: Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace*, 1906, oil on cardboard, 62.2 x 48.2 cm (Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen)

Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace*, 1906, oil on cardboard, 62.2 x 48.2 cm (Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen)

Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace, Half-Length I is one of two similar paintings Modersohn-Becker produced in the hot Paris days of August 1906. In the work, the artist depicts herself nude in a natural, botanical setting. Wreathed in her signature necklace (a motif that appeared often in this period), she decorates herself in pink flowers. Three flowers dot the top of her head, while she gently carries two more in each hand. Behind her, a verdant mass of green leaves and stems sprawls upwards; two white flowers appear on either side of her as butterflies flit about and encircle her. Most striking in the painting is, naturally, Modersohn-Becker's nude figure, with her breasts occupying the lower center of the image as they rhyme with the swoop of the necklace. The artist seems utterly at ease in her lack of dress; her posture is casual, even happenstance. She glances upwards with a sly smile.

Though "Self-Portrait Nude" conveys a sense of calm and contentment, the painting should be understood as a near-revolutionary act in the history of modernism. The female nude had long been a staple in the repertoires of male painters, from Italian Renaissance artists (like **Titian**) to key figures in nineteenth-century French painting (such as **Édouard Manet**). Around the beginning of the twentieth century in particular, modernists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse (artists whom Modersohn-Becker studied closely) revamped the female nude for the sake of artistic experimentation, whether they wanted to investigate the possibilities of abstraction or explore themes of free sexuality and uninhibited morality.

As feminist art historians began arguing in the 1970s, these works by artists like **Picasso** and **Matisse** seemed to *objectify* the female body. Their sitters were made sexually available, even defenseless; they were designed for a male viewer and his desire. The question is then, if a woman artist depicted *herself* in the nude, could this be an act of agency or self-assertion? How could female artists position their work within the ground-breaking aesthetics of modernism while expressing their own gendered experience?

Being an artist and a woman

For all of her career, Modersohn-Becker, born Paula Becker, struggled to find her footing as a professional artist. She only sold two works during her lifetime and after disastrous reviews of an early exhibition in 1899, she shied away from showing her work publicly. Few women artists in Europe achieved any real celebrity and a sustainable career typically required independent wealth. Moreover, a woman artist's educational opportunities were far more restricted than those of their male counterparts. While drawing from live, nude models was considered the standard for a proper (male) artist's training, women had difficulty accessing these lessons due to moral codes and gender-segregated schooling. Modersohn-Becker could only first practice so-called "life drawing"

at age 20 at an art school in Berlin intended for female students. However, different educational opportunities began cropping up in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century—for both men and women.

Worpswede



Figure **3.2.5.4**: Worpswede

In 1899, Modersohn-Becker joined the artists working at the so-called Worpswede Artist Colony in a small, moorland town north of the German city of Bremen. (Male) artists, including Fritz Mackensen, Hans am Ende, and Otto Modersohn established the colony, drawing influence from the rustic landscape and experimenting with styles and approaches not taught in the formal art academies.

At Worspwede, Modersohn-Becker worked with these figures, including the poet Rainer Maria Rilke and the sculptor Clara Westoff, eventually marrying Otto Modersohn in 1901 and adding his last name to her own.



Figure **3.2.5.5**: Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Child on red cube pillow*, c. 1904, 66,2 cm x 58 cm (Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen)

In the Worpswede environment, Modersohn-Becker began practicing the format that would come to dominate her career, portraits of women and girls, especially mothers and their children. This latter theme was not new in the history of art (think of all the Madonna and Child paintings from the medieval period onwards), but Modersohn-Becker avoided the typical approaches that male

artists adopted; instead of focusing on the idealized virtues of the family-unit, she depicted maternity, childhood, and femininity as elemental, psychologically charged experiences. In *Child on Red Cube Pillow*, for example, a toddler sits somberly on a pillow that seems to be elevating in ambiguous perspective. Despite the child's age and her somewhat elaborate dress, the sitter carries an intense, introspective quality.



Figure **3.2.5.6**: Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Self-portrait on the 6th wedding anniversary*, oil and tempera on cardboard, 1906 (**Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen**)

While in Worspwede, Modersohn-Becker was already traveling to Paris frequently to develop her work. In 1900, she took life classes at the Colarossi Academy, attended anatomy lectures open to the public at the School of Fine Arts, and sketched works on display at the Louvre Museum. By the time she visited again in the late winter of 1905, she had absorbed the influences of artists like Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, and Vincent van Gogh. Despite Worpswede's experimental ethos, for Modersohn-Becker, Paris offered an ideal context in which to work and live alone outside a disappointing marriage (Paula and Otto would not consummate their marriage for five years).

Once in France, Modersohn-Becker struggled to make a living but was nonetheless prolific. In May 1906, she painted *Self-Portrait on Her Sixth Wedding Anniversary, 25th of May*, considered to be the first nude female self-portrait created in modern art (and with the artist imagining herself pregnant, to boot.) However, with Otto's frequent attempts to save their marriage and her own financial difficulties, Modersohn-Becker eventually reconciled with her husband and in March 1907, moved back to Worpswede with the caveat that she'd return to Paris each winter. In November of that year, at age 30, she died of an embolism, three weeks after giving birth to her only daughter, Mathilde.

Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace

Seen in light of her biography, Modersohn-Becker's *Self-Portrait Nude* represents the artist's claim to her own self-depiction, even if her immediate life circumstances prevented a sustainable sense of autonomy. In the painting, the artist luxuriates in her body and her gender; she presents herself as part of nature, set as she is against the green leaves, but she also insists on adornment. While there is a sensuality to the image, it's not a sexuality per se that requires male validation or even acknowledgement. Scholars believe that Modersohn-Becker in fact painted *Self-Potrait Nude* in front of a mirror in her studio; the painting is a dialogue between the artist and how she understands herself at a particular moment. This work is not just about a timeless, eternal sense of femininity or a totally fixed sense of self.



Figure \(\PageIndex{7\): Paula Modersohn-Becker, *Young girl with yellow flowers in the glass*, c. 1902, 52 x 53 cm (Kunsthalle Bremen)

At the formal level, Modersohn-Becker distinguishes each brushstroke and gesture through relatively discrete sections of skin tone and color; the very making of the painting is visible. Moreover, the butterflies in the background certainly represent the natural world, but they also signify change: just as larvae metamorphose into cocoon states and then butterflies, so too can the artist constantly transform through their practice. As Modersohn-Becker wrote in an early letter to the poet Rilke, “What is finished? And when is one finished? Hopefully never.”

Additional resources

Museen Böttcherstraße, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen

Paula Modersohn-Becker at Google Arts and Culture

John Colapinto, “Paula Modersohn-Becker: Modern Painting’s Missing Piece,” *The New Yorker* (October 29, 2013)

Paula Modersohn-Becker, the Letters and Journals (Northwestern University Press, 2013)

Diane Radycki, *Paula Modersohn-Becker, The First Modern Woman Artist* (Yale University Press, 2013)

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3.2.6: Emil Nolde, Young Couple

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **3.2.6.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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3.2.7: Alexej von Jawlensky, Young Girl in a Flowered Hat

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188149



Video **3.2.7.1**: Alexej von Jawlensky, *Young Girl in a Flowered Hat*, 1910, oil on cardboard (Albertina, Vienna)

Key points:

- This painting exemplifies the open brushwork, bright and jarring colors, bold outlines, and simplified forms that characterize Expressionism.
- Similar to Gauguin and Kandinsky, Jawlensky believed rural and folk culture were more authentic than established European traditions.
- Painted on cardboard, *Young Girl in a Flowered Hat* contrasts the raw, unaffected quality of Jawlensky's technique to the delicate sophistication of his modern subject.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.8: 3.2.8-Vasily Kandinsky

3.2.8.1: Kandinsky, Apocalypse, Abstraction

3.2.8.2: Improvisation 28 (second version)

3.2.8.3: Klänge (Sounds)

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3.2.8.1: Kandinsky, Apocalypse, Abstraction

R. CHARLES CRAMER and *DR. KIM GRANT*

Page ID
188151



Figure **3.2.8.1.1**: Vasily Kandinsky, *Small Pleasures*, 1913, oil on canvas, 110.2 x 119.4 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

At first glance, Vasily Kandinsky's *Small Pleasures* appears to be an abstract painting of organic lines and blotches of bright primary and secondary colors. At the center of the composition is an inverted U surrounded by undulating, serpentine lines that frame amorphous shapes and bursts of color. What are we to make of this?



Figure **3.2.8.1.2**: Vasily Kandinsky, *With Sun*, 1910, glass painting, 30.6 x 40.3 cm (Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus)

One clue is found in a painting Kandinsky made three years earlier, in which we see the same basic composition with much clearer subject matter. The inverted U is a hill, on top of which is a city with tall towers capped by onion domes (common in Kandinsky's homeland of Russia). Waves (in blue) and fires (in yellow and orange) surge around the base, where a couple lies on the ground. Three horsemen ride up the left-hand side of the hill, while on the right three men attempt to flee in a red rowboat.

Apocalypse

This imagery is identifiable as a scene from the Apocalypse, the end of the world as described in the biblical Book of Revelation. According to St. John the Divine, before the second coming of Christ ushers in a spiritual paradise there will be a period of terrible destruction. Angels will sound their trumpets, the four horsemen of the apocalypse (war, plague, famine, and death) will be loosed, the sun will be blacked out, and the moon will become bloody. A hail of fire will burn the world, while a flood of bitter waters will drown its inhabitants (Revelation 6-9). This is what is depicted, albeit obliquely, in S*mall Pleasures*. Between 1909 and 1913, Kandinsky painted the Apocalypse a number of times.



Figure **3.2.8.1.3**: Vasily Kandinsky, *All Saints I*, 1911, glass painting, 34.5 x 40.5 cm (Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus)

In *All Saints I*, we can easily discern an angel on the left sounding a trumpet, flood waters rising, and fires raging, while souls emerge from their graves to be judged. Saint George, the emblem of Kandinsky's art group **Der Blaue Reiter**, appears just below the angel's arm with a number of Eastern Orthodox Christian saints, including Vladimir, Boris, and Gleb.

Out of this devastation, signs of new hope and new life emerge. A dove under the angel's trumpet refers to the story of Noah's flood, a prior destruction of the world by God in an attempt to purify it. Christ on the cross in the background promises resurrection after death, as do a phoenix and butterfly on the far right. (According to legend, the phoenix emerges from the ashes of its dead parent, and butterflies emerge reborn from the cocoon of the caterpillar).

In the upper left, we see a walled city with dome-capped towers next to another emblem of rebirth: the rising sun. This city is the "new Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:2), the "shining city on the hill" mentioned in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, an echo of the promise that in the afterlife, the meek shall inherit the earth and reign with him in heaven (Matthew 5; Psalm 37).

Kandinsky's interest in apocalyptic subject matter is related to his belief that humankind was on the verge of a cataclysmic change from the current, materialistic epoch to an "Epoch of the Great Spiritual." Such millenarian beliefs were not uncommon at the time, particularly within the occult spiritualist movement of **Theosophy**.



Figure 3.2.8.1.4: Unknown artist, *Anna Teaching Mary*, glass painting, early 19th century (Museum für Volkskultur in Württemberg, Waldenbuch)

Another influence on Kandinsky's work at this time was **primitivism**. Both *All Saints I* and *With Sun* were *hinterglasmalerei*, or paintings executed on the underside of glass. This technique was unusual for professional artists, but was common in folk art in Russia and southern Germany, where Kandinsky was living at the time. Kandinsky was introduced to Russian folk art when he went on an ethnological expedition to the Vologda region in northern Russia in the 1890s. He continued to look to art by amateur, Medieval, non-western and other so-called primitive artists for examples because he felt that the naturalistic style taught in professional art academies was suited only to representing the external appearances of things.

Kandinsky believed that the artist should act as a sort of shaman (originally a Russian-Siberian concept, it is worth noting) — a channel to the spiritual realm, and ultimately a guide to help lead society into the coming Epoch of the Great Spiritual. He found in folk art such as icon painting and *hinterglasmalerei* a non-naturalistic style better suited to his spiritual themes and ambitions.

This devotion to art associated with primitivism and spirituality also helps to explain Kandinsky's preference for a very simplified drawing style. In *hinterglasmalerei*, objects are rendered in an almost childlike fashion: easily recognizable, but highly schematic, with no effort to imitate the exact appearances of what is represented.



Figure 3.2.8.1.5: Vasily Kandinsky, *All Saints I*, 1911, oil and gouache on cardboard, 50 x 64.8 cm (Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus)

There is a second, oil and gouache on board version of *All Saints I* that is much more abstract than the earlier version on glass. In this second painting we can barely recognize any of the subject matter, except by comparing it to the original version. Usually artists work from a quick sketch to increasingly refined detail. Why did Kandinsky do the opposite? If these paintings are intended to be about the apocalypse, why does he make their subject matter so difficult to see?



Figure 3.2.8.1.6: Vasily Kandinsky, *Small Pleasures*, 1913, oil on canvas, 110.2 x 119.4 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

The answer is twofold. First, Kandinsky hides his imagery because recognizing the objects depicted in a painting keeps the viewer's mind anchored in our current, materialistic world of things. Stripping away the representational details of objects and reducing them to simpler, abstracted forms helps to prepare viewers for the new, spiritual epoch.

At the same time, however, Kandinsky recognizes that viewers need guidance. The purely spiritual would be incomprehensible to those who have lived all of their lives in the material world. So, in effect, he tries to have it both ways. He starts with depictions of recognizable objects and uses universal themes from mythology and religion in the comforting style of folk painting for the sake of familiarity. Then he abstracts that imagery until the psychological process of recognizing material objects in the work becomes

secondary, or even subconscious. For Kandinsky, the real content of the painting should come from the work's formal qualities: its use of color, line, and compositional rhythms.

Color vibrations

In his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky gives special attention to color's ability to communicate, not just sensually, but also spiritually:

> *Generally speaking, color is a power which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the [viewer's] soul.*
>
> *Vasily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York 1977), p. 25.*

The analogy to music here is telling. Kandinsky believed that music was a more advanced form of art than painting precisely because it was more "abstract." Music moves us emotionally and spiritually through pure form (**sound vibration**), without directly representing any real-world content. He believed visual artists could do the same through color vibrations, and make painting a truly spiritual art form.

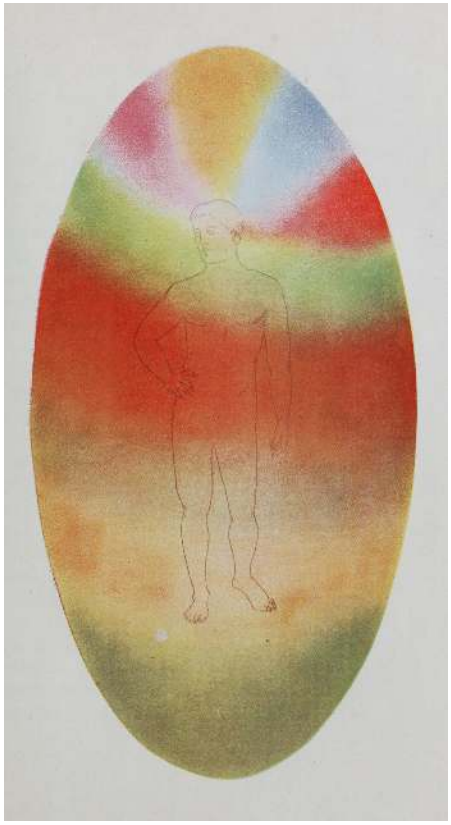


Figure **3.2.8.1.7**: "The astral body of the average man," from Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Man Visible and Invisible* (New York, 1903), plate X

The notion that spiritual states can be conveyed through color patterns would have been familiar to many people in the early-twentieth century. **Theosophists** believed that certain privileged seers were able to perceive color auras that show a person's emotional and spiritual condition. The illustration above represents the "astral body" surrounding an "ordinary lower middle-class man," for example.

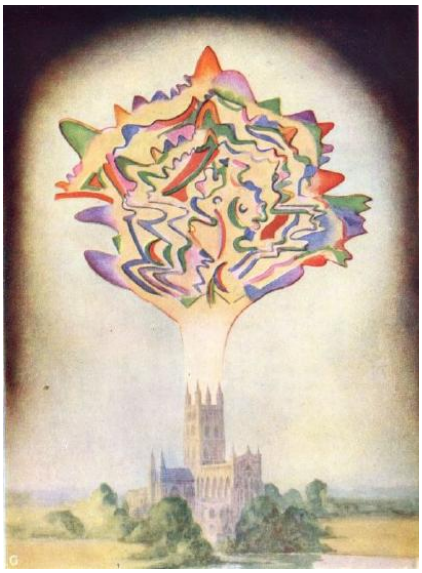


Figure 3.2.8.1.8: "A ringing chorus by Gounod," from Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought Forms* (London, 1901), plate G

For Kandinsky, the close connections and even transferability among color, music, and spirituality were probably enhanced because he experienced a phenomenon known as synesthesia. This is a condition where sensory "wires" in the brain are in effect crossed, so that a person may experience a color as a sound, or taste as a texture. The English language recognizes this phenomenon in phrases such as "loud color" or "sharp cheese." In another Theosophical treatise on spiritual auras, there is a striking illustration of synesthesia in the form of an abstract cloud of color emerging from a church tower, illustrating the color equivalent of what is being sung within, "a ringing chorus by [the composer Charles] Gounod."



Figure 3.2.8.1.9: Vasily Kandinsky, *Small Pleasures*, 1913, oil on canvas, 110.2 x 119.4 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

When we look at Kandinsky's *Small Pleasures*, then, we may subconsciously recognize some of the apocalyptic imagery, and that may help guide us to the spiritual content of the work. But according to Kandinsky, we should not be distracted by any material objects represented. The higher, spiritual content of the work is better communicated through pure form, through the color vibrations he carefully orchestrated to resonate in our souls.

Additional resources:

Read *Man Visible and Invisible* at the Internet Archive

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3.2.8.2: Improvisation 28 (second version)

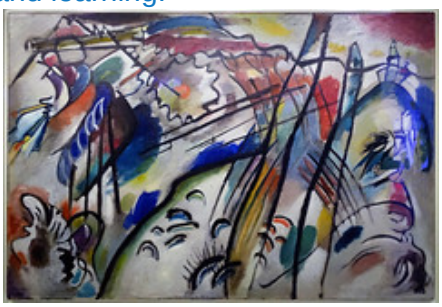
by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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188152



Video **3.2.8.2.1**: Vasily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 28* (second version), 1912, oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

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3.2.8.3: Klänge (Sounds)

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

Page ID

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Video *PageIndex*11: Video from The Museum of Modern Art.

Additional resources:

This book and German Expressionism at MoMA

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3.2.9: Franz Marc and the animalization of art

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **3.2.9.1**: Franz Marc, *Grazing Horses IV (The Red Horses)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 121 x 183 cm (Harvard Art Museums)

> *I am trying to heighten my sense of the organic rhythm of all things, trying to empathize pantheistically with the shivering and coagulating of blood in nature, in trees, in animals, in the air … I see no happier means to the animalization of art than the animal painting.Franz Marc, "Über das Tier in der Kunst," translated in Vivian Endicott Barnett, ed., Franz Marc and August Macke 1909-1914 (Munich, London and New York, 2018), p. 48.*

Franz Marc's 1910 call for the "animalization of art" stakes out the ground that he would harvest for the most fertile and productive years of his career. Before his early death in World War I, Marc used animal paintings to express a pantheistic vision of the harmony between animals and their natural environment.

Pantheism

Pantheism (literally "all-God-ism") is the belief that God is not separate from the universe that he created, but identical with it, immanent within it like "shivering and coagulating blood in nature, in animals, in the air." Probably the most famous statement of the pantheist creed is that of the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth. In his 1798 poem *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth notes his feeling of a presence "deeply interfused" in nature "that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things."



Figure **3.2.9.2**: Franz Marc, *The World Cow*, 1913, oil on canvas, 70.7 x 141.3 cm, (MoMA)

As Marc noted in a 1915 letter to his wife, his own pantheism arose specifically from his disgust with modernity and human beings. Lamenting the "progress-hungry spirit of modern centuries," Marc wrote: "People with their lack of piety, especially men, never touched my true feelings. But animals with their virginal sense of life awakened all that is good in me."[1] Marc's form of primitivism went further than that of his fellow Expressionists. They looked to the lives of peasants and so-called primitive cultures for inspiration; Marc looked all the way back to a state of nature before humankind even existed.

Expression through color and form

Marc's animalization of art did not simply entail naturalistic paintings of animals in unspoiled landscapes. Already in *The World Cow* and *Grazing Horses IV*, we can see Marc intensifying the color and simplifying the drawing of his subjects, a tactic he takes even further in *Large Blue Horses*.



Figure **3.2.9.3**: Franz Marc, *Large Blue Horses*, 1912, oil on canvas, 41-5/8 x 71-5/16 inches (Walker Art Center)

In all of these works, Marc uses primary and secondary colors in their most intensely saturated state. Bright red or blue animals graze in vibrant pastures of reds, greens, and yellows underneath rainbow skies. While the proportions, anatomy, and postures of the animals are accurate (he made a living teaching animal anatomy for a time), Marc has increasingly abstracted their forms toward basic, almost geometric shapes that echo into the distant landscape.



Figure 3.2.9.4: Robert Delaunay, *Sun, Tower, Airplane*, 1913, oil on canvas, 132.08 x 131.13 cm (Albright-Knox Art Gallery)

These are pictorial strategies that Marc initially picked up in encounters with works of the Impressionists and Van Gogh while on a trip to Paris in 1907, and then with Robert Delaunay's **Simultanist** works in a subsequent trip in 1912. However, where Delaunay celebrated modern subjects, Marc avoided them. And despite the stylistic similarities between the two artists, there are crucial differences in intent.

How does a deer see the world?

The fracturing and fragmentation in Delaunay's works are reflective of human perceptual tendencies: the way present sense-experiences awaken simultaneous echoes of past viewings in the mind. Marc expressly wished to avoid making paintings about human perception. Why reject painting corrupt human beings, and then execute works that reflect a specifically human way of looking at the world? In an essay entitled, "How does a Horse see the World?" Marc asks,

> *What does the doe have in common with the view of the world as it appears to people? Does it make any reasonable or artistic sense to paint the doe as it appears on our retina — or in the manner of the Cubists because we feel the world to be cubistic? Who says the doe feels the work to be cubistic? It's the doe that feels, therefore the landscape must be "doelike."*[2]

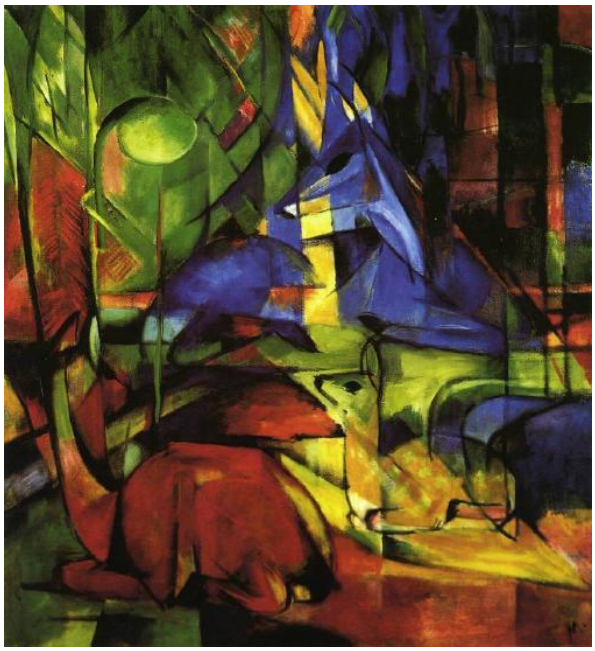


Figure 3.2.9.5: Franz Marc, *Deer in the Forest II*, 1914, oil on canvas, 110 x 100 cm (Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe)

It is of course impossible to know how a deer sees the world, but the distortion of form and intensification of color may be an attempt to represent the world as a deer sees it — as continuous with (and not separate from) herself. These more rectilinear, faceted works still reflect Marc's desire to integrate animal and landscape. The angular fragments that make up the bodies of the three deer extend and echo into the surrounding forest, with the blue, red, green, and yellow colors scattered prismatically throughout.

Color and energy

Another way to look at Marc's project is not in terms of objects or the perception of them, but rather in terms of energy and forces. Marc's description of pantheism as an "organic rhythm," as "the shivering and coagulating of blood in nature" suggests that the animals and landscape elements themselves are just temporary "coagulations" of matter and energy that are in a constant cycle of birth, life, death, decay, and rebirth. What is permanent and what permeates is the energy coursing through this cycle, expressed in the vibrancy of Marc's color and the rhythms of his compositions.



Figure 3.2.9.6: Franz Marc, *Yellow Cow*, 1911, 140.7 x 189.2 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY)

Marc's color theory, as inchoate as he acknowledged it to be, suggests such a reading:

> *Blue is the male principle, severe and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, cheerful and sensual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy, the color that has to come into conflict with, and succumb to the other two. For instance, if you mix blue — so serious, so spiritual — with red, you intensify the red to the point of unbearable sadness, and the comfort of yellow, the color complementary to violet, becomes indispensable …*[3]

The gendering of colors, and especially the association of male with spiritual and female with sensual, is obviously sexist. It is also dubious to assert that colors have such specific and absolute meanings. Red surely signifies something very different in Edvard Munch's ***The Scream*** than it does in Henri Matisse's ***Joy of Life***.

But we can generalize Marc's theory to a series of coherent underlying propositions. Colors are not necessarily gendered, but they are generative in the sense that they can be endlessly recombined into new colors or new creations. Viewing colors and color combinations can induce sensations and moods: cheerfulness, heaviness, sadness, and so on. These colors and moods are sometimes harmonious, but sometimes clashing and in conflict.

It is a painter's job to deploy the emotive and generative qualities of colors in order to produce formal tensions and harmonies that convey various psychological states. This provides an interesting new way to look at his work: one more focused on abstract qualities of design than the subject matter.

Toward abstraction

In the same letter where he talks about how he turned to animals as a more pure subject than humankind, Marc continues, "But then I discovered in [animals], too, so much that was ugly and unfeeling … Trees, flowers, the earth all showed me every year more and more of their deformity and repulsiveness — until now, suddenly, I have become fully conscious of nature's ugliness and impurity." In response to this new consciousness, Marc says his art changed as well: "Instinctively, by an inner compulsion, my presentation became more schematic or abstract."[4]



Figure **3.2.9.7**: Franz Marc, *Fighting Forms*, 1914, oil on canvas, 91 x 131 cm (Bavarian State Painting Collections, Munich)

In his last major works, the representational content is almost impossible to identify, and Marc's paintings read as abstract interactions between primal spiritual forces, embodied in form and color. Titles such as *Fighting Forms* and *Playful Forms* reinforce this reading.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Marc was drafted into the German army as a cavalryman. Because of his painting skills, he was put to work for a time camouflaging artillery, and he amused himself by developing patterns inspired by Manet and Kandinsky. Unfortunately, he was later sent to the front, and died in the battle of Verdun on 4 March 1916 — ironically just days before orders came to withdraw him from combat as a notable artist.

Notes:

1. Franz Marc, letter, 12 April 1915, as translated in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, L.A. and London, 1968), p. 182.
2. Franz Marc, “How does a Horse see the World?” translated in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley, L.A. and London, 1968), pp. 178-79.
3. As translated in Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany, 1890-1937: Utopia and despair* (Manchester and New York, 1988), p. 71.
4. As translated in Chipp, p. 182.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

3.2.10: Egon Schiele

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3.2.10.1: Seated Male Nude (Self-Portrait)

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

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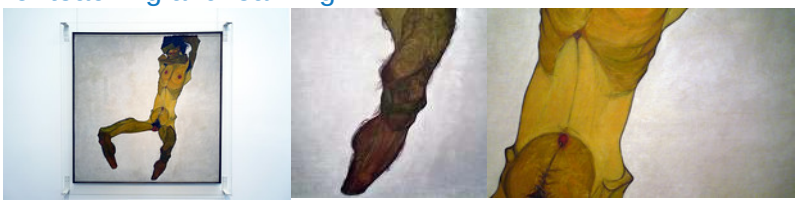


Video **3.2.10.1.1**: Egon Schiele, *Seated Male Nude (Self-Portrait)*, 1910, oil and gouache on canvas, 152.5 × 150 cm (Leopold Museum, Vienna)

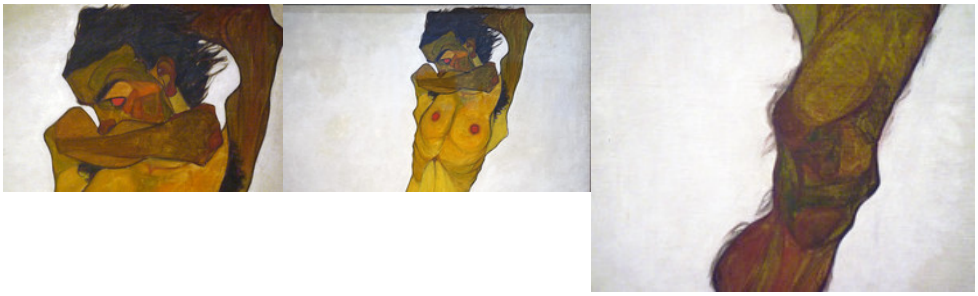
Key points:

- Schiele's choice to paint himself in such expressive terms demonstrates his interest in focusing on the self and subjective experience.
- The expressive contortions of the body reflect sculptural traditions of the past, but Schiele's figure lacks the heroicism of male nudes by artists such as Michelangelo.
- His depiction of the fragmented and emaciated body in *Seated Male Nude*, as well the red details and the lack of any surrounding context, suggest a heightened intensity of the figure's physical and psychological experience.

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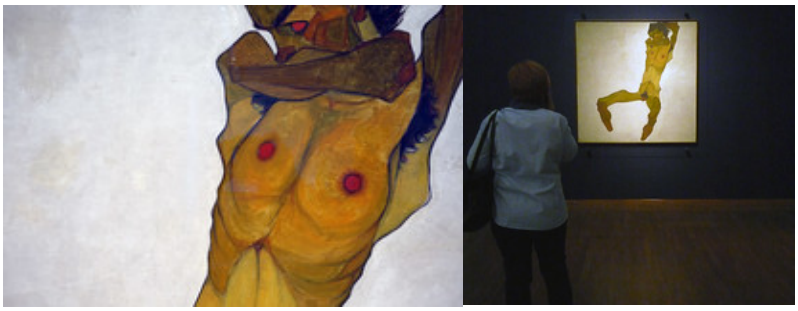
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3.2.10.2: Nazi looting- Egon Schiele's Portrait of Wally

by DR. ERIN THOMPSON and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **3.2.10.2.1**: Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Wally Neuzil*, 1912, oil on panel, 32 × 39.8 cm (Leopold Museum, Vienna) Speakers: Dr. Erin Thompson and Dr. Beth Harris

Additional resources:

"Two Schiele Drawings Ordered Returned to Heirs of Nazi Victim," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2018

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3.2.10.3: The Hermits

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **3.2.10.3.1**: Egon Schiele, *The Hermits*, 1912, oil on canvas, 71-1/4 x 71-1/4″ (Leopold Museum, Vienna)

Key points:

- The use of gold and fractured appearance of the background recall religious art of the medieval period, uniting the spiritual concerns of the past with the psychic interests of the modern age.
- Schiele's visible use of paint creates an agitated feeling, reflecting Expressionism's interest in our inner states of anxiety and tension.
- The figure on the right could reference the older Austrian artist Gustave Klimt. Since he has no eyes, he may also symbolize a prophet who possesses inner vision.
- Schiele described *The Hermits* as a poetic summary of his own experience, perhaps implying that the artist serves as a prophet in the modern age.

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3.2.10.4: Wangechi Mutu on Egon Schiele

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The Artist Project is an online series in which artists respond to works of art in The Met's encyclopedic collection. **http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/5/wangechi-mutu/**

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Cubism + early abstraction

A new, modern world demanded new ways of seeing and representing the things in it.

c. 1907 - 1939

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4.1: The Case for Abstraction

by THE ART ASSIGNMENT

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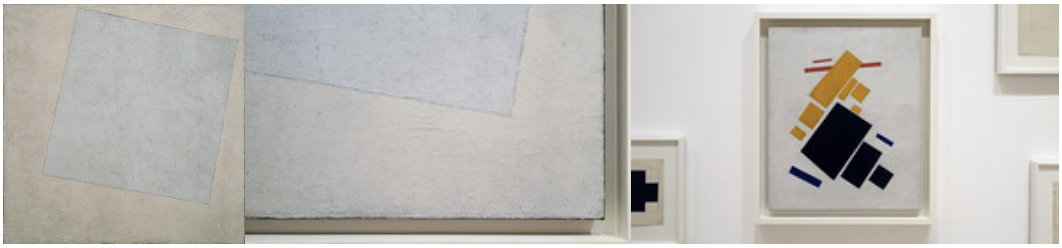
Video **4.1.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

Abstract art definition from the Tate

Abstract art resources from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



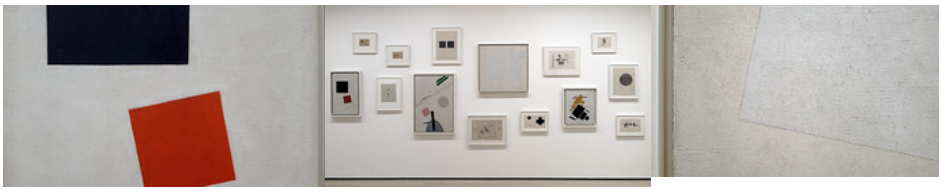
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4.2: Abstract art and Theosophy

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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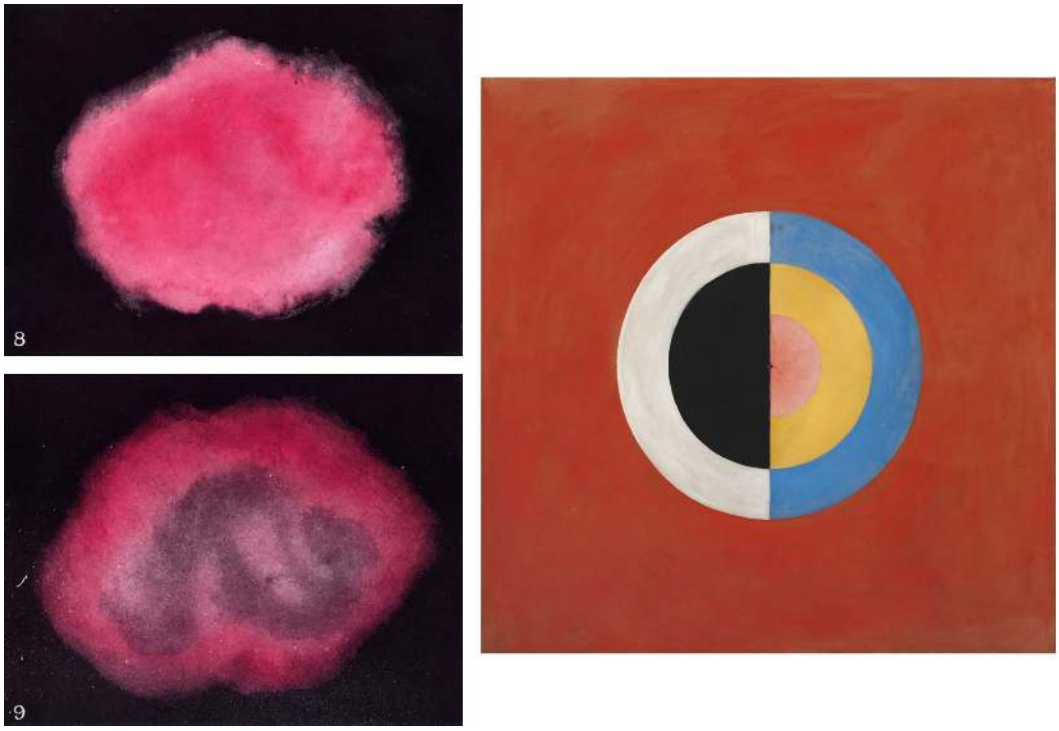


Figure 4.2.1: Left: from Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought Forms*, 1905 (London: The Theosophical Publishing House LTD); right: Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, No. 17. The Swan*, 1915, oil on canvas, 150.5 × 151 cm (Moderna Museet / Stockholm)

On the left, two amorphous pinkish clouds float against a black field; and on the right, a nested set of hard-edged, bisected disks converge toward a tiny equilateral triangle. These images look like they belong in the milieu of mid-twentieth century Abstract Expressionism, but they were actually produced almost half a century earlier by two remarkable women, Annie Besant and Hilma af Klint. They provide the first hints of the way in which abstract art was underwritten by a very surprising



Figure 4.2.2: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

source: an occult spiritualist movement called Theosophy. Many early abstractionists, including Vassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Kasimir Malevich, and František Kupka, as well as Hilma af Klint, cited Theosophy as a direct source for their ideas and works.

The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, was probably the most influential spiritualist organization of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Theosophy was a highly eclectic mixture of religious, philosophical, and occultist ideas. One of the

founders, Madame Blavatsky, wrote books that mix elements of Hinduism and Buddhism with Ancient Greek philosophy and modern science.

The Society had no formal dogma or established rituals, and had multiple, sometimes competing, centers and leaders around the world. Its members generally believed that there were truths beyond the reach of science, and that throughout history certain enlightened individuals or Mahatmas (including Abraham, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius) used spiritual discipline to grasp these truths and obtain supernatural powers.

Symbolism

The connection between Theosophy and formally-innovative modern art begins in the late-nineteenth century, when some artists and writers reacted strongly against the materialism of an age dominated by science and industrialization. In an 1892 essay, the art critic Albert Aurier decried the futility of scientific reasoning in the face of the deeper mysteries of life:

> ***The nineteenth century, after having proclaimed for eighty years, in its infantile enthusiasm, the omnipotence of observation and of scientific deduction, after having affirmed that no mystery could survive its lenses and its scalpels, seems finally to realize the vanity of its efforts, the puerility of its boasts.Albert Aurier, "Les peintres symbolistes," in Textes critiques, 1889-1892 (Paris: Ecole nationale supérieur des Beaux-Arts, 1995), pp. 29-30 (authors' translation)***

Aurier saw hope for the future in a new art movement called Symbolism, led by Paul Gauguin. Gauguin's work demonstrates his rejection of science and modernity most obviously in its turn away from the modern, urban subjects preferred by the Impressionists in favor of rural and religious subject-matter. His *Vision after the Sermon*, which Aurier described as the first masterpiece of the new movement, shows a group of Breton peasant women leaving church and having a collective vision of the Biblical patriarch Jacob wrestling an angel (Genesis 32:22-32).



Figure **4.2.3**: Paul Gauguin, *Vision after the Sermon (or Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888, oil on canvas, 72.20 x 91.00 cm (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh)

Equally important is the work's style, which rejects what had been a constant in Western art since the Renaissance: a basis in naturalism. Anatomy in Gauguin's work is rendered with the crude simplicity of a medieval woodcut. There is very little

chiaroscuro to indicate volume, and the ground is painted a virtually unmodulated red, defying expectations of both spatial recession and naturalistic color choice.



Figure **4.2.4**: Paul Sérusier, *Portrait of Paul Ranson in Nabi costume*, 1890, oil on canvas, 51 x 46.5 cm (Musée d'Orsay)

Following Gauguin, a number of Symbolist artists affirmed this linkage of a simplified or abstracted style with higher spiritual content. Prominent among these was a group who called themselves The Nabis, after the Hebrew word for "prophet." They were influenced by the Theosophist Edouard Schuré, whose book *Les Grands Initiés* (1889) recounts the esoteric wisdom of an eclectic group of spiritual "initiates," including Krishna, Hermes, Moses, Pythagoras, Plato, and Jesus.

Paul Sérusier's *Portrait of Paul Ranson* shows the Nabi artist in an elaborate blue-and gold robe, holding a gold staff decorated with symbols, and reading from a medieval-style illuminated manuscript. Behind him a red circle creates a mystic halo, and also shows the flat bright colors and abstract designs favored by the Nabis.

Although the juxtaposition of Ranson's 19th century pince-nez, waxed mustache, and well-trimmed goatee with this Medieval and esoteric regalia is somewhat incongruous (and may well have been intended to be tongue-in-cheek), it does demonstrate the spiritual aspirations of the group.

Spiritual visions

Theosophists often claimed that the "initiated" had an ability to directly perceive spiritual manifestations in the world around us. The Besant and Klint works with which we began were the result of such visions. Besant was a medium who was able to perceive color auras or "thought-forms" emanating from individuals that revealed their emotional and spiritual state. The upper pink cloud of "vague pure affection" was seen issuing from someone who was "happy and at peace with the world, thinking dreamily of some friend," while the one below shows affection intermixed with "the dull hard brown-gray of selfishness," and thus indicates affection based upon the pleasure of favors received or anticipated [1].

Klint was a member of a group of five women in Sweden who used séances to communicate with the spirits of deceased Mahatmas in order to recover lost wisdom. She claimed that her series of *Paintings for the Temple* were

> ***…painted directly through me [by these spirits], without any preliminary drawings, and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brush stroke.****as quoted by Moderna Museet*

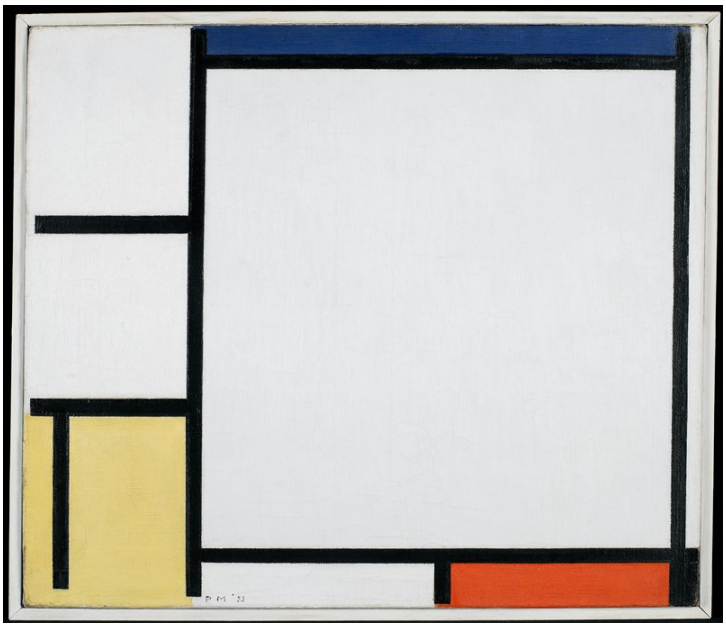


Figure **4.2.5**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue, Red, Yellow, and Black*, 1922, oil on canvas, 41.9 x 48.9 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Theosophy and Modernism

Theosophy aligned so well with modern art because it validated the idea that European art's traditional naturalistic style, which (they believed) merely imitates the surface appearances of nature, is inadequate to explain the deep underlying mysteries of the universe. For the theosophists and the artists who were influenced by them, there are truths inaccessible to the scientific method, and a meta-reality beyond the reach of human perception. Theosophy was a source for many artists who sought higher spiritual truths and a non-perceptual basis for their art, and it validated the idea that a fully spiritual art would leave behind all basis in natural objects and would be fully abstract.



Figure **4.2.6**: Vassily Kandinsky, *Study for Painting with White Form*, 1913, watercolor, opaque watercolor and ink on paper, 27.6 x 37.8 cm (MoMA)

It is important to recognize, however, that the styles inspired by Theosophy were remarkably diverse, ranging from Mondrian's rigidly rectilinear geometry to Kandinsky's improvisational painterly exuberance. The spiritual meta-reality appeared to different artists in remarkably diverse guises.

Theosophy was also undoubtedly compelling to some artists because of its suggestion that the artists themselves could be counted among the initiates, and that they had a mission to enlighten humankind. In his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1909), Kandinsky imagines the spiritual evolution of humankind as an upward-moving triangle articulated with different levels of enlightenment, from the ignorant masses at the base to the few initiates at the apex. Those toward the top of the triangle cannot be understood by those below them – thus helping to explain the poor critical reception of innovative modernist art such as Kandinsky's – but nonetheless are leading humanity upward in their spiritual evolution.

Notes:

1. Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbetter, *Thought Forms*, New York: John Lane, 1905, pp. 40-42.

Additional resources:

Sixten Ringbom. "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual': Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. vol. 29 (1966), pp. 386–418.

Maurice Tuchman, et al. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York, London, and Paris: Abbeville Press, 1986).

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4.3: Who created the first abstract artwork?

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Abstract art — also called “non-representational” or “non-objective” — has long been considered a central achievement of modernism. Several early-twentieth century artists claimed to be the first to make a completely abstract artwork, and although it turns out to be surprisingly difficult to fully settle the question, we will consider some of the main contenders below.

Defining the terms

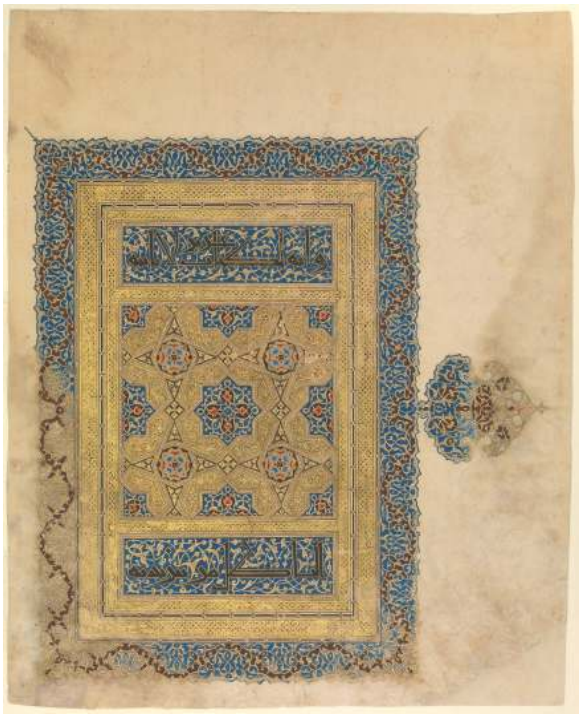


Figure **4.3.1**: Muhammad ibn Aibak ibn-Abdallah, Folio from a non-illustrated manuscript, 1306-7, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 43.2 x 35.2 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This 14th-century manuscript painting pre-dates the modern contenders for the first abstract work by over six hundred years. It is one example from a long Islamic tradition of non-representational art. Works like this are generally ignored in discussions about who made the first abstract painting, which reveals that the debate is, in fact, quite limited in its focus. We really mean, “Who in Western culture created the first abstract work?” Like Columbus “discovering” America, it turns out that there were actually a lot of people already there.

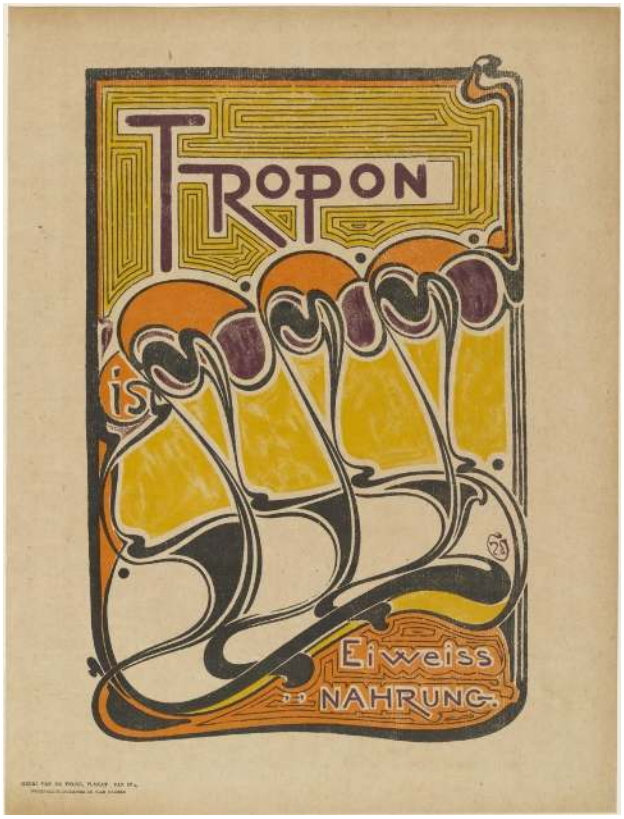


Figure **4.3.2**: Henri van de Velde, *Tropon* Poster, from the periodical *Pan*, vol. IV no. 1 (April-May-June 1898), lithograph, 31.1 x 19.9 cm (MoMA)

Van de Velde's poster advertising the protein extract Tropon displays an abstract design of stylized, vaguely organic shapes. Why is this also not generally considered a viable contender for the first abstract work? We find that we need to limit the question again: the first abstract work must have been made as "fine art." Decorative art and commercial design don't count. This distinction can seem very arbitrary, since many modern artists worked as commercial designers at times, and modern design is also often collected by art museums.

What we are really looking for, then, is not truly "the first" abstract artwork. Instead, we are seeking the first abstract artwork that was *intentionally created in the context of the post-Renaissance Western art world*, when fine art was expected to be representational.

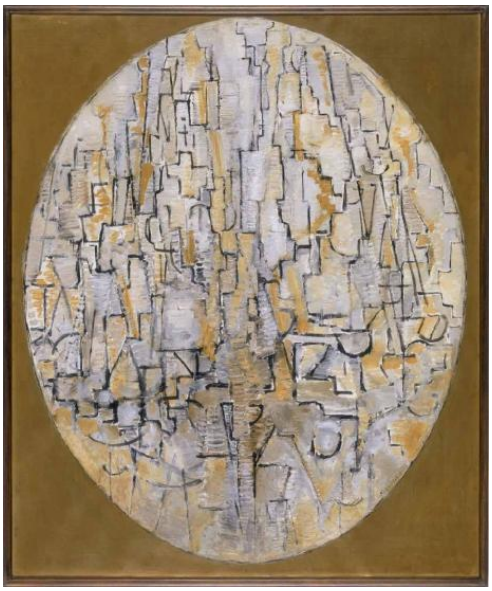


Figure **4.3.3**: Piet Mondrian, *Tableau No. 3* or *Composition in Oval*, 1913 (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).

Piet Mondrian wrote extensive justifications of abstract art, demonstrating a clear awareness of how radical he felt the move to abstraction was for fine art. Over the course of the 1910s he produced several series of works through a process that he explicitly called "abstraction," etymologically defined as "pulling away" elements of natural appearances from observed objects until eventually they bore **no resemblance to those objects**.

The work above is part of his series of abstracted trees: perhaps the two parallel vertical lines in the lower center are a trunk, and the oval frame defines the crown of the tree. However, if we approached the work in a museum without that information, it would be easy to see it as abstract in the sense of entirely non-representational. The gradual nature of Mondrian's evolution makes it very difficult to state when he first created a fully abstract work.

The titling of works can further complicate the issue: this work was titled "Tableau" or "Composition" by Mondrian, asking us to see it as just a composition of lines, shapes, and colors. An equally abstract-seeming work from the same year is called "The Tree A," which asks us to see a tree where otherwise we might not. Should determining whether a work is abstract depend on its title or other extrinsic information?

Kandinsky's spiritual vision

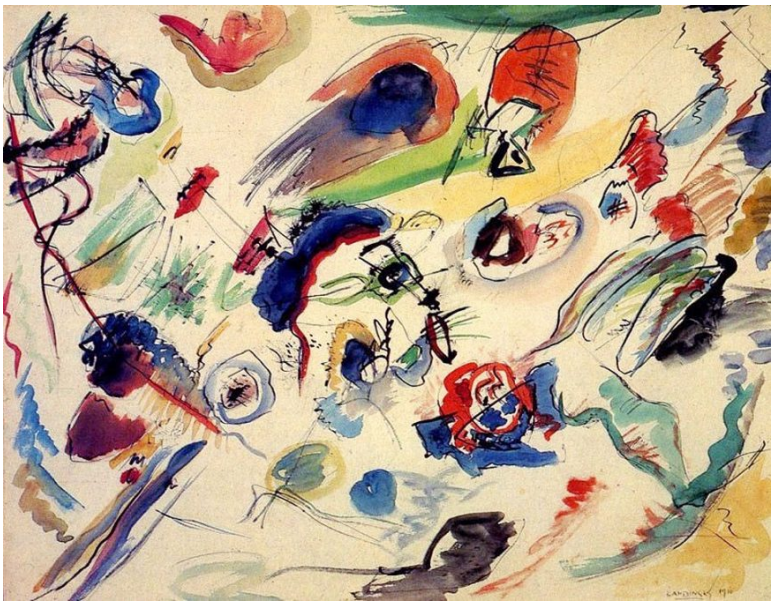


Figure **4.3.4**: Vasily Kandinsky, *Untitled* (*Study for Composition VII, first abstraction*), 1913, watercolor (Centre Pompidou).

Vasily Kandinsky backdated this work to 1910 (in the signature at the lower right), probably in order to claim that he was the first abstract artist — most art historians believe it dates to 1913. His 1909 text *On the Spiritual in Art* justifies abstraction in art as more spiritual than representation. However he, like Mondrian, approached abstraction very gradually. Even this painting is ambiguously abstract. It is part of a group of works based on imagery of the apocalypse, and, like Mondrian, Kandinsky "abstracted" that imagery to **reduce material references**.

In many paintings the imagery is very difficult to recognize, but it is still there. Kandinsky famously described seeing one of his own paintings as "only form and colors . . . . whose content was incomprehensible," but this was only because the work was on its side. Viewing it from the proper angle he saw the painting's apocalyptic imagery.[1]

Both Mondrian and Kandinsky eventually went on to create unequivocally non-representational artwork, but where is the line between representation and abstraction when the abstracted forms are derived from representational images that only a few people, if any, can recognize? Is abstraction in the eye of the beholder?

Appreciating color and music

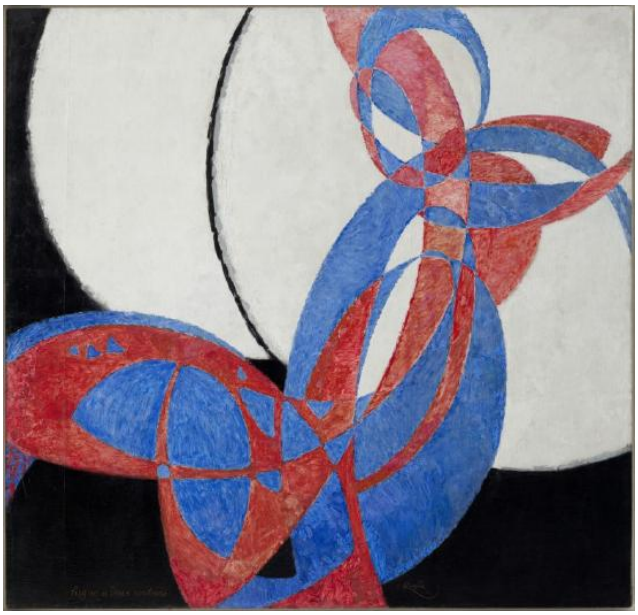


Figure 4.3.5: František Kupka, *Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours*, 1912, oil, canvas, 211 × 220 cm (National Gallery, Prague)

In the early twentieth century many people (including Kandinsky) justified abstract painting by comparing it to music. When we listen to instrumental music we do not generally compare it to real world sounds; we just enjoy being moved by the melody, harmony, rhythm, etc., in themselves. Why should visual art be different? Why not just appreciate how we are moved by colors, shapes, and textures?

A group of artists called the Orphists, including **Robert** and Sonia Delaunay and František Kupka, took this route. The title of Kupka's *Fugue in Two Colors* declares the painting to be the visual equivalent of a type of musical composition in which a short melody is repeated and developed in multi-part counterpoint. The looping, swelling, intertwining curves of red and blue in Kupka's painting are understandable as visualizations of the flowing aural interweaving of the musical voices in a fugue. Again, however, there was a naturalistic source for the painting: a drawing of a girl dancing with a ball in her hand that Kupka progressively abstracted.

Malevich's Suprematism



Figure 4.3.6: Kasimir Malevich, The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10, photograph, 1915

Kasimir Malevich is unusual in making the leap to pure abstraction very rapidly, rather than through a long process of abstracting natural objects. Malevich's works in The Last Futurist Exhibition are geometric abstractions, although some of them have titles that suggest real-world references, such as *Airplane Flying*. Malevich claimed that he first painted a pure abstract work, *Black Square*,

in 1913. However, there is no evidence to support this other than some loosely-related theater designs, and as we have noted, abstraction in design occurred earlier than that. This photograph of the exhibition dates to 1915, and Malevich wrote a theoretical justification of non-representational Suprematist painting the same year, making 1915 a solid *terminus ante quem* for the first abstract painting.

A new contender



Figure **4.3.7**: Hilma af Klint, exhibition at the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York**, 2018

Another artist who has recently been brought forward as a candidate for painting the first abstract artwork is Hilma af Klint. Between 1906 and 1915 Klint made a series of works called *Paintings for the Temple* that were generated from visions she had as a spiritual medium (in fact, all of the artists considered here apart from van de Velde were motivated to create abstract art for **spiritual reasons**). Some of Klint's works have recognizable natural imagery, but many others are pure geometric or biomorphic abstractions.

In terms of chronology Klint is a serious contender to be the first abstract painter, and it may be gratifying to think that it is a woman who has that distinction, despite the jockeying of her male contemporaries. Unfortunately, however, Klint's abstract works were created completely outside the context of the modern art world. In fact, she stipulated that they not be exhibited until twenty years after her death, and as a consequence they were unknown outside of her circle of friends, and had no influence on the debates concerning the viability of abstraction in art until the question was already settled.

An unanswerable question?

In the end, it may not be possible to answer the question of who created the first abstract artwork, but even this brief survey of the main contenders raises an arguably more interesting question. Although there were common themes and some direct contacts between the artists considered here, they were largely independent, working in different countries (Sweden, Russia, Germany, France, and The Netherlands), ending up with very different-looking works, and developing substantially different rationales for practicing abstraction. For whatever reason, in the years around 1910-15 all across Europe, the time was right for abstract art to (re-)enter the Western art world.

Notes:

1. Vasily Kandinsky, "Reminiscences" (1913), as translated in Robert L. Herbert, ed., *Modern Artists on Art* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 29.

Additional resources:

Hilma af Klint at the Guggenheim Musem

Henri van de Velde"s art at the Cooper Hewitt Museu

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.4: Beginner's Guide to Cubism

Picasso and Braque revolutionized painting with their new approach to representation.

c. 1907 - 1939

4.4.1: Pablo Picasso and the new language of Cubism

4.4.2: Inventing Cubism

4.4.3: Cubism and multiple perspectives

4.4.4: Synthetic Cubism, Part I

4.4.5: Synthetic Cubism, Part II

4.4.6: Salon Cubism

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4.4.1: Pablo Picasso and the new language of Cubism

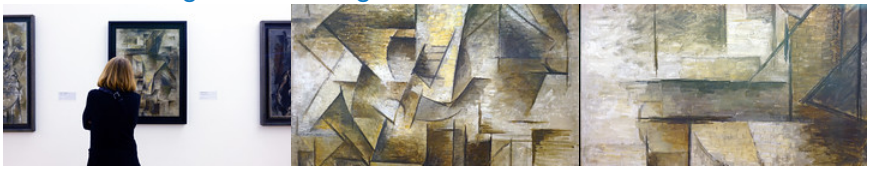
- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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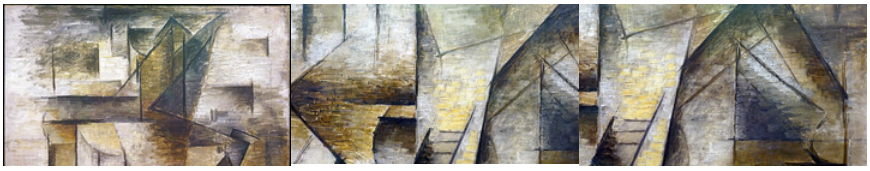


Video **4.4.1.2**: Pablo Picasso, *The Guitarist*, 1910, oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm (Centre Pompidou, Paris)

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4.4.2: Inventing Cubism

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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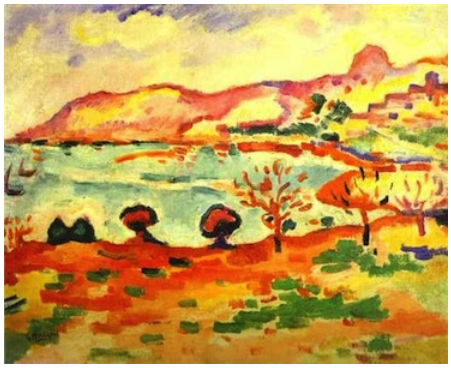


Figure 4.4.2.1: Georges Braque, *Landscape of l'Estaque*, 1907, oil on canvas, 37 x 46 cm. (Musée d'Art moderne, Troyes, France)

During the summer of 1908, Braque returned to Cézanne's old haunt for a second summer in a row. Previously he had painted this small port just south of Aix-en-Provence with the brilliant irrevent colors of a Fauve (Braque along with Matisse, Derain, and others defined this style from about 1904 to 1907). But now, after Cézanne's death and after having met Picasso, Braque set out on a very different tack, the invention of Cubism.



Figure 4.4.2.2: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 8 x 7 feet and 8 inches (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Cubism is a terrible name. Except for a very brief moment, the style has nothing to do with cubes. Instead, it is an extension of the formal ideas developed by Cézanne and broader perceptual ideas that became increasingly important in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These were the ideas that inspired Matisse as early as 1904 and Picasso perhaps a year or two later. We certainly saw such issues asserted in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.* But Picasso's great 1907 canvas is not yet Cubism. It is more accurate to say that it is the foundation upon which Cubism is constructed. If we want to really see the origin of the style, we need to look beyond Picasso to his new friend Georges Braque.

A New Perspective

The young French Fauvist, Georges Braque that had been struck by both the posthumous Cézanne retrospective exhibition held in Paris in 1907 and his first sight of Picasso's radical new canvas, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.* Like so many people that saw it, Braque is reported to have hated it—Matisse, for example, predicted that Picasso would be found hanged behind the work, so great was his mistake. Nevertheless, Braque stated that it haunted him through the winter of 1908. Like every good Parisian, Braque fled

Paris in the summer and decided to return to the part of Provence in which Cézanne had lived and worked. Braque spent the summer of 1908 shedding the colors of Fauvism and exploring the structural issues that had consummed Cézanne and now Picasso. He wrote:

> *It [Cézanne's impact] was more than an influence, it was an invitation. Cézanne was the first to have broken away from erudite, mechanized perspective…*[1]



Figure **4.4.2.3**: Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, 1902-04, oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 36 3/16 inches (73 x 91.9 cm) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Like Cézanne, Braque sought to undermine the illusion of depth by forcing the viewer to recognize the canvas not as a window but as it truly is, a vertical curtain that hangs before us. In canvases such as *Houses at L'Estaque* (1908), Braque simplifies the form of the houses (here are the so called cubes), but he nullifies the obvious recessionary overlapping with the trees that force forward even the most distant building.



Figure **4.4.2.4**: Georges Braque, *Houses at l'Estaque*, 1908, oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm (Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, Switzerland)

Brothers of Invention

When Braque returned to Paris in late August, he found Picasso an eager audience. Almost immediately, Picasso began to exploit Braque's investigations. But far from being the end of their working relationship, this exchange becomes the first in a series of collaborations that lasts six years and creates an intimate creative bound between these two artists that is unique in the history of art.



Figure 4.4.2.5: Pablo Picasso, *The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro*, 1909, oil on canvas, 24-1/8 x 20-1/8″ (Museum of Modern Art, New York, fractional and promised gift)

Between the years 1908 and the beginning of the First World War in 1914, Braque and Picasso work together so closely that even experts can have difficulty telling the work of one artist from the other. For months on end they would visit each others studio on an almost daily basis sharing ideas and challenging each other as they went. Still, a pattern did emerge and it tended to be to Picasso's benefit. When a radical new idea was introduced, more than likely, it was Braque that recognized its value. But it was inevitably Picasso who realized its potential and was able to fully exploit it.

Tough Art



Figure 4.4.2.6: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 81 cm (Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland)

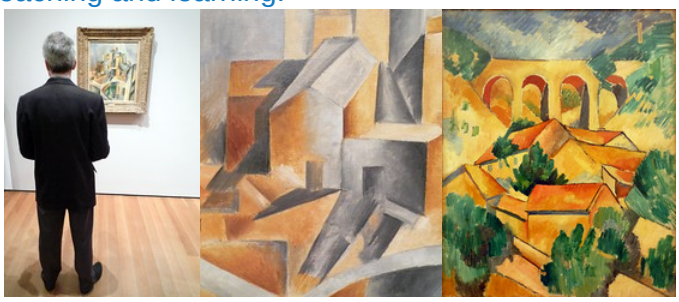
By 1910, Cubism had matured into a complex system that is seemingly so esoteric that it appears to have rejected all esthetic concerns. The average museum visitor, when confronted by a 1910 or 1911 canvas by Braque or Picasso, the period known as Analytic Cubism, often looks somewhat put upon even while they may acknowledge the importance of such work. I suspect that the difficulty, is, well…, the difficulty of the work. Cubism is an analysis of vision and of its representation and it is challenging. As a society we seem to believe that all art ought to be easily understandable or at least beautiful. That's the part I find confusing.

1. As quoted in William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989, p.353.

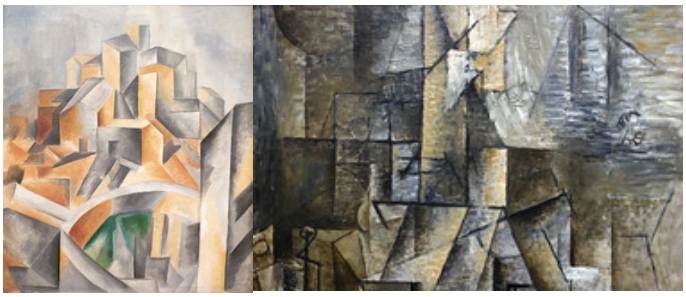
Additional resources:

Cubism on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

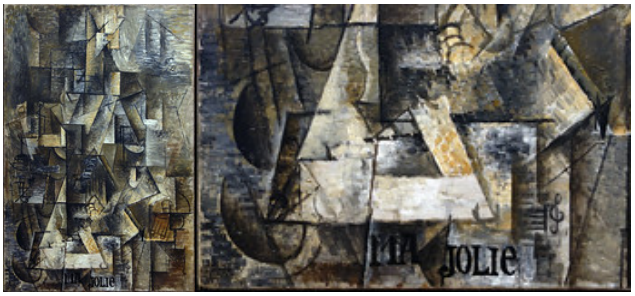
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4.4.3: Cubism and multiple perspectives

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.4.3.1**: Left: Georges Braque, *Pitcher and Violin*, 1909–10, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 73.2 cm (Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland); Right: a violin seen from the front and the side

At first sight the objects in Georges Braque's *Pitcher and Violin* appear arbitrarily distorted, but they are not. One tactic that Braque uses here is depicting objects from multiple perspectives. While most of Braque's violin is depicted frontally, like an illustration in an encyclopedia, the scroll at the top of the neck is represented from the side, and the bridge that holds the strings over the neck and sound board has been flipped up.

The pitcher is also depicted mostly from the side, but we see the top rim from above on the left-hand side, while the spout is depicted from a slightly less elevated angle. Similarly, while Braque appears to have depicted the violin standing improbably on its bottom edge, it is more likely that we are expected to understand it as lying flat on a table. Thus, we are looking down on the violin at the same time as we look straight ahead at the body of the pitcher and the wall behind the table.

Cubism as higher truth

This use of multiple perspectives became a hallmark of the **Cubist** style, but Braque and Picasso never explained why they employed this technique. One common contemporary interpretation argued that the use of multiple perspectives allows greater truth and accuracy than the traditional naturalistic style that had dominated art since the Renaissance. In 1912, the writer and art critic Jacques Rivière argued that **linear perspective** creates unrealistic distortions. For example, if we stand in the middle of railroad tracks, they appear to converge and meet at a point, when in fact they remain parallel.



Figure **4.4.3.2**: François Bonvin, *Still Life with Violin, Sheet Music, and Rose*, 1870, oil on canvas, 50.8 x 71.1 cm (**Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco**)

François Bonvin's painting of a violin shows how much the instrument is skewed and distorted when viewed in perspective. Parts nearer the viewer are larger than parts further away, and some parts are compressed by foreshortening while others are occluded entirely. Rivière wrote that such distortions are corrected in real life simply by moving around objects to see their true shapes.

> *A step to the right and a step to the left [can] complete our vision. The knowledge we have of an object is … a complex sum of perceptions … the object must always be presented from the most revealing angle.*
>
> *Jacques Rivière, "Present Tendencies in Painting" (1912), as translated in Edward Fry, ed., Cubism (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 77.*

Braque represents the key parts of the violin from the most revealing angle. For example, the scroll is flipped to the side because if viewed from the front like the rest of the violin, it would not be visible at all. At the same time, though, if the scroll were viewed from the side, we would only see two of the tuning pegs, so Braque flips the view again to straight on so that all four pegs are visible.



Figure **4.4.3.3**: William Claesz. Heda, *Still Life with Oysters, a Roemer, a Lemon and a Silver Bowl*, 1634, oil on panel, 43 x 57 cm (**Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam**)

In 1912, the writer Olivier-Hourcade provided another example of how Cubist paintings correct the distortions of perspective:

> *The painter, when he has to draw a round cup, knows very well that the opening of the cup is a circle. When he draws an ellipse, therefore, he is not sincere, he is making a concession to the lies of optics and perspective, he is telling a deliberate lie.*
>
> *Olivier-Hourcade, "The Tendency of Contemporary Painting" (1912), as translated in Fry, Cubism, p. 74.*

Look at all of the ellipses (flattened circles) in the Heda still-life above: the lip of the glass, the goblet, and the silver pedestal bowl, as well as the two pewter plates and the sliced lemon. All of these shapes are circles in real life; they only appear to be ellipses because of the angle from which they are viewed. The painter can correct this illusion simply by depicting these shapes from straight on, so the circle reveals its true shape.



Figure **4.4.3.4**: Georges Braque, *Still Life with Clarinet (Bottle and Clarinet)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 50.2 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

The subject of this still life may be difficult to discern, but with the help of the title we can begin to pick out the represented objects. The clarinet is the white rectangular shape in the left of the painting. Four finger holes extend up its length, which is shaded with chiaroscuro to suggest its tubular volume.

Note that while the bulk of the instrument is seen from the side, the opening at the base in the center of the painting is round, and a semicircle and schematic triangle at the other end by the edge of the canvas suggest the wedge-shaped cut out of the mouthpiece where the reed sits.

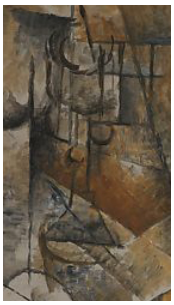


Figure **4.4.3.5**: Georges Braque, *Still Life with Clarinet (Bottle and Clarinet)*, detail of glass in upper right quadrant 1911, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 50.2 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Above the clarinet's finger holes, we can see a wine bottle with schematic, squared-off shoulders. Its transparency is indicated by the fact that we can see the clarinet through it. Notice that here, too, while we see the bulk of the bottle from the side, Braque has rendered the bottle's mouth as a circle, as though seen from above, while a quarter-circle indicates the round base below.

With familiarity, we can begin to recognize objects in Cubist still-lifes even when they are not explicitly mentioned in the title. In the upper right quadrant of this painting there is a stemmed glass, again seen mostly from the side, but circles at the base, lip, and stem indicate the perfect roundness of those parts.

An art of conception, not perception

Jacques Rivière also argued that monochromatic color and inconsistent lighting are more truthful means to depict reality than traditional naturalism. As the **Impressionists** had demonstrated, the appearance of objects changes radically in different kinds of light.

Monochromatic color eliminates the variables of lighting to represent objects in their true form, as we know them to be, rather than showing them distorted by our vision. For this reason, Cubism was often seen as an art of conception rather than perception. Cubist

paintings represented the composite idea of objects that we have in our heads, rather than rendering objects from one point of view, at one moment in time, and in one kind of light.

Cubism vs. illusionism

Braque and Picasso were well aware of how revolutionary their new way of representing objects was. As if marking the very different approaches to "realism" employed by Cubism and traditional naturalism, Braque painted a nail in the top center of *Pitcher and Violin*. Although it is rendered in a relatively cursory manner, its darkness and cast shadow make it appear at first sight as though it were a real nail pinning the painting to the wall.



Figure **4.4.3.6**: William Michael Harnett, *Still Life – Violin and Music*, 1888, oil on canvas,101.6 x 76.2 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

This refers to a tradition of nineteenth-century *trompe l'oeil* painting that was the culmination of Renaissance naturalism. Trompe l'oeil paintings are so detailed and convincing that the viewer is fooled into thinking they are real.

Everything in this Harnett still life is painted: the violin, the door, the rusty hinges and nails, the lock, and even the wooden frame. Although this is the style that is usually taken as being the most "realistic," it is in fact an illusion: it's only paint on canvas. The use of multiple perspectives to show objects' true shapes is arguably more true to reality.

Incomprehensible fins

The idea of Cubism as a more truthful representation of objects based on the use of multiple perspectives to build up a composite, conceptual representation was one of the dominant interpretations of the movement. It does not, however, fully account for what we see in the works, and it should be remembered that Braque and Picasso did not articulate or endorse this interpretation.

One thing that this interpretation does not account for is what can be called the "background noise" of Cubist paintings. While some shapes in Braque's *Pitcher and Violin* and *Clarinet and Bottle* can be seen as articulating the shapes of those objects from

multiple perspectives, others appear to be just arbitrary fragments. Also, as the style of Cubism evolved, Braque and Picasso broke objects up into smaller and smaller facets, until they are **virtually unrecognizable** in a shallow plane of monochromatic shards.



Figure **4.4.3.7**: Georges Braque, *Still-LIfe with Banderillas*, 1911, oil and charcoal with sand on canvas, 65.4 x 54.9 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

More oddly still, not only are the objects themselves faceted, it appears as though the empty space between them has also been shattered into facets. In some works, paint is applied in an almost brick-like fashion, further contributing to the background noise, until only a few clues (and the titles) hint at what is being represented.

Rivière found such paintings perplexing:

> ***To each object they add the distance which separates it from neighboring objects … and in this way they show it prolonged in all directions and armed with incomprehensible fins. The intervals between forms—all the empty parts of the picture, all the places in it occupied by nothing but air, find themselves filled up by a system of walls and fortifications.***
>
> *Jacques Rivière, "Present Tendencies in Painting" (1912), as translated in Edward Fry, ed., Cubism, p. 79.*

Although this is a fairly accurate description of late Cubist painting, Rivière was unable to explain its motivations and claimed that these were "mistakes." His highly rational view of Cubism led him to dismiss the elements of the style that did not conform to his ideas. Rivière's "multiple perspectives as higher truth" interpretation is compelling, and as we have seen backed by some visual evidence, but there are clearly other facets to Picasso's and Braque's Cubism.

Additional resources:

Edward Fry, ed., *Cubism* (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1966)

Read and listen to more about *Still life with Banderillas* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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4.4.4: Synthetic Cubism, Part I

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Starting in 1912, surprising new elements begin to turn up in works by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque: cut-up pieces of newspaper, wallpaper, construction paper, cloth, and even rope. Although the resulting collages are visually very different from the largely monochromatic oil paintings most commonly associated with the movement, they are still considered to be part of Cubism.

Partly this is because these works often included drawings that use techniques associated with Cubism, such as deconstructing objects into fragmented, angular forms seen from multiple perspectives. Beyond this similarity, though, there is also another, more conceptual one. This new phase of Cubism is also dedicated to exploring the ambiguities of representation, now on an even wider scale.

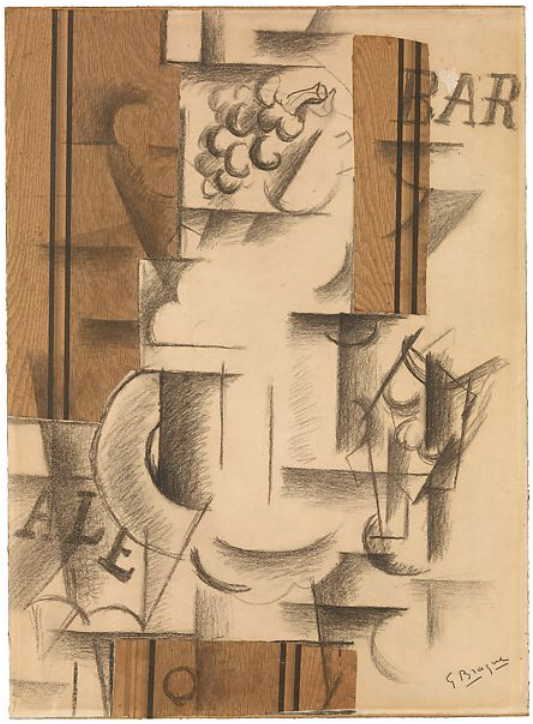


Figure **4.4.4.1**: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, charcoal, wallpaper, and gouache on paper, 24 3/4 x 18 inches (**Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Fruit Dish and Glass is Braque's first work using *papier collé* (pasted paper), a subset of collage made using only paper. Picasso's first collage, ***Still Life with Chair Caning*** preceded Braque's *Fruit Dish and Glass* by a few months and was made from a variety of materials including oilcloth and rope. Papier collé was a central medium in the second phase of Braque's and Picasso's joint Cubist investigations commonly known as Synthetic Cubism.

Retreat from abstraction

During this phase both artists retreated from the verge of total abstraction they had reached in their **late Analytic Cubist paintings**. Synthetic Cubist works use multiple forms of representation, combining the abstracted forms of Analytic Cubism with color, collage, and even sometimes naturalistic representations, to create a complex whole.



Figure **4.4.4.2**: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, detail (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In *Fruit Dish and Glass*, Braque combines Cubist drawing with illusionistic representation, words, and decorative paper printed with a wood grain pattern (*faux bois*). At the top we see a bunch of grapes drawn relatively naturalistically, with light and shade defining its three-dimensional forms. The remaining still-life objects are depicted in an Analytic Cubist style that deconstructs them into arcs, cylinders, and flat planes representing a fruit dish, plates, and glasses on a table. The words “BAR” and “ALE” are frequently seen on signs and labels in cafés and indicate the general location of the still life.

References to traditional illusionism



Figure **4.4.4.3**: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, detail (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Charcoal drawing extends over the strips of wood grain paper that frame and anchor the central forms. The two vertical strips in the upper portion represent wood paneling on a café wall behind the still life, while the horizontal strip below represents a wooden table supporting the dishes and fruit. A circle drawn on the lower strip of wood grain paper suggests the round knob of a drawer pull. This is a reference to illusionistic paintings, which often depict handles and knobs facing the viewer to enhance the sense of the objects being real and within easy reach.



Figure **4.4.4.4**: Jean Siméon Chardin, *The House of Cards*, 1737, oil on canvas. 82.2 x 66 cm (**National Gallery of Art, Washington**)

The naturalistic grapes framed by lines and pasted paper at the top of the work are also a specific reference to the Western tradition of illusionistic representation. A famous story from Ancient Greece describes how the painter Zeuxis was so skilled an artist that birds tried to eat the grapes he painted. Braque centers his drawn grapes as a well-known example of traditional naturalism and then surrounds them with alternative strategies of representation.

Signifying real objects by other means

The Cubist drawings of suggestive geometric forms are, like the words BAR and ALE, a means of referring to or signifying real objects. If we know the language we know what a word signifies; this is true of French and English, and it is (at least theoretically) true of Cubist forms as well. Once we are aware of Cubist conventions for drawing we can recognize that certain relationships of lines and shapes signify fruit, a glass, or a face. The wood grain paper is also a means of signification. The represented texture refers to the physical materials in the scene, providing further information.



Figure 4.4.4.5: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, detail (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In addition, wood grain paper is, like the drawn grapes, an illusion. The naturalistically depicted grapes represent the central achievement of the European fine art tradition. The wood grain paper is, by contrast, a cheap mass-produced item used for decorative purposes. Its presence undermines the exalted value of artistic skill in creating illusionistic representations, and demonstrates another feature of synthetic Cubism: the collapse of distinctions between "high" art and the cheap, ephemeral materials and techniques of mass-produced design.

A kind of certainty

Braque later wrote:

> ***The papiers collés in my drawings have also given me a kind of certainty.***
>
> *Georges Braque, "Thoughts on Painting" (1917)*

This is generally understood to mean that they allowed him a way to retreat from the increasingly unmoored abstraction of late Analytic Cubism and anchor his works more solidly in relation to reality. The vaporous spaces and ambiguous forms of Analytic Cubist paintings like ***The Portuguese*** are, however, replaced by a different type of ambiguity resulting from the complex and shifting relationships of disparate materials and modes of signification.

Braque's association of *papiers collés* with certainty should also be understood in terms of literalism and materiality. Picasso and Braque often employed collage elements as a shortcut means to represent objects. A newspaper in a still life of a café table will be represented by simply gluing newspaper to the picture plane, rather than painstakingly imitating its appearance using paint. Similarly, literal wallpaper is used to represent the presence of wallpaper in the scene, and the actual label is used to show a label on a bottle of wine. This is a form of playful one-upmanship of the Western tradition of naturalistic depiction: the artist now offers reality itself, rather than illusion.



Figure 4.4.4.6: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, charcoal, wallpaper, and gouache on paper, 24 3/4 x 18 inches (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Collage elements also enhance the physical and tactile qualities of the artwork, which increasingly interested both Braque and Picasso. During this period they both also made **sculptures** and created pronounced surface textures in their paintings by adding

sand, sawdust and other grainy materials to paint.

The strips of wood-grain paper in *Fruit Dish and Glass* confront the viewer with powerful dark shapes, which create a visually strong frame for the more immaterial charcoal drawing on white paper. In addition, the way the drawing continues onto the pasted paper enhances the typically Cubist interest in the tension between literal flatness and represented spatial depth.

Multiple readings



Figure **4.4.4.7**: Pablo Picasso, *Siphon, Glass, Newspaper and Violin*, 1912, paper and charcoal, 18 1/2 x 24 5/8 inches (**Moderna Museet, Stockholm**)

In *Siphon, Glass, Newspaper and Violin*, Picasso displays the multiple ways charcoal drawing and papier collé can be used to represent objects. For example, on the left newspaper is cut into the shape of a siphon, while on the right it is used as a surface for drawings of a glass and part of a violin. Its edges also define the left side of the violin's upper body and neck.

Analytic cubist techniques are used to depict the glass, violin, and top of the siphon from **multiple perspectives**, while on the far right, paper painted with illusionistic wood grain indicates the violin's material. In the center the word 'JOURNAL' (the French word for newspaper) cut from a newspaper's masthead represents that object in a particularly direct and literal way. Although we are not offered a coherent visual illusion of the objects in the title, these multiple media and representational strategies combine to give us all of the relevant information.



Figure **4.4.4.8**: Pablo Picasso, Siphon, Glass, Newspaper and Violin, 1912, detail (**Moderna Museet, Stockholm**)

Papier collé and collage not only anchored Cubist forms more firmly as distinct material objects, they also gave the artists a particularly rich means for generating multiple possibilities of meaning through a combination of media, representational strategies, and suggestive shapes and their formal relationships. Collage shapes, materials, colors, and words all contribute to the complex significations that proliferate in Synthetic Cubism.

Additional resources:

Read about *Fruit Dish and Glass* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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4.4.5: Synthetic Cubism, Part II

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.4.5.1**: Left: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, charcoal and cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper with gouache on white laid paper mounted on paperboard, 62.9 × 45.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); Right: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches (McNay Museum, San Antonio)

Pablo Picasso's *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass* is generally thought to have been made as a response to **Georges Braque's *Fruit Dish and Glass***. Both works bring a new tool into the already-complex collection of Cubist techniques of representation — the use of collage.

A wealth of associations

The subject of Picasso's *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass* is familiar from earlier **Analytic Cubist paintings**, which frequently depict café tables with drinks, newspapers, and **musical instruments**. Here, however, the abstracted geometric forms of Analytic Cubism are limited to the charcoal drawing of the glass on paper pasted on the right. It is one element in the collage, which includes seven different types of paper arranged on a wallpaper ground.

The pattern of the wallpaper is a diagonal lattice that frames flowers and recalls the overall patterns of lattices and grids that structure earlier Analytic Cubist paintings such as Braque's *Piano and Mandola*.

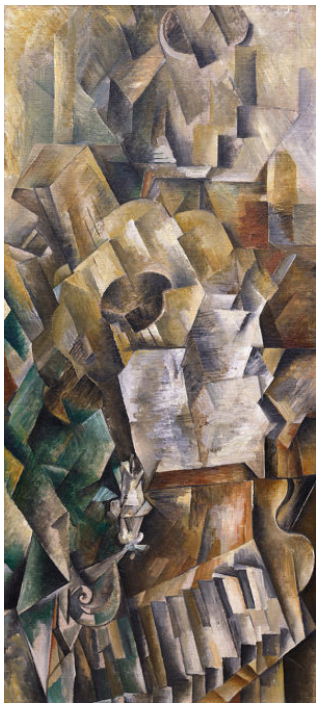


Figure 4.4.5.2: Georges Braque, *Piano and Mandola*, 1909-10, oil on canvas, 36 1/8 x 16 7/8 inches (**Guggenheim Museum, New York**)

While Braque's *Fruit Dish and Glass* used only one type of pasted paper (the printed wood grain), Picasso uses many, and demonstrates that a wealth of associations can be generated from their juxtaposition.

Patterns of formal relations

An intricate pattern of formal relations is created between the varied shapes and colors of the pasted paper, which also generate a complex set of possible readings. The guitar is signified by multiple cut-paper elements.

On the left, the hand-painted wood grain paper cut into a double curve suggests the material and shape of the guitar's body. A vertical trapezoid of blue paper is the neck in perspective, while the shallow black curve below stands for both the bottom of the guitar and the leading edge of the circular table on which the still-life sits.

In the center of the image, the white paper circle representing the sound hole in the guitar body looks like a hole cut out of the picture, while the fragment of sheet music simultaneously refers to itself, and to the sounds emanating from the instrument.

The glass drawn in charcoal is somewhat overwhelmed by the strong shapes of the pasted papers, but its ghostly appearance, as well as the semi-transparency of the paper on which it is drawn, suggests the transparency of glass. It is brought into the composition by the use of a visual rhyme — the circular lip of the glass directly echoes the white circle of pasted paper to the left.



Figure **4.4.5.3**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, Collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches (McNay Museum, San Antonio)

The importance of text

One topic of debate among art historians has been the importance of the legible texts in Cubist collages. In this instance, it is generally agreed that the newspaper text in the lower left is relevant. The headline "La Bataille s'est engagé" (the battle has begun) is from an article about the Balkan War, but it is often interpreted as a competitive challenge to Braque, referring to the use of *papier collé*. In that reading, this work is a direct response to, and attempt to one-up, Braque's *Fruit Dish and Glass*.

The truncated masthead of the newspaper "LE JOU" (short for *le journal*, French for "the newspaper") is also meaningful. It appears in many Cubist works and not only signifies the newspaper's presence in the still life, but also a pun on the French words for "to play" (*jouer*) and "toy" (*le jouet*). This is a verbal echo of the many formal rhymes and visual puns that appear in Synthetic Cubist works. These allow for multiple readings of individual elements and the relationships between them.



Figure **4.4.5.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, detail (McNay Museum, San Antonio)

In *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, for example, "LE JOU" also recalls the French word for day (*le jour*), and suggests another reading for the forms in the work. The circle of white paper overlapping the trapezoid of blue paper above it can be interpreted as representing not only a guitar's sound hole and neck, but as the sun rising into the sky at the beginning of a new day. Battles often begin at dawn, and the paired juxtaposition of the papier collé guitar and the Analytic Cubist drawing of a glass suggests a competition between older and newer Cubist techniques.

Political references

Most early discussions of Cubist collages stressed their formal innovations and the novel representational strategies they employed. More recently, however, some art historians have looked more closely at the texts of the newspaper clippings in Picasso's works and discovered references to his political interests.



Figure **4.4.5.5**: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Bottle of Suze*, 1912, pasted paper, gouache, and charcoal, 25 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches (**Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis**)

Still Life with Bottle of Suze is another work that uses legible clippings of articles about the contemporary Balkan war. This one also includes a clipping about a socialist demonstration against that war held in a Paris suburb. When asked about it years later Picasso said he used that particular clipping because it was a huge event and to show that he was against the war.



Figure **4.4.5.6**: Detail, Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Bottle of Suze*, 1912 (Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis)

While it is unlikely that Picasso expected viewers to carefully read the fine print text in the newspaper clippings he used, headlines and sub-headers often stand out and appear to make relevant comments. In *Still Life with Bottle of Suze* a bold face sub-header on the left, “La Dislocation”, is easily legible and placed next to the still-life objects that have been separated and dislocated by Cubist representational techniques.

An art of ordinary activities and cheap materials

Most early Cubist collages depict still-life subjects, usually the types of objects found on café tables. They represent the ordinary places where the artists would have a drink, listen to a musical act, read a newspaper, and meet their friends. Newspaper clippings represent the sort of topical events discussed in cafés. Preserved in the artworks, the newspapers and other ordinary non-art materials such as wallpaper, labels, tickets, etc. now seem like mementos of a specific time and place.



Figure **4.4.5.7**: Pablo Picasso, *Au Bon Marché*, 1913, oil and pasted paper on cardboard, 9 1/4 x 12 1/4 inches (Ludwig Collection, Aachen)

In their collages Picasso and Braque avoided conventional, often expensive, art materials and overt displays of technical skill that would indicate artistic training. Prior to its use by Braque and Picasso, collage was primarily a craft technique used by women and hobbyists in the 19th century to make scrapbooks. Collages are "poor" art works that do not employ the professional artist's traditional manual skills.

Picasso's *Au Bon Marché* proclaims its cheapness not only in its materials, but by its title as well. *Bon marché* is a French term meaning "good deal" or "cheap" as well as being the name of a prominent Paris department store. At the top of the collage, an advertisement for a rival Paris department store, Samaritaine, suggests another persistent theme of the collages: references to brand name products, mass media, advertisements, and commerce. Many artists, starting with the **Dadaists** during World War I and continuing to the present day, adopted the Cubists' use of cheap found materials, employing them as a critical strategy to question the commercial values of the art world and modern society.

An enormous influence

For many people the appeal of early Cubist collage and papier collé is more intellectual than conventionally aesthetic. These works prompt the viewer to enjoy the multiple references and significations to be found in the combinations of forms and punning texts, rather than displaying the sensuous qualities of the painted surface or the artist's skilled touch.

Despite its somewhat arcane intellectual appeal, however, Cubist collage had an enormous influence on modern art in the 20th century. Its employment of simplified planar forms was instrumental in the establishment of non-representational art, especially the geometric abstraction of movements such as **Suprematism**, **Constructivism**, **De Stijl**, **Color Field painting**, and **Minimalism**. And, the way the collages combine disparate found materials, refer to mass consumer culture, and collapse distinctions between 'low' and 'high' culture contributed to the development of Dada, **Surrealism**, assemblage, **Pop art**, and the various trends associated with **post-modernism**.

Additional resources:

Still Life with Bottle of Suze at the Kemper Art Museum

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4.4.6: Salon Cubism

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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The face of Cubism

Today, most people associate Cubism with **Picasso** and **Braque**, but in the early 1910s when the style was new, the works of many other Cubist artists, including Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Henri Le Fauconnier, and Fernand Léger, were better known. These artists are often called the Salon Cubists because they participated in the large annual public exhibitions in Paris known as Salons. Picasso and Braque, by contrast, had an exclusive contract with their dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and only showed their Cubist works in Paris at his private gallery.

The Salon Cubists lived and worked in Paris neighborhoods, mostly Montparnasse and suburban Puteaux, some distance from Picasso and Braque's studios in Montmartre. They met frequently with writers and intellectuals to discuss a range of ideas including mathematics, physics, politics, and philosophy. The group was large; thirty artists exhibited over 200 works at their 1912 exhibition, *La Section d'Or* (The Golden Section). In the early 1910s their works appeared in modern art exhibitions throughout Europe.



Figure **4.4.6.1**: Cubist rooms at the Salon d'Automne 1912

A public profile

The Salon Cubists cultivated publicity; they showed their works as a group in order to attract attention in the overcrowded Salons. The Cubist Room at the 1911 Salon des Indépendants gained them public notice from purportedly scandalized viewers along with extensive critical recognition in newspapers and magazines.

By the time Cubism appeared, public outrage over modern art was a cliché. A long succession of modern art movements had led the public to expect incomprehensible new art works, and in the 1910s the number of "-isms" began to proliferate exponentially in both visual arts and literature. Cubism was one of the most prominent and successful movements claiming to represent the modern world in new, specifically modern ways. How it did so was, however, a matter of constant debate.

Big, ambitious paintings

Like Picasso and Braque, the Salon Cubists extended **Cézanne's** exploration of the tensions and ambiguities of depicting three-dimensional objects in space on the flat surface of the picture plane. Salon Cubist paintings were, however, notably different from Picasso's and Braque's.

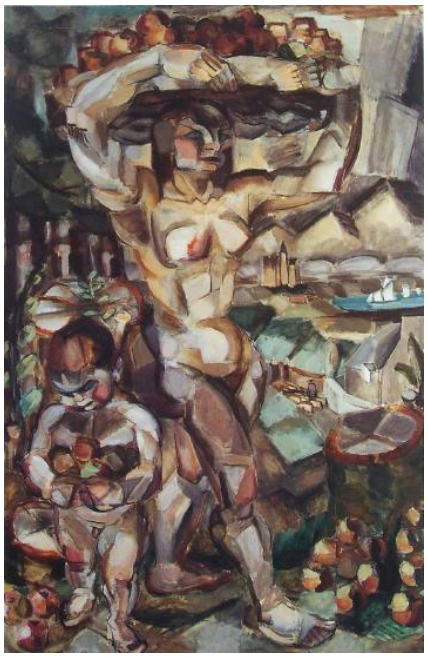


Figure **4.4.6.2**: Henri Le Fauconnier, *Abundance*, 1910, oil on canvas, 191.5 x 123 cm (**Kunstmuseum Den Haag**)

The first difference is scale. Many Salon Cubist paintings were large. Henri Le Fauconnier's *Abundance*, which was considered an important example of Cubist painting and exhibited widely throughout Europe in the 1910s, measures slightly over six by four feet. Picasso's and Braque's contemporary Cubist works were rarely more than a quarter that size, and often much smaller.



Figure **4.4.6.3**: Albert Gleizes, The Bathers, 1912, oil on canvas, 105 x 171 cm (**Musee d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris**)

Another difference is subject matter. Picasso and Braque painted mostly still lifes and single figures in portrait format, while the Salon Cubists addressed grand themes and painted multi-figure compositions, landscapes, and cityscapes. Albert Gleizes' *The Bathers* combines a pastoral scene of nude figures bathing in the foreground with the factory chimneys of a modern suburb smoking in the background. In Le Fauconnier's *Abundance* an allegorical female nude and a child are surrounded by fruit symbolizing the fertility of the land, and by extension, nationalistic pride in France itself.

Conflicting interpretations

While Picasso and Braque never provided any explanation of their Cubist work, some Salon Cubists were more forthcoming. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger published *Du Cubisme* (1912), which, despite its often vague and theoretically inconsistent text, was the most popular book on Cubist art for years. It was one of many texts on Cubism by critics, writers, and theorists eager to explain the new style.

Interpretations were often in conflict as critics attempted to explain how and why Cubist painters developed their non-naturalistic techniques of representation in relation to almost every scientific discovery and philosophical theory popular in the early 20th

century. Some prominent critics and theorists analyzed **Cubism as an art of conception** (depicting what is known) rather than perception (depicting what is seen) in terms of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Cubist approaches to depicting figures and space were also frequently linked to non-Euclidean geometry and conceptions of space and time derived from both occultism and non-Newtonian physics. Another source for Cubist innovations was seen in the enormously popular anti-rationalist philosophy of Henri Bergson.



Figure **4.4.6.4**: Jean Metzinger, *Le Goûter*, 1911, oil on cardboard, 29 7/8 x 27 5/8 inches (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

Bergsonian Cubism

Jean Metzinger's *Le Goûter* can be used to illustrate a Bergsonian approach to interpreting Cubism. The painting, whose title translates both to "taste" and "tea-time," shows a seated woman holding a spoon and touching a tea saucer. Bergson's philosophy stressed the importance of the physical senses, particularly touch, taste, and smell, as sources of intuitive knowledge. *Le Goûter* is all about sensory experience. Its female subject is partially nude, traditionally intended to appeal to the (implied) heterosexual male viewer's sense of touch as well as sight, and it depicts her using her own senses, touching the tea saucer while smelling and tasting her tea.

Typical Cubist techniques can also be interpreted in Bergsonian terms. In *Le Goûter* the woman's head and the cup are depicted from different angles. We see the cup and saucer from the side on the left and from above on the right. The woman faces us directly on the right, and is in profile on the left. According to Bergson the world is not composed of static objects isolated in empty space. Instead everything exists in duration — a continuous flow of time and space. The Cubist technique of depicting things simultaneously from different vantage points can be understood as presenting a Bergsonian conception of reality by rejecting a static single view point and showing the object as constantly changing in the temporal and spatial flux. This is also indicated by the technique of *passage*, breaking the boundaries between solid objects and surrounding space, as Gleizes does on the woman's left shoulder in *Le Goûter*.



Figure **4.4.6.5**: Henri Le Fauconnier, *Abundance*, 1910, oil on canvas, 191.5 x 123 cm (**Kunstmuseum Den Haag**)

Bergson's concepts of intuition and *élan vital* can also be used to interpret Cubism. *Élan vital* is Bergson's concept of a universal life force. In Le Fauconnier's *Abundance* the vibrant and chaotic interlocking planes unify the figures, fruit, village and distant Alpine landscape into a visually active, faceted surface that suggests a vital force pulsating through everything. *Élan vital* cannot be directly perceived or even rationally understood, but it can be intuited. Bergson believed artists were particularly sensitive and intuitive beings in tune with the *élan vital*, and in their art they communicated their insights to the masses.



Figure **4.4.6.6**: Albert Gleizes, *The Path (Meudon)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 146.4 x 114.4 cm (private collection)

Products of the artist's intuitive understanding, Cubist paintings with their non-rational spaces and ambiguous forms also prompted viewers to use their own intuition to complete the images in their minds. Gleizes' *The Path (Meudon)* is a patchwork of geometric shapes that on examination reveals a scene of trees towering over a suburban village with a man walking in the foreground and a church on the horizon. The dynamic interlocking planes convey both a sense of movement and of unity, a world in which each part is connected to the whole in a vibrant, oscillating pattern suggestive of the vital force that animates the Bergsonian universe.

A kaleidoscope of modern experience

Some painters used Cubist forms to suggest a more abstract and extended interpenetration of space and time than Metzinger depicted in *Le Goûter*.



Figure **4.4.6.7**: Fernand Léger, *The Wedding*, 1912, oil on canvas, 257 x 206 cm (**MNAM Pompidou Center**)

Fernand Léger's *The Wedding* combines fragmented images of a crowded wedding celebration with aerial views of rooftops and a tree-lined street, interspersed with cloudy white abstract planes. His multiple views are more complex and disjointed than the comparatively legible scenes by Gleizes, Metzinger, and Le Fauconnier.

Léger's painting suggests floating fragments of memory brought together in a kaleidoscope of shifting images. This conflation of different scenes in a single painting can be connected to Bergson's notion of duration and to the related concept of **simultaneity, which was understood by many artists of the time** as a synthesis of memory and vision.

Ultimately, the work of the Cubist artists exhibiting in the Paris Salons was no more the product of a single unified theory than were the less public Cubist works of Picasso and Braque. The Salon Cubists used the new style to address a broad range of subjects and ideas, from traditional allegories and the celebration of nature to contemporary concepts of time and space.

Additional resources:

View a digitized copy of *Du Cubisme* at MoMA

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4.5.1: How to paint like Pablo Picasso (Cubism)

- by **COREY D'AUGUSTINE**

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4.5.2: Picasso's Early Work

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Age twenty and looking rather goth

When I'm in the galleries at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, I obviously spend a good deal of time looking at the art. But I also watch people look at the art and listen to what they have to say. The comments that people make can be quite thoughtful and visitor comments and questions have added enormously to my appreciation of the art over the years. Still, there are many comments that are born of pure befuddlement. And many of these target Picasso.



Figure **4.5.2.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Self Portrait*, 1901, oil on canvas (Musée Picasso)

Many people seem to believe that Picasso's abstraction of the human figure, his penchant for reconfiguring the body by mis-aligning a nose or an eye, for instance, is the result of his inability to draw. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is an old anecdote that tells of Picasso, who, upon emerging from an exhibition of drawings by young children, says, "When I was their age I could draw like Raphael, but it took me a lifetime to learn to draw like them."

Perhaps this quote is apocryphal, but it points to something undeniably true: Picasso was an extraordinary craftsman, even when measured against the old masters. That he chose to struggle to overcome his visual heritage in order to find a language more responsive to the modern world is an important triumph that has had a vast effect upon our world. Picasso's art has transformed and inspired not only artists, but also architects, designers, writers, mathematicians, and even philosophers. We may look at Picasso's art in museums, but his art—via these translators—has therefore had a profound influence on what we see in our everyday life. Just think of the advertisements for products we buy, buildings in which we live and work, books we read, and even the way we conceive of reality.

"My kid could make that"



Figure **4.5.2.2**: Pablo Picasso age 12 or 13, Study of a Torso, After a Plaster Cast, 1893-94 (Musée Picasso, Paris)

There is no question that Picasso's art has had a most profound impact on the twentieth century. While Picasso suggests the value of unlearning the academic tradition, it is important to remember that he had mastered its techniques by a very early age. His father, Don José Ruiz Blasco, was a drawing teacher and curator at a small museum. The young Picasso began drawing and painting by

age seven or eight. By age ten, Picasso assisted his father, sometimes painting the minor elements of the elder's canvases. Soon after his father became a professor at the art academy in Barcelona, the young Picasso completed the entrance examinations (in record time) and was advanced to the school's upper-level program. He repeated this feat when he applied to the Royal Academy in Madrid.

Picasso in Paris

Like Van Gogh had done before him, Picasso arrived in Paris determined to work through the avant-garde's techniques and subjects to better understand such art. An example of his explorations of the achievements of contemporary art in Paris can be seen by comparing a painting by Degas to one by Picasso.



Figure **4.5.2.3**: Edgar Degas, *Woman Ironing*, oil on canvas, ca. 1890 (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)

It is not surprising that Picasso, the great draftsman, would be interested in the work of the "odd man out" Degas, who nearly alone among the Impressionists retained the primacy of line. In the example *Woman Ironing*, Picasso has infused a somewhat maudlin weariness to his attenuated and curiously sensual laborer. Still, Picasso understands Degas's experimentation with abstraction. Note how in Degas's image, the luminous negative space defined between the arms refuses to recede beyond the figure, remaining trapped instead. Likewise, Picasso defines and centers an almost identical form. Notice, too, the bowl that Picasso places in the lower right corner. Like everything in this canvas, it is roughly formed with a dry brush. Still, the simple strokes of white and dark gray that define the volume speak to the magical pleasure of rendering space, a love that Picasso carries with him through out his career.



Figure **4.5.2.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Woman Ironing*, 1904, oil on canvas, 116.2 x 73 cm (Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Family of Saltimbanques



Figure 4.5.2.5: Pablo Picasso, *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905, oil on canvas, 212.8 x 229.6 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

This great, early painting by Picasso portrays a family of saltimbanques. These are wandering circus performers that move from town to town—never truly welcome, and only briefly tolerated for their ability to entertain.

Like so many of Picasso's early subjects during his so-called Blue and Rose periods in the first years of the twentieth century, here is a group of disenfranchised, alienated people that live on the fringes of society. This particular group includes characters from the sixteenth-century Italian performing tradition of *commedia dell'arte*. One such figure is the rogue wit known as the Harlequin, who wears a suit of multicolored triangles. Picasso seems to have identified with such characters at this time. As he often reminded people, he was very poor at this point in his career. A Spaniard in France who did not yet speak the language, and still an unknown artist only in his mid-twenties, Picasso might well have felt an affinity with itinerant outsiders such as the saltimbanques.

The Laundry Barge

In Paris in 1904, Picasso rented a studio in an old, dilapidated building filled with artists and poets. Located at 13 Rue Ravignan, the building was dubbed the Bateau-Lavoir (or laundry barge) by poet-in-residence, Max Jacob. It is at this time that Picasso first came into contact with French painter Henri Matisse, as well as American ex-pat Gertrude Stein, who—along with her brother Leo—was one of the foremost patrons of modern art in Paris.

Additional resources:

Pablo Picasso on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Cubism on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Portrait of Gertrude Stein at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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4.5.3: Guernica

by LYNN ROBINSON

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What would be the best way today to protest against a war? How could you influence the largest number of people? In 1937, Picasso expressed his outrage against war with *Guernica*, his enormous mural-sized painting displayed to millions of visitors at the Paris World's Fair. It has since become the twentieth century's most powerful indictment against war, a painting that still feels intensely relevant today.



Figure **4.5.3.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Antiwar icon

Much of the painting's emotional power comes from its overwhelming size, approximately eleven feet tall and twenty five feet wide. Guernica is not a painting you observe with spatial detachment; it feels like it wraps around you, immerses you in its larger-than-life figures and action. And although the size and multiple figures reference the long tradition of European history paintings, this painting is different because it challenges rather than accepts the notion of war as heroic. So why did Picasso paint it?

Commission



Figure **4.5.3.2**: Postcard of the International Exposition, Paris, 1937 (from a series of 20 detachable cards, edited by H. Chipault)

In 1936, Picasso (who was Spanish) was asked by the newly elected Spanish Republican government to paint an artwork for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris World's Fair. The official theme of the Exposition was a celebration of modern technology. Yet Picasso painted an overtly political painting, a subject in which he had shown little interest up to that time. What had happened to inspire it?

Crimes against humanity: an act of war



Figure **4.5.3.3**: Guernica in ruins, 1937, photograph (German Federal Archives, bild 183-H25224)

In 1936, a civil war began in Spain between the democratic Republican government and fascist forces, led by General Francisco Franco, attempting to overthrow them. Picasso's painting is based on the events of April 27, 1937, when Hitler's powerful German air force, acting in support of Franco, bombed the village of Guernica in northern Spain, a city of no strategic military value. It was history's first aerial saturation bombing of a civilian population. It was a cold-blooded training mission designed to test a new bombing tactic to intimidate and terrorize the resistance. For over three hours, twenty five bombers dropped 100,000 pounds of explosive and incendiary bombs on the village, reducing it to rubble. Twenty more fighter planes strafed and killed defenseless civilians trying to flee. The devastation was appalling: fires burned for three days, and seventy percent of the city was destroyed. A third of the population, 1600 civilians, were wounded or killed.

Picasso hears the news

On May 1, 1937, news of the atrocity reached Paris. Eyewitness reports filled the front pages of local and international newspapers. Picasso, sympathetic to the Republican government of his homeland, was horrified by the reports of devastation and death. *Guernica* is his visual response, his memorial to the brutal massacre. After hundreds of sketches, the painting was done in less than a month and then delivered to the Fair's Spanish Pavilion, where it became the central attraction. Accompanying it were documentary films, newsreels and graphic photographs of fascist brutalities in the civil war. Rather than the typical celebration of technology people expected to see at a world's fair, the entire Spanish Pavilion shocked the world into confronting the suffering of the Spanish people.

Later, in the 1940s, when Paris was occupied by the Germans, a Nazi officer visited Picasso's studio. "Did you do that?" he is said to have asked Picasso while standing in front of a photograph of the painting. "No," Picasso replied, "you did."

World traveler

When the fair ended, the Spanish Republican forces sent *Guernica* on an international tour to create awareness of the war and raise funds for Spanish refugees. It traveled the world for 19 years and then was loaned for safekeeping to The Museum of Modern Art in New York. Picasso refused to allow it to return to Spain until the country "enjoyed public liberties and democratic institutions," which finally occurred in 1981. Today the painting permanently resides in the Reina Sofia, Spain's national museum of modern art in Madrid.

What can we see?

This painting is not easy to decipher. Everywhere there seems to be death and dying. As our eyes adjust to the frenetic action, figures begin to emerge. On the far left is a woman, head back, screaming in pain and grief, holding the lifeless body of her dead child. This is one of the most devastating and unforgettable images in the painting. To her right is the head and partial body of a large white bull, the only unharmed and calm figure amidst the chaos. Beneath her, a dead or wounded man with a severed arm and

mutilated hand clutches a broken sword. Only his head and arms are visible; the rest of his body is obscured by the overlapping and scattered parts of other figures. In the center stands a terrified horse, mouth open screaming in pain, its side pierced by a spear. On the right are three more women. One rushes in, looking up at the stark light bulb at the top of the scene. Another leans out of the window of a burning house, her long extended arm holding a lamp, while the third woman appears trapped in the burning building, screaming in fear and horror. All their faces are distorted in agony. Eyes are dislocated, mouths are open, tongues are shaped like daggers.



Figure **4.5.3.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm. (Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Color

Picasso chose to paint *Guernica* in a stark monochromatic palette of gray, black and white. This may reflect his initial encounter with the original newspaper reports and photographs in black and white; or perhaps it suggested to Picasso the objective factuality of an eye witness report. A documentary quality is further emphasized by the textured pattern in the center of the painting that creates the illusion of newsprint. The sharp alternation of black and white contrasts across the painting surface also creates dramatic intensity, a visual kinetic energy of jagged movement.

Visual complexity

On first glance, *Guernica's* composition appears confusing and chaotic; the viewer is thrown into the midst of intensely violent action. Everything seems to be in flux. The space is compressed and ambiguous with the shifting perspectives and multiple viewpoints characteristic of Picasso's earlier Cubist style. Images overlap and intersect, obscuring forms and making it hard to distinguish their boundaries. Bodies are distorted and semi-abstracted, the forms discontinuous and fragmentary. Everything seems jumbled together, while sharp angular lines seem to pierce and splinter the dismembered bodies. However, there is in fact an overriding visual order. Picasso balances the composition by organizing the figures into three vertical groupings moving left to right, while the center figures are stabilized within a large triangle of light.

Symbolism

There has been almost endless debate about the meaning of the images in Guernica. Questioned about its possible symbolism, Picasso said it was simply an appeal to people about massacred people and animals. "In the panel on which I am working, which I call *Guernica*, I clearly express my abhorrence of the military caste which has sunk Spain into an ocean of pain and death." The horse and bull are images Picasso used his entire career, part of the life and death ritual of the Spanish bullfights he first saw as a child. Some scholars interpret the horse and bull as representing the deadly battle between the Republican fighters (horse) and Franco's fascist army (bull). Picasso said only that the bull represented brutality and darkness, adding "It isn't up to the painter to define the symbols. Otherwise it would be better if he wrote them out in so many words. The public who look at the picture must interpret the symbols as they understand them."

In the end, the painting does not appear to have one exclusive meaning. Perhaps it is that very ambiguity, the lack of historical specificity, or the fact that brutal wars continue to be fought, that keeps *Guernica* as timeless and universally relatable today as it was in 1937.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

Guernica: Testimony of War (PBS)

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4.5.4: Portrait of Gertrude Stein

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **4.5.4.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The Laundry Barge



Figure **4.5.4.1**: Le Bateau-Lavoir, Place Émile Goudeau, Montmartre, Paris

In 1904, Picasso rented a studio in an old, dilapidated building in Paris filled with artists and poets. Located at 13 Rue Ravignan, the building was dubbed the Bateau-Lavoir (or laundry barge) by poet-in-residence, Max Jacob.

It was at this time that Picasso first came into contact with French painter Henri Matisse, as well as the American expatriate Gertrude Stein. Gertrude commissioned a portrait by Picasso in 1905, around the same time that her brother Leo bought Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre*. As the strong solid woman of Picasso's painting suggests, Gertrude Stein was a formidable presence in Paris of the early 20th century. An influential writer, she, along with her brother, was an important patron of the arts, known for hosting salons that brought together some of the period's most famous artists, writers, and intellectuals.



Figure **4.5.4.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Gertrude and Picasso

At the time of his commission, Picasso hoped to cultivate a relationship with the wealthy Stein, who had already been impressed by the innovative style of Matisse.



Figure **4.5.4.3**: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 175 x 241 cm. (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

In contrast to Matisse's bright colors and sensuous undertones in paintings like *Bonheur de Vivre*, Picasso's portrait demonstrates the angular distortions and formal experimentation that would characterize his artwork through the invention of Cubism.



Figure 4.5.4.4: (L) Alvin Langdon Coburne, Photograph of Gertrude Stein, 1913 (George Eastman House Collection); (R) Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 32 inches (100 x 81.3 cm) (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The story goes that Stein sat for Picasso so many times (as many as 90 sittings) that eventually he said he could no longer see her when he looked at her. He then wiped out her face in the painting and left on a trip to Spain. When he returned to Paris in the fall, Picasso quickly completed the portrait—supposedly from memory—in a way that challenged traditional expectations of portraiture. Whereas most portraits tell us about the sitter through their physical likeness and expressive detail, Picasso instead showed his subject as a massive hulking figure who stares blankly past the viewer.



Figure 4.5.4.5: Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Gertrude Stein, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Painted in dull, muted colors, Stein's broad body fills Picasso's canvas. Her bulky form sits on a large armchair or sofa and stiffly leans forward, imposing in the way she rests her arms and large hands heavily on the folds of her skirt. In contrast to the rounded mass of the figure, Stein's face has a planar quality that seems hard and mask-like—an effect heightened by the geometric treatment of the eyes, nose, and mouth, and the dark modeling that distinguishes its angular contours from the rest of her head and body.



Figure 4.5.4.6: Iberian female head, c. 299 and 100 B.C.E., sandstone, 15 cm x 17 cm x 10 cm (National Archaeological Museum of Spain)

Picasso's odd rendering of Stein's features reflects the influence of African and Iberian art on the artist, but it might also allude to art's inability to reveal the truth about an individual. Like many European artists at the time, Picasso looked to ancient and non-western art as a source of primitive inspiration—a colonialist notion that viewed "uncivilized" cultures to be more spiritually authentic than the sophisticated cities of Europe. Thus, while Picasso admired the formal qualities of these sculptural influences, he also believed them better able to communicate deeper meaning and ideas that could not be conveyed through the established traditions of Western art.

The Power of the Artist

By reworking Gertrude Stein's portrait in a primitive style, Picasso claimed for himself the power to represent the woman as she really is, not merely as a likeness of her physical appearance. Stein's response to the image supports this point of view. In her book on Picasso, she wrote:

> ***I was and I still am satisfied with my portrait, for me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me.*** [1]



Figure 4.5.4.7: Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Gertrude Stein, 1905-06, oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Like Picasso's reliance on the expressive potential of primitive forms, Stein's repetitive word play demonstrates her own interest in how language could convey meaning through formal effect instead of descriptive content. For the artist and the author, both challenged the conventions of their media in order to explore the power of art to communicate in new ways that would be appropriate to the modern era.

[1]Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (London: B.T. Batsford, LTD, 1938); reprinted by Dover Publications, 1984, p. 8.

Additional resources:

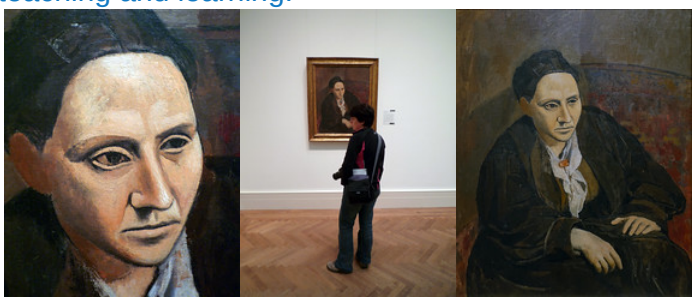
This painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre* at The Barnes Foundation

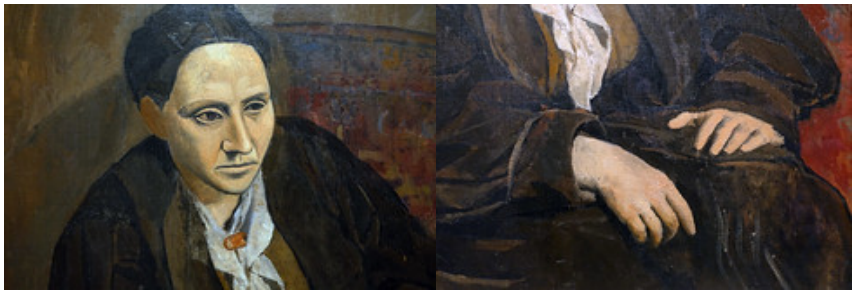
Biography of Gertrude Stein from *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*

The Collections of Gertrude and Leo Stein (Smithsonian.com)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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4.5.5: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **4.5.5.11**: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 243.9 x 233.7 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Cézanne's ghost, Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre*, and Picasso's ego

One of the most important canvases of the twentieth century, Picasso's great breakthrough painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was constructed in response to several significant sources.



Figure **4.5.5.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 8′ x 7′ 8″ (243.9 x 233.7 cm) (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

First amongst these was his confrontation with Cézanne's great achievement at the posthumous retrospective mounted in Paris a year after the artist's death in 1907.



Figure 4.5.5.2: Paul Cézanne, *The Large Bathers*, 1906, oil on canvas, 82 7⁄8 × 98 3⁄4″ (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

The retrospective exhibition forced the young Picasso, Matisse, and many other artists to contend with the implications of Cézanne's art. Matisse's *Bonheur de Vivre* of 1906 was one of the first of many attempts to do so, and the newly completed work was quickly purchased by Leo & Gertrude Stein and hung in their living room so that all of their circle of avant-garde writers and artists could see and praise it. And praise it they did. Here was the promise of Cézanne fulfilled—and one which incorporated lessons learned from Seurat and van Gogh, no less! This was just too much for the young Spaniard.



Figure 4.5.5.3: Henri Matisse, *Bonheur de Vivre*, 1906, oil on canvas, 175 x 241 cm (The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia)

Pablo becomes Picasso

By all accounts, Picasso's intensely competitive nature literally forced him to out do his great rival. *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* is the result of this effort. Let's compare canvases. Matisse's landscape is a broad open field with a deep recessionary vista. The figures are uncrowded. They describe flowing arabesques that in turn relate to the forms of nature that surround them. Here is languid sensuality set in the mythic past of Greece's golden age.

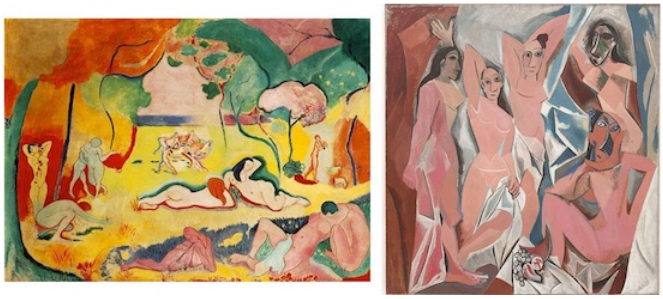


Figure 4.5.5.4

In very sharp contrast, Picasso, intent of making a name for himself (rather like the young Manet and David), has radically compressed the space of his canvas and replaced sensual eroticism with a kind of aggressively crude pornography. (Note, for example, the squatting figure at the lower right.) His space is interior, closed, and almost claustrophobic. Like Matisse's later *Blue Nude* (itself a response to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*), the women fill the entire space and seem trapped within it. No longer set in

a classical past, Picasso's image is clearly of our time. Here are five prostitutes from an actual brothel, located on a street named Avignon in the red-light district in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia in northern Spain—a street, by the way, which Picasso had frequented.

Picasso has also dispensed with Matisse's clear, bright pigments. Instead, the artist chooses deeper tones befitting urban interior light. Gone too, is the sensuality that Matisse created. Picasso has replaced the graceful curves of *Bonheur de Vivre* with sharp, jagged, almost shattered forms. The bodies of Picasso's women look dangerous as if they were formed of shards of broken glass. Matisse's pleasure becomes Picasso's apprehension. But while Picasso clearly aims to "out do" Matisse, to take over as the most radical artist in Paris, he also acknowledges his debts. Compare the woman standing in the center of Picasso's composition to the woman who stands with elbows raised at the extreme left of Matisse's canvas: like a scholar citing a borrowed quotation, Picasso footnotes.

The creative vacuum-cleaner

Picasso draws on many other sources to construct *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*. In fact, a number of artists stopped inviting him to their studio because he would so freely and successfully incorporate their ideas into his own work, often more successfully than the original artist. Indeed, Picasso has been likened to a "creative vacuum cleaner," sucking up every new idea that he came across. While that analogy might be a little coarse, it is fair to say that he had an enormous creative appetite. One of several historical sources that Picasso pillaged is archaic art, demonstrated very clearly by the left-most figure of the painting, who stands stiffly on legs that look awkwardly locked at the knee. Her right arm juts down while her left arm seems dislocated (this arm is actually a vestige of a male figure that Picasso eventually removed). Her head is shown in perfect profile with large almond shaped eyes and a flat abstracted face. She almost looks Egyptian. In fact, Picasso has recently seen an exhibition of archaic (an ancient pre-classical style) Iberian (from Iberia–the land mass that makes up Spain and Portugal) sculpture at the Louvre. Instead of going back to the sensual myths of ancient Greece, Picasso is drawing on the real thing and doing so directly. By the way, Picasso purchased, from Apollinaire's secretary, two archaic Iberian heads that she had stolen from the Louvre! Some have suggested that they were taken at Picasso's request. Years later Picasso would anonymously return them.

Spontaneity, carefully choreographed



Figure **4.5.5.5**: Pablo Picasso, *Study for Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, 7.5 x 8 in. (18.5 x 20.3 cm) (irregular) (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Because the canvas is roughly handled, it is often thought to be a spontaneous creation, conceived directly. This is not the case. It was preceded by nearly one hundred sketches. These studies depict different configurations. In some there are two men in addition to the women. One is a sailor. He sits in uniform in the center of the composition before a small table laden with fruit, a traditional symbol of sexuality. Another man originally entered from the left. He wore a brown suit and carried a textbook, he was meant to be a medical student.

The (male) artist's gaze

Each of these male figures was meant to symbolize an aspect of Picasso. Or, more exactly, how Picasso viewed these women. The sailor is easy to figure out. The fictive sailor has been at sea for months, he is an obvious reference to pure sexual desire. The medical student is trickier. He is not there to look after the women's health but he does see them with different eyes. While the sailor represents pure lust, the student sees the women from a more analytic perspective. He understands how their bodies are constructed, etc. Could it be that Picasso was expressing the ways that he saw these women? As objects of desire, yes, but also, with a knowledge of anatomy probably superior to many doctors. What is important is that Picasso decides to remove the men. Why? Well, to begin, we might imagine where the women focused their attention in the original composition. If men are present, the prostitutes attend to them. By removing these men, the image is no longer self-contained. The women now peer outward, beyond the confines of the picture plane that ordinarily protect the viewer's anonymity. If the women peer at us, like in Manet's *Olympia* of 1863, we, as viewers, have become the customers. But this is the twentieth century, not the nineteenth and Picasso is attempting a vulgar directness that would make even Manet cringe.

Picasso's perception of space

So far, we have examined the middle figure which relates to Matisse's canvas; the two masked figures on the right side who refer, by their aggression, to Picasso's fear of disease; and, we have linked the left-most figure to archaic Iberian sculpture and Picasso's attempt to elicit a sort of crude primitive directness. That leaves only one woman unaccounted for. This is the woman with her right elbow raised and her left hand on a sheet pulled across her left thigh. The table with fruit that had originally been placed at the groin of the sailor is no longer round, it has lengthened, sharpened, and has been lowered to the edge of the canvas. This table/phallus points to this last woman. Picasso's meaning is clear, the still life of fruit on a table, this ancient symbol of sexuality, is the viewer's erect penis and it points to the woman of our choice. Picasso was no feminist. In his vision, the viewer is male.

Although explicit, this imagery only points to the key issue. The woman that has been chosen is handled distinctly in terms of her relation to the surrounding space. Yes, more about space. Throughout the canvas, the women and the drapery (made of both curtains and sheets) are fractured and splintered. Here is Picasso's response to Cezanne and Matisse. The women are neither before nor behind. As in Matisse's Red Studio, which will be painted four years later, Picasso has begun to try to dissolve the figure/ground relationship. Now look at the woman that Picasso tells us we have chosen. Her legs are crossed and her hand rests behind her head, but although she seems to stand among the others, her position is really that of a figure that lies on her back. The problem is, we see her body perpendicular to our line of sight. Like Matisse and Cezanne before him, Picasso here renders two moments in time: as you may have figured out, we first look across at the row of women, and then we look down on to the prostitute of our/Picasso's choice.

African masks, women colonized

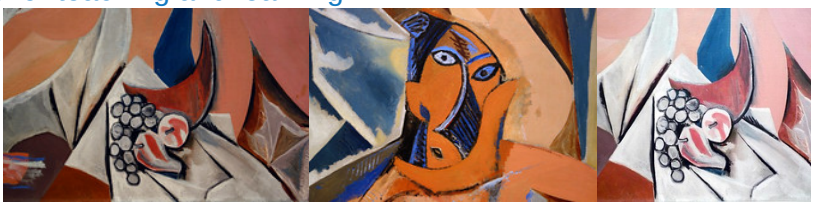
The two figures at the right are the most aggressively abstracted with faces rendered as if they wear African masks. By 1907, when this painting was produced, Picasso had begun to collect such work. Even the striations that represent scarification is evident. Matisse and Derain had a longer standing interest in such art, but Picasso said that it was only after wandering into the Palais du Trocadero, Paris's ethnographic museum, that he understood the value of such art. Remember, France was a major colonial power in Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much African art was ripped from its original geographic and artistic context and sold in Paris. Although Picasso would eventually become more sophisticated regarding the original uses and meaning of the non-Western art that he collected, in 1907 his interest was largely based on what he perceived as its alien and aggressive qualities.

William Rubin, once the senior curator of the department of painting and sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, and a leading Picasso scholar, has written extensively about this painting. He has suggested that while the painting is clearly about desire (Picasso's own), it is also an expression of his fear. We have already established that Picasso frequented brothels at this time so his desire isn't in question, but Rubin makes the case that this is only half the story. *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* is also about Picasso's intense fear…his dread of these women or more to the point, the disease that he feared they would transmit to him. In the era before antibiotics, contracting syphilis was a well founded fear. Of course, the plight of the women seems not to enter Picasso's story.

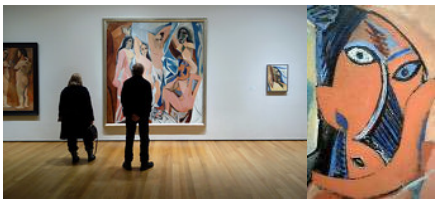
Additional resources:

This painting at MoMA

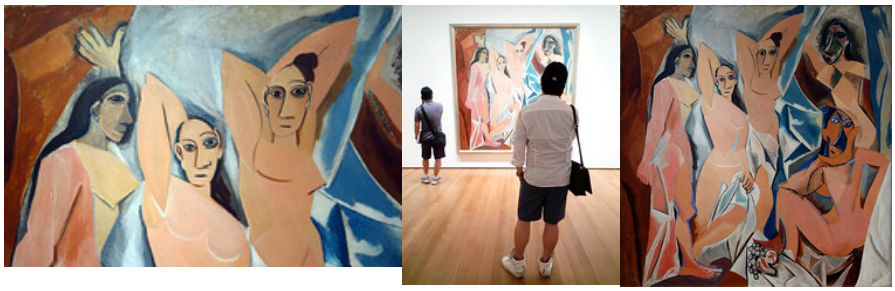
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4.5.6: Pablo Picasso, Three Women

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure 4.5.6.1: Pablo Picasso, *Three Women*, 1907-8, oil on canvas, 200 x 178 cm (**The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg**)

Pablo Picasso's *Three Women* shows both a simplification of the human body to basic geometric forms and a novel approach to representing the figure in space. Rather than depicting the figures as independent forms in an open spatial environment, Picasso's women form an interlocking whole, fitting together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

The jutting hip of the central figure forms a common edge with the right-hand figure's torso and breast, and the left-hand figure's shoulder, arm, and head help to define the central figure's right side. The figure on the right merges with the surrounding form, which is probably a curtain. On the left and at the top of the painting there is a greater distinction between the orange and red tones of the figures and the blues and greens of the background, but here too the relation of the figures' physical forms to the surrounding space is ambiguous.

The geometrically schematized blue drapery covering part of the left-hand figure echoes the the color of the background, and both are divided into a pattern of diamonds and triangles. The effect of these repeated patterns and ambiguities is a painting that shifts oddly from conveying a strong sense of solid volumes and space, and a reminder that the painting is literally a flat surface covered in a pattern of painted geometric shapes.

A new approach

Three Women is closely related in subject and style to ***Les Demoiselles d'Avignon***, painted the previous year, but in the later painting the women no longer confront the viewer. Their eyes are shut, and their faces are depicted using very similar simplified forms rather than the varied approaches used in *Les Demoiselles*. The women's faces are, however, still mask-like and echo the forms of African masks that Picasso admired in the ethnographic museum in Paris.



Figure **4.5.6.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Three Women*, 1907-8, detail (**The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg**)

The mood of *Three Women* is also very different from *Les Demoiselles*; it is restrained and calm rather than expressive and aggressive. *Three Women* is focused on formal qualities — the creation of geometric patterns using the simplified shapes of the women's bodies. This simplification of the bodies' forms into basic shapes was also deeply indebted to the African sculptures Picasso had seen.

Les Demoiselles uses similar formal devices, but they are just one among many concerns. In the differences between the two paintings we can see Picasso turning away from using painting as a means of emotional expression and instead adopting a much more restrained approach directed to exploring ways of representing figures in space. This ultimately led to the revolution in representation known as **Cubism**.



Figure **4.5.6.3**: Georges Braque, *Houses at L'Estaque*, 1908, oil on canvas, 73 x 59.5 cm (Kunstmuseum, Bern)

Three Women also reflects Picasso's encounter with Georges Braque's recent **L'Estaque landscapes** in its random deployment of light and shadow. Although both painters used chiaroscuro to depict three-dimensional form, neither Braque's *Houses at l'Estaque* nor Picasso's *Three Women* reveals a consistent light source. This further confuses our perception of objects in space and is a key way the painting ignores the conventions of naturalistic representation established in the Renaissance.

The origin of “Cubism”

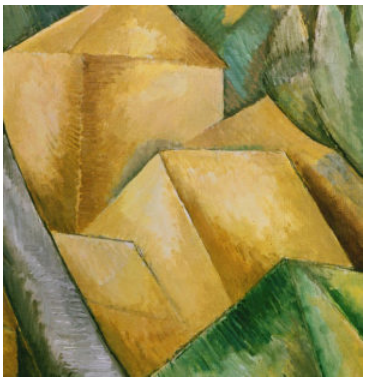


Figure **4.5.6.4**: Georges Braque, *Houses at L’Estaque*, 1908, detail (Kunstmuseum, Bern)

Braque’s landscapes were the source of the term Cubism, which originated in an art critic’s passing comment. In a brief newspaper review, Louis Vauxcelles (who also “named” **Fauvism** by making a similarly casual comment) described Braque’s paintings of l’Estaque as reducing all forms to geometrical schemas and cubes. Vauxcelles’ description caught on, and the label “Cubism” became a catch-all term referring to a broad range of experimental modern painting and sculpture created in the early decades of the 20th century.

What broadly connects the disparate artworks labeled Cubist is not cubes, however, but the use of abstracted forms to represent objects in space. In many instances, Cubist forms can be described as geometric schemas (to use Vauxcelles’ other descriptive term for Braque’s 1908 landscapes). But more important than any particular stylistic feature is the way Cubism attempts to revolutionize the representation of the third dimension in art, arguably for the first time since the invention of **linear perspective** in the 1400s.

This project evolved and shifted over time, both formally and conceptually, and its main catalysts, Picasso and Braque, did not explain what they were doing or trying to achieve. Contemporary critics and subsequent art historians were left to figure out the significance of the new style, and while they all agreed it was interesting and important, they came to no ultimate consensus. Despite the many and varied interpretations, one thing that underlies Picasso and Braque’s Cubism is an inquiry into the problems of perceiving and representing volume and space in art.

Building on Cézanne

By 1908, abandoning naturalistic conventions was far from new. What made Braque’s and Picasso’s early Cubist paintings distinctive was their emphasis on depicting three-dimensional forms and spatial relationships. Their early Cubist works build on **Paul Cézanne’s** exploration of the tensions between representing three-dimensional forms in space and the flatness of the painting’s surface.



Figure **4.5.6.5**: Paul Cézanne, *Bathers* (*Les Grandes Baigneuses*), c. 1894-1905, oil on canvas, 127.2 x 196.1 cm (National Gallery, London)

In *Bathers* Cézanne used a mosaic of brushstrokes to unify the painting and emphasize the flatness of its surface. Although the figures are situated in a landscape, there is minimal indication of spatial recession, and the background is a flat pattern of color that vaguely suggests trees and a cloudy sky.

As in Picasso's *Three Women*, a piece of drapery on the left is painted the same color as the background sky and contributes to the painting's lack of recession. Also like Picasso's painting, the figures are simplified and arranged into tight-knit groups, a pyramid on the left and an oval on the right. In comparison to Cézanne's painting, however, the figures in *Three Women* are more sculptural and massive, the space more compressed.



Figure **4.5.6.6**: Paul Cézanne, *Houses in Provence: The Riaux Valley near L'Estaque*, c. 1883, oil on canvas, 65 x 81.3 cm (**National Gallery of Art, Washington DC**)

Although primarily interested in the human figure, during this period Picasso followed Cézanne and Braque in painting landscapes as he extended his exploration of new strategies for representing three dimensional forms in space.

Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro is markedly more abstract than Cézanne's *Houses in Provence*, but both paintings unify the forms of the landscape into a consistent surface pattern that renders spatial depth ambiguous. Cézanne's surface pattern is created by a mosaic of identical parallel brushstrokes, while Picasso uses repeating patterns of geometric shapes; the diamond pattern of the sky is a prominent example.



Figure **4.5.6.7**: Pablo Picasso, *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro*, 1909, oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm (Nationalgalerie, Museum Berggruen, Berlin)

The abstraction of *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro* is more pronounced than that of *Three Women*, although many of the formal strategies are the same. The viewer is confronted with an array of advancing and receding geometric forms defined by sharply delineated edges and chiaroscuro shading. The light source is inconsistent, as is the vantage point; some of the barely identifiable houses are depicted from the side, while those next to them are shown from above. The overall effect suggests that the viewer, instead of being fixed solidly in place relative to the scene, is floating above and around it, combining **views from multiple perspectives**. This concept would become increasingly important to the understanding of Cubism, but it is only embryonic here.

Rather than being situated in clear relation to the land, the buildings are spread out as if on a sloped table top and appear to be sliding out of the canvas and into the viewer's space. While the figures in *Three Women* are tightly interlocked and neatly contained with the limits of the canvas, the buildings in *Houses on the Hill* seem to teeter on the brink of losing their balance. Maintaining a precarious balance between representation and abstraction would preoccupy Picasso and Braque for the next six years.

A daring and dangerous pursuit

Braque's and Picasso's early Cubist paintings privileged three dimensional form over color and explored new but very ambiguous ways of representing forms in space. This approach was only the beginning of their Cubist adventure. Picasso described his relationship with Braque during the Cubist years 1908-1914 as being like two mountain climbers roped together.

The artists also referred to themselves as the American aviation pioneers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, indicating that they saw themselves as pursuing a daring and dangerous course. It would lead them away from the representation of solid three dimensional forms to the shadowy ambiguities of late **Analytic Cubism** and then to the collage techniques associated with **Synthetic Cubism**.

Additional resources:

Read about African influences in Modern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Watch a video about Georges Braque"s *Houses at L'Estaque* at the Kunstmuseum, Bern

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4.5.7: 4.5.7-The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro

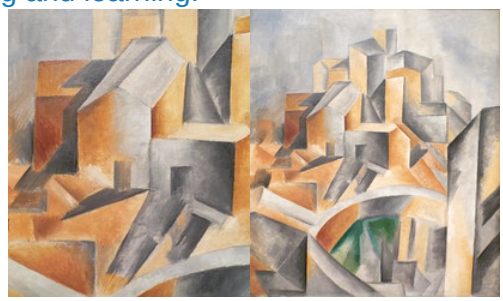
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Video 4.5.7.1: Pablo Picasso, *The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro*, summer 1909, oil on canvas, 24-1/8 x 20-1/8″ (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, fractional and promised gift)

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4.5.8: Pablo Picasso, Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188195



Figure 4.5.8.1: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910, oil on canvas, 39 9/16 x 26 9/16 inches (Art Institute of Chicago)

Over a hundred years after it was made, Pablo Picasso's portrait of his art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler remains a mysterious painting. Viewers often wonder if they are looking at it correctly. Is there an angle of view from which the rudimentary shadowy forms will suddenly fall into place and clearly reveal the image of a man? The answer is no, or at least not in the way that optical puzzles often reveal their subjects.

Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's **Cubist** paintings can, however, be deciphered. To help us understand the portrait of Kahnweiler we will look at how Picasso's representation of the human figure changed from emphasizing solid forms to a more linear schematic approach in which the boundaries between figure and space dissolve.

Abstracting solid mass

Although the objects and figures depicted in the earliest Cubist paintings are often distorted and abstracted they are not difficult to recognize. In these paintings Picasso experimented with the representation of objects in space by emphasizing three-dimensional mass and form. The woman's head in *Woman with Pears* is depicted using blocky geometric shapes.



Figure **4.5.8.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Woman with Pears*, 1909, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 27 7/8 inches (MoMA)

Picasso does not just simplify the surface planes of her head into basic geometric forms; he exaggerates shapes to invent a new abstracted structure. The forehead becomes a series of separate projecting and recessed cubic forms, while the tendons of the neck look like massive concrete supports buttressing the head. Picasso similarly abstracted the head into a complex of geometric shapes in the sculptures he made at this time as well.



Figure **4.5.8.3**: Pablo Picasso, *Woman's Head (Fernande)*, 1909, bronze, 16 ¼ x 9 ¾ x 10 ½ inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (photo: **Ben Sutherland**, CC BY 2.0)

One thing that makes *Woman with Pears* easier to read than Kahnweiler's portrait is Picasso's use of contrasting colors to clearly separate figure from background. However, we can also see that the angular abstracted shapes in the background echo the forms of the woman's head. This has the effect of creating a strong pattern on the surface of the canvas. Instead of receding into the background, the folds of the green curtain parallel the structure of the neck, and the scattering of fruit on the table imitates the shapes of the woman's face. It is the complex ambiguity of representing three-dimensional objects in space on a painting's two-dimensional surface that would become a central focus of Picasso's (and his colleague Braque's) Cubism.

Shattering form and space

In *Portrait of Ambrose Vollard*, painted a few months before the portrait of Kahnweiler, Picasso has shattered the figure into a collection of angular planes that extend into the surrounding space like pieces of a broken window. The head is easy to identify, largely because it is painted in naturalistic flesh tones and stands out next to the surrounding grays. Shadowed facets on the forehead and eyes are reminiscent of the woman's boxy forehead in *Woman with Pears*, but unlike the figure in that painting, the rest of the body has no solidity and merges entirely with the background.



Figure **4.5.8.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Ambrose Vollard*, 1910, oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 25 5/8 inches (Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow)

Rather than sculptural form, Picasso's *Portrait of Ambrose Vollard* is largely composed of lines and floating abstract planes defined by apparently random chiaroscuro shading. Other than the face, nothing seems solid or certain. The vague outlines of a bottle in the upper left and the suggestion of architectural forms in the upper right are more legible than Vollard's body in the foreground. We can just distinguish the suggestion of shoulders and arms in the shaded planes below the head. Perhaps the white planes in the center indicate the man's shirt front.

Between *Woman with Pears* of 1909 and *Portrait of Ambrose Vollard* painted the following year, Picasso's investigations into the abstract representation of three dimensional forms in space changed significantly. The same change is evident in **Braque's contemporary works**. The two artists' early analysis and abstraction of solid masses emphasized solidity at the expense of surrounding space. The later paintings emphasize the representation of space at the expense of solid three-dimensional forms.

A traditional portrait?

The portrait of Kahnweiler extends this breakdown of solid form even further. The simplification of complex three-dimensional forms to arrangements of angular facets that advance and recede into a flickering gridded arrangement of shadows and highlights creates a ghostly appearance. It is as if Kahnweiler and his surroundings are simultaneously materializing and dematerializing as we look at the painting.



Figure 4.5.8.5: Left: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910, oil on canvas, 39 9/16 x 26 9/16 inches (Art Institute of Chicago); Right: Diego Velazquez, *Juan de Pareja*, 1650, oil on canvas, 32 x 27 1/2 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Unlike Vollard's portrait, Kahnweiler's face has no color to distinguish clearly it from the surrounding space. Suggestive areas of dark forms indicate the general shape of the figure. Although difficult to see, the figure dominates the center of the canvas as it does in Vollard's portrait. This is the traditional format used in European half-length portraits like Diego Velazquez's ***Juan de Pareja***. Within this centralized dark area, lighter quadrilaterals and triangles on the upper portion suggest Kahnweiler's face, neck, white shirt, and tie. At the bottom of the canvas another central area of lighter forms reveals his folded hands, and a few lines indicate the basic shapes of his fingers.

A few legible references



Figure 4.5.8.6: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, detail, 1910 (Art Institute of Chicago)

When we examine the upper portion of the figure we can see more details in the face. Simplified cubic forms describe the eyes and surrounding facial structure, while a shaded cylinder suggests the nose. A parallel set of linear curves arching above the face indicate the art dealer's slicked back hair, and another curve under the nose suggests a mustache or simplified mouth.

Below the projecting angle of the chin there is a suggestion of a white collar, tie and pleated shirt front, and further down two light horizontal curves indicate Kahnweiler's watch chain gleaming against his dark jacket. Picasso said he added these legible references to natural forms to the overwhelmingly abstract composition late in the painting process in order to help viewers recognize the subject.



Figure **4.5.8.7**: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, detail of still life, 1910 (Art Institute of Chicago)

Kahnweiler is not portrayed in an abstract empty space. There is a tabletop still life in the bottom left corner of the painting, with the upper portion of a long-necked bottle easily discernible. Suggestions of architectural elements and other objects appear as well.

Art historians have identified the shadowy forms of an African mask in the upper right and an Oceanic sculpture from New Caledonia in the upper left, both artifacts owned by Picasso. **Non-western works from Africa and Oceania** were key inspirations for Picasso's initial abandonment of Western techniques of representation and his later development of the abstract approaches associated with Cubist sculpture and collage.



Figure **4.5.8.8**: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, detail of African mask, 1910 (Art Institute of Chicago)

Picasso's portrait of Kahnweiler presents the essential innovations of Analytic Cubism. Three-dimensional forms are simplified into geometric shapes and combined with nonrepresentational geometric planes to create ambiguous relationships between mass and space. The use of light and shade further emphasizes the spatial ambiguities and abstract pattern on the surface of the canvas. A visible mosaic of brushstrokes adds to the surface pattern and enhances the modernist tension between the painting's representation of objects in space and the painting as a flat plane.

Additional resources:

Read more about the Kahnweiler portrait at the Art Institute of Chicago

Read about the African influences on Modern Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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4.5.9: Still Life with Chair Caning

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video 4.5.9.1: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912, oil and oilcloth on canvas framed with rope, 29 x 37 cm (Musée Picasso, Paris)

The Evolution of Cubism

Beginning in 1908, and continuing through the first few months of 1912, Braque and Picasso co-invent the first phase of Cubism. Since it is dominated by the analysis of form, this first stage is usually referred to as Analytic Cubism. But then during the summer of 1912, Braque leaves Paris to take a holiday in Provence. During his time there, he wanders into a hardware store, and there he finds a roll of oil cloth. Oil cloth is an early version of contact paper, the vinyl adhesive used to line the shelves or drawers in a cupboard. Then, as now, these materials come in a variety of pre-printed patterns.

Braque purchased some oil cloth printed with a fake wood grain. That particular pattern drew his attention because he was at work on a Cubist drawing of a guitar, and he was about to render the grain of the wood in pencil. Instead, he cut the oil cloth and pasted a piece of the factory-printed grain pattern right into his drawing. With this collage, Braque changed the direction of art for the next ninety years.

Collage

As you might expect, Picasso was not far behind Braque. Picasso immediately begins to create collage with oil cloth as well—and adds other elements to the mix (but remember, it was really Braque who introduced collage—he never gets enough credit). So what is the big deal? Oil cloth, collage, wood grain patterns—what does this have to do with art and Cubism? One of the keys to understanding the importance of Cubism, of Picasso and Braque, is to consider their actions and how unusual they were for the time. When Braque, and then Picasso placed industrially-produced objects (“low” commercial culture) into the realm of fine art (“high” culture) they acted as artistic iconoclasts (“icon”=image/”clast”=destroyer).

Moreover, they questioned the elitism of the art world, which had always dictated the separation of common, everyday experience from the rarefied, contemplative realm of artistic creation. Of equal importance, their work highlighted—and separated—the role of technical skill from art-making. Braque and Picasso introduced a “fake” element on purpose, not to mislead or fool their audience, but rather to force a discussion of art and craft, of high and low, of unique and mass-produced objects. They ask: “Can this object still be art if I don’t actually render its forms myself, if the quality of the art is no longer directly tied to my technical skills or level of craftsmanship?”

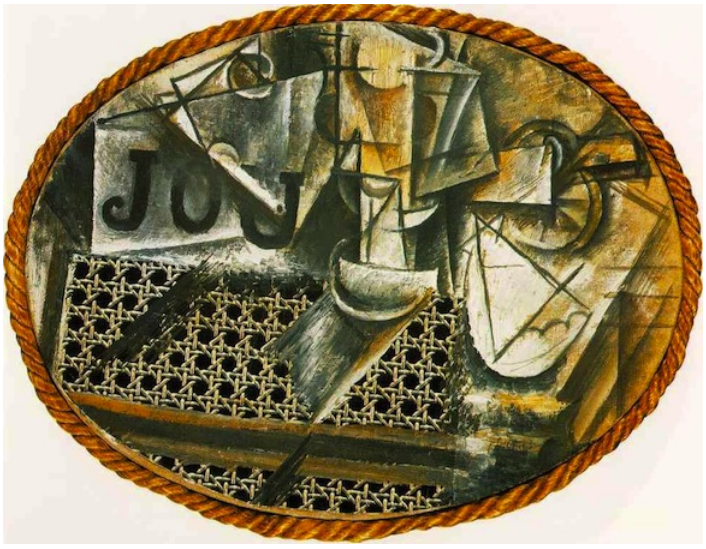


Figure 4.5.9.2: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912, oil on oil-cloth over canvas edged with rope, 29 x 37 cm (Musée Picasso)

Still-Life with Chair Caning

Virtually all avant-garde art of the second half of the twentieth century is indebted to this brave renunciation. But that doesn't make this kind of Cubism, often called Synthetic Cubism (piecing together, or synthesis of form), any easier to interpret. At first glance, Picasso's *Still-Life with Chair Caning* of 1912 might seem a mish-mash of forms instead of clear picture. But we can understand the image—and other like it—by breaking down Cubist pictorial language into parts. Let's start at the upper right: almost at the edge of the canvas (at two o'clock) there is the handle of a knife. Follow it to the left to find the blade. The knife cuts a piece of citrus fruit. You can make out the rind and the segments of the slice at the bottom right corner of the blade.

Below the fruit, which is probably a lemon, is the white, scalloped edge of a napkin. To the left of these things and standing vertically in the top center of the canvas (twelve o'clock) is a wine glass. It's hard to see at first, so look carefully. Just at the top edge of the chair caning is the glass's base, above it is the stem (thicker than you might expect), and then the bowl of the glass. It is difficult to find the forms you would expect because Picasso depicts the glass from more than one angle. At eleven o'clock is the famous "JOU," which means "game" in French, but also the first three letters of the French word for newspaper (or more literally, "daily"; journal=daily). In fact, you can make out the bulk of the folded paper quite clearly. Don't be confused by the pipe that lays across the newspaper. Do you see its stem and bowl?

Looking Down and Looking Through

But there are still big questions: why the chair caning, what is the gray diagonal at the bottom of the glass, and why the rope frame? (Think of a ship's port hole. The port hole reference is an important clue.) Also, why don't the letters sit better on the newspaper? Finally, why is the canvas oval? It has already been determined that this still life is composed of a sliced lemon, a glass, newspaper, and a pipe. Perhaps this is a breakfast setting, with a citron pressé (French lemonade). In any case, these items are arranged upon a glass tabletop. You can see the reflection of the glass. In fact, the glass allows us to see below the table's surface, which is how we see the chair caning—which represents the seat tucked in below the table.

Okay, so far so good. But why is the table elliptical in shape? This appears to be a café table, which are round or square but never oval. Yet, when we look at a circular table, we never see it from directly above. Instead, we see it at an angle, and it appears elliptical in shape as we approach the table to sit down. But what about the rope, which was not mass-produced, nor made by Picasso, but rather something made especially for this painting? We can view it as the bumper of a table, as it was used in some cafés, or as the frame of a ship's port hole, which we can look "through," to see the objects represented. The rope's simultaneous horizontal and vertical orientation creates a way for the viewer (us) to read the image in two ways—looking down and looking through/across. Put simply, Picasso wants us to remember that the painting is something different from that which it represents. Or as Gertrude Stein said, "A rose is a rose is a rose."

Additional resources:

Musée Picasso, Paris

Picasso on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Cubism on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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4.5.10: Pablo Picasso, The Three Musicians

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188197



Figure 4.5.10.1: Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921, oil on canvas, 200.7 x 222.9 cm (MoMA)

Picasso's *Three Musicians* presents three figures painted in a decorative, brightly colored, **Synthetic Cubist** style. It is one of two very large paintings of the same subject that Picasso painted in 1921, both interpreted to be symbolic group portraits of the artist and two old friends. In this version, Picasso is the Harlequin figure wearing the bright diamond patterned suit in the center. The white Pierrot figure on the left is thought to be the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, while the dark figure of a monk on the right represents the poet Max Jacob.

An old subject made new

Both Harlequin and Pierrot are characters from the traditional Italian theater known as *commedia dell'arte*. Picasso depicted these characters throughout his career, personally identifying with the trickster Harlequin.



Figure **4.5.10.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Family of Saltimbanques*, 1905, oil on canvas, 83 3/4 x 90 3/8 inches (**National Gallery of Art, Washington**)

In his early ***Family of Saltimbanques***, Picasso portrayed himself as Harlequin standing in a group of figures, two of whom have also been identified as representing Apollinaire (the red jester) and Jacob (the small acrobat in blue). When Picasso painted *Three Musicians* sixteen years later he had lost both friends; Apollinaire had died in 1918, and Jacob had recently entered a monastery.

Although it is an oil painting, *Three Musicians* looks like a collage made from cut out pieces of colored paper. The forms are simplified into angular shapes that interlock like a jigsaw puzzle, and the flat colors create a surface pattern with multiple spatial ambiguities. Dark brown is used for the background wall and also for a foreground table, parts of the figures' faces, and the silhouette of a dog lying under the table. Harlequin's mask is part of a large, complex blue shape that covers much of the Pierrot. The same blue appears in the lower portion of the painting, possibly as furniture, and on the table top as part of a still life. While some objects are easily identifiable — the guitar in the center, the sheet music, and the clarinet on the left — others, like the pile of objects on the table, are less clear.

A retrospective presentation of Cubism

Three Musicians reads like a retrospective presentation of **Cubism** and its elements. Picasso painted Harlequin's hand in brown on a small white square close to the center of the painting, making it the pivot of the composition. It represents both collage and the artist's creative hand. Not only is the painting's style derived from Cubist collage, it contains multiple references to earlier Cubist works.



Figure **4.5.10.3**: Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921, detail (MoMA)

The clarinet, guitar, and sheet music were standard objects in Cubist still life paintings. Prominent among the objects depicted on the table to the left is the painted representation of a cut out piece of newspaper, a primary material of early Cubist collage. The light blue face and beard of the monk is in the form of a wood comb, a decorator's tool used by Braque and Picasso to create fake wood grain in many Cubist works. The diamond pattern of Harlequin's suit, as well as his ruff and left cuff, echo the lattice pattern both Picasso and Braque used to structure many **Analytic Cubist** paintings. Also, according to tradition Harlequin's suit is made from patches, a particularly appropriate costume for one of the inventors of Cubist collage.

A new decorative approach

Three Musicians is part of a significant shift that occurred in Picasso's art after 1914. This was the year World War I began, and it marked the end of his close working relationship with Georges Braque, who joined the French army. After 1914 Picasso made few collages. Instead, he deployed his Cubist strategies in the traditional medium of oil on canvas, which allowed him to create paintings that were much larger and more decorative. This new approach had one very practical advantage; oil paintings could be sold at higher prices. *Man with a Pipe* is an early example of this shift.



Figure 4.5.10.4: Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Pipe*, 1915, oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 35 1/4 inches (Art Institute of Chicago)

Measuring a little over four by three feet, it is a painted illusion of collaged layers of different colored and textured papers. The bright colors and stippled planes form a richly decorative pattern, very different from Picasso's actual collages of rather grubby odds and ends. Despite the new emphasis on color and pattern, Picasso's trademark Cubist play with illusionism is still present, appearing not only in the representation of collaged paper fragments, but also in the painted decorative textures of marble and wood in the lower left.

A new theatricality

Another significant change that occurred during the war years was Picasso's involvement with the Ballets Russes. Beginning in 1916, Picasso designed costumes and stage sets for the ground-breaking ballet company, often using the stylistic innovations of **Synthetic Cubism** in his designs.

Picasso's involvement with the ballet paralleled conservative trends in his work during and after World War I. In its highly theatrical presentation of Cubist elements, *Three Musicians* showcases the radical innovations of modern art, but the painting also has many conservative elements.

It is a large-scale, multi-figure oil painting in the tradition of the masterpiece. Despite its spatial ambiguities and inconsistencies, the figures are placed in a shallow stage-like space defined by receding orthogonal lines in conformity with **linear perspective techniques** for representing depth.

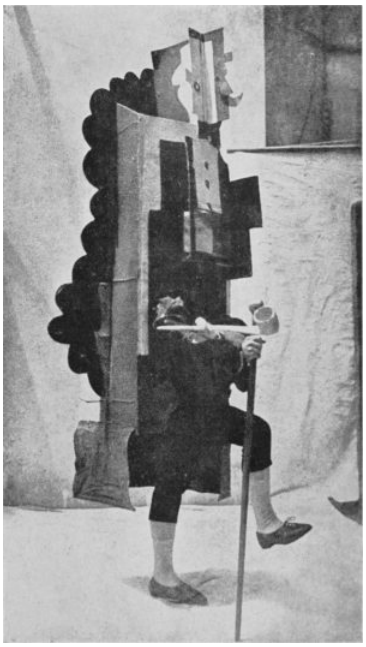


Figure **4.5.10.5**: Photograph of a Picasso costume for *Parade*, 1917

Three Musicians, like Picasso's designs for the very aristocratic art form of ballet, indicated that Cubism was no longer truly subversive. It had become a fine art.

Turn to tradition

One of the most startling transformations in Picasso's art during World War I was his return to traditional naturalistic representation. He was not alone; the years of reconstruction following the war were dominated by a widespread cultural desire for a "return to order."



Figure **4.5.10.6**: Pablo Picasso, *The Seated Harlequin*, 1923, oil on canvas, 130.2 x 89.1 cm (Kunstmuseum, Basel)

Many formerly radical modern artists adopted traditional styles and subjects during this period of intense nationalism in France, when the extreme innovations of modern art were often regarded as foreign (German) and suspicious. The *commedia dell'arte* subject of *Three Musicians* is itself traditional and was particularly popular in the conservative political and cultural climate of World War I and its aftermath.



Figure **4.5.10.7**: Gino Severini, *Two Puncinellos*, 1922 oil on canvas, 119.5 x 86.5 cm (Kunstmuseum den Haag)

During this period Picasso painted many *commedia dell'arte* figures using traditional naturalistic techniques, as did other prominent modern artists, including the former Italian Futurist Gino Severini.

The same summer that he painted the two versions of *Three Musicians*, Picasso also painted the much more traditional *Three Women at the Spring*, which uses **chiaroscuro** modeling to represent classical figures based on Ancient Greek sculpture.



Figure **4.5.10.8**: Pablo Picasso, *Three Women at the Spring*, 1921, oil on canvas, 203.9 x 174 cm (**MoMA**)

Despite obvious differences of style and subject, the paintings are all large, centralized, and balanced compositions, with three monumental figures compressed into a shallow, frieze-like space. The paintings display Picasso's simultaneous commitment to two different styles of representation: classical naturalism and Cubism. *Three Musicians* can thus be seen as reconciling the two, making Cubism into a style that is appropriate for masterpieces in the traditional sense of large scale ambitious multi-figure paintings.

Additional resources:

Watch a recreation of *Parade*

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4.5.11: Guitar

- *by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID
188198



Video **4.5.11.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1914, ferrous sheet metal and wire 30 1/2″ x 13 3/4″ x 7 5/8″ / 77.5 x 35 x 19.3 cm (MoMA)

> ***I have seen what no man has seen before. When Pablo Picasso, leaving aside painting for a moment, was constructing this immense guitar out of sheet metal whose plans could be dispatched to any ignoramus in the universe who could put it together as well as him, I saw Picasso's studio, and this studio, more incredible than Faust's laboratory, this studio which, according to some, contained no works of art, in the old sense, was furnished with the newest of objects… Some witnesses, already shocked by the things that they saw covering the walls, and that they refused to call paintings because they were made of oilcloth, wrapping paper, and newspaper, said, pointing a haughty finger at the object of Picasso's clever pains: "What is it? Does it rest on a pedestal? Does it hang on a wall? What is it, painting or sculpture?' Picasso, dressed in the blue of Parisian artisans, responded in his finest Andalusian voice: 'It's nothing, it's el guitare!'; And there you are! The watertight compartments are demolished. We are delivered from painting and sculpture, which already have been liberated from the idiotic tyranny of genres. It is neither this nor that. It is nothing. It's el guitare!***
>
> *(André Salmon, New French Painting, August 9, 1919)*

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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4.6.4: The Portuguese

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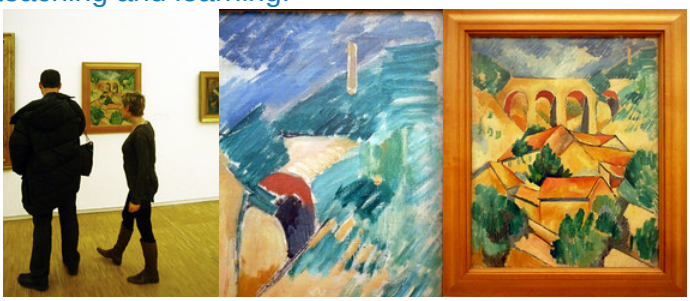
4.6.1: Le Viaduc à L'Estaque, (The Viaduct at L'Estaque)

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **4.6.1.8**: Georges Braque, *Le Viaduc à L'Estaque, (The Viaduct at L'Estaque)*, 1908, oil on canvas, 28-5/8 x 23-1/4″ / 72.5 x 59 cm (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris)

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4.6.2: Georges Braque, Violin and Palette

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Although much of the painting is not naturalistic, we can identify the still-life objects in Georges Braque's *Violin and Palette* fairly easily. The form of the violin at the bottom of the painting is fractured; the body of the instrument has been broken up into geometric shapes, and on the right side they grow like crystals into the surrounding space.



Figure **4.6.2.1**: Georges Braque, *Violin and Palette*, 1909, oil on canvas, 36 1/8 x 16 7/8 inches (**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York**)

While the lower portion of the instrument is painted naturalistically and visibly recedes, the upper left side does not, and part of it is missing altogether. The bridge that supports the strings has been tilted and flattened into a light gray pentagon between the S-shaped sound holes. The strings are broken into two differently angled sections, the neck is shortened, and the scroll at the top is displaced and twisted in relation to the body.

Tradition and innovation

This painting is an early example of Analytic Cubism, the name given to the first phase of Picasso's and Braque's joint endeavor to create a new approach to the pictorial representation of objects in space. Despite its often baffling innovations, one of the defining features of **Cubism** is its engagement with the European painting tradition.

This engagement with tradition is particularly evident in Picasso's and Braque's use of traditional subjects: landscapes, figure studies, portraits, and still life paintings of dishes, fruit, glassware, and musical instruments. Landscapes largely disappeared after the earliest stages. Picasso made more figure studies and portraits during the Analytic Cubist phase, while Braque favored still life subjects.

The relative familiarity of these subjects helps to set Cubism's radical formal innovations in high relief. Why are objects and even apparently space itself fractured and faceted? Many different explanations have been put forward by art critics and historians, but they all revolve around Braque and Picasso's engagement in a radical new analysis of three-dimensional form and its relation to both literal and pictorial space.



Figure **4.6.2.2**: Georges Braque, *Violin and Palette*, detail, 1909 (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Some of the distortions in *Violin and Palette*, most notably the relationship of the violin's scroll to its body, may be explained as the result of combining **several different angles of view** into a single depiction. This explanation was frequently advanced by contemporaneous critics, and it does explain many of the **Salon Cubists' paintings**. However, it fails to account for all of the distortions in Braque's *Violin and Palette*, such as the way parts of the violin are abstracted into geometric forms, and the elimination of entire parts of the instrument.

It also does not address the way in which the surrounding space is represented as if it too were fractured geometric abstractions of solid forms. These are all important characteristics of Braque's Cubist exploration of new strategies of pictorial representation.



Figure **4.6.2.3**: Georges Braque, *Violin and Palette*, detail, 1909 (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

The upper half of *Violin and Palette* displays additional approaches to representation. We see several pages of sheet music, perhaps propped up on a music stand behind the violin depicted below. Paper is flat, but Braque has used shading to indicate creases and the bowing of the page.This gives the paper tangible form while also connecting it to the abstract geometric pattern that dominates the

painting. Notice that Braque paints the musical staff lines projecting to the left beyond the page on which they are printed. This is an echo of the way he painted cubic sections of the violin growing into space below.

A *trompe l'oeil* illusion

Above and behind the sheet music, Braque painted a green curtain and a palette hanging from a nail. Both of these objects refer to traditional naturalistic representation. The **curtain** is a conventional framing device used in European painting to suggest spatial depth. In Braque's painting the curtain frames the palette. Although the curtain, nail, and palette are painted in a sketchy manner that is not very realistic, cast shadows make a direct visual reference to the kind of trompe l'oeil illusionism employed in William Harnett's *Violin and Music*.



Figure 4.6.2.4: William Harnett, *Still Life — Violin and Music*, 1888, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Because the palette is itself flat, and Braque painted shadows behind its curved edges, his illusion is somewhat successful and contrasts with the distorted representation of the violin below. The placement of the nail in the top center of the painting adds another layer to the paintings' illusion. It looks like it could be literally nailing the canvas to the wall. As a whole, *Violin and Palette* presents naturalistic representation in juxtaposition to Cubist representational techniques to indicate that these new techniques are alternative, and equally viable, modes of depiction.

A developmental process

Picasso's and Braque's Cubism is generally understood to have been a developmental process rather than a style that followed a predetermined theoretical approach. The two artists worked in a close and competitive relationship between 1908 and 1914, meeting regularly to see each other's latest works, and pushing each other to increasingly daring pictorial innovations. Braque's *Violin and Palette* was painted during the early stages of their Cubist explorations. Over the course of the next few years, both artists' approach to representation became increasingly abstract.



Figure 4.6.2.5: Georges Braque, *Mandora*, 1909–10, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 55.9 cm (Tate Modern, London)

In Braque's *Mandora*, the surface of the painting is divided into a shifting lattice of diamond shapes in which we can dimly perceive the suggestion of several objects. The mandora (a type of lute) is the only object we can see with certainty, but it is a much less substantial presence than the violin in *Violin and Palette*. Dark geometric shapes create a shadow framing the lighter central facets, suggesting the outline of the mandora and other objects arranged on a table. Vertical rectangles in the upper portion of the canvas may indicate more objects resting on the table top, but there is not enough information to be certain. The still life objects have become a shifting **chiaroscuro** pattern of abstract shapes that sparkle across the canvas with little regard for legibility or representational accuracy.



Figure 4.6.2.6: Georges Braque, *Candlestick and Playing Cards on a Table*, 1910, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 54 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

A new kind of pictorial space

Candlestick and Playing Cards on a Table is even more difficult to decipher. The title tells us what to look for, and hints of the objects' forms emerge from the shifting grid of rectangles presented in an oval format. In the center of the composition we can find

the circular base of a candlestick. It is placed above the corner of a table, which juts out towards the viewer. The most legible objects are the two playing cards on the right. Below them Braque painted a schematic open drawer, another reference to traditional trompe l'oeil painting effects like the curtain and nail in *Violin and Palette*.



Figure **4.6.2.7**: Left: Georges Braque, *Candlestick and Playing Cards on a Table*, 1910, oil on canvas, 64.8 x 54 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) Right: Jean Siméon Chardin, *The House of Cards*, 1737, oil on canvas, 82.2 x 66 cm (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

The jutting corner of the table and the open drawer in Braque's painting are counterpoints to the depiction of an indeterminate space. Black lines that demarcate the edges of objects also create abstract floating planes that hover throughout the painting. This adds another level of complexity to the composition and its suggestion of multiple interlocking layers of planes that fill and define a new kind of shallow pictorial space.

A limited palette

One of the characteristics of Braque's and Picasso's Analytic Cubist paintings is their increasingly limited color range. In his **earliest Cubist landscapes**, Braque used the ochres, greens, and blues favored by **Cézanne**. *Violin and Palette* is restricted to browns, grays, and a little green, while the later still life paintings are limited to browns and grays.

From 1909 to 1912 both Picasso and Braque painted almost exclusively in a range of neutral tones before re-introducing color, largely through the use of collage elements. **Other Cubist painters** often used bright colors, making the use of a limited palette one of the distinctive characteristics of Braque's and Picasso's Analytic Cubist paintings. This elimination of color is generally linked to their intense focus on the structural analysis of representing objects in space.

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4.6.3: Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso- Two Cubist Musicians

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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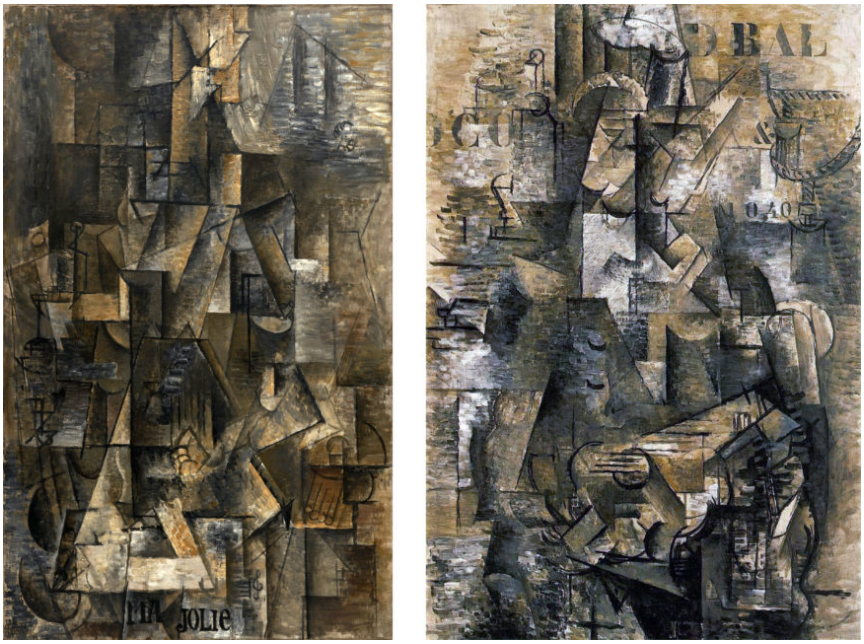


Figure **4.6.3.1**: Left: Pablo Picasso, I, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 25 3/4 inches (MoMA); Right: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 46 x 32 inches (Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland)

The Portuguese and *Ma Jolie* are well-known examples of late Analytic **Cubism**, sometimes called High **Analytic Cubism** or Hermetic Cubism. The latter name refers directly to the mysterious and difficult qualities of these paintings' abstraction. The two paintings are very similar in overall appearance. At the time, Braque and Picasso were using the same pictorial language and had stopped signing the front of their paintings, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish authorship of individual works.

Where are the musicians?

The artists' joint exploration of new pictorial strategies for representing solid forms in space became something quite different from their earlier investigations. There are no clear representations of recognizable solid forms in either painting, and the figures that are the subjects of the paintings seem to be absent as well. Both are intended to represent musicians: in Braque's, a man plays a guitar, while in Picasso's a woman plays a guitar or zither. Finding the representations of the bodies of these figures is, however, virtually impossible. Knowledge of earlier **Analytic Cubist works** can help direct our efforts.

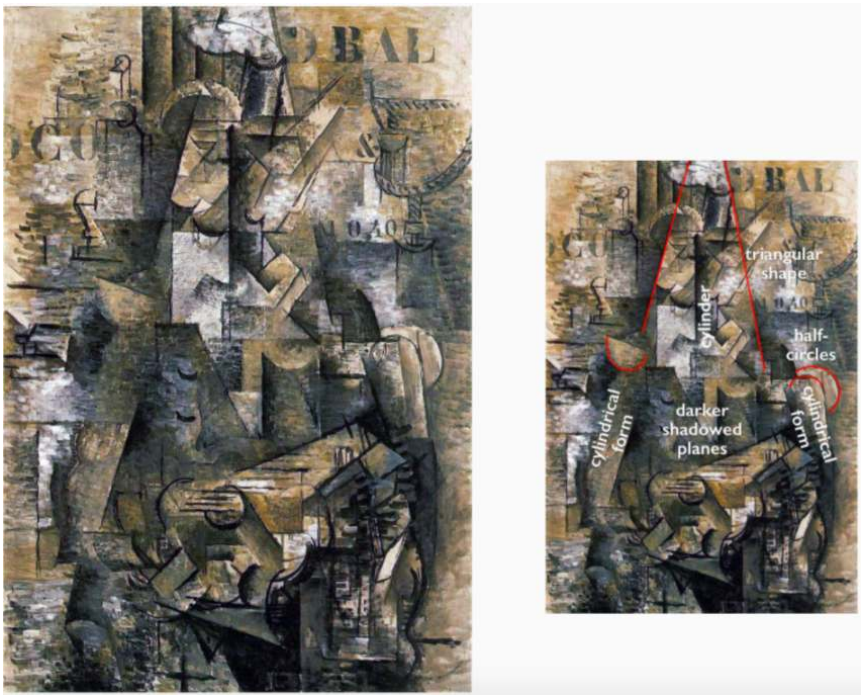


Figure **4.6.3.2**: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 46 x 32 inches (Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland)

Cubist portraits and figure paintings typically follow the traditional format of placing the figure in the center of the canvas. In *The Portuguese*, darker shadowed planes suggest the upper body in the center. There are also suggestions of cylindrical forms representing the upper arms on the sides of this area, and half circles above them indicate shoulders. On top of the dark torso area rises a long lighter triangle outlining a collection of smaller forms surrounding another dark cylinder. This is the area of the man's neck and head.

Looking for identifiable signs

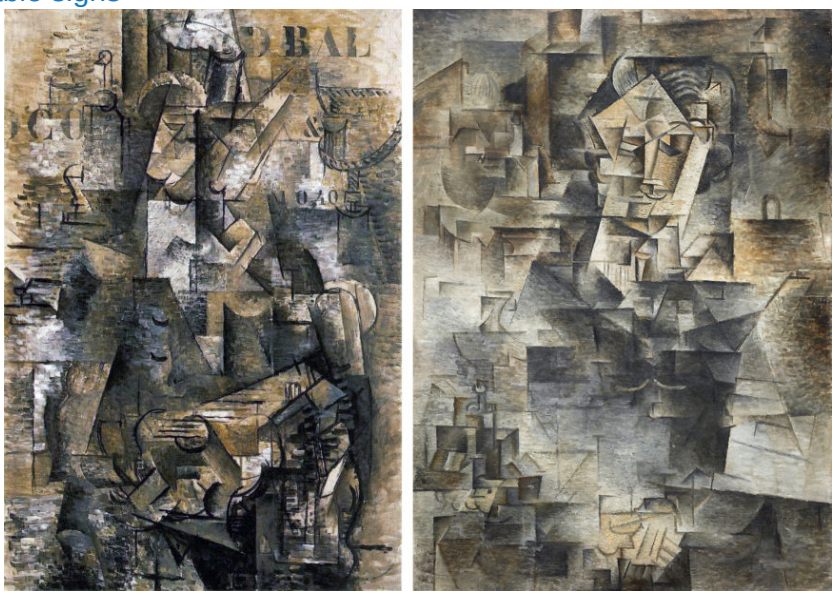


Figure **4.6.3.3**: Left: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 46 x 32 inches (Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland)
Right: Pablo Picasso, *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910, oil on canvas, 39 9/16 x 26 9/16 inches (Art Institute of Chicago)

Picasso's *Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* uses a similar yet more legible strategy of contrasting light and dark areas to suggest the head above the body. The face of Braque's guitar player is more abstracted than Kahnweiler's face, in which we can find the eyes, nose, and mouth/mustache fairly easily.

In Braque's painting, curved lines may represent closed eyelids, the bottom of the nose, a mustache, or a chin, but no clear relationships between these marks and those next to them solidly anchor our translation of the schematic lines and angles into a legible face. We cannot identify even the basic features — eyes, nose and mouth — with certainty.

While the guitarist's face and head in Braque's painting are a welter of black lines and shifting light and shadowed planes, there are some legible signs within the painting. The one that is most helpful in terms of orienting the viewer is the black outline of the guitar's sound hole crossed by black horizontal lines indicating the instrument's strings in the center of the lower portion of the painting. A bright rectangle projects diagonally to the right from the sound hole to indicate the guitar's fret board.

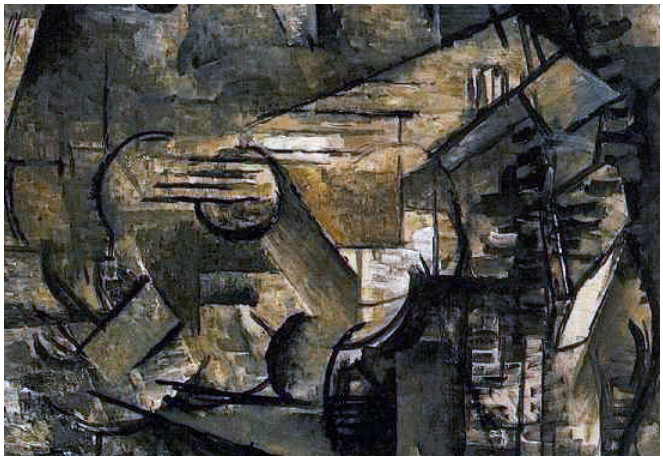


Figure **4.6.3.4**: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, detail, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 46 x 32 inches (**Kunstmuseum**, Basel, Switzerland)

Once we recognize the location of the guitar we can begin to look for the signs of the figure holding it. This approach to reading Cubist works by looking for identifiable signs and establishing others based on their relationship to them is key to understanding Cubist paintings, particularly the later ones.

They are structured like a language in which basic units (comparable to words) are placed in relation to each other (as words are in a sentence), making it possible to represent and communicate an infinite number of ideas. You could also think of Cubism as an attempt to create a new alphabet or sign language for representation.

A deeper understanding

Some early theorists of Cubism, including Kahnweiler, thought the Cubist system of representation would prompt a deeper understanding of its subjects than traditional naturalistic representation. We know much more about things than the limited views that traditional representational paintings can supply. When we consider what a Cubist painting represents we engage in an intellectual or conceptual activity rather than a merely perceptual or visual one. The limited gray and brown palette enhances this intellectual approach by denying us the sensual pleasures of color.



Figure **4.6.3.5**: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, detail, 1911-12, oil on canvas, 46 x 32 inches (**Kunstmuseum**, Basel, Switzerland)

Braque included some identifiable forms to indicate the environment surrounding the figure in *The Portuguese*. The most noticeable is the loop of rope in the upper right. This is a recurring motif in contemporary works by both Braque and Picasso that represents a rope and tassel curtain tie back; here it suggests the guitar player is in an interior space, possibly a cafe. This is not certain, however; the surrounding environment is often interpreted as the deck of a ship in harbor, largely because Braque informed Kahnweiler that he saw the Portuguese guitar player in that context.

Including letters, numbers and symbols

One of the most striking aspects of *The Portuguese* is the inclusion of letters, numbers, and an ampersand in the painting's shadowy, abstract planes. They are in standardized stencil format and suggest partially visible posters or painted signs, perhaps on the walls or windows of an interior space. They are also flat forms floating in ambiguous relation to the complex spatial planes depicted in the painting; neither clearly foreground nor background, they remind the viewer that the painting is literally a flat surface and even its confusing shallow planar space is an illusion.

The letters, numbers, and ampersand also repeat our experience of trying to understand the painting by the limited number of identifiable visual signs. We recognize them as individual signifying units, but they don't make up complete words; the information they provide is only partial, and we have to fill in the blanks.

The Portuguese offers an array of clues in the form of letters, symbols, abbreviated representations, suggestive forms, and signs. It is a mystery with many possible readings and no single correct solution. By the time *The Portuguese* was painted neither Braque nor Picasso worked directly from life. Despite Braque's letter informing Kahnweiler that the painting's subject was a Portuguese guitar player he saw on board a ship in Marseilles, it is unlikely that a specific real world scene is the basis for every detail in the painting.



Figure 4.6.3.6: Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie*, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 25 3/4 inches (MoMA)

Music as a subject

Picasso's *Ma Jolie* is even more abstract than Braque's *The Portuguese*. Other than a greater concentration of shaded planes in the center of the painting there is little suggestion of a distinction between figure and background, or head and body. Picasso does provide a few visual hints of the subject, signs that he used, often more legibly, in contemporary works.

Curved black lines in the lower corners are often interpreted as indicating the arms of a chair, and the group of short parallel lines ending in circles on the lower right may be tassels or fringe on the chair. Six vertical lines in the center of the painting suggest the strings of a guitar or zither. The words "Ma Jolie" ("my pretty one" in French) accompanied by a musical staff and treble clef painted at the bottom of the canvas refer to a popular song of the day, as well as to Picasso's nickname for his current girlfriend.



Figure 4.6.3.7: Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie*, detail, 1911–12, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 25 3/4 inches (MoMA)

The reference to a popular song adds to the multiple ways music is the subject of Analytic Cubist paintings. In part, musical references are practical; musical instruments are more complex and interesting forms than the glassware and bottles that were also common Cubist subjects. Musical instruments are easy to identify by parts and lend themselves to the formal transformations foundational to Cubist innovations. Braque was an amateur musician, and both artists had various instruments in their studios. Music was also an important touchstone for Cubism more generally. As a non-representational art form with its own internal structures and systems of tones and rhythm, music is an abstract language that is suggestive rather than concretely referential. The paintings of late Analytic Cubism with their mysterious objects and figures in indeterminate space are like music; they are visual

orchestrations of painted forms in which shifting patterns suggest far more than they clearly depict. For both Picasso and Braque these paintings were as close as they were willing to approach complete abstraction.

Additional resources:

Read more about Cubism at MoMA

Read about African influences in Modern art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

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4.6.4: The Portuguese

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188203

Cold Coffee and Analytic Cubism



Figure **4.6.4.1**: Georges Braque, *The Portuguese*, 1911, oil on canvas, 116.8 x 81 cm (Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland)

To understand Cubism it helps to go back to Cézanne's still life paintings or even further, to the Renaissance. Let me use an example that worked nicely in the classroom. I was lecturing, trying to untangle Cubism while drinking increasingly cold coffee from a paper cup. I set the cup on the desk in the front of the room and said, "If I were a Renaissance artist in mid-15th century Italy painting that cup on that table, I would position myself at particular point in space and construct the surrounding objects and space frozen in that spot and from that single perspective. On the other hand, if this was the late 19th century and I was Cézanne, I might allow myself to open this view up quite a bit. Perhaps I would focus on, and record, the perceptual changes of shape and line that result when I shift my weight from one leg to the other or when I lean in toward the cup to get a closer look. I might even allow myself to render slightly around the far side of the paper cup since, as Cézanne, I am interested in vision and memory working together. Finally, if I were Braque or Picasso in the early 20th century, I would want to express even more on the canvas. I would not be satisfied with the limiting conventions of Renaissance perspective nor even with the initial explorations of the master Cézanne.

As a Cubist, I want to express my total visual understanding of the paper coffee cup. I want more than the Renaissance painter or even Cézanne, I want to express the entire cup simultaneously on the static surface of the canvas since I can hold all that visual information in my memory. I want to render the cup's front, its sides, its back, and its inner walls, its bottom from both inside and out, and I want to do this on a flat canvas. How can this be done?

The answer is provided by *The Portuguese*. In this canvas, everything was fractured. The guitar player and the dock was just so many pieces of broken form, almost broken glass. By breaking these objects into smaller elements, Braque and Picasso are able to overcome the unified singularity of an object and instead transform it into an object of vision. At this point the class began to look a little confused, so I turned back to the paper cup and began to tear it into pieces (I had finished the coffee). If I want to be able to show you both the back and front and inside and outside simultaneously, I can fragment the object. Basically, this is the strategy of the Cubists.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Kunstmuseum, Basel

Biographical essay and collected work, MoMA

Essay on Cubism from the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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4.7.1: Cubist Sculpture I

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188205



Figure **4.7.1.1**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1914, sheet metal and wire, 30 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 7 5/8 inches (**MoMA**)

Picasso's *Guitar* hangs from the wall like a painting or a real guitar, but we wouldn't mistake it for either one. Unlike a painting, it's a complex three-dimensional object, and it's clearly not a functional guitar to be played. It's an abstract representation of a guitar, an artwork, but one that doesn't fit neatly into the tradition of Western representational sculpture. It is not a solid mass carved from marble or cast in bronze; it is not on a pedestal, nor is it attached to a background like a relief.

An unprecedented subject

Furthermore, the guitar as a subject is unprecedented in a sculptural tradition almost exclusively devoted to representations of human and animal figures. Picasso's own earliest Cubist-based sculptures were of a woman's head.



Figure **4.7.1.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Woman's Head (Fernande)*, 1909, bronze, 16 ¼ x 9 ¾ x 10 ½ inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (photo: **Ben Sutherland**, CC BY 2.0)

Guitar represents Picasso's attempt to expand his Cubist investigations of the ambiguities of represented form and space into three dimensions. Both Picasso and Braque began making paper and cardboard Cubist sculptures of still-life objects around the same

time that they began making collages.



Figure **4.7.1.3**: Picasso's studio, Paris 1912 (MoMA)

None of these early sculptures survive, and only a few photographs document their existence. They were, however, seen by other artists who visited Picasso's and Braque's studios. **Vladimir Tatlin's counter-reliefs** were made in direct response to these early Cubist sculptures.

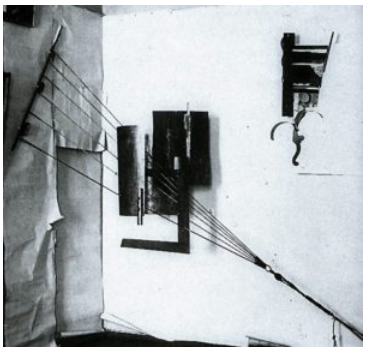


Figure **4.7.1.4**: Vladimir Tatlin's Counter-Reliefs at the Last Futurist Exhibition, 1914

Innovations derived from an African mask

The surviving sheet-metal *Guitar* in MoMA's collection is a later version of a now lost cardboard model (also known as a maquette). It is an important work, not only because it is one of the earliest surviving Cubist sculptures by Picasso, but also because of what Picasso's friend and art dealer **D. H. Kahnweiler** wrote about it. He claimed that the innovative treatment of forms in *Guitar* was directly derived from an African **Grebo mask** Picasso owned. In that mask the eyes are represented by projecting cylinders. Human eyes, of course, are recessed in the head and do not project out from the face. In *Guitar* Picasso used a similar strategy for representing the guitar's sound hole as a tube projecting from the empty space at the base of the fretboard. Space becomes shaped forms, while solid forms — the body of the guitar in this case — become, in places, empty space.



Figure **4.7.1.566**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1914, sheet metal and wire, 30 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 7 5/8 inches (MoMA)

Guitar follows the example of the Grebo mask in radically simplifying forms to basic geometric shapes and arranging them to convey information. We see the double curve of the guitar's body in the flat frontal plane of the sculpture as well as a larger flat plane in the back. We also are shown the guitar's hollowness by the rectangle cut into the guitar shape between the front and back curved planes. The cylinder projects from the center of this empty space; it is itself hollow, so it is both a projecting form and one signifying emptiness.

Kahnweiler explained that Picasso derived a crucial concept from the Grebo mask — that it was possible to use signs to represent things rather than imitating their appearance. This, far more than mere formal similarities, is central to understanding the way **Picasso's art as a whole was affected by insights prompted by African and Oceanic masks and sculptures**. We recognize the facial features in the Grebo mask by the placement and relationship of the parts rather than their specific details. The mouth, for example, is simply a rectangle with stripes. Alone it would not be recognized as a mouth, but in the context of the mask it is a very effective representation of one.

A new type of sculpture

With *Guitar,* Picasso extended his collage explorations into three dimensions. By doing so he made a new type of sculpture, which is now called *assemblage* because it is assembled from multiple parts rather than formed as a single mass. The move into three dimensions added an important element to the work — cast shadows. These contribute to the visual complexity of *Guitar* by creating planes and patterns, and suggesting much greater depth and solidity than is actually created by the rather delicate metal planes. In this photograph the shadow projected on the wall to the left seems to represent the side of the guitar.

Of course, because it is a three dimensional object, the shadows projected by *Guitar* will change with changes in lighting. Shadows add an additional layer of complexity to Picasso's Cubist investigation of the ambiguities that can arise from the juxtaposition of real things and their representations.

A workman's lunch

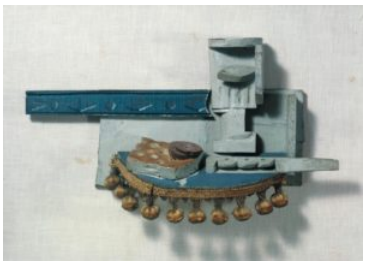


Figure **4.7.1.6**: Pablo Picasso, *Still LIfe*, 1914, painted wood and upholstery fringe, 25.4 x 45.7 x 9.2 cm (**Tate, London**)

Picasso's *Still Life* is another Cubist sculpture attached to a wall that plays with reality and representation. The still life subject is unconventional for a sculpture. It represents a working man's simple lunch of sausage and bread accompanied by a glass of wine and a knife. All of the elements are painted wood except for a real piece of tasseled upholstery fringe attached to the semicircular plane representing the table top. The bread and sausage are crudely painted imitations of the subject, the knife is a simplified basic form, while the wineglass is Cubist in style. A strip of wood painted with a repeating pattern represents a decorative railing on the wall.

The sculpture uses a real decorative object, the strip of upholstery tassels, in combination with representations of objects depicted with varying degrees of naturalism. Adding to the complex display of reality and illusion is the painted decorative railing, which is attached to the wall as part of the sculpture, but could be a "real" decorative railing on the gallery wall.

Despite the inclusion of real objects and the realistically painted bread and sausage, Picasso clearly wanted the viewer to see *Still Life* as art, a hand-made object. The semi-circular plane representing the table top does not project from the wall at 90 degrees; it is tipped down like the table tops in Cubist paintings and collages, and could not support a real glass or knife. The quality of the workmanship is intentionally crude and roughly finished, in keeping with the simple workman's lunch depicted.

Fine art versus craft

Still Life leads us to consider different possible approaches to representation and decoration, fine art and craft, and what they signify. The work juxtaposes the crafts of woodworking and upholstering, both associated with working class labor, with the

illusionistic representation of still life objects associated with fine art. In uniting these two very differently-valued types of craft labor Picasso calls into question the traditional high valuation of the fine arts in relation to the so-called crafts, as well as challenging established distinctions between fine art and decoration. Known for his working class sympathies, Picasso here seems to claim an affinity with the artisans who work in the decorating trades.

Although they were little known at the time they were made, the innovations of Picasso's Cubist assemblages foreshadowed many developments of twentieth-century sculpture. His use of found materials, rejection of the traditional materials and techniques of European sculpture, and elimination of a clear distinction between artwork and object make his early Cubist assemblages important early contributions to the breakdown between art and life that would become a key theme of twentieth-century sculpture.

Additional resources:

Picasso: Guitars 1912-1914 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York

A Technical Study of Picasso's Construction *Still Life*, 1914 in the Tate Papers

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4.7.2: Cubist Sculpture II

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188206

Cubism instigated significant developments in twentieth-century sculpture, challenging the European sculptural tradition in terms of form, media, and often subject matter. Alexander Archipenko's *Médrano II* is an early example of the new approaches used by Cubist sculptors.

A circus performer



Figure **4.7.2.1**: Alexander Archipenko, *Médrano II*, 1913, painted tin, wood, glass and oil cloth, 49 7/8 x 20 ¼ x 12 ½ inches (**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York**)

Médrano II is a representation of a woman made from simple shapes in a variety of materials. She looks like a jaunty doll dancing on a shelf. Her head is a piece of folded tin with a painted eye and red hairline and a thin piece of pink wood for a nose. A central wooden vertical supports glass, tin, and wood planes, which are cut into basic geometric shapes and painted in bright colors to represent her shoulders, arms, legs, and skirt. Two simplified wooden feet anchor the figure on a multicolored horizontal plane that projects like a shelf from a vertical red backdrop that frames the figure.

The title refers to the **Médrano circus,** which was frequented by many artists in the early 20th century, and indicates that the brightly painted figure is a circus performer. Her mobile stance with one leg bent on tiptoes and the inclusion of a ball below her skirt suggests the lighthearted attitude of an acrobat or juggler. The forms of Archipenko's sculpture are similarly playful with repeated circles that seem to bounce through the figure, as well as the delicate pattern painted on the glass skirt, through which we can see the woman's thigh.

Sculptures that hang from the wall

Médrano II is a rare surviving early Cubist sculpture that reflects the innovations of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's Synthetic Cubist collages and **sculptures**. Like them, Archipenko combines a variety of cheap materials, emphasizes repeated geometric shapes, and adopts a playful approach to representation and design. The presentation of the sculpture against a framing backdrop is also similar to Picasso's early Cubist sculptures, which were frequently conceived as hanging from the wall like paintings. The subject of a female figure and the bright colors are, however, more comparable to the approaches used by the **Salon Cubists**, and *Médrano II* was, in fact, exhibited in the 1914 Salon des Indépendants.



Figure 4.7.2.2: Henri Laurens, *Head of a Woman*, 1915, painted wood, 20 x 18 ¼ inches (MoMA)

Henri Laurens' *Head of a Woman* also uses a Cubist assemblage technique, but it is a more abstract and formally ambitious work than Archipenko's. Like the later Cubist paintings and collages of Braque and Picasso, the head is fractured into multiple abstract shapes that represent specific features by relationship and form. For example, we can recognize the central vertical white triangle as a nose and the white circle next to it as an eyeball, while zigzag edges in the plane above suggest hair. The sculpture successfully translates the ambiguities of Cubist representation into three dimensions; however, it was made to hang on a wall, and thus intended to be viewed from a restricted angle. Like Archipenko's *Médrano II*, it does not exploit the full potential of sculpture's three-dimensionality.

A more traditional approach

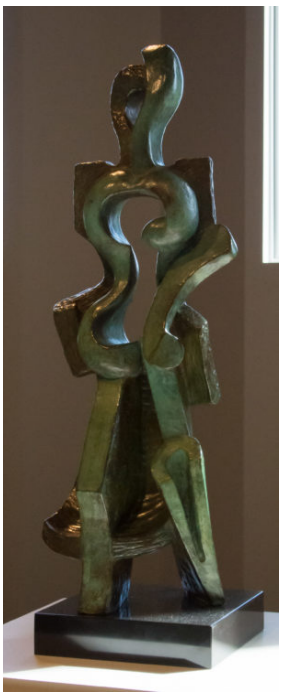


Figure 4.7.2.3: Alexander Archipenko, *Walking Woman*, 1912, bronze, 30 ½ x 9 ¾ x 8 ½ inches (Denver Art Museum) (photo: mark6mauno, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Archipenko also created several small freestanding bronze Cubist sculptures of women. In terms of medium, these were much more traditional than his *Médrano II*. They did, nevertheless, fully translate the Cubist approach into the three dimensions of sculpture.

Walking Woman breaks down the mass of the body and incorporates space into the center of the form. The solid elements of the sculpture shape space, turning a void into an implied solid. The woman's torso is defined by the conventional double curves that outline breasts, waist, and hips, but here they shape emptiness. Picasso used a similar strategy to define the body of the guitar in his collage *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*.



Figure **4.7.2.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, Collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches (**McNay Museum, San Antonio**)

Archipenko's *Walking Woman* is also reminiscent of the **Analytic Cubist** strategies used in paintings like Picasso's *Girl with a Mandolin* in which simplified, geometric body parts are fragmented and dissolved into the surrounding space. The figure is suggested in Archipenko's sculpture, and some parts of it, like the head, legs and part of a skirt, can be identified with confidence, but others, like the arms, are missing or only indirectly suggested.



Figure **4.7.2.5**: Pablo Picasso, *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, 1910, oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 29 inches (**MoMA**)

Classical references

Woman Combing Her Hair is much more traditional than *Walking Woman* despite the shaped void representing the woman's head and neck. Archipenko used Cubist techniques here to create a decorative form with obvious classical references in both the contrapposto pose and the form. The truncated arm and breaks at the knees suggest the broken remains of Classical figures like the *Venus de Milo*.



Figure 4.7.2.6: Left: Alexander Archipenko, *Woman Combing Her Hair*, 1915, bronze, 34 7/8 inches tall (Yale University Art Gallery); Right: Aphrodite, known as the "Venus de Milo," c. 100 B.C. E., marble, 2.02 m. tall (Louvre) (photo: Mattgirling, CC BY 3.0)

A non-naturalistic concavity defines the inner thighs and pubic area, but the effect is still fundamentally naturalistic and sensual. The raised arm merging with the figure's hair is a quotation of many images of Venus. In this work the innovations of Cubism are used to create a modernist update of a decorative table-top sculpture.



Figure 4.7.2.7: Left: Jacques Lipchitz, *Man with a Guitar*, 1915, limestone, 38 1/4 x 10 1/2 x 7 3/4 inches (MoMA); Right: Jacques Lipchitz, *Man with a Mandolin*, 1916-17, limestone, 30 x 10 1/4 x 11 3/8 inches (Yale University Art Gallery)

Jacques Lipchitz also made Cubist figure sculptures in the mid-1910s that participate in the contemporary trend to **establish Cubism as a classical style**. His *Man with a Guitar* and *Man with a Mandolin* abstract the figures into clusters of simple geometric planes. This approach is notably similar to Picasso's contemporary Cubist figure paintings, such as *Seated Man*.



Figure 4.7.2.8: Picasso, *Seated Man*, 1915-16, watercolor on paper, 11 3/8 x 8 7/8 inches (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The technique of stone carving is traditional, and the soft white tones of Lipchitz's figures reflect the classical tradition of Western sculpture. The figures themselves are radically abstracted, but the overall treatment of the sculptural form remains conventional. Lipchitz emphasizes sculptural mass, rather than integrating mass and space. *Man with a Guitar* stands on an integrated pedestal, a long-established mode of presentation. Like Archipenko's more sensual figures of women, Lipchitz's male musicians turn Cubism into a decorative style with classical overtones.

Cubism instigated two significant developments in twentieth century sculpture. The first, and more radical of the two, was the combination and assemblage of non-traditional materials to create objects that challenged the European sculptural tradition in terms of form, media, and often subject matter. This development led through **Dada** and **Surrealism** and on to the many art works of the later 20th century that challenged traditional conceptions of art.



Figure 4.7.2.9: Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, 1955-59, mixed media (photo: rocor, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The second development of Cubist sculpture was also extremely fertile. It was the establishment of a new abstract formal language for sculpture that retained the traditional Western conception of the art object as designed for aesthetic contemplation, while

expanding its range into non-representational forms.



Figure **4.7.2.10**: David Smith, *Cubi X*, 1963, stainless steel, 1308.3 x 199.9 x 61 cm (**MoMA**) (photo: **rocor**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Additional resources:

Read more about Robert Rauschenberg's *Monogram* at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Read more about David Smith's *Cubi X* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York

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4.7.3: Juan Gris, The Table

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188207

Juan Gris' *The Table* depicts a **Cubist** still life using an elaborate combination of traditional naturalism, abstraction, and *papier collé* (pasted paper collage). Objects or parts of objects, including a pipe, a glass, bottles, and a key, have been meticulously drawn and shaded in charcoal. Their arrangement is, however, abstract, and many of them have been broken into sections and partly obscured.



Figure **4.7.3.1**: Juan Gris, *The Table*, 1914, paper, opaque watercolor, and charcoal on canvas, 23 1/2 x 17 1/2 inches (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

A tangle of forms

Most of the objects are depicted from above and are placed along one of two distinct axes: one vertical and one diagonal. Aligned with the vertical axis we see a wine bottle on the right, the upper portion of a glass with its circular lip in the center, an open book at the bottom, and the stripes of the flowered wallpaper. A second wine bottle is canted at a diagonal in the center of the composition; to the left another open book and the pedestal bottom and stem of a wineglass are placed at the same angle, as is the cut right edge of a piece of wood grain paper.

Gris used a variety of papers in this work. In addition to the wallpaper and the printed wood grain paper, there is a page from a detective novel, part of the front page of a newspaper, and different types of unprinted paper. The charcoal drawings and paint appear on all the papers, creating a woven tangle of forms in which it is impossible to clearly determine the represented location and spatial relationships of the objects.

The True and the False

Like **Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso**, Gris used printed paper in his collage as a direct means to refer to objects. The wallpaper represents the wallpaper in the cafe where the still life is located. The printed wood grain paper represents the wooden table. The piece of newspaper and page of the novel signify the presence of these two objects in the still life.

The newspaper headline is directly relevant to Gris' playful Cubist approach to representation. It is slightly obscured but still legible and reads "Le Vrai et le Faux Chic" — "The True and the False Fashion." The paper's masthead, also partially visible as

"LE JU" is an elision of "Le Journal" (newspaper), and a pun on the French words for "to play" (*jouer*) and "toy" (*le jouet*) that was frequently used by Picasso and Braque in their Cubist still lifes.



Figure **4.7.3.2**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches (**McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas**)

The newspaper headline states the theme of the work, a play between the real and the fake. Although we reflexively associate the Western naturalistic style with 'reality' and 'truth', compared to the charcoal drawings it is the collaged papers that are real things — a real newspaper, a real page from a book — not representations of things. The wood grain on the printed paper, called *faux bois* (fake wood) in French, is, however, obviously fake despite its material presence.

Conceptual puzzles and illusionism



Figure **4.7.3.3**: Juan Gris, *The Table*, 1914, detail (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

Gris displays various tricks and conceptual puzzles related to pictorial illusionism throughout the work. Above the headline "Le Vrai et le Faux" he depicted two cigarettes. One is painted white and stands out against the darker background to create a *trompe l'oeil* image with shadowed edges covering part of the the masthead. Below this cigarette is a second one only sketched in outline. This one makes no attempt to fool the viewer into thinking it is a real cigarette; it is simply a drawing. Which one is "true," the one that tricks the viewer into thinking it is really there, or the one that announces itself as what it is, lines drawn on paper?



Figure 4.7.3.4: Georges Braque, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, charcoal, wallpaper and gouache on paper, 24 3/4 x 18 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Such plays between representation and reality were common in the Synthetic Cubist still-life paintings of Picasso and Braque as well. In the first papier collé, ***Fruit Dish and Glass***, Braque contrasted faux bois paper with realistically rendered grapes, a reference to the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis, who was said to have painted grapes so realistic that birds pecked at them.



Figure 4.7.3.5: Juan Gris, *The Table*, 1914, detail (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

In *Fruit Dish and Glass*, Braque also drew a circle on the lower strip of woodgrain paper to represent the knob of a drawer pull facing the viewer. Gris uses a much more naturalistic drawing of a key in a drawer in a similar manner, as well as depicting a book with its collaged page as a three dimensional object projecting over the table's edge. Both suggest that the objects are real and within the viewer's reach — a common strategy used in naturalistic still life paintings to convince viewers that their illusionistic objects are real.



Figure **4.7.3.6**: Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *The House of Cards*, c. 1737, oil on canvas, 82.2 x 66 cm (**National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.**)

Logical Cubism

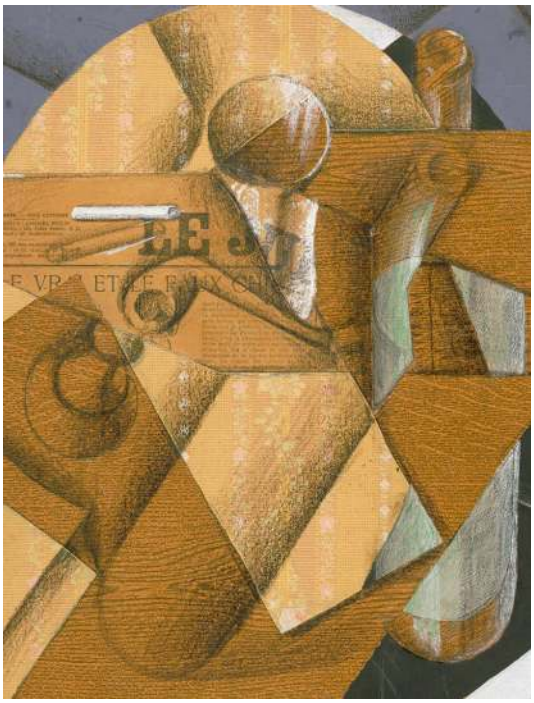


Figure **4.7.3.7**: Juan Gris, *The Table*, 1914, detail (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

In *The Table*, Gris developed the Cubist techniques and representational strategies used by Picasso and Braque into something distinctly his own. His drawings do not radically deconstruct objects as Picasso did in his drawing of a glass in *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*. Gris' wine bottles are naturalistically drawn, as are the parts of his wineglass in the upper center and left of the canvas.

He does, however, use the deconstructive formal vocabulary of Analytic Cubism when he detaches the rim of the glass and the lips of the bottles from their bodies to draw them as perfect circles.

For many contemporary art critics Gris' painting was considered both extremely logical and the best example of **Cubism as an art of conception** rather than perception. He presents objects as they are known/conceived rather than as they are seen/perceived. His depiction of the rims of glasses as perfect circles combined with drawing the rest of the glasses in profile is a conceptual approach because it shows key aspects of the object simultaneously, even though they cannot both be seen at once in reality.

Rhyming patterns

In addition to describing the essential form of objects, note how the circles in *The Table* align with the main diagonal and vertical axes of the composition, creating a pattern of formal rhymes throughout the work. This is one of the most distinctive aspects of Gris' style, the development of complex surface patterns based on a systematic geometric order. The background checkerboard pattern of *Guitar and Glasses* organizes the distribution of objects laid upon the café table, aligning everything into an interwoven vertical, horizontal, and diagonal grid.



Figure **4.7.3.8**: Juan Gris, *Guitar and Glasses*, 1914, paper, gouache and crayon on canvas, 36 1/8 x 25 1/2 inches (**MoMA**)

In some of his earliest Cubist works, such as *Man in a Café*, Gris used the golden section system of harmonious proportions to organize his compositions, but even when he worked more intuitively, his paintings and collages were structured to emphasize clear geometric forms and formal balance.



Figure **4.7.3.9**: Juan Gris, *Man in a Café*, 1912, oil on canvas, 50 1/4 x 34 3/4 inches (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

For some influential early critics and theorists of Cubism, the conceptual clarity and formal harmony of Gris' paintings exemplified the art movement's achievements. He had close connections to the **Salon Cubists** as well as to Picasso and Braque. *Man in a Café* was shown in the *Section d'Or* exhibition in 1912, after which Picasso and Braque's dealer, Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, offered Gris a contract and he began to focus more specifically on still life subjects.



Figure **4.7.3.10**: Juan Gris, *Still Life with Checked Tablecloth*, 1915, oil and graphite on canvas, 45 7/8 x 35 1/8 inches (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

The decorative qualities of Gris' work with its rich colors and strong geometric structure would become key characteristics of late **Cubism** and **Purism** as they developed during and after World War I.

Additional resources:

Read more about Juan Gris at the Guggenheim

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4.7.4: The Cubist City – Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.7.4.1**: Robert Delaunay, *The Eiffel Tower*, 1911, oil on canvas, 79 1/2 x 54 1/2 inches (**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum**, New York)

Robert Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower* seems to slash up through the canvas, bending and distorting the surrounding city as it climbs into a fractured sky. This is one of many paintings in which Delaunay attempted to convey the dominating and disorienting presence of the famous nineteenth-century Paris monument — a product of modern engineering and a symbol of modernity.

In this painting we see the tower from **different angles**, looking simultaneously up at the supporting legs and arch, and down at the central portions of the tower. Some sections seem to dissolve, while others morph into extra supports and towers as if a different side view has been attached to the main form.

Although the details of the structure are often confused, the overall triangle formed by the central tower projecting from its splay-legged base is clear and shapes everything that surrounds it. The tall buildings on the sides of the painting curve and sway as if responding to the tower's contours. The sky shatters into crystalline angles, and clusters of round shapes — suggesting trees or clouds or smoke — solidify the space around the tower into a cacophony of shifting planes.

Modern style for a modern subject

This is a vision of the modern city in the most modern painting style of the day, **Cubism**. Delaunay exhibited with many other Cubist painters in the Paris Salons, where his work was notable for its focus on Paris as a subject.

Although the group of Cubists with whom Delaunay was associated, the **Salon Cubists**, were dedicated to modern artistic techniques, their subjects were often not especially modern. Delaunay was unusual in his devotion to representing the experience of the modern city, and he was particularly drawn to the Eiffel Tower as a symbol of modern Paris.



Figure **4.7.4.2**: Postcard of the Eiffel Tower, c. 1910

Constructed as a temporary monument for the 1889 Universal Exposition, the Eiffel Tower was intended to display advanced structural engineering. It was, and remains, completely out of scale with the surrounding buildings. It is also remarkably different in kind from the city's buildings; it has no external walls and no solid form. Although massive in scale, it seems light and airy because of its open structure, through which the sky is visible. In the early twentieth century, it was a center for modern communications and scientific technology, serving as a telegraph relay station as well as a post for studying weather and aerodynamics.



Figure **4.7.4.3**: Robert Delaunay, *The City*, 1911, oil on canvas, 57 1/16 x 44 1/8 inches (**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York**)

Delaunay often depicted Paris and the Eiffel Tower as viewed through a window. In *The City*, curtains are visible on the sides as light, curved forms framing the central scene. The dark shadowed buildings and rooftops of the city rise up from below and stretch into the distance, where the red and black silhouette of the Eiffel Tower can just be seen surging up into the faceted sky. In addition

to the Cubist fracturing of forms and space, Delaunay here used a **Neo-Impressionist**-like technique of small brushstrokes to create the effect of shimmering highlights on the surface of the canvas. The following year he would devote himself to an **analysis of color and light** partly derived from Neo-Impressionism that would lead him to non-representational painting.

Unanimist spectacles

Delaunay's depictions of the Eiffel Tower as a conjunction of fragmented and discontinuous views have been linked to the French philosopher Henri Bergson's early twentieth-century theories about the way memory informs perception to combine past and present experiences. The unification of different views of the tower in a single image has also been connected to the contemporary French literary movement Unanimism, which celebrated the collective soul of individuals united by group experiences.

In Delaunay's paintings, the Eiffel Tower becomes a focus for all of the city's inhabitants. The simultaneous depiction of different viewing angles can be understood as a way of representing the union of all the different people's viewpoints, and perhaps even the people's spiritual unification, as they look at the tower.



Figure **4.7.4.4**: Robert Delaunay, *The Cardiff Team*, 1913, oil on canvas, 198.8 x 135.2 cm (Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven)

In *The Cardiff Team* the Eiffel Tower form is joined by two other aggressively modern subjects, a biplane and the enormous Paris Ferris wheel, which hover over the ball players and billboards in the lower half of the canvas. The title refers to a recent Paris-Cardiff rugby match, and the active figures in the foreground are based on a contemporary newspaper photo. The spectacle of modern team sports is an example of a popular group activity that created a Unanimist experience of collectivity.

The painting's billboards advertise Astra, an airplane construction company, and "Magic Paris." (In another version of the painting "Magic Paris" is replaced by "Delaunay," indicating how closely the painter identified with the Eiffel Tower rising above the sign.) The contrasting planes of brilliant colors that structure the painting reflect Delaunay's contemporary exploration of abstract color relationships, but this work is clearly a representation of Paris as a modern urban spectacle.



Figure 4.7.4.5: Fernand Léger, *The City*, 1919, oil on canvas, 231.1 × 298.4 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Delaunay's friend and fellow Salon Cubist, **Fernand Léger**, also painted the modern city in a modern style. His huge painting *The City*, painted after World War I, is an amalgam of the chaotic visual experience of the twentieth-century urban environment. A cacophony of brightly colored geometric shapes and letters compete for attention. Vertical rectangles create a rhythm across the surface of the canvas, while depth is suggested by layering and diagonal planes jutting into the painting from the lower corners.

In the upper half of the painting there are two simplified shapes of a human head and torso, one green and one purple and red. These immediately recognizable human silhouettes are figures in advertising posters, similar to those in Delaunay's *The Cardiff Team*, a nod to another aspect of modern life — the increasing presence and stridency of commercialism.

While most Cubist painters tended to depict traditional subjects, both Delaunay and Léger found the flat, hard-edged geometric style of Cubism an appropriate vehicle for representing the modern world of machines and mass production. Léger's highly abstract style contrasts with the more legible, painterly, and nuanced representation of the city in Delaunay's *The Cardiff Team*, but there are nevertheless important similarities.

Both artists represent the modern city by combining disparate elements, including letters and billboards, in complex abstract compositions based on ambiguous spatial relationships and color patterns. Léger's painting builds on Delaunay's earlier work and even has a coded homage to his fellow artist in the form of the initial R on the left paired with the bisected target shape, which forms a D. These are surrounded by open ironwork scaffolding that suggests fragments of the Eiffel Tower. The target shape also echoes Delaunay's investigations of color in disc-shaped abstract paintings.



Figure 4.7.4.6: Robert Delaunay, *Disc (The First Disc)*, 1913, oil on canvas, 53 inches in diameter (private collection)

Transforming people

A striking aspect of these paintings of the city is the treatment of the human figure, which is starkly impersonal. The rugby players in *The Cardiff Team* are part of the modern spectacle. They have no faces, and in the case of the main central figure, no head at all.



Figure 4.7.4.7: Fernand Léger, *The City*, detail, 1919 (**Philadelphia Museum of Art**)

Similarly, in the lower center of *The City* are two charcoal-gray figures. The featureless face of one confronts us at the bottom of the canvas, while the other is on a dark-gray and white staircase in the background.

The anonymous, geometric rendering of these figures shows that Léger, like Delaunay, had no interest in depicting human beings as individuals. It may even suggest that modernity is transforming not only the environment, but also humankind, to match its own mechanical rationality.

Delaunay and Léger used Cubism's abstract language of fractured forms and spatial dislocations to express the unique qualities of the modern urban experience. Their paintings focused on the distinctively modern aspects of Paris and depicted the way in which people are absorbed into and perhaps even transformed by modernity. Neither artist saw this as a bad thing; their paintings celebrate the union of modern humans and their new environment.

Additional resources:

Read more on Fernand Léger's art and the modern city

A lithograph of Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower* at MoMA

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.8: Fernand Léger

4.8.1: Contrast of Forms

4.8.2: Untitled (Fireplace Mural)

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4.8.1: Contrast of Forms

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **4.8.1.1**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

Additional resources:

View this work in MoMA's collection

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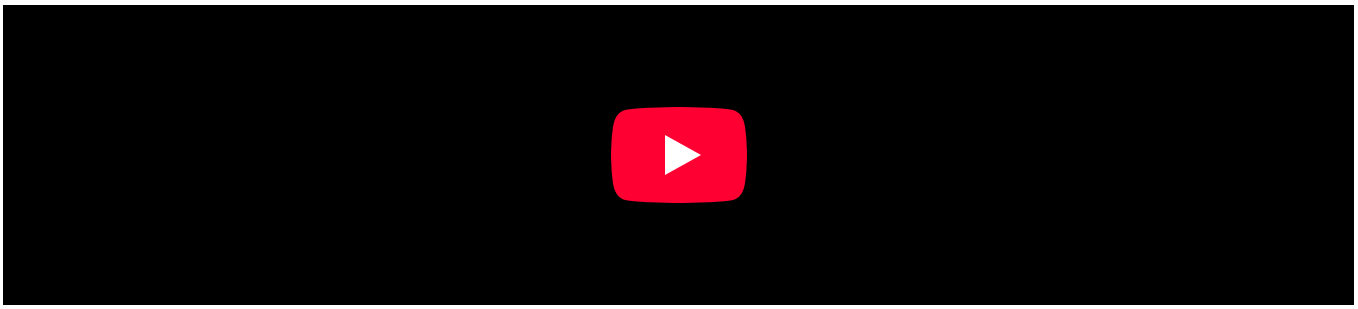
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4.8.2: Untitled (Fireplace Mural)

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Mural) by Fernand Léger is on view in the new Nancy and Rich Kinder Building for modern and contemporary of Fine Arts, Houston. Although trained as an architect, once Léger moved to Paris, he became associated with some of the most forward-looking painters of the time, eventually developing his own form of late Cubism so elegantly seen in this mural. Discover how his works came to be displayed alongside those of Matisse and Picasso with Gary Tinterow, Director and Margaret Alkek Williams Chair of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.9: Simultanism (Orphism)

4.9.1: Sonia Delaunay

4.9.2: Robert Delaunay

4.9.3: Robert Delaunay, Simultaneous Contrasts- Sun and Moon

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4.9.1: Sonia Delaunay

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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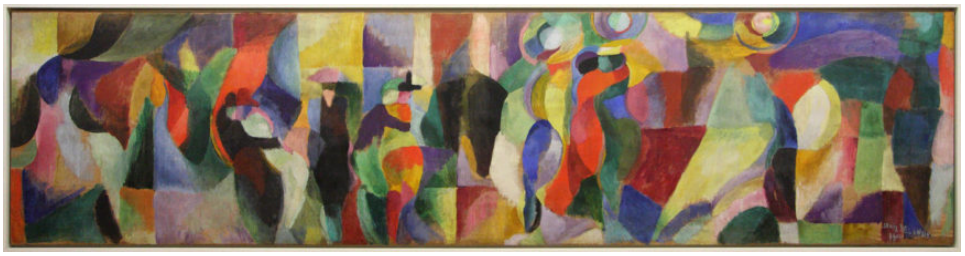


Figure 4.9.1.1: Sonia Delaunay, *Bal Bullier*, 1913, oil on canvas, 97 x 336.5 cm (MNAM Centre Pompidou)

Almost eleven feet wide, Sonia Delaunay's *Bal Bullier* creates an overwhelming impression of brilliant color and movement. The composition juxtaposes rectangular geometric forms and circles with more fluid curved shapes, loosely structured across the canvas in a rhythmic pattern of dark and light verticals.

A modern dance hall

The *Bal Bullier* was a dance hall in Paris that Delaunay frequently visited with her husband, Robert. Her painting shows a scene of modern urban life comparable to those painted by the Impressionists in the late 19th century, such as Auguste Renoir's ***Moulin de la Galette***.

If you look closely at the dark shapes in the center you will see the abstracted forms of couples dancing the tango. The dance, which originated in sailors' bars in Argentina, was very popular in Paris in the early 20th century. It is renowned for its erotic intensity and requires a very tight embrace between partners, which Delaunay represents in the interlocking curves of the figures.



Figure 4.9.1.2: Sonia Delaunay, *Electrical Prisms*, 1914, oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm (MNAM Centre Pompidou)

Sonia's *Electrical Prisms* is both a display of color relationships and an abstracted depiction of her first experience of electric streetlights on a Paris boulevard. The streetlights become discs of radiating color that permeate the entire canvas, but there are also suggestions of solid forms. A tall kiosk with books or magazines is on the left, and parts of some shadowy figures appear in the lower half of the painting, almost completely absorbed into the brilliant colors of the electric light.

Intuition vs. intellect

While Robert studied scientific color theory, they both described Sonia's approach to their new style as intuitive. This is a cliché of traditional Western gender roles — the male as rational and intellectually inclined, the female as naturally gifted and intuitive — but it is a cliché that they both embraced.

Interestingly, in Western art theory color is thought to appeal directly to the senses, in contrast to drawing's supposed appeal to the intellect; thus, Sonia's purportedly intuitive approach to color was aligned with traditional Western conceptions of color's role in art. It should be noted, however, that Sonia formally studied art for several years in a German academy and an art school in Paris, while Robert's formal artistic training was limited to a two-year apprenticeship with a theatrical designer in Paris.

The influence of craft

Sonia's use of color was also sometimes explained by another cliché of the early 20th century, the influence of peasant crafts on her work. Since the late 19th century, modern artists such as Gauguin had admired, and appropriated, the purportedly naive, untutored styles of peasant art, which were often vividly colored and non-naturalistic.



Figure 4.9.1.3: Sonia Delaunay, Blanket, 1911, fabric, 109 x 81 cm (MNAM, Centre Pompidou)

Sonia herself claimed that the patchwork blanket she made for her son in 1911 was inspired by peasant blankets she remembered seeing in Russia as a child. Its irregular grid of largely rectangular geometric forms was also similar to contemporary Cubist painting. Sonia saw her blanket as an important influence on her and Robert's subsequent development of Simultanist paintings.

Abstraction and decoration

Sonia's blanket and its influence raises a key issue for modern abstract art — its relationship to crafts and the decorative arts. The use of non-representational forms and patterns has a long history in Western crafts and decorative arts; it was the so-called fine arts of painting and sculpture that traditionally relied on representational subject matter. When modern painters began to use non-naturalistic colors and abstract forms in the early 20th century, one of their primary concerns was to prove that their paintings were not "mere" decoration. This is one reason why many of the first modern artists to embrace pure abstraction took so long do so and wrote extensive justifications, often claiming **exalted spiritual motivations** for their abstraction.

Abstraction and representation

Unlike many of their contemporaries who developed abstract painting styles that progressed from representation to pure abstraction, the Delaunays painted representational and non-representational Simultanist works at the same time. Modern objects such as the Eiffel Tower and airplanes as well as scenes of dance halls and rugby games were enveloped in the prismatic color planes of Simultanism. Like the **Italian Futurists**, the Delaunays created a post-Cubist style appropriate to the modern city, and Sonia expanded her art beyond the limits of the easel painting to engage with everyday life.

Going beyond painting



Figure **4.9.1.4**: Sonia Delaunay wearing her Simultaneous Dress in 1913

The same year that she painted *Bal Bullier* Sonia made herself a **Simultaneous Dress**. Like her earlier blanket, it was a colorful patchwork of geometric shapes, but the dress was made to be seen in public. She wore it to the dance hall with Robert, who also wore clothes in vivid contrasting colors. By attiring themselves in the colors and forms of their painting they became living, moving artworks, Simultanist human beings.

Sonia dreamed of transforming everything around her, and she created and exhibited bookbindings, home furnishings, and posters in the Simultanist style in 1913. After World War I, she became a very successful designer of clothing and interior furnishings, and colorful contrasts of geometric forms remained characteristic of her work.

A Simultanist book

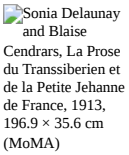


Figure **4.9.1.5**: Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*, 1913, 196.9 × 35.6 cm (**MoMA**)

One of Sonia's most famous early creations is the Simultanist book she designed in collaboration with the poet Blaise Cendrars titled *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*.

Unfolded, the book is six feet long. Delaunay and Cendrars initially intended to publish 150 copies, which opened together in a line would have equaled the height of the Eiffel Tower. The text of Cendrars' poem is printed in multiple colors and varied fonts on the right, while Delaunay's largely abstract Simultanist designs parallel it on the left, with panels of lighter colors also interspersed throughout the text.

The poem combines disjointed thoughts, repeated refrains, and references to a trip on the Trans-Siberian railroad, of which there is a map at the top. Time and place shift throughout the text, with Paris as a constant presence. Sonia's colorful abstract forms swirl down the long sheet, looping into circles that visually echo the poem's evocation of the train's rolling motion.

The poem ends with a Paris scene next to the only clear representational form in the design – a red Eiffel Tower accompanied by a circle reminiscent of the giant Paris ferris wheel.

When fully unfolded, the designs on the left side seem to ascend like clouds of brightly colored smoke from the Eiffel Tower to the beginning of the poem at the top, where the viewer is led to read the poem down the right side. Thus, the open book creates a continuous circuit with the tower standing like an anchor at the bottom.



Figure **4.9.1.6**: Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*, 1913, detail (**MoMA**)

Simultanism was developed in a collaboration between Sonia and Robert Delaunay, but it extended well beyond that initial relationship. It became an approach to modern art and style that worked to bridge the distances between the visual arts and literature, the fine and decorative arts, and the art and spectacles of the modern urban world.

Additional resources:

Read more about Sonia Delaunay at the Tate Modern

A detailed look at *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* at the National Gallery of Art

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4.9.2: Robert Delaunay

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.9.2.1**: Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows on the City*, 1912, oil on canvas, 40 x 46 cm (**Kunsthalle Hamburg**)

Robert Delaunay's *Simultaneous Windows on the City* is enigmatic. Where is the city? Where are the windows? At first (and possibly second and third) glance what we see is a fractured pattern of mostly rectangular planes painted in the colors of the spectrum over both a canvas and its wooden frame. If we consider the post-Renaissance Western conception of a painting as being like a window, then we might interpret the painted frame as a window frame and the canvas inside as representing the city, but this does little to help us see a city depicted in the painting.

Cubist composition

Looking at the painting in Cubist terms is more successful. Delaunay exhibited with the **Salon Cubists**, and this painting was made as Delaunay's artistic interests shifted from the Cubists' analysis of form to an investigation of color and light.



Figure **4.9.2.2**: Georges Braque, *Man with a Guitar*, 1911, oil on canvas, 45 3/4 x 31 7/8 inches (**MoMA**)

Despite its intense color, S*imultaneous Windows on the City* remains Cubist in overall composition. Like Braque's roughly contemporary Cubist composition *Man with a Guitar*, Delaunay's painting is a complex grid of dark and light-toned planes and ambiguous forms in which the viewer can find vestigial signs of the subject.

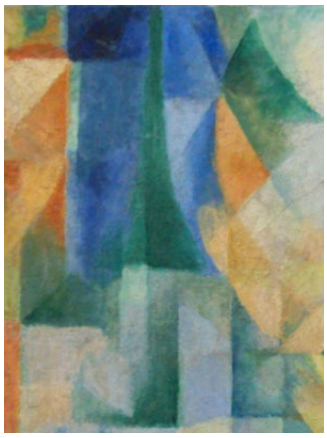


Figure **4.9.2.3**: Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows on the City*, 1912, detail (**Kunsthalle Hamburg**)

The most recognizable form in Delaunay's painting is the green Eiffel Tower in the center, rising up from its triangular base to a point toward the top of the canvas. Below the tower are suggestions of rectangular buildings with dark blue windows. Some of these are painted directly on the wooden frame, indicating that it cannot be literally equated with a window's frame.

The side bars of the frame are, however, darker than the canvas area, and their diagonal edges at the top and bottom create the illusion of a casement window opening into the viewer's space. The bright yellows and oranges on the canvas convey an impression of warm outdoor light, while the intense blues in the rectangle surrounding the Eiffel Tower suggest sky. The color contrasts also create a sense of spatial depth as the cool blues appear to recede next to the vivid warmth of the yellows and oranges.

An established subject

Delaunay painted many depictions of both the **Eiffel Tower and Paris** as seen from a window, and this painting is a more abstract version of what was an established subject for him.



Figure **4.9.2.4**: Robert Delaunay, *The Tower with Curtains*, 1910, oil on canvas, 116 x 97 cm (**Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf**)

Knowledge of his earlier paintings makes it easier to see the representational forms in this one. The orange shapes, for example, are like the curtains in the windows that frame the tower in previous paintings. Here, however, their color also plays a crucial role, suggesting sunlight and creating a chromatic contrast with the blue that intensifies both colors.

Simultanism and Orphism

The use of chromatic contrast is a primary interest in *Simultaneous Windows on the City*, and became a central concern of Delaunay's art. He studied the science of vision and color theory, particularly the writings of M. E. Chevreul and Ogden Rood, which had influenced the Neo-Impressionists in the 19th century.



Figure 4.9.2.5: Robert Delaunay, *Window on the City no. 3*, 1911, oil on canvas, 113.7 x 130.8 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Delaunay used the Neo-Impressionists' divisionist technique to create a visible mosaic of colored brushstrokes in paintings like *Window on the City no. 3*, but he soon shifted to using larger planes of color. In 1912 he and his wife Sonia developed an approach to painting light by means of color that they called Simultanism.

The Delaunays were not alone in using the term Simultanism in relation to art. Simultaneity was a popular term with broad significance among avant-garde artists and writers of the time. Generally, it alluded to new concepts of space and time described by early-20th century physicists, such as Einstein, and philosophers, notably Henri Bergson. More specifically, it referred to techniques used by **Cubists** and **Futurists** to combine different vantage points into a single "simultaneous" image. Such images were considered a synthesis of memory and perception, and sometimes also a synthesis of many different people's views.

The Delaunays' friend, the writer Guillaume Apollinaire, labelled their work "Orphism" or "Orphic Cubism," and linked it with the work of other artists who were also developing post-cubist styles. Despite Apollinaire's confusing combination of very different artistic styles and approaches into a single category, the term Orphism has endured. It is sometimes used as a synonym for Simultanism or, more generally, to refer to abstract painting that uses color in a manner comparable to the use of sound and rhythm in music.



Figure 4.9.2.6: Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows on the City*, 1912, oil on canvas, 40 x 46 cm (Kunsthalle Hamburg)

The complexity of vision

As we look closely at *Simultaneous Windows on the City* we experience the complexity of vision. The fractured planes of different colors mimic the way light reflects off glass and how when we look out a window we can often simultaneously see the view outside and reflections of objects inside. Perhaps the curved orange and yellow planes on the right are not a curtain but the reflection of a head and neck with an ear jutting out next to the Eiffel Tower.

The longer you look at the painting the more possible readings of the suggestive forms you are likely to discover. Delaunay's painting is not only about vision, it is also about painting itself and the way its colored shapes and relationships structure vision. We are led to realize this because the lack of clear representational imagery constantly reminds that we are looking at colors painted on the flat surface of the canvas.

Between abstraction and representation

The Delaunays' Simultanist paintings explore the potential of color contrasts to create form and depth.



Figure **4.9.2.7**: Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Contrasts: Sun and Moon*, 1912, oil on canvas, 134.5 cm diameter (**MoMA**)

They often hover ambiguously between pure abstraction and representation, particularly the paintings that take the light of celestial objects as their subjects, such as Robert's *Simultaneous Contrasts: Sun and Moon*. A few are clearly non-representational, while others depict specific subjects, **ranging from street lamps to dance halls** and airplanes.



Figure **4.9.2.8**: Robert Delaunay, *Homage to Blériot*, 1914, tempera on canvas, 250 x 250 cm (**Kunstmuseum Basel**)

The modern experience

In adopting the term Simultanism to describe their paintings, the Delaunays combined reference to a famous text on color theory with recent philosophical and scientific explorations of perception and memory. The art they produced reflected this combination in its synthesis of formal concerns and modern subject matter.

Additional resources:

Read Ogden Rood's *Modern Chromatics* at the Linda Hall Library Foundation

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4.9.3: Robert Delaunay, Simultaneous Contrasts- Sun and Moon

- *by THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART*

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Video **4.9.3.3**: Video from The Museum of Modern Art

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4.10.1: Russian Neo-Primitivism- Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.10.1.1**: Natalia Goncharova, *Gardening*, 1908, oil on canvas, 102.9 x 123.2 cm (Tate Gallery)

Natalia Goncharova's *Gardening* is an example of the contradictions of early-twentieth century Russian modernism. It simultaneously faces outward and inward, forward and backward — outward and forward to engage with some of the most radical trends of European modern art, and inward and backward to reflect on traditional Russian subjects and themes.

Looking forward

In terms of style, *Gardening* is aggressively modern. With its flat colors and decorative patterning created by the flowers and distant houses, the painting reflects the deliberately simplified style initially developed by the Post-Impressionists in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the crudely rendered forms of the figures and spatial dislocations suggest contemporaneous painting techniques associated with **Fauvism** and **German Expressionism**.

During the first decade of the twentieth century Goncharova and other Russian artists worked hard to assimilate the new styles and attitudes of modern European art. They were able to see many examples of modern art in traveling exhibitions and reproductions in books and magazines. The extensive collections of Ivan Morozov and Sergei Shchukin in Moscow also provided Russian artists with opportunities to view many works by prominent European modernists.



Figure **4.10.1.2**: Natalia Goncharova, *Peasants Picking Apples*, 1911, oil on canvas, 104.5 x 98 cm (Tretyakov State Gallery).

Goncharova was a remarkably prolific and eclectic painter who produced an enormous number of works that show her immersion in contemporary European styles and techniques. *Peasants Picking Apples*, created a few years after *Gardening*, depicts a similar subject, but the painting's forms are flatter and more simplified, now reflecting Goncharova's assimilation of the formal innovations of **early Cubism**. This is particularly evident in the simultaneous profile and frontal view of the peasants' faces and in the hard, angular facets of their bodies.

Peasant life and Russian nationalism

Goncharova's subjects were at odds with her aggressively international and forward-leaning style. Peasant labor was a popular subject for many Russian modern artists between 1910 and 1913, especially for those associated with Neo-Primitivism, which included Goncharova and her partner Mikhail Larionov, as well as Kasimir Malevich and Aleksandr Shevchenko. Although they were deeply engaged with the developments of European art, Russian modernists were also committed to explicitly Russian themes and subjects — and peasants were a particularly significant subject for them.

Belief in a specifically Russian identity had deep historical roots in Russian culture, which had defined itself since the 18th century in ambivalent relation to Western European culture. Russian modernists maintained this long-standing ambivalence. They embraced many of the ideas and formal innovations of European modernism, but they insisted on interpreting and developing them in distinctively Russian ways.

Peasants who had worked the land for centuries were widely considered to embody the Russian national identity and soul. To assert their difference from Europe, Russian intellectuals described Russian peasants and the land itself as Eastern and Asian or Oriental. Russian peasants were often portrayed as true primitives, uncorrupted by European civilization. Ironically, by embracing the primitive Russian peasant, Russian modern artists were following European precedents, most famously that of Paul Gauguin, who admired and painted the primitive lifestyle of the **French peasants in Brittany** before he moved to the Pacific Islands.

Embracing Russian folk traditions

Russian Neo-Primitivist artists did not just depict Russian peasants, they also often modeled their styles on traditional Russian folk art, particularly popular woodcuts called *luboks*, as well as shop signs, embroidery, hand-made toys, and religious icons. Paintings by Mikhail Larionov display varied styles associated with traditional folk art.



Figure 4.10.1.3: Mikhail Larionov, *Spring*, 1912, oil on canvas, 1912. (Tretyakov State Gallery)

In *Spring*, instead of depicting peasants performing seasonal labor, Larionov adopted folk art forms to create whimsical panels in bright yellow, red, gold, and white that represent the season of fertility and new growth through symbolic imagery and text. A bird and flying cupids bring flowering branches to a smiling nude woman, a stick figure holds a shovel at the base of one flowering tree, while another flowering tree is flanked by a caterpillar and a butterfly. The style is highly decorative and abstracted in the manner of traditional folk embroidery and painted furniture designs.



Figure 4.10.1.4: Mikhail Larionov, *Soldier on a Horse*, c. 1911, oil on canvas, 87 x 99.1 cm (Tate Gallery)

Children's art

Larionov also employed styles associated with children's art and graffiti, which were considered contemporary manifestations of primitive artistic expression. With its limited palette of vivid primary colors and flat simplified forms, his *Soldier on a Horse* is reminiscent of crude sign painting and children's art.

Although it lacks the sophisticated techniques of naturalistic representation, the subject is clearly legible, and the painting effectively conveys the excitement of the rearing horse and the pride of the erect soldier, a nationalistic subject. To emphasize their

connection with popular Russian art, Neo-Primitivist artists included the work of children and sign painters alongside their own paintings in the 1913 Target exhibition in Moscow.



Figure **4.10.1.5**: Natalia Goncharova, *God of Fertility*, 1909-10, oil on canvas (Tretyakov State Gallery)

Russia's ancient Scythian roots

Russia's prehistoric past was also the subject of some Neo-Primitive paintings. Goncharova's *God of Fertility* depicts a type of stone funerary sculpture thought to have originated with ancient Scythians (nomadic tribes who roamed Siberia in the first millennium B.C.E.). These mysterious carved stones remained objects of folk superstition and ritual into modern times. Scythian myths and prehistoric pagan rituals were popular subjects for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century avant-garde Russian music and dance as well. The most famous example is Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, whose primitive rhythms, dissonances and anti-classical choreography caused a scandal at its first performance in Paris in 1913.

In *God of Fertility* Goncharova again joins a primitive subject to a modern artistic style, using a Cubist technique of faceting to create a non-naturalistic, depthless space in which various symbolic objects associated with fertility float. These include a flower and a horse, the latter referring to the importance of horses in Scythian culture. Abstract geometric forms describe the basic shapes of the ancient sculpture and also suggest that it exists in a space beyond that of the transitory material world.

Promoting Russian modernist primitivism

Neo-Primitivism was an important trend in early Russian modern art, pioneered in large part by Goncharova and Larionov. In addition to producing their own works of modern art, they were organizers of the Jack of Diamonds exhibiting group, which mounted a series of shows of modern European and Russian art in Moscow between 1910 and 1917. The first Jack of Diamonds exhibition showed the French Cubist painters Albert Gleizes and Henri Le Fauconnier alongside Russian artists working in Munich such as Vassily Kandinsky and Alexei von Jawlensky, as well as Russian artists working in Moscow.

In 1912, however, Goncharova and Larionov left the Jack of Diamonds group because they felt it had become too European in its orientation. They mounted The Donkey's Tail exhibition devoted exclusively to Russian modern art and largely focused on Neo-Primitivism. The artworks nevertheless remained an amalgam of modern and primitive, European and Russian influences. That year, Alexander Schevchenko's essay "Neo-Primitivism" acknowledged this fundamental contradiction by defining Russian modern art as a hybrid form that had assimilated French avant-garde painting and combined it with the traditional decorative forms of Russian folk art and icons.

Additional resources:

Read more about Natalia Goncharova

Read more about the Scythians

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4.10.2: Kazmir Malevich, Suprematist Composition- White on White

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **4.10.2.1**: Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, oil on canvas, 79.4 x 79.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

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4.10.3: Kasimir Malevich and Cubo-Futurism

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.10.3.1**: Kasimir Malevich, *Reservist of the First Division*, 1914, oil, collage, and thermometer on canvas, 21 1/8” x 17 5/8” (MoMA)

Kasimir Malevich created *Reservist of the First Division* (1914) in the first year of World War I. The title refers to a member of the reserve army waiting to be called up for military service, and it had personal significance as Malevich was himself a reservist (although not in the First Division). He was anxious about going to war, but the painting does not convey any obvious emotion or even a clear message. It is a combination of oil paint and collage in a style related to the Synthetic Cubism of **Picasso** and Braque. At the time Malevich was part of a group of Russian modern artists known as Cubo-Futurists, who used pictorial techniques initially developed by modern artists in Western Europe.

Combining representations

Like Synthetic Cubist paintings, Malevich’s *Reservist of the First Division* combines different systems of representation. Several objects are depicted using naturalistic techniques — a white cylinder projecting towards the viewer in the middle of the painting and a green cylinder on the left cast shadows and have traditional chiaroscuro shading to indicate their curved shapes. On the right a human ear is clearly depicted. There are also two immediately recognizable schematic objects — a gold cross just to the left of center at the top, and below it half of a black handlebar mustache on a peachy flesh-colored ground; both are symbolic references to a Russian military man.

These identifiable objects and symbols are detached elements in an abstract geometric design of colored shapes, varied textures, and painted lines that includes paper collages with printed words, letters, the number 8, a postage stamp depicting the Czar, and a real thermometer. The collaged words are: opera (at the top), Thursday and tobacconist (in the middle), and (to the left) the name of a traditional academic painter, A. Vasnetzov, who had rejected Malevich’s paintings from exhibition. The words, like the represented forms, refer to things without clearly relating them to the other elements of the painting.

Zaum Realism

Reservist of the First Division uses fragments of objects, shapes, and words to communicate by non-rational means. This was a central technique of Russian Futurist writers that they called *zaum*, a neologism usually translated as “transrational.” *Zaum* entailed using non-referential linguistic forms — simple phonemes, letters, and nonsense words — to bypass rational understanding and communicate emotion directly. The Futurists believed that through *zaum* they were able to access a higher reality that transcended the limitations of rationality and the material world.

Malevich collaborated with the Futurist writers on several projects, the most important of which was the radically innovative opera *Victory over the Sun* (1913). Like the Futurists, he tried to use the **formal elements** of painting (line color, shape, composition, etc.)

as direct means to communicate feeling independent of representation or obvious reference. He described many of his paintings, including *Morning in the Village after Snowstorm* (1912-13) and *The Knife Grinder* (1912-13), as “zaum realism.”



Figure **4.10.3.2**: Kasimir Malevich, *The Knife Grinder*, 1912-13, oil on canvas, 79.5 x 79.5 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

Russian Subjects

Although Malevich explicitly linked these two paintings to *zaum’s* direct emotional non-rational communication through basic formal units, they are less abstract and easier to decipher than the slightly later work *Reservist of the First Division*. Figures and space are simplified into geometric shapes and arranged to create repeating abstract patterns. *The Knife Grinder* depicts a man pumping a sharpening wheel as he works. His foot, hand, and knife appear in multiple positions to convey motion in time. Malevich derived the faceting of space and figure from techniques popular among many well-known Western European Cubists and Futurists whose works were reproduced in art magazines and exhibited in Russia.



Figure **4.10.3.3**: Kasimir Malevich, *Morning in the Village after Snowstorm*, 1912-13, oil on canvas, 80 x 80 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

The Italian Futurists often used modern representational techniques to depict conspicuously modern subjects. Malevich, by contrast, used an avant-garde formal vocabulary to represent traditional (even self-consciously “primitive”) subjects. Such subjects were popular among Russian avant-garde painters such as **Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov**, who promoted a

specifically Russian approach to modernism by embracing Russian subjects and traditional art forms. *Morning in the Village after Snowstorm* shows Russian peasants carrying buckets and pulling a sled through a snowy village scene. *The Knife Grinder* uses his foot to pump a simple wheel and pulley mechanism, a marked contrast to the Italian Futurists' passion for depicting electricity and powerful, sometimes violent, modern machines such as automobiles, trains, and machine guns.



Figure **4.10.3.4**: Kasimir Malevich, *Woman at a Poster Column*, 1914, oil, collage and lace on canvas, 71 x 64 cm (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)

Combining Media and Styles

Malevich combined geometric abstraction, Cubist systems of representation, and collage in an unprecedented manner in *Reservist of the First Division* and related works such as *Woman at a Poster Column* (1914) and *Composition with Mona Lisa* (1914). With these works the *zaum* techniques of non-rational communication using basic formal units are more fully realized and developed to include recognizable images and objects detached from their usual context.

All three use large flat planes of color as a structuring device. These planes seem to hover in front of the picture plane, creating complex layers of space markedly different from the shallow, fractured pictorial space of most Cubist paintings. The inclusion of photographs and objects, such as the thermometer in *Reservist of the First Division* and the strips of lace in *Woman at a Poster Column*, was also an innovative *zaum* pictorial strategy that foreshadowed the **Dada** artists' embrace of the illogical in their strategically disruptive use of collage.



Figure **4.10.3.5**: Kasimir Malevich, *Composition with Mona Lisa* (*Partial Eclipse*), 1914, oil, graphite, and collage on canvas, 62.4 x 49.2 cm (State Russian Museum)

Replacing Conventions

Composition with Mona Lisa combines a collaged reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with colored planes and suggestions of cylinders and other objects rendered in a Cubist style. The painted Russian text translates as "partial eclipse," and the collaged newspaper text directly under the *Mona Lisa* reproduction declares "apartment for rent," while the text collaged on the painted cube below reads, "in Moscow." Two red 'X's have been painted on the *Mona Lisa's* face and chest, and the top of her head is torn off. The work seems to thematize as well as embody the fact that the conventions of naturalistic representation, which had dominated Western art since the Renaissance, have been cancelled out. New replacements are available in Moscow, and Malevich puts himself at the forefront of the avant-garde.

Malevich's intense engagement with Cubist and Futurist styles exemplified the Russian avant-garde's adaptation of European modernist techniques to serve their own distinctive artistic aims — most notably the depiction of specifically Russian subjects. With his later collage works, Malevich ventured into new territory, combining abstract planes with representational elements. In the following year he would break away completely from representation and create a new art movement, **Suprematism**.

Additional resources:

Read more about *Reservist of the First Division*

Read more about *Morning in the Village After a Snowstorm*

Charlotte Douglas, *Kazimir Malevich* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994).

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4.10.4: Suprematism, Part I- Kasimir Malevich

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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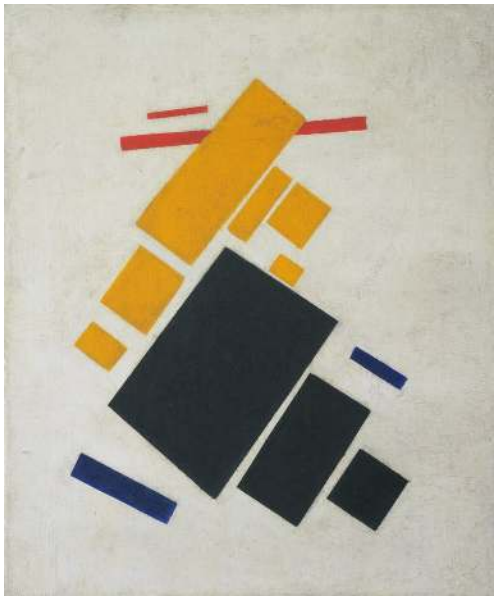


Figure **4.10.4.1**: Kasimir Malevich, *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition*, 1915, oil on canvas, 58.1 x. 48.3 cm, (MoMA)

Kasimir Malevich's *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* does not depict an airplane. Instead, it was intended to convey the sensation of mechanical flight using thirteen rectangles in black, yellow, red, and blue placed in dynamic relationships on a white ground. Movement is created by the diagonal orientation of the rectangles in relation to the edges of the canvas. Groups of individual colors suggest distinct objects shown at varying distances as they increase or diminish in scale. Ascension is implied by the point of the yellow rectangle centered at the top of the composition, while the bright yellow and red rectangles float above the heavier dark blue and black rectangles.



Figure **4.10.4.2**: Photograph of The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10, St Petersburg, Russia, 1915

The Last Futurist Exhibition

Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition was first shown in 1915 at "The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10" in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was not the most important painting in this first display of Malevich's Suprematist paintings. That was *Black Square*, which was hung in a position of honor up by the ceiling in the corner of the room, the traditional location of a Christian icon in a Russian peasant's house. In keeping with this exalted placement Malevich described *Black Square* as "the first step of

pure creation in art”[1] and “the embryo of all potentials.”[2] The 38 other paintings of geometric forms, including *Airplane Flying*, were implicitly generated from this basic form.

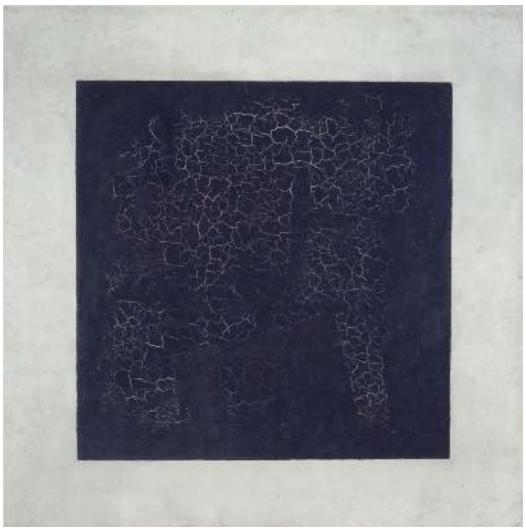


Figure **4.10.4.34**: Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915, oil on linen, 79.5 x 79.5 cm (State Tretyakov Gallery)

Suprematism as a new realism

Malevich declared Suprematism was a new “realism” in painting, a statement that may seem puzzling given that the paintings are all basic geometric forms on a white background. By making this claim Malevich rejected the conventional understanding of realism in painting as the representation of the world we see.

There are two different ways to understand Malevich’s alternative conception of realism. The first is formal: the painter’s basic formal elements of surface, color, shape, and texture are real things in themselves. They are not signs referring to anything else or images representing real things outside the painting. *Black Square* is a black square of paint on canvas, nothing more, nothing less. It makes no reference to any other object; it is a real thing in itself.

This formalist approach is a defining aspect of modernist art and literature, and it was a major concern of the Russian Futurist poets with whom Malevich often collaborated. They invented ***zaum***, a “transrational” language that used linguistic forms — phonetic sounds, letters, syllables and words divorced from referential meaning — to communicate directly by means of feeling. Reduction to basic forms of verbal or visual language was intended to liberate the writer or artist from the conventions of the past and the limitations of the world as it exists. *Zaum* would pave the way to a new world and a new mode of being.

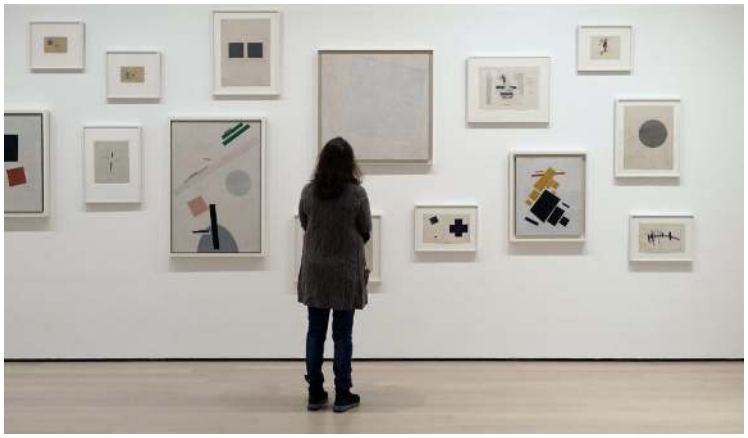


Figure **4.10.4.4**: Looking at Kasimir Malevich’s paintings in the Museum of Modern Art

The second way to understand Suprematism as a “new realism” is in relation to a reality beyond the one we normally experience. **Mystical traditions** and theories of multi-dimensional, non-Euclidean space were popular within artistic and literary circles in the early 20th century. Malevich was particularly interested in the mystical geometry of Peter Ouspensky, who believed artists were

able to see beyond material reality and communicate their visions to others. In a pamphlet written for The Last Futurist Exhibition, Malevich echoes this conception of the artist:

> ***I transformed myself in the zero of form . . . I destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped from the circle of things, from the horizon-ring that confines the artist and the forms of nature.T. Anderson, ed. K. S. Malevich: Essays on Art 1915-1933, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1969), p. 19.***

This is a description of the artist as a superior being who leads the way to a new consciousness. Suprematism was the result, a non-objective art of "pure feeling," unconcerned with representation of the visible world.

Kasimir Malevich as a pioneer of abstraction

Malevich has long been considered, with Kandinsky and Mondrian, one of the **pioneers of non-representational painting** in the early twentieth century. A number of other artists also developed non-representational painting in this period, but for varying reasons their work was not widely known. Malevich, Kandinsky and Mondrian were prominent and active participants in the world of modern avant-garde art and published multiple texts explaining their theories. This greatly increased their visibility and influence.

All three were committed to the notion of the artist as a spiritual leader who perceives a greater metaphysical reality and whose art guides society towards its realization. They also all believed that they could communicate this spiritual reality using the basic formal means of painting.

Malevich's approach was, however, different from the multi-year, carefully reasoned progression from naturalistic representation to non-objective painting undertaken (separately) by Kandinsky and **Mondrian**. Malevich leaped from **a style** closely related to Synthetic Cubism to Suprematism within a few months, and his explanatory texts were written afterwards to support what was largely an intuitive discovery.

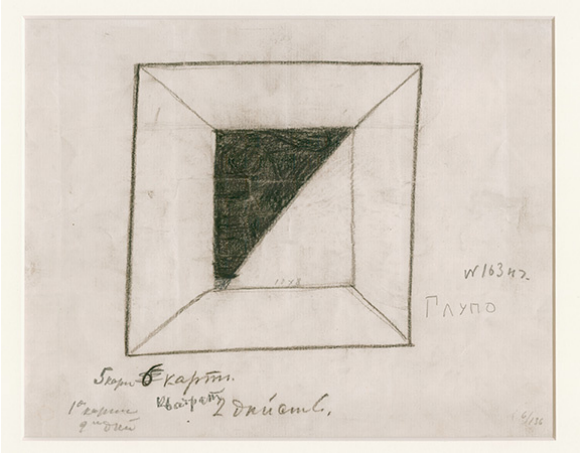


Figure 4.10.4.5: Kazimir Malevich, Set Design for *Victory over the Sun*,1913, graphite on paper, 21.5 x 27.5 cm (State Museum of Theater and Music, St. Petersburg)

Suprematism's beginnings

Malevich retrospectively located the origin of *Black Square* in the basic geometric shapes of the stage designs he made in 1913 for the Cubo-Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun*. This opera, created in collaboration with the Futurist poets Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, told a story of time travelers overcoming old concepts of time and gravity. The theme of space travel and the character of the Aviator are directly relevant to Suprematist painting, which also reflects forms in aerial photographs widely reproduced in Russian newspapers during the early years of World War I.

The title of *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* makes direct reference to this subject, but all Suprematist paintings depict geometric forms on a white ground in a manner that suggests abstracted objects floating in space. Malevich related this white

ground to the cosmic infinite and the void that represents transformed consciousness. Combining mystic spiritualism with modern technology was common practice among Cubists and Futurists in Europe as well as Russia.

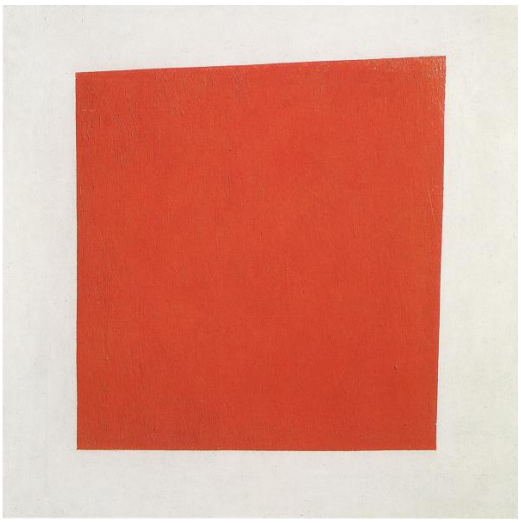


Figure **4.10.4.6**: Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* (*Red Square*), 1915, oil on canvas, 53 x 53 cm (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg)

What's in a name?

The titles of Malevich's paintings in The Last Futurist Exhibition indicated that Suprematism was not a carefully refined and consistent theory of non-objective painting. Some works had non-referential titles such as *Quadrilateral*, while others referred to specific objects or people as in *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions.* Whether a painting received a referential title or not often seems random: *Quadrilateral* is the original title of *Black Square*, while *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman* is a similar painting of a red square.

The referential titles in Malevich's early Suprematist paintings contradict his initial claim to have escaped the world of material things and reached a world of pure non-objective form. Although the works are non-representational, Suprematist paintings often refer to feelings provoked by specific material things. We have seen how non-representational forms may convey the sensation of flight in *Airplane Flying: Suprematist Composition* at the beginning of this essay. What sensations do the forms of Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack. Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension* provoke in you?

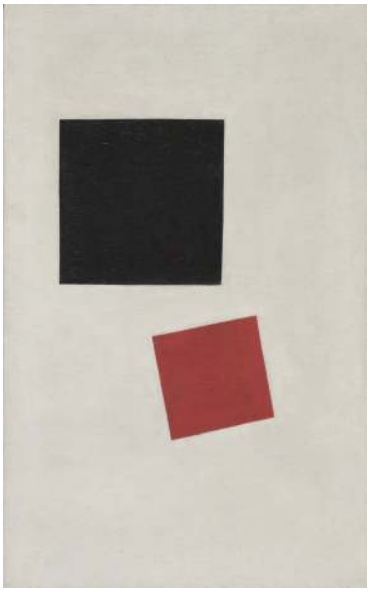


Figure **4.10.4.7**: Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack. Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension*, 1915, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 44.5 cm (MoMA)

Notes:

1. Kasimir Malevich, From *Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting*. (Moscow, 1916).
2. Letter to Mikhail Matyushin (1915) quoted in John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven, 1996), p. 127.

Additional resources:

John Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1920-1934*. Revised Edition. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2017.

Charlotte Douglas, *Kazimir Malevich* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994).

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992).

John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

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4.10.5: Suprematism, Part II- El Lissitzky

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **4.10.5.1**: El Lissitzky, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1919, color lithograph on paper, 51 x 62 cm

Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge is a propaganda poster designed by El Lissitzky using the abstract visual language of Suprematism, an art movement founded by **Kasimir Malevich** in 1915. Made in support of the efforts of the **Bolshevik Red Army** to overcome the anti-communist White Russians, the poster creates a powerful dynamic composition using basic geometric shapes in red, white, and black.

The few words are aligned with the diagonal trajectory of the red triangle so the act of reading follows the overall movement of the design. The red triangle pierces the white circle like a pin in a balloon, implicitly freeing it from the surrounding darkness. A smaller triangle and circle repeat the same theme in the upper right, and throughout the design small red rectangles dominate small dispersing white rectangles, symbolizing the Red Army's triumph over the White Russians.

Towards a practical Suprematism

In this poster we see not only a masterpiece of modern graphic design, but also a new application of the Suprematist visual language, which signified spiritual transcendence, into a practical language intended to convey specific ideas and information about the material world. This seems like a betrayal of the aims of Suprematism, but Malevich supported this practical application of Suprematism's forms.

In the chaotic years following the Russian Revolution of 1917 Malevich backed the creation of the new Soviet culture and believed that deploying Suprematist works throughout society would help to usher in a new spiritual era of immateriality.

This sounds naive in hindsight, given the dedicated materialism of communist ideology and Soviet society, but in the years following the revolution avant-garde artists were given substantial opportunities to help shape the new culture. Many artists, including Lissitzky, followed Malevich in seeing the Russian Revolution as a preliminary stage on the path to a new spiritual form of existence.



Figure **4.10.5.2**: El Lissitzky and Kasimir Malevich, Study for curtains for the meeting room of the Committee to Abolish Unemployment, 1919, gouache, watercolor, graphite and ink on paper, 49 x 62.5 cm (State Tretyakov Gallery)

UNOVIS

After the Russian Revolution the art education system was re-organized, and many modern artists took teaching positions in the new art schools and workshops. In 1919 Malevich was invited to teach at the art school in Vitebsk, where he promoted his Suprematist ideals and acquired many followers among the teachers and students. They formed a group, UNOVIS (Affirmers of the New Art), dedicated to disseminating Suprematism as the visual language of world revolution.



Figure **4.10.5.3**: Workshop of the Committee to Abolish Unemployment in Vitebsk with Suprematist panels by UNOVIS, 1919

In keeping with communist ideals they saw themselves as a collective and signed works as UNOVIS. Most of their works have not survived as they were temporary installations or ephemeral works like posters, brochures, and signs. They used Suprematist forms to decorate public buildings and meeting rooms, such as the facade decoration and curtain design for the Committee to Abolish Unemployment in Vitebsk, which was celebrating its anniversary with a festival in 1920. This is a new stage of Suprematism, one that sees it moving out of the cloistered confines of avant-garde art exhibitions and into the real world, to test its viability in front of a general public.

Prouns

In addition to the movement from the art gallery into the real world, another key transformation of later Suprematism was the extension of its flat planes into designs suggesting volumetric forms. Lissitsky makes this move explicitly in compositions he called “prouns,” an acronym for Project for the Affirmation of the New in Russian, which he described as “the transfer point from painting to architecture.”[1]

Lissitzky's *Proun 19D* and Malevich's *Painterly Masses in Motion* both display abstract rectilinear forms floating in an indeterminate space. Malevich suggests some depth by relative size and by overlapping his brightly colored rectangles, but the overall design of the painting remains very flat. Lissitzky's *Proun 19D* uses more muted colors and multiple textures, including collaged papers of varied sorts, foil, oil paint, and crayon. These textures already make the proun a more substantial material object than Malevich's oil painting.



Figure **4.10.5.4**: Left: Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Masses in Motion*, 1915, oil on canvas, 101.5 x 62 cm (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam); right: El Lissitzky, *Proun 19D*, 1920 or 1921, mixed media on plywood, 97.5 x 97.2 cm (MoMA)

In addition, Lissitzky depicted some of his floating forms in axonometric perspective to indicate that they were three dimensional. The thin brown rectangle that juts in from the right edge of the painting has a bright side receding on the top and an even brighter end receding on the left. In the center of the work two more rectangles, one brown and one blue and beige, are also depicted in axonometric perspective, floating at the same angle. These three forms hover over and through the various flat painted planes surrounding them in the composition to create an ambiguous, but still fairly consistent sense of objects in space.

The upper left side of *Proun 19D* is, however, far more complex and cannot be read as a depiction of objects in the same space as the forms on the right, or even at all in many instances. For example, several of the black rectangles suggest the sides of three-dimensional geometric forms, but they are not consistently drawn, so they metamorphose into flat shapes or altogether different objects as you examine them. Which planes are receding? Which are flat? It is impossible to tell. This lack of rationally-defined space is another instance of the Suprematists' preference for ambiguous, otherworldly spatial constructions over practical, real-world applications.

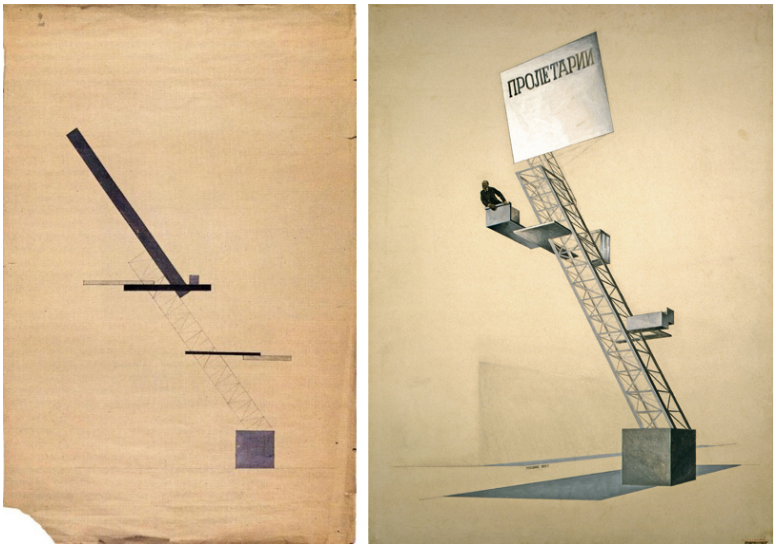


Figure **4.10.5.5**: Left: Ilia Chashnik and El Lissitzky, *Project for a Tribune in Smolensk*, 1920, gouache, pencil and ink on paper. (State Tretyakov Gallery). Right: El Lissitzky, *Lenin Tribune*, 1924, gouache, ink and photomontage on cardboard. (State Tretyakov Gallery).

Making Suprematism Practical?

Despite their apparently greater materiality, Lissitzky's prouns remain abstract and spiritual, and even when Suprematism was enlisted to make utilitarian and propagandistic objects for real-world use, it was similarly impractical. One of Lissitzky's most famous designs, *Lenin Tribune*, was for a speaker's rostrum, which was based on earlier UNOVIS designs attributed to Ilia Chashnik.

Chashnik's earlier design employs characteristic Suprematist geometric forms, but rather than floating in an indeterminate space, the forms rise up diagonally from a square anchored to a ground line. Lissitzky's reworking of the design employs the three-dimensional forms of his prouns: the square is now a cube, and the linear pattern of the diagonal rectangle has become a structural girder supporting the speaker's platform.

The photo collage of Lenin speaking from the rostrum further emphasizes the material reality and function of the structure, but even so the *Lenin Tribune* is curiously abstract and impractical. The jutting platforms, although drawn as solid forms, serve no obvious purpose, and how did Lenin get up to the top platform? What exactly is that gray plane on the ground? A shadow? And if so, of what? The *Lenin Tribune* is less a utilitarian design for a speaker's podium, and more a conceptual project intended to associate modern engineering, abstract design, and the leadership of Soviet Russia. In the end, Suprematism had great difficulty reconciling its utopian, spiritual aims with the practical applications demanded by the Soviet state.

Notes:

1. El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, *Die Kunstismen* (1925) translated and quoted in Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia*, p. 33.

Additional resources:

Learn about the Russian Revolution

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992).

Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012).

Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

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4.10.6: Constructivism, Part I

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT



Figure **4.10.6.1**: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Spatial Construction no. 12*, c. 1920, plywood, aluminum paint and wire, 24 x 33 x 18.5" (**MoMA**)

Aleksandr Rodchenko's *Spatial Construction no. 12* is one of a set of three-dimensional geometric forms generated by a simple iterative process. It began as a sheet of plywood cut into an ellipse. Rodchenko then made a second cut following the edge of the first to create a narrow oval ring. He continued cutting ever smaller rings until reaching the center.

Once cut, the rings were fanned out into three dimensional forms held in place by wire. They were covered with aluminum paint and suspended from the ceiling for exhibition, along with similar constructions cut from a square, a circle, a triangle, and a hexagon. These visually complex sculptures created by a simple process were the result of the Russian Constructivists' goal to create rationally-produced objects based on fundamental laws of form and structure.

Constructing a new art for a new Russia

The Constructivists were a group of avant-garde artists who worked to establish a new social role for art and the artist in the communist society of 1920s Soviet Russia. They were committed to applying new methods of creation aligned with modern technology and engineering to art, and eventually to utilitarian objects. Their overall approach was theoretical and scientific, and they rejected the stereotype of the artist as intuitive and inspired.

They made a distinction between composition, which resulted from the artist's intuition, and construction, based on scientific laws. Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions* were examples of the latter, forms structured by logical deduction, not intuition. They were considered "lab work" rather than art objects and were made to demonstrate theoretical concepts.



Figure **4.10.6.2**: Obmokhu Exhibition, Moscow, 1921

Structure as form

Very few early Russian Constructivist works have survived, but the photograph of the Obmokhu (Society of Young Artists) exhibition where Rodchenko displayed his *Spatial Constructions* in 1921 shows a variety of Constructivist works. Most use simple geometric forms and straight lines, a visual language that suggests the basic structural units of modern engineering and architecture.

In two-dimensional works, paint strokes and free-hand drawings were replaced by lines and shapes created by ruler and compass. Most of the three-dimensional works were made of wood, but they have uniform smooth surfaces suggesting machine-made forms rather than textures created by the artist's hand. As noted above, Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions* were covered with aluminum paint, and it is likely that they would have been made of metal if that had been feasible.

The visual language of many Constructivist works signifies the modern machine age in terms of structure as well as surface. Rodchenko's hanging *Spatial Constructions* were dynamic forms with visible structures, rather than static sculptural masses on pedestals. The interest of the work lies, in part, in the way it demonstrates a system. Rodchenko's *Spatial Constructions* create complex shifting patterns of solid planes, spaces, and shadows, but their basis is a simple, easily-grasped rational system. Recognizing the way this rudimentary system generates complex visual experiences is part of the works' aesthetic pleasure.



Figure **4.10.6.3**: Konstantin Medunetsky, *Spatial Construction* (*Construction no. 557*), 1919, tin, brass, painted iron and steel, 46 x 17.8 x 17.8 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

Materials and *faktura*

Konstantin Medunetsky's *Spatial Construction* was also in the Obmokhu exhibition, but it displays different concerns from Rodchenko's works. Instead of demonstrating a rational construction system, Medunetsky's work displays contrasts between shaped metals. A tin S-curve, a steel circle, a brass triangle, and a red-painted iron parabola are interwoven and welded to a painted metal cube. The work is strikingly modern in its abstract formal language and its machine-age materials.



Figure **4.10.6.4**: Vladimir Tatlin, *Counter-Relief*, 1913, wood, metal, leather (The State Tretyakov Gallery)

The different shapes of the metals demonstrate their material properties: the thin S-curve shows the great flexibility of tin; the thin triangle plate of brass highlights its qualities as a surface material; the heavy steel ring showcases its strength and flexibility; while the red-painted iron parabola is the stabilizing, unifying, and dynamic force of the composition. It also has symbolic references; it is like both a handle and an arrow pointing upward to the communist future, signified by the brilliant red paint.

The juxtaposition of different materials in Medunetsky's work reflects the Constructivist concept of *faktura*. *Faktura* was a much-debated term among Russian modernists in the first decades of the twentieth century that signaled a focus on the texture and working qualities of materials.

Vladimir Tatlin's *Counter-Relief* is an example of a modern sculpture that was seen as primarily concerned with *faktura*. It is a non-representational sculptural assemblage of various found materials displayed in ways that demonstrate their properties. The wood, pitted and discolored with age, acts as a tack board for the other elements, including coarse-grained leather stained with different dyes and various types of metal with contrasting colors and sheens.

Each material is manipulated in ways that display its working qualities: the soft elasticity of the leather tacked to the upper half, and the stiff flexibility of the metal as it is bent into curved planes and twisted into a wire corkscrew.

Traditional Western sculptors such as **Michelangelo** or **Bernini** had generally attempted to transcend their materials: to make marble appear to be flesh or cloth. The philosophy of *faktura* was, on the contrary, to understand and display the fundamental properties of materials.



Figure **4.10.6.5**: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Black on Black*, 1918, oil on canvas, 84 x 66.5 cm (State Russian Museum)

In 1918 Rodchenko made a number of paintings that demonstrate pure *faktura*; their surfaces were simply black paint applied to canvas in varied textures to create shapes. The paintings were made as a challenge to the white Suprematist paintings of **Kasimir**

Malevich, which used white geometric forms as a means of spiritual communication. In contrast, Rodchenko's black paintings made no reference to anything other than their material qualities.

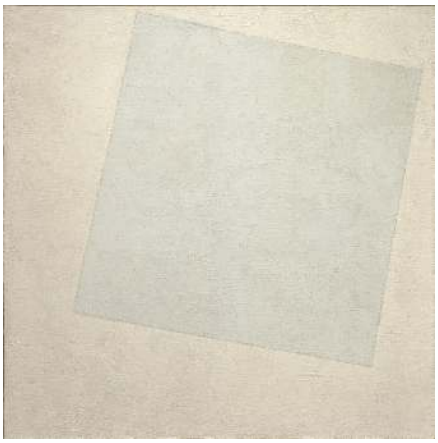


Figure **4.10.6.6**: Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, 1918, oil on canvas, 79.4 x 79.4 cm (MoMA)

The end of artistic intuition

Rodchenko's challenge to Malevich's Suprematism illustrates one of the essential tenets of Constructivism: the rejection of old conceptions of art and the artist. Despite his radical invention of pure geometric abstraction, Malevich was what the Constructivists considered an outdated and bourgeois artist. He was an individualist who believed that he created his art intuitively. In addition, Malevich was an idealist dedicated to a spiritual world and an art that communicated transcendental meanings and emotions. The Constructivists, in line with Communist tenets, rejected spiritual concerns in favor of the material world and laws determined by scientific means. The Constructivists' "lab works" in the 1921 Obmokhu exhibition displayed their approach to making impersonal and scientifically-grounded forms that had no significance beyond their material existence as physical examples of rational systems.



Figure **4.10.6.7**: Photo of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*

Synthesizing art and engineering

The work of Vladimir Tatlin was a major touchstone for the Constructivists. His ***Monument to the Third International***, a model for a structure intended to house Communist Party functions, was a paradigm of the Constructivists' efforts to synthesize art and engineering to create modern utilitarian forms for the new era. Tatlin himself, however, rejected the Constructivists' dedication to the scientific production of works. Although his art was not engaged with spiritual concerns, as Malevich's was, he believed the artist's intuition could not be replaced by scientific laws.

After the 1921 Obmokhu exhibition the Constructivists left their theoretically-oriented lab works behind and became dedicated to utilitarian production. Their abstract formal ideas helped to shape designs for furniture and clothing, posters and theatrical productions, architecture and even manufacturing techniques. This turn **to utilitarian projects** was motivated in large part by the requirements and expectations of Soviet society and the massive drive to modernize and industrialize the country.

The Constructivists' theories and ideas also became part of international conversations about the fundamental elements of art, designing for the modern world, and the education of artists. Another major focus for these debates was the German **Bauhaus**, and they resonated across the 20th century and continue to this day.

Additional resources:

Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992).

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4.10.7: Constructivism, Part II

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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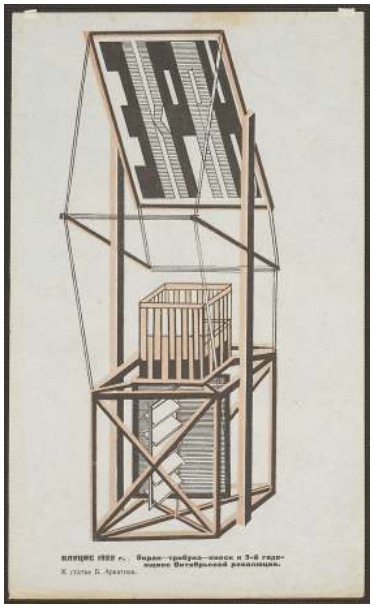


Figure 4.10.7.1: Gustav Klutsis, *Screen-Platform-Kiosk for the Fifth Anniversary of the Great October Revolution*, 1922, color lithograph on paper, 259 x 157 mm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Gustav Klutsis' kiosk is a utilitarian Constructivist design from the early 1920s. The structure is economical and based on a systematic rational design stripped down to its essential supporting elements. It is a simple multi-purpose structure containing a bookshelf, a screen for projecting newsreels, a platform for a speaker, and a board for posters. In this single object we see the fundamental aim of the Constructivists: the creation of utilitarian works whose structural organization and materials were aligned with the ideology of communism and contributed to the creation of a new society.

The kiosk was intended to be a public locus for spreading "agitation and propaganda," often shortened to agitprop. The Agitation and Propaganda Section was a crucial arm of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Its work included conveying information about communism and the Soviet government's policies and goals, as well as more directly practical information intended to support the development of the people.

Agitprop played an important role in the creation of the new Soviet society, helping to turn a poor agricultural country of largely-uneducated peasants into a modern nation of literate industrial workers. Propaganda directed people to become dedicated Communist Party members and contributors to the new socialist society. As artists and designers, the Constructivists were closely involved with Soviet agitprop during the 1920s.

A New Environment

After 1921 the Constructivists renounced the creation of mere art objects and entered a "productivist" phase during which they attempted to design utilitarian objects for factory production. Given the nascent state of Soviet industry at the time, this effort was largely unsuccessful, however, and very few Constructivist designs made it past the drawing board.

Alexandr Rodchenko's **Workers' Club** is a rare documented example of Constructivist furniture designs that were actually made. It was exhibited in the Soviet pavilion (itself a famous example of early Russian modernist architecture by Konstantin Melnikov) at the 1925 International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris.

Like Klutsis' kiosk, the furniture of the Workers' Club is made of basic, undecorated geometric forms that display their structural purpose and integrity. The material — wood — is economical, and some of the furniture (the bookshelf, podium, display board, projection screen, and bench) was collapsible so it could be stored when not in use. The **color scheme** was red, gray, white, and black, which created a distinctive graphic quality as well as highlighting red, the signature color of the Communist Revolution.

Also like Klutsis' kiosk, the purpose of the Workers' Club was to foster the new communist society. It was both a center for education and a place for the new workers to meet socially. As such, it is the best example ever made of the Constructivist ideal of designing an environment to foster the new communist life. It was, however, not mass-produced, nor did it serve as a prototype for factory production. It was in the end closer to an artisan-produced conceptual art project than it was to a modern industrial product.



Figure **4.10.7.2**: Vavara Stepanova, Designs for Sports Clothing from *LEF* no. 2, 1923

Designing for life

The everyday utilitarian objects designed by the Constructivists included clothing. Vavara Stepanova published her ideas about clothing designed for pure functionality, accompanied by illustrations of her sports clothing designs. They used a minimum of cloth cut into boxy shapes that would be easy to manufacture and comfortable to wear. The graphic textile designs were intended to distinguish the individual athletes or teams for spectators viewing from a distance.

Stepanova's designs rejected the pitfalls of bourgeois "fashion," in which designs change rapidly to promote consumerism and signal gender and class differences. By subsuming all stylistic decisions to the unifying Constructivist visual language of basic geometric forms, strong diagonals, and a restricted palette of red, black, and white, clothing design itself could reflect the communist ideals of rigorous functionalism and class leveling.



Figure **4.10.7.3**: Liubov Popova, Textile sample (State Tretyakov Gallery)



Figure **4.10.7.4**: Liubov Popova, Textile Design on the Cover of *LEF* no. 2, 1924

Working in Industry

Stepanova and Liubov Popova were the only prominent Constructivists working as designers in industrial production during the 1920s. They were employed by the First State Textile Printing Works to design textile patterns. Their designs were aggressively abstract and economical, using repeating patterns of basic geometric forms in black and white and sometimes one or two colors. They described their designs as a form of Constructivist propaganda, but their success in Constructivist terms was limited.

Although their textile patterns were mass-produced and used to make clothing, their employment in the textile industry was exclusively that of conventional artisan/designers. It did not reflect their Constructivist goal to be a new type of artist-producer fully engaged in all areas of the production and marketing processes, from developing chemicals for dyes to designing store window displays and advertisements.



Figure **4.10.7.5**: Alexandr Rodchenko, Design for Rubber Trust advertising poster, 1923

Advertising and Posters

Ultimately, the most widely disseminated Constructivist products were their advertising posters and graphic designs for product packaging, books, and magazines. Rodchenko saw his work in advertising as a direct engagement with building the Soviet economy during the NEP (New Economic Policy) period of the 1920s.

His poster for rubber overshoes combines representation and abstract geometric forms to convey its message. White diagonal lines representing heavy rain are prevented from hitting the globe by an enormous rubber overshoe. The color scheme is simple: red,

yellow, blue, black, and white. The simple sans serif font uses different colors to create emphasis and support the visual message. The blue background suggests water, while the USSR in red dominates the globe. Not only will buying rubber overshoes keep your feet dry, it will help to maintain Soviet dominance of the world.



Figure 4.10.7.6: Georgii and Vladimir Stenberg, Poster for Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*, 1929, lithograph, 106.2 x 70.5 cm

The Stenberg Brothers' poster for Dziga Vertov's ***The Man with the Movie Camera*** uses a low vantage point to depict a dizzying array of skyscrapers rising diagonally into space and suggesting the kind of modern, productive, and prosperous communist city shown in the film. The text is formed into a spiral that also appears to rise toward the center, while a woman's arms, legs and head are arranged to suggest a dancer spinning through space. The abstract forms of modern design have become the forms of the urban environment and the human body. The emphasis on dynamic compositions and hard-edged geometric design made the Constructivist style a perfect vehicle for fostering excitement about the new Communist/industrial society.



Figure 4.10.7.7: Gustav Klutsis, *We Will Repay the Coal Debt to Our Country*, 1930, lithograph, 104.5 x 74 cm (MoMA)

Turning to Photomontage

By the late 1920s photography and photomontage had come to dominate Constructivist poster design. This was part of a widespread turn away from modernist abstraction in Soviet culture and an embrace of realistic styles that would be more easily

understood by the masses. Klutsis' *We Will Repay the Coal Debt* is one of many posters he designed as propaganda for the first Five Year Plan – Stalin's drive to industrialize the nation.

Although the main content of the poster is a photograph of workers, the overall design and color scheme remains Constructivist. The figures are closely cropped to make them appear large, and they loom up over the viewer at a diagonal. The dynamism of the diagonal is further emphasized by the drill and mallet held by two workers, as well as the belts strapped across the third worker's chest. The flat red background and sans serif text placed at an opposing diagonal and partly overlapping the central worker turn the photograph of three individuals into a timeless image of the Soviet workers' determination to support the economic goals of their society.

Additional resources:

Permanent Reconstruction of Rodchenko's Workers' Club in Kunstmuseum, Liechtenstein

Read more about Liubov Popova at the Tate Museum

Christina Kiaer, I*magine No Possessions:The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2005).

Christina Lodder, "Liubov Popova: From Painting to Textile Design," *Tate Papers* no. 14.

Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992).

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4.10.8: Tatlin's Tower

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188224



Figure **4.10.8.1**: Tatlin and an assistant with the *Monument to the Third International* in Moscow, 1920

Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, commonly referred to as Tatlin's Tower, is an iconic work of Russian modern art from the early Soviet era. It is a symbol of the utopian aspirations of the communist leaders of Russia's 1917 **October Revolution**, and of the brief period when those aspirations were allied with the futuristic visions of modern artists. The original *Monument* has not survived and is known only from photographs, but it was never intended to be a durable object.

An ambitious plan for a sculptural structure

It was a 20-foot-tall wooden model for an enormous structure that was never constructed, in part because the material and technological resources required to build it successfully were unavailable in post-revolutionary Russia. Tatlin's *Monument* thus has historical significance that goes beyond its original purpose and meaning. It is both a symbol of exalted utopian goals and an ironic monument to the economic and technological limitations of the early Soviet state.

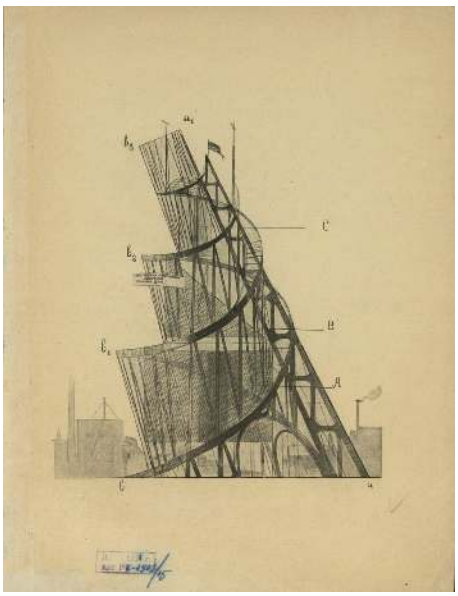


Figure **4.10.8.2**: Vladimir Tatlin, Drawing of the *Monument to the Third International*, published in Nikolai Punin, T*he Monument to the Third International*. (St. Petersburg, 1920)

As part of a large-scale program to replace old czarist monuments with monuments to the revolution, the huge structure was both a symbolic sculpture and functional architecture. Designed to straddle the Neva river in St Petersburg, the 1300 foot (400 meter) iron and glass *Monument* would surpass Paris's Eiffel Tower in both scale and complexity. Its design consists of a contracting double helix that spirals upward, supported by a huge diagonal girder. Inside this external metal structure are four geometric volumes that were intended to revolve at different speeds.

As planned, the geometric volumes would be made of glass and serve both practical and symbolic functions. The largest and lowest was a cube, making one revolution per year, that would house meetings of the legislature of the Third International or Comintern, the international communist organization working for world revolution. The next volume up was a pyramid, making one revolution per month, that would host the Comintern executive. Above that was a cylinder, making a full revolution every day, to house the Comintern propaganda services, including the press, poster and pamphlet designers, etc.; and on top was a half sphere that revolved hourly and housed the Comintern radio station.



Figure **4.10.8.3**: Model of Tatlin's Tower, Royal Academy, London, 27 Feb 2012 (photo: TobyJ, CC BY-SA 3.0)

A Symbol of the Future

Tatlin's design for the *Monument* conveyed meaning in multiple ways. The rising spirals, diagonal girder, and rotating internal volumes give symbolic form to the aspirations and dynamic forces of the world communist revolution. The planned materials of metal and glass were associated with modern engineering and construction technology, and signified the advanced, even futuristic, goals of communist society. This was further emphasized in the plan to have the interior volumes revolve mechanically, which symbolized the alignment of communist world revolution with the astronomical movement of the sun, earth, and moon, and also likened the new government to an efficient modern machine.

The Monument stressed the Comintern's transparency to the people in its fully visible support structure and the glass interior volumes housing its various functions. The importance given to disseminating information and propaganda to the masses is also integral to the design and acknowledges the crucial role played by mass communication technologies in modern society and their power to promote world revolution.

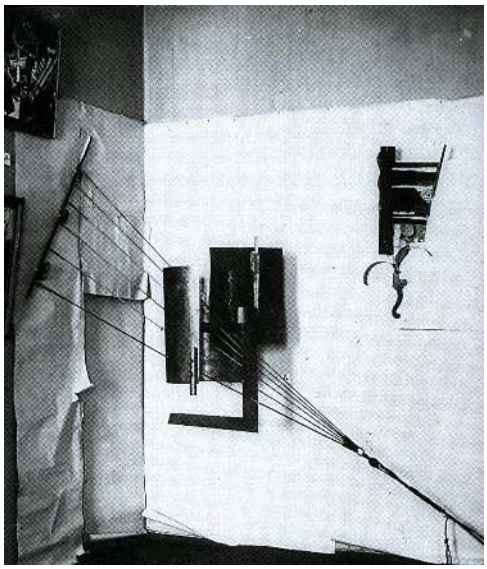


Figure **4.10.8.4**: Photo of Tatlin's sculpture at the Last Futurist Exhibition

Tatlin and Constructivism

Although Tatlin's Monument was never built, models of it were made and displayed at political meetings, demonstrations, and parades through the 1920s. Its most important historic role, however, was its influence on Russian Soviet modern artists, particularly the **Constructivists**, who were conceptualizing new aesthetic practices aligned with the goals and values of the new communist society. For these artists Tatlin's combination of modern materials, rational structure, and utilitarian forms was an important example of how artists could synthesize the historically disparate roles and forms of art, craft, and engineering to contribute to the formation of a new world.

Tatlin had established his reputation as a cutting-edge modern artist in Moscow before the 1917 revolution. He participated in The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10 in 1915, where his rival Kasimir Malevich first presented **Suprematist** works. There, Tatlin exhibited a group of sculptures he called "counter-reliefs" and "corner counter-reliefs." These were complex assemblages of various found non-art materials (scraps of wood, metal, glass, cardboard, wire, and rope) suspended from walls.

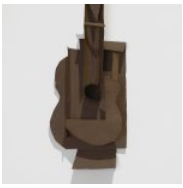


Figure **4.10.8.5**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*, 1914, sheet metal and wire, 77.5 x 35 x 19.3 cm (**MoMA**).

These counter-reliefs are often associated with Picasso's early Cubist sculptures, which Tatlin saw in Paris in 1913. Both artists rejected the Western tradition of sculpture as a unified mass made from a single material (traditionally marble or bronze), and instead created *assemblages* — sculptures that combine heterogeneous materials in novel ways.

Picasso's Cubist sculptures represented objects such as **guitars**, glasses, and bottles, and explored the formal and spatial ambiguities previously developed in Cubist painting. Tatlin's approach was markedly different and often completely non-representational. He was more interested in the forms, textures and physical potential of the materials themselves than in exploring the ambiguities of representation, and his works were also more radical in their relationship to space than Picasso's.

A New Type of Sculpture

Tatlin's earliest counter-reliefs were in a rectangular format and hung on the wall. They were composed of separate but interdependent components, and emphasized the contrasts between different textures and materials.



Figure 4.10.8.6: Vladimir Tatlin, *Relief*, 1914 (**destroyed**).

The relief reproduced here was part of a group of works titled *Selection of Materials*. It is an abstract composition made of scraps of wood, metal, and glass attached to a chipped and cracked stucco surface. Each material displays its texture rather than being cleaned and polished to suggest pure abstract forms. The materiality of the object and its constituent parts is fundamental to the effect of the work.

This work and others like it engage with a prominent concern of early 20th-century modern artists and writers: how non-representational form could communicate feeling directly. *Faktura* was a key concept in Russian debates on modern art that was connected to the artist's use of the physical qualities of materials. Tatlin's reliefs were understood as displays of faktura, meaning their interest was fundamentally formal and concerned with the visual and tactile properties of their material components. They had no representational content and (unlike the work of many of Tatlin's contemporaries) no spiritual significance.

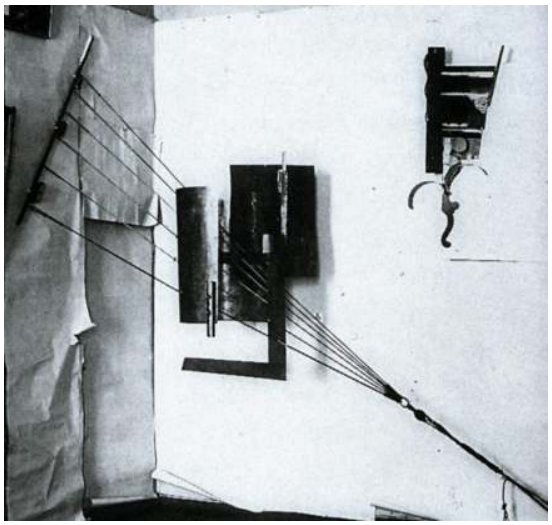


Figure 4.10.8.7: Detail of Tatlin's sculpture at the Last Futurist Exhibition

Corner counter-reliefs

The corner counter-reliefs added another dimension to Tatlin's work. They broke out of the limiting rectangle and created a new kind of spatially-ambiguous sculpture with indefinite boundaries. These were not self-supporting objects that could be easily moved; their form depended on the walls from which they were hung. This made their sculptural identity as independent objects even more ambiguous. The walls were part of the sculpture, and were sometimes covered with paper to emphasize their integral role in the work.

One of the most noticeable and innovative aspects of Tatlin's corner counter-reliefs is the way they incorporate literal dynamic tension in the form of supporting ropes and wires. These allow the planes of various textures and materials to be suspended in space, and they also make physical tension a manifest part of the work's composition.

We don't just see the flat planes, curved forms, and bars hovering juxtaposition to each other, we see how the entire sculpture is put together. The structural relationships are laid bare. It was this literal incorporation of structure that came to be seen as an early stage in the development of Constructivism — the dominant modern art movement in Soviet Russia after 1920.

Additional resources:

Learn about the Russian Revolution

John Bowlt, *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, 1920-1934*. Revised Edition. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2017.

Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992.

Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012.

Cite this page as: Dr. Charles Cramer and Dr

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4.10.9: Varvara Stepanova, The Results of the First Five-Year Plan

by JESSICA WATSON

Page ID
188225



Figure **4.10.9.1**: Varvara Stepanova, *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan*, 1932 (State Museum of Contemporary Russian History, Moscow)

Photomontage in the Soviet Union

Have you ever wondered what came before Photoshop? After the First World War, artists in Germany and the Soviet Union began to experiment with photomontage, the process of making a composite image by juxtaposing or mounting two or more photographs in order to give the illusion of a single image. A photomontage can include photographs, text, words and even newspaper clippings.



Figure **4.10.9.2**: Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova in their studio 1922 (photo: Mikhail Kaufman[?])

Russia had for centuries been an absolute monarchy ruled by a tsar, but between 1905 and 1922 the country underwent tremendous change, the result of two wars (World War I, 1914-18 and Civil War, 1917-22) and a series of uprisings that culminated in the October Revolution of 1917. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) was established in 1922 under Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. The young communist state was celebrated by many artists and intellectuals who saw an opportunity to end the corruption and extreme poverty that defined Russia for so long.

The Russian avant-garde had experimented with new forms of art for decades and in the years after the Revolution, photomontage became a favorite technique of artists such as El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova. Stepanova was a talented painter, designer and photographer. She defined herself as a constructivist and focused her art on serving the ideals of the Soviet Union. She was a leading member of the Russian avant-garde and later in her career, she became well known for her contributions to the magazine *USSR in Construction*, a propagandist publication that focused on the industrialization of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, a ruthless dictator who took power after Lenin's death and who's totalitarian policies are thought to have caused suffering and death for millions of his people.

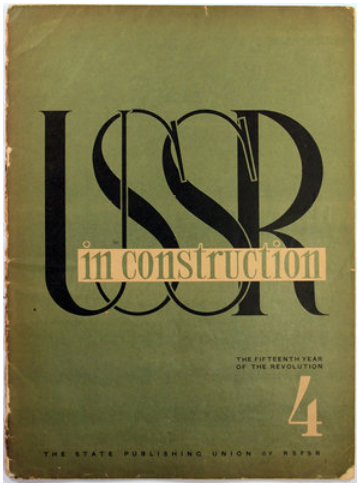


Figure **4.10.9.3**: USSR in Construction, issue 4, 1932, English edition

The public targeted by USSR in Construction was mostly foreign. The purpose of the magazine was to show countries such as France and Great Britain that the USSR was also a leading force in the global market and economy. By choosing to include images rather than just articles, the public would be able to see with their own eyes the accomplishments achieved under Stalin. At first the subjects depicted were strictly industrial, but as the magazine gained recognition and readers, topics diversified, and included subjects from education to sports and leisure. Soviet strategists were well aware that many European countries were witnessing the rise of a small base of devoted Communists, despite general mistrust and even contempt by the continental social and political elite.

As its title suggests, this photomontage is an ode to the success of the First Five-Year Plan, an initiative started by Stalin in 1928. The Plan was a list of strategic goals designed to grow the Soviet economy and accelerate its industrialization. These goals included collective farming, creating a military and artillery industry and increasing steel production. By the end of the First Five-Year Plan in 1933, the USSR had become a leading industrial power, though its worth noting that contemporary historians have found that economists from the USSR inflated results to enhance the image of the Soviet Union. In this work of art, Stepanova has also used the tools of the propagandist. This photomontage is an ideological image intended to help establish, through its visual evidence, the great success of the Plan.

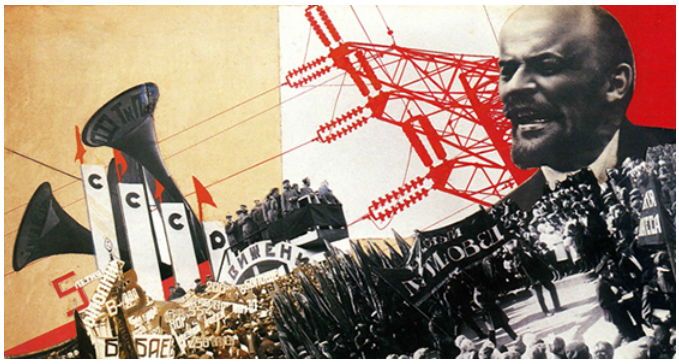


Figure **4.10.9.4**: Varvara Stepanova, *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan* (detail of top), 1932 (State Museum of Contemporary Russian History, Moscow)

Constructing the image

In Stepanova's photomontage, everything is carefully constructed. The artist uses only three types of color and tone. She alternates black and white with sepia photographs and integrates geometric planes of red to structure the composition. On the left, Stepanova has inserted public address speakers on a platform with the number 5, symbolizing the Five Year Plan along with placards displaying the letters CCCP, the Russian initials for USSR. The letters are placed above the horizon as is a portrait of Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union. The cropped and oversized photograph of Lenin shows him speaking; his eyes turned to the left as if looking to the future. Lenin is linked to the speakers and letter placards at the left by the wires of an electrical transmission tower. Below, a large crowd of people indicate the mass popularity of Stalin's political program and their desire to celebrate it.

Red, the color of the Soviet flag, was often used by Stepanova in her photomontages. She also commonly mis-matched the scale of photographic elements to create a sense of dynamism in her images. Despite the flat, paper format, different elements are visually activated and can even seem to 'pop out.' Several clear artistic oppositions are visible in *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan*. For example, there is a sharp contrast between the black and white photographs and the red elements, such as the electric tower, the number 5, and the triangle in the foreground. Our eyes are attracted to these oppositions and by the contrast between the indistinct masses and the individual portrait of Lenin, as an implicit reference to the Soviet political system.



Figure **4.10.9.5**: Varvara Stepanova, *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan* (detail of bottom), 1932 (State Museum of Contemporary Russian History, Moscow)

Manipulating reality

As the term photomontage suggests, images are combined and manipulated to express the message the artist wants to convey. This image celebrating of the results of the First Five-Year Plan is the artist's interpretation of events, under the strict supervision of Party ideologues.

The Plan resulted in radical measures that forced farmers to give up their land and their livestock. Many people were reduced to extreme poverty and famine became widespread. Terror, violence, and fear replaced the initial optimism about the Plan. What started as positive propaganda became, little by little, a means to hide a disastrous economic policy from the rest of the world. It became an absolute necessity for the State to project a pristine image of its society no matter how dire the situation became. Stepanova admits no fault or imperfection in *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan*.

Although Stepanova worked hand in hand with the Soviet government, her work shows great personal creativity. By using vibrant color, and striking images in a dynamic composition, she pioneered photomontage and revolutionized the way we now understand photography. Historical hindsight can make it difficult for contemporary viewers to engage the overtly propagandistic aspects of these images, in fact their exaggerated euphoria can even be mistaken for irony. Nevertheless, despite our increasingly sophisticated understanding of the distinction between image and reality, Stepanova's photomontages are an important reminder of how an artist can blur the line between aesthetic passion and ideology.

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4.11: Purism

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188226



Figure 4.11.1: Charles Edouard Jeanneret, *Still Life*, 1920, 31 7/8 x 39 1/4 inches (MoMA)

A rational and scientific art

The Purists, Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (now better known as the architect Le Corbusier), rejected the image of the modern artist as an intuitive, expressive genius. In their view modern artists and their art should be rational and scientific, and Jeanneret's *Still Life* shows exactly what they meant by that. It depicts a collection of man-made objects simplified into basic geometric forms: circles, cylinders, rectangles, and regular curves. These forms are precisely placed in a rhythmic composition that was organized using a pre-determined geometric system to achieve a harmonious balance. Colors are dark and muted to enhance the shapes of the objects without creating decorative distractions.

The painting is absolutely precise, with sharp, clear edges and unobtrusive brushwork. It has been purified of anything extraneous and accidental, and its parts create a perfectly ordered whole along horizontal and vertical axes. It is as if we are seeing each object in its ideal Platonic state in a conceptual geometric space, rather than from a human point of view that could change. The repeated perfect circles are clear indicators of this idealist perspective. They represent the forms of a white plate, the mouths of two glass bottles, the rim of a drinking glass, and two pipe bowls.



Figure 4.11.2: Pieter Claesz, *Still-life with Wine Glass and Silver Bowl*, 17th century, oil on panel, 42 x 59 cm, (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin)

In a naturalistic still life, like the one above, these would be depicted as ellipses to indicate perspectival depth, but here they are drawn to show their true circular shape, without regard for how they might be perceived in real life. The lighting also indicates the painter's disregard of naturalism. Lighting is used only to indicate the shape of the volumes; some objects are lit from the left,

others from the right. There are no cast shadows, with the possible exception of the top of the guitar neck on the right, which has an echoing black geometric shape underneath it.

Mechanical evolution

The Purists presented their paintings as the next stage of modern art's evolution after Cubism. Purism replaced what they described as Cubism's decorative, vague, and contingent forms with mathematically-designed compositions of perfected ideal forms. Purist paintings were, however, clearly indebted to Cubism, particularly the geometrically-organized paintings of **Juan Gris**. The guitar in Jeanneret's *Still Life* was one of the Cubists' favorite subjects, and Jeanneret used compositional rhymes throughout as Cubist painters often did.



Figure **4.11.3**: Juan Gris, *Guitar and Glasses*, 1914, paper, gouache and crayon on canvas, 36 1/8 x 25 1/2 inches (**MoMA**)

As you can see, Juan Gris's *Cubist Guitar and Glasses* creates a pattern of circles from glasses and the guitar's sound hole, quite similar to the compositional use of circles in Jeanneret's painting. The comparison of these two paintings also shows how the Purist painting rejects Cubist ambiguity in favor of solidly placed, fully depicted objects — note how many of Gris' objects fragment and disappear into the background.

Purist still-life objects were not intended to represent the spatial ambiguities of three-dimensional objects presented on a two-dimensional plane; they were presented as "type objects." These are objects — like plates, glasses, bottles and musical instruments — that humans have been making for generations and that have evolved through a process of mechanical selection and refinement to become pure economical forms.



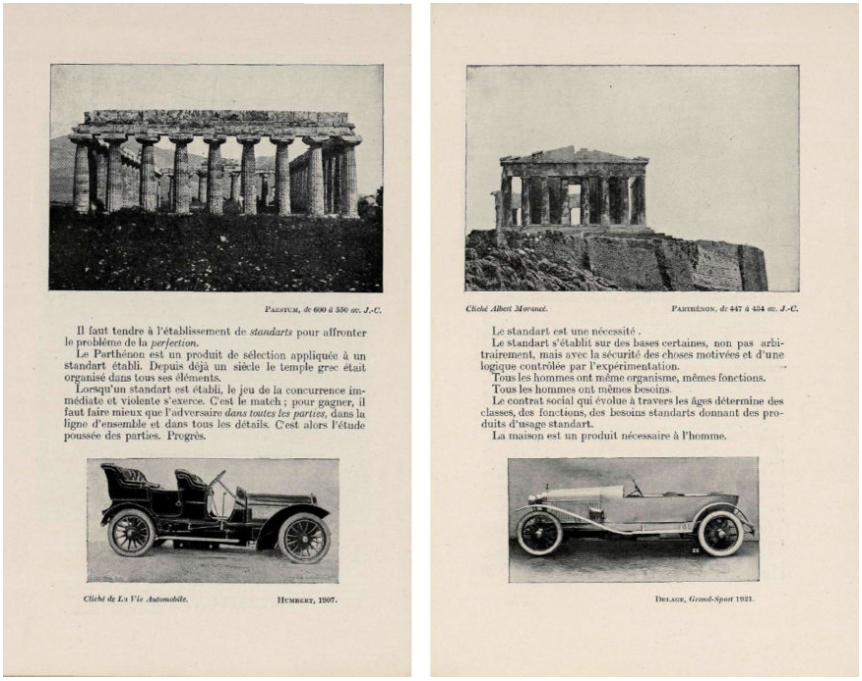
Figure 4.11.4: Amédée Ozenfant, *Still Life with Bottles*, 1922, oil on canvas, 51 1/8 x 38 1/4 inches (Los Angeles County Museum)

Classical modernism

Unlike Cubism, which was invented, gradually refined, and reinvented by Picasso and Braque in the process of working, Purist theory preceded the creation of Purist artworks. In addition, individual Purist paintings were fully conceived before being made; they are rational constructions, not idiosyncratic personal expressions.

The Purists saw their art as both modern and classical. It was modern in its dedication to evolutionary science, industrial technology, and a machine-age aesthetic of economical forms. It was classical in its devotion to rationality and order. According to the Purists, the modern machine age was able to realize the goals and ideals of the Ancient Greeks — a perfectly harmonious society and environment.

Their paintings alluded to Ancient Greek models in their depiction of ideal platonic forms, their employment of the harmonious mathematical proportions used to build Greek temples like the Parthenon, and in their generalized references to Greek architectural forms. Ozenfant's *Still Life with Bottles* is one of many Purist paintings that use faceted glassware to suggest the fluted columns of Classical architecture.



Paestum, de 600 à 550 av. J.-C.

Il faut tendre à l'établissement de *standarts* pour affronter le problème de la *perfection*.
Le Parthénon est un produit de sélection appliquée à un standart établi. Depuis déjà un siècle le temple grec était organisé dans tous ses éléments.
Lorsqu'un standart est établi, le jeu de la concurrence immédiate et violente s'exerce. C'est le match ; pour gagner, il faut faire mieux que l'adversaire *dans toutes les parties*, dans la ligne d'ensemble et dans tous les détails. C'est alors l'étude poussée des parties. Progrès.

Cliché de *La Vie Automobile*. Humbert, 1907.

Cliché Albert Morancé. Parthénon, de 447 à 434 av. J.-C.

Le standart est une nécessité.
Le standart s'établit sur des bases certaines, non pas arbitrairement, mais avec la sécurité des choses motivées et d'une logique contrôlée par l'expérimentation.
Tous les hommes ont même organisme, mêmes fonctions.
Tous les hommes ont mêmes besoins.
Le contrat social qui évolue à travers les âges détermine des classes, des fonctions, des besoins standarts donnant des produits d'usage standart.
La maison est un produit nécessaire à l'homme.

Delage, *Grand-Sport* 1921.

Figure **4.11.5**: L'Esprit Nouveau No. 10 (July 1921), pages 1140 and 1141

The Purists communicated their ideas through their magazine, *L'Esprit Nouveau* (The New Spirit), which was published from 1920 to 1925. In addition to essays on contemporary art and architecture, they published articles about modern music, literature, theater, politics, city planning, industrial practices, and recent scientific discoveries.

This broad scope demonstrated the Purists' engagement with the developments of modern industrial society and the process of mechanical evolution. For them, all human-made objects, from paintings to architecture and machines, participated in the same fundamental evolution toward more efficient and rational forms. In one of his most famous essays from the Purist period, Jeanneret compared the evolution of Ancient Greek temple designs to that of modern automobiles, both of which became lighter and more efficient in terms of structure and use of materials.

Celebrating mass-produced objects

The Purists celebrated the efficiency of assembly-line production in modern factories and claimed that modern factory workers were proud of the well-designed, efficient objects they helped to produce. Purist paintings reflect this attitude in both subject matter and style. The same objects appear repeatedly in their paintings, as though mass-produced. In addition, the forms of the paintings rely on mechanical tools such as rulers, compasses, and french curves; tools that are associated with engineering and mass-production rather than with the fine art of painting.



Figure **4.11.6**: Fernand Léger, *The Siphon*, 1924, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 18 /18 inches (**Albright-Knox Art Gallery**)

Ozenfant and Jeanneret were the only true Purist artists, but Fernand Léger was closely associated with them during the early 1920s. He also embraced a machine aesthetic in his paintings and celebrated the achievements of modern technology and industry.

The Siphon depicts modern glassware in simplified legible forms. The glass, siphon, and hand were derived from a contemporary newspaper advertisement for Campari, but Léger made them into anonymous refined objects and placed them against a background of ambiguous geometric forms and abstract rectangles. Although the style is notably different from that of the Purists in its greater abstraction and attention to bold graphic design through the extensive use of black, the subject matter and simplified forms of modern mass-produced objects is in explicit accord with Purist theories.

The *Esprit Nouveau* Pavilion

The most famous work associated with Purism was the *Esprit Nouveau* pavilion at the 1925 International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris. The Purists were one of several movements in the 1910s and 20s that sought to deploy their style not just in isolated individual works of art, but in **total designed environments**. Indeed, Jeanneret, under his pseudonym Le Corbusier, later became a renowned **architect**.



Figure **4.11.7**: Reconstruction (replica) of the *L'Esprit Nouveau* Pavilion, constructed by Jose Oubrerie and Giuliano Gresleri in Bologna in 1977 (original, 1925) (photo: **Steve Silverman**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Ozenfant and Jeanneret conceived the ***Esprit Nouveau* pavilion** and its **furnishings** as a model of standardized industrial design for the masses. The building was to be made of inexpensive modern materials while the lighting fixtures and glassware were mass-produced items, the latter made for chemistry laboratories. Paintings by the Purists and Léger decorated the walls, their idealized compositions of abstracted objects the perfect complement to the basic geometric forms of the structure and its furnishings.

Purism reflected the optimistic attitudes of the post-World War I period of reconstruction in which France worked to rebuild its industries and war-torn land. The movement's theories embraced machine-age industrial production and looked forward to an era of health and prosperity for the masses. In this modern age, Purist art was made to complement a rationally designed environment that efficiently met the needs of everyone.

Additional resources:

Carol Eliel, *L'Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918-1925*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.12: School of Paris

In the center of the European pre-war art world, artists experimented with a variety of styles and media.

c. 1904 - 1939

4.12.1: Marc Chagall, Half-Past Three (The Poet)

4.12.2: Amedeo Modigliani, Young Woman in a Shirt

4.12.3: Constantin Brancusi, the Kiss

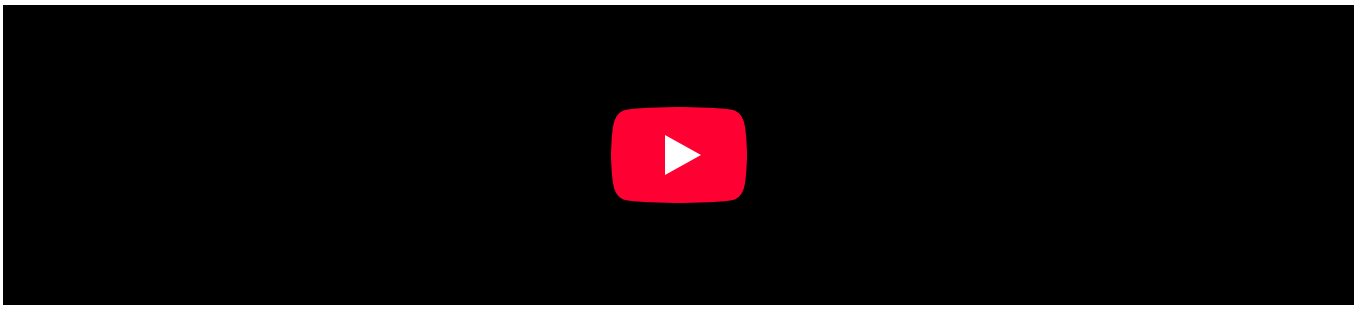
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4.12.1: Marc Chagall, Half-Past Three (The Poet)

- by **BANK OF AMERICA**

Page ID

188228





ıagall in the winter of 1912, “Half-Past Three (The Poet)” can be considered something of an artistic manifesto, dividual creativity and of the power of our imagination. In it, Chagall renders conventional, but strikingly personal, elements of his Parisian studio in a truly unconventional way: as a set of intersecting and overlapping lines and prismatic planes. Learn more about this compelling masterpiece with Timothy Rub, Former Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

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4.12.2: Amedeo Modigliani, Young Woman in a Shirt

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Video **4.12.2.5**: Amedeo Modigliani, *Young Woman in a Shirt*, 1918, oil on canvas (Albertina, Vienna)

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4.12.3: Constantin Brancusi, the Kiss

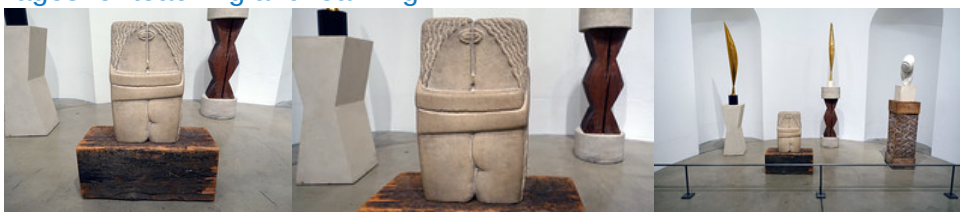
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Video **4.12.3.1**: Constantin Brancusi, *The Kiss*, 1916, limestone, 58.4 x 33.7 x 25.4 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.13: Photography

4.13.1: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare

4.13.2: Alexander Rodchenko, At the Telephone

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4.13.1: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare

by DR. SHANA GALLAGHER-LINDSAY and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
188232



Video **4.13.1.1**: Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare*, Paris, 1932

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4.13.2: Alexander Rodchenko, At the Telephone

by **DR. KAREN BARBER**

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Figure **4.13.2.1**: Alexander Rodchenko, *At the Telephone*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 39.5 × 29.2 cm (MoMA)

Alexander Rodchenko's 1928 photograph *At the Telephone* shows a woman, seen from above, leaning against the wall as she speaks into the telephone. The unusual overhead perspective, the cropping (which suggests a momentary glimpse from above), and the way in which the the walls, the gleaming telephone box, and floorboards read as lines and shapes—hints at the radical nature of this photograph—and of New Vision photography.

Revolutionary Photography

In the years after the 1917 Russian Revolution and the shift to socialism, **Russian Constructivist** artists like Alexander Rodchenko were concerned with making a new socially productive, utilitarian art that would support the bourgeoning communist society. Under communism, the collective, rather than the individual, was the primary focus of artists, designers, and architects. Rodchenko, who previously had worked in painting and sculpture, took up photography in the mid-1920s. At this time, he was preoccupied with the following question: How does one express the idea of Revolution with the camera? [1]

One way he answered this question was by shifting the perspective. Taken from above, the radically **foreshortened** view of a woman on the telephone dominates the left side of the picture. We do not see her face or what she looks like, and her hands, one of which appears as disembodied fingers clutching the wall while the other grasps the new telephone, are emphasized. Strong verticals, from the floorboards to the graffitied wall and the telephone, are broken by the diagonal of the woman's body and outstretched leg and its shiny black patent leather shoe. Stark contrasts of light and dark and a careful attention to the varied texture of elements in the frame—the shiny black shoe, the grain of the wooden floorboards, the rough texture of the wall, the gleaming black of the telephone—reveal the artist's sharp focus on his subject. But the resulting image is abstract (similar, in fact, to his earlier abstract paintings) and remarkably flat, as if an exercise in contrast, and hard geometries.

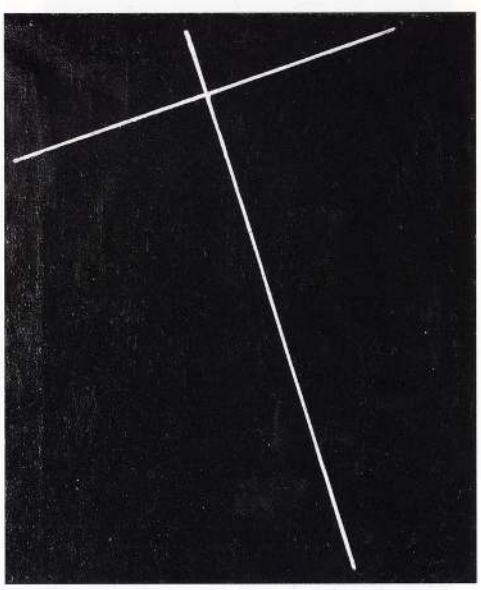


Figure **4.13.2.2**: Alexander Rodchenko, *Construction No. 128*, 1920, oil on canvas 62 x 53 cm (Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow)

This is not your typical image of a woman on the telephone. We do not, for example, see her body straight on, in what Rodchenko disparagingly called “belly-button” photography. Instead of holding the camera at his waist (as was done with earlier cameras, like the Kodak brownie), using his handheld camera (that could be aimed from the eye, and was understood to be an extension of it) he photographed her from above. In part, this use of unusual angles, which was characteristic of his photographs from this period, was intended to force the viewer to actively engage with the image over time, because it would have taken the viewer a moment to recognize the subject due to its unexpected angle. Thus, this radical new perspective, a birds-eye view, was meant to change the viewer’s perception, to make us see the world anew and become more aware of our environment.

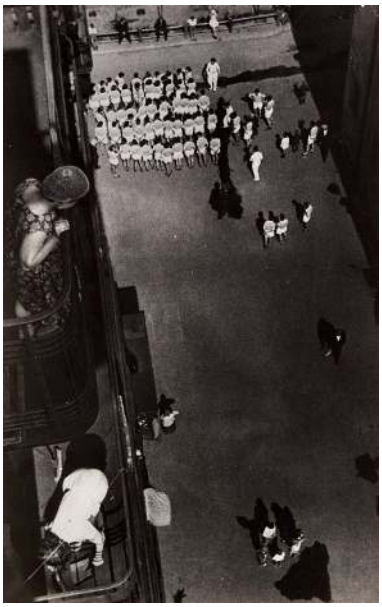


Figure **4.13.2.3**: Alexander Rodchenko, *Gathering for a Demonstration*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 22.54 x 14.29 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Rodchenko was also concerned with the photograph’s ideological content. *At the Telephone* was part of a magazine story about the steps in the production of a newspaper, which sometimes involved gathering and relaying information using telephones, which were celebrated as a new technology in Russia after the Revolution in 1917. Although the Five-Year Plan—a government initiative for the rapid industrialization of the country—started in 1928, the same year as Rodchenko’s photograph, the emphasis on the role

of new technologies is striking. The telephone spoke to one of the technological achievements of the Soviet state, and, as part of a magazine story, it encouraged readers to embrace progress, change, and new perspectives. *At the Telephone* also emphasized the participation of women in the publication of the newspaper and the use of the telephone in everyday life.

Painting is Dead and the Turn to Photography

Photography had taken on a new importance in the years after the Russian Revolution in 1917, from the use of **photomontage** in advertising, posters, and books, to the use of photography to promote the activities of the new regime. Photography, which involved a machine (the camera), was seen as aligned with modern world (the world of telephones, airplanes, and automobiles). But it could also be aligned with communist ideology. As reproducible media, photography and film could take the place of painting and sculpture as art forms that could reach the masses.

Earlier in the decade, artists including Rodchenko, **Varvara Stepanova**, and Gustav Klucis, took up photomontage for masses-focused, utilitarian purposes that included advertising, typography, and propaganda. The institutions they were working for or with had the authority of the government or were government sponsored. Narkompros, the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, administered all aspects of education and culture, and many of the artists, including Tatlin and Rodchenko, occupied positions in Izo (the Section of Visual Arts of Narkompros). Rodchenko also taught at Vkhutemas (the Higher State Artistic-Technical Workshops), which was the principal state art school.

This shift to photomontage signaled the rise of "Productivism" after 1921—the term used to describe the shift by Constructivist artists after 1921 to the production of utilitarian objects (posters, advertisements, kiosks, clothing) and designs for manufacturing. But Rodchenko's engagement with photomontage lasted only a few years, and he abandoned it in 1924 when he began making still photographs.



Figure **4.13.2.4**: Alexander Rodchenko, *Chauffeur*, 1929, gelatin silver print, 29.8 × 41.8 cm (**MoMA**)

Not "Belly-Button" Photography

When Rodchenko purchased a handheld camera in Paris in 1925, he sought out new ways to create meaningful work that moved beyond traditional approaches to photography. After the formation of the magazine *New Left* (1927–28), which was extensively illustrated with photographs, Rodchenko took on a prominent role as designer and photography editor. *At the Telephone* ran in issue 11 (1928). He had already written a series of essays that detailed his views on photography and its role in society in issue five (1928):

> ***Photography possesses old points of view, those of man standing on earth and looking straight ahead. What I call 'shooting from the belly button'— with the camera hanging on one's stomach.***

> ***I am fighting against this standpoint and shall continue to do so, as will my comrades, the new photographers.***
>
> ***Photograph from all viewpoints except "from the belly button," until they all become acceptable.***
>
> ***The most interesting viewpoints today are "from above down" and "from below up," and we should work at them. . . I want to affirm these vantage points, expand them, get people used to them.Alexander Rodchenko [2]***

For Rodchenko, these new angles would encourage active viewing and expand our perception of the world around us.



Figure **4.13.2.5**: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Novyi LEF. Zhurnal levogo fronta iskusstv*, 11, 1928, letterpress, 22.9 x 15.3 cm (MoMA)

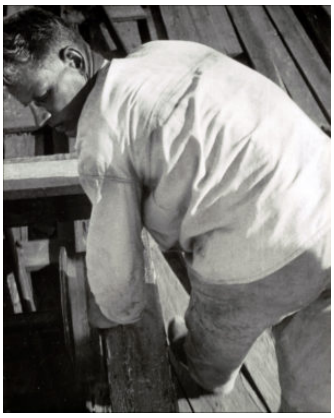


Figure **4.13.2.6**: Aleksandr Rodchenko, *Sawmill Worker*, 1930, gelatin silver print (MoMA)

Despite Rodchenko's revolutionary approach to photography, he was accused (in 1928, the same year he made *At the Telephone*) in the pages of *Soviet Photography* of being more concerned with style over substance, and with plagiarizing avant-garde artists like László Moholy-Nagy. Although he defended himself in a series of written rebuttals, official state-sanctioned photography had shifted away from Rodchenko's radical viewpoints to prefer optimistic and naturalistic views of Soviet life referred to as Socialist Realism. The government argued that Socialist Realism could be easily understood by workers, many of whom were illiterate.

Toward the end of the 1920s, Rodchenko began to focus on photo-essays, many of which valorized labor (such as *Sawmill Worker*). *At the Telephone* was made in 1928 before he consciously switched to photojournalism around 1929, but it reveals his ongoing interest in depicting the rapidly changing world (of newspapers, cameras, and telephones) in new and unexpected ways. His

favored viewpoints, from above or below, were made possible, not coincidentally, by the introduction of handheld cameras (a new technology) in the mid-1920s.

Notes

[1] For more on "Revolutionary Photography" see: Christina Lodder, "**Revolutionary Photography**," in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, eds. *Object:Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949. An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014).

[2] Alexander Rodchenko, "Downright Ignorance or a Mean Trick?" in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era* (New York: Aperture, 1989), p. 246.

Additional resources:

Museum of Modern Art, New York. Interactive Feature: **Aleksandr Rodchenko** (1998)

Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983)

The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1992)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

4.14: De Stijl

Members of the De Stijl movement used abstract, geometric principles and primary colors in painting, sculpture, design, and architecture.

1917 - 1931

4.14.1: De Stijl, Part I- Total Purity

4.14.2: De Stijl, Part II- Near-Abstraction and Pure Abstraction

4.14.3: De Stijl, Part III- The Total De Stijl Environment

4.14.4: Piet Mondrian

4.14.4.1: Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow

4.14.4.2: Composition No. II, with Red and Blue

4.14.4.3: TateShots- Piet Mondrian

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4.14.1: De Stijl, Part I- Total Purity

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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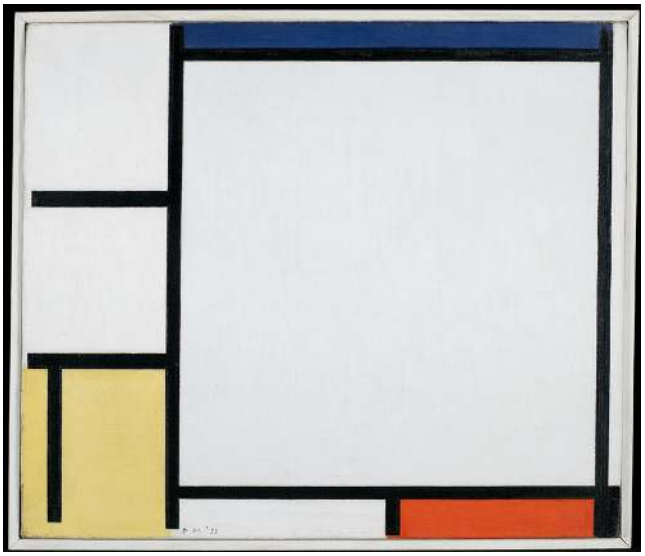


Figure 4.14.1.1: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue, Red, Yellow, and Black*, 1922, oil on canvas, 41.9 x 48.9 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

De Stijl is one of the most recognizable styles in all of modern art. Consisting only of horizontal and vertical lines and the colors red, yellow, blue, black, and white, De Stijl was applied not only to easel painting but also to architecture and a broad range of designed objects from furniture to clothing. This is not inappropriate. Despite its close association with Piet Mondrian, the artist thought of it not as his personal style, but as De Stijl – *The* Style; it was objective and universal, applicable to all people and all things.

We will discuss De Stijl in three parts. This first part will introduce the elements of De Stijl, the **second** will examine the processes of abstraction that led to De Stijl, and the **third** part will examine the application of De Stijl to architecture and design.



Figure 4.14.1.2: Piet Mondrian, *Evolution*, 1911, oil on canvas, 183 x 257.5 cm (Kunstmuseum Den Haag)

De Stijl and Theosophy

Mondrian partially attributed his arrival at the elements of De Stijl to **Theosophy**, an occult philosophy promoted by thinkers such as Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner. Theosophists sought knowledge of higher, spiritual truths than those available to science, and often claimed to have access to those truths through direct spiritual insight. Mondrian became a member of the Dutch Theosophical Society in 1909, and painted a number of works around that time that explore mystical awareness.

His *Evolution* triptych (1910-11) shows the "three spirits" that Madame Blavatsky described as living within humankind: terrestrial (on the left), sidereal or astral (on the right), and divine (in the center). Such works show Mondrian's interest in finding a visual language for expressing spiritual things, but they are far from the radical abstraction that he later arrived at. In fact, allegorical paintings of spiritual and occult subjects have a long tradition, with roots in the nineteenth-century Symbolist movement, and even farther back in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

While Theosophy certainly informed the spiritual goals of De Stijl, its influence on the actual style of De Stijl is less clear. The Dutch mathematician and Theosophist M. H. J. Schoenmaekers, whom Mondrian met in 1916, wrote an essay the year before in which he asserted that, "The three essential colors are yellow, blue, and red." He also declared that, "The two fundamental and absolute oppositions that shape our planet are: the horizontal line of the earth's trajectory around the Sun, and the vertical trajectory of the rays that emanate from the center of the sun."[1]

These quotes are, however, just two examples from a torrent of wildly different suggestions that Theosophists made for visualizing the spiritual. Other artists influenced by Theosophy developed very different styles (Vassily Kandinsky and **Hilma af Klint**, for example). So why did the practitioners of De Stijl believe that their style was the most authentic expression of universal spirituality?

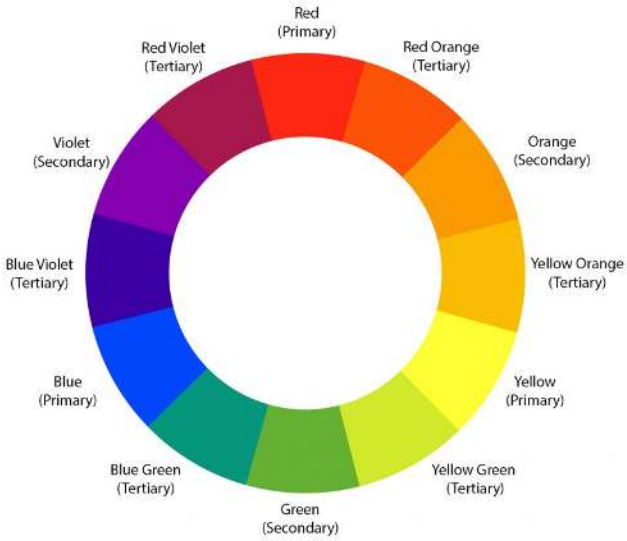


Figure **4.14.1.3**: Color wheel with primaries, secondaries, and tertiaries

Blue, yellow, red, black, white

It helps to think of the elements of De Stijl as building-blocks: structural components that, in different combinations, can be used to make everything in the universe. Take for example De Stijl's limited palette of red, yellow, and blue. These are what are called the "primary"colors, because if you had perfectly pure versions of each of these colors, you could create every other color. Red + yellow in different proportions create every shade of orange; blue + yellow create the shades of green; blue + orange create brown, and so on. Similarly, by combining black and white, you can make every shade of gray in between.

Red, yellow, and blue are "primary" colors in another sense as well. Although you can mix red and yellow to make orange, or red and blue to make violet, you cannot mix violet and orange, or even red-violet and red-orange, to make pure, primary red. It is for this reason that the artists of De Stijl could not have chosen orange, lavender, and teal. Not only are those colors impure (teal is a mixture of blue and green), they are also not fully representative of the color spectrum; if you had only those three colors you could never create red, yellow, or blue.

Color printers rely on this principle, although the primaries that work best in this case are cyan (a light greenish blue), magenta (a blueish red), and yellow. Together with black ink and the white of the page itself, a four-cartridge CMYK printer can reproduce every color in a photograph of you and your friend at the beach, from the subtle teals of the water, to the dull reddish-brown of the rocks, to the brilliant yellow of the sand.

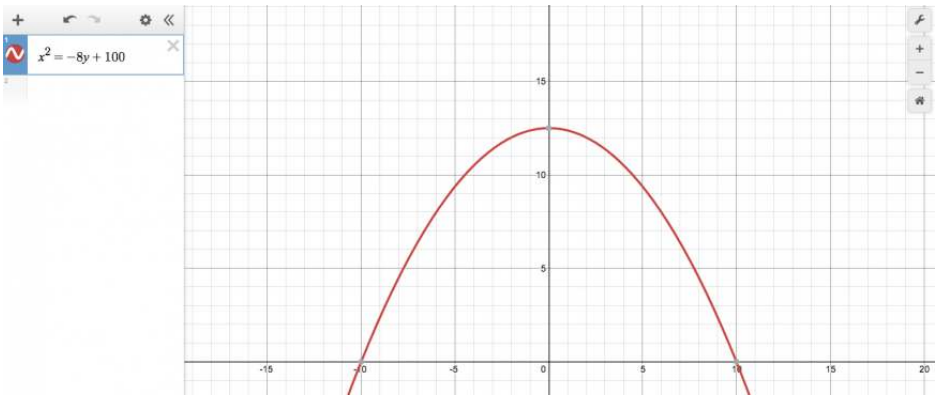


Figure **4.14.1.4**: Coordinate grid of $x^2 = -8y + 100$ (image: **Desmos)**

Horizontal and vertical lines

The justification for De Stijl's use of only horizontal and vertical lines is somewhat trickier, and it helps to think of them not as 'lines' but as directional forces or vectors: dynamic structuring factors, rather than stable structural components. If you recall from working with coordinate planes in mathematics, any kind of regular line can be expressed in a formula that describes the movement of a point along a regular grid defined by 'x,' the horizontal axis, and 'y', the vertical axis.

A diagonal line at a forty-five degree angle would be expressed as x = y, for example: for every unit moved in a horizontal (x) direction, move the same unit in a vertical (y) direction. The parabola of a soccer ball punted upfield might be x^2 = -8y +100. Thus any rational line could be expressed mathematically as a motion defined by two interacting forces, a horizontal force and a vertical force.

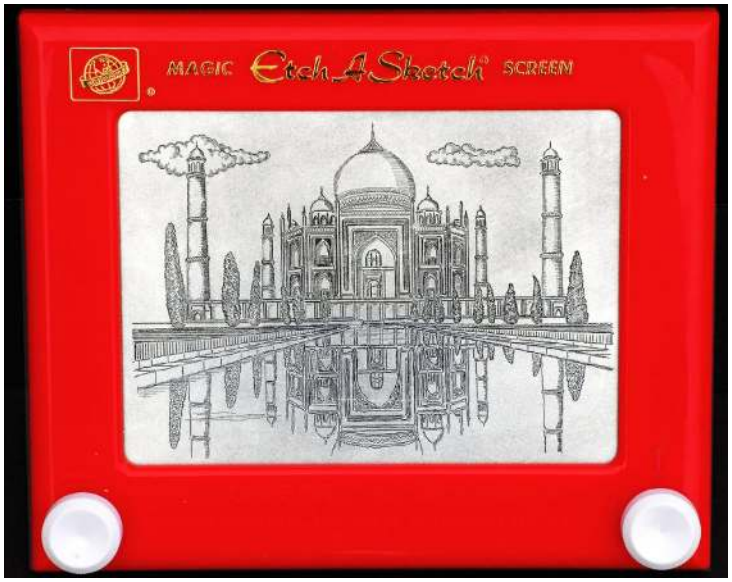


Figure **4.14.1.5**: Taj Mahal drawn on an Etch-A-Sketch (photo: **Etcha,** CC BY-SA 3.0)

To put this into what may be more familiar terms, think of an Etch-a-Sketch machine. There are just two control knobs, one for the horizontal motion of a black line on the gray screen, and the other for vertical motion. But by simultaneously manipulating both knobs, you can draw diagonal or curved lines to create triangles and circles — or a baseball cap, a human face, and even a chaotic scribble that would seem impossible to reduce to an "x, y" formula.

De Stijl's horizontal and vertical lines are like the shape-making vectors controlled by the Etch-a-Sketch knobs. In the same way that a printer combines just a few primaries to make any color, by manipulating the horizontal and vertical forces of an Etch-a-Sketch, you can draw anything in the universe, from a box, to a tree, to the Taj Mahal.

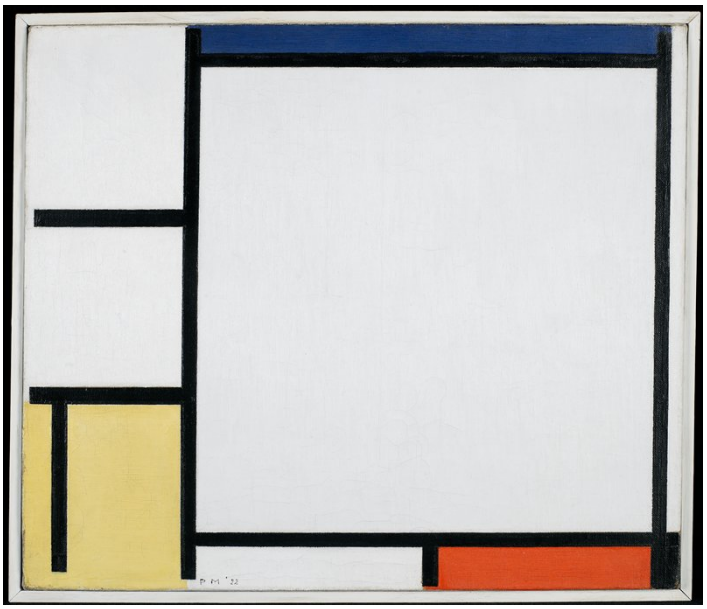


Figure **4.14.1.6**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue, Red, Yellow, and Black*, 1922, oil on canvas, 41.9 x 48.9 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art)

Building-blocks of the universe

To give one more analogy by way of conclusion, the elements of De Stijl are the artist's equivalent of the physicist's fundamental building blocks: protons, neutrons, and electrons. With a bucket of each of these atomic building blocks, you could make anything in the universe, from hydrogen (one proton + one electron), to oxygen (eight protons + eight electrons + eight neutrons), to water (two hydrogen atoms + one oxygen atom), to a protein, a paramecium, and eventually even a person.

Similarly, if you have buckets of pure red, yellow, blue, black and white paint, and a lot of skill on an Etch-a-Sketch machine, you could represent absolutely anything. It is in this sense that De Stijl is universal, "the" style, and not just the personal style of Piet Mondrian or the style of some specific region or period in time. Although our own historical moment tends to celebrate cultural and individual differences and reject "absolutes" or "universals," De Stijl has a decent claim to being, as its name asserts, *The Style* for all things, all time, and all people everywhere.

Notes:

1. M. H. J. Schoenmaekers, *Het Nieuwe Wereldbeeld* (Van Dishoeck: Bussum, 1915), pp. 224, 102 (authors' translation).

Additional Resources:

Yve-Alain Bois, et.al., *Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944* (Exhibition catalog: National Gallery of Art and MoMA, 1994).

Piet Mondrian, Harry Holtzman, and Martin S. James, *The New Art–the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986).

Michel Seuphor. *Piet Mondrian: Life and Work* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969).

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4.14.2: De Stijl, Part II- Near-Abstraction and Pure Abstraction

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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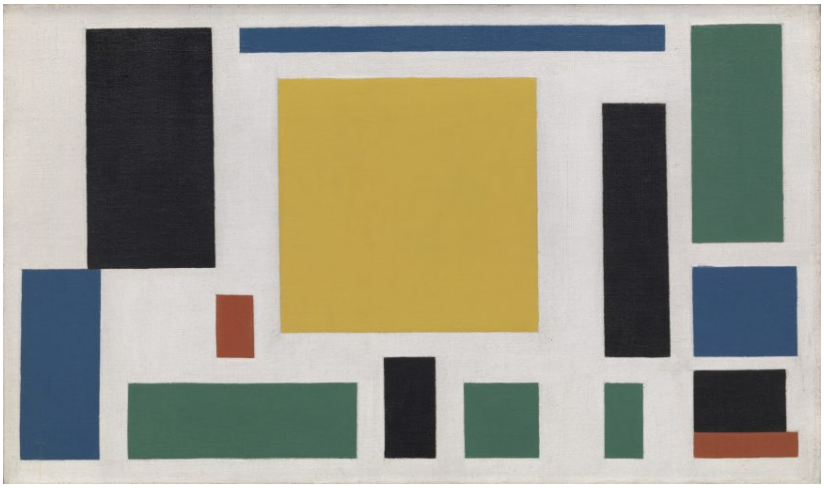


Figure **4.14.2.1**: Theo van Doesburg, *Composition VIII* (*The Cow*), 1918, oil on canvas, 37.5 x 63.5 cm, (MoMA)

Theo van Doesburg's *Composition VIII* consists of just fourteen rectangles. One nearly perfect yellow square in the center is surrounded by thirteen rectangles of different proportions: four green, three blue, four black, and two red. They are scattered evenly across the surface, not overlapping (although two pairs abut), and are carefully aligned with the edges of the rectangular white canvas. This seems to be a good, and fairly early, example of what is called "abstract art," art without any subject matter or visual resemblance to actual objects in nature.

In what appears to be a ludicrous parenthetical statement, however, the title also declares the work to be a cow. And indeed, there are a number of preliminary studies by van Doesburg that may justify that subtitle.



Figure **4.14.2.2**: Top left: Theo van Doesburg, *Study for Composition* (*The Cow*), 1917, pencil on paper, 11.7 x 15.9 cm (MoMA); top right: Theo van Doesburg, *Study for Composition* (*The Cow*), 1917, pencil on paper, 11.7 x 15.9 cm (MoMA); bottom: Theo van Doesburg, *Composition* (*The Cow*), 1917, gouache, oil, and charcoal on paper, 39.4 x 58.4 cm (MoMA).

One graphite drawing is immediately recognizable as a cow or bull grazing head down in a field, despite its sketchy execution and the simplification of its muscular contours. Another graphite drawing squares off those contours; the cow's hip and thigh muscles are simplified into a block, and the rear leg is straightened into an elongated peg. A painted study continues this squaring off process. The head is now composed of a few rectangles: a broad forehead in purple, a black snout terminating in a nested red band, and a yellow antenna-like vertical suggesting an ear.

Now it is possible to see *Composition VIII* as a cow as well. The central yellow square is a massive, weighty ribcage, and the black rectangle on the left is a hip, with the blue and red below representing two legs. In the lower right is a tripartite head: blue forehead, black snout, and red mouth/nostrils. The title is appropriate after all; at first sight what we see is just an abstract "composition" of colored rectangles, but hidden within is a cow.

Near-abtraction and pure abstraction

This set of works introduces what is an important distinction for modern art: the difference between near-abstract art and pure-abstract (non-representational) art; or better yet, the difference between abstraction as a verb and abstraction as a noun. Pure-abstract art is abstraction as a noun: the work is begun without reference to natural objects, and intends no reference to natural objects.

The artists of **De Stijl** did eventually end up practicing pure-abstract art, but first van Doesburg and Mondrian spent nearly a decade in the gray area of near abstraction: starting with recognizable scenes, then drawing them away from their natural appearances. This is to practice abstraction as a verb: the etymology of the word derives from "ab" = "away" + "trahere" = '"to pull" (the same root as the word "tractor").

A gradual process

In his 1919 "Dialogue on the New Plastic," Mondrian explains how he "very gradually" arrived at the straight lines of De Stijl, starting with the complex lines found in nature: "First I abstracted the capricious, then the freely curved, and finally the mathematically curved." [1] This use of the term abstraction as a verb suggests a process; by gradually "pulling away" the contingencies and imperfections of natural objects, the artist can gradually purify nature of its "accidents" to discover its essence. This process would eventually lead to a spiritual abstract art, abstraction as a noun, as Mondrian had already realized in a note written in a sketchbook around 1912-14:

> ***If one conceived of these forms as increasingly simple and pure, commencing with the physical visible forms of appearance, then one passes through a world of forms ascending from reality to abstraction. In this manner one approaches Spirit, or purity itself.Piet Mondrian, Two Mondrian Sketchbooks, ed. and trans. R. P. Welsh and J. M. Joosten (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1969), p. 36.***



Figure **4.14.2.3**: Piet Mondrian, *Avond* (*Evening*): *The Red Tree*, 1908-10, oil on canvas, 70 x 99 cm (Kunstmuseum Den Haag)

Abstraction as purification

Mondrian's work between around 1908 and 1920 exemplifies this gradual abstracting process starting from a number of natural objects and scenes: a landscape of a pier and ocean, a church in the Dutch town of Domburg, and, most famously, trees.

In the tree series, Mondrian starts with an immediately recognizable apple tree. The color is intensified, but the cool blues suggest the deepening twilight of its title “Evening,” and the red tree glows as if reflecting the sunset. The branches are carefully rendered; every twist and knot is shown, and the texture of the rough bark is conveyed by thick, parallel strokes. The painting concentrates on the surface appearance of the tree, viewed in the light of a specific time of day.



Figure **4.14.2.4**: Left: Piet Mondrian, *Gray Tree*, 1911, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 109.1 cm (Kunstmuseum Den Haag); right: Piet Mondrian, *Flowering Appletree*, 1912, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 107.5 cm (Kunstmuseum Den Haag).

In a later painting of the same subject Mondrian reduced the color to all grays, eliminating any reference to lighting conditions. The branches have also been simplified into sweeping strokes, as though Mondrian was rendering a general blueprint of an apple tree’s spreading growth rather than the details of a particular tree. In a third painting those sweeping curves are generalized further into almost mathematical regularity, with near-perfect parabolas representing the tree’s uppermost branches stretching toward the sky.



Figure **4.14.2.5**: Piet Mondrian, *The Tree ‘A’*, 1913, oil on canvas, 100.3 x 67.3 cm (Tate Gallery)

By 1913 Mondrian had reduced most of the curved and diagonal lines of his trees to a step-pattern of horizontal and vertical lines, almost literally embodying his later assertion that he proceeded by abstracting first the “capricious” curves, then the “freely curved,” and finally the “mathematically curved” in order to arrive at the horizontal and vertical lines of De Stijl.

Composition and harmony

After nearly a decade of abstracting from carefully-observed natural objects, the project of De Stijl changed. Although it is not obvious when looking at their works, at a certain point Mondrian and van Doesburg stopped working from nature – from trees or cows – and began working directly with the elements of De Stijl: horizontal and vertical lines bounding flat areas of yellow, blue, red, black, and white. At this point the focus of the work changed from abstraction as a verb to abstraction as a noun, from distillation to composition.

Having discovered the pure building blocks of the universe, they began using those building blocks to create compositions independent of any reference to natural objects. The goal was now to create an aesthetic harmony or compositional balance that is not available in nature.

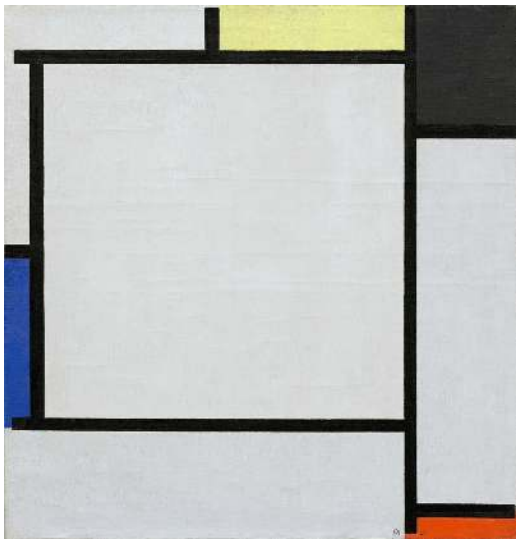


Figure **4.14.2.6**: Piet Mondrian, *Tableau 2*, 1922, oil on canvas, 55.6 x 53.3 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

For example, in *Tableau 2* (1922), an equilateral triangle is created within the square of the canvas by balancing the three areas of color around its edges: the red to the lower right, the blue just below middle left, and the yellow and black corner in the upper right. The square format of the canvas gives a sense of overall stability, while the implied triangle tilts toward the right, creating a dynamic internal equilibrium.



Figure **4.14.2.7**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow, and Black*, 1929, oil on canvas, 45.1 x 45.3 cm (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York)

Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow, and Black (1929) has an asymmetrical but satisfying balance around a square in the lower right. Three colored rectangles surround this square: a red square in the upper left joins with the yellow rectangle below and the blue rectangle to the right to create another implied triangle. In both compositions, as a response to the different visual “weights” of the three primary colors, the pale yellow rectangles are paired with a black rectangle to balance the more visually powerful red and dark blue.

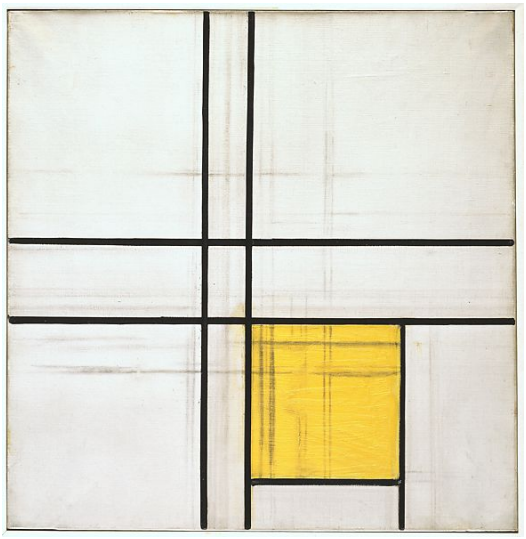


Figure **4.14.2.8**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Double Lines and Yellow* (unfinished), 1934, oil and charcoal on canvas, 55.5 x 54.5 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

This project of creating dynamically balanced compositions using the elements of De Stijl occupied Mondrian for two decades. Unfinished works from this period show his intuitive and sometimes very tentative and slow process. He would push black lines and color areas around until they came together in a composition that satisfied his quest for absolute purity and total harmony.

Irritated by nature

Mondrian's early biographer Michel Seuphor described how the artist was so "irritated" by nature and the color green that when seated facing the window, he asked if he could change places so he would not have to look at the trees outside. [2] This may seem odd since many people think a view of trees is pleasant, and Mondrian himself had made a careful study of trees in order to arrive at De Stijl. But for Mondrian, nature was impure, contingent, materialistic, and aesthetically dissonant; it was the opposite of the pure, spiritual harmony that he sought and found in De Stijl.

Notes:

1. Piet Mondrian, "Dialog on the New Plastic," *De Stijl* February-March 1919, in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds. and trans., *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 77.
2. Michel Seuphor, *Mondrian: Life and Work*, (New York: Harry Abrams, 1956), p. 73.

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4.14.3: De Stijl, Part III- The Total De Stijl Environment

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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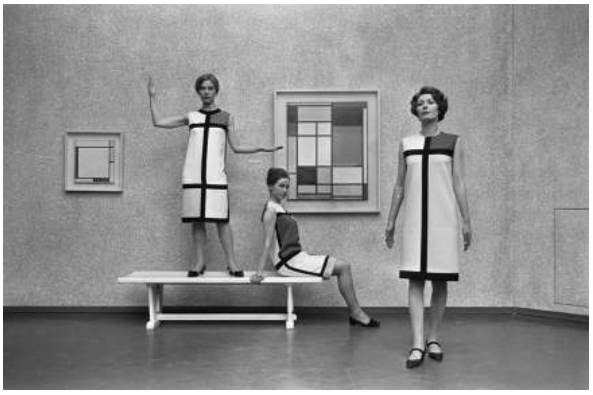


Figure **4.14.3.1**: Yves Saint Laurent Mondrian dresses at the Museum of Modern Art,1966

In 1965, French fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent created a set of six cocktail dresses in the style of **Piet Mondrian**, using only red, yellow, blue, and white rectangles bounded by black horizontal and vertical lines. The cut of the dresses was A-line, with no darts or belt, and the weight of the fabric was calculated to ensure that it hung straight, with minimal wrinkling or movement. Today, an internet search for “Mondrian car,” “Mondrian chair,” “Mondrian tea towel,” and the like will find any number of De Stijl-inspired home products for purchase.

A universal style

While it may seem like crass commercial exploitation to see the pure, spiritual art of De Stijl applied to product design, in a way it actually serves to fulfill the ultimate long-term goal of the movement, which was to make the style truly universal. Mondrian wrote many essays discussing how De Stijl could be seen in modern architecture, product design, city planning, and even music.

Similarly, Theo van Doesburg, editor of the journal *De Stijl*, was an architect who preferred to design total environments, including the furniture and wall decoration. Bart van der Leck, one of the co-founders of De Stijl (although he refused to sign their “manifesto”), designed De Stijl-inspired stained glass, a typeface, and posters, as well as hangings and carpets sold by the Dutch department store Metz & Co.

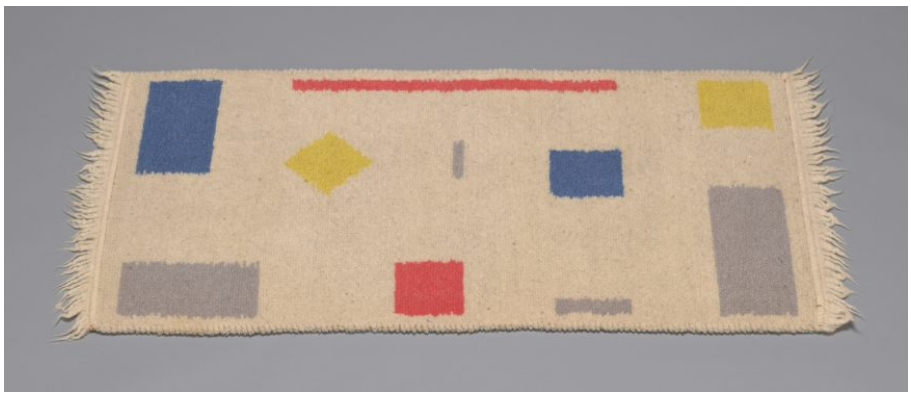


Figure **4.14.3.2**: Bart van der Leck, Double-Faced Rug, Metz & Co, 1929-35, wool, 124.5 x 55.2 cm (MoMA)

Provided that all of these products not only use the elements of De Stijl, but are also composed in a way that is sensitive to the sort of **harmonious balance** sought by Mondrian and his fellow artists, this expansion beyond the museum painting and into the terrain of everyday life is entirely appropriate.

Entering paradise

If a single De Stijl painting represents an oasis of absolute purity and harmony in a world that is woefully short of both of those qualities, and if an encounter with a De Stijl painting can help to purify and harmonize the human spirit, think how it would be to

live in an entire De Stijl environment.

Mondrian himself sought to move beyond the isolated easel painting. Although there are inevitable aesthetic compromises that come with designing architecture, enough purity and harmony can be retained that the individual living in an entire De Stijl environment will be, in Mondrian's words, "uplifted through beauty toward universal life."[1]

When Mondrian moved back to Paris following the end of World War One, **he painted all of his furniture white** and decorated the walls with planes of colored card stock. His friend Maud van Loon described the effect of coming into this space as a spiritual oasis:

> ***The stairwell was horrific, terribly shabby, unsightly … Then you walked through his door and into a brilliantly white studio with a color plane here and there. As you stepped inside, you were in Paradise.Cited in Cees de Jong, ed., Piet Mondrian: The Studios (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), p. 96.***



Figure **4.14.3.3**: Theo van Doesburg, *Test of Color Composition* with furniture by Gerrit Rietveld, in *De Stijl* 3, no. 12 (November 1920)

De Stijl architecture

Architecture and interior design were important to De Stijl from the beginning, and in fact architectural renderings dominate the illustrations in the short-lived journal dedicated to the movement, *De Stijl* magazine. However, in order for architecture to become, in effect, a three-dimensional De Stijl environment, rigorous rules need to be followed.

Ornament must be excluded in order to purify the space as much as possible, so any merely decorative objects or elements must be banished. Functional objects such as chairs and lamps need to be included, of course, but they should conform with the pure elements of De Stijl as much as possible.

Mondrian acknowledged that whereas a painter has total freedom about what shapes to use and where to place them, "Utility or purpose indeed affects architectural beauty … Function can even limit beauty: some utilitarian things … may require a round form, although the straight expresses the profoundest beauty." In such cases, the designer should use "a pure circle, which is far from capricious nature" and closer to the rigorous geometric purity of De Stijl.[2]



Figure **4.14.3.4**: Gerrit Rietveld, Schröder House, exterior, 1924 (photo: **Sailko**, CC BY 3.0)

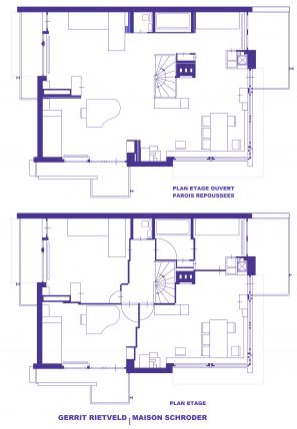


Figure **4.14.3.142**: Schröder House, floor plans, 1924 (image: **Jchancerel**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Rietveld's Schröder House

The best-known example of a total De Stijl environment is Gerrit Rietvelt's Schröder House (1924). Commissioned by Truus Schröder, a recently widowed mother of three, the house clings oddly to the end of a street of row houses in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Its exterior is composed entirely of white and neutral gray rectangular planes, punctuated by horizontal and vertical linear elements in black, red, yellow, and blue.

One of the architect's intentions was to integrate the house with its environment, so entire walls and even corners are opened up by windows and French doors. The interior was also designed to be open, especially on the top floor, which had sliding panels that could create separate rooms or one flowing space.



Figure **4.14.3.5**: Schröder House, interior, top floor, 1924 (photo: **Inhabitat**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Rietveld also designed as much of the interior and furnishings as possible using the basic tenets of De Stijl. A hanging lamp seems to demonstrate the three dimensions of space: length, width, and height, and is so stripped of unnecessary ornament that it hangs from its own electric cords. His famous *Red Blue Chair* shows an element of the compromise that Mondrian noted for designing functional objects. A perfectly horizontal seat and perfectly vertical back would be extremely uncomfortable, so Rietveld tilted both slightly to accommodate the organic imperfection of the human body. But the armature of the chair is made of modular beechwood slats oriented in the three dimensions, and of course all is painted in pure De Stijl red, blue, yellow, and black.



Figure **4.14.3.6**: Left: Gerrit Rietveld, Hanging Lamp, 1920, Wood, glass, and tubular bulbs, 104.1 x 40 x 40 cm, (**MoMA**). Right: Gerrit Rietveld, *Red Blue Chair*, 1918-23, painted wood, 86.7 x 66 x 83.8 cm (**MoMA**).

The individual and the universal

De Stijl was one of a number of modern movements that believed its utopian aspirations would be best achieved by creating total environments, over which the designer (not the inhabitant) had complete control. As we imagine living in Rietveld's Schröder House, we may be put off, not only by the barren minimalism of the hard, geometric surfaces, but also by the total lack of individual personality or whimsy. These are environments to which the occupant is expected to conform, rather than adapting the decor to fit the individual tastes of the occupant.

What may appear repugnant in our era, which prizes individual differences and self-expression, was actively embraced by many modern architects and designers. For Mondrian, "If our material environment is to be pure in its beauty and therefore healthy and practical, it can no longer be the reflection of the egotistic sentiments of our petty personality." If a total De Stijl environment were to expand from the painting, to the home or office interior, to the street and city itself, then all individual components of the environment must be subsumed to an overarching, homogeneous design. Mondrian continues, "And man? Nothing in himself, he will be part of the whole; and losing his petty and pathetic individual pride, he will be happy in the Eden he will have created!"[3]

Notes:

1. Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The Home – The Street – The City,' in *De internationale revue i10* (Amsterdam, 1927), as translated in Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, eds. and trans., *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian (New York*: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 208.

2. Piet Mondrian, “The Realization of Neo-Plasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today,” originally published in *De Stijl* (March and May, 1922), as translated in *The New Art – The New Life*, p. 171.
3. Piet Mondrian, “Neo-Plasticism: The Home, The Street – The City” (1926), as translated in *The New Art – The New Life*, pp. 208, 212.

Additional Resources:

Nancy J. Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1983).

Cees W. De Jong, ed. *Piet Mondrian: The Studios* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015).

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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4.14.4.1: Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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Pure abstract art becomes completely emancipated, free of naturalistic appearances.
—Piet Mondrian, 1929[1]



Figure **4.14.4.1.1**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Walking up to Piet Mondrian's painting, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* can be a baffling experience (see image at left). The canvas is small and uses only the simplest of colors: red, blue, yellow, white and black. The composition is similarly reduced to the simplest of rectilinear forms, squares and rectangles defined by vertical and horizontal lines. One would hardly suspect that we are seeing the artist's determination to depict the underlying structure of reality.

Neo-Plasticism

Mondrian called his style Neo-Plasticism or "The New Plastic Painting," the title of his famous 1917 essay promoting abstraction for the expression of modern life. Don't be confused by Mondrian's use of the term "plastic." He uses it to refer to the plastic arts—media such as sculpture, that molds three-dimensional form, or, in Mondrian's case, painting on canvas. For centuries, European painters had attempted to render three-dimensional forms in believable spaces—creating convincing illusions of reality (**click here** for an example—Vermeer's *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*). In contrast, Mondrian and other modernists wanted to move painting beyond naturalistic depiction to focus instead on the material properties of paint and its unique ability to express ideas abstractly using formal elements such as line and color.

Mondrian believed his abstraction could serve as a universal pictorial language representing the dynamic, evolutionary forces that govern nature and human experience. In fact, he believed that abstraction provides a truer picture of reality than illusionistic depictions of objects in the visible world. Perhaps this is why Mondrian characterized his style as "abstract real" painting.

Abstraction and human progress

Mondrian's earliest paintings were quite traditional in both subject and style. He studied at the art academies in the Hague and in Amsterdam in his home country of the Netherlands. Then, as with many artists during the early twentieth century, he began to emulate a variety of contemporary styles, including **Impressionism**, **Neo-Impressionism**, and **Symbolism** in an effort to find his own artistic voice. The impact of these modern movements can be seen in the development of Mondrian's painting which, over time, shows the dissolution of recognizable objects into increasingly pared-down structures (see the three depictions of trees below). His emphasis on line, color, and geometric shape sought to highlight formal characteristics.



Figure **4.14.4.1.2**: Three trees by Piet Mondrian: *Study for the Gray Tree* (left), 1911, charcoal on paper, 58.4 x 86.5 cm; *The Grey Tree* (center), 1911, oil on canvas, 79.7 x 109.1 cm; Flowering Apple Tree (right), 1912, oil on canvas, 78.5 x 107.5 cm (all in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag)

Mondrian was inspired by **Cubism**, a movement led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque that explored the use of multiple perspectives. Mondrian began experimenting with abstracted forms around the time he moved to Paris in 1912.



Figure **4.14.4.1.3**: Piet Mondrian, *Ocean 5*, 1914, charcoal and gouache on paper/Homosote panel, 87.6 x 120.3 cm (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

His famous "Pier and Ocean" series (see above), which reduces the landscape to arrangements of vertical and horizontal lines, exemplifies this period in Mondrian's career. He wanted to push beyond Cubism's strategy of fragmenting forms (café tables were a favorite subject), and move toward pure abstraction. However, this change in Mondrian's process did not take place overnight and he continued to work in a studied, methodical way. In fact, his production of paintings within a series of canvases was part of Mondrian's method, and how he worked through thematic and compositional issues. Because Mondrian continued to rely on the series throughout his career, we can see the progression of his pictorial language even in his later, purely abstract work.

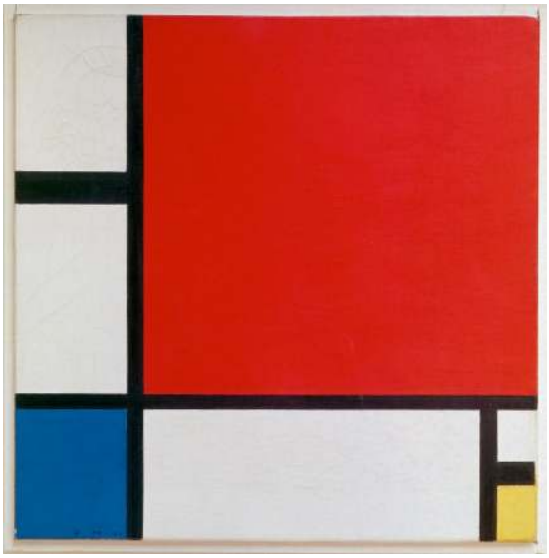


Figure **4.14.4.1.4**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

His use of the term “composition” (the organization of forms on the canvas) signals his experimentation with abstract arrangements. Mondrian had returned home to the Netherlands just prior to the outbreak of the First World War and would remain there until the war ended. While in the Netherlands he further developed his style, ruling out compositions that were either too static or too dynamic, concluding that asymmetrical arrangements of geometric (rather than organic) shapes in primary (rather than secondary) colors best represent universal forces. Moreover, he combined his development of an abstract style with his interest in philosophy, spirituality, and his belief that the evolution of abstraction was a sign of humanity’s progress.

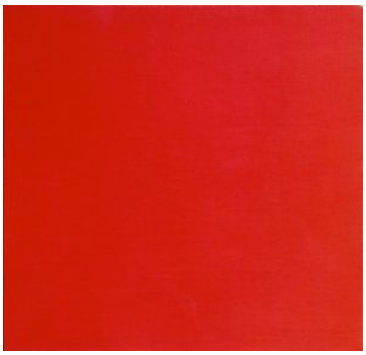


Figure **4.14.4.1.5**: Piet Mondrian, Red (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Philosophy & Theosophy

Some art historians have viewed Mondrian’s painting as an expression of his interest in dialectical relationships, ideas advanced by the early nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel that art and civilization progress by successive moments of tension and reconciliation between oppositional forces. For Mondrian then, composing with opposites such as black and white pigments or vertical and horizontal lines suggest an evolutionary development.

Mondrian’s painting may also reflect his association with the Theosophical Society, an esoteric group that had a strong presence in Europe. Theosophists were interested in opposites as an expression of hidden unity. During WWI, Mondrian stayed in Laren, a village with a thriving art community near Amsterdam. He lived near M.H.J. Schoenmaeker, a prominent Theosophist who used terms such as “New Plastic” to promote his ideas on spiritual evolution and the unification of the real and the ideal, the physical and immaterial. In Theosophy**,** lines, shapes, and colors symbolized the unity of spiritual and natural forces.

De Stijl

While in Holland, Mondrian founded the movement called *De Stijl* (The Style) with the artist Theo van Doesburg. The two shared many ideas about art as an expression of relationships, particularly the relationships between art and life. Because these artists believed that the evolution of art coincided with the modern progression of humankind, they thought that New Plasticism could, and should, encompass all of human experience. Van Doesburg founded the journal *De Stijl* to promote these ideas and demonstrate that their geometric abstraction, based on their theory of spiritual and pictorial progress, could form a total environment, and impact modern life. Although Mondrian and van Doesburg eventually parted ways, their movement to combine modern art and living was so influential that the abstract, geometric principles and use of primary colors they applied in painting, sculpture, design, and architecture still resonate today.



Figure **4.14.4.1.6**: Piet Mondrian (detail), *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, oil on canvas, 46 x 46 cm (Kunsthaus Zürich)

Dynamic contrasts

Mondrian's *Composition with Red, Blue, and Yellow* demonstrates his commitment to relational opposites, asymmetry, and pure planes of color. Mondrian composed this painting as a harmony of contrasts that signify both balance and the tension of dynamic forces. Mondrian viewed his black lines not as outlines but as planes of pigment in their own right; an idea seen in the horizontal black plane on the lower right of the painting that stops just short of the canvas edge (see image above). Mondrian eradicates the entire notion of illusionistic depth predicated on a figure in front of a background. He achieves a harmonious tension by his asymmetrical placement of primary colors that balance the blocks of white paint. Notice how the large red square at the upper right, which might otherwise dominate the composition, is balanced by the small blue square at the bottom left. What's more, when you see this painting in a person you can discern just how much variation is possible using this color scheme—and that Mondrian used varying shades of blacks and whites, some of which are subtly lighter or darker. Seen up close, this variety of values and textures create a surprising harmony of contrasts. Even the visible traces of the artist's brushwork counter what might otherwise be a rigid geometric composition and balance the artist's desire for a universal truth with the intimately personal experience of the artist.

[1]Piet Mondrian, "Pure Abstract Art, 1929" in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, edited and translated by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G.K. Hall& Co.), p. 224.

Additional resources

Marty Bax, *Complete Mondrian* (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K.: Lund Humphries, 2001).

Yve-Alain Bois, et.al., *Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1994).

Piet Mondrian, Harry Holtzman, and Martin S. James, *The New Art–the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986).

Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

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4.14.4.2: Composition No. II, with Red and Blue

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **4.14.4.2.1**: Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. II, with Red and Blue*, oil on canvas, 1929 (original date partly obliterated; mistakenly repainted 1925 by Mondrian), oil on canvas, 15 7/8 x 12 5/8″ / 40.3 x 32.1 cm (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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4.14.4.3: TateShots- Piet Mondrian

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Video **4.14.4.3.1**: Co-curator Michael White explores how Mondrian’s studio became a way of creating abstract space outside his paintings.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.1: Futurism

This group of young and rebellious Italian writers and artists was determined to celebrate industrialization.

1909 - 1914

5.1.1: Italian Futurism- An Introduction

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5.1.1: Italian Futurism- An Introduction

by EMILY CASDEN

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Figure **5.1.1.1**: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913 (cast 1931), bronze, 43 7/8 x 34 7/8 x 15 3/4″ (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Can you imagine being so enthusiastic about technology that you name your daughter Propeller? Today we take most technological advances for granted, but at the turn of the last century, innovations like electricity, x-rays, radio waves, automobiles and airplanes were extremely exciting. Italy lagged Britain, France, Germany, and the United States in the pace of its industrial development. Culturally speaking, the country's artistic reputation was grounded in Ancient, Renaissance and Baroque art and culture. Simply put, Italy represented the past.

In the early 1900s, a group of young and rebellious Italian writers and artists emerged determined to celebrate industrialization. They were frustrated by Italy's declining status and believed that the "Machine Age" would result in an entirely new world order and even a renewed consciousness.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the ringleader of this group, called the movement Futurism. Its members sought to capture the idea of modernity, the sensations and aesthetics of speed, movement, and industrial development.

A manifesto



Figure **5.1.1.2**: Umberto Boccioni, *Materia*, 1912 (reworked 1913), oil on canvas, 226 x 150 cm (Mattioli Collection loaned to Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

Marinetti launched Futurism in 1909 with the publication his “Futurist manifesto” on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The manifesto set a fiery tone. In it Marinetti lashed out against cultural tradition (passatismo, in Italian) and called for the destruction of museums, libraries, and feminism. Futurism quickly grew into an international movement and its participants issued additional manifestos for nearly every type of art: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, photography, cinema—even clothing.

The Futurist painters—Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Gino Severini, and Giacomo Balla—signed their first manifesto in 1910 (the last named his daughter Elica—Propeller!). Futurist painting had first looked to the color and the optical experiments of the late 19th century, but in the fall of 1911, Marinetti and the Futurist painters visited the Salon d’Automne in Paris and saw Cubism in person for the first time. Cubism had an immediate impact that can be seen in Boccioni’s *Materia* of 1912 for example. Nevertheless, the Futurists declared their work to be completely original.

Dynamism of Bodies in Motion

The Futurists were particularly excited by the works of late 19th-century scientist and photographer Étienne-Jules Marey, whose chronophotographic (time-based) studies depicted the mechanics of animal and human movement.



Video **5.1.1.1**

A precursor to cinema, Marey’s innovative experiments with time-lapse photography were especially influential for Balla. In his painting *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, the artist playfully renders the dog’s (and dog walker’s) feet as continuous movements through space over time.



Figure 5.1.1.3: Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912, oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 43 1/4 ” (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo)

Entranced by the idea of the “dynamic,” the Futurists sought to represent an object’s sensations, rhythms and movements in their images, poems and manifestos. Such characteristics are beautifully expressed in Boccioni’s most iconic masterpiece, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (see above).



Figure 5.1.1.4: Nike (Winged Victory) of Samothrace, c. 190 B.C.E. 3.28m high, Hellenistic Period, marge, (Musée du Louvre, Paris)

The choice of shiny bronze lends a mechanized quality to Boccioni’s sculpture, so here is the Futurists’ ideal combination of human and machine. The figure’s pose is at once graceful and forceful, and despite their adamant rejection of classical arts, it is also very similar to the *Nike of Samothrace*.

Politics & War

Futurism was one of the most politicized art movements of the twentieth century. It merged artistic and political agendas in order to propel change in Italy and across Europe. The Futurists would hold what they called serate futuriste, or Futurist evenings, where they would recite poems and display art, while also shouting politically charged rhetoric at the audience in the hope of inciting riot. They believed that agitation and destruction would end the status quo and allow for the regeneration of a stronger, energized Italy.

These positions led the Futurists to support the coming war, and like most of the group's members, leading painter Boccioni enlisted in the army during World War I. He was trampled to death after falling from a horse during training. After the war, the members' intense nationalism led to an alliance with Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party. Although Futurism continued to develop new areas of focus (aeropittura, for example) and attracted new members—the so-called "second generation" of Futurist artists—the movement's strong ties to Fascism has complicated the study of this historically significant art.

Additional resources:

Unique Forms in the Continuity of Space at MoMA

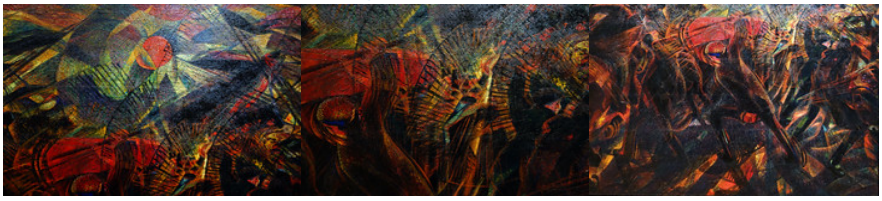
The Futurist Manifestos and related materials

Charles Bernstein reading the Futurist Manifesto at MoMA (video)

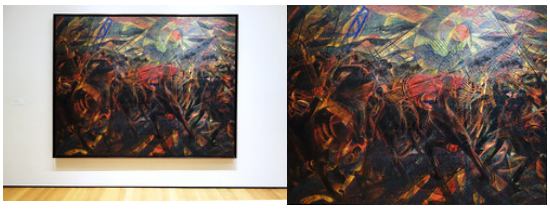
Boccioni's Materia in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection

Étienne-Jules Marey at MoMA

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5.1.2: Futurist Free Word Painting

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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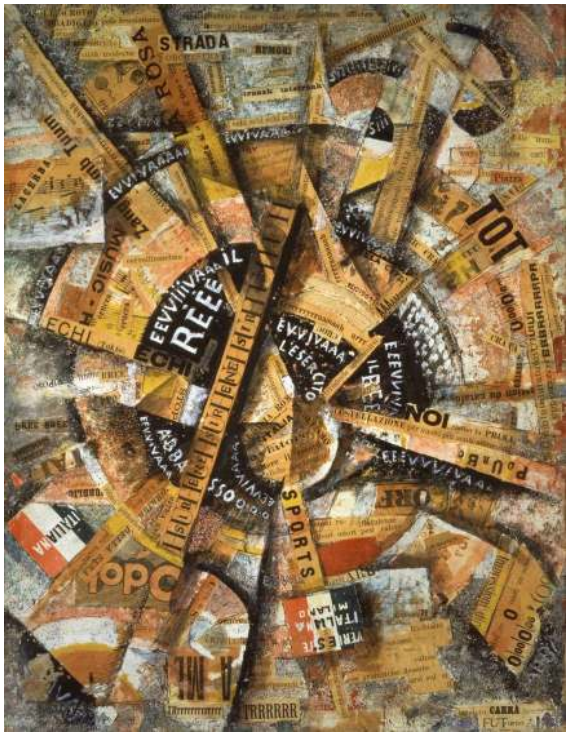


Figure 5.1.2.1: Carlo Carrà, *Interventionist Demonstration (Patriotic Holiday – Free Word Painting)*, 1914, tempera, pen, mica powder, and collage on cardboard, 38.5 x 30 cm (Mattioli Collection, on long-term loan to Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

Created in the politically volatile days leading up to World War I, Carlo Carrà's *Interventionist Demonstration (Patriotic Holiday – Free Word Painting)* displays both the **Italian Futurists'** avant-garde techniques and their militant nationalism. It is a collage painting that uses words as its primary element.



Figure 5.1.2.2: Carlo Carrà, I*nterventionist Demonstration (Patriotic Holiday – Free Word Painting)*, 1914, detail, 38.5 x 30 cm (Mattioli Collection, on long-term loan to Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

The composition rotates like an airplane propeller, and the word "aviator" is pasted at its heart. Dozens of pasted and painted words fan out from the center like voices shouting in a crowd. There are clippings from advertisements, Futurist poems, and newspaper articles, as well as two painted Italian flags and graffiti-like inscriptions of popular slogans supporting the Italian army and king, and condemning Austria.

Instructions from a propeller

Free word painting is a development of Filippo Marinetti's *parole in libertà* — "words in freedom," often translated as "free word poetry." Inspired by the intensity of his experiences as a war correspondent in Libya, Marinetti first described *parole in libertà* as instructions emanating from an airplane propeller. The instructions included the abolition of syntax, punctuation, conjunctions, adverbs, and adjectives. Verbs must be used only in the infinitive form.

These restrictions defined a poetry largely based on conjunctions of nouns intended to directly express things and their physical qualities. For example, a section of Marinetti's first free word poem *Battle of Weight + Smell* reads, "20 meters battalions-ants cavalry-spiders roads-fords general-island couriers-locusts sands-revolution howitzers-grandstands clouds-grates guns-martyrs . . ." [1]

A multi-sensory approach

The Futurists developed multi-sensory approaches to communicate the experiences of physical reality. Instead of description, Futurist poets used onomatopoeia to convey sounds directly. The title of Marinetti's poem *ZANG TUMB TUUUM* is onomatopoeic; the "words" are the successive sounds of an artillery shell firing, exploding, and reverberating.



Figure 5.1.2.3: Filippo Marinetti, Cover of *ZANG TUMB TUUUM*, 1914

In addition to sound, *parole in libertà* appealed directly to vision and instigated a revolution in typography. The cover of *ZANG TUMB TUUUM* uses different weights of type to signify the relative volume of different sounds and layout to convey relationships and physical movement. *ZANG* is on top and angles steeply upward to indicate the firing of the shell. The twice-repeated *TUMB* is lower and heavier to convey the booming impact of the shell and the power of the explosion. The diminishing echoes of the sonic reverberation are represented below by the steep down-sloping *TUUUMBs* that shrink with each repetition.

While Futurist poets added concrete aural and visual dimension to their poems, Futurist artists worked to expand the sensory appeal of their works beyond the visual. Carlo Carrà published a manifesto in which he called for painters to express sounds and smells through the use of shape and color. He claimed that all sounds and smells are dynamic vibrating intensities that provoke mental shapes and colors. This is a reference to a well-known perceptual phenomenon known as synesthesia, which can affect people in varying ways. Some people, for example, see colors when they hear music, while others smell a specific odor when they see a particular color. Synesthesia played an important role in the development of abstract painting in the early 20th century, most famously in the theories of Vasily Kandinsky.

Eliminating boundaries

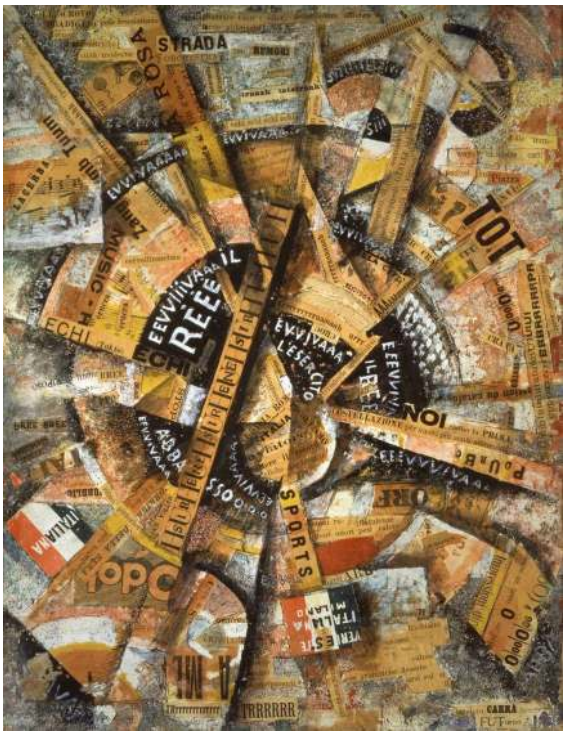


Figure **5.1.2.4**: Carlo Carrà, *Interventionist Demonstration (Patriotic Holiday – Free Word Painting)*, 1914, 38.5 x 30 cm (Mattioli Collection, on long-term loan to Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

The dynamic arrangement of words in *Interventionist Demonstration* creates a vortex of expressive significance that sucks the viewer into the composition. There are no still or stable places in the painting. The expanding, radiating composition, along with the inconsistent orientation of the lines of text, suggests that the sounds are coming at the viewer from all sides, dissolving the traditional boundary between viewer and artwork. This was a key goal of the Futurist painters, who wanted to create the sensation of immediacy and aimed to place the viewer in the center of the artwork.

Eliminating boundaries between the senses and between artistic media was also crucial for the Futurists. Carrà intended his painting to communicate emotion directly and synesthetically by means of color, shape, and composition, as well as by words. In addition to political slogans, most of the collaged words are references to Futurist themes, including the city and its crowds, sports and speed, sounds and music, colors and odors. There are numerous violent-sounding onomatopoeic words as well, including the title of Marinetti's poem *ZANG TUMB TUUUM* pasted in the upper left.

A twirling dancer



Figure **5.1.2.5**: Left: Gino Severini, *Serpentine Dancer*, in *Lacerba* (July 1, 1914), p. 202; Right: Gino Severini, *Sea = Dancer*, 1914, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 11/16 inches (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

Gino Severini's *Serpentine Dancer* uses an approach similar to that of Carrà's *Interventionist Demonstration*. It represents the experience of watching a dancer in a nightclub. The abstract composition combines semi-circular arcs accompanied by acute triangles and stark contrasts of black and white. The forms of the drawing are comparable to Severini's *Sea = Dancer*, painted only a few months earlier.

Reinforcing the equivalencies of words, sounds, and colors, the drawing includes many names of colors (*verde*, *bleu*, *giallo*, *azzurro*), as well as onomatopoeic sounds like TTATTA and SZSX. Words of different sizes are woven through the image, creating repeating patterns, echoing shapes in contrasting tones, and contributing both sound and meaning.

Severini indicated the twirling of the dancer with both repeated arcs and the words *giro rapidissimo* (rapid turn) and *profondita spirale* (deep spiral). *Luce* (light), *calor* (heat), and *odore* (odor) evoke the sensory experience of being in the nightclub. *Piogga di fuoco artificiale* (rain of fireworks), *palla mauser sililo lacerazione* (hissing Mauser pistol shot) and *penetrazione luminosissima szszsz* (luminous penetration) slash through the image in a white triangle that pierces the heart of the image. They remind us that for the Futurists any **mass activity**, including the pleasures of nightclubs and dancing, went hand in hand with a desire to incite violence, riot, and war.

On the battlefield

Painted a year later, Severini's *Cannon in Action* uses similar techniques to communicate the experience of soldiers on the battlefield in World War I. Rather than representing the twirling of a dancer, this composition explodes out from the center in curves and arcs that convey the power and noise of a cannon firing. In keeping with the Futurists' love of machinery, a cannon and armored vehicle dominate the scene with soldiers serving as their faceless accessories. Written words follow the painted forms, and most are informational and descriptive, just as the painting is largely representational rather than abstract. For example, the phrases written in the cloud of smoke behind the cannon are all comments on the horrible smell.



Figure 5.1.2.6: Gino Severini, *Cannon in Action*, 1915, oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm (**Museum Ludwig, Cologne**)

The Futurists' *parole in libertà* and the development of free word painting arose from their desire to break down the divisions between different art forms to communicate feeling directly. Words, sounds, images, shapes, and colors were all used to convey the intensity of experience and bring the viewer into the heart of the action, be it participating in a crowd in a city square, dancing in a nightclub, or joining artillery men on a battlefield.

Notes:

1. Translated in Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 207.

Additional resources:

Read about "words in freedom" at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's *Checklist* blog

Read Carlo Carrà's manifesto, *The Painting of Sounds, Noises, and Odors*

Read Filippo Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature*

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5.1.3: Umberto Boccioni and the Futurist City

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
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Figure **5.1.3.1**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

At almost ten feet wide, Umberto Boccioni's *The City Rises* projects an image of overwhelming power. Huge workhorses surge across the canvas, their abstracted bodies dissolving into the space and light while their harnesses point upward like wings. Surrounding the enormous beasts, straining workmen in dynamic, elongated postures also partly dissolve into the vibrant, swirling brushstrokes that cover the painting's surface. Boccioni has turned a construction site into a symbolic image of the powerful forces underlying the modern city.

Like the hooves of enormous steel horses

The painting contains a striking contradiction. It represents the construction site for a new electric power plant on the outskirts of Milan, Italy's first modern industrial city. In the upper portion of the painting you can see the building under construction, tall smokestacks and, on the left, an electric tram. In the foreground, however, the scene is far from modern in its depiction of the brute power of human and animal labor rather than the power of machines. This contrast between the modern city and the physical labor required to construct it reflects Italy's somewhat belated industrialization in the early 20th century.



Figure **5.1.3.2**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

The **Futurists** were outspoken supporters of Italy's modernization. Led by the poet Filippo Marinetti, they demanded an end to the idolization of Italy's dead past and called for the destruction of museums, libraries, and cultural monuments. They glorified modern technology, electricity, steel, and the speed of automobiles, trains, and airplanes. In addition, they promoted an aggressive masculinity and explicitly rejected feminism.

Boccioni's paintings often seem to directly reflect Marinetti's poetic imagery:

> ***We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke . . . deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses . . .***
>
> *Filippo Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," translated by R. W. Flint, reprinted in Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas (London: Blackwell, 2003), p. 148.*

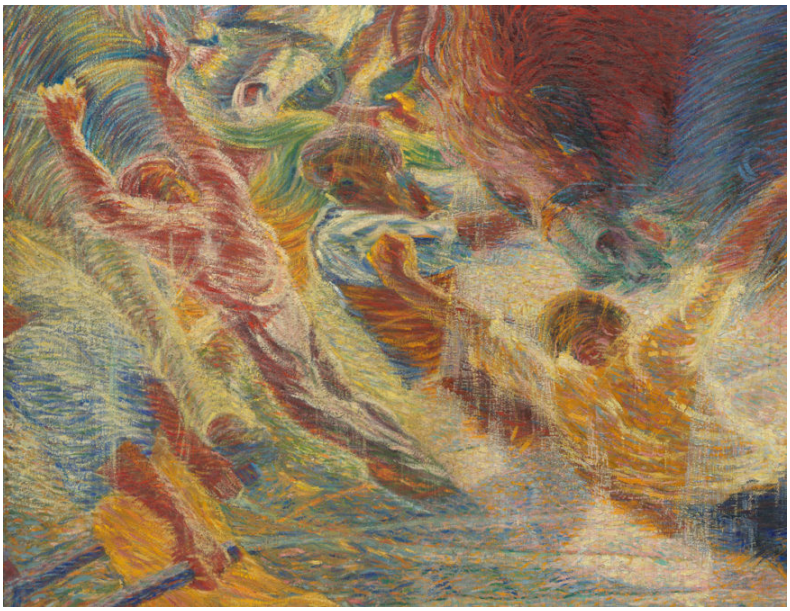


Figure **5.1.3.3**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

Painting universal dynamism

In addition to the roiling forms of the abstracted horses, *The City Rises* conveys the intense energy of the modern city and its workers by using bright color. The paint is applied using a modified divisionist technique (developed by French 19th-century Post-Impressionists, most notably **Georges Seurat**), in which small brushstrokes of complementary colors create a bright, flickering surface. There are no shadows; instead, swirls and rays of white paint overwhelm the figures with glowing light.



Figure **5.1.3.4**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

In keeping with Boccioni's conception of a universal dynamism uniting all things, the flecks of paint suggest molecules of physical matter constantly changing to form new objects and energy. Nothing appears stable as the composition surges upward. The figures create powerful diagonals rising from right to left in the foreground. A second diagonal rises from left to right in the background, where the scene recedes into cloudy, angled vistas of industrial smokestacks.

The power of the masses

The figures in *The City Rises* have no faces and do not represent specific individuals. They are part of the city's crowd, units in a potentially overwhelming force — the new masses of the modern city. The Futurists celebrated the vigor of the urban masses and even tried to incite riot and rebellion by insulting their audiences during aggressive public performances of their poetry and manifestos. We can see this side of the Futurists' interests in another Boccioni painting, *Riot in the Galleria*, made while he was working on *The City Rises*.

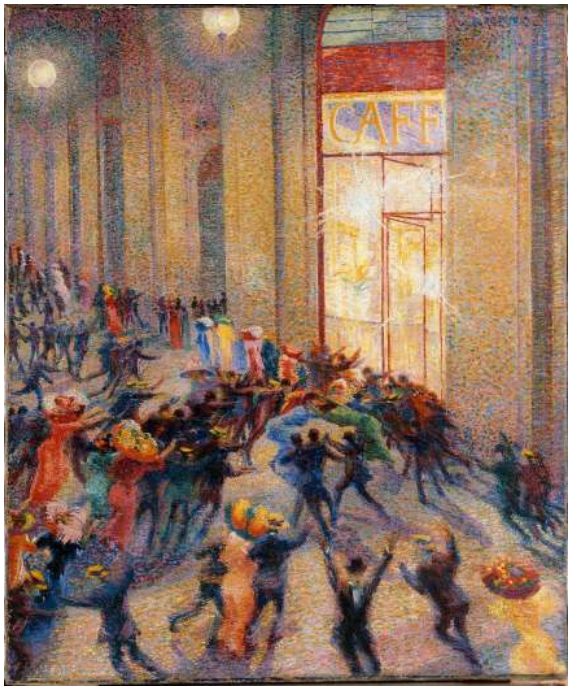


Figure **5.1.3.5**: Umberto Boccioni, *Riot in the Galleria*, 1910, oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm (Pinocoteca di Brera, Milan)

In terms of subject and location, *Riot in the Galleria* is almost the polar opposite of *The City Rises*. Instead of a daytime construction site in the new industrial suburbs, it depicts a nighttime scene in a popular shopping arcade, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, in the heart of Milan's old city. The people, although equally faceless, are well-dressed and implicitly middle-class. The men wear suits and ties, the women are fashionably attired in bright colors and large fancy hats. Bright orbs of electric light glow in the upper half of the painting and illuminate the crowd outside a glass-fronted cafe.

In his "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" Boccioni declared:

> ***We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke . . . deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses . . .***
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> *Filippo Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," translated by R. W. Flint, reprinted in Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas (London: Blackwell, 2003), p. 148.*



Figure **5.1.3.6**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

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Figure **5.1.3.7**: Umberto Boccioni, *The City Rises*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 199 cm × 301 cm (MoMA)

In keeping with Boccioni's conception of a universal dynamism uniting all things, the flecks of paint suggest molecules of physical matter constantly changing to form new objects and energy. Nothing appears stable as the composition surges upward. The figures create powerful diagonals rising from right to left in the foreground. A second diagonal rises from left to right in the background, where the scene recedes into cloudy, angled vistas of industrial smokestacks.

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Figure **5.1.3.8**: Umberto Boccioni, *Riot in the Galleria*, 1910, oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm (Pinocoteca di Brera, Milan)

In terms of subject and location, *Riot in the Galleria* is almost the polar opposite of *The City Rises*. Instead of a daytime construction site in the new industrial suburbs, it depicts a nighttime scene in a popular shopping arcade, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, in the heart of Milan's old city. The people, although equally faceless, are well-dressed and implicitly middle-class. The men wear suits and ties, the women are fashionably attired in bright colors and large fancy hats. Bright orbs of electric light glow in the upper half of the painting and illuminate the crowd outside a glass-fronted cafe.

In his "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" Boccioni declared:

> ***Our renovated consciousness does not permit us to look upon man as the center of universal life. The suffering of a man is of the same interest to us as the suffering of an electric lamp, which with spasmodic starts, shrieks out the most heart-rending expressions of color. The harmony of the lines and folds of modern dress works upon our sensitiveness . . ."***
>
> *Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," Reprinted in Art in Theory 1900-2000, p. 151.*

Riot in the Galleria fully demonstrates Boccioni's claim that light and clothing are as interesting as people.

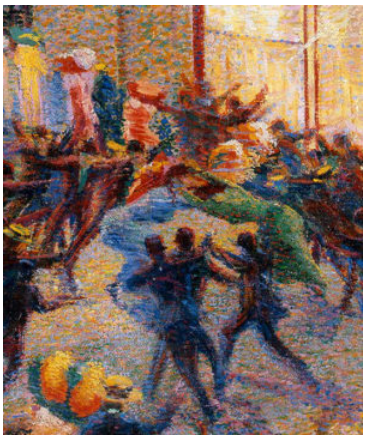


Figure **5.1.3.9**: Umberto Boccioni, *Riot in the Galleria*, detail, 1910, oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm (Pinocoteca di Brera, Milan)

The cause of the riot is unknown. Two women dressed in blue and green fight outside the cafe, while three men struggle together in front of them. A large crowd surges in from the left with their arms raised, while a group of barely individualized figures gestures

behind the fighting women. Figures on the periphery run both towards and away from the central group. The scene is depicted from a safe distance, and we look down at the melee as non-involved spectators.

Although a riot is potentially dangerous, the painting is overwhelmingly cheerful with its bright patterns of divisionist colors. The strong verticals of the arcade's architecture loom over the frenzied crowd in the lower half of the painting, providing a sense of balance, and enhancing our sense of psychological distance.

The scene is exciting without appearing threatening. This rather callous approach to a street brawl reflects the Futurists' conviction that riot, revolution, and war were cleansing; they would sweep away the failures of the past and renew the world.

A shift in style



Figure **5.1.3.10**: Umberto Boccioni, *The Street Enters the House*, 1911, oil on canvas, 100 x 100.6 cm (Sprengel Museum, Hannover)

A slightly later painting of an urban scene, *The Street Enters the House*, represents a major shift in Boccioni's style prompted by his exposure to Cubist techniques during a 1911 visit to Paris. The fractured representation of objects and space in **Salon Cubism** was not only more current than divisionism, it was an effective means to convey the Futurists' modern concepts of space and time.

Like many of the Salon Cubists, the Futurists were influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson as well as by recent scientific discoveries, such as X-rays and Einstein's new physics. They embraced the concepts of **simultaneity** and universal dynamism and sought new ways to depict the vital energy of the universe in painting. Boccioni declared that space no longer existed and that he would paint dynamic sensation itself rather than isolated objects. He also promised to put the spectator in the center of the picture.



Figure **5.1.3.11**: Umberto Boccioni, *The Street Enters the House*, detail, 1911, oil on canvas, 100 x 100.6 cm (Sprengel Museum, Hannover)

The Street Enters the House is a literal depiction of that promise. It represents a woman in the center of the picture watching men constructing a factory from her balcony. Fractured buildings frame the work site in the center, while a kaleidoscopic array of girders, bricks, and figures thrust upward, surrounding and, in places, penetrating the woman's body. She leans somewhat precariously over the dizzying view, and we hover even more insecurely just above her. Confronted by the complexity of the scene and the vibrant colors, we are drawn in to psychologically engage with its urban confusion, a very different effect from the distant vantage point of *Riot in the Galleria*.

Boccioni's desire to place the spectator in the center of the painting reflects his conception of a reality in which time and space are in constant flux, and that he as an artist intuits the vital forces that flow through all things. By depicting the excitement of rioting crowds, the construction of the new city, and the electricity that powered it, he conveyed his sensitivity to the new forms and energies of the modern world.

Additional resources:

Read about Futurism's interest in riots at the Guggenheim Museum's *Checklist* blog

Read more about Umberto Boccioni at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

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5.1.4: Umberto Boccioni, Unique Forms of Continuity in Space

by DR. ROSALIND MCKEVER

Page ID 188246

The Futurists wanted art to break from the Classical and Renaissance styles still dominant in Italy at the start of the Twentieth Century. For some, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* shows a figure striding into the future. Its undulating surfaces seem to transform before our eyes. About fifty years after Charles Darwin introduced the theory of evolution and about thirty years after Nietzsche described his "super-man," Boccioni sculpted a future-man: muscular, dynamic and driven.



Figure **5.1.4.1**: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913 (cast 1931), bronze, 111.2 x 88.5 x 40 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Motion as Form



Figure **5.1.4.2**: Auguste Rodin, *The Walking Man*, 1907, cast made by Fonderie Alexis Rudier in 1913, bronze, 213.5 x 71.7 x 156.5 cm (Musée Rodin, Paris)

The face of the sculpture is abstracted into a cross, suggesting a helmet, an appropriate reference for the war-hungry Futurists. The figure doesn't appear to have arms, though wing-like forms seem to emerge the rippling back. However, these protrusions are not necessarily even a part of the figure itself, since Boccioni sculpted both the figure and its immediate environment. The air displaced by the figure's movement is rendered in forms no different than those of the actual body. See, for example, the flame-like shapes that begin at the calves and show the air swirling away from the body in motion.

This idea of sculpting the environment around a figure is expressed in Boccioni's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture" (1912) and shows the influence of the sculptor Medardo Rosso, an Italian contemporary of Auguste Rodin who worked in Paris (and who was becoming more popular back in Italy in this period thanks to the efforts of sometime-Futurist Ardengo Soffici. Rosso made impressionistic plaster or bronze busts, covered in wax, of people in Paris, in which the figures merge into the space around

them, as seen in his *Impressions of the Boulevard: Woman with a Veil*, 1893. *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* has also been compared to Rodin's armless *Walking Man* of 1907.

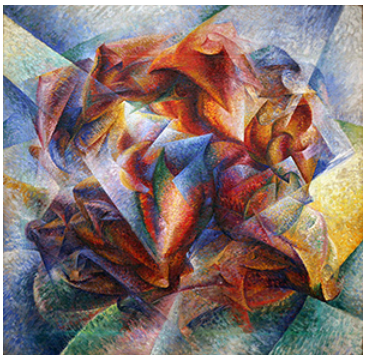


Figure **5.1.4.3**: Umberto Boccioni, *Dynamism of a Soccer Player*, 1913, oil on canvas, 193.2 x 201 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Unique Forms is one of a series of sculptures of striding figures that Boccioni created in 1913. Up until 1912, Boccioni had been a painter, but after visiting Paris and the seeing sculptural innovations like Braque's three-dimensional Cubist experiments in paper, Boccioni became obsessed with sculpture. His striding sculptures continued the theme of human movement seen in his paintings such as *Dynamism of a Soccer Player*, 1913.

Movement was a key element for Boccioni and the other Futurists, as the technology of transportation (cars, bicycles, and advanced trains) allowed people to experience ever greater speeds. The Futurist artists often depicted motorized vehicles and the perceptions they made possible—the blurry, fleeting, fragmentary sight created by this new velocity.

Breaking his Own Rules



Figure **5.1.4.4**: Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (Dinamismo di un Cane al Guinzaglio)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 95.57 x 115.57 x 6.67 cm (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York)

Unlike fellow Futurist Giacomo Balla, who used repeated forms to represent movement, in work such as *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (1912), Boccioni synthesized different positions into one dynamic figure. Although *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* is the most famous Futurist sculpture, there are some aspects of the work that do not fit neatly with the artists' declarations. For example, three years before he made this sculpture, Boccioni and the other Futurist artists had banned the painting of nudes for being hopelessly mired in tradition—and *Unique Forms* is a nude male, albeit one abstracted through exaggerated muscles and possibly shielding its head with a helmet.

Boccioni also breaks rules from his "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture" where he declared that Futurist sculpture should be made of strong, straight lines, "The straight line is the only way to achieve the primitive purity of a new architectonic structure of masses or sculptural zones." Clearly, he had not yet recognized the potential for the dynamic curves so powerfully expressed here. His manifesto also states that sculpture should not be made from a single material or from traditional materials such as marble or bronze.

Bronze or Plaster?



Figure 5.1.4.5: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, plaster (Museu de Arte Contemporânea in São Paulo)

Boccioni produced several mixed media sculptures and the original *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, was, like the majority of his sculptures, made of plaster. The bronze versions we are so familiar with are casts made long after the artist's death in 1916. The original white plaster sculpture, today in São Paulo, looks more transient and delicate than the later bronze casts, and is thus far more fitting for Futurism, since many Futurists claimed to want their works of art destroyed by more innovative artist successors, rather than preserved in a museum.



Figure 5.1.4.6: Maria Angela Cassol (signed M.A.C. on the coin) Twenty Cent Euro coin, 2002 (copyright: Repubblica italiana. Issuing authority: Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze)

Unique Forms appears on the Italian 20-cent Euro coin and is both Futurism's most famous symbol and a reminder that the movement itself was dynamic and did not always follow its own declarations. The Futurists sought to clear away the legacy of art's history so that the future could come more quickly, but *Unique Forms* has often been compared to the ancient Greek *Nike of Samothrace* and Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne*. The Futurists wanted to destroy the museums, but in the end, their work was added to the canon of Italian sculpture.

> ***"Museums: absurd abattoirs for painters and sculptors who ferociously slaughter each other with colour-blows and line-blows along the disputed walls!"***
>
> ***–F.T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," 1909***

Additional Resources:

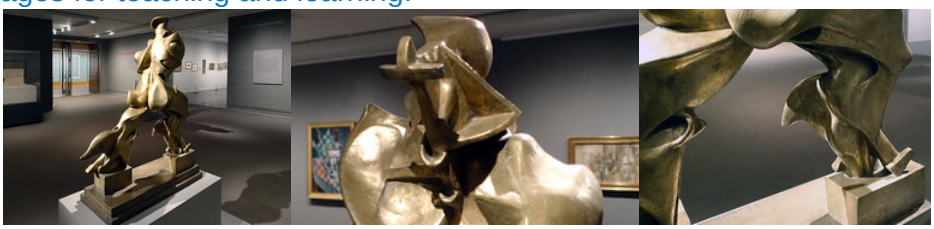
This sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Ester Coen, *Umberto Boccioni* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988)

This sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Medardo Rosso, *Impressions of the Boulevard: Woman with a Veil*, 1893 (Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London)

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5.1.5: Gino Severini, Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188247



Figure **5.1.5.1**: Gino Severini, *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin*, 1912, oil and sequins on canvas, 161.6 x 156.2 cm (MoMA)

Gino Severini's *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin* draws us into the frenzied excitement of a Paris nightclub. Combining a **Cubist** technique of fractured planes with the use of repetition, Severini creates a brilliant kaleidoscope of partially-glimpsed figures in motion. Dominating the center of the painting are two dancing women —one with blond curls on the left, the other with dark hair on the right— and a swirling pink and purple dress. Looping patterns of real sequins decorate the dress, adding to the shimmering play of light in the painting.

Adopting Cubist techniques

The painting's emphasis on dynamism is characteristic of **Italian Futurism**, as is the subject of modern urban life. The Futurists embraced the energy of the modern city, its crowds and electricity. They adopted Cubist techniques to convey the sense of movement in time, while rejecting what they considered the more static and analytic approach of Cubist painters. Whereas in Cubist paintings the use of multiple, fragmentary views of things suggests the viewer is moving around the object, in Futurist paintings it is the scene that is moving around the viewer.



Figure **5.1.5.2**: Georges Braque, *The Clarinet*, 1912, oil and sand on canvas, 36 x 25 3/8" (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

Severini lived in Paris and was friends with many avant-garde painters, including Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. In *Dynamic Hieroglyph* he adopts their recent innovations by including painted words and collaging sequins onto the painting's surface. Severini's painting is, however, markedly different from **Synthetic Cubism** in its subject matter as well as its brilliant colors and decorative qualities. It is closer to the paintings of the **Salon Cubists**, such as Jean Metzinger's *Dancer in a Café*. However, Severini's emphasis on the whirling dynamism of the scene differentiates his Futurist approach from Metzinger's more static and balanced Cubist composition based on an underlying grid.



Figure **5.1.5.3**: Jean Metzinger, *Dancer in a Cafe*, 1912, oil on canvas, 57.5 x 45" (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo)

Like many Salon Cubists, Severini was influenced by the popular philosopher Henri Bergson. *Dynamic Hieroglyph* was painted from memory, and in keeping with Bergson's ideas, it attempts to convey the painter's intuitive vision of reality in which time and space are suffused with memory and sensation. The dancers' movements fragment and fill the painting with energy and traces of their momentary presence. They embody Bergson's concept of *élan vital*, the vital force of the universe uniting all matter.



Figure 5.1.5.4: Gino Severini, *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin*, 1912, oil and sequins on canvas, 161.6 x 156.2 cm (MoMA)

Severini conveys the dancer's movements through the repetition and fragmentation of forms. For example, we see parts of the head of the dancer on the left in three or four different positions as she dances. The swirling movements of the dancer's skirts are depicted as fragments of patterned purple, pink, light blue, and white material appearing in various locations. In addition, abstract curves and angles suggest the changing shapes of the fabric as the dancer moves through space. A bright circle of white dominates the center of the painting, suggesting a spot-lit dance floor and the swirling circular movements of the dancers.



Figure 5.1.5.5: Gino Severini, *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin*, details, 1912, oil and sequins on canvas, 161.6 x 156.2 cm (MoMA)

On the periphery of the dancer's orbit many other figures and objects complete the frenetic scene of a nightclub in full swing. In the lower left corner is a Cubist tabletop still life with martini glasses, over which a woman in a blue dress and black hat stands laughing. In the lower right corner is a mustachioed man wearing a monocle, black suit, tie, and top hat. Directly in front of him is a Cubist rendering of the scroll and tuning pegs of a bass.

Placing the viewer in the center

In depicting the upper portion of a bass projecting into the painting Severini was copying a device frequently used by two earlier innovative painters of dancers and Paris nightlife, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Edgar Degas.



Figure 5.1.5.6: Left: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril*, lithograph on paper, 50 13/16 x 36 13/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); Right: Edgar Degas, *The Rehearsal of the Ballet Onstage*, c. 1874, oil on paper, 21 3/8 x 28 3/4" (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In their works the cropped tops of musical instruments were intended to give the viewer a sense of being present in the audience and looking over the musicians at the stage. Severini's *Dynamic Hieroglyph*, in keeping with the Futurists' goal of placing the viewer in the center of the painting, attempts to provide an even more intense sensation of presence and immediacy through its fractured forms, brilliant colors, and glittering sequins.

Streamers and national flags are draped across the upper portion of *Dynamic Hieroglyph*, intertwining with suggestions of abstracted figures and light fixtures. Among these chaotic forms several enigmatic, but easily legible, figures appear: a black cat head, a North African man riding a camel, and a nude woman riding a pair of scissors. These figures may refer to cabaret acts or themed costume parties that were often held in the fashionable nightclub.



Figure 5.1.5.7: Gino Severini, *Dynamic Hieroglyph of the Bal Tabarin*, detail, 1912, oil and sequins on canvas, 161.6 x 156.2 cm (MoMA)

Severini also included a number of words in the painting, a device he adopted from Picasso's and Braque's Cubism. The two most prominent words, "polka" and "valse" (waltz), directly refer to the painting's subject, while others have less obvious relevance, and may refer to Severini's personal experiences and memories.



Figure **5.1.5.8**: Umberto Boccioni, *The Laugh*, 1911, oil on canvas, 110.2 x 145.4 cm (MoMA)

Paris nightlife was an ideal subject to display the Futurists' fascination with the energy of modern urban crowds and the novel effects of electric lighting. Umberto Boccioni's *The Laugh* depicts a crowded club splintered into shards of garish color under the projecting rays of electric lights. A smiling woman, usually identified as a *cocotte* or fashionable prostitute, wears a large red hat and dominates the scene in the upper left corner.

In the center of the painting we see the huge yellow feather and elaborate hat of another woman. The somewhat less visible faces of three men surround the women, and we can also see fragments of other figures, hands, stemmed glassware, and fruit in the kaleidoscope of colorful planes. Receding into the background are more tables with glasses, and suggestions of figures enjoying themselves under the glowing light bulbs.



Figure **5.1.5.9**: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *At the Moulin Rouge*, 1893-95, oil on canvas, 123 x 141 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Severini's *Bal Tabarin* and Boccioni's *The Laugh* are Futurist updates of Toulouse-Lautrec's ***At the Moulin Rouge***, which also depicts the decadent pleasures of Paris nightclubs. The compositions of all three are designed to make the viewer feel as if they are present in the scene, but Toulouse-Lautrec's is comparatively distanced and reserved. Severini and Boccioni use brilliant colors, abstraction, fragmentation and repetition of forms to create a vibrant whirling energy that seems to fully surround the viewer and encourage us to participate in the contagious hilarity of the crowded nightclub.

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5.1.6: Giacomo Balla, Street Light

by DR. JENNIFER BETHKE

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Figure **5.1.6.1**: Giacomo Balla, *Street Light*, c. 1910-11 (dated 1909), oil on canvas, 174.7 x 114.7 cm (**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**)

If you were an artist preparing to paint a picture, depicting a lamp post might not be your first choice of subject matter. It certainly wouldn't have been the go-to subject for most painters in the early twentieth century: a human figure, a landscape, or a still life would have been more standard choices. But in 1910 or 1911, the Futurist painter Giacomo Balla painted a large canvas displaying a huge electric street light, on a canvas that is over five feet tall, with a diminutive moon in the corner. Why would he have made such a choice?

Loving the future, hating the past

As a member of the **Italian Futurist movement**, Balla was passionately invested in making art that reflected "the future": that is, the increasingly industrialized and technological world of the early twentieth century. Futurism swept onto the European art scene in 1909, when an Italian poet named Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" in newspapers in Italy and France. In it, he declared that reverence for history and past artistic traditions needed to be abandoned in order to move society and art decisively into the modern age. In embracing modernity and violently dismissing Italy's honored artistic heritage ("Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!" he wrote), Marinetti initiated one of the most bombastic and aggressive avant-garde movements of his time. The writer prized new technology rather than tradition, and sought to create a climate of violent revolution rather than one of comfortable stability. The artists who gathered around him aimed to make art that would showcase modern mechanical developments like airplanes and automobiles, especially because they could provide the viewer with new experiences like the speed of these new modes of transport.

Balla's *Street Light*, in this sense, is a sort of demonstration piece for the Futurist movement. Balla has rejected traditional subject matter in this painting, and instead has painted an object that is forthrightly modern and technological: one of the new, electric street lamps that were just being installed at this time in Rome, where Balla lived. The introduction of electrified city lighting must have been an exciting sign of technological advancement for the Futurists, and also a powerful symbol of how the ancient city of Rome was finally abandoning its past and entering the modern age.

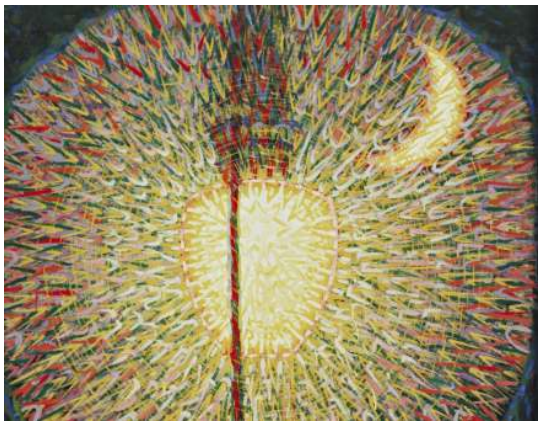


Figure **5.1.6.2**: Giacomo Balla, *Street Light* (detail), c. 1910-11 (dated on painting 1909), oil on canvas, 174.7 x 114.7 cm (**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**)

The small crescent moon Balla included in his painting is also an illustration of Futurist ideas. Just as the street light stands for the future in the picture, the small moon stands for the past. In part Balla means this in a literal sense. In the past people relied on the moon to see at night; in modern times we rely on electricity. But Balla is also alluding to a number of Marinetti's writings in which the moon was used as a symbol for the artistic traditionalism that the Futurists wanted to destroy. Summed up in his slogan "Let's kill the moonlight!" Marinetti attacked the gentle light of the moon and its long association with traditional romance and sentimentality. He condemned past generations of artists and poets as "lovers of the moon," and called for a more modern and aggressive symbol—like a racing car or a train—to take its place. Balla's *Street Light*, which overpowers the moon's dim light, serves as a visual equivalent to these ideas.



Figure **5.1.6.3**: Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte – 1884*, 1884-86, oil on canvas, 207.5 x 308.1 cm (**The Art Institute of Chicago**)

Balla's style

Balla was one of the older members of the Futurist movement, and he had already established a career as a painter by 1909 when Futurism was founded. Before joining the Futurists, Balla had been working in one of the styles popular in late nineteenth-century Europe, which art historians often term "**post-Impressionism**." In Italy one of the most prominent post-Impressionist styles was "Divisionism," so named because it was based on dividing colors into their constituent parts on the canvas and letting brushstrokes remain visible instead of smoothly blending them together (Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte*, above, is one of the best-known examples of Divisionism). Since *Street Light* was painted early in the Futurist movement, Balla's style here is still essentially Divisionist in its approach. Balla uses obvious, bold brushstrokes in a repeated V-pattern to illustrate the light and energy radiating from the lamp. The saturated colors of *Street Light*—from the almost blinding white and yellow at the center of the lamp, to the cooler hues further from the light's bulb—are also typically Divisionist.



Figure **5.1.6.4**: Giacomo Balla, Street Light (detail), c. 1910-11 (dated on painting 1909), oil on canvas, 174.7 x 114.7 cm (**The Museum of Modern Art, New York**)

Street Light seems to have been enthusiastically received by Balla's fellow painters when it was completed. In a group manifesto written in 1910, titled "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto," the work is showcased as a superb example of Futurist subject and style: the group exalts the "electric lamp, which, with spasmodic starts, shrieks out the most heartrending expressions of color."



Figure **5.1.6.5**: Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912, oil on canvas, 89.8 x 109.8 cm (**Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York**)

Despite these claims, Balla and the other Futurist painters would soon abandon the Divisionist style, since it ultimately seemed too tied to past generations to be truly "of the future." After the Futurists visited Paris together in 1911, several of them adopted aspects of **Cubism**, though they altered the technique to focus more clearly on Futurist concerns like modern technology, movement, and speed. Balla, however, began to earnestly explore how one might paint movement in other ways. At first, in a series of paintings in 1912, he showed movement by painting many small increments of time in a series, as in *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (above). Later, in 1912 and into 1913, Balla entered an exploratory abstract phase, painting the movement of cars driving, birds in flight, and even the movement of light itself, via geometric shapes, dynamic lines, and abstract patterns of color. These paintings, such as *Abstract Speed* (below), put Balla at the forefront of European artists who were pioneering total abstraction in their work. *Street Light*, painted just a few years before these experiments, was a visual manifesto that ultimately helped drive the Futurist movement in these new directions.



Figure **5.1.6.6**: Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed — The Car has Passed*, 1913, oil on canvas, 50.2 x 65.4 cm (**Tate, London**)

Additional Resources:

This painting at The Museum of Modern Art

Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Balla's *Abstract Speed* at Tate

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5.1.7: Carlo Carrà, Funeral of the Anarchist Galli

by DR. ROSALIND MCKEVER

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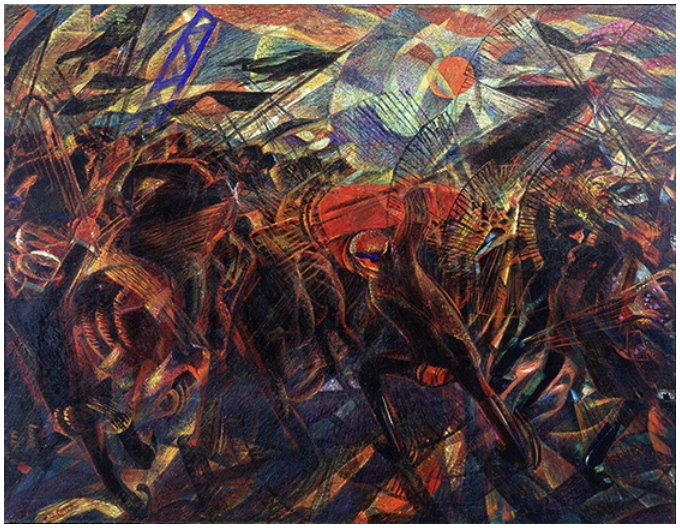


Figure **5.1.7.1**: Carlo Carrà, *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli (I funerali del anarchico Galli)*, 1910-11, oil on canvas, 198.7 x 259.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

"We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure and by riot" declared F.T. Marinetti in his 'Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909). Such crowds were increasingly common in the industrial cities of northern Italy, such as Milan, where the Futurists were based.

In this painting Carlo Carrà commemorates the death of Angelo Galli during a strike in Milan and the subsequent funerary parade to the cemetery, which erupted into violence between anarchists and the police. At the center of the canvas, Galli's red coffin is held precariously aloft, surrounded by a chaotic explosion of figures clad in anarchist black, illuminated and dissected by light emanating both from the coffin and the sun.



Figure **5.1.7.2**:Detail with coffin, Carlo Carrà, *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli (I funerali del anarchico Galli)*, 1910-11, oil on canvas, 198.7 x 259.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Futurism's anarchist roots

Carrà lived in Milan and was involved with anarchist groups; he was at the funeral and recalled the event in his memoirs *La mia vita* (1945):

> ***I found myself unwillingly in the centre of it, before me I saw the coffin, covered in red carnations, sway dangerously on the shoulders of the pallbearers; I saw horses go mad, sticks and lances clash, it seemed to me that the corpse could have fallen to the ground***

> ***at any moment and the horses would have trampled it. Deeply struck, as soon as I got home I did a drawing of what I had seen.***

Carrà's autobiography associated the funeral with the earlier 1904 strikes which had gained a mythological status in the history of Italian politics, but in fact the event took place two years later during a smaller strike, as chronicled in the *Corriere della Sera* on May 14, 1906. Writing his memoirs many years later—in 1945, as Fascism fell—Carrà may have been keen to associate himself with an important moment in Italian anarchism.

A Cubist redesign



Figure **5.1.7.3**: Carlo Carrà, *Study for Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*, pastel on paper, 58 x 87 cm (private collection, Milan)

The preparatory drawing for *Funeral* uses one-point perspective and combines detail and dynamism in its depiction of the scene. When Carrà began working on the painting in 1910, it may have originally looked similar to this drawing, but in 1911 the Futurist artists went on their first trip to Paris and saw examples of Picasso's Cubism; upon returning Carrà changed his canvas to the fractured perspective we see in the painting today.

Nevertheless, the Futurists were keen to emphasize that their abstraction was quite different from that of the Cubists, stressing their dynamism as opposed to static analytical Cubism. In 'The Exhibitors to the Public,' the manifesto the Futurists published in the catalogue of their first exhibition in Paris in 1912, they wrote this statement, possibly referring to this picture:

> ***If we paint the phases of a riot, the crowd bustling with uplifted fists and the noisy onslaughts of the cavalry are translated upon the canvas in sheaves of lines corresponding with all the conflicting forces, following the general law of violence of the picture.***

Carrà's redesign also brought the spectator closer to the action, in line with the Futurists' desire to put the spectator "at the center of the picture," a goal expressed in 'Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto' (1910). The bright dabs of paint on the surface of Carrà's picture, rarely apparent in reproductions, also show Futurism's debt to the Italian Divisionist painters who preceded them.



Figure **5.1.7.4**: Top of canvas detail, Carlo Carrà, *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli (I funerali del anarchico Galli)*, 1910-11, oil on canvas, 198.7 x 259.1 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

This interest in the direct relationship between the viewer and the painting is especially apparent when *Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* is compared with Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo's *Fourth Estate (Il Quarto Stato)* (1898-1901), which has a similar subject.



Figure **5.1.7.5**: Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, *The Fourth Estate (Il Quarto Stato)*, 1898-1901, oil on canvas, 560 x 283 cm (Museo del Novecento, Milan)

A historic battle

Despite its formal novelty, *Funeral* is unusual for Futurism because its subject and grand scale make it essentially a history painting. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the first director of the Museum of Modern Art, wrote just a year after the museum purchased the painting, "fundamentally, in its main lines and masses Carrà's *Funeral* is as classically organized as a fifteenth-century battle piece by Paolo Uccello." (Twentieth Century Italian Art, 1949).



Figure **5.1.7.6**: Paolo Uccello, *Battle of San Romano*, c. 1435–1455, tempera on wood, 182 × 320 cm (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence)

After moving away from Futurism in 1916, Carrà became very interested in Uccello, writing a long article mentioning *The Battle of San Romano* in the Uffizi, one of three canvases of this battle by Uccello. Carrà could have been familiar with the other two versions before painting *Funeral* as he visited both the Louvre and the National Gallery in 1899-1900. The clash between the anarchists and the police is compositionally closest to the Uffizi version; the dominance of black and red recalls the Louvre version; and the melee of flag poles, lances and cranes jutting into the sky is present in all three.

Carrà's painting has become an emblem of Futurism, both for its violent subject and formal novelty. Its relationships with anarchist politics, Cubism and battle paintings remind us of the diverse ideas circulating in early twentieth-century Europe.

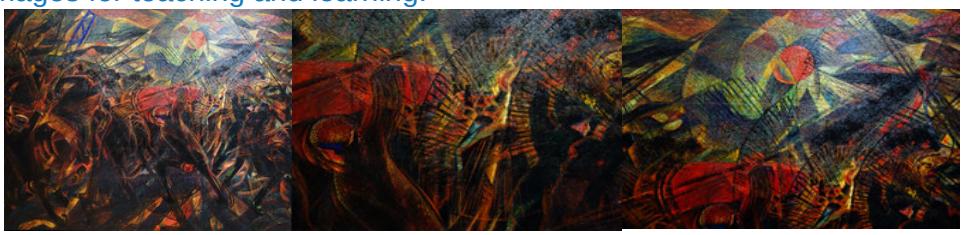
Additional resources:

This painting at MoMA

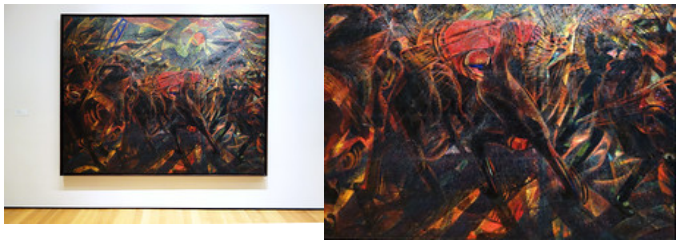
F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), read by Charles Bernstein

Carlo Carrà Wikipedia entry

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5.1.8: Raymond Duchamp-Villon, Horse

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID
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Video 5.1.8.1: Raymond Duchamp-Villon, *Horse*, 1914, bronze, 39-3/8 x 24 x 36 inches (99 x 61 x 91.4 cm) (Art Institute of Chicago)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

5.2: Metaphysical Art

5.2.1: Giorgio de Chirico, The Soothsayer's Recompense

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5.2.1: Giorgio de Chirico, The Soothsayer's Recompense

by **DR. SOPHIA MAXINE FARMER**

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Figure **5.2.1.1**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, 1913, oil on canvas, 135.6 × 180 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Soothsayer's Recompense* presents a desolate *piazza* (city square) occupied by only a statue. In the background a train, barely visible behind a brick wall, arrives at a station. An arch frames several palm trees rising from behind the same wall. An evening sky renders the scene full of long shadows, sharp contrasts between light and dark, and sickly colors. The large-scale painting presents a subtly disquieting space that sparks many questions. Why does a statue of a woman languish in the empty space? What is the meaning of this puzzling work?

Although*The Soothsayer's Recompense* remains open to interpretation, the painting contains elements that allude to the artist's life, to popular myth, and to his interpretation of the philosophy of metaphysics. *The Soothsayer's Recompense* was painted in 1913, during the artist's famed Metaphysical period (1910–1919).



Figure 5.2.1.2: *Sleeping Ariadne*, Roman copy after a Pergamon school original, early 2nd century B.C.E., Phrygian marble (Vatican Museums) (photo: Carole Raddato, CC BY-SA 2.0)



Figure 5.2.1.3: *Sleeping Ariadne*, 2nd century C.E., marble, 2.26 x 1.29 x 1.03 m with significant 16th century restorations (Uffizi, Florence)

Classical mythology and personal symbolism

The classical statue languishing in the *piazza* is a painted representation of the mythological figure of Ariadne. More specifically, de Chirico's rendering is based on his own viewing of multiple Roman copies of a Hellenistic Greek sculpture known as the *Sleeping Ariadne* statue. De Chirico combines different elements from versions of the sculpture that he saw at the Vatican Museums

in Rome, the Uffizi Galleries in Florence, and the Louvre Museum in Paris. One of the most renowned sculptures of antiquity, *Sleeping Ariadne* is a symbol of the Greco-Roman past.

In Greek mythology, Ariadne helped the Athenian hero Theseus to escape the Labyrinth on the Island of Crete after he slew the Minotaur. Afterwards, abandoned by Theseus, she slept on the shore waiting for love and rescue. While the conclusion to her story varies depending on the source, her desertion and subsequent melancholy became a popular source for both poetic and visual interpretation. In *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, de Chirico emphasizes the statue's despondence and isolation by taking her out of the museum and positioning her in the empty *piazza*. Moreover, the sculpture is significantly altered in form. Elongated and repositioned on a stark square slab, de Chirico's Ariadne appears to sink into the stone base beneath her. The statue's body is repositioned from reclining partially upright to lying down with both breasts exposed. Yet her head remains at the same cocked angle, framed by both her arms.

In many ways the subtle alterations of the *Sleeping Ariadne* statue reflect the personal significance that the Ariadne myth acquired for de Chirico during the 1910s. Born in Greece to Italian parents, the artist moved to Munich in 1905 where he became interested in the work of German philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer. De Chirico then relocated to Milan, Florence, and eventually Paris in 1911. While in Paris, de Chirico expressed his homesickness for Greece and Mediterranean culture in his Metaphysical Paintings. While in Paris, de Chirico expressed his homesickness for Greece and Mediterranean culture in letters to his family. Some critics have observed resonances of this feeling of isolation in the artist's Metaphysical Paintings. De Chirico's identification with the Ariadne myth communicates not only a shared sense of solitude, but also offers a dreamy escape into the classical past and a retreat into de Chirico's memories of his childhood in Greece.



Figure **5.2.1.4**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Transformed Dream*, 1913, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 151.8 cm (St. Louis Art Museum)

The personal nature of de Chirico's painting is further revealed through the inclusion of the two palm trees. These trees are likely a reference to de Chirico's Grecian childhood where he grew up surrounded by palms. Yet some scholars believe the significance of these trees to be more complex. During the early 1910s de Chirico introduced French colonial products into his paintings. Thanks to the expansive trade network established between France and its colonies in Africa and the Americas, Parisians enjoyed exotic vegetation and foods not readily accessible to much of Europe. De Chirico saw these imports for the first time in Paris and it was not long before bananas, pineapples, foreign palm varietals, and other overseas goods appeared in the artist's paintings of the same period.

Between past and present

In *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, Ariadne lies between wakefulness and sleep, between past and present. Her still, delicately draped classical form is in stark contrast to the unadorned *piazza* and the locomotive, a symbol of technological advancement that embodied the velocity of modernity (the speed of change driven by industrialization). The relationship between the contrasting motifs of antiquity and modernity, however, is not direct, the train is distant and the wall conceals most of it from view. Will the

train stop at the station behind Ariadne? As a symbol of modernity, does the train, in some way, come to rescue the suffering Ariadne, bringing her into modern era?



Figure 5.2.1.5: Clock and train (detail), Giorgio de Chirico, *The Soothsayer's Recompense*, 1913, oil on canvas, 135.6 × 180 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

The artist imbues the scene of the darkening *piazza* with a sense of foreboding despite the station's clock which reads just a few minutes before two. The time of day does not line up with the sickly and darkening sky or elongated shadows. De Chirico referred to his use of exaggerated lighting as the melancholy of the beautiful autumn afternoons that he witnessed in Italian *piazze* in Milan, Florence, and especially Turin. With these elements de Chirico hints at the construct of time as a philosophical concept. Is it two o'clock or later? Does the clock keep time or defy it? Either way, it adds another element of suspense, surely something will happen once the clock strikes two.

Visualizing metaphysics

The desolate square in *The Soothsayer's Recompense* is full of stark forms that simultaneously call to mind the simplicity of modernist design (clean lines free from ornament) and the motifs of classical architecture such as the roman arch. But this is not an actual *piazza*. Rather, this space utilizes architectural forms to frame Ariadne, the palm trees, the train, and the clock—uniting their disconnected symbolism within a tangible space. The combination of these forms is an attempt to visualize metaphysics—a branch of philosophy that considers what it means to transcend the physical. Metaphysics deals with abstract concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time, and space. This philosophy is the basis for Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical works. Shying away from abstraction, de Chirico and other Metaphysical artists employed readable signs and symbols that are used in unexpected ways. *The Soothsayer's Recompense* does not relay all the complexities of Metaphysics but rather encourages the viewer to reflect on the abstract concepts explored in this branch of philosophy.



Figure **5.2.1.6**: Giorgio de Chirico, *Ariadne*, 1913, oil and graphite on canvas, 135.3 × 180.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The Soothsayer's Recompense and de Chirico's other works of Metaphysical Painting such as *Ariadne*, *The Disquieting Muses*, and *The Song of Love* share visual similarities with the works of French Surrealism. Although both Surrealist and Metaphysical paintings use unexpected juxtapositions, Surrealist works attempt to visualize or activate the unconscious mind, whereas de Chirico here uses philosophy. Moreover, Metaphysical painting predates the founding of Surrealism by nearly a decade, and de Chirico did not wish to be labeled a Surrealist even as he became celebrated in Parisian circles as the "Father of Surrealism." While the works of these two artistic movements appear visually similar, the aims of Metaphysical Painting are entirely divorced from the Freudian-inspired works of Surrealism.

Afterlives and copies

The Soothsayer's Recompense is not the only painting by Giorgio de Chirico to feature Ariadne in a desolate *piazza*, merely the first of its kind. In the years that followed, the artist painted many variations of this scene in the Metaphysical style, often with additional and interchangeable symbols including towers, fountains, and the occasional shadowy or indefinite figure. The reasons behind de Chirico's reuse of motifs, spaces, and even whole paintings is complex, but it is clear that the elements of *The Soothsayer's Recompense* had personal importance for the artist.

Additional resources:

Paolo Baldacci and Giorgio de Chirico. *De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888–1919*, 1st North American Edition (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997)

Emily Braun, eds. *Giorgio de Chirico and America* (New York: Hunter College of the City University of New York), 1996

Sophia Maxine Farmer, "De Chirico in New York: a Guide for Museumgoers," *La Voce di New York* (June, 2017)

Sophia Maxine Farmer, "The Trouble with De Chirico: *Verifalsi* and the Study of Backdated Paintings." *The Brooklyn Rail* (May, 2017)

Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico

Taylor, Michael R., and Guigone Rolland, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Myth of Ariadne* (London: Merrell, 2002)

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: British art and literature

6.1: British Art and Literature During WWI, The Old Guitarist, and the question of beauty

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6.1: British Art and Literature During WWI, The Old Guitarist, and the question of beauty

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video 6.1.1: Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, late 1903 – early 1904, oil on panel, 122.9 × 82.6 cm (Art Institute of Chicago, © 2018 Estate of Pablo Picasso)

Additional resources

This painting at the Art Institute of Chicago

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Dada + Surrealism

These two movements reconceptualized what art could be, impacting art making through today.

c. 1913 - 1939

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    - 7.2.1.10: Surrealism and Women
    - 7.2.1.11: A brief guide to Egyptian Surrealism
  - 7.2.2: Man Ray, The Gift
  - 7.2.3: René Magritte, The Treachery of Images (Ceci n’est pas une pipe)
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7.2.4.2: Metamorphosis of Narcissus
7.2.5: Alberto Giacometti, The Palace at 4 a.m.
7.2.6: Meret Oppenheim, Object (Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

7.1: Dada

This international "anti-movement" of radical young artists claimed that virtually anything could be art.

c. 1913 - 1920

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7.1.1.1: Introduction to Dada

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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Figure **7.1.1.1.1**: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (original), photographed by Alfred Stieglitz in 1917 after its rejection by the Society of Independent Artists

Art as provocation

When you look at **Marcel Duchamp's** *Fountain*, a factory-produced urinal he submitted as a sculpture to the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, you might wonder just why this work of art has such a prominent place in art history books.

You would not be alone in asking this question. In fact, from the moment Duchamp purchased the urinal, flipped it on its side, signed it with a pseudonym (the false name of R. Mutt), and attempted to display it as art, the piece has generated controversy. This was the artist's intention all along—to puzzle, amuse, and provoke his viewers.



Figure **7.1.1.1.2**: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (reproduction), 1917/1964, glazed ceramic with black paint (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Fountain was submitted to the Society of Independent Artists, one of the first venues for experimental art in the United States. It is a new form of art Duchamp called the "readymade"— a mass-produced or found object that the artist transformed into art by the operation of selection and naming. The readymades challenged the very idea of artistic production, and what constitutes art in a gallery or museum. Duchamp provoked his viewers—testing the the exhibition organizers' liberal claim to accept all works with "no judge, no prize" without the conservative bias that made it difficult to exhibit modern art in most museums and galleries. Duchamp's *Fountain* did more than test the validity of this claim: it prompted questions about what we mean by art altogether—and who gets to decide what art is.

A world of questions

Duchamp's provocation characterized not only his art, but also the short-lived, enigmatic, and incredibly diverse transnational group of artists who constituted a movement known as Dada. These artists were so diverse that they could hardly be called a coherent group, and they themselves rejected the whole idea of an art movement. Instead, they proclaimed themselves an anti-movement in various journals, manifestos, poems, performances, and what would come to be known as artistic "gestures" such as Duchamp's submission of *Fountain.*

Dada artists worked in a wide range of media, frequently using irreverent humor and wordplay to examine relationships between art and language and voice opposition to outdated and destructive social customs. Although it was a fleeting phenomenon, lasting only from about 1914-1918 (and coinciding with WWI), Dada succeeded in irrevocably changing the way we view art, opening it up to a variety of experimental media, themes, and practices that still inform art today. Duchamp's idea of the readymade has been one of the most important legacies of Dada.

Dada readymades

In a 1936 essay titled "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the German philosopher and cultural theorist, Walter Benjamin, proclaimed that the industrial age had changed everything about the way we view art. He believed that new technologies for mass production and media (such as photography) would invalidate the remnants of classical artistic traditions that were still being promoted by institutions such as art academies and museums.



Figure **7.1.1.1.3**: Marcel Duchamp, left: *Bicycle Wheel*, original 1913, reproduction 1964, wheel and painted wood, 64.8 x 59.7 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art) (photo: **Stefan Powell**, CC BY 2.0); right: *Bottle Rack*, original 1914, reproduction 1963/1976, galvanized iron, 57 x 36.5 x 36.5 cm (Moderna Museet, Stockholm) (photo: **Hans Olofsson**, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Duchamp's idea of the **readymade**, which he began exploring with works such as *Bicycle Wheel* and *Bottle Rack* as early as 1913, confronted these issues head on—subjecting the idea of art to intense scrutiny.



Figure **7.1.1.1.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912, oil and oilcloth on canvas framed with rope, 29 x 37 cm (Musée Picasso, Paris)

Although Duchamp coined the term "readymade" and was the first to show mass produced objects as art, he drew inspiration from Braque, **Picasso**, and the other **Cubists** then working in Paris, who had already begun incorporating everyday items from mass culture (such as newspaper and wallpaper) into their abstracted collages.

International collaboration

Sharing and adapting characterized the key approaches of Dada artists, and Duchamp's use of articles from everyday life caught on among the various Dada collectives, though each used the readymade in ways that reflected their own group's specific artistic concerns.

Art historian Leah Dickerman has demonstrated that Dada can best be understood by looking at its distinct manifestations in six urban centers. The Dada movement officially began in Zurich, a city in politically neutral Switzerland where many artists and intellectuals fled during World War I. From there, the movement radiated outward to the other groups in Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, and Paris—each of which had members in communication with the other groups.

Zurich Dada



Figure **7.1.1.1.5**: Hugo Ball performing at the Cabaret Voltaire, 1916

Beginning in 1916, Zurich Dada centered around the Cabaret Voltaire, which provided a creative haven for exiled artists and others to explore new media and performance while critiquing what they saw as the predominant "rational" culture that led to the irrational horrors of the war. Members of this group included Hugo Ball (German), Emmy Hennings (German), Hans (also known as Jean) Arp (from Alsace, a contested territory between France and Germany), Sophie Taeuber (later to become Sophie Taeuber Arp, Swiss), and Tristan Tzara (Romanian). It was their raucous, irreverent, and absurd performances ranging from sound poetry to dances in costumes modeled after Native American and other non-European ritual garments, that gained the attention of the avant-garde art world. In addition to their collaborative art practices, exhibitions, and performances, the artists in Zurich published a journal and other graphic materials to spread their ideas.

Taeuber and Arp



Figure **7.1.1.1.6**: Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Tête Dada (Dada Head)*, 1920, wood and paint, 29.43 cm high (Centre Pompidou, Paris)

Sophie Taeuber produced an incredible collection of marionettes and worked in media such as textiles and wood, which had traditionally been relegated to the category of "craft" (ostensibly a "low" art associated with "women's work") by European

academic art institutions. Hans/Jean Arp moved away from his previous interest in **German Expressionism** to develop what he called “chance collages,” in which it is said that he tossed torn or cut paper squares onto a larger sheet of paper on the floor and then glued them in whatever formation they landed. Taeuber and Arp also produced abstract wooden sculptures, many of which resembled organic forms or, alternatively, mechanical forms such as mannequin heads.

In works such as these, Zurich Dada demonstrated a skeptical attitude toward rationality and intention, found strategies to explore abstraction, and displaced the artist’s hand (that is, the direct connection to the work of art that was the basis of the “aura” that Benjamin associated with traditional artworks in museums and galleries). Instead of the specialized materials of fine art such as oil paint and marble, these artists favored mass media imagery and everyday commercial materials such as paper. They sought to integrate art and life more closely in order to critique the effects that modern industrialization—factory labor, mass production, and rapid urbanization—had wrought on society. These industrial advances raised the standard of living for many, but had a devastating impact on the battlefield where millions died due to poison gas and other types of newly efficient weapons.

Berlin Dada

Dada arrived in Germany in 1917 when Richard Huelsenbeck, a German poet who had spent time at the Café Voltaire, brought the ideas he encountered in Zurich to Berlin. Here, Dada became even more overtly political. Using the readymade, new photographic technologies, and elements from everyday life, including mass media imagery, Huelsenbeck and his collaborators critiqued modern bourgeois society and the politics that had led to the First World War.

Berlin Dadaists embraced the tension and images of violence that characterized Germany during and after the war, using absurdity to draw attention to the physical, psychological, and social trauma it produced. Employing strategies ranging from a Cubo-**Futurist** rendering of form to mixed-media assemblage, they satirized the immorality and corruption of the social elite, including cultural institutions such as museums. Many of these works were featured alongside manifestoes and other textual works in Dada journals.



Figure **7.1.1.1.7**: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919-1920, photomontage and collage with watercolor, 114 x 90 cm (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie)

During the Weimar Republic, artists such as **Hannah Höch** produced collages using imagery from magazines and other mass media to provoke the viewer to critically evaluate and challenge cultural norms.

One of the most transformative Berlin Dada practices—one that continues to inform contemporary art today—was the invention of mixed media installations. This began in earnest with the First International Dada Fair in 1920, which featured an assortment of paintings, posters, photographs, readymades, and two- and three-dimensional mixed media art.



Figure 7.1.1.1.8: First International Dada Fair, Galerie Otto Burchard, Berlin, 1920 (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)



Figure 7.1.1.1.9: John Heartfield, *Der Sinn des Hitlergrusses: Kleiner Mann bittet um grosse Gaben (The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts)*, 1932 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

In Berlin, artists such as John Heartfield and George Grosz, political agitators who had anglicized their names in protest of overzealous German nationalism, continued their Dada cultural interrogations into the 1930s to combat the rise of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party. Because Heartfield, Grosz, and other artists involved in Berlin Dada embraced Communism as the solution to fight fascism, they combined Dada strategies with the radical agitprop (agitational propaganda) that had been used to mobilize public opinion against traditional bourgeois society during the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union. Heartfield is best known for his use of photomontage. In the hands of Heartfield and other Dadaists, mainstream advertising, high society publicity, and fascist propaganda was turned on its head, providing readers with humorous, yet sobering exposés.



Figure **7.1.1.1.10**: Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, Hannover, 1933

Although a spirit of collaboration characterized Dada in all its manifestations, Hannover Dada is best known for the collages and three-dimensional assemblages of one artist: Kurt Schwitters. Labeling his art "*Merz*" (a term he extracted from the word *Kommerz*, German for "commerce"), his art reflected a desire to explore the connections between human experience, memory, and objects in the world—particularly discarded scraps of newspaper, movie tickets, or other scrapped consumer goods. Schwitters gave these cast-off everyday objects new life in his collages that retained a dialogue with painting, formal abstraction, and sculpture.

This approach is particularly visible in his *Merzbau*, a project that he worked on for years in his Hannover home before having to abandon it for subsequent efforts in Norway and England when he was forced by the Nazis to flee Germany. Within this cottage-sized three-dimensional assemblage he incorporated abstract structures reminiscent of German Expressionist film and stage design along with objects that served as souvenirs of key moments and relationships, expressing also his interest in material, physical, and spiritual interactions.

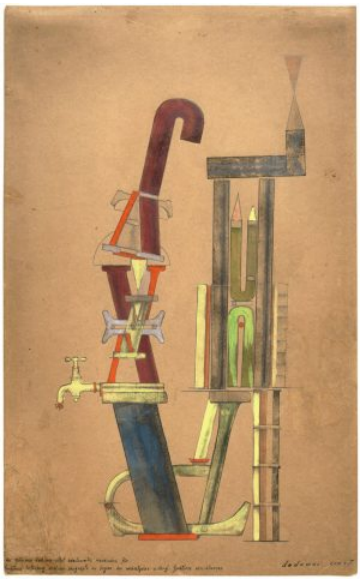


Figure **7.1.1.1.11**: Max Ernst, *Little Machine Constructed by Minimax Dadamax in Person*, 1919-20, handprinting, pencil and ink frottage, watercolor, and gouache on heavy brown pulp paper, 49.4 x 31.5 cm (Guggenheim)

Cologne Dada

Dada in Cologne (a city in western Germany) is most closely associated with the diverse artworks of Max Ernst, an artist who produced a prolific body of work that included *frotage* (rubbings), painting, collage, and mixed media assemblage. These works,

many of which explored the absurd and suggested fantastic creatures, dwellings, and landscapes, are often associated with **Surrealism**, a movement with which he was also affiliated. Because Ernst worked in Germany and France, fled to the United States during World War II, and later returned to Europe, his work impacted art on both sides of the Atlantic and can be found in collections around the world.

New York and Paris Dada

New York Dada, where we began this discussion, lost its momentum when its two primary leaders, Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, returned to Europe after World War I. In Paris, the two leaders joined like-minded artists and former exiles to continue their raucous, yet playful, interrogation of art and culture. More attuned to the approaches of the Zurich and New York groups, Paris Dada centered around spectacle and was less overtly political than Dada in Germany. The group's performances, photographs, mixed media collage, and installations nevertheless emphasized the absurd and challenged social norms. These interests, combined with the emerging appeal of investigating imagery that reflects psychological states, led many of the Paris Dada group (including Man Ray, best known for his experimental photographs) to join the **Surrealists** who, led by writer Andre Breton, made Paris the center of their activities.

Dada and Its Legacies

Many of the artists who identified with Dada went on to become Surrealists. Because of this, and the relatively brief duration of the Dada phenomenon, it took some time for subsequent artists and historians to appreciate its value. In retrospect, however, we can see the reverberations of Dada throughout the twentieth century, and it has been one of the main contributors to contemporary art practices since its revival as Neo-Dada in the 1960s.

Additional resources:

World War I and Dada from The Museum of Modern Art

John Heartfield, *Der Sinn des Hitlergrüsses* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Marcel Duchamp on The Museum of Modern Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Leah Dickerman and Brigid Doherty, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005)

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7.1.1.2: Dada Manifesto

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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MANIFESTE DADA 1918.

Figure **7.1.1.2.1**: 2-page layout of Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto*, printed in Dada 3 (December 1918)

The poet Tristan Tzara was a strong advocate of the international Dada movement, but his *Dada Manifesto* of 1918 (which you can read in full **here**) appears to be complete nonsense. It is, in fact, just that — but in a really interesting way that perfectly serves the goals of the Dada movement.

An anti-manifesto manifesto

A manifesto (derived from a Latin word meaning "clear," which is ironic in this case) is a document that states the beliefs and objectives of a group. Many manifestos are political, but artists began issuing manifestos declaring their aesthetic aims in the 1880s. Tzara paradoxically introduces his Dada manifesto with a rant against manifestos and their lists of demands:

> ***To put out a manifesto you must want: A. B. C. / fulminate against 1. 2. 3. / fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs and big abcs / sign, shout, swear, organize prose into a form of absolute and irrefutable evidence, to prove your non plus ultra.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," 1918 [1]***

The righteous zeal of manifestos repels Tzara, as does the way manifestos seek to impose a course of action on others. "To impose your A. B. C. is a natural thing — hence deplorable," he insists, rather oddly, since we are used to thinking of what is "natural" as good, not deplorable.

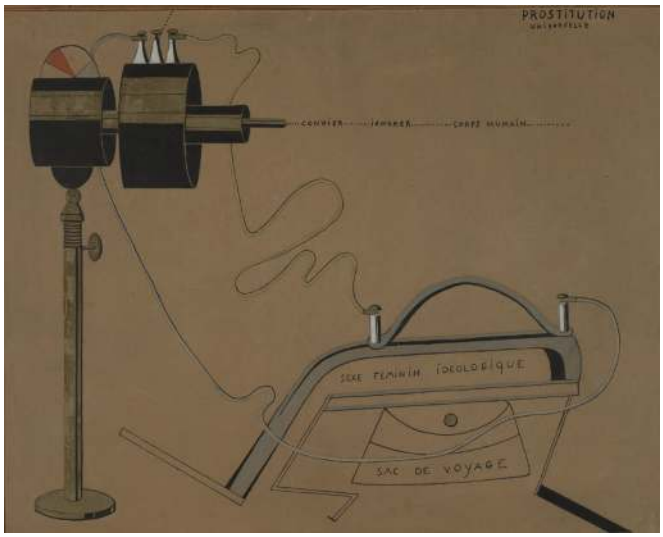


Figure 7.1.1.2.2: Francis Picabia, *Universal Prostitution*, 1916-17, black ink, tempera, and metallic paint on cardboard, 74.5 x 94.2 cm (Yale University Art Gallery)

After this opening rant Tzara slides into one of the many bewildering, free-associative broadsides that are scattered throughout the manifesto: "Everybody does it in the form of crystalbluffmadonna, monetary system, pharmaceutical product, bare leg advertising the ardent sterile spring [season]." These seemingly senseless interludes are partly a Dada strategy to prevent any extended trains of rational thought, but there is also some method to the madness. Tzara here evokes all sorts of ways that human beings find comfort, purpose, and meaning in life, such as religion, money, technology, drugs, sex, and consumerism. These false comforts are, implicitly, as deplorable as the self-righteousness that produces manifestos.

For Tzara, Dada emphatically does not want to participate in such false comforts or organized social movements, so what he is writing is an anti-manifesto manifesto:

> ***I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am also against principles.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," 1918***

Violating two basic principles of logic, Tzara here contradicts his own terms (writing a manifesto that wants nothing), and denies his own premises (he is against the very principles that makes him reject manifestos). With this sentence, Tzara introduces us to the main strategy of Dada: continuous contradiction.

Continuous contradiction

A core idea behind Dada is absurdism, a philosophical position that recognizes an inherent conflict between humankind's constant need to search for meaning and purpose in life, and the lack of any such (knowable) meaning or purpose. "Supposing life to be a poor farce, without aim," Tzara writes. Throughout history, people have attempted to assuage their psychological distress by asserting various meanings and purposes for life, but these are themselves contradictory (the way two different religions frequently are), and there is insufficient evidence for any of them.

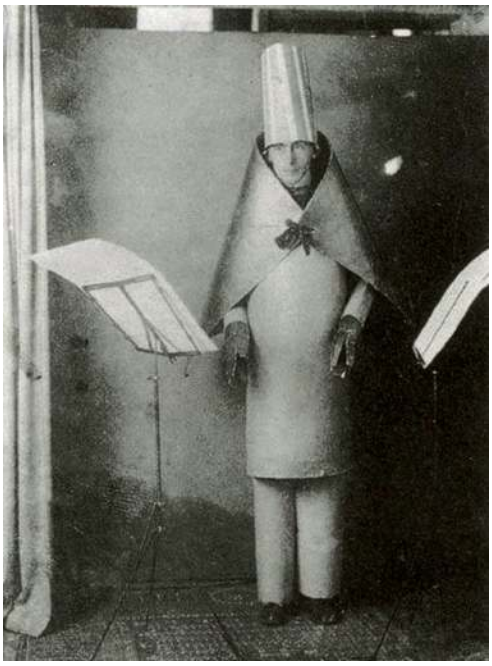


Figure **7.1.1.2.3**: Photograph of Hugo Ball reciting *Karawane*, 1916

Dada is based on the recognition and acceptance of the meaninglessness of life, and the last thing Dadaists want to do is to create another illusion to comfort people with a sense of purpose when there is none. The only gesture left to Dada is to tear down other people's systems and illusions, as Tzara recognizes in scattered statements that almost read as genuine attempts at an absurdist or nihilist manifesto:

> ***There is no ultimate truth… Does anyone think that, by a minute refinement of logic, they have demonstrated the truth and established the correctness of their opinions? … I detest greasy objectivity, and harmony, the science that finds everything in order… I am against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle to have none.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," 1918***

Perhaps the closest that Tzara comes to making a graspable statement of the Dada creed is this:

> ***I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," 1918***

Even in what should be a straightforward statement of the main strategy of Dada, "continuous contradiction," Tzara recognizes that he would, in effect, be contradicting himself if he did not contradict himself and affirm affirmation as well. The fact that this is an absurd internal contradiction is not a logical flaw; it is the essence of Dada.

The strategy of continuous contradiction accounts in part for why so much of Dada art is offensive. That offense arises out of our consciousness of social conventions being broken or sacred cows being desecrated. Examine the works illustrated here and in the essays on **Dada performance**, **pataphysics**, **collage**, **readymades**, and **politics**. Notice how they violate all sorts of conventions and mock the many ways that humanity tries to make sense of and find purpose in life: religion, culture, fashion, nationalism, war, art, consumerism, technology, science, family, love, etc.



Figure 7.1.1.2.4: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 277.5 x 177.8 x 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art) photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Radical individualism

Although Dada considers all human systems to be vain attempts to allay our terror at the meaninglessness of existence, Tzara is not a complete nihilist. Scattered throughout the manifesto are statements that suggest his belief in radical individualism. Tzara calls humankind an "infinite and shapeless variation." There are no universal values, truths, or tastes: "Criticism is useless, it exists only subjectively, for each person separately, without the slightest character of universality. Does anyone think they have found a psychic base common to all humankind?" Any attempt to generalize knowledge or assert a universal human ideal is in vain:

> ***If I cry out: Ideal, ideal, ideal / Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge, / Boomboom, boomboom, boomboom, I have given a pretty faithful version of progress, law, morality, and all other fine qualities that various highly intelligent people have discussed in so many books, only to conclude that after all everyone dances to their own personal boomboom, and that the writer is entitled to his boomboom.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," 1918***

The last couple of clauses begin to suggest a value and a purpose: "everyone dances to their own personal boomboom," and each of us is entitled to our own boomboom. Accepting such radical individualism would result in the highest state possible: freedom at least from subservience to anyone else's system — political, religious, philosophical, ethical, economic, sartorial, sexual, or social. "Dada was born of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom."

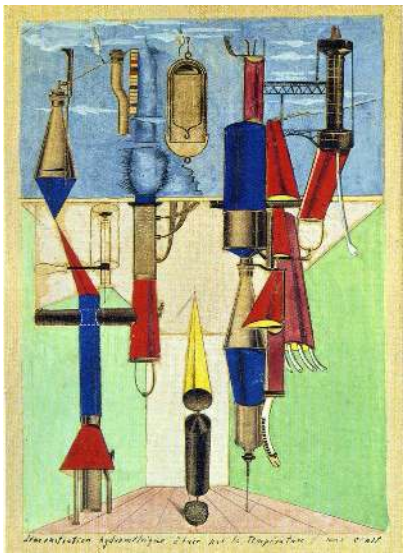


Figure 7.1.1.2.5: Max Ernst, *Hydrometric Demonstration How to Kill by Temperature*, 1920, collage, gouache, India ink, and pencil on paper, 24 x 17 cm (private collection)

What is sacrificed in this dedication to individual expression, however, is the communicative function of art. Communication requires a shared system (a language, whether verbal, visual, or otherwise), and at least an assumption of shared concepts or emotions that can be conveyed through that system. Both of these requirements imply a sacrifice of radical individualism, so Tzara freely jettisons them: “Art is a private affair, artists produce it for themselves … When a writer or artist is praised by the newspapers, it is a proof of the intelligibility of their work: wretched lining of a coat for public use.” Dada should be unintelligible: “What we need is works that are strong straight precise and forever beyond understanding.” The unintelligibility of Dada art becomes proof of its author’s freedom from any shared language, truths, or values.

In its unintelligibility, offensiveness, and contradictions, Dada reflects the fundamental absurdity of life itself. The manifesto concludes: “Dada Dada Dada, a roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE.” Dada is nonsense, but very carefully produced nonsense, targeted at very specific effects: to mirror the senselessness of the universe, to shake the reader/viewer out of their seductive but false systems of belief, and to encourage us to dance to our own personal boomboom.



Figure 7.1.1.2.6: Hannah Höch, *The Beautiful Girl*, 1919-20, photomontage and collage, 35 x 29 cm (private collection)

Notes:

1. Tristan Tzara, “Manifeste Dada,” 1918, as published in *Dada* vol. 3 (December 1918), n.p. The English translation throughout this essay is based on the University of Pennsylvania version, but has been occasionally modified for clarity using the original French version.

Additional resources:

Read more about Dada at the Kunsthaus Zürich

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7.1.1.3: Dada Pataphysics

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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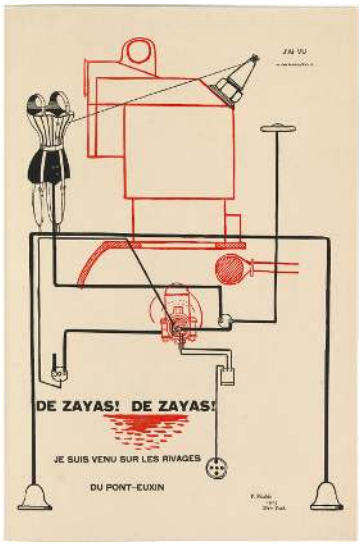


Figure **7.1.1.3.1**: Francis Picabia, *Portrait of Marius de Zayas*, 1915, relief print on paper, 39 x 27 cm (National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC)

Careful inspection reveals this line drawing to be based on an electric diagram of an automobile, with two headlights at the bottom corners and a spark plug just right of center at the top. There are a number of schematic electro-mechanical components and wiring that attaches to the crotch and left breast of an empty woman's corset. Nothing in the diagram or the text explains how this is a portrait of the Mexican writer and caricaturist Marius de Zayas, as the title indicates. It is one of many works by Picabia and other Dada artists that refer to modern science, engineering, and technology, often in bewilderingly nonsensical ways. What is this about? Why do science and technology feature so prominently in Dada works, and why are they treated so absurdly?

A machine age utopia

The first two decades of the 20th century witnessed the increasing presence of machines in everyday middle-class life, including telephones, automobiles, phonographs, typewriters, electric washing machines, and portable cameras. Public awareness of scientific discoveries and technological breakthroughs was also fueled by regular newspaper accounts of airplanes, radio waves, x-rays, and relativity.



Figure **7.1.1.3.2**: Left: *Scientific American* cover from April 13, 1895 on manufacturing incandescent light bulbs; right: AT&T 'Everyday Magic' advertisement for the Bell System telephone, *Popular Mechanics*, March 1910

Descriptions of scientific discoveries and advertisements for new technology tended to tout them in utopian terms — as solving longstanding problems and advancing wealth, leisure, and public welfare. In the early decades of the 20th century, modern artists such as **Fernand Léger and Robert Delaunay** celebrated the machine age both directly in their subject matter, and indirectly by choosing a hard-edged, geometric, rationalized style that mimicked machine-made products.



Figure **7.1.1.3.3**: Left: Fernand Léger, *The Staircase*, 1914, oil on canvas, 133.4 x 93.5 cm (**Moderna Museet Stockholm**); right: Robert Delaunay, *Hommage à Bleriot*, 1914, glue-bound distemper on canvas, 250 x 251 cm (**Kunstmuseum Basel**)

Against rational systems

In part, the Dadaists presented a scientific and mechanized vision of the world and humankind as an antithesis to expressionist artists, such as the **Blaue Reiter group**, who emphasized humankind's spirituality. German Dadaists in particular adopted a materialist view of nature and human history that aligned with the political philosophy of Karl Marx and Communism. However, the Dadaists were also suspicious of the new science and technology for several reasons. Their response to the destructive use of technology during World War I is discussed in the essay **Dada Politics**. More generally, the Dadaists rejected all rational systems and utopian fantasies as part of their embrace of **absurdism**. Dadaists mocked all the ways that humankind has tried to find sense and purpose in what they saw as a senseless universe and purposeless existence.

For example, *Three Standard Stoppages* by French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp parodies the metric system, an attempt to advance scientific knowledge, engineering, and trade by standardizing units of measure. In 1799, France was the first country to adopt the metric system, when the meter was defined as one ten-millionth of the distance from the equator to the North Pole on a meridian passing through Paris.



Figure **7.1.1.3.4**: Marcel Duchamp, *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913-14, wood box with threads and cut wood slats, 28.2 x 129.2 x 22.7 cm (**MoMA**)

Duchamp created his own parodic metric system(s) by dropping three meter-long lengths of string from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane, allowing each to twist "as it pleases," and then tracing their lines to make three wooden prototype "rulers," which were placed in a special case. These rulers can be used both for measurement (although all three differ in length), and as straightedges (although all three have different curving profiles). Needless to say, any scientific or engineering project that depended on Duchamp's system would be sabotaged from the start.



Figure **7.1.1.3.5**: Marcel Duchamp, T*he Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 277.5 x 177.8 x 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art) photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Duchamp used his new metric system to create one of the most absurd "engineering" projects of all time, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23), often called the ***Large Glass***. Essentially a design for a machine to help the nine bachelors in the lower register make love to the bride above, the elaborate physics and engineering of the contraption were described in hundreds of notes that the artist wrote on scrap paper over many years. Many are written in complex pseudo-technical language, such as:

> ***The bride, at her base, is a reservoir of love gasoline. (or timid power). This timid-power, distributed to the motor with quite feeble cylinders, in contact with the sparks of her constant life (desire-magneto) explodes and makes this virgin blossom who has attained her desire.Translated in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (New York, 1973), pp. 43-4.***

These bewildering notes were tossed into a box in no particular order, and in later years, Duchamp meticulously reproduced them in limited-edition box sets, thereby increasing the absurdity of the project.

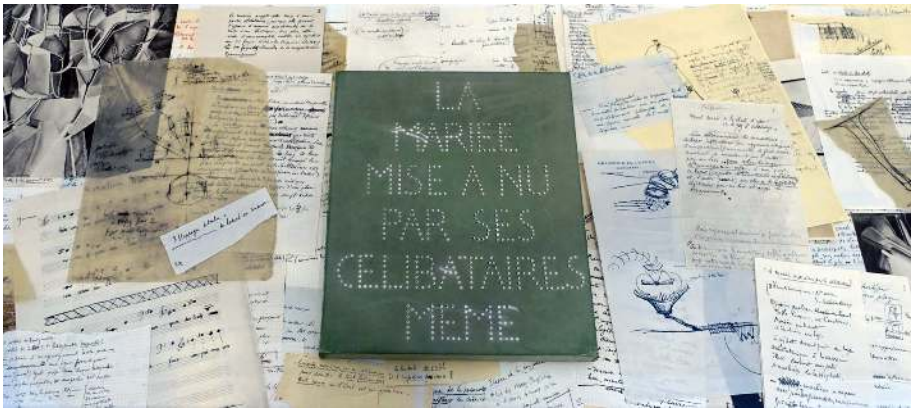


Figure **7.1.1.3.6**: Marcel Duchamp, *The Green Box*, 1934, box containing collotype reproductions on various papers, 33 x 28.3 x 2.5 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art) photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Pataphysics

Duchamp was inspired by the absurdist writings of French Symbolist author Alfred Jarry, who coined the term "pataphysics" to refer to a "science of imaginary solutions" that would "examine the laws governing exceptions" in his posthumously published

novel *The Exploits and Opinions of Dr Faustroll, Pataphysician* (1914).[1] The term pataphysics is currently used to refer to works that imitate the language and imagery of science and technology, but upend them and make them dysfunctional or absurd.

The Dada artist Max Ernst was also inspired by Jarry, and claimed that his works could only be understood by "poets, pataphysicians, and a few illiterates."[2] Among his absurd pataphysical creations was a set of works made by using a catalog of scientific teaching materials called *Bibliotheca Paedagogica*.

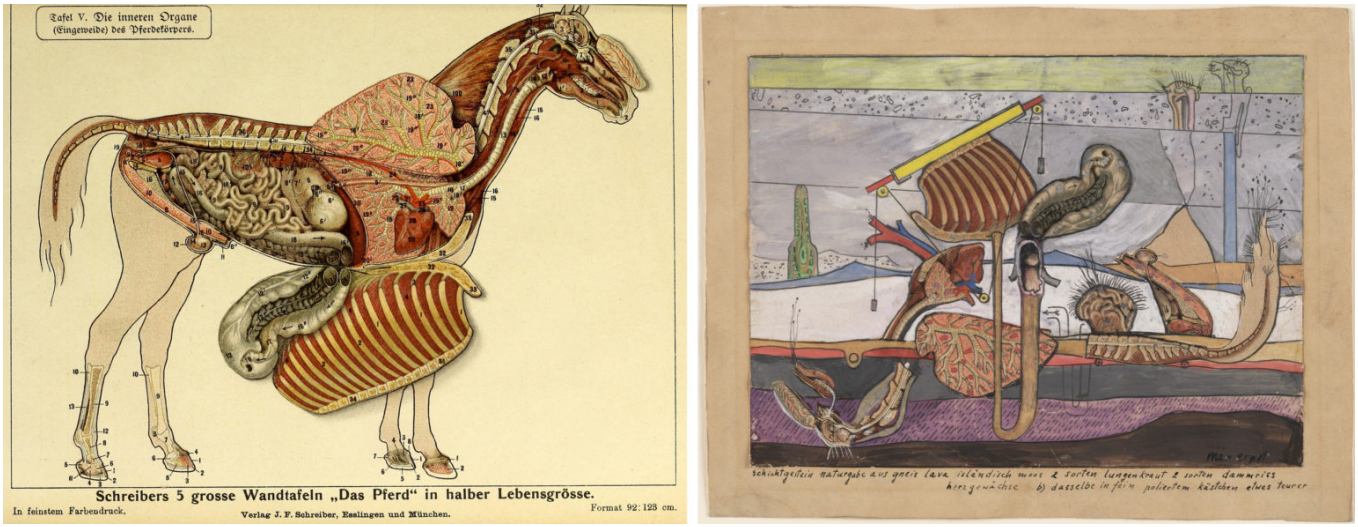


Figure **7.1.1.3.7**: Left: Illustration of the inner organs of a horse, from *Bibliotheca Paedagogica* (Cologne: Ständige Lehrmittel-Ausstellung, 1914); right: Max Ernst, *Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Iceland Moss 2 kinds of lungwort 2 kinds of ruptures of the perinaeum growths of the heart b) the same thing in a well-polished little box somewhat more expensive*, 1920, gouache and pencil on printed paper on card stock, 19.1 x 24.1 cm (MoMA)

In this piece, for example, an illustration of the inner organs of a horse is flipped upside-down and selectively covered with opaque paints until it becomes a diagram of geological strata where bizarre fossilized life-forms and a machine with pulleys await discovery. Ernst's title, written longhand below, reinforces the pseudo-scientific qualities of the work in a characteristically absurd way: *Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Iceland Moss 2 kinds of lungwort 2 kinds of ruptures of the perinaeum growths of the heart b) the same thing in a well-polished little box somewhat more expensive*.

A "machinomorphic" ideal

While many Dada misappropriations of contemporary science and technology are nonsensical, others seem calculated to raise philosophical questions about human nature and ethics. This is especially true of works that use the common Dada tactic of substituting machines for humans, either in whole or in part.



Figure **7.1.1.3.8**: Left: Francis Picabia, *Voilà Haviland: La poésie est comme lui*, 1915, ink, tempera, pencil, and collage on board, 25 ¾ × 18 ¾ inches (**Musée d'Orsay**); right: Raoul Hausmann, *Spirit of the Age: Mechanical Head*, 1919, wooden mannequin head with attached objects, 32.5 x 21 x 20 cm (Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris) photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Human beings are commonly considered superior to machines because of our ability to feel, to act with free will, and to behave ethically — all of which are thrown into question when technology replaces humanity. As photographer Paul Haviland put it in a 1915 essay:

> ***We are living in the age of the machine. Man made the machine in his own image. She has limbs which act; lungs which breathe; a heart which beats; a nervous system through which runs electricity. The phonograph is the image of his voice; the camera the image of his eye … After making the machine in his own image he has made his human ideal machinomorphic.Paul B. Haviland, statement in 291, nos. 7-8 (September-October 1915), n.p.***

The same year, Francis Picabia made a portrait of Haviland as a lamp with its plug-less electric cord wrapped impotently around it. German Dadaist Raoul Hausmann's ***Mechanical Head*** seems to realize this human-machine "cyborg" ideal, while at the same time underscoring the dangers of idealizing machines and using them to replace humanity.

Sex machine

Dada artists frequently conflated technology and sexuality, creating an uncomfortable disjunction between the cold, geometric impersonality of machines, and our expectations of emotionally-engaged, warm, organic intimacy. This is evident in Duchamp's ***Bride Stripped Bare*** and Picabia's *Portrait of Marius de Zayas* discussed above, and even more blatantly in Picabia's *Universal Prostitution*, where an upright, phallic electrical machine spews provocative words ("to invite … to ignore … human body") over the kneeling mechanical form to which it is wired. The lower form is labeled "ideological feminine sex" with her "travel bag," suggesting an absurd commentary on the relationship between the genders.

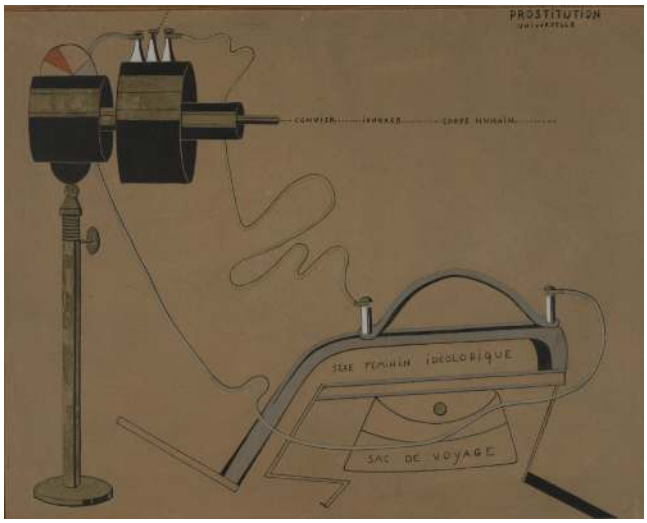


Figure **7.1.1.3.9**: Francis Picabia, *Universal Prostitution*, 1916-17, ink, tempera, and metallic paint on cardboard, 76.2 x 95.9 cm (**Yale University Art Gallery**)

In all of his works illustrated on this page, Picabia's style reinforces the machine-versus-human contrast. Where we expect the original, expressive, and autographic mark of the artist, Picabia employs the inexpressive linear anonymity of an engineering diagram.

The Dada interest in science and technology was not only highly topical in the early twentieth century during a burgeoning "machine age," but it also posed wider, philosophical questions about what happens when machinery replaces humanity.

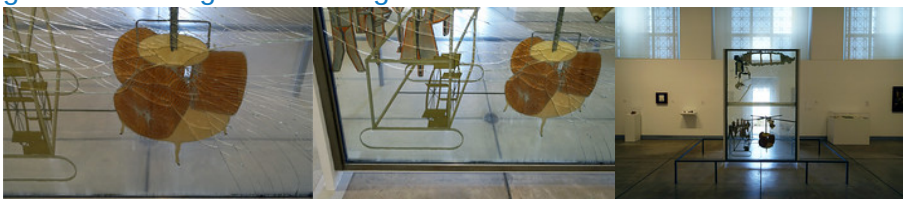
Notes:

1. Alfred Jarry, *Exploits & Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston, 1996),), pp. 21-22.
2. Max Ernst, *La Nudité de la femme est plus sage que l'enseignement du philosophe* (Paris, 1959), as translated in *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), p. 14.

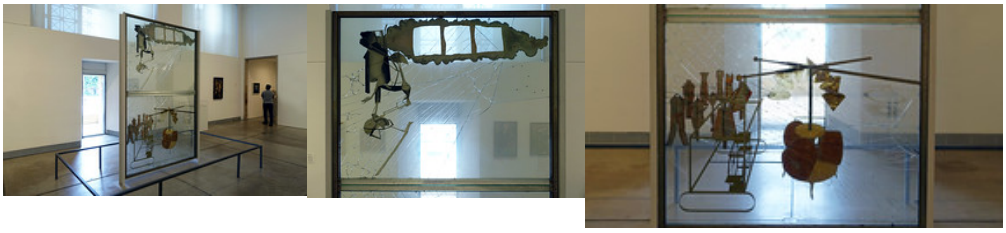
Additional resources:

Read more about Francis Picabia at MoMA

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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Figure 7.1.1.3.26: More Smarthistory images…

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7.1.1.4: Dada Politics

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
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Figure **7.1.1.4.1**: First International Dada Fair, Galerie Otto Burchard, Berlin, 1920 (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)

A sign reading “Dada ist politisch” (Dada is political) is visible on the right side of this photo of the opening of the 1920 First International Dada Fair in Berlin. The German Dadaists’ explicit engagement with politics marks a notable change from **Zurich Dada**, which, while iconoclastic, was rarely overtly political. This is partly because Switzerland was neutral during World War I, and provided something of an escape for the artists who gathered there. The founder of Zurich Dada, Hugo Ball, once described Switzerland as “a birdcage, surrounded by roaring lions.”[1] When Dada spread to Germany following the end of World War I, it entered the lion’s den.

Social and economic crisis

Germany was in social, political, and economic chaos after the war. Its industrial base had been decimated, and there was a struggle for political power between the right-wing Social Democrats and the left-wing Communist Party. The Spartacist Uprising, a general strike and armed insurrection by the Communists in 1919, was met with brutal repression and the extra-judicial killing of its leaders Rosa Luxemburg and **Karl Liebknecht**. Following the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1919, a new government known as the Weimar Republic was formed by the Social Democrats. The new government was immediately beset by economic difficulties that included massive war debts and the punitive reparations set by the Treaty of Versailles. To pay off its debts the government simply printed more money, which led to hyperinflation. By the end of 1922, a loaf of bread cost 200 billion Deutschmarks. Most of the German Dadaists were sympathetic to the Communist party and strongly critical of the Weimar government and its policies.

Against bourgeois capitalism

George Grosz, whose painting *A Winter’s Tale* (1917) is visible hanging above the “Dada ist politisch” sign, was born Georg Groß, but changed the spelling to “de-Germanize” his name as a protest against German nationalism. He was arrested during the Spartacist Uprising, and was a member of the Communist Party until 1923.

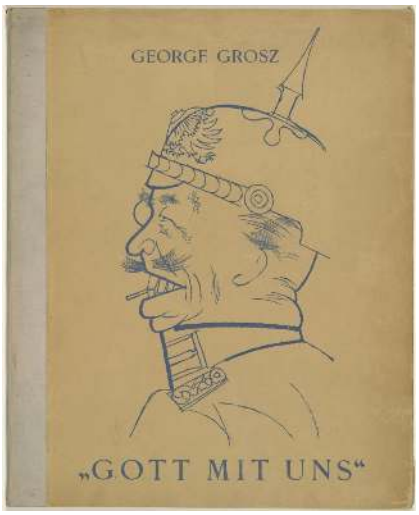


Figure **7.1.1.4.2**: George Grosz, Cover, *Gott mit uns (God with us)*, 1919, letterpress and line block, 49.2 x 40 cm (MoMA)

A portfolio of Grosz's iconoclastic prints was on sale at the Dada Fair. The title "Gott mit uns" (God is with us), taken from the official slogan inscribed on the belt buckles of German army troops, is clearly mocked by the grotesque caricatures of soldiers and officers in the portfolio. Grosz and his publisher were fined for defamation of the military, and all unsold copies of the portfolio were destroyed.



Figure **7.1.1.4.3**: George Grosz, *Dawn (Früh um 5 Uhr!)*, 1920/21, photolithograph from a portfolio of ten lithographs *In the Shadows* (1921), 48 x 35.4 cm (MoMA)

Unrepentant, Grosz continued to make prints critical of the ruling classes. His photo-lithograph *Dawn* shows two simultaneous early morning scenes. On top, members of the working class, tools and lunch pails in hand, trudge to work at the factory, while in the scene below, the wealthy continue to enjoy their previous evening's debauchery. The workers are mostly thin and ragged, while the wealthy bourgeois men are caricatured as fat and dissipated figures clutching their cocktails and prostitutes.

War technologies

Another major target of Dada scorn was **science and technology**; this was part of a broad strategy to discredit rational thought and utopian projects. The Dada mistrust of technology also had roots in its destructive use during World War I.



Figure 7.1.1.4.4: A British Mark IV (Male) tank during the Battle of Cambrai, France, November-December 1917 (Imperial War Museums)

The Great War, as it it was then known, was largely fought by armies hunkered down in vast networks of defensive trenches. Offensive sorties resulted in massive casualties, as charges were met by a hail of bullets from recently-invented machine guns. Armored vehicles were invented to protect troops during charges, and continuous "caterpillar" tracks on a rhomboid frame helped these early tanks navigate the deeply entrenched terrain. Chemical weapons delivered by artillery, such as chlorine gas and mustard gas, were also brutally effective against massed troops, necessitating the use of gas masks and protective clothing. War photographs suggest not only the destructiveness, but also the dehumanizing effect of these new military technologies.



Figure 7.1.1.4.5: British soldiers with a Vickers machine gun wearing PH-type anti-gas helmets during the Battle of the Somme, July 1916 (Imperial War Museums)

The Communist-influenced Dadaists saw the roots of this destruction not just in the technology itself, but in what later became known as the "Military-Industrial Complex," the factory owners and financiers who profited from weapons manufacture. In her **collage** *Hochfinanz (High Finance)*, Hannah Höch shows two middle-class figures with outsized heads dominating an aerial view of Wroclaw, Prussia (now in Poland). Surrounding them are images of weaponry, machinery, and mass production: two shotguns, a factory, piston rods, a threaded bolt, the red-white-and-black Imperial German flag, and a military truck driving along a rubber tire. One of the two figures is British scientist Sir John Herschel (perhaps in reference to the contribution of scientists to the invention of war technologies), but the title *High Finance* suggests that the two well-dressed old men are bankers implicated in both the destructive war technologies and the exploitative practices of early-twentieth century capitalism.



Figure **7.1.1.4.6**: Hannah Höch, *Hochfinanz (High Finance)*, 1923, collage, 36 x 31 cm (Galerie Berinson, Berlin)

War casualties



Figure **7.1.1.4.7**: First International Dada Fair, Galerie Otto Burchard, Berlin, 1920 (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)

Also visible in the Dada Fair photograph are two works that refer to another lingering effect of the war: the common sight of soldiers returning with disfiguring injuries, amputated limbs, and artificial body parts. On the right edge of the photo is a sculpture of a man by George Grosz and John Heartfield entitled ***Middle-class Philistine Heartfield Gone Mad***. The torso is a tailor's dummy decorated with symbols of war (a revolver, an iron cross, an insignia for the Black Eagle Order), while much of the rest of the body is made of machine parts: a metal pipe for a leg, a lightbulb for a head, and dental prostheses for genitals. The figure also wears a dehumanizing number for identification. The assemblage simultaneously suggests a wounded soldier with multiple prostheses, and a cyborg whose infatuation with technology has overwhelmed its humanity.



Figure **7.1.1.4.8**: Left: Photo of a disabled German soldier using prosthesis in a carpentry shop in Konigsberg, Prussia (Library of Congress); George Grosz and John Heartfield, photo at the First International Dada Fair in Berlin, 1920 in front of their sculpture *Der wildgewordene Spiesser Heartfield (Elektro-Mechan. Tatlin-Plastik)*, 1920

On the left of the Dada Fair photograph is the painting *War Cripples*, or *45% Fit for Duty*, by Otto Dix, who served as a machine gunner in the Battle of the Somme, during which one million men were killed or wounded. Dix's original painting was destroyed, but a contemporary print shows how it called attention to the war wounded. Although they are attired in the splendor of their full-dress uniforms, large portions of the soldiers' bodies have been replaced by prosthetics, and what at first may appear to be "modernist" distortions of their faces are not. The man at the far left has a permanently staring glass eye, and his jaw has been replaced by a crude early attempt at plastic surgery that is only slightly less disturbing than the mangled face of the man at the far right. To his left, permanent tremors afflict a man with "shell shock" (now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and next to him a quadriplegic man is being wheeled past a shoe store he will never need to visit. It is hard to overstate the contrast between this image and traditional, heroic depictions of soldiers.



Figure **7.1.1.4.9**: Otto Dix, *War Cripples*, 1920, drypoint, 32.5 x 49.8 cm (MoMA)

Images such as these show how the Dadaists' mistrust of authority, technology, and nationalism, combined with their willingness to shock and offend, were effective in creating devastating social and political criticism in postwar Germany.

Notes:

1. Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield and trans. by Ann Raimes (Berkeley, L.A. and London, 1996), p. 34.

Additional resources:

Read more about Otto Dix at MoMA

Read more about George Grosz at MoMA

An online catalogue of works by John Heartfield at the Akademie der Künste

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7.1.1.5: Dada Collage

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **7.1.1.5.1**: Max Ernst, *The Word*, or *Woman-Bird*, 1921, collage with gouache and watercolor, 18.5 x 10.6 cm (private collection)

A nude woman stands in the foreground, a collar around her headless neck and birds tucked between her legs and under her arm. Her right thigh has been skinned to reveal a network of root-like nerves or blood vessels, and she stands knee-deep in what appears to be a cut-open internal organ or organism. Slightly behind her in the shallow space stands a fully-flayed figure that has been sliced vertically in two so we see it half from behind and half from the front

Although some attempt has been made to unify the space by enclosing the figures in a room defined by **linear perspective**, this work is clearly a collage made up of elements cut from a variety of sources. The foreground woman is Eve from Albrecht Dürer's ***Adam and Eve***, the background figure is an anatomical illustration, and the birds were presumably sourced from an ornithological guide. The technique of collage, long used in a domestic and craft context to make samplers, scrap-books, and greeting cards, had recently been ushered into the world of fine art by Braque and Picasso's **Synthetic Cubist** experiments.



Figure **7.1.1.5.2**: Left: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Glass*, 1912, collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches (McNay Museum, San Antonio); right: Hannah Höch, *The Beautiful Girl*, 1919-20, photomontage and collage, 35 x 29 cm (private collection)

The Cubists used collage to further their explorations of the ambiguities of space and representation, but the Dadaists saw in it the potential to advance their **absurdist philosophy** and **political activism**.

Inherently Dada

There is something inherently Dada about the technique of collage. Its use of prefabricated or **readymade** materials negates the importance of artistic skill, and the fact that collage is frequently sourced from mass-produced advertising and journalism collapses boundaries between "high" and "low" culture. Also, the act of making a collage is literally iconoclastic (Greek for "image-breaking"). Cutting up source material implies a rejection of its world-view, a disruption of the way that newspaper, that scientific text, or that advertisement organizes information, and a refusal of the ideas or directives it was intended to convey. Finally, the recombination of these elements gives free play to the artist's desire to re-shape the world, which for the Dadaists often resulted in images that range from bizarrely humorous to downright disturbing.



Figure **7.1.1.5.3**: Max Ernst, *The Word*, or *Woman-Bird*, 1921, collage with gouache and watercolor, 18.5 x 10.6 cm (private collection)

Ernst's *The Word*, for example, assaults numerous targets of Dada scorn. Much of the source material appears to be scientific in nature, continuing a broad Dada offensive against **science and technology**. The incorporation of Dürer's engraving of Adam and Eve mixes religion with science as well as high art with "mere" illustration. The fact that Dürer's print uses **animal symbolism** suggests, but does not spell out, a symbolic meaning for the birds, which had an ambiguous multivalence in Ernst's art. Their placement here is unquestionably sexual, and Eve's nudity and the mutilation of both her body and that of the background figure (Adam?) creates uncomfortable overtones of sexual violence. Altogether, the image is absurd, humorous, anti-conventional, and disturbing, all characteristic qualities of Dada.

Photomontage

Dadaists invented a form of collage known as photomontage, which incorporates photographs, sometimes along with other collaged and painted elements. The reputation of photography as a factual record of the world implies a truth-to-reality that can make the absurdity of Dada photomontages additionally disturbing. Many photomontages were sourced from advertisements and journalism. The products and fashions in them appear dated today, but were insistently topical and relevant at the time, and helped Dada to mount an offensive against contemporary social, political, and commercial culture.



Figure **7.1.1.5.4**: Raoul Hausmann, *A Bourgeois Precision Brain Incites a World Movement*, also known as *Dada siegt (Dada Triumphs)*, 1920, photomontage and collage with watercolor on paper, 33.5 x 27.5 cm (private collection)

Raoul Hausmann's photomontage *A Bourgeois Precision Brain Incites a World Movement* (often called *Dada siegt*, or "Dada triumphs") shows an interior cluttered with various objects suggestive of the title: a partial map of the world, a diagram of a brain, and three well-dressed middle-class men, including Hausmann himself. "Precision" is suggested by all of the scientific and **machine references**, including a typewriter and adding machine in the foreground, as well as another anatomical diagram hanging on the back wall. A pulley and drive belt in the upper left, along with a series of Corbin brand automatic door-closers below, refer to industrial and assembly-line production techniques. The "world movement" of the title is, however, not the orderly, precision phenomenon suggested by these objects. It is instead the unruly disorder of Dada, which we see emblazoned across the map, inscribed on the brain, and written on the street in the background photograph of the Wenzelsplatz in Prague.

Political critique

Hausmann claimed to have appropriated the idea of photomontage from a traditional practice among German military families, who would paste a photograph of their enlisted son's face over the head of a lithograph of a generic soldier. This anecdote suggests a **political dimension** to the technique of photomontage, although Dada collages generally challenged militarism and patriotism. Post-World War I Germany was a social and economic disaster. In addition to the destruction of a large part of its industrial base during the war, punitive reparations following Germany's defeat led to rampant inflation. The generally left-leaning German Dadaists were much more politically active than their counterparts in Zurich, Paris, or New York City, and frequently used art as a form of direct social and political critique.



Figure **7.1.1.5.5**: Georg Scholz, *Bauernbild (Farmer Picture)*, also known as *Industrial Farmers*, 1920, oil on wood with collage and photomontage, 98 x 70 cm (Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal)

Georg Scholz combined collage and photomontage with traditional oil on panel in *Bauernbild (Farmer Picture)*, a scathing satire of the greed and hypocrisy of the large-scale industrial farmers that were replacing traditional small farms. The grotesquely caricatured couple sit proudly in the foreground. He clutches a bible, but his partially sliced open head reveals his true motivation, money. His wife, a nail through her forehead, proudly displays one of her pig-like offspring, while his snotty-nosed and pimple-faced brother is tormenting a toad, a farm-machine patent the only thing in his empty head. Various mechanical devices in the room and a threshing machine out the window demonstrate the family's devotion to industrialization, while on the back wall, portraits of the recently deposed Kaiser Wilhelm II and another son in uniform demonstrate their patriotic support of the government and the war.

The roots of collage



Figure **7.1.1.5.6**: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919-20, photomontage and collage with watercolor, 114 x 90 cm (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie)

With self-conscious irony, Hannah Höch returned collage to its roots as a traditionally female domestic art form. The long title of her photomontage ***Cut with a Kitchen-Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*** suggests how her feminine tool — the kitchen knife that is ostensibly creating the collage — is being used to cut through the (implied masculine) bloated and self-indulgent political class of the time. (Weimar, Germany was where the first democratic constitution of Germany was signed after WWI, giving the name Weimar Republic to the inter-war government.)

Scattered throughout the collage are photographs of German political figures such as the recently-deposed Kaiser Wilhelm II (upper right) and current president Friedrich Ebert (upper center) surrounded by images of gears, ball bearings, soldiers, and other emblems of industrial and military power. Text cut-outs such as "Join Dada" and "invest your money in Dada" exhort us to participate in the mass resistance, represented by crowds of demonstrators in the lower left, along with Communist leaders including Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx (center right), and recently-assassinated German Communist Party leader Karl Liebknecht (lower left). Interspersed throughout are signs of growing female empowerment. A map in the lower right highlights European countries that had recently given women voting rights, and at the center German Expressionist artist **Käthe Köllwitz's** head is juggled by a woman dancer, a common emblem of female freedom in Höch's work.

The heterogeneity of the source material in all of these examples, along with the dizzying shifts of scale and perspective, makes viewing Dada collages an unsettling aesthetic experience. Because the use of prefabricated, mass-produced source material violates conventions of artistic skill and originality as well as aesthetic harmony, collage was in many ways a perfect medium for Dada iconoclasm and social protest.

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7.1.1.6: Dada Readymades

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID 188261

Although they were conceived more than a century ago, readymades continue to challenge and confound. The term was coined by Dada artist Marcel Duchamp to describe ordinary, prefabricated objects selected by an artist and presented as art. Sometimes the object is altered, such as by combining it with another object to make an "assisted readymade.'" The first readymade consisted of a bicycle wheel mounted upside-down on the seat of a stool. What are we to make of such an object? Why does it qualify as a work of art? Is any object a potential readymade? Can anyone make one?



Figure **7.1.1.6.1**: Left: Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, original 1913, reproduction 1964, wheel and painted wood, 64.8 x 59.7 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art) (photo: **Stefan Powell**, CC BY 2.0); Right: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (original), photographed by Alfred Stieglitz in 1917 after its rejection by the Society of Independent Artists

For his most notorious readymade, Duchamp took an ordinary men's urinal, flipped it ninety degrees, titled it ***Fountain***, and submitted it to an art exhibition under the pseudonym "R. Mutt." Although the exhibition was non-juried, meaning that it would theoretically accept any submitted work, *Fountain* was rejected, and Duchamp published a defense of it:

> ***Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, and placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view — created a new thought for that object.***
>
> ***Marcel Duchamp (anonymously), "The Richard Mutt Case," in The Blind Man, no. 2 (May 1917), n.p.***

Duchamp here notes several points of intervention by the artist that make even a "pure" readymade like *Fountain* different from an ordinary object:

(1) The readymade is chosen by the artist. Different objects have different associations and significance; an airplane propeller signifies something different than a high-heeled shoe. Readymades do not display an artist's technical skill, but a work of art based on choosing an object, rather than representing one, does not necessarily sacrifice a capacity for meaningful communication.

(2) The readymade is divorced from its ordinary context and use value, and re-presented in an art world context. This encourages us to encounter the object in a different way. A urinal encountered in a men's restroom is a simple matter of utilitarian fact; one encountered in a gallery becomes a focus for observation, cogitation, discussion, appreciation, and/or denunciation.

(3) The readymade is sometimes given an unexpected title. This also encourages us to think about the object anew: Why is Duchamp's urinal entitled "fountain"? What do urinals have in common with fountains? How are they different? Why is a fountain suitable for public display (and a common site for sculptural decoration), while a urinal is not?



Figure **7.1.1.6.2**: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (reproduction), 1917/1964, glazed ceramic with black paint (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) (photo: **Dr. Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Stupid as a painter

Duchamp insisted that these points of intervention serve to "create a new thought for that object," signaling that the purpose of the readymade is fundamentally conceptual, not aesthetic or technical. Any objection that the object is not beautiful or did not require any skill to make misses the point.

In a 1946 interview, Duchamp objected to the common French expression, "stupid as a painter" — roughly an equivalent to the American "dumb as a box of rocks'" or British "thick as two planks."[1] He blamed the poor reputation of painters' intelligence on the fact that art is so strongly associated with mere technical skill and/or sensual appeal — how well artists reproduce what they see or stimulate aesthetic pleasure. Readymades require neither technical skill nor formal sensitivity; the "art" is purely in the idea.

Unconventional and dysfunctional

Invented in the context of Dada, many early readymades seem to be direct challenges to social conventions. (For a brief explanation of the underlying philosophy of Dada, see Tristan Tzara's ***Dada Manifesto***)



Figure **7.1.1.6.3**: Man Ray, *Gift*, replica of 1921 original, flatiron and tacks, 15.3 x 9 x 11.4 cm (photo: **Jens Cederskjold**, CC BY 3.0)

For example, the American Dadaist **Man Ray** created an assisted readymade by welding a row of tacks to the bottom of a flatiron, an early form of clothes-press that was heated directly on a stove rather than by electricity. The result is worse than useless; it is actively counter-productive. An object intended to help keep clothes neat would instead reduce them to tatters. The title suggests a further assault on polite convention; as a gift, this iron would be very mean-spirited.



Figure **7.1.1.6.4**: Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Morton Schamberg, *God*, 1917

Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and Morton Schamberg's assisted readymade *God* was made by fitting a plumbing trap to a miter box. Separately, each object had a useful function. The water in the U-bend of a plumbing trap prevents sewer gas from seeping into the house, and a miter box helps guide a carpenter's saw to make perfect right-angle or 45-degree cuts. Putting them together makes both dysfunctional, and the title *God* adds a note of sacrilege to further shock the middle-class public that might encounter the object in an art gallery.

Anti-art art

For a Dadaist, the fact that such found objects violate expectations for what art "should" be is part of their program of undermining social conventions. Indeed, the revered status of art and related concepts such as "creativity" and "originality" makes them an obvious target for a movement devoted to iconoclasm. In some cases the assault on art itself was direct.



Figure **7.1.1.6.5**: Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack*, original 1914, reproduction 1963/1976, galvanized iron, 57 x 36.5 x 36.5 cm (Art Institute of Chicago) photo: **Toohool**, CC BY-SA 4.0

The first "pure" readymade — unmodified and not combined with another object — was a bottle rack that was so obviously inartistic it was discarded by Duchamp's family after the artist left France at the beginning of World War I. An unknown inscription on the original work may have helped guide interpretations, but Duchamp himself could not remember it in later years.

The underlying idea may have been a pun based on the French name of the object, *égouttoir*. The root word "*goutte*," meaning drop (as in drop of water) suggests its function to drain the water out of bottles placed upside-down on its spikes. But Duchamp, who

loved wordplay, may have also seen a pun on the word "*goût*" (taste), which in French as in English has aesthetic as well as culinary significance. Duchamp insisted that readymades be selected "based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste."[3] Indeed, the object is inartistic, anesthetic, tasteless — and placed in the center of an art gallery, the *égouttoir* could, by association, drain the taste from all the surrounding artworks.



Figure **7.1.1.6.6**: Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919

Another example of Duchamp's deliberately anti-art readymades is a postcard reproducing one of the world's most famous and revered works of art, Leonardo's ***Mona Lisa***, adorned with a mustache and goatee. Not only did Duchamp deface what is commonly regarded as a work of transcendent technical skill with a bit of crude graffiti, he violated gender norms as well by adding facial hair to a woman's portrait. Beneath the image is more Duchampian wordplay: the initials L.H.O.O.Q., which read aloud in French sounds like "*Elle a chaud au cul*" — "she's got a hot ass."

From readymades to assemblages and conceptual art

Duchamp recognized that the power of readymades would diminish with proliferation, so he made only thirteen. The technique of creating art by carefully selecting and combining already-made objects has, however, proven enormously fruitful for other artists. Sculptures based on found objects have flourished since the "neo-Dada" assemblages of **Robert Rauschenberg** in the late 1950s. And although readymades remain controversial for many members of the general public, it is undoubtedly true that the contemporary art world now values artists' concepts much more highly than their technical skills, just as Duchamp hoped.

Notes:

1. Marcel Duchamp, interview with James Johnson Sweeney, *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, vol. XIII, no. 4-5 (1946), in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Oxford, 1973), p. 126.
2. Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades'," talk delivered in 1961 at the Museum of Modern Art, in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 141.

Additional resources:

Read more about Marcel Duchamp at The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

MoMA curator Ann Temkin discusses readymade's in MoMA's collection

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7.1.1.7: Dada Performance

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
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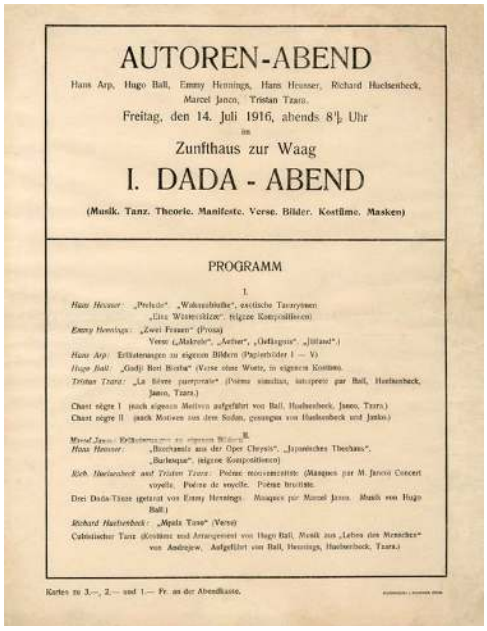
Figure **7.1.1.7.1**: Marcel Slodki, Poster for the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire, 1916, lithograph

The Dadaists produced a bewildering variety of art, but the roots of Dada were in performance. The movement was founded in 1916 when German writer Hugo Ball and poet/performer Emmy Hennings received permission from the owner of the Meirei café in Zurich, Switzerland to use a small room as a venue for art performances. Ball recorded the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire in his diary on 2 February:

> ***Under this name a group of young artists and writers has been formed whose aim is to create a center for artistic entertainment. The idea of the cabaret will be that guest artists will come and give musical performances and readings at the daily meetings. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to [make] suggestions and contributions of all kinds.***
>
> ***Translated in Leah Dickerman, ed., Dada (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006), p. 22.***

Artists and writers of many nationalities who had fled to neutral Switzerland to escape World War I responded to this invitation. In addition to Ball and Hennings, the core of the Zurich Dada group included the Romanians Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco (Iancu) and the Germans Hans Arp, Sophie Täuber, and Richard Huelsenbeck.

Ball and Hennings invited artists “whatever their orientation” and contributions “of all kinds,” setting the stage for a wildly diverse output that included Ball’s poetry, Hennings’ songs, Janco’s masks, Arp and Täuber’s abstract weavings and constructions, and Huelsenbeck’s chants. The disparate group was united by anti-war sentiment as well as general iconoclasm and irreverence, indicated by the name Voltaire, which referred to the 18th-century French satirist of religion and established authority.



AUTOREN-ABEND

Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Hans Heusser, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara.

Freitag, den 14. Juli 1916, abends 8½ Uhr

im

Zunfthaus zur Waag

I. DADA - ABEND

(Musik. Tanz. Theorie. Manifeste. Verse. Bilder. Kostüme. Masken)

PROGRAMM

I.

Hans Heusser: „Prelude". „Wahnsinnballet", exotische Tanzsynthesen. „Eine Wissenschaft". (eigene Kompositionen)

Emmy Hennings: „Zwei Frauen" (Prosa)
Verse („Makrele", „Aefter", „Gefängnis", „Island".)

Hans Arp: Erläuterungen zu eigenen Bildern (Papierbilder I — V)

Hugo Ball: „Gadji Beri Bimba" (Verse ohne Worte, in eigenen Kostüm).

Tristan Tzara: „La Rêve parpureale" (Poème simultan, interpreté par Ball, Huelsenbeck, Janco, Tzara.)

Chant nègre I (nach eigenen Motiven aufgeführt von Ball, Huelsenbeck, Janco, Tzara.)

Chant nègre II (nach Motiven von dem Sudan, gesungen von Huelsenbeck und Janko.)

Marcel Janco: Erklärungen zu eigenen Bildern II.

Hans Heusser: „Bruchstücke aus der Oper Chrysis". „Japanisches Theehaus". „Burlesque". (eigene Kompositionen)

Rich. Huelsenbeck und Tristan Tzara: Poème mouvementiste. (Masques par M. Janco) Concert voyelle. Poème de voyelle. Poème bruitiste.

Drei Dada-Tänze getanzt von Emmy Hennings. Masques par Marcel Janco. Musik von Hugo Ball.)

Richard Huelsenbeck: „Mpata Tuse" (Verse)

Cubistischer Tanz (Erfindung und Arrangement von Hugo Ball, Musik zum „Leben des Menschen" von Andrejew. Aufgeführt von Ball, Hennings, Huelsenbeck, Tzara.)

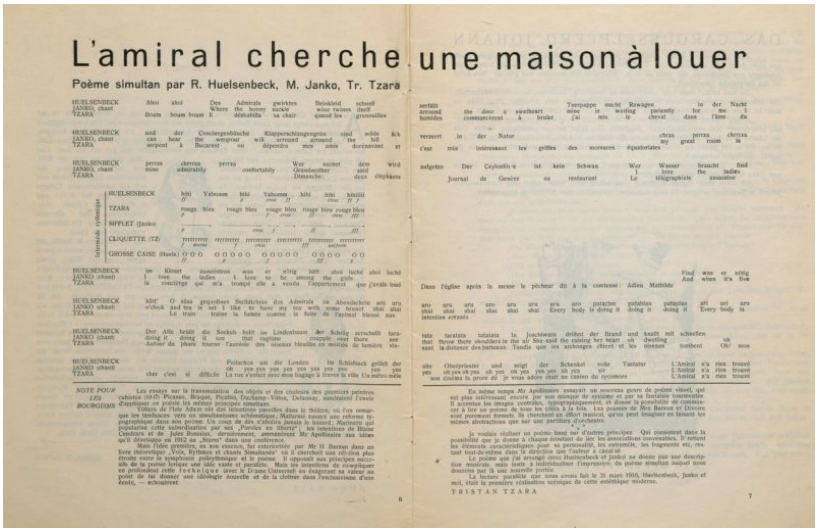
Karten zu 3.—, 2.— und 1.— Fr. an der Abendkasse.

Figure 7.1.1.7.2: Program for the first Dada Evening in Waag Hall

Tristan Tzara documented the program of a Dada soirée held on 26 February 1916 in prose as breathlessly cascading and chaotic as the evening itself must have been:

> ***DADA!! the latest thing!!! bourgeois syncope, BRUITIST [noise] music, the new rage, Tzara song dance protest — the bass drum — red light, policemen — songs cubist tableaux postcards Cabaret Voltaire song — simultaneous poem … two-step alcohol advertisement smoking toward the bells / we whisper: arrogance / Ms. Hennings' silence, Janco declaration. transatlantic art = people rejoice star projected on Cubist dance in bells.***
>
> ***Tristan Tzara, "Chronique Zurichoise," entry for 26 February 1916, in Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., Dada Almanach (Berlin, 1920), p. 11.***

Despite its apparent randomness, this is a fairly straightforward listing of the kinds of performances the Dadaists favored, which, like a cabaret variety show, included dance, music, poetry recitations, costumed performances, and audience participation. However, most of these popular art forms were distorted beyond recognition.


L'amiral cherche une maison à louer

Poème simultan par R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janko, Tr. Tzara

Figure **7.1.1.7.3**: L'amiral cherche une maison à louer text, recited 30 March 1916, as published in the journal *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916

For one type of recitation mentioned by Tzara, the "simultaneous poem," different lines of text were read at the same time by different performers. In *L'amiral cherche une maison à louer* (*The admiral is looking for a house to rent*), three voices speak/sing the text simultaneously, Huelsenbeck in German, Janco in English, and Tzara in French, while playing a siren whistle, rattle, and bass drum. The performance provides a sensory and semantic cacophony that is only resolved in the final bleak line, when all three performers together recite in French, "The admiral found nothing."

Another type of performance was the sound poem, which was made up of meaningless phonemes rather than words. For example, Ball's poem *Karawane* begins, "jolifanto bambla o falli bambla / großiga m'pfa habla horem / egiga goramen / higo bloiko russula huju / hollaka hollala … ."



Figure **7.1.1.7.4**: Hugo Ball reciting *Karawane*

Ball recited this poem while wearing a cardboard costume vaguely resembling a bishop's cape and miter that was so restricting he had to be carried on and off stage. The costume combined with the incomprehensible chant (Catholic masses were conducted in Latin at the time), created an obvious satire on religion.

Ball's own description of this performance also suggests a sort of regression therapy in which he recollects seeing the liturgy as a child:

> ***I do not know what gave me the idea of this music, but I began to chant my vowel sequences in a church style like a recitative … For a moment it seemed as if there were a pale, bewildered face in my Cubist mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiems and high masses in his home parish. Then the lights went out, as I had ordered, and bathed in sweat I was carried off the stage like a magical bishop.Translated in Dickerman, ed., Dada, p. 28.***

Dada song and dance



Figure 7.1.1.7.5: Photo of Sophie Täuber dancing at the opening of Galerie Dada, March 1917

More ordinary cabaret fare such as song-and-dance numbers were also distorted. With a gallows humor typical of those caught up in the horror of World War I, Emmy Hennings sang an altered version of a popular soldier's marching song, 'This is how we live [*So leben wir*],' as "This is how we die, this is how we die, / We die every day, / Because they make it so comfortable to die."

Dada soirées also included performers in Janco's so-called African masks dancing and chanting Huelsenbeck's African-sounding songs. The chants were at first entirely invented (with each verse ending in "umba, umba"), but later included some authentic African and Maori borrowings. Like Hugo Ball's sound poems, such performances were intended as repudiations of Western rationalism and civilization, and possibly as invocations of healing primal states.

While the Dadaists' intention was to valorize non-Western cultures, their "primitivist" performances are today considered problematic. Like many modern artists who embraced "**primitivism**" the Dadaists appropriated non-Western cultural artifacts without understanding or acknowledging their original values and purposes. They assumed African cultures and peoples were non-rational and tended to generalize all African and Oceanic cultures into a single homogeneous entity.

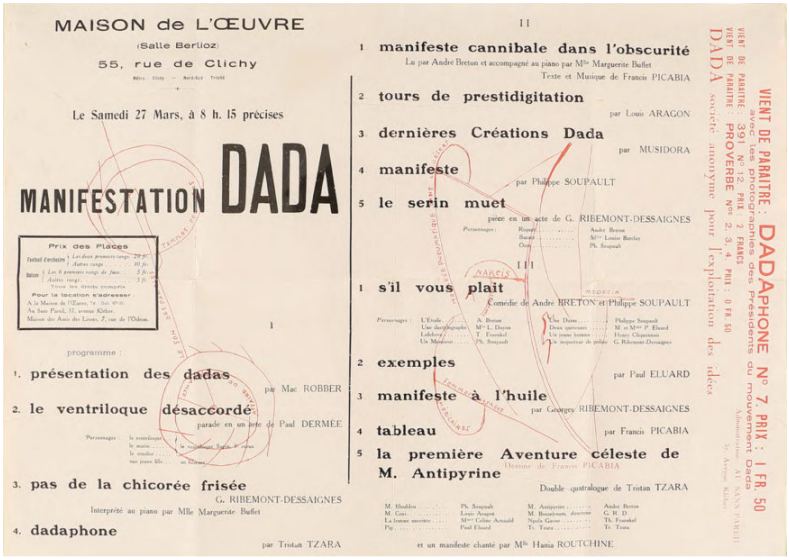
Among her many projects, Sophie Täuber participated in Dada performances as a dancer in a troupe choreographed by Rudolf Laban, who was known for rejecting classical movement in favor of more natural body language. A photograph of her in a pose at the opening of the Galerie Dada while wearing a mask by Janco shows another artistic convention broken by the Dadists. In a typical cabaret the attractive appearance (and implied sexual availability) of the female performers was taken for granted, but as Hans Richter noted in his memoir of Zurich Dada, the masks and costumes hid the "pretty faces" and "slender bodies" of the dancers[1].



Figure **7.1.1.7.6**: Photo of Sophie Täuber and Hans Arp with marionettes for *König Hirsch*

Täuber also produced figurative sculpture, mostly reduced to basic geometric shapes either turned on a lathe or constructed out of found materials. The marionettes she produced for a 1918 staging of Carlo Gozzi's *König Hirsch* (King Stag), for example, are made of thread spools and other wood scraps jointed with eye hooks. Although not produced in the context of Dada, these marionettes evoke many of the same themes, including the playful use of found materials and the uncomfortable transformation of organic, apparently free human beings into rigidly mechanized **automatons**.

'Our cabaret is a gesture'


MAISON de L'ŒUVRE

(Salle Berlioz)

55, rue de Clichy

Le Samedi 27 Mars, à 8 h. 15 précises

MANIFESTATION DADA

Prix des Places

programme :

1. présentation des dadas par Mac ROBBER
2. le ventriloque désaccordé parade en un acte de Paul DERMÉE
3. pas de la chicorée frisée G. RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES Interprété au piano par Mlle Marguerite Buffet
4. dadaphone par Tristan TZARA

II

1 manifeste cannibale dans l'obscurité Lu par André Breton et accompagné au piano par Mlle Marguerite Buffet Texte et Musique de Francis PICABIA
2 tours de prestidigitation par Louis ARAGON
3 dernières Créations Dada par MUSIDORA
4 manifeste par Philippe SOUPAULT
5 le serin muet pièce en un acte de G. RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES

III

1 s'il vous plait Comédie de André BRETON et Philippe SOUPAULT
2 exemples par Paul ELUARD
3 manifeste à l'huile par Georges RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES
4 tableau par Francis PICABIA
5 la première Aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine Dessins de Francis PICABIA Double quatralogue de Tristan TZARA

et un manifeste chanté par Mlle Hania ROUTCHINE

VIENT DE PARAITRE : DADAPHONE N° 7. PRIX : 1 FR. 50 avec les photographies des Présidents du mouvement Dada

DADA société anonyme pour l'exploitation des idées

Figure **7.1.1.7.7**: Program for the Manifestation Dada at Théâtre de l'oeuvre, Paris, 27 March 1920

Dada was a cosmopolitan movement at a time of rising nationalism, and it quickly became a global phenomenon, spreading from Zurich and New York to Paris, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, and other locales. The program for a 1920 Paris Dada soirée included a reading of Francis Picabia's *Cannibal Manifesto*, which insulted the audience, and a piano piece by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes titled "March of the Curly Endive," which was written by chance using a pocket roulette wheel.

What are such performances about? It would violate the **absurdist creed** of Dada to attempt to submit them to reason and order. Perhaps Hugo Ball put it best when he said, "Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect."[2]

Dada was anti-war, anti-authority, anti-nationalist, anti-convention, anti-reason, anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist, and anti-art. Performance was of particular value to the Dadaists because its combination of media expanded the potential for multi-sensory and

poly-semantic assault; and also because its direct interaction with the public gave it a greater potential to agitate and to shock.

Notes:

1. Hans Richter, *Dada Art and Anti-Art* (London, 1997), pp. 79-80.
2. Translated in Dickerman, ed., *Dada*, p. 25.

Additional resources:

Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (National Gallery of Art, 2005)

Audio performance of a version of *L'amiral cherche une maison a louer*

Jody Blake, "Ragging the War: Dada," in *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 59-82.

Read more about "primitivism" in modern art

"We Need a New Skin Color": The Racial Imagination of Dada

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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7.1.2.3: Fountain

7.1.2.4: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)

7.1.2.5: Boite-en-valise, Series F

7.1.2.6: Marcel Duchamp and the Viewer

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7.1.2.1: Nude Descending a Staircase, No 2

by DR. TOM FOLLAND

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Figure 7.1.2.1.1: Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 (151.8 x 93.3 cm) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

When the French artist Marcel Duchamp arrived by ship to New York in 1915, his reputation, as the saying goes, preceded him. Two years earlier, in 1913, after an inauspicious debut in France, Duchamp sent his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* to America. His now famous depiction of a body in motion walking down a narrow stairway quickly drew outrage from a public unfamiliar with current trends in European art, and became a *succès de scandale* (success from scandal) that launched Duchamp into the American spotlight. But why was the painting so shocking?

The 1913 exhibition, dubbed "The Armory Show" for its installation in New York City's 69th Regiment Armory, proposed to survey modern art from Romanticism of the early nineteenth-century to Cubism of the present.

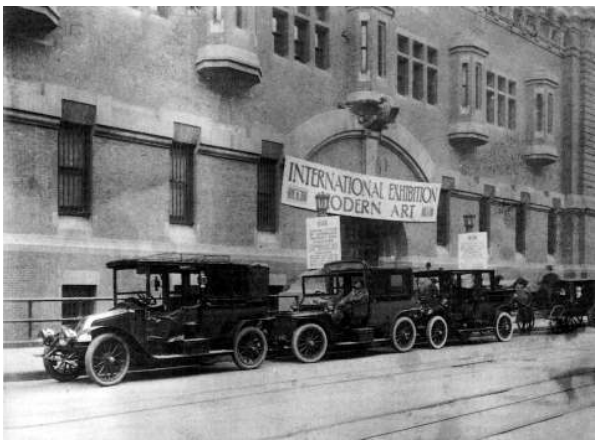


Figure 7.1.2.1.2: Entrance to the New York City Armory Show, 69th Regiment Armory, New York City, 1913 (**public domain**)

The group that organized the 1913 exhibition called themselves the Association of American Painters and Sculptors. The sprawling exhibition also included American art and no doubt the organizers hoped that they might promote the work of an American vanguard in the company of illustrious European modernists. All that was quickly forgotten however, as it was Duchamp's painting that captured attention as the exhibition toured the country. The Armory Show also had the unfortunate effect of showcasing the provincialism of American artists who seemed to paint as if nothing had changed since the Realist and Impressionist movements of

the nineteenth-century. In the face of this realization, the American artist **William Glackens**, one of the exhibition's organizers wryly lamented, "we have not yet arrived at a National Art."[1]



Figure **7.1.2.1.3**: Detail, Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 (151.8 x 93.3 cm) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

As the exhibition toured the country, Duchamp's painting captured widespread attention for its unconventional rendition of the nude. He positioned the figure—its upright stance reiterated by the vertical orientation of the canvas—in a descending diagonal from upper left to lower right. A tangle of shattered geometric shapes suggest the stairs in the lower left corner of the composition while rows of receding stairs at the upper left and right frame the strangely multiplying female form as she descends. But what a descent! The figure recalls the whirling of a robot promenading down a set of stairs as if in some sort of futurist movie, or perhaps a magic lantern show—a popular form of image projection in the years before the development of cinema.



Figure **7.1.2.1.4**: Robert Henri, *Salome Dancer*, 1909, oil on canvas, 77 x 37 inches / 195.6 x 94 cm (**Mead Art Museum, Amherst College**)

Duchamp's painting was certainly a far cry from what passed as modern painting in the United States at that time. One of the most progressive movements was the **Ashcan School**, whose members used gritty palettes in expressive renderings of city street scenes,

immigrant subjects, and other urban themes that seemed shockingly modern. Robert Henri's *Salome* (left) for example, shows an actress striding across a narrow stage in a rather brazen manner. Her head tilts back as she gazes at the viewer and her hands sweep aside the folds of her skirt to reveal her legs. In contrast to Henri, Duchamp's subject matter is nearly indecipherable. His figure registers as female because of the convention, at least in recent years, that expects most nudes in art to be women. Moreover, the style was an extreme distortion of even the most contemporary kind of realism at the time. It was, perhaps, for these reasons that the painting challenged audiences, such as the uncomprehending critic who described *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* as "the explosion of a shingle factory."[2]

Like much European modernism (think **Cubism**, **Futurism** or **Orphism**), the painting abandoned any resemblance to nature. Its relatively monochromatic palette of warm browns and ochre subtly tinged with a greyish blue-green is typical of early Cubist paintings by **Pablo Picasso** and **George Braque**, who had wanted to minimize the optical effects of color and emphasize, instead, a revolutionary new conception of space. In this regard at least, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* did not disappoint.

Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2) did not waiver from its origins in Cubism. But, the unusual sense of motion conveyed in the painting may reflect an additional influence in the photography of **Eadweard Muybridge** (below) or Étienne-Jules Marey, who had invented a camera shutter in 1882 that allowed for an early version of time-lapse photography. Notice how the figure approximates the blur one might see with time-lapse imagery. Even painters of the Puteaux group, whom Duchamp had known in France, disapproved (they were interested in furthering the original Cubist investigations into pictorial space and perception of Picasso and Braque). In *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, Duchamp had welded a cubist style of shattered picture planes to the kind of painting being done by the Italian avant-garde movement Futurism, typified by Umberto Boccioni's ***Unique Forms of Continuity in Space***. The painting, as a result, is sometimes referred to as a Cubo-futurist work.

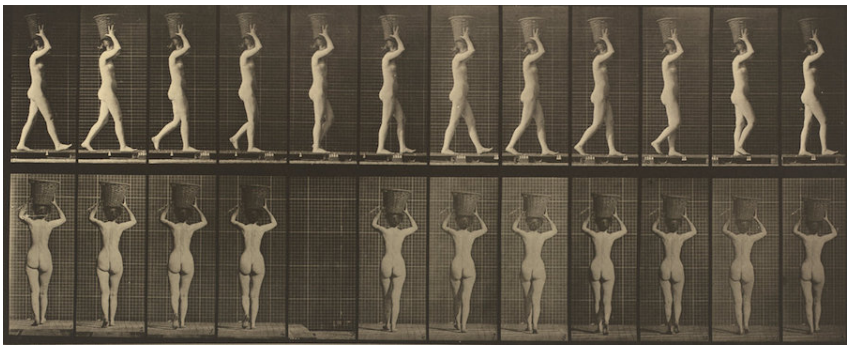


Figure 7.1.2.1.5: Eadweard Muybridge, Walking and Carrying a 15-lb. Basket on Head, Hands Raised, c. 1887, collotype, 16.8 x 41.8 cm (National Gallery of Art)

However unresponsive the reception for *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* was in France, it became a charged symbol of the modern in America. The female form had, of course, suffered avant-garde assault for some time in Europe reaching as far back as **Manet's *Olympia*** (1863), which showed a nude female reclining across a flatly painted interior. Matisse and his followers had even **further abstracted the figure** in their fauvist paintings. But in America, the lingering traces of the classical style with its idealizing forms still prevailed even among more contemporary painters. Duchamp turned a venerable subject—the female nude, and all it embodied about western culture and traditions of beauty—into something monstrous and worse, something machine-like. As in his later **readymades**—which turned ordinary commercial objects into works of art—Duchamp embraced the very thing art was supposed to reject: the cold logic of industrial production.

Notes

[1]"The American Section The National Art, An Interview with The Chairman of the Domestic Committee, W.M.J. Glackens," *Arts And Decoration*, vol. 2 (March 1913), p. 159.

[2]Julian Street, "Why I became a Cubist," Everybody's Magazine 28, June, 1913.

Additional resources:

This work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Marcel Duchamp on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Readymade (Tate Glossary)

Dada and the Readymade from the National Gallery of Art

Freeze Frame: Eadweard Muybridges's Photography of Motion from the National Museum of American History

Dada on MoMAlearning

Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 1996.

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7.1.2.2: Art as concept- In Advance of the Broken Arm

- *by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video 7.1.2.2.1: Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of November 1915) (MoMA)

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7.1.2.3: Fountain

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID
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Video **7.1.2.3.1**: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964, porcelain urinal, paint (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

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7.1.2.4: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)

by DR. LARA KUYKENDALL

Page ID
188267



Video **7.1.2.4.1**: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Estate of Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

You might know Marcel Duchamp because of his *Fountain*—the urinal that he signed (as R. Mutt) and submitted to the Society of Independent Artists art show in 1917. This "**readymade**" was a whimsical and iconoclastic gesture—in keeping with the spirit of the New York Dada circle. Like his Dada compatriots, including Francis Picabia and Man Ray, Duchamp reveled in humor, wordplay, and the radical redefinition of art during and just after World War I.



Figure **7.1.2.4.1**: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Art driven by ideas



Figure 7.1.2.4.2: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917/1964, glazed ceramic with black paint (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

Even before *Fountain*, Duchamp had made a big splash at New York's 1913 Armory Show with his controversial cubo-futurist painting ***Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*** (1912).But Duchamp said he wanted to get away from painting as a strategy for art-making. This was partly a reaction against the popular French saying, "bête comme un peintre," which means "stupid as a painter" (a phrase used to describe someone foolish—much like the English "dumb as a box of rocks"). To say someone is "stupid as a painter" is to say that painters only translate what they see and that painting is not an intellectual activity. Duchamp disagreed, and strove to make works, like *Fountain*, that were driven by intellect (what would come to be known as "conceptual art") and defied standards of beauty and artistic technique. Duchamp called *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* his "hilarious picture" and it, too, engages wit, absurdity, non-traditional materials, and conceptualism to push the boundaries of what was acceptable and possible in the art world of his generation.

Dust, wire, glue and varnish



Figure 7.1.2.4.3: Man Ray, *Dust Breeding*, 1920, printed c. 1967, gelatin silver print, 23.9 x 30.4 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even is often called the *Large Glass* because that is precisely what it is: two pieces of glass, which are stacked vertically and framed like a double-hung window to reach over nine feet tall. Though the *Large Glass* is essentially a flat, two-dimensional object, it is emphatically not a painting, as it is mostly transparent—you can walk around it and view it from both sides—and Duchamp avoided using traditional materials like canvas and oil paint. Instead, he concocted the imagery on the glass surface out of wire, foil, glue, and varnish. He also allowed dust to collect on the glass as it laid flat in his studio, which he affixed with adhesive. Man Ray's photograph, *Dust Breeding* (1920), shows just how dirty the glass got.

Duchamp stopped working on the *Large Glass* in 1923, after eight years, not because it was complete, but because he decided it should remain "definitively unfinished." Later, in 1927, when the glass was en route to collector Katherine Dreier's house from an exhibition in Brooklyn, he was thrilled to discover it had been damaged, saying the accidental cracking finished the work in a way that he never could have.



Figure 7.1.2.4.4: Marcel Duchamp, Malic Molds and shattered glass (detail), *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

The *Large Glass* is a curious contraption; it looks a bit like a mechanical diagram and was designed it to function like an allegorical machine. He made preliminary paintings and drawings for components of the *Large Glass* including ***Chocolate Grinder (No. 2)*** (1914). He also amassed an impressive collection of cryptic notes that he brought together in ***The Green Box*** (1934), which scholars have used to interpret the work's many different meanings—from the frustrations of love and sex, to the physics of electromagnetism and the fourth dimension. To understand how the *Large Glass* works like a machine we must imagine its components in motion.



Figure 7.1.2.4.5: Marcel Duchamp, Annotated detail, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, Even (The Large Glass), 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

The bride and the bachelors

The action begins in the upper left corner with the "Bride," the element that resembles a bug or a tree. She flirts by stripping for the "Bachelors" in the lower register. The Bachelors are the nine vaguely anthropomorphic cylinders in the lower left section of the glass, and they think the Bride is very attractive. Each Bachelor is trying to win her affection, but they exist in a completely different zone, and are having a hard time communicating with her.

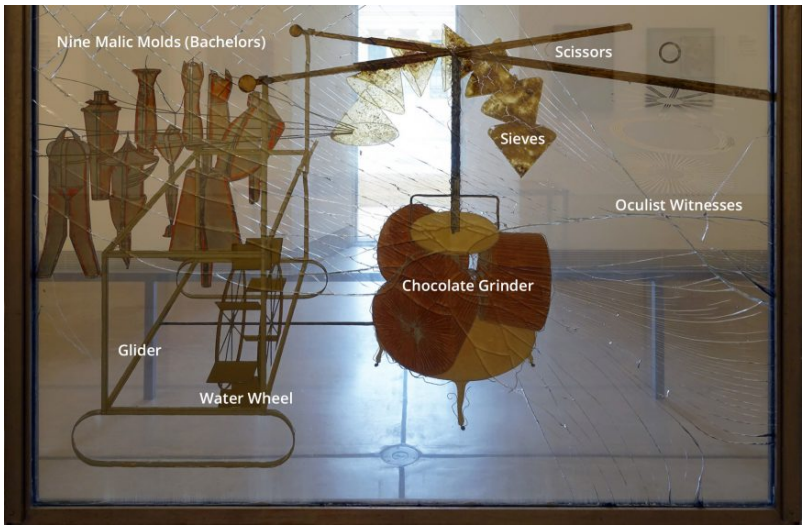


Figure 7.1.2.4.6: Marcel Duchamp, Annotated detail, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

As the Bachelors become excited their forms fill up with what Duchamp called an "illuminating gas" (invisible). This gas causes an "imaginary waterfall" to turn the water wheel (mill) beneath them. That action makes the rectangular glider slide back and forth, which moves the scissors above, which makes the chocolate grinder churn. All of that motion builds up, as the gas from the Bachelors flows into the cone-shaped sieves. The gas that represents the Bachelors' desire for the Bride transforms into liquid and flows into the lower right corner. Next, the liquid is propelled through the three circular elements, and through a magnifying glass (Oculist Witnesses), and shoots into the Bride's realm above. The goal for each Bachelor is to land his shot within one of the three square windows inside of the cloud that hovers at the top of the glass (Draft Piston or Nets). If he can do that, he will win the Bride and they will be able to consummate their love physically. If you look closely, you can see nine small holes on the right side of the Bride's register, which Duchamp marked by firing matches with paint on the tips through a toy cannon. Unfortunately, only one of those shots even came close to its target. Thus, the Bachelors cannot reach the Bride and their love for her remains unfulfilled.

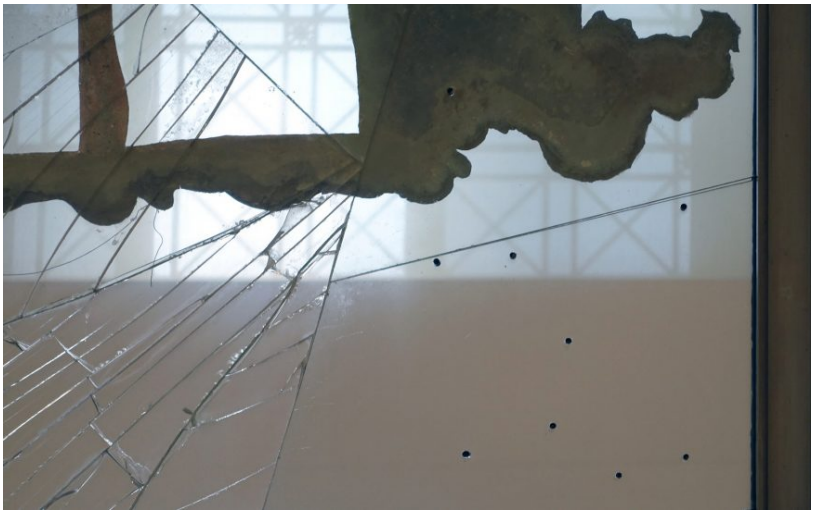


Figure 7.1.2.4.7: Marcel Duchamp, Nine Shots (detail), *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)



Figure **7.1.2.4.8**: Marcel Duchamp, Oculist Witnesses (detail), *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Duchamp loved science. To create the *Large Glass*, he experimented not only with new media but also with recent scientific theories as if he were in a laboratory. On top of the tale of amorous attraction and frustration, Duchamp layered ideas about such scientific phenomena as electromagnetism and telegraphy. The way the Bride communicates her erotic feelings from her pane of glass to the Bachelors' realm below relates to the power of electricity and the vibratory waves in the electromagnetic field mobilized in wireless telegraphy. The Bride's form actually resembles the telegraphic antenna on the top of the Eiffel Tower that was the source of much popular interest in Duchamp's day. As an antenna, she can send and receive unseen messages through space, but the Bachelors are not so advanced. They are able to receive her communications, but their only response comes in the form of those failed shots from the toy canon, which are at best a rudimentary and rather pathetic means of winning her love.

Duchamp's writings reveal that he imagined the Bride's realm as the mysterious fourth dimension of space, a higher plane from the Bachelors who live in our common three-dimensional world. This accounts for their miscommunications and failed attempts at finding love. In the *Large Glass*, Duchamp brought art, science, sex, and love together in an absurdly humorous way. Watching machines try to fall in love; imagining the bug-tree-antenna Bride strip for Bachelors who cannot reach her; understanding that the object was made with dust, shattered glass, and marks made randomly by a toy cannon; and tying that drama to the complicated workings and invisible forces of science is surprising, playful, and oddly hilarious.



Figure **7.1.2.4.9**: Marcel Duchamp, Chocolate Grinder (detail), The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass), 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

From art to chess

After this project ended, Duchamp claimed to give up his career as an artist and became a professional chess player. His final joke was the revelation upon his death in 1968 that he had been working secretly on a major installation, ***Étant donnés*** (1946-66), for twenty years. This surprised even those who knew him well, and built upon many of the themes of eroticism and physics that he

explored in the *Large Glass*. You can see both, along with *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, *Fountain*, and many other works by Duchamp, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Additional resources:

Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, and David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds. *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

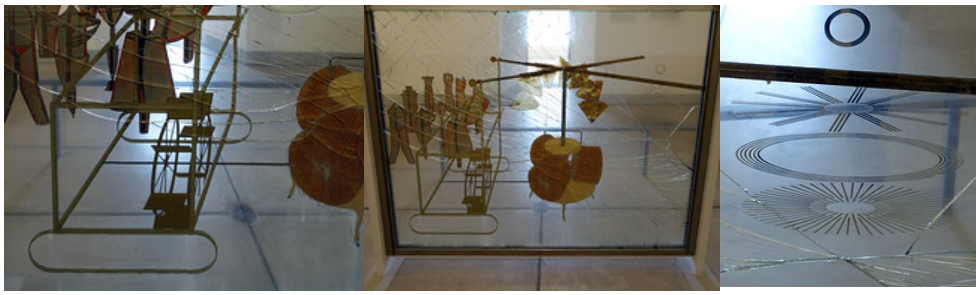
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Glass) ," in Smarthistory, March 6, 2016, accessed August 14, 2020, https://smarthistory.org/duchamp-largeglass/. via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

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7.1.2.5: Boite-en-valise, Series F

by BRUCE GUENTHER and DR. BETH HARRIS

Page ID

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Video 7.1.2.5.1: Marcel Duchamp, *Boite-en-valise, Series F*, 1960 (Portland Art Museum). This video was produced in cooperation with Portland Art Museum.

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7.1.2.6: Marcel Duchamp and the Viewer

by **DR. MARK B. POHLAD**

Page ID
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Figure **7.1.2.6.1**: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, 1946–66 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, photo: Regan Vercruysse, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Inexplicably, a rough-hewn antique door stands in a dimly lit dead-end corridor in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. For those curious enough to investigate and look through its peepholes, what they see startles them. It is the final project of Marcel Duchamp, an artist who repeatedly redefined art in the twentieth century. Exploring how his art challenges viewers is essential to understanding his creativity and much of the art of the last century.

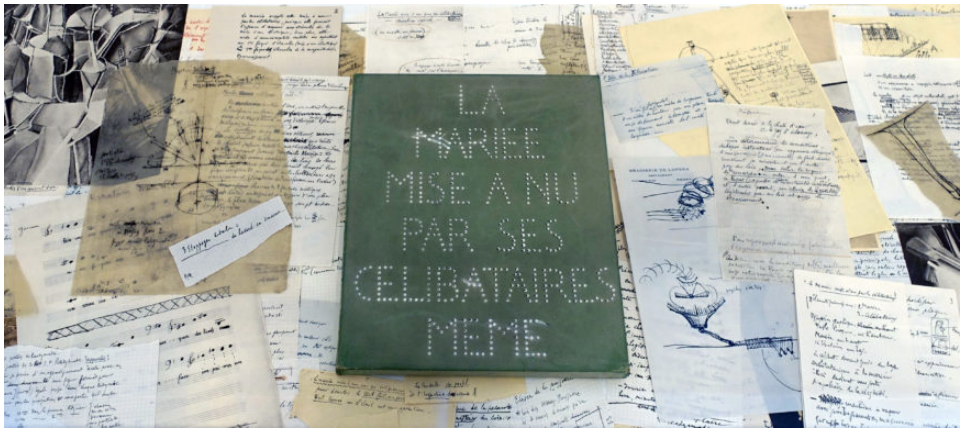


Figure **7.1.2.6.2**: Marcel Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Green Box), 1934 © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art; photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



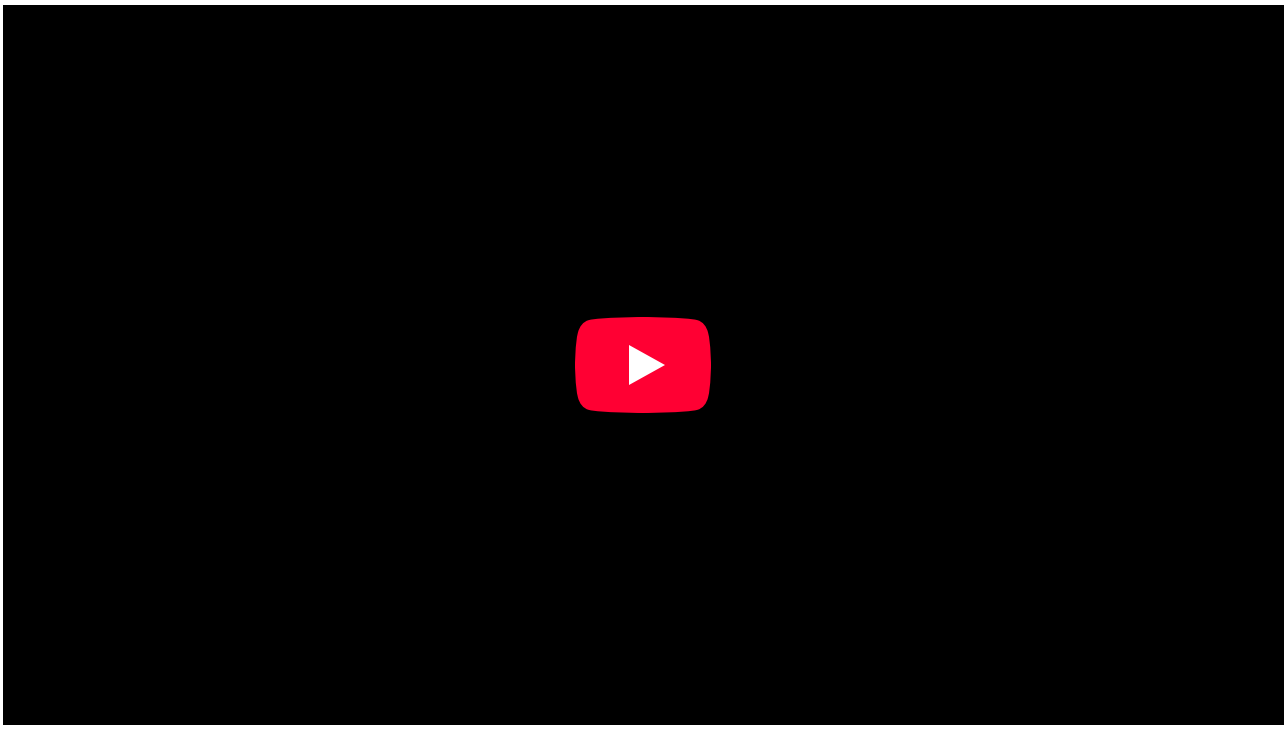
Figure **7.1.2.6.3**: Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, dust, two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm © Succession Marcel Duchamp (Philadelphia Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The challenging nature of his art

Duchamp's art is highly innovative and extremely varied. Many of his works don't fall into the traditional genres of fine art, such as painting and sculpture. They include "readymades"—already manufactured objects chosen by Duchamp and treated as artworks—notes and publishing projects, and even motorized machines. On top of that, they are often made with unconventional media, such as glass, dust, found objects, and even body hair. To complicate things even further, many of Duchamp's pieces relate to others in his *oeuvre* (output). The *Green Box*, for instance, is a boxed collection of carefully reproduced handwritten notes about his large, complex ***The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)***. A further challenge for viewers is that his artworks frequently make references to literature, math and science, philosophy, and even chess. Indeed, Duchamp's art asks a lot from his audience!

The role and experience of the viewer

Despite the often aloof, cerebral quality of his pieces, for Duchamp the viewer was critically important. In a 1957 lecture, he described how "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." [1]





Rotoreliefs featured in Duchamp's film Anémic Cinéma (1926) © Succession Marcel Duchamp (The Museum of Modern Art)

As if to emphasize the viewer's role, many of Duchamp's pieces explore notions of visual perception. In the 1920s he constructed two large, motorized machines on standing frames. ***Rotary Glass Plates*** (1920) and ***Rotary Demisphere*** (1925) are made of, respectively, spinning rectangular plates which are read as a completed circle when in motion, and a rotating spiral which creates a dizzying dimensionality. Their whole purpose was simply to create these visual effects in the eye of the viewer.



Figure **7.1.2.6.4**: Marcel Duchamp, *With Hidden Noise*, 1916, ball of twine between two brass plates, joined by four long screws, containing unknown object added by Walter Arensberg, 12.7 x 12.7 x 13 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art, © Succession Marcel Duchamp, photo: Thomas Hawk, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Relatedly, Duchamp also created *Rotoreliefs*—boxed sets of six cardboard disks printed with various circular patterns. When a disk is placed on a rotating record turntable it produces a compelling illusion. These days Duchamp's optical works are considered predecessors of the psychedelic-era "Op Art" of the 1960s and 70s.



Figure 7.1.2.6.5: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (reproduction), 1917/1964, glazed ceramic with black paint (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) (photo: Dr. Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) © Succession Marcel Duchamp

The importance of the viewer for Duchamp is also suggested by the fact that some of his works invite participation, at least implicitly. This is especially true of the **readymades**. It is hard to resist turning the *Bicycle Wheel*, made from a wheel and fork mounted on a stool, or shake ***With Hidden Noise***, a ball of twine with metal plates on either end, to hear the rattling object inside. A person might consider clearing sidewalks with the ordinary snow shovel ***In Advance of the Broken Arm*** or relieving themselves in the commercially produced urinal ***"Fountain"*** (this actually happened, in the first instance, by a janitor outside a museum in the 1940s, and then later by an artist in 1990).



Figure 7.1.2.6.6: Marcel Duchamp, In Advance of the Broken Arm, August 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of 1915), wood and galvanized-iron snow shovel, 52″ / 132 cm high © Succession Marcel Duchamp (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Duchamp sometimes gave the viewer specific (and absurd) instructions for experiencing his pieces. For instance, the title of an optical glass work he made in 1917 reads, ***To Be Looked At (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*** (1918). And for the cover of a 1947 **exhibition catalogue**, Duchamp painted almost a thousand rubber "falsies" (prosthetic breasts), and attached a label asking the viewer to *"Prière de Toucher"* ["Please Touch"]. These strategies disrupt the usual, distant relationship between art objects and the audience, but they also critique and complicate it.



Figure **7.1.2.6.7**: Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy* (with Louise Norton), c. 1920–21, gelatin silver print, 21.6 x 17.3 cm (Philadelphia Museum of Art) © Man Ray Trust



Figure **7.1.2.6.8**: Man Ray with Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Selavy, 1920–21, Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette, 16.5 x 11.2 cm © Man Ray Trust

Rrose Sélavy

Perhaps Duchamp's most elaborate and sophisticated challenge to creative norms was his invention of a separate artist altogether: "Rrose Sélavy" (c. 1920-21). Her name has been translated in many ways, but most often phonetically as "Eros [love], that is life." To photograph Rrose, Duchamp enlisted the help of friends Louise Norton, a writer and editor, and Man Ray, a photographer and artist. Duchamp himself is done up in drag, dressed as a stylish, modern woman wearing a dress, wig, hat, and make-up. Norton crouched behind him, and it is her more feminine arms and hands that we see. Another photograph of Rrose was also featured on the label for a "rectified readymade," a fake commercial cologne bottle labeled *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette [Beautiful Breath, Veil Water]* (1920–21). Imitating a commercial product poses interesting questions about commodity versus artistic production.

Appearing at a time when Duchamp was famously thought to have given up art altogether, Rrose continued to "make" pieces. Her name appears on many of Duchamp's pieces including the "assisted readymade," ***Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy*** (1921/1964), a birdcage filled with marble cubes, a thermometer, and a bird's cuttlebone. Her name is part of a tongue-twisting pun on the aforementioned *Rotary Demisphere* and as the signature on ***Fresh Widow*** (1920), a reduced scale French-style window with black leather panes. Rrose's importance to Duchamp is evident in the very title of his miniature, portable display of his own art: ***Box in a Suitcase: from or by Rrose Sélavy or Marcel Duchamp*** (1935–41). In the last two decades, scholars have been extremely interested in the gender-transforming nature of Rrose, drawing on feminism, gender studies, and queer theory to understand the implications of Duchamp's radical creation.

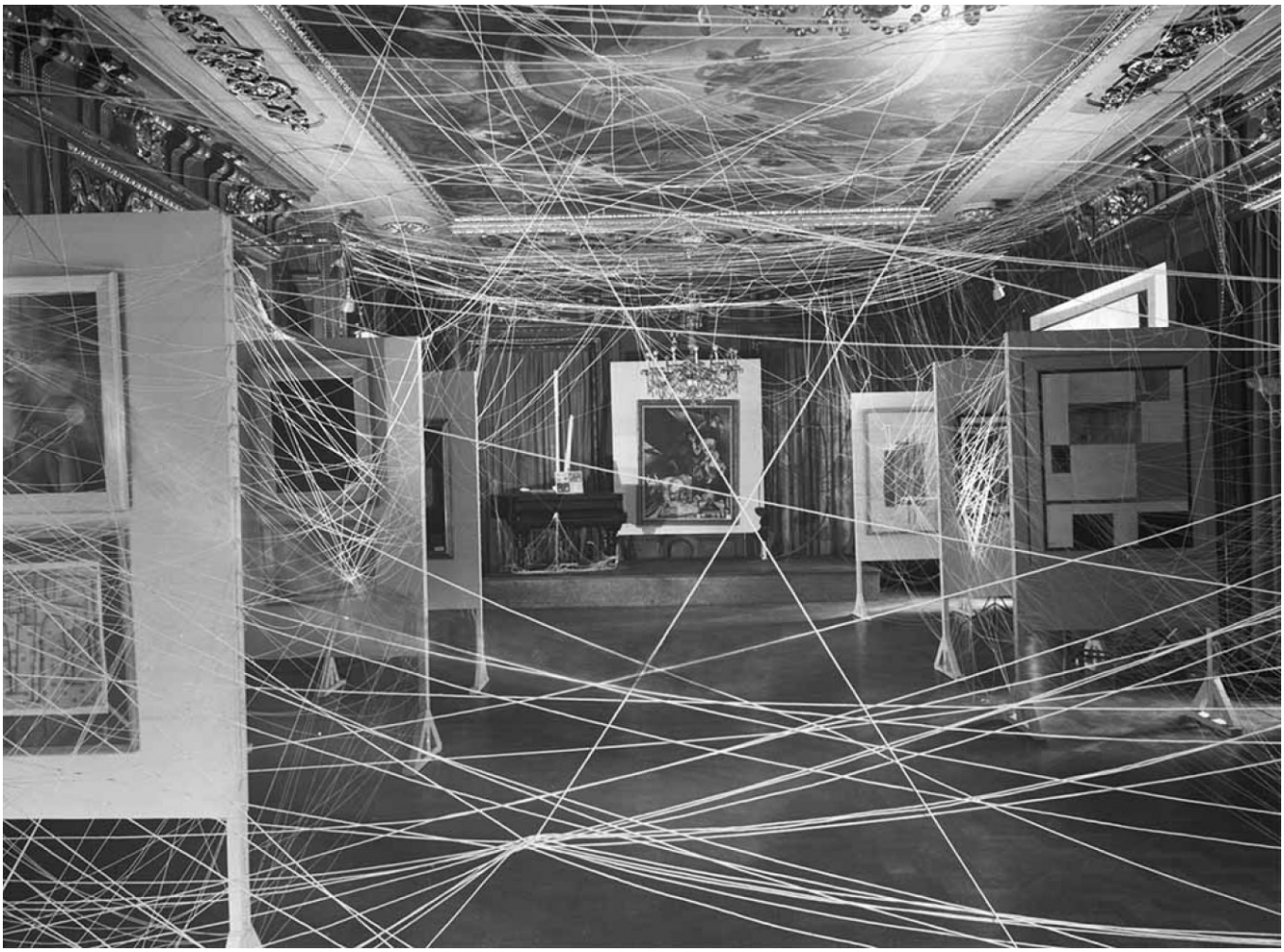


Figure **7.1.2.6.9**: Marcel Duchamp installation, First Papers of Surrealism (New York), 1942 (photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Challenging exhibition spaces

When Duchamp was asked to design exhibitions for fellow artists and groups, his imaginative set-ups often disrupted traditional viewing. For a 1938 show of Surrealist art, he placed artists' works on department store revolving doors, covered the floor with sand and leaves, and put four large beds in each corner. Overhead he suspended coal bags stuffed with newspaper—a genuine fire hazard given the coal dust sifting down from them. Finally, Duchamp shrouded the space in almost complete darkness; Man Ray handed out flashlights to visitors with which to view the artworks.

Four years later, Duchamp designed the exhibition *First Papers of Surrealism*, in which he laced the exhibition space with a huge quantity of string, seriously impeding viewers' ability to get close to the artworks. As if this were not enough, for the show's opening, Duchamp invited children to play raucously in the space. It seems Duchamp was intent on flouting art world norms. In 1953, for an exhibition of Dadaism at New York's Sidney Janis Gallery, Duchamp crumpled up an information sheet listing the artists and their artworks. Upon entering, visitors had to pull them out of a wastepaper basket. It was an appropriately iconoclastic

gesture for a show of Dada art and another example of how Duchamp worked to subvert traditional expectations around viewing. [2]



Figure **7.1.2.6.10**: Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés*, 1946–66 (Philadelphia Museum of Art © Succession Marcel Duchamp, photo: Jon Seidman, CC BY 2.0)

The last word

Duchamp continued challenging his public, even posthumously. Just months after his death, a major new work was unveiled at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the one mentioned at the start of this essay. He had been secretly working on *Étant donnés* for more than twenty years, from 1944 to 1966. Its long title: *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage… (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas…)* is meant to imitate the dry language of a mathematical theorem. Peering into the holes in the door, the solitary viewer sees into a lighted diorama. Past a ruined brick wall are the hyper-realistic torso, limbs, and blond hair—but not the face—of a nude woman. She lays on a bed of twigs, legs wide open, and holds a lamp aloft. In the background is a detailed painting of a landscape with a mechanical waterfall that appears to be flowing.



Figure **7.1.2.6.11**: Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, 1912, oil on canvas, 57 7/8 x 35 1/8 (151.8 x 93.3 cm) (Philadelphia Museum of Art) © Succession Marcel Duchamp

Just as he had outraged viewers with his famous ***Nude Descending a Staircase, #2*** at the Armory Show half a century earlier, so Duchamp hoped to shock his audience well into the future. *Étant donnés (Given)* can be related to the deliberately outrageous and sometimes women-objectifying art of the Surrealists, with whom Duchamp collaborated. But its themes are high-minded and include the nature of representation itself, artistic inspiration, and, of course, the individual experience of the viewer. Thinking about his future audience, Duchamp even left a **notebook of instructions** for its museum set-up and maintenance.

For those who approach the *Étant donnés*'s inexplicable rustic door in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and choose to peer inside, there may be both surprise and disgust. There may also be an immediate, self-conscious awareness that someone may catch them gawking, and that they, the viewer, are somehow involved in the scene before them. Ultimately, however, Duchamp implicates more than the individual viewer. He implicates the very act of looking, as well as a long history of art that similarly tries to lure the viewer's attention and participation. [3]

As he said in his talk “The Creative Act”: “In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius: he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator…and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers [textbooks] of Art History.” Despite—or perhaps because of—the intriguing challenges Duchamp’s art poses to viewers, his historical importance continues to grow over time.

Notes:

[1] From a talk given by Duchamp in Houston at the meeting of the American Federation of the Arts, April 1957. In Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London, 1975), p. 138–140.
[2] The Duchamp-designed exhibitions referenced above are, in order:
a. The Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme (January 17–February 24, 1938), Galérie Beaux-Arts, Paris.
b. First Papers of Surrealism (October 14–November 7, 1942), Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York.
c. Dada: 1916–1923 (April 15–May 9, 1953), Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
[3] Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 111–15.

Additional Resources:

Duchamp reading “The Creative Act,” **Aspen 5 +6, the Minimalism Issue, 1967,** Ubuweb.com

Marcel Duchamp on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Dawn Ades, David Hopkins, Neil Cox, *Duchamp* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2021)

Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014)

Cite this page as: Dr. Mark B. Pohlad, "Marcel Duchamp and the Viewer," in *Smarthistory*, February 24, 2021, accessed January 1, 2023, **https://smarthistory.org/duchamp-viewer/**.

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7.1.3: Max Ernst, Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale

- by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID

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Max Ernst, *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924, oil with painted wood elements and cut-and-pasted printed paper on wood with wood frame, 69.8 x 57.1 x 11.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) With Dr. Steven Zucker and Dr. Beth Harris

This painting at MoMA

This painting at MoMALearning

Dada on Smarthistory

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7.1.4: Raoul Hausmann, Spirit of the Age- Mechanical Head

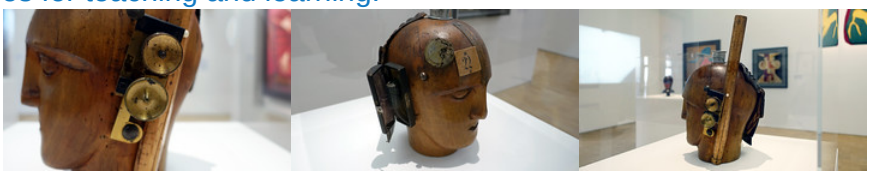
- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **7.1.4.1**: Raoul Hausmann, *Spirit of the Age: Mechanical Head*, 1919, wooden mannequin head with attached objects, 32.5 x 21 x 20 cm (Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris)

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7.1.5: Dada's "Aproximate Man"- A Portrait of Tristan Tzara (1919) by Marcel Janco

- *by DR. EDUARD ANDREI*

Page ID

188272



Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\): Marcel Janco, *Portrait of Tristan Tzara*, 1919, mixed media, 55 x 25 x 0.7 cm (Centre Pompidou, image: **public domain**)

This mask doubles as a portrait of the poet and **Dada** co-founder Tristan Tzara. Created in 1919 by the painter and architect Marcel Janco (also known in Romanian as “Iancu”), the mask-portrait is an important and rare document of the Dada movement and an embodiment of the so-called “approximate man” — a term that encapsulates many of the movement’s characteristics (“Approximate Man” is the title of a book-length poem by Tzara).

Tzara and Janco were both Jewish Romanian intellectuals at the epicenter of the European avant-garde during World War I; their artistic pursuits were instrumental in the emergence of the Dada movement in Zurich, at the now-famous **Cabaret Voltaire**.

The outbreak of World War I made many of Europe’s youth to flee to Zurich, in the neutral country of Switzerland, where they could pursue their studies, avoid being drafted, and even express their opposition vis-à-vis the absurdity of war.

Both Janco and Tzara were among these youth; Janco arrived in Zurich in 1914, Tzara in 1915. They both enrolled at the University, where they met again, since they had already established a friendship as high schoolers in Bucharest. There, in 1912, together with another friend, Ion Vinea, they established the literary magazine *Simbolul* (“The Symbol”), in whose pages Tzara had published his first Romanian-language poetry, illustrated with drawings by Janco.



Figure \(\PageIndex{2}\): Photograph, 1912 (image: Eduard Andrei)

Tristan Tzara is the poet's pseudonym, which he fully adopted in 1915 in Zurich (he was born Samuel Rosenstock). "Tristan" is a reference to Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*, while "Tzara" is a variant of the Romanian word for "(home) country."



Figure \(\PageIndex{3}\): Poster for the opening of Cabaret Voltaire, 1916, lithograph by Marcel Slodki (Kunsthaus Zurich, image: **public domain**)

In Zurich, Janco and Tzara entered a closely-knit group of artists, all of whom are now remembered as the core members of Dada. Among these artists was the Alsatian sculptor and painter Hans/ Jean Arp, who fled to Zurich in 1915, simulating a mental illness in order to eschew being drafted for war. There he met the Swiss dancer and visual artist Sophie Taeuber, who would become his wife. In the same circles were the writer Hugo Ball and his partner, the poet and cabaret singer Emmy Hennings. Ball was discharged from war service on medical counts and had become a staunch pacifist. In a similar situation was Ball's friend Richard Huelsenbeck, an antiwar writer who later became a psychiatrist in Long Island, NY.

It was Ball who founded, in 1916, the Cabaret Voltaire, named after the French **Enlightenment** philosopher Voltaire.

At this cabaret, these interconnected artists established Dada. The origin of this unusual name for the group remains controversial. Tzara claimed to have coined it; according to the most recounted narrative, Tzara would have found this word by chance in a Larousse dictionary he opened at a random page.



Figure \(\PageIndex{4}\): Marcel Janco, Portrait of Tristan Tzara, 1919, mixed media, 55 x 25 x 0.7 cm (Centre Pompidou, image: public domain)

The portrait of Tzara by Janco is one of several visual sources that help us understand what went on at the Cabaret Voltaire. In an era where video recordings were not yet possible, the only documentation we have of the creative output of the Dada group is in the form of literary sources like memoirs and diaries and some visual sources, namely paintings and photographs.

What these sources show us is that the Cabaret Voltaire became home to multimedia **performances** combining poetry, music, visual arts (notably collage and posters), and dance (often entailing the use of masks and puppets). These performances were modeled on the aesthetic principles of Richard Wagner and **Wassily Kandinsky** and echoed the notion of a "total work of art" (a work of art that makes use of many art forms, also called *Gesamtkunstwerk*).

Amid the resources for visualizing these Dada performances was a painting by Marcel Janco from 1916, titled *Cabaret Voltaire*. Although the painting no longer exists, we still have a grayscale photograph and a color lithograph of it.

The painting offered a bird's eye view of the incendiary atmosphere of those Dadaist soirées. People in the audience, seated at tables, look like an electrified crowd: they laugh, chat, yell, and gesticulate.

One of them points to the word „DADA", legible on a banner above the pianist. Of all the faces, only one appears to be unchanged: a skull-like mask, reminiscent of African art, likely authored by Janco.



Figure \(\PageIndex{5}\): Left to right: Grayscale photograph of oil on canvas painting by Marcel Janco, 1916, Cabert Voltaire; color lithograph of the same painting; annotated lithograph identifying portrayals of Dada artists within the painting and, in yellow, a man pointing to the word "Dada" and a mask, probably by Janco (images: Eduard Andrei)

Marcel Janco's masks, costumes, and stage props were the artist's most significant contribution to Dada performances. The simple materials he employed for their creation, such as burlap, paper, and rope, suggest that his masks and props were meant to be ephemeral, like the shows for which they were made, all conceived as one-time events. For this reason, some art historians think that the few Janco masks that are still extant are, in fact, later copies.



Figure \(\PageIndex{6}\): Janco, *Portrait of Tristan Tzara*, 1919, mixed media, detail (Centre Pompidou, image: public domain)



Figure \(\PageIndex{7}\): Marcel Janco, *Mask* (Centre Pompidou, image: public domain)

One of three masks attributed to Janco in the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the mask known as the *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* is eerily oversized and stitched together of diverse materials (cardboard, jute canvas, string, ink, and gouache). As it has been noted, by Dadaist Hugo Ball and many others, art works like Janco's mask redefined art making, relinquishing traditional drawing and paintings methods for unexpected juxtapositions of materials achieved by means of collages and montage.

In *Portrait of Tristan Tzara*, the unusual size and the childlike combination of heterogenous textures demonstrate Janco's playful approach to his art. He does not stifle or control the accidental creases of the cardboard or the unraveling of the canvas bits, but uses them to increase the expressive force of the ensemble. For example, the casual drop of the string is utilized to call to mind the strap of Tzara's monocle. This is not the only such use of string in Janco's work; in another mask (shown here to the right), the string is used to stand in for the moustache of the figure.

Chance and spontaneity are key concepts for Dada artists. Janco's *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* presents yet another key Dada element, namely asymmetry. For example, while one eye is round and seemingly enlarged due to the monocle that cover it, the other eye is merely suggested by the angled line that stands in for the eyebrow.



Figure \(\PageIndex{8}\): Anthropomorphic mask, early 20th century, Ivory Coast, formerly owned by Tristan Tzara (**Musée du Quai Branly**)



Figure \(\PageIndex{9}\): Lötschental mask, Switzerland, date unknown (image: Eduard Andrei)

The elongation of the face, like an inverted triangle, demonstrates the influence of African masks. A mask that once belonged to the private collection of Tristan Tzara is now housed in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* epitomizes the Dada artists' interest in African art — an interest shared by both Tzara and Janco. However, Janco's masks were not direct quotations of specific African or Oceanic masks. Instead, his masks were original creations that drew on the formal characteristics of African masks, translating some of their visual identity by means of strikingly different, ephemeral materials.

This source of inspiration for Dada needs to be understood in the context of the highly problematic "**primitivism**" and "exoticism" of the early 20th century, fueled by colonialism.



Figure \(\PageIndex{10}\): Romanian folk mask (The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest)

At a strictly formal level, European artists' encounter with the plastic vocabulary of African art — though devoid of any understanding of that art's context and meaning — contributed to revolutionizing European artistic expression.

According to the Dada-Afrika exhibition of 2016, organized on the occasion of the Dada centennial by the Rietberg Museum in Zürich, the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, and the Berlinische Galerie, there may be other influences in Janco's masks, for example, the Swiss carnival masks from the Lötschental region.

Another source of inspiration, as shown by some scholars, could have been the folk masks worn by carolers in Romanian villages.

These different sources have in common a quest for a return to an archaic, mythical time, construed differently by different cultures across Europe, Africa, and Asia.



Figure \(\PageIndex{11}\): Sophie Taeuber dancing with a mask by Janco, 1916-7, photographer unknown (image: Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber-Arp)

In a rare period photograph of Dada artist Sophie Taeuber, we see her wearing one of Janco's masks while dancing. Unlike the *Portrait of Tristan Tzara*, this mask is three-dimensional, cubic, and fully enveloping the dancer's head. However, this mask is similar to the Portrait of Tristan Tzara in that it, too, bears the influence of African art and achieves its expressive potential by means of a playful, geometric composition.

Whether three-dimensional like this mask or flatter like the *Portrait of Tristan Tzara*, Janco's masks reveal the artist's interest in space. On a side note, Janco's investment in the spatiality of his art will gain full force in his later activity as an architect upon his return to Romania.

The use of such masks in performance affected the performer wearing the mask, dictating an attitude verging on pathos, if not madness. As Hugo Ball wrote in a note from May 24, 1916, on his first performance with a mask by Janco, the masks as props called to mind aspects of Japanese and ancient Greek theatre, while being squarely rooted in modern times.

> ***"Janco has made a number of masks (…) They are reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theater, yet they are wholly modern. (…) Their varied individuality inspired us to invent dances, and for each of them I composed a short piece of music on the spot. (…) What fascinates us all about the masks is that they represent (…) characters and passions that are larger than life. The paralyzing horror of our time was thus made visible."***
>
> ***Hugo Ball, 1916, included in Die Flucht aus der Zeit, 1927***

During World War I, the raw finish of Janco's masks and the use of red paint might have been intended to evoke the blood, disfigurement, and widespread use of gas masks in war, which the Dada artists were against. After the war, in 1919, the Dada group experienced a series of internal problems leading to the (unofficial) dissolution of the group. The Dadaist notions of art and life give way to new ideas, notably the desire for a universal abstract art that can play an active, positive role in society.

From their first appearance at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 to the final soirée at the Saal zur Kaufleuten in 1919, Janco's masks constituted an essential component of the Dadaist aesthetic. Complicated by their affinity and partial reliance on **primitivist** and exoticizing ideas of the time, Janco's masks embodied an artistic credo of the Dada group. In Janco's words, his masks expressed "our belief in a direct, magical, organic and creative art." Notably, the *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* epitomized the notion of an "approximate man." Tzara himself chose this phrase as the title of a poetry book of his from 1931 since it so aptly encapsulated Dada.

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7.1.6: Hannah Höch,Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany (essay)

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER



Video **7.1.6.1**: Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-1920, collage, mixed media

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7.1.7: Francis Picabia, Ideal

by DR. STEPHANIE CHADWICK

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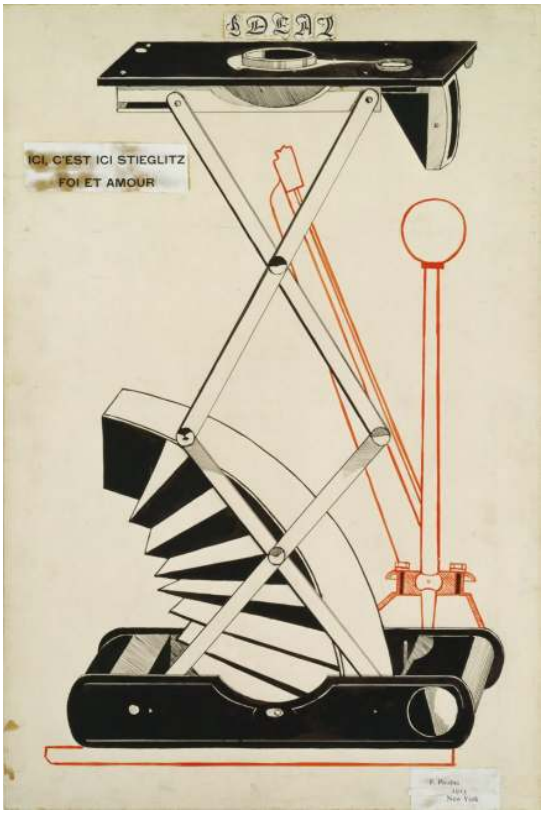


Figure **7.1.7.1**: Francis Picabia, *Ideal*, 1915, ink, graphite, and cut-and-pasted painted and printed papers on paperboard, 75.9 x 50.8 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

When you first see Francis Picabia's *Ideal*, a mixed media piece consisting of drawing, painting, and cut and pasted letters, you might wonder, "Just what *is* this unusual contraption?" Despite the image's reliance on a machine aesthetic (resemblance to sleek modern machinery that inspired many early twentieth-century artists) a closer look reveals that this is not a functional apparatus—at least, it would not function in any way we can easily identify. In this sense, the image undermines the whole point of technical drawings and modern inventions: to make life easier, not harder, for the people who use them.

Picabia's industrial forms, inspired in part by his enthusiasm for technical manuals and diagrams, embrace the mechanical age. Yet the pictorial elements suggest dysfunction and when combined with its enigmatic captions, deflate any overblown pride that often results from technological achievement. If this resembles an image we might see in a catalogue, the machine being advertised has no known purpose. One could say, however, that the drawing calls attention to the radical rethinking of the status of art in the early twentieth century, an age of mechanical reproduction in which devices such as the camera showed the potential to replace the artist's hand in the creative process.

New Forms for the Modern Age



Figure **7.1.7.2**: Francis Picabia, *Ideal* (detail), 1915 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The text Picabia included provides clues about his point in producing the image. Antiquated gothic letters at the top center of the picture spell the word "IDEAL," a philosophical term referring to concepts and standards of perfection (such as ideal beauty) that

were important to the Symbolist art movement at the turn of the twentieth century and, indeed, to much of the art produced in the west since the Italian Renaissance. Picabia had dabbled in the Symbolist style (which focused on dreams and personal visions) but, like many artists of his day, eventually turned instead to imagery more attuned to the modern age. In fact, for Picabia, the machine was the ideal form to communicate the new rush of sensations and possibilities that characterized modernity. He depicted odd combinations of machine parts in his art, however, to represent both human invention and fallibility—a combination that resonated in the context of World War I , which saw new technologies deployed, for the first time, in global warfare.

The tensions between utopic and dystopic views of modern machines play out in Picabia's drawing, where he has rearranged and combined parts of a camera with what look to be an automobile brake and gearshift, forming something new, abstracted, and quasi-comical. The fact that this odd camera appears to be flipped onto its back and fitted with some kind of shifter might also allude to Picabia's love of cars (he owned many and liked to drive fast). But the assortment of levers, accordion arm, and conveyor belt-like base could also suggest a heavy construction vehicle, the kind used to clear old structures from the sites on which modern skyscrapers are built. These towers of industry also attracted Picabia, who proclaimed, upon first seeing the New York skyline in 1913, that he would make art that speaks to "the rush of upward movement" and humankind's "desire to reach the heavens, to achieve Infinity."[1]

New York, new ideas

Using a wartime mission to obtain supplies in the Americas as a ruse, Picabia (who was French) travelled to New York in 1915 to escape the war. There, he reunited with friends he had made on his first trip to New York for the 1913 Armory show (the first large-scale exhibition of modern art in the United States). One of these friends was the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who was also a prominent gallery owner and patron of modern art in New York.

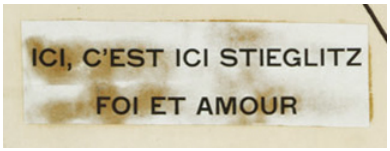


Figure **7.1.7.3**: Francis Picabia, *Ideal* (detail), 1915 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The caption at the upper left of the piece uses a modern typeface, and offers clues to the meaning of the image. It proclaims in French, *"Ici, C'est Ici Stieglitz Foi et Amour" ("Here, Here is Stieglitz Faith and Love,"* usually translated as *"Here, This is Stieglitz Here")*, and tips us off that what we are looking at is actually a kind of portrait. Instead of a naturalistic rendering of Stieglitz, Picabia represents the photographer as a hybrid machine made from a large camera not unlike the one the photographer was known to have carried to photograph the New York cityscape.



Figure **7.1.7.4**: Alfred Stieglitz Photographing on a Bridge, c. 1905, gelatin silver print, 10.3 x 7.9 cm (**source**)

Stieglitz's Gallery 291 in New York served as a nexus of activity for photographers and the few modern artists practicing or exhibiting in the United States at that time, and Picabia showed his work there in 1913 and 1915. He also became involved with gallery activities and even contributed to the journal titled *291* that Stieglitz and his cohorts published, featuring *Ideal* on one of its covers.

With the artistic encouragement of Stieglitz and the group of artists, photographers, and writers at Gallery 291, Picabia made a series of mechanical portraits, including *Ideal*, that he called “Mechanomorphs,” creating a veritable who’s who symbolized by a readymade vocabulary of machine parts and plans. In each of these mechanical portraits, Picabia used elements gleaned from advertisements and technical manuals to represent key features of his sitters. To depict Stieglitz, the rendering comprised of camera parts seemed ideal. The title ‘Mechanomorph” seems fitting for the piece as well, since it combines machine parts and suggests shifting, ambiguous functions. Yet, this camera appears to be broken and may signify a growing tension between Picabia and the photographer.



Figure **7.1.7.5**: Cover of *291* journal featuring Picabia’s Ideal, 1915, relief print on paper, 44 x 28.9 cm (National Portrait Gallery)

A mechanical riddle

Flipped on its back, an accordion arm raises its lens (or eye) upward, an image in keeping with the idealism Picabia saw in Stieglitz’s circle promoting modern art in New York. It was an idealism that Picabia shared, to some extent, but rejected in his embrace of the **Dada** movement—an international collection of artistic approaches that seemed worlds away, yet also in close physical proximity, to 291. Dada is a nonsensical term loaded with connotations about the joys of youth and the idiocy of the absurd that was characterized by an ironic stance in relation to culture and especially to any of the traditions that had led to the war. Along with his friend Marcel Duchamp, who had also fled the war in Europe, Picabia became a leader of the Dada movement in New York, where he combined enigmatic, absurd, yet witty imagery that often featured texts that read like riddles. *Ideal* is perhaps one of the most intriguing of these riddles, referring, in its way, to Picabia’s exploration of the relationships between human beings, machines, and creativity.

1. Francis Picabia, statement made to the *New York Times*, February 16th, 1913 (“Picabia Art Rebel, Here to Present the New Movement,” section V, p. 9).

Additional resources:

This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Cover of *291* featuring this work at the National Portrait Gallery

Maria Lluisa Borràs and Francis Picabia, *Picabia* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

Leah Dickerman and Brigid Doherty, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington [D.C.]: National Gallery of Art in association with Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 2005).

Francis Picabia, Statement made to the *New York Times*, February 16th, 1913 (“Picabia Art Rebel, Here to Present the New Movement, ” Section V, p. 9).

Francis Picabia, Statement made to the *New York Tribune*, October 24th, 1915 (“French Artists Spur on American Art”).

Francis Picabia, William A. Camfield, Beverley Calté, Candace Clements, Arnauld Pierre, Pierre Calté, and Imogen Forster, *Francis Picabia catalogue raisonné* (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2014).

William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1970).

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7.2: Surrealism

These artists explored subconscious thought in order to bypass restrictions placed on people by social convention.

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7.2.1.1: Surrealism, an introduction

by JOSH R. ROSE

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Reshaping the world

When you think of maps, what comes to mind? An informative document used by travelers? Demarcations of national borders and geographic features? At the very least, we might think of some factual representation of the world, not one that is fictitious or subjective.

Imagine a map of the world. Now take a moment to examine the following map, created by members of the Surrealist movement and published in the Belgian journal *Variétés* in June 1929.

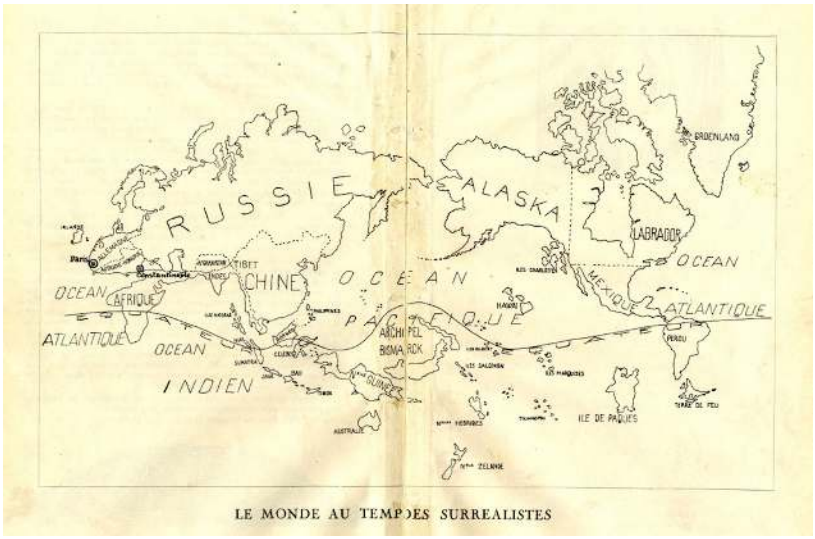


Figure **7.2.1.1.1**: Le monde au temps des Surrealistes (The World at the Time of the Surrealists), image from p. 26-27 in special issue "Le Surrealisme en 1929" of *Varietes: Revue mensuelle Illustree de l'espirit contemporain* (June 1929)

This anonymous map might seem unsettling; it emphasizes certain areas while removing others, and changes dramatically the size of landmasses. How is this map different from the world we know? And, although it might seem like an odd place to begin, what can it tell us about the ideas and approaches of the Surrealists?



Figure **7.2.1.1.2**: Marcel Jean, Spector of the Gardenia, 1936, plaster head, painted black cloth, zippers, film, velvet-covered wood base (MoMA)

Psychic freedom

Historians typically introduce Surrealism as an offshoot of Dada. In the early 1920s, writers such as André Breton and Louis Aragon became involved with Parisian Dada. Although they shared the group's interest in anarchy and revolution, they felt Dada lacked clear direction for political action. So in late 1922, this growing group of radicals left Dada, and began looking to the mind as a source of social liberation. Influenced by French psychology and the work of Sigmund Freud, they experimented with practices that allowed them to explore subconscious thought and identity and bypass restrictions placed on people by social

convention. For example, societal norms mandate that suddenly screaming expletives at a group of strangers—unprovoked, is completely unacceptable.



Figure **7.2.1.1.3**: Man Ray, Recording a waking dream seance session, Bureau of Surrealist Research, c. 1924

Surrealist practices included "waking dream" seances and automatism. During waking dream seances, group members placed themselves into a trance state and recited visions and poetic passages with an immediacy that denied any fakery. (The Surrealists insisted theirs was a scientific pursuit, and not like similar techniques used by Spiritualists claiming to communicate with the dead.) The waking dream sessions allowed members to say and do things unburdened by societal expectations; however, this practice ended abruptly when one of the "dreamers" attempted to stab another group member with a kitchen knife. Automatic writing allowed highly trained poets to circumvent their own training, and create raw, fresh poetry. They used this technique to compose poems without forethought, and it resulted in beautiful and startling passages the writers would not have consciously conceived.

Envisioning Surrealism: automatic drawing and the exquisite corpse

In the autumn of 1924, Surrealism was announced to the public through the publication of André Breton's first "Manifesto of Surrealism," the founding of a journal (*La Révolution surréaliste*), and the formation of a Bureau of Surrealist Research. The literary focus of the movement soon expanded when Max Ernst and other visual artists joined and began applying Surrealist ideas to their work. These artists drew on many stylistic sources including scientific journals, found objects, mass media, and non-western visual traditions. (Early Surrealist exhibitions tended to pair an artist's work with non-Western art objects). They also found inspiration in automatism and other activities designed to circumvent conscious intention.



Figure **7.2.1.1.4**: André Masson, *Automatic Drawing*, 1924, ink on paper, 23.5 x 20.6 cm (MoMA)

Surrealist artist André Masson began creating automatic drawings, essentially applying the same unfettered, unplanned process used by Surrealist writers, but to create visual images. In *Automatic Drawing* (left), the hands, torsos, and genitalia seen within the mass of swirling lines suggest that, as the artist dives deeper into his own subconscious, recognizable forms appear on the page.

Another technique, the exquisite corpse, developed from a writing game the Surrealists created. First, a piece of paper is folded as many times as there are players. Each player takes one side of the folded sheet and, starting from the top, draws the head of a body, continuing the lines at the bottom of their fold to the other side of the fold, then handing that blank folded side to the next person to continue drawing the figure. Once everyone has drawn her or his "part" of the body, the last person unfolds the sheet to reveal a strange composite creature, made of unrelated forms that are now merged. A Surrealist Frankenstein's monster, of sorts.



Figure **7.2.1.1.5**: Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray, *Untitled (Exquisite Corpse)*, 1926-27, colored pencil, pencil, and ink on paper, 35.9 x 22.9 cm (MoMA)

Whereas automatic drawing often results in vague images emerging from a chaotic background of lines and shapes, exquisite corpse drawings show precisely rendered objects juxtaposed with others, often in strange combinations. These two distinct "styles," represent two contrasting approaches characteristic of Surrealists art, and exemplified in the early work of Yves Tanguy and René Magritte.



Figure **7.2.1.1.6**: Left: Yves Tanguy, *Apparitions*, 1927, oil on canvas, 92.07 x 73.02 cm (Dallas Museum of Art); right: René Magritte, *The Central Story*, 1928, oil on canvas (Private collection)

Tanguy began his painting *Apparitions* (left) using an automatic technique to apply unplanned areas of color. He then methodically clarified forms by defining biomorphic shapes populating a barren landscape. However, Magritte, employed carefully chosen, naturalistically-presented objects in his haunting painting, *The Central Story*. The juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated objects suggests a cryptic meaning and otherworldliness, similar to the hybrid creatures common to exquisite corpse drawings. These two visual styles extend to other Surrealist media, including photography, sculpture, and film.

The Surrealist experience

Today, we tend to think of Surrealism primarily as a visual arts movement, but the group's activity stemmed from much larger aspirations. By teaching how to circumvent restrictions that society imposed, the Surrealists saw themselves as agents of social change. The desire for revolution was such a central tenet that through much of the late 1920s, the Surrealists attempted to ally their cause with the French Communist party, seeking to be the artistic and cultural arm. Unsurprisingly, the incompatibility of the two groups prevented any alliance, but the Surrealists' effort speaks to their political goals.

In its purest form, Surrealism was a way of life. Members advocated becoming *flâneurs*–urban explorers who traversed cities without plan or intent, and they sought moments of objective chance—seemingly random encounters actually fraught with import and meaning. They disrupted cultural norms with shocking actions, such as verbally assaulting priests in the street. They sought in their lives what Breton dubbed *surreality*, where one's internal reality merged with the external reality we all share. Such experiences, which could be represented by a painting, photograph, or sculpture, are the true core of Surrealism.



Figure **7.2.1.1.7**: Meret Oppenheim. *Object*, 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup 4-3/8 inches in diameter; saucer 9-3/8 inches in diameter; spoon 8 inches long, overall height 2-7/8″ (The Museum of Modern Art)

The "Nonnational boundaries of Surrealism"*

Returning to *The Surrealist Map of the World*, let's reconsider what it tells us about the movement. Shifts in scale are evident, as Russia dominates (likely a nod to the importance of the Russian Revolution). Africa and China are far too small, but Greenland is

huge. The Americas are comprised of Alaska (perhaps another sly reference to Russia's former control of this territory), Labrador, and Mexico, with a very small South America attached beneath. The United States and the rest of Canada are removed entirely. Much of Europe is also gone. France is reduced to the city of Paris, and Ireland appears without the rest of Great Britain. The only other city clearly indicated is Constantinople, pointedly not called by its modern name Istanbul. An anti-colonial diatribe, the Surrealists's map removes colonial powers to create a world dominated by cultures untouched by western influence and participants in the Communist experiment. It is part utopian vision, part promotion of their own agenda, and part homage to their influences.

It also reminds us that Surrealism was an international movement. Although it was founded in Paris, pockets of Surrealist activity emerged in Belgium, England, Czechoslovakia, Mexico, the United States, other parts of Latin America, and Japan. Although Surrealism's heyday was 1924 to the end of the 1940s, the group stayed active under Breton's efforts until his death in 1966. An important influence on later artists within Abstract Expressionism, Art Brut, and the Situationists, Surrealism continues to be relevant to art history today.

*André Breton, "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," in *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parameter and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 7-18.

Additional resources:

Surrealism on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

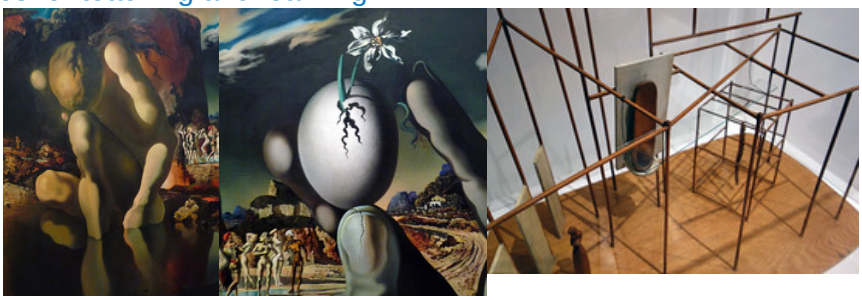
André Breton, *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924)

Surrealism Reviewed: a selection of audio interviews and music (UbuWeb)

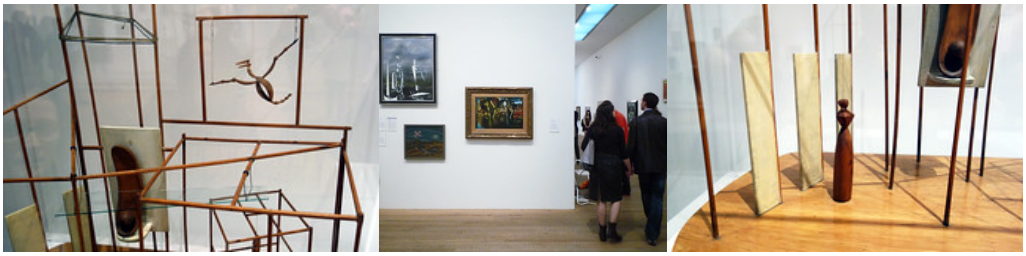
Four Surrealist films by Man Ray

Digital archive of Surrealist journals from Spain, Chile, and Argentina (in Spanish)

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



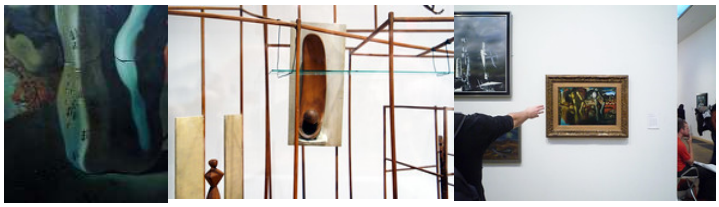
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7.2.1.2: The Case for Surrealism

- *by THE ART ASSIGNMENT*

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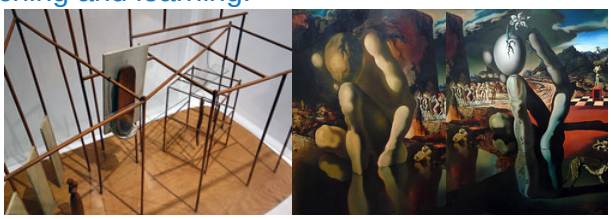


Video **7.2.1.2.1**: Speaker: Sarah Urist Green

Additional resources:

Surrealism essay from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



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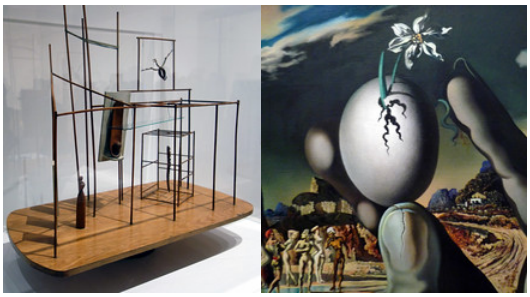
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7.2.1.3: Surrealism- Origins and Precursors

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **7.2.1.3.1**: André Breton in 1924

Imagination above all

In 1922 the young French Dada poet and future leader of the Surrealist movement André Breton denounced recent conservative trends in modern art, such as **Purism**, and advocated a more "thoughtful" approach.



Figure **7.2.1.3.2**: Left: Gustave Moreau, *Salome Dancing before Herod*, 1876, oil on canvas, 58.5 x 41.1 inches (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles); Right: Odilon Redon, *The Black Sun*, c. 1900 oil on board, 12 3/4 x 9 3/8 inches (MoMA)

To reorient contemporary attitudes, he called for a reconsideration of the art of **Pablo Picasso** and 19th century artists associated with Symbolism, including **Paul Gauguin**, Odilon Redon, and Gustave Moreau. Symbolist artists were dedicated to the imagination and painted mysterious dream-like images drawn from mythology, the Bible, and other literary sources, as well as individual fantasy.

Breton's early dedication to the imaginative qualities of modern art set the stage for Surrealism, a movement formally inaugurated in 1924 that placed the mental activity of the artist above all other considerations, especially the formal concerns that had become a hallmark of modern art. According to the Surrealists, the artist's proper goal is the exploration of the arational mind and the re-creation of the world to accord with the desires of the imagination. Artists preoccupied with issues such as painting technique and formal harmonies are engaging in a trivial activity and ignoring the profound revolutionary potential of human creativity.



Figure **7.2.1.3.3**: Henri Rousseau, *The Snake Charmer*, 1907, oil on canvas, 189 x 169 cm (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Breton was a protégé of the widely admired modern poet and influential art critic Guillaume Apollinaire, who had championed many important modern artists and was a close friend of Picasso. In addition to the Cubists, Apollinaire promoted Henri Rousseau and Marc Chagall, who created imaginative works in what were described as naïve styles. These painters' works were seen as natural products of their imagination. Rousseau, who worked as a customs inspector, was a dedicated self-taught painter of imaginary exotic scenes.



Figure **7.2.1.3.4**: Marc Chagall, *Over Vitebsk*, 1915-20, oil on canvas, 26 3/8 x 36 ½ inches (MoMA)

Chagall was a trained artist who painted fairytale-like images that reflected his childhood memories of the Jewish community of Vitebsk, Russia (now Belarus). He was admired for his ability to incorporate the formal innovations of **Fauve** and **Cubist** painting into his fantasy scenes.



Figure **7.2.1.3.5**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Enigma of a Day*, 1914, oil on canvas, 185.5 x 139.7 cm (MoMA)

André Breton and the future Surrealists were most impressed by another imaginative artist admired by Apollinaire, Giorgio de Chirico. Unlike Chagall, de Chirico was largely unaffected by the formal innovations of modern painting. His imaginative visions had none of the fairytale charm of the Russian-Jewish painter's work, and compared to Chagall's colorful kaleidoscopic dreams of flying people and animals, de Chirico's pre-World War I paintings are ominous nightmares.

Between 1911 and 1915 de Chirico worked in Paris, creating dream-like scenes in which simplified depictions of desolate classical cityscapes are rendered in exaggerated linear perspective. Dark, threatening skies and diagonal patterns of stark shadows enhance the overall sense of menace. Occasional figures depicted in silhouette are the only living beings in de Chirico's cityscapes, which are populated by statues and mannequins standing isolated in the twilit streets.



Figure **7.2.1.3.6**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Uncertainty of the Poet*, 1913, 106 x 94 cm (Tate Gallery, London)

Also prominent in his works are enigmatic arrangements of disparate objects. In *The Uncertainty of the Poet* the broken torso of a Classical female nude statue confronts a bunch of bananas next to an arcade, while on the distant horizon a steam locomotive races toward the picture's edge. Each item is carefully depicted, and the arrangement appears meaningful; however, the significance of the image remains open to interpretation. It was precisely this suggestive appeal to the imagination through the conjunction of disparate objects that attracted Breton and would form one of the principal strategies of Surrealist art.

Paris Dada and the Birth of Surrealism



Figure **7.2.1.3.7**: Paris Dadaists at the opening of Max Ernst exhibition at Au Sans Pareil, 1921

In the years following World War I, Breton and other young French writers established the Dada movement in Paris. Closely involved with members from other Dada groups, including Tristan Tzara, Francis Picabia, and **Marcel Duchamp**, the Paris Dadaists developed different interests. Although they adopted the **Dada strategy** of attacking modern society and art through nonsensical and arbitrary actions, they gradually abandoned the Dada embrace of nonsense as a nihilistic dead end.

Under the leadership of Breton, the Paris Dadaists found a new means to revitalize the revolutionary momentum of modern literature and art in the immense potential of the unconscious mind. Influenced by his experiences working in a psychiatric hospital during the war, Breton was fascinated by recent **psychological theories and discoveries**. Hoping to find the ultimate source of human creativity, the Dadaists experimented with hypnosis and other methods of gaining access to subconscious mental activity. Out of these experiments Surrealism was born.



Figure **7.2.1.3.8**: Man Ray, Surrealists at the Central Bureau of Surrealist Research, 1924

Awakening the creative resources of the mind

Adopting the term “surrealism,” earlier coined by Apollinaire, Breton published the *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924 and provided his own definition:

SURREALISM, *n*. Psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express — verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner, the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy*. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.[1]

It is obvious from these definitions that Surrealism was conceived as much more than a new trend in literature and the arts. Its intended social agency was ultimately very broad. The goal of Surrealist writings and art was to "ruin" the logical, practical, and moral reasoning that structures human understanding of reality. Replacing such reasoning would be Surrealist thought, which through a variety of creative strategies would release the long-suppressed potential of the imagination and the unconscious mind to revolutionize reality.



Figure **7.2.1.3.9**: Cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 1, December 1924

Surrealist thinking was not limited to artists. Unconscious, arational thought was understood by the Surrealists as the means employed by those who discover new continents and new laws of nature; by those who invent new tools and new methods; and ultimately, by all revolutionaries whose ideas remake reality in some way. Surrealist thinking was a means accessible to everyone, and the ultimate Surrealist goal was to awaken the public to the immense creative resources of their own minds and ignite a total recreation of the world.

Notes:

1. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.

Additional resources:

BBC Four program on the Surrealists (contains video clips and links)

Read more about Giorgio de Chirico at MoMA

Surrealism and Psychoanalysis

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7.2.1.4: Surrealism and Psychoanalysis

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **7.2.1.4.1**: André Brouillet, *Clinical Lesson at La Salpêtrière*, 1887, oil on canvas, 290 x 430 cm (University of Paris). This painting of Jean Charcot demonstrating hypnosis hung in Freud's study.

From its inception, Surrealism was closely involved with contemporary developments in psychology and psychoanalysis. The movement's leader André Breton had studied medicine and served in a mental hospital during World War I, an experience that directly affected Surrealism's development. The Surrealists' initial understanding of human psychology was largely informed by the work of the French psychologists Jean Charcot and Pierre Janet. Particularly influential for the development of early **Surrealist automatic techniques** were their studies of hypnosis and what was called psychological automatism, the involuntary actions and processes not under the control of the conscious mind—for example, dreaming. The German artist Max Ernst brought detailed knowledge of Sigmund Freud's more developed theories of the unconscious to the group, and these became the greatest influence on Surrealism. As Freud's writings were translated into French, the Surrealists' understanding and deployment of his ideas became increasingly sophisticated and complex.



Figure **7.2.1.4.2**: Sigmund Freud's consulting room in Vienna, 1938 (photo: **Edmund Engelman**)

Freud's theories of the mind

Certain general concepts associated with psychoanalysis are useful for considering Surrealist art. The most important of these is the notion of the unconscious as a repository for thoughts and feelings that are generally unavailable to consciousness. Freud considered dreams to be coded expressions of unconscious fears, desires, and conflicts that could be deciphered and potentially resolved through analysis. In Freud's view, neurosis was typically the result of unresolved conflicts and disruptions in early childhood psychosexual development. Sexuality, erotic desire, and violence are at the heart of Freudian theories of the mind. What lies buried in the unconscious are powerful and instinctual drives, repressed by civilization and rationality, which if inadequately resolved are detrimental to the individual's, and ultimately society's, mental health.

This notion informed Surrealist attitudes toward love and sexuality, which were primary subjects of their creative work. They were also a major focus of political statements and activities opposing conventional morality and constraints on the free expression of sexuality. It should be noted, however, that the Surrealist group's promotion of liberated sexuality was limited and excluded male homosexuality.



Figure **7.2.1.4.3**: Max Ernst, images from *Une Semaine de Bonté: Book IV Oedipus*, 1934

Freud's conception of the unconscious as a site of primal violence and conflict repressed from consciousness played a role in the work of many Surrealist artists. Max Ernst and André Masson, in particular, frequently employed images of sexual violence. Surrealist automatic techniques were thought to reveal unconscious thoughts and desires; thus, the repetition of erotic imagery and themes of violence that appear in many works were considered manifestations of what Ernst described as his "obsessions." The dismembered and fragmented female nudes, knives, fish, birds, and cut pomegranates that populate Masson's early Surrealist works similarly suggest the artist's unconscious preoccupations.



Figure **7.2.1.4.4**: André Masson, *Armor*, 1925, oil on canvas, 80.6 x 54 cm (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice)

It has often been noticed that the Surrealists' conscious pursuit of the unconscious, as well as their occasional very literal conformity to Freud's theories, casts doubt on the success of their efforts to access unconscious thoughts. From the beginning, many critics complained that Surrealist artists merely illustrated psychological theories, rather than truly expressing the profound depths of their unconscious.

The unconscious as creative source

André Breton explicitly rejected attempts to read Surrealist art as revealing the individual artists' psychological history. Also, unlike Freud and his fellow psychoanalysts, the Surrealists had no interest in the therapeutic potential of Freud's theories. They were interested in the unconscious as a creative source, not in the possibility of healing neurosis through psychoanalytic therapy.

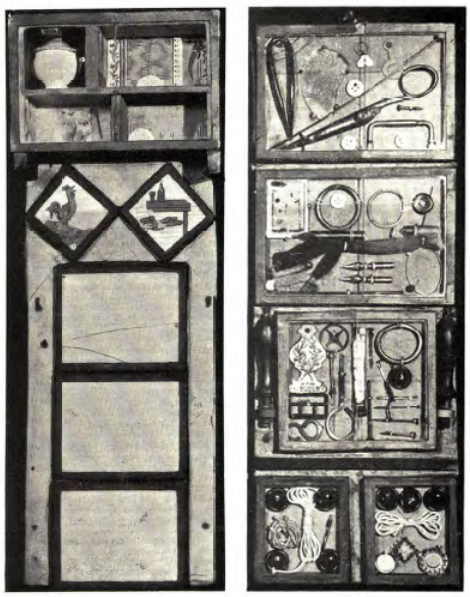


Figure 7.2.1.4.5: Photographs of objects made by the mentally ill published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 12 (15 December 1929), pp. 42-43

In fact, the Surrealists celebrated insanity as a form of mental liberation and published illustrations of objects made by patients in mental hospitals. They believed that to cure the mentally ill was to make them conform to stifling social conventions. In the Surrealists' view, the insane created their own reality to satisfy their deepest desires, and as a result they were happy. The Surrealist goal was not to promote so-called normal psychological lives, but on the contrary to make reality accord with the "abnormality" of unconscious desires.

Displacement and condensation

Several Freudian concepts are useful tools for considering the strategies employed in Surrealist art. In his early work Freud concluded that dreams were often pictorial representations constructed, like poetry, by means of metaphor. The unconscious thoughts and desires at the heart of the dream were subjected to a form of censorship, which transformed their initial content into metaphor by the mechanisms of *displacement* and *condensation*.



Figure 7.2.1.4.6: Salvador Dalí, *The Great Masturbator*, 1929, oil on canvas, 110 x 150 cm (Museo Nacional Centro de Art Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Displacement, which Freud considered the most striking achievement of dream work, is the mechanism of substituting symbols for objects or concepts to disguise the true nature of dream thoughts. Among the common dream symbols he listed were knives and boxes as symbols for male and female genitalia, respectively.

In the mechanism of condensation, logical connections are lost or rearranged, and multiple associations may be connected to one object or image. Freud believed that the meaning of any given dream was unique, and only the dreamer with the help of an analyst could decipher the underlying thoughts and their significance. He also noted, however, that language and culture often determined dream symbolism and that there were common symbols to be found in many individuals' dreams, as well as in fairytales and folklore.

Fetishism

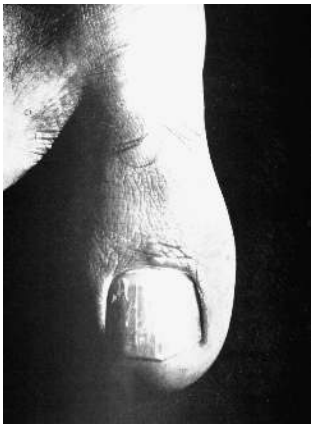


Figure 7.2.1.4.7: Jacques-André Boiffard, *Big Toe*, published in Documents 6 (November 1929)

Displacement and condensation are operative in other mental processes and are central to the Freudian concept of the *fetish*. A fetish is any object that is thought to embody or contain supernatural powers, and in Freud's theory it is typically a phallic substitute. Freud described the genesis of fetishism as the moment when the male child sees that his mother has no penis. This recognition is deeply disturbing because the child assumes that she must have once had a penis and later lost it, and by implication he thinks that he too may be castrated.

The child denies this horrifying possibility by essentially granting his mother a substitute phallus in the form of another object, often, Freud theorized, one he saw just after he recognized his mother's lack of penis, such as a foot or shoe. This becomes a fetish object, which is both highly desirable and a source of great anxiety, representing as it does both the fear of loss and the satisfying replacement of the lost object.



Figure 7.2.1.4.8: Salvador Dalí, *Surrealist Object Functioning Symbolically — Gala's Shoe*, 1931 (1973 edition), Assemblage with shoe, marble, photographs, glass, was, hair, scraper, and gibbet. 48.3 x 27.9 x 9.4 cm (The Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, FL; photo: **ellenm1**, CC BY-NC 2.0)

Salvador Dalí, whose art often directly reflects Freudian theories, was influenced by Freud's concept of the fetish when he developed the idea of **Surrealist objects**, and many of his own works include shoes and other common fetishes.

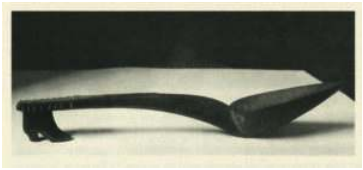


Figure 7.2.1.4.9: Man Ray, Photograph of André Breton's "Slipper Spoon," 1934

Breton similarly described the marvelous significance of discovering an ashtray in the form of a spoon attached to a shoe. Not all Surrealist objects have such immediately recognizable Freudian symbolism, but the complex depths of feeling that they arouse in their finders and makers, and potentially in their viewers as well, indicate their genesis in the depths of the erotic unconscious.

Jacques Lacan



Figure 7.2.1.4.10: Hans Bellmer, *Untitled* from *The Doll*, 1936, gelatin silver print, 4 5/8 x 3 1/16 inches (MoMA)

Art historians have also been interested in the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, who as a young man was closely associated with the Surrealists. Lacan's ideas on the formative role of vision in the psychological development of individual

identity have been suggestively employed to analyze Surrealist artworks, particularly photography, as representing a form of pre-linguistic and thus pre-conscious experience.

Although Lacan's writings are much less accessible to general understanding than Freud's, they provide useful theoretical material for the investigation of a variety of topics that engaged Surrealist artists, including the psychology of representation, the disjunctions between visual and bodily experience, and the conflicts between desire and repressive social forms, particularly language.

Additional resources:

Read more about *Une Semaine de Bonté* at the Musée d'Orsay

Look through scans of *La Révolution surréaliste* at the National Library of France

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7.2.1.5: Surrealist Techniques- Automatism

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188281



Figure **7.2.1.5.1**: Max Ernst, *The Horde*, 1927, oil on canvas 114 x 146.1 cm (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)

An inchoate mob of savage creatures surges toward the viewer in Max Ernst's *The Horde*, a painting that was made using automatic techniques intended to make the artist's unconscious thoughts visible. In keeping with **Freudian theories**, Ernst's unconscious is a site of turmoil where monstrous figures overwhelm rational understanding. *The Horde* suggests the dread associated with childhood fears of nameless beasts lurking in the closet and under the bed. The figures in Ernst's painting are terrifying because they are both familiar and utterly strange; we recognize them as creatures of our own imagination as much as the artist's.

The creativity of the unconscious

Automatism was a group of techniques used by the Surrealists to facilitate the direct and uncontrolled outpouring of unconscious thought. In his first Surrealist Manifesto, André Breton provided a dictionary-style definition that made automatism virtually a synonym of Surrealism.

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner, the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.[1]



Figure **7.2.1.5.2**: Man Ray, Surrealist automatic recording session at the Central Office of Surrealist Research, 1924

Derived in part from the "spirit writing" of mediums who were believed to be conduits for messages from the afterlife, and in part from psychiatric methods used to obtain uninhibited monologues from patients, the Surrealists cultivated techniques of speaking or writing rapidly without any specific goal or conscious direction. In doing this they were attempting to externalize the kind of thinking evident in dreams, where, according to Sigmund Freud, everyone is a poet.

For the Surrealists, automatism revealed the source of inspiration and original invention in the human mind. It could be used to make truly creative production available to everyone, a first step in the Surrealist transformation of the world. They believed that

the sheer speed of automatic writing and automatic speech bypassed logic, aesthetic conventions, and social inhibitions to allow a direct transcription of unconscious thoughts and desires.

Unconscious production techniques



Figure **7.2.1.5.3**: Madame Fondrillon, *Mediumistic Drawing*, 1909, pencil and crayon on paper, 22 x 28 cm (Reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 4, (15 July 1925), page 1)

The Surrealists experimented with numerous techniques in an attempt to find parallels to automatic writing appropriate for making visual art. The drawings of mediums were an early model because they were generated according to the dictates of their guiding spirits without the medium being conscious of what they were drawing. Some Surrealists doubted that artists could achieve a similarly direct and unconscious form of meaningful visual production, but over the years Surrealist artists developed numerous automatic techniques that served as a basis for creating successful artworks.



Figure **7.2.1.5.4**: André Masson, *Battle of Fishes*, 1926, sand, gesso, oil, pencil and charcoal on canvas, 14 ¼ x 28 ¾ inches (MoMA)

In all their automatic techniques Surrealist artists attempted to eliminate conscious intention, typically by using arbitrary methods that allowed chance to play a key role. André Masson, for example, employed random drippings of gesso, paint, and sand on canvas. Produced without the intervention of conscious intentions, the artist's hand was theoretically responding to the dictates of his unconscious as it made the random marks. Subsequently, Masson would discover figures and scenes in the suggestive forms generated by his automatic markings. These found images were also theoretically prompted by his unconscious needs and desires, and he consciously enhanced them with pencil to create figures and scenes such as *Battle of Fishes*.

The example of Leonardo da Vinci

Masson's technique combined automatism with conscious refinements. This was typical of many Surrealist artists who employed forms of direct automatic production and then enhanced the resulting suggestive marks to create a more legible image. They also

frequently left some forms vague so they could be interpreted in many different ways. Ambiguous forms allow viewers to engage imaginatively with the artwork and create an image that responds to their own unconscious desires.

Leonardo da Vinci provided an explicit precedent for the employment of such procedures when he suggested that artists seek inspiration in the suggestive forms of an old wall's damaged surface. Max Ernst systematized Leonardo's approach when he developed *frottage* and *grattage*.

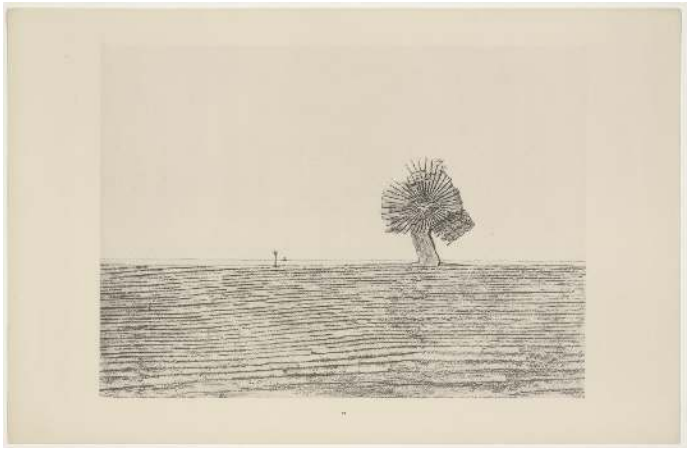


Figure **7.2.1.5.5**: Max Ernst, *The Pampas* from *Natural History*, published 1926 (MoMA)

To make *frottages* such as these from the *Natural History* series, Ernst rubbed charcoal on paper placed over textured objects. *Grattage*, used to create *The Horde*, is a similar technique developed for oil painting, in which different colors are painted on canvas in layers and allowed to dry. The textures of objects placed under the canvas are transferred to the painted surface by scraping away the upper layer of paint.

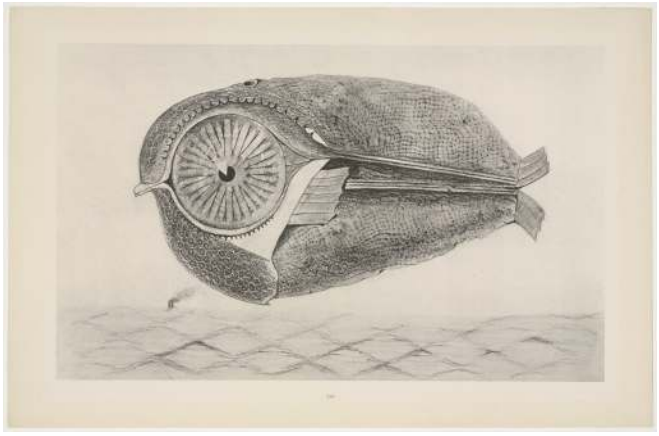


Figure **7.2.1.5.6**: Max Ernst, *The Fugitive* from *Natural History*, published 1926 (MoMA)

Ernst claimed the arbitrary markings resulting from *frottage* intensified his "visionary capacities" and provoked hallucinations of strange figures and landscapes. These, he believed, were the result of his own unconscious obsessions. Like Masson, Ernst subsequently developed his arbitrarily-generated forms by adding drawing or arrangements to make the unconscious images he discovered more easily visible to others.



Figure 7.2.1.5.7: Oscar Dominguez, *Untitled*, 1936, gouache on paper, 14 1/8 x 11 ½ inches (MoMA)

Oscar Dominguez invented another automatic technique, decalcomania, which involved dripping ink or gouache on paper and then pressing the wet surface with a second sheet of paper. The resulting arbitrary blots could be named by the creator according to the images seen in the work, or left untitled for viewers to discover their own images. Unlike Ernst's and Masson's earlier automatic techniques, decalcomania did not require any conscious adjustments by the artist to complete the work. The Surrealist leader André Breton hailed it as a complete fusion of chance forms and imaginative vision, uncorrupted by previously learned artistic techniques or conscious intention.

Suggestive form and multiple associations

Although the Surrealists' goal was to manifest unconscious thought in their artistic productions, they did not restrict themselves to automatic techniques. They were afraid that if they established any specific technique as the "right" way to make Surrealist art it would be used superficially to create a style rather than to manifest authentic unconscious activity. Ultimately, the Surrealists supported artists who employed many different styles and approaches to create works that accorded with the goal of unconsciously-inspired creative production.

One of the key characteristics of works produced using automatic techniques was the generation of suggestive forms that promoted multiple associations. Even when Surrealist artists did not use specific automatic techniques they often relied on the power of abstract shapes to generate associations consciously and unconsciously. They understood this as employing a mechanism common to dreams, automatic writing, poetry, and even simple puns in which similar sounds generate new meanings and associations. Both Joan Miró and Jean Arp exploited the associations generated by simple abstract visual forms placed in relation to each other to create playful works that reveal the rich possibilities of unconscious associations.



Figure **7.2.1.5.8**: Joan Miró, *Maternity*, 1924, oil on canvas (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh)

At first glance, Miró's *Maternity* may appear to be a work of geometric abstraction or a diagram of a whirligig. Closer inspection reveals that the abstract shapes create a comical, crudely simplified image of a woman with two small children floating in space. The figures are reduced to basic signs; the mother is signified by a dark segment of a circle with a smaller circle pierced through it — a skirt with a hole. Crossing her body is a diagonal line terminating in her breasts, one frontal and the other in profile, from which her children hang like decorative anchors. Her head with its radiating rays of hair is comparatively tiny.



Figure **7.2.1.5.9**: Jean Arp, *Woman*, 1927, oil and gilded wood on plywood, 136 x 100 x 3.8 cm (**Pompidou Center, Paris**)

Arp's wood relief *Woman* similarly presents a figure in extremely reduced abstract forms. The organic shapes seem to shift in their references to various body parts, as well as suggesting altogether different things. The shape defining the navel also suggests a vagina, while the breasts may also seem to be the shape of flying birds.



Figure **7.2.1.5.10**: Yves Tanguy, *Inspiration*, 1929, oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm (Musee des Beaux Arts, Rennes)

Such fluidity of reference was at the heart of the Surrealist appreciation of the potential of visual art. In addition to demonstrating the fecundity of the artist's imagination, suggestive abstracted forms allowed viewers to discover and strengthen their own subconscious thoughts and desires by contributing imaginatively to the meaning, and thus to the making, of the work. All Surrealist strategies used to create visual art demonstrated the mind's ability to transform a given reality by transforming its ambiguities into significant imagery according to the dictates of the unconscious.

Notes:

1. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 26.

Additional resources:

Max Ernst at MoMA

André Masson at the Guggenheim Museum

Joan Miró at the Guggenheim Museum

Jean Arp at the Guggenheim Museum

Yves Tanguy at the Guggenheim Museum

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7.2.1.6: Surrealist Techniques- Subversive Realism

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
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Figure **7.2.1.6.1**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Uncertainty of the Poet*, 1913, 106 x 94 cm (Tate Gallery, London)

The omnipotence of the dream

A central approach of Surrealist visual art was derived from André Breton's assertion of "the omnipotence of the dream" in the first Surrealist Manifesto. Following the **ideas of Sigmund Freud**, the Surrealists saw dreams as visual representations of unconscious thoughts and desires. In their first magazine, *La Révolution Surréaliste*, they published accounts of their own dreams and reproductions of art that seemed to record dream images, notably the **paintings of Giorgio de Chirico**.

In addition to the dream-like atmosphere of de Chirico's work, the Surrealists were attracted to what are often called its literary qualities. The strange juxtaposition of female nude, bananas, and train in *The Uncertainty of the Poet* seems like a literal illustration of the discordant imagery of a modern poem. In addition, the erotic symbolism of the image conforms to Freud's belief in the central importance of sexuality in the unconscious.

Rejecting the formal concerns of modern art

In claiming de Chirico's pre-war work as exemplary, the Surrealists implicitly rejected modern art's emphasis on formal innovation. De Chirico's use of linear perspective, his inexpressive representation of objects, and his lack of interest in the material qualities of paint all seemed to revive the outdated naturalistic conventions of pre-modern painting, as did his use of complex, symbolic subject matter.



Figure **7.2.1.6.2**: Giorgio de Chirico, *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, 1914, oil on canvas (Private Collection)

For the Surrealists de Chirico's style was irrelevant; what mattered to them was his ability to represent unconscious dream images. They were interested in the subject of his painting, not how it was painted. In their willingness to elevate subject matter over painting style and technique the Surrealists explicitly placed themselves outside of what they considered were the limiting concerns of established modern art. In return, many critics (and later art historians) attacked the Surrealists for failing to understand and appreciate the formal achievements of modern art.

Because the movement was initiated and led by writers, Surrealist art was often considered to be literary and illustrative rather than a properly modern visual art. This overlooked the fact that many prominent Surrealist artists, including André Masson, Joan Miró, and Max Ernst, frequently employed modern styles and developed **innovative artistic techniques**.

For the Surrealists, an artist's style and technique were the means to concretize inspired thinking, the creative activity of the unconscious. Whether those means were traditional naturalism or the more abstract innovations of modern art was not important as long as they were effective. The use of meticulous naturalistic techniques — traditionally employed to represent the accepted "reality" of the external world — demonstrated the equal reality of the unconscious world revealed by Surrealism.

A window into another world



Figure **7.2.1.6.3**: Max Ernst, *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924, oil with painted wood elements and cut and pasted printed paper on wood with wood frame, 27 ½ x 22 ½ x 4 ½ inches (MoMA)



Figure **7.2.1.6.4**: Max Ernst, *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924, detail, oil with painted wood elements and cut and pasted printed paper on wood with wood frame, 27 ½ x 22 ½ x 4 ½ inches (MoMA)

The complexity of the Surrealists' challenge to modernist values can be appreciated by considering Max Ernst's *Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale*. This painting was one of the first works by a Surrealist artist reproduced in the group's journal, *La Révolution Surréaliste*. It combines echoes of de Chirico's classical architecture and deep perspectival space with an incomprehensible nightmarish scene of violence in the foreground. Small wooden elements are attached to the painting to form a building, gate, and doorknob. The title is handwritten on the edge of the frame, which connects the painted world to the world of the viewer.

Ernst's combination of painting, writing, collage, and relief sculpture disrupts the established categories of the individual arts as much as the image defies rational explanation. The painting is no longer simply a flat plane covered by colors, it has returned to its pre-modernist role as a window into another world, and that world is one into which we as viewers are invited. The gate on the left has swung open towards us, and the man running on the roof of the building at the right reaches for the "doorknob" on the frame that separates our world from his.

For the Surrealists who desired the complete breakdown of distinctions between art and life, dream and reality, Ernst's disruption of pictorial boundaries meant far more than a challenge to the conventional distinctions between the different arts. It was the means to enter an entirely new world and heralded the concrete realization of Surrealism's ultimate goal, the resolution of dream and reality into a new surreality.

The interior model

The Surrealists believed that the world of the imagination was the only proper subject for the arts, which must challenge what Breton called "the poverty of reality." He claimed that the work of art must "refer to a purely interior model." While this statement applies to all Surrealist artworks, regardless of productive technique, style, or subject, many Surrealist artists followed de Chirico's example and created dreamlike imagery that appears to literally reveal the "interior model."



Figure **7.2.1.6.5**: Yves Tanguy, *Mama, Papa is Wounded!*, 1927, oil on canvas, 36 ¼ x 28 ¾ inches (MoMA)

Yves Tanguy's meticulously painted depictions of imaginary landscapes stretching off to an infinitely distant horizon combine the naturalistic rendering of real space and light effects with suggestive abstract forms. Their naturalism invites the viewer's imaginative entry into the world they make visible and presents the possibility that the world of the unconscious can be made real.

Realism as subversive

The realistic representation of the world of the unconscious reached its apogee in the paintings of Salvador Dalí, who adopted an extremely detailed realistic technique reminiscent of nineteenth-century academic painting. This was an explicit attempt to turn academic naturalism into a subversive technique.



Figure **7.2.1.6.6**: Salvador Dalí, *The Lugubrious Game*, 1929, oil and collage on cardboard, 44.4 x 30.3 cm

The vivid realism of Dalí's bizarre scenes seems to confirm that the world they represent is just as real as scenes encountered in ordinary waking life. In paintings such as *The Lugubrious Game*, Dalí minutely depicted his psychological obsessions, which were largely derived from **Freud's theories** of infantile eroticism.

The artist's profile floats horizontally in the center of the painting and generates a bizarre collection of objects, human figures, animals, and insects. Explicit and symbolic depictions of male and female genitalia abound, as do direct references to Freud's theories of castration anxiety and anality. In this painting and many others Dalí portrays a universe in which the most apparently innocent objects, from a seashell to a man's hat, acquire erotic significance.



Figure **7.2.1.6.7**: Salvador Dalí, *The Invisible Man*, 1929, oil on canvas, 140 x 81 cm (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid)



Figure **7.2.1.6.8**: Salvador Dalí, *The Invisible Man*, detail, 1929, oil on canvas, 140 x 81 cm (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid)

Dalí invented a technical strategy for Surrealist art that he called **"paranoia criticism."** In Dalí's view unconscious erotic desires inevitably shape our vision of reality, and the Surrealist artist's role is to demonstrate this in order to "systematize confusion," overthrow rationality, and discredit what we think of as reality. Just as paranoiacs are convinced that seemingly unrelated objects and events are in fact intimately connected to their own obsessions, Dalí's paranoiac paintings were intended to demonstrate how his imagination radically transforms objects to make them conform to his desires.

His first published paranoiac painting, *The Invisible Man*, depicts a strange landscape with multiple figures and objects. Individual elements also create the figure of a large seated man. The back of a nude woman in the upper center of the image is one of his upper arms. His face appears in a collection of architectural elements, and his hair is also clouds. The longer you look at the painting, the more figures and parts of figures you will see. Paintings such as this were intended to make viewers aware that the "reality" they see is only one view. It is possible to make reality answer our desires simply by changing the way we look at things.



Figure **7.2.1.6.9**: René Magritte, *The Human Condition*, 1933, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 7/8 inches (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

In contrast to Dalí's often obscene and intentionally shocking imagery, René Magritte used realistic painting techniques to present philosophical conundrums about the nature of representation and its relation to reality and language. In *The Human Condition*, Magritte depicts the way a painting's representation "replaces" reality, leading us to consider the many assumptions we make about realistic images and their relationship to what they represent.



Figure **7.2.1.6.10**: René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*, 1929, oil on canvas, 23 ¾ x 32 inches (LACMA)

The Treachery of Images presents the disjunctions between the written phrase *"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"* (This is not a pipe) and the depiction of a pipe above it. Representation is not reality, although it may look like it; nor is language to be trusted as a source of truth about what is real. The painting of a pipe is not a pipe; but the word "pipe" is not a pipe either. By undermining comfortable assumptions about the human ability to understand reality through language and representation, Magritte's works demonstrate that we make the world we think we know. Everything is, in the end, a question of representation (in words or images) in which we choose to believe, or not.

Additional resources:

Read a biography of Giorgio de Chirico at the Guggenheim Museum

Read a biography of Yves Tanguy at the Guggenheim Museum

Read more about Salvador Dalí at MoMA

Read More about René Magritte at MoMA

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7.2.1.7: Surrealist Techniques- Collage

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188283



Figure **7.2.1.7.1**: Max Ernst, Page from *Une Semaine de Bonté, Volume II: Water*, 1934 (MoMA)

An overwhelming dream

A woman sleeps in an elaborately decorated bed hung with fringed and tasseled curtains. A bearded man dressed in a frock coat stands in the bedroom and contemplates her, his chin in his hand. Behind him loom a disproportionately large table and chair, and under his feet the floor is flooded. He ignores both the surging waters and the two nude men at his feet clutching spars, apparent victims of a shipwreck.

We are looking at one of the many wildly incongruous scenes that make up Max Ernst's Surrealist collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* (*A Week of Kindness*) This image of a man studying a sleeping woman directly suggests a key influence on Ernst and the Surrealists in general, the **psychoanalytic theories** of Sigmund Freud, particularly his study of dreams.

Following Freud, the Surrealists considered dreams a principal means to gain access to the unconscious, and they published many accounts of their own dreams in the journal *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Here, Ernst collaged together images cut from old book illustrations to depict a dream-like scene that has materialized in a woman's bedroom and threatens to completely overwhelm the presumed dreamer and her observer.

Irrational juxtaposition

The Surrealists saw collage as a means to enact what they considered to be the fundamental poetic activity of the unconscious mind, the combination of disparate entities to create a new thing. Both Surrealist poets and artists used collage techniques. Like **automatic writing**, collage allows writers and artists to rapidly combine and juxtapose pre-existing elements, whether words or images, and transform them into new creations. This irrational juxtaposition of pre-existing elements mirrors the construction of dreams, which also bring together seemingly unrelated things to create strange narratives and scenes.



Figure **7.2.1.7.2**: Max Ernst, *Here Everything is Still Floating*, 1920, printed paper collage with pencil on cardstock, 6 ½ x 8 ¼ inches (MoMA)

In *Here Everything is Still Floating* Max Ernst collaged images of a fish skeleton and a beetle onto a military photograph of an aerial bomb attack, thereby creating a seascape in which a steamboat encounters an enormous ghostly fish. We can identify the individual source images if we look closely, but they have been transformed by their new context, and their original significance is no longer relevant. They have become part of a new world.

Manifestations of the unconscious

Ernst was the first visual artist to join the Surrealist movement, and his early Dada collages such as *Here Everything is Still Floating* were an important catalyst for the development of Surrealism. As a **Dadaist** Ernst initially used collage techniques of juxtaposition to violate established expectations and rationality. For the Surrealists, however, the disruptions and dislocations of collage were not just arbitrary iconoclasm; they were direct manifestations of unconscious thinking.

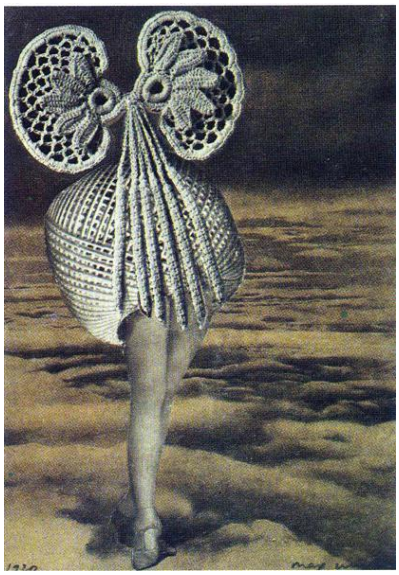


Figure **7.2.1.7.3**: Max Ernst, *Above the Clouds Walks Midnight*, 1920, collage

The phrase

> ***as beautiful as the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissecting table***

from *Les Chants de Maldoror* by the nineteenth century writer known as the Comte de Lautréamont was a touchstone for the Surrealists. It embodied their notion that the union of disparate objects or words can result in new and marvelous creations. Ernst

described the mechanism of collage in a more general way as “the coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a plane that apparently does not suit them.”[1] What arises from that coupling is something previously unknown, a new reality.

Transforming ordinary things

Collage techniques were widely used in the 19th century by women making albums and decorative objects. In the 20th century they were adopted by the **Cubist painters Picasso and Braque**, who used them to expand their exploration of representational strategies and pictorial form.



Figure **7.2.1.7.4**: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Glass*, 1912, collage and charcoal on board, 18 7/8 x 14 ¾ inches (McNay Museum, San Antonio)

Unlike the Cubists, the Surrealists were not interested in formal issues or in what they saw as narrowly aesthetic concerns. They viewed collage as a means to transform ordinary things, such as wallpaper, and turn them into points of entry to another world.



Figure **7.2.1.7.5**: Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté, Volume 3: The Court of the Dragon*, 1934

In his collage novels such as *Une Semaine de Bonté*, Ernst exploited the potential of collage to scramble the order of so-called reality to an extreme degree. He placed individual collage images of an imaginatively reordered universe into an extended visual narrative based on an illogical series of displacements and irrational re-integrations. To stress the independent existence of the imaginatively created world, these collages are seamless. Unlike Cubist collages, where the disparate parts remain clearly visible, Surrealist collages conceal the sutures between the constituent units, thereby emphasizing the final image’s “reality” rather than the procedures and materials of its creation.



Figure **7.2.1.7.6**: Salvador Dalí, *Illumined Pleasures*, 1929, oil and collage on board, 9 3/8 x 13 ¾ inches (MoMA)

The basic mechanism of collage, irrational juxtaposition or the bringing together of radically incompatible things, was foundational for Surrealism, just as it is fundamental to the way dreams work according to Freud. Salvador Dalí combined collage and oil paint in some of his early Surrealist works, but even when he did not incorporate literal collage elements, the conceptual mechanism of the technique remains at the heart of his work. In *Illumined Pleasures* we see Dalí's sleeping profile in the center surrounded by the incongruous objects of his unconscious thoughts.

In the foreground, directly below Dalí's profile, a bearded man in a suit grabs a woman in a nightgown while both stand in water. Note the similarity to the Ernst scene we first looked at above; both works illustrate imagery Freud described as frequently appearing in dreams. Surrounding Dalí's profile are what he called his "obsessions," and these are grouped together in a collage-like presentation. Some of the figures are themselves conjoined images, such as the smiling woman's head, which is also a foaming beer stein, and her neck, which is also a girl's face in the shape of a mug.



Figure **7.2.1.7.7**: René Magritte, *Time Transfixed*, 1938, oil on canvas, 57 7/8 x 38 7/8 inches (Art Institute of Chicago)

The conceptual mechanism of collage is also central to many of the paintings of René Magritte, which depict the irrational juxtaposition of disparate objects in a realistic style. In *Time Transfixed* a steam-train engine enters a room through the fireplace. The scale is impossible, but the details of the representation are so meticulous, including the cast shadow of the train and the steam going up the chimney, that we are led to consider this an accurate depiction of the world of dreams where such incredible combinations are commonplace.

The Surrealist juxtaposition of disparate entities, be it literal or conceptual, requires recognizable elements to achieve its surprising and innovative effects. This reliance on realistic representation differentiated Surrealism from most modern art movements, which rejected realism as an outdated concern with subject matter rather than artistic form. For the Surrealists, however, dedication to narrowly artistic concerns such as form, style and technique was an abdication of artists' potential to change the world. Collage, with its ability to reshape reality in challenging, but still recognizable ways, was a central technique in the Surrealists' revolutionary endeavors. It showed precisely how the mind could re-make the world in a concrete way, by using new and unexpected combinations of existing things to create a new reality.



Figure **7.2.1.7.8**: Max Ernst, *Quietude* from *La Femme de 100 Têtes*, 1929 (MoMA)

Notes:

1. Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, translated by Dorothea Tanning. (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), p. 13.

Additional resources:

Read a biography of Max Ernst at the Guggenheim Museum

View *Une Semaine de Bonté, Volume II: Water* at MoMA

View *Une Semaine de Bonté, Volume 3: The Court of the Dragon* at MoMA

Read more about René Magritte at MoMA

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7.2.1.8: Surrealist Photography

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Figure **7.2.1.8.1**: Man Ray, *Enigma*, gelatin silver print, 1920

An enigmatic image

Man Ray's photograph of a mysterious object or objects covered in a blanket and tied up with rope is the opening image of the Surrealists' first journal, *La Révolution Surréaliste*. It appeared without caption or attribution in the middle of an essay announcing the Surrealists' dedication to dreams and revolution. Readers were left to determine its significance on their own. Perhaps it was intended to represent the **mysteries of the unconscious** bound up and hidden beneath the surface of ordinary things. Perhaps it referred to the as-yet-undisclosed contents of the magazine that the reader would encounter in the following pages.

Most likely it was intended to appeal to the unconscious desires of each individual reader. Surrealism as a movement was dedicated to creating works that not only expressed their author's unconscious mental activity, but also provoked such activity in the viewer. The Surrealists developed a number of tools for achieving this end, including **irrational juxtapositions**, **suggestion**, and **subversive realism**, all of which were mobilized in Surrealist photography.

Rayographs



Figure **7.2.1.8.2**: Man Ray, Rayograph #3 from *Champs Délicieux*, 1922 (Pompidou Center, Paris)

Photography played an important role in Surrealism from the movement's inception. The New York Dadaist Man Ray moved to Paris in the 1920s and became an early member of the Surrealist group as well as working as a successful fashion photographer. The Surrealist leader André Breton admired his Dada rayographs for the surprising ways they both revealed and transformed common objects. Rayographs, also known as rayograms or photograms, are made by placing objects on photo-sensitive paper and briefly exposing them to light. The silhouettes of the objects are recorded on the paper as white unexposed areas, and can create unexpected patterns and suggestive images.

Photographic proof

Man Ray's photographs liberally illustrate Surrealist journals, as do many photographs from anonymous sources. In many instances these photographs were intended as visual proof of Surrealism's existence in the world. Traditionally regarded as a means to create factual visual records, photographs were used by the Surrealists both to document Surrealist occurrences and to call into question the nature of reality.

During early debates on the possibility of a Surrealist visual art, Pierre Naville published a statement that the only acceptable types of visual production were non-artistic photographs that revealed the Surrealist nature of reality. Although this restrictive view of Surrealist art did not prevail, interest in photography as a form of Surrealist documentation endured and became an important aspect of Surrealist visual production.



Figure 7.2.1.8.3: J.-A. Boiffard, photograph of the Humanité bookstore used as an illustration in André Breton, *Nadja*

Breton's autobiographical texts *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou* were illustrated with photographs by Man Ray, Brassaï, Boiffard, and others. The photographs document the objects and Paris locations described in Breton's narrative. They are presented as a form of evidence that implicitly attests to the truth of Breton's description of his Surrealist adventures.



Figure 7.2.1.8.4: Man Ray, *Untitled (Hat)*, 1933, gelatin silver print

Man Ray's photographs of fashionable hats and Brassaï's photographs of discarded bus tickets were used to illustrate Surrealist essays on the widespread presence of erotic forms and **automatism** in daily life. The photographs were intended to document how the common objects of the modern world are profoundly shaped by **unconscious, frequently sexual, desires**. Women's hats take on phallic and vaginal forms, while the tickets and other odds and ends people drop on the street have been folded and fondled into elaborate and suggestive shapes.



Figure **7.2.1.8.5**: Brassaï, *Involuntary Sculpture (Bus Ticket)*, 1933, gelatin silver print

The Surrealists called these manipulated objects involuntary sculptures and, like doodles and Surrealist artworks created by using automatic techniques, they understood them to be the direct result of unconscious creative activity.

The strangeness of the world



Figure **7.2.1.8.6**: Dora Maar, *Père Ubu*, 1938, gelatin silver print (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Surrealist photographs were also used to reveal the strangeness of the world we think we know, often by simply presenting it in a new way. Dora Maar titled her photograph of a baby armadillo after the anti-hero of Alfred Jarry's famously transgressive and iconoclastic play *Ubu Roi* (1896), which was much admired by the Surrealists.

The close-up image of the animal's unfamiliar form is startling in itself, but by connecting the armadillo to Père Ubu, Maar created an emotional resonance for viewers familiar with the character. Suddenly, the small animal is transformed into a large, greedy, and violent human being — what was perhaps merely strange becomes monstrous. This is possible in part because of the way the photograph distorts our sense of scale by close-cropping and isolating the animal within the frame.

Innovative techniques

In addition to presenting photographs as Surrealist documents of the unexpected strangeness of reality, photographers associated with Surrealism experimented with darkroom techniques to create bizarre, often unpredictable, results.



Figure **7.2.1.8.7**: Raoul Ubac, *The Secret Gathering*, 1938, gelatin silver print (MoMA)

In works such as *The Secret Gathering*, Raoul Ubac exploited the unsettling effects of double exposures and solarization (extreme over-exposure of film, which reverses tones) to suggest photography's capacity to reveal a Surrealist reality hidden from ordinary vision. Based on photographs of two nude women, Ubac used darkroom manipulations to transform the original photographs into the suggestion of an other-worldly gathering of semi-human beings. Because we can still see some body parts clearly, we are led to think that this strange photograph may be a faithful document of a surreal world.



Figure **7.2.1.8.8**: Left: Claude Cahun, *Que me veux tu*? 1929, gelatin silver print (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); Right: Claude Cahun, *Self-Portrait*, 1929, gelatin silver print (Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris)

In *Que me veux tu? (What do you want from me?)* Claude Cahun similarly used darkroom manipulation to present herself doubled. Cahun's self-portraits use multiple exposures, costumes and varied strategies of self-presentation to question the nature of individual identity. Her photographs are unusual in the context of Surrealist photography both as self-portraits and as images of a woman made by a woman.

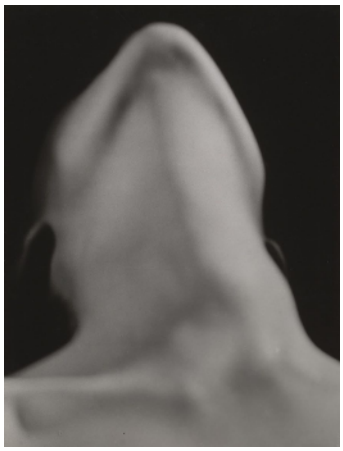


Figure **7.2.1.8.9**: Man Ray, *Anatomies*, 1929, gelatin silver print (MoMA)

Women's bodies were a favored subject for Surrealist photographers. Employing unusual angles, cropping, distorting lenses, and selective focus, Surrealist photographers transformed the body according to their desires and imagination. The infinitely malleable forms of the body served as revelatory means for Surrealist vision. Man Ray's *Anatomies*, for example, transforms a woman's chin and neck into a phallic form, in keeping with **Freudian theories of fetishism**.



Figure **7.2.1.8.10**: Hans Bellmer, *The Doll*, 1936, gelatin silver print (MoMA)

Hans Bellmer combined sculpture with photography in the creation of his doll, whose body changed with each image, fragmenting and multiplying body parts according to the erotic desires of its maker.

Photography and film as Surrealist media

Some scholars consider photography to be the most effective of the Surrealists' visual productions in part because of its ability to reveal hidden realities and to demonstrate the transformative powers of vision. In addition, photography is less restricted by the expectations and artistic conventions that affect the traditional art forms of painting and sculpture.

Film also seems to be a particularly appropriate Surrealist medium, as was noted in the first published discussion of the possibilities for Surrealist visual art. The Surrealists recognized that film could literally show the flow of unconscious thought and create extended dream-like visual experiences. During the Dada period the group made a practice of moving from theater to theater, watching only parts of the films being screened. In this way they experienced the unfolding of a suggestive collection of disparate images without submitting to the logic of a single narrative.



Figure 7.2.1.8.11: Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, still from *L'Age d'Or*, 1930

Luis Buñuel was the most dedicated and successful Surrealist filmmaker. Salvador Dalí collaborated with him in the creation of the two most important and notorious Surrealist films, *Un Chien andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'Or* (1930). While film never became the primary focus of Surrealist visual production, the influence of Surrealism on photography and filmmaking has been immense and endures to the present day.

Additional resources:

Watch *Un Chien andalou*

Read more about Man Ray at MoMA

See all of the Rayograms from *Champs Délicieux* at the J. Paul Getty Museum

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7.2.1.9: Surrealist Exhibitions

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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Figure **7.2.1.9.1**: Galerie Surréaliste, c. 1927, photo by Man Ray

Surrealism was the first modern art movement to make the creation and design of exhibitions a major focus of its activity. The group transformed the art exhibition from a traditional display of artworks into a staged venue intended to provoke new ideas and experiences. The contents of Surrealist exhibitions were typically eclectic and included works by Surrealist artists, other artists and non-artists admired by the Surrealists, as well as objects of various sorts and artifacts from cultures perceived as "**primitive**."

Exhibitions as Surrealist experiences

From the beginning, Surrealist exhibitions were intended to provide a Surrealist experience for viewers and lead them to perform their own acts of Surrealist imagination. The juxtaposition of disparate works and objects in the extended space of an exhibition would, it was hoped, provoke the creation of a new world, using the same mechanism as that employed in a **Surrealist collage**.

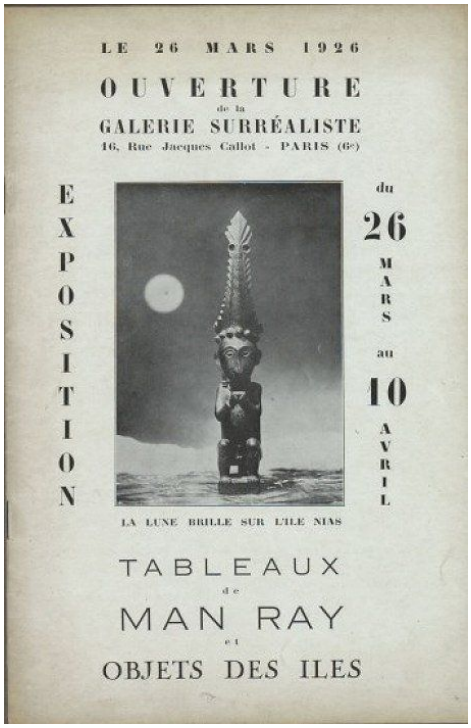


Figure **7.2.1.9.2**: Man Ray exhibition card

During the 1920s the Surrealists ran their own art gallery, which staged several unconventional exhibitions. Man Ray's work was exhibited with art from Oceanic cultures, while Tanguy's paintings were paired with Native American works. These non-European works were also seen as products of unconscious thinking, and as such fully equal to the works of Surrealist artists in providing insight into the immense creative resources of the arational mind.

Contempt for art market values



Figure **7.2.1.9.3**: Left: Exquisite Corpse drawing by Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray, 1927, ink and pencil on paper, 14 1/8 x 9 inches (MoMA); Right: Exquisite Corpse drawing by Yves Tanguy, André Breton, Max Morise, and Man Ray, c. 1927

The Surrealist Gallery also presented an exhibition of "exquisite corpse" drawings. These are drawings of figures made by a collaboration of three to five people using a method derived from parlor games. Each person draws part of the body and then folds the paper over so the person drawing the next section cannot see the previous drawing. Once the figure is completed the paper is unfolded and the strange juxtapositions of the various parts become a new Surrealist entity.

The "exquisite corpse" method demonstrated many basic Surrealist principles. Both artists and non-artists participated in the making of exquisite corpses, which, like all Surrealist works, were not intended to be the result of artistic skill. The group nature of the drawings as well as their arbitrary automatic creation were intended to subvert any attempt to exalt the individual artist and his or her talent. These are drawings anyone can do. The exhibition of exquisite corpse drawings in the Surrealist Gallery demonstrated the group's contempt for conventional assumptions about the value of art and the skills of artists that underpin the art market.

Irrational categories of display



Figure **7.2.1.9.4**: Surrealist Objects exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton, 1936

The Surrealist Gallery did not survive very long, but the Surrealists continued to stage exhibitions, which grew in scope and ambition during the 1930s. The Surrealist Exhibition of Objects was held in the gallery of Charles Ratton, a dealer in African, Oceanic, and Native American arts. This 1936 exhibition brought together over two hundred objects divided into categories, including **Surrealist objects** as well as natural objects, interpreted objects, mathematical objects, found objects, readymade objects, and so-called **"savage" objects** (the art of Oceania and Native Americans).



Figure **7.2.1.9.5**: Surrealist Objects exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton, 1936

The eclectic presentation brought together objects typically exhibited in very different contexts: art galleries, natural history museums, anthropological museums, science museums, and flea markets. By upsetting the conventional categories of knowledge and presenting an alternative, illogical system, the Surrealists demonstrated how context creates meaning. The exhibition undermined the supposedly rational divisions of human knowledge using irrational strategies of display.

Surrealist environments

The most famous Surrealist exhibition was the 1938 International Exhibition of Surrealism at the Beaux Arts Gallery in Paris. It displayed 300 works and objects by over sixty artists from fifteen different countries. The scale of the exhibition was impressive, and its installation design made it truly remarkable. Visitors were enfolded in an entire Surrealist environment.



Figure **7.2.1.9.6**: Roger Schall, *Untitled (International Surrealist Exhibition, Paris)*, 1938, gelatin silver print, 22.1 x 21.1 cm (MoMA)

In the lobby was Dalí's *Rainy Taxi*, an old car surrounded by vines and installed with a system of tubing that created a downpour in the interior. Two mannequins, one with a shark's head and one with a woman's, sat inside surrounded by lettuce and covered in live snails.

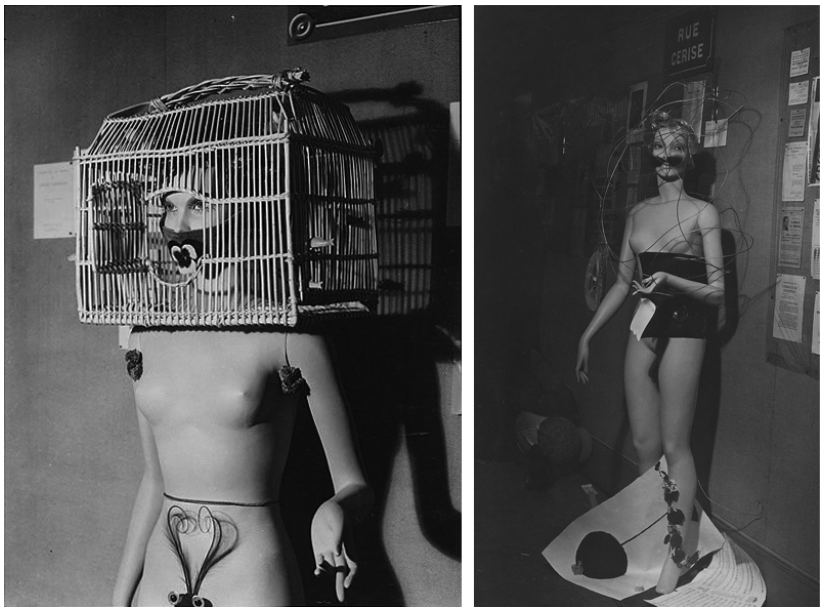


Figure 7.2.1.9.7: Left: Man Ray, André Masson's mannequin at the International Surrealist Exhibition, 1938; Right: Man Ray, Joan Miró's mannequin at the International Surrealist Exhibition, 1938

Leading from the lobby was a long hallway lined by twenty mannequins, each costumed by a Surrealist artist. At the end of the passageway was the main hall of the exhibition, designed by **Marcel Duchamp**. The ceiling was hung with hundreds of sacks of coal, while the floor was covered with dead leaves and had a pool with water lilies and reeds. In the center of the room was an old iron heater, and in each corner were large beds covered in satin quilts.



Figure 7.2.1.9.8: Roger Schall, *Untitled (International Surrealist Exhibition, Paris)*, 1938, gelatin silver print, 22.1 x 21.1 cm (MoMA)

Paintings were hung on the walls as well as on two revolving doors next to the heater. Surrealist furniture and objects were displayed throughout. The room was unlit, and visitors were given flashlights to use during their journey through the exhibition. During opening night a German military march was played through a loudspeaker, coffee was roasted to emanate the "perfumes of

Brazil," and a dancer performed a dance titled "The Unconsummated Act" in and around the pool. For the most part art critics mocked the exhibition, but it was an enormous popular success.

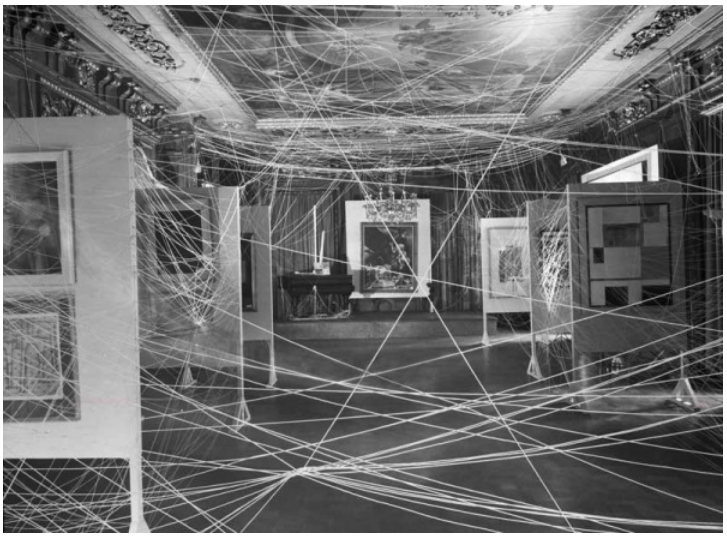


Figure 7.2.1.9.9: First Papers of Surrealism exhibition, 1942

The elaborate installation of the 1938 exhibition was not repeated, but in 1942 Duchamp designed another installation for the First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition in New York City. He wound a mile of string into a labyrinth that covered the walls and art works like an enormous spider web. Visitors were literally enmeshed with the Surrealist works in the environment. The illogical space he created seemed to be more a physical manifestation of mental space than an environment to be explored by a human body.



Figure 7.2.1.9.10: Eric Schaal, Dalí's Dream of Venus pavilion at the New York World's Fair, 1939

Salvador Dalí took the concept of Surrealist installation into the realm of advertising, fashion, and popular entertainment. In addition to designing windows for department stores in the 1930s, he erected the Dream of Venus pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair. This full-scale fantasy environment turned Surrealist eroticism into a kind of popular burlesque. Visitors entered between two huge legs, and the interior included a grotto with a ceiling covered in inverted open umbrellas, a new version of *Rainy Taxi*, a 36-foot long sofa with a reclining nude, and seventeen women costumed as mermaids cavorting for viewers in a furnished aquarium.

Surrealist exhibitions broke down conventional distinctions between art and non-art, and thwarted the consumption of creative works as commodities. In addition, the Surrealists transformed the conception of the exhibition from a neutral site for the display of objects into a creative production in its own right. The later developments of environments, happenings, and installation art are all indebted to the Surrealists' conception of the art exhibition as an experience rather than simply a showcase for artworks.

Additional resources:

Read more about the First Papers of Surrealism exhibition at the *Tate Papers*

Roger Schall's photos of the 1938 Surrealist exhibition at MoMA

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7.2.1.10: Surrealism and Women

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

Page ID
188286



Figure **7.2.1.10.1**: Max Ernst, image from *Une Semaine de Bonté: Book II Water*, 1934 (MoMA)

Women as objects of fear and desire

Women were a central subject in Surrealist art. Male Surrealist artists often portrayed fragmented, deformed, and dismembered female bodies as objects of violent erotic imaginings. This may be attributed, at least in part, to the Surrealists' engagement with **Freudian psychoanalytic theories**, in which the female body is both the primary object of male heterosexual desire and a source of great anxiety resulting from male fears of castration. Women thus represent the greatest source of erotic satisfaction, while also inspiring disgust and terror.



Figure **7.2.1.10.2**: Hans Bellmer, *The Doll*, 1935-37, gelatin silver print (MoMA)

With her seemingly endless permutations and multiplication of body parts, Hans Bellmer's fetishistic doll can be seen as an objectification of these powerful and contradictory emotions. The Surrealists' perception of women as terrifying but erotic objects also appears in their fascination with the praying mantis. In the 1930s many Surrealist artists depicted this insect, whose female beheads and eats the male during or immediately following copulation. Max Ernst's ironically titled *The Joy of Life* shows the insects in the foreground of an ominous jungle scene filled with half-hidden, menacing creatures.



Figure 7.2.1.10.3: Max Ernst, *The Joy of Life*, 1936, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 93 cm (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art)

Women as a source of inspiration

The other side of the coin was a tendency to idealize women as beautiful, mysterious sources of inspiration. The violated and debased female body is such a commonplace of Surrealist art that it may seem surprising that the Surrealists were dedicated to romantic love. This is more evident in Surrealist writing than in the visual arts, but it was an attitude that affected the personal lives of artists and writers alike.



Figure 7.2.1.10.4: Man Ray, photograph of Nusch Eluard, 1935, gelatin silver print, 23 x 17.8 cm (MoMA)

Man Ray photographed the Surrealist poet Paul Eluard's second wife Nusch as the beloved muse to whom he dedicated many love poems. The wives and lovers of the male Surrealists were often key figures in the movement even if they were not themselves artists or writers. They were celebrated in Surrealist art and writings and often directly participated in the movement by signing manifestos, making objects, and contributing to **exquisite corpses** and other group activities. Gala Dalí was the most prominent. First the wife of the Surrealist poet Paul Eluard, then the lover of Max Ernst, she ultimately became the wife of Salvador Dalí, who dedicated all his work to her, even signing her name to his paintings because she inspired them.

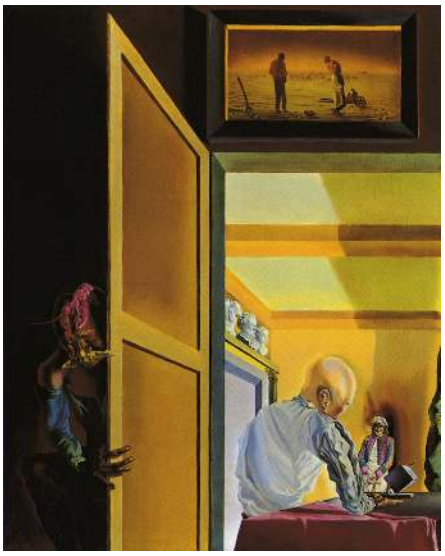


Figure **7.2.1.10.5**: Salvador Dalí, *Gala and the Angelus of Millet before the arrival of the Conical Anamorphoses*, 1933, oil on canvas, 24.2 x 19.2 cm (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)

Women Surrealist artists



Figure \(\PageIndex{6\): Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space*, 1937, gelatin silver print, (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)

In the early years of Surrealism no women artists were members of the group, but this changed over time as the movement grew in size and influence. Many of the most well-known women associated with Surrealism became involved with the movement through their personal relationships with Surrealist men. **Meret Oppenheim** and Lee Miller both worked with Man Ray, in addition to making their own Surrealist works. **Leonora Carrington** and Dorothea Tanning became involved with Surrealism through Max Ernst; Remedios Varo through the Surrealist poet Benjamin Péret; and Kay Sage through Yves Tanguy.



Figure **7.2.1.10.7**: Kay Sage, *A Finger on the Drum*, 1940, oil on canvas, 15 x 21½ inches (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Leonor Fini exhibited with the Surrealists in the 1930s, as did the Czech Surrealist painter Toyen, and the photographers **Claude Cahun and Dora Maar**.



Figure **7.2.1.10.8**: Left: Toyen (Maria Čerminová), *The Message of the Forest*, 1936, oil on canvas, 160 x 129 cm (National Galleries of Scotland); right: Dora Maar, *Le Simulateur*, 1936, gelatin silver print, 30.2 × 23.5 cm (The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston)

Surrealist women representing women



Figure 7.2.1.10.9: Leonora Carrington, *Self Portrait*, c. 1938, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 32 inches (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Given the Surrealist interest in creating art that manifested the unconscious and the **prominence of Freudian themes** in the work of male Surrealist artists, certain questions inevitably arise. How did female Surrealist artists represent their dreams and unconscious desires, and how are they different from the representations of male Surrealist artists? These are difficult questions to answer, in part because the Surrealists strongly rejected conformity. Although there are similarities between certain Surrealist artists, it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations about all male Surrealists, and this is equally true of the women.



Figure 7.2.1.10.10: Dorothea Tanning, *Birthday*, 1942, oil on canvas, 40¼ x 25½ inches (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Many of the women associated with Surrealism were as interested in women as an artistic subject as the male Surrealists were. Their representations of women are, however, notably different. While male Surrealist artists often depicted faceless, distorted, and violated female bodies, artists such as Carrington, Varo, and Fini portrayed women, including themselves, as young and beautiful. In depictions of their dreams and in their self-representations, women artists associated with Surrealism often seem to conform to male Surrealist idealizations of women as beautiful, child-like creatures inhabiting magical dream environments.



Figure 7.2.1.10.11: Remedios Varo, *The Call*, 1961, oil on masonite, 39 ½ x 26 ¾ inches (National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC)

Women's self-representations

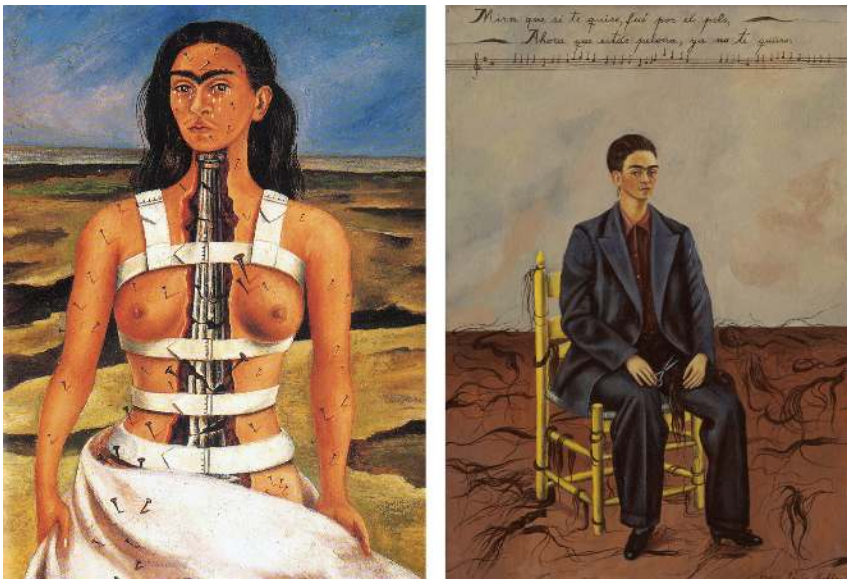


Figure 7.2.1.10.12: Left: Frida Kahlo, *The Broken Column*, 1944, oil on masonite, 30.5 x 39 cm (Museo Dolores Olmedo); Right: Frida Kahlo, *Self Portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, oil on canvas, 15 ¾ x 11 inches (MoMA)

Self-portraiture was a more significant genre among Surrealist women artists than it was among the men, and several women artists associated with the group are particularly notable for the depth and complexity of their engagement with self-representation. The most famous of these is **Frida Kahlo**, whom the Surrealist leader André Breton saluted as a natural Surrealist, although she never considered herself a member of the movement. Kahlo used her own image as a primary subject, often combining it with symbolic objects and scenes that represent her thoughts, feelings, and memories. She was also concerned with constructing her image in life, dressing in men's clothes, or more often in traditional regional Mexican costumes, as a means of proclaiming her identity.



Figure 7.2.1.10.13: Leonor Fini, *The Alcove/Self Portrait with Nico Papatakis*, 1941, oil on canvas

Leonor Fini, who also never joined the group but was friends with many Surrealists and participated in Surrealist exhibitions, was similarly preoccupied with her own image in art and life. She appears in her paintings as a beautiful, dominating, and sensual woman, often surrounded by imagined figures and environments. The self-image in her paintings was not unlike the figure she presented in person. She wore dramatic costumes, and once received the Surrealists dressed in priest's robes, clothing she found particularly erotic and transgressive.



Figure 7.2.1.10.14: Claude Cahun, *Self Portrait*, 1928

Unlike Kahlo and Fini, Claude Cahun participated in a variety of Surrealist group activities in the 1930s. In addition to making Surrealist objects, she produced a series of photographic self-portraits in which she transformed herself radically from one image to the next, appearing in several wearing masks and costumed as a doll. The gender ambiguities in many of her self-portraits suggest an exploration of her own image that is concerned with both personal and social issues of identity.

The role of women in Surrealism was complex and contradictory. The movement both infantilized and empowered women, treated them as erotic objects and supported their sexual emancipation, subjected them to the **male gaze** and validated their own self images. Furthermore, it is important to note that while women were a minority within the Surrealist group, many more women artists achieved significant recognition in the context of Surrealism than in other major modern art movements.

Additional resources:

Read a short biography of Toyen at the National Galleries of Scotland

Read more about Dora Maar at the Tate London

Read more about Dorothea Tanning and see more of her work at the Dorothea Tanning Foundation

Read more about Remedios Varo at MoMA

Read more about Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* at MoMA

Read more about Leonor Fini at the Weinstein Gallery

Read more about Claude Cahun at the New York Times

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7.2.1.11: A brief guide to Egyptian Surrealism

- by **TATE**

Page ID

188287



In 1938, a group of 37 artists, writers and thinkers in Cairo signed a manifesto titled ‘Long Live Degenerate Art’. This marked the start of the group known as ‘Art and Liberty’, and the birth of a distinctly Egyptian style of Surrealism. Get to know some of the key Egyptian Surrealists in this short animated film, including Mayo, Amy Nimr, Ramses Younan, and their connection to an international network of Surrealists in the first half of the twentieth century.

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7.2.2: Man Ray, The Gift

by JOSH R. ROSE

Page ID
188288

Man Ray and *The Gift*

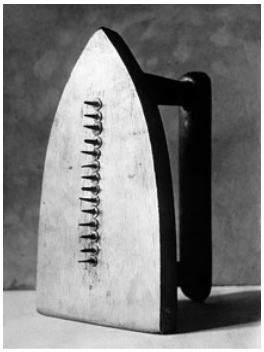


Figure **7.2.2.1**: Man Ray, *Gift*, c. 1958 (replica of 1921 original), painted flatiron and tacks, 15.3 x 9 x 11.4 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

The American artist Man Ray (born Emanuel Radnitzky) arrived in Paris in 1921. Within a year, the artist had his first solo show at a Parisian gallery. Among the works he exhibited was one unlisted sculpture: the object, which he called *The Gift*, was an everyday flatiron with brass tacks glued in a column down its center. According to Man Ray in his autobiography *Self-Portrait*, the object was made quickly, in a bout of inspiration, the day of the gallery opening.

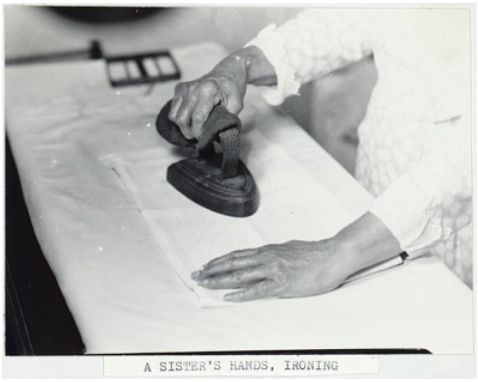


Figure **7.2.2.2**: Samuel Kravitt, *A Sister's Hands Ironing*, c. 1931-36, photo, Hancock Shaker Village, Massachusetts (Library of Congress)

What do we make of Man Ray's relatively simple, yet subversive act of presenting a modified household appliance as a work of art? The flatiron – intended to smooth wrinkles from fabric – has been rendered useless with the addition of a row of brass tacks. We are perhaps expected to react the way the store owner supposedly did when Man Ray purchased these items, by exclaiming, "But you'll ruin the shirt if you put tacks there!"

Dada, or the nonsense of the everyday

Before arriving in Paris, Man Ray was associated with the New York Dada group, which included the artist Marcel Duchamp. As a loosely-affiliated group of like-minded artists, they were particularly interested in using humor and antagonism to question the definition of a work of art. Re-defining art was prevalent in Duchamp's Readymades, such as his *Bicycle Wheel*, a sculpture made by conjoining a bicycle wheel and a stool, two utilitarian objects.

The Surrealist object



Figure **7.2.2.3**: Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1951 (third version, after lost original of 1913), metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 129.5 x 63.5 x 41.9 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Although made in the spirit of Dada, Man Ray's *The Gift* prefigured by several years a key artistic practice that would develop within the Surrealist movement: the "Surrealist object," a type of three-dimensional art work that included found objects, modified objects, and sculpted objects.

The Surrealist object—one of many literary and visual practices in the movement—became prominent beginning in 1936, after its association with a series of extravagant international expositions organized in London and Paris. Surrealism had been first publicly announced in 1924, with the publication of André Breton's first "Manifesto of Surrealism." Stridently activist, Surrealists sought to release society from cultural constraints and the need to conform to social norms, which they felt curtailed people's desires to live as they wished.

Function/Dysfunction

Of the many types of Surrealist objects that were produced, two important features are present in Man Ray's *The Gift*. First, an everyday object has been changed so that its original function is denied. Indeed, the artist's relatively simple addition of tacks transforms a useful device into a destructive one.

Second, Man Ray's alteration gives a common object a symbolic function. The flatiron, associated with social expectations of propriety and middle-class values, becomes a subversive attack on social expectations. Even if Man Ray's tack-lined iron is no longer used for pressing clothes, the object resonates with ruinous, violent possibilities.

Denial and destruction

While denial and destruction are qualities are not intrinsic to all Surrealist art, there are striking examples, like *The Gift*, that show Surrealists working with banal objects to question the viewer's expectations, and force us to re-evaluate the function of those objects in our lives.



Figure **7.2.2.4**: Wolfgang Paalen, *Articulated Cloud*, umbrella in foam, 1938

Wolfgang Paalen's work from 1938, *Articulated Cloud*, an umbrella crafted from spongy foam, denies the object's intended function by causing water to be absorbed rather than repelled. It also makes the umbrella rather useless for anyone seeking shelter

from rain.

Another object by Man Ray—a metronome with a photograph of a woman's open eye clipped to it—adds an ominous sense of relentless observation to an ordinary musician's timing instrument. Man Ray's title of the piece, *Object to Be Destroyed*, seems mysterious at first. But when we consider the psychological effects of such obsessive observation—and think about what kind of impulses such regulations might evoke – the artist's title becomes easier to understand.



Figure **7.2.2.5**: Man Ray, *Indestructible Object (or Object to Be Destroyed)*, 1964 (replica of 1923 original), metronome with cutout photograph of eye on pendulum, 22.5 x 11 x 11.6 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

No longer a simple time-keeping device, *Object To Be Destroyed* summons feelings of irritation over being watched, and powerlessness in the face of endless time. There is no means to stop the cycle, except to destroy the object itself.

Don't touch the art!

The violent implications of *The Gift* and other Surrealist objects by Man Ray came to fruition in 1957 when *Object to Be Destroyed* was lost during a Man Ray retrospective. Varying stories exist as to the fate of the sculpture. In his autobiography, Man Ray recounts that a group of students visited the exhibition and caused a scene, during which one of them walked off with the sculpture, and it was never seen again. Numerous historians, however, state that during the exhibition one of the students took the title literally and smashed it with a hammer.

Whether stolen or smashed, *Object to Be Destroyed* no longer existed. This compelled Man Ray to remake the sculpture, but he pointedly changed the title to *Indestructible Object*.

Additional Resources:

Andre Breton, *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, 1924

Man Ray; Prophet of the Avant-Garde, American Masters Series on PBS.org (September 17th, 2005)

Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention, Exhibition at The Jewish Museum (November 15, 2009 – March 14, 2010)

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7.2.3: René Magritte, The Treachery of Images (Ceci n’est pas une pipe)

by **DR. BETH HARRIS** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

Page ID
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René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images (Ceci n’est pas une pipe)*, 1929 (LACMA)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

7.2.4: Salvador Dalí

7.2.4.1: The Persistence of Memory

7.2.4.2: Metamorphosis of Narcissus

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7.2.4.1: The Persistence of Memory

- *by SAL KHAN and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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Video **7.2.4.1.1**: Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931 (MoMA)

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7.2.4.2: Metamorphosis of Narcissus

by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **7.2.4.2.1**: Salvador Dalí, *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, 1937, oil on canvas, 51.1 x 78.1 cm (Tate Modern, London)

The ancient source of this subject is Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (Book 3, lines 339-507). It tells of Narcissus, who upon seeing his own image reflected in a pool, so falls in love that he cannot look away. Eventually he vanishes and in his place is a "sweet flower, gold and white, the white around the gold."

Dalí's poem, below, accompanied the painting when it was initially exhibited:

> ***Narcissus,***
> ***in his immobility,***
> ***absorbed by his reflection with the digestive slowness of carnivorous plants,***
> ***becomes invisible.***
> ***There remains of him only the hallucinatingly white oval of his head,***
> ***his head again more tender,***
> ***his head, chrysalis of hidden biological designs,***
> ***his head held up by the tips of the water's fingers,***
> ***at the tips of the fingers***
> ***of the insensate hand,***
> ***of the terrible hand,***
> ***of the mortal hand***
> ***of his own reflection.***
> ***When that head slits***
> ***when that head splits***
> ***when that head bursts,***
> ***it will be the flower,***
> ***the new Narcissus,***
> ***Gala – my Narcissus.***

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7.2.5: Alberto Giacometti, The Palace at 4 a.m.

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

Page ID

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Video **7.2.5.1**: Alberto Giacometti, *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, 1932 , wood, glass, wire and string (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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7.2.6: Meret Oppenheim, Object (Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon)

by JOSH R. ROSE

Page ID
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Figure **7.2.6.1**: Meret Oppenheim, *Object*, 1936, fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, cup 4-3/8″ in diameter; saucer 9-3/8″ in diameter; spoon 8″ long, overall height 2-7/8″ (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

A Luncheon with Fur

The story behind the creation of *Object*, an ordinary cup, spoon, and saucer wrapped evocatively in gazelle fur, has been told so many times its importance in modernist history transcends the fact it might be apocryphal (of dubious authenticity). The twenty-two year old Basel-born artist, Meret Oppenheim, had been in Paris for four years when, one day, she was at a café with Pablo Picasso and Dora Maar. Oppenheim was wearing a brass bracelet covered in fur when Picasso and Maar, who were admiring it, proclaimed, “Almost anything can be covered in fur!” As Oppenheim’s tea grew cold, she jokingly asked the waiter for “more fur.” Inspiration struck—Oppenheim is said to have gone straight from the café to a store where she purchased the cup, saucer, and spoon used in this piece. This amusing story belies the importance of Object and the critical acclaim and public fascination that has elevated it to point where it has become the definitive surrealist object…ultimately to Oppenheim’s dismay.

What Is a Surrealist Object?

Oppenheim’s *Object* was created at a moment when sculpted objects and assemblages had become prominent features of Surrealist art practice. In 1937, British art critic Herbert Read emphasized that all Surrealist objects were representative of an idea and Salvador Dalí described some of them as “objects with symbolic function.” In other words, how might an otherwise typical, functional object be modified so it represents something deeply personal and poetic? How might it, in Freudian terms, resonate as a sublimation of internal desire and aspiration? Such physical manifestations of our internal psyches were indicative of a *surreality*, or the point in which external and internal realities united, as described by André Breton (one of Surrealism’s founders and theorists) in his first *Manifesto of Surrealism*.

Visceral Responses

What, then, do we make of this set of be-furred tableware? Interpretations vary wildly. The art historian Whitney Chadwick has described it as linked to the Surrealist’s love of alchemical transformation by turning cool, smooth ceramic and metal into something warm and bristley, while many scholars have noted the fetishistic qualities of the fur-lined set—as the fur imbues these functional, hand-held objects with sexual connotations.

In a 1936 issue of the *New Yorker Magazine*, it was reported that a woman fainted “right in front of the fur-bearing cup and saucer [while it was on exhibit at MoMA]. “She left no name with the attendants who revived her – only a vague feeling of apprehension." [1] Such visceral reactions to Oppenheim’s sculpture come closest, perhaps, to what were likely the artist’s aspirations. In an interview later in life, Oppenheim described her creations as “not an illustration of an idea, but the thing itself.”

Unlike Read and Dalí, Oppenheim stresses the physicality of *Object*, reinforcing the way we can readily imagine the feeling of the fur while drinking from the cup, and using the saucer and spoon. The frisson we experience when china is unexpectedly wrapped in fur is based on our familiarity with both, and the fur requires us to extend our sensory experiences to fully appreciate the work.

Object insists we imagine what sipping warm tea from this cup feels like, how the bristles would feel upon our lips. With Oppenheim's elegant creation, how we understand those visceral memories, how we create metaphors and symbols out of this act of tactile extension, is entirely open to interpretation by each individual, which is, in many ways, the whole point of Surrealism itself.

Presentation Problems

In spite of our individual response, the interpretation of *Object* has been complicated by the ways it was assigned meaning by others. When *Object* was finished, Oppenheim submitted it to Breton for an exhibition of Surrealist objects at the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris in 1936. However, while Oppenheim preferred a non-descriptive title, Breton took the liberty of titling the piece *Le Déjeneur en fourrure*, or *Luncheon in Fur*. This title is a play on two nineteenth-century works: Édouard Manet's infamous modernist painting *Luncheon on the Grass (Le Déjeneur sur l'herbe)* and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's erotic novel *Venus in Furs*. With these two references, Breton forces an explicit sexualized meaning onto *Object*. Recall that the original inspiration for this work was implicitly practical: when Oppenheim asked the waiter for more fur for her cooling teacup, it was suggested as a way to keep her tea warm, and not necessarily as overtly sexual.

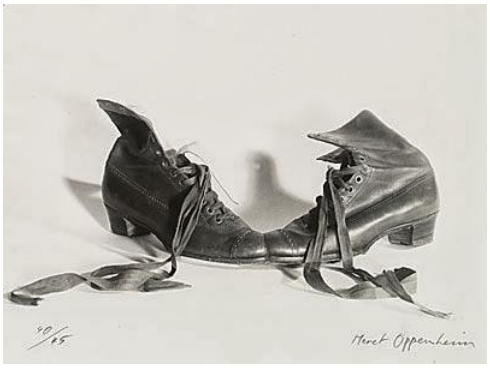


Figure 7.2.6.2: Meret Oppenheim, *Das Paar (The Couple)*, pair of brown shoes attached at the toes, original version 1936, remade 1956

The Meaning of Others

Certainly we cannot assume that the spark of the idea for this piece and the piece itself are necessarily related, but the way meanings have been ascribed to Oppenheim's pieces by others has plagued many of her works.

Art historian Edward Powers has noted that when Oppenheim sent her Surrealist object *Das Paar* to a photographer before submitting it for exhibition, the photographer took the liberty of tying up the laces before photographing it. When Breton saw the photo with tied laces, he dubbed this object *à délacer* which in French means to untie, typically either shoes or a corset. The title and laced shoes together suggest the potential act of undressing and a fascination with exposing the female body. However, when Oppenheim later described *Das Paar* (with the laces untied), she stated it was an "odd unisexual pair: two shoes, unobserved at night, doing 'forbidden' things." She expressly assigned no gender, and suggests the "forbidden" acts already taking place between anthropomorphized shoes. She takes a more literal approach, the shoes as expressive things in themselves, rather than symbolically resonant of something else.

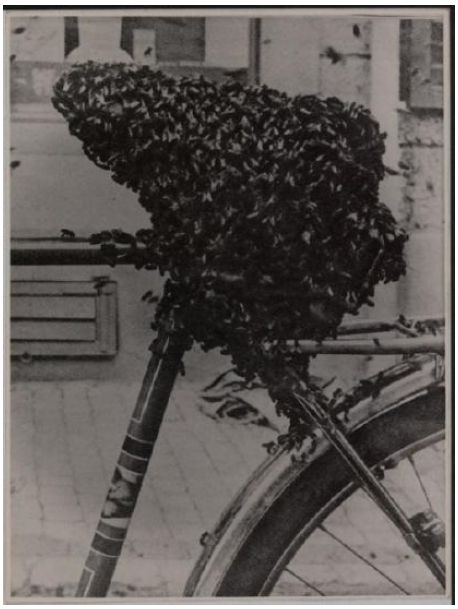


Figure **7.2.6.3**: Meret Oppenheim, *Bee-covered bicycle seat*, found photograph, 1954

This is not to suggest that all her interactions with Breton were negative. When she happened across a wonderfully disturbing photograph of a bicycle seat covered in bees, she mailed it to Breton, who republished the found photograph as an artistic contribution by Oppenheim in the third issue of the new Surrealist publication *Medium*.

Dangerous Success

Yet, the early acclaim for the fur-covered *Object* had a negative effect on Oppenheim's early career. When it was purchased by The Museum of Modern Art and featured in their influential 1936-37 exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, and Surrealism," visitors declared it the "quintessential" Surrealist object. And that is how it has been seen ever since. But for Oppenheim, the prestige and focus on this one object proved too much, and she spent more than a decade out of the artistic limelight, destroying much of the work she produced during that period. It was only later when she re-emerged, and began publicly showing new paintings and objects with renewed vigor and confidence, that she began reclaiming some of the intent of her work. When she was given an award for her work by the City of Basel, she touched upon this in her acceptance speech: "I think it is the duty of a woman to lead a life that expresses her disbelief in the validity of the taboos that have been imposed upon her kind for thousands of years. Nobody will give you freedom; you have to take it."

1. Nelson Landsdale and St. Clair McKelway, Talk of the Town, "Critical Note," *The New Yorker*, December 26, 1936, p. 7.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: German and Italian art between the wars

New movements in the Weimar Republic sought to bring art and design in line with modern life.

1918 - 1939

- 8.1: Prints and photography
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  - 8.1.2: August Sander, Portraits
  - 8.1.3: Umbo, The Roving Reporter
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- 8.2: Bauhaus
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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.1: Prints and photography

These artists used easily-reproducible media to capture the sometimes harsh realities of life in the Weimar Republic.

1918 - 1939

8.1.1: Käthe Kollwitz, In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht

8.1.2: August Sander, Portraits

8.1.3: Umbo, The Roving Reporter

8.1.4: Horst P. Horst, Mainbocher Corset, Paris

8.1.5: Lotte Jacobi, Head of a Dancer

8.1.6: Gertrud Arndt, Self-Portrait with Veil

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8.1.1: Käthe Kollwitz, In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht

by SHAWN ROGGENKAMP

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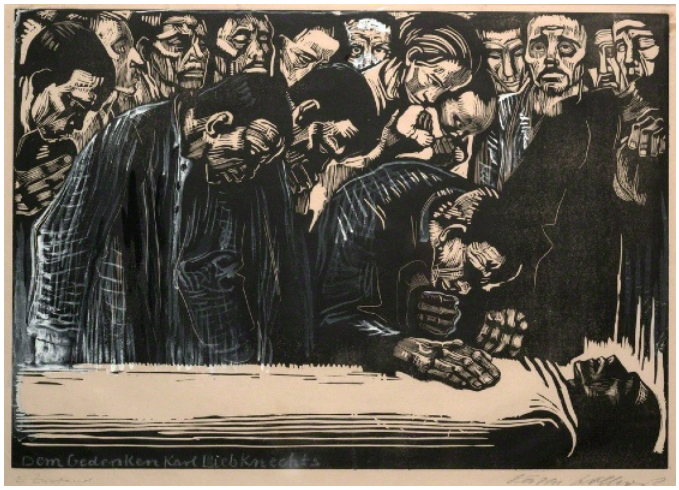


Figure **8.1.1.1**: Käthe Kollwitz, *Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht)*, 1919-1920, Woodcut heightened with white and black ink, 37.1 × 51.9 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Printmaking

In the political turmoil after the First World War, many artists turned to making prints instead of paintings. The ability to produce multiple copies of the same image made printmaking an ideal medium for spreading political statements. German artist Käthe Kollwitz worked almost exclusively in this medium and became known for her prints that celebrated the plight of the working-class.

The artist rarely depicted real people, though she frequently used her talents in support of causes she believed in. This work, *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* was created in 1920 in response to the assassination of Communist leader Karl Liebknecht during an uprising of 1919. This work is unique among her prints, and though it memorializes the man, it does so without advocating for his ideology.

History and politics

From the end of the First World War in late 1918 to the founding of the Weimar Republic (the representative democracy that was the German government between the two World Wars) in August 1919, Germany went through a period of social and political upheaval. During this time, Germany was led by a coalition of left-wing forces with Marxist sympathies, the largest of which was the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Other, more radical groups were grappling for control of Germany at the same time, including the newly founded German Communist Party (KPD).

The Socialists and Communists both wanted to eliminate Capitalism and establish communal control over the means of production, but while the Socialists believed that the best way to achieve that goal was to work step by step from within the Capitalist structure, the Communists called for an immediate and total social revolution that would put governmental power in the hands of the workers. In this spirit, the KPD staged an uprising in Berlin in January 1919. Military units called in by the SPD suppressed the uprising and captured two of the leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered while in custody on January 15, 1919. Their deaths struck a chord across the left-wing landscape and they were widely celebrated as martyrs to the Communist cause.

Kollwitz was not a Communist, and even acknowledged that the SPD (generally more cautious and pacifist than the KPD), would have been better leaders. But she had heard Liebknecht speak and admired his charisma, so when the family asked her to create a work to memorialize him she agreed.

A Lamentation

Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht is in the style of a lamentation, a traditional motif in Christian art depicting the followers of Christ mourning over his dead body, casting Liebknecht as the Christ figure. The iconography would have been easily recognizable by the masses who were the artist's intended audience.



Figure **8.1.1.2**: Max Beckmann, "The Martyrdom," plate 4 from Hell, 1919, lithograph, 54.7 x 75.2 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Other memorial works

Several artists at the time created memorial works for Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The most well known (along with Kollwitz's work) are Max Beckmann's "The Martyrdom" from his portfolio *Hell* of 1919 (above), and Conrad Felixmüller's *People Above the World* from that same year. In contrast to those works, Kollwitz's *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* focuses not on the man himself, but on the workers who had put their faith in him,. The focus on those broadly affected, rather than those in the spotlight is a constant theme in the artist's work, reflected in her most famous works from the *War* cycle, which depict not the soldiers or the fighting, but the suffering of the women and children left behind and starving.

The composition

The composition divides the sheet into three horizontal sections. The top section is densely packed with figures. Their faces are well modeled and have interesting depth in themselves, but the sense of space is very compressed – the heads push to the foreground and are packed into every available corner of space. It gives the impression of multitudes coming to pay their respects, without compromising the individuality of the subjects.

The middle strata contains comparatively fewer details, further emphasizing the crowding at the top of the printing plate. This section draws attention to the specific action of the bending mourner. His hand on Liebknecht's chest connects this section to the the bottommost level of the composition, the body of the martyred revolutionary.



Figure **8.1.1.3**: Mourning woman holding a child (detail), Käthe Kollwitz, *Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht)*, 1919-1920, Woodcut heightened with white and black ink, 37.1 × 51.9 cm (Art Institute of Chicago)

Above the bending mourner, a woman holds her baby up to see over the heads of those in front of them. Women and children were a central concern of Kollwitz's work, making her a unique voice in a creative environment dominated by young men (in fact, Kollwitz was the first woman to be admitted into the Prussian Academy).

Woodblock prints

Woodblock printing is a technique in which a design is carved into a slab of wood which is then covered with ink and printed onto paper. Ink coats the original surface of the wood block, which prints as black, while the cut away areas stay the color of the paper. This is different from printmaking methods such as engraving in which the ink is caught in the recesses carved into the metal plate by the stylus and therefore the lines print black and the untouched areas of the plate come out white in the print.

The German Expressionist artists, in particular Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the Brücke group, used woodcuts as early as 1904 to capture the rough, vital energy that they perceived in the work of so-called "primitive" societies without a fine art tradition.

Kollwitz's career overlapped with the German Expressionists but she was not an Expressionist herself and was about a generation older than most of them. Her use of such a trendy technique was uncharacteristic, and in fact, she only worked in woodblocks for a few years after the First World War. Kollwitz created some of her most powerful and affecting work in this style, including the War print cycle of 1924. She embraced the raw effect of woodblock printing to create pieces works that have cast off the subtlety and finesse of her earlier work in etching and lithography. Kollwitz' felt that her protest against the horrors of war was best communicated in the rough edges and stark black and white that woodblock prints afforded.

Additional Resources:

Biography of the artist from Oxford University Press

Kollwitz Museum in Berlin

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8.1.2: August Sander, Portraits

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK, DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

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Video **8.1.2.1**: Three portraits by August Sander are discussed here: *Pastry Cook*, gelatin silver print, 1928; *Secretary at a Radio Station*, Cologne, gelatin silver print, c. 1931; and *Disabled Man*, gelatin silver print, 1926.

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8.1.3: Umbo, The Roving Reporter

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK, DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

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Video **8.1.3.1**: Umbo (Otto Umbehr), *The Roving Reporter*, photomontage (rephotographed), 1926

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8.1.4: Horst P. Horst, Mainbocher Corset, Paris

by **DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON**

Page ID
188299



Figure 8.1.4.1: Horst P. Horst, *Mainbocher Corset*, modeled by Madame Bernon, photographed Aug. 15, 1939, gelatin silver print, published in American *Vogue* (Sept. 15, 1939), pg.19; published in French *Vogue* Dec. 1939 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

How did the German-born fashion photographer Horst P. Horst capture the anxiety and sorrow he felt as he fled France for the United States just prior to the outbreak of World War II?

In this starkly lit black-and-white photograph we see a model from behind, wearing a corset laced up the back with the tightening ribbons pooling and dripping off the edge of the balustrade against which she is perched. We see only the model's torso, bowed head, and outstretched upper arms, folded inward at the elbows. The model's face is mostly hidden; we see her ear and the shiny waves of her coiffed hair. Her corseted torso forms a C-shaped curve, contrasting the sharp angle made by the right side of her nipped-in waist and the curve of her right hip.

The Mainbocher Corset, featured in this photograph, was made by corset maker Detolle for the American couturier, brought an end to the loose fitting, straight silhouettes of the Jazz Age in favor of a slim-waist, fuller-bust, controlled-hourglass figure.



Figure 8.1.4.2: Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus (‘The Rokeby Venus’)*, 1647–51, oil on canvas, 122.5 x 177 cm (The National Gallery, London)

This shift in fashion to a familiar ideal shape for women from a bygone era was called the “Velasquez silhouette” in the *Vogue* article that accompanied Horst’s image, after Diego Velázquez’s well-known 17th-century painting *Rokeby Venus*. [1] In 1914, Mary Richardson, a British subject agitating for women’s right to vote, slashed this painting of what many considered an extraordinarily beautiful woman to protest the arrest of suffragette Emily Pankhurst. The painting was carefully restored, but Richardson’s attack underscores the strong emotions this image could still trigger almost 300 years after it was painted. While Horst omitted the mirror in his photograph, we see the echoes of the *Rokeby Venus* in the *Mainbocher Corset*—in the position of the right arm, the narrow waist above a curved hip, and the near concealment of the model’s face that no mirror reveals.

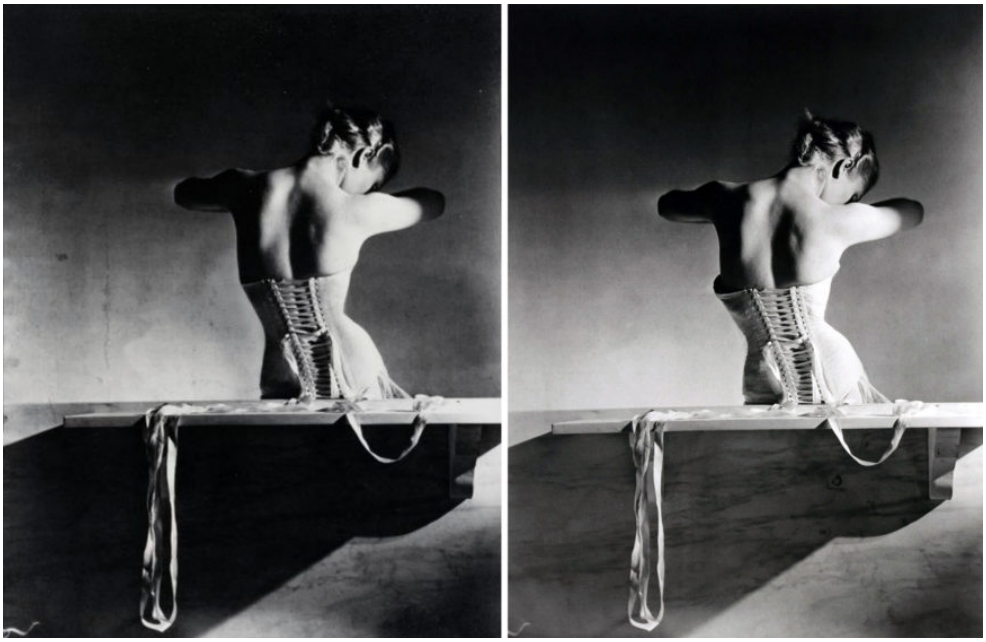


Figure 8.1.4.3: Left: Horst P. Horst, *Mainbocher Corset*, modeled by Madame Bernon, photographed Aug. 15, 1939, gelatin silver print, published in American Vogue (Sept. 15, 1939), pg.19; published in French *Vogue* Dec. 1939 (Victoria and Albert Museum); right: unpublished version that was not retouched, with the gap visible on the left side of the photograph

While the published versions of the photo were retouched to make the model’s waist even more slender and to remove the gap made at the top left edge of the corset, the photographer explained that he preferred the photo with the visible gap between the corset and the model’s body, finding it more alluring.

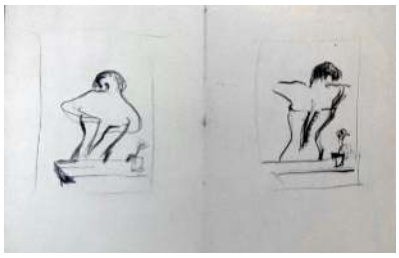


Figure 8.1.4.4: Horst's sketchbook, undated

In Horst's sketches to work out the composition, he included a vase with a rose, alluding to historical images of Venus and linking the model's torso to a still life object. The final version of the studio image omits this element to keep the viewer's focus on the curving torso, positioned to the right of the center of the frame, balanced by the dangling ribbons on the model's left, another reference to Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* recalling the ribbons spilling out of Cupid's hand and over the mirror he holds. Perhaps leaving these unfurled ribbons also signals the unravelling Horst felt in leaving Paris.



Figure 8.1.4.5: Still from Madonna, "Vogue" official music video, directed by David Fincher, recorded in December 1989, released on March 27, 1990

The photograph has an elegance, as well as a feeling of stillness and melancholy that continued to influence fashion photography for decades after it was taken, inspiring pop-star Madonna to appropriate its composition at the end of her music video for the song ***Vogue***, released in 1990.

Influences and the making of *Mainbocher Corset*

Horst P. Horst was born in Germany in 1906 as Horst Bohrman. As a teenager, he studied carpentry and set design at the Hamburg School of Arts and Crafts and befriended Eva Weidemann, a dancer, ten years his senior, who worked with Lothar Schreyer at the Weimar **Bauhaus**. Lothar Schreyer was an early Weimar Bauhaus instructor, the first Master of the Theater department who was heavily steeped in the mysticism so common for the time. Weidemann introduced Horst to the Bauhaus teachings, though she was not a student there herself, but rather a performer in Schreyer's experimental theatrical works.

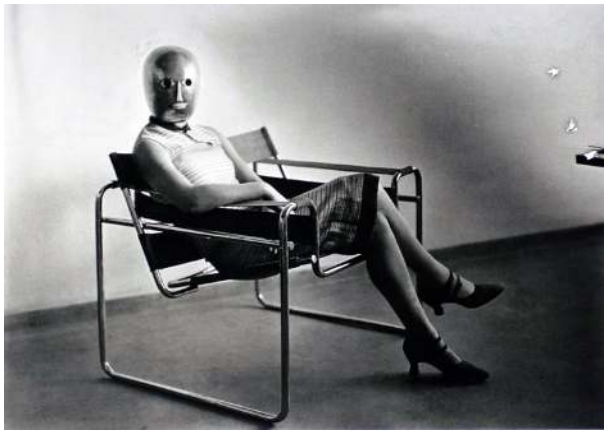


Figure **8.1.4.6**:Erich Consemüller, *Bauhaus Scene*, 1926

Horst claimed the **Bauhaus** influenced his aesthetic, which we can see in the asymmetrical framing and the dramatic lighting as well as the spare setting and focus on a singular object. However, Erich Consemüller's 1926 photograph of a seated woman contrasts with Horst's 1939 image. In Consemüller's photograph the masked model is comfortably supported by the tense fabric bands of her chair, while Horst's model is constricted by fabric in tension and is not comfortably seated.



Figure **8.1.4.7**:Leni Riefenstahl, *Pommel Horse*, gelatin silver print, 1936

Perhaps even more striking is the influence of the **German Neoclassicism** of the 1920s and 1930s with its admiration for beautifully sculptural human bodies, as seen in the work of **Leni Riefenstahl from the 1936 Munich Olympics** which reflected Nazi aesthetics.



Figure **8.1.4.8**: George Hoyningen-Heune, *The Divers*, gelatin-silver print, 1931

Horst moved to Paris in 1930 to apprentice under modernist architect **Le Corbusier**, but soon met *Vogue* photographer and Baltic Baron George Hoyningen-Heune who introduced him to Paris's fashionable world and his own photographic work, becoming both

Horst's mentor and partner (see Hoyningen-Heune's photograph of Horst's torso from 1931). Through his connection to Hoyningen-Heune, Horst began as a studio fashion photographer for Paris *Vogue* in 1931.

Horst made *Mainbocher Corset*, which would become his most well-known photograph, just prior to leaving Paris for New York on August 15th, 1939. He recalled 45 years later:

> ***It was the last photograph I took in Paris before the war. I left the studio at 4:00am, went back to the house, picked up my bags and caught the 7:00am train to La Havre to board the Normandie. We all felt that war was coming. Too much armament, too much talk. And you knew that whatever happened, life would be completely different after…. This photograph is peculiar—for me, it is the essence of that moment. While I was taking it, I was thinking of all that I was leaving behind. [2]***

Two weeks later, the Second World War began when Hitler invaded Poland. Horst's photograph was published in American *Vogue* on September 15th, 1939. *The Mainbocher Corset*—and the American couturier's return to a slim-waist, fuller-bust, controlled hourglass figure ideal after the loose fitting, straight silhouettes of the Jazz Age— had been intended to appear in the October issue of French *Vogue*, but the magazine did not to publish issues in either October or November, due to uncertainty at the outset of World War II, so the photo was not published until December. An anonymous editorial in the December 1939 French *Vogue* lamented the passing frivolities of fashions produced the previous August but asserted that the fashion industry was too important to France and its working economy to simply shut the industry down due to the war. The designed pages of the ready-to-print but now outmoded October issue were included in the December French *Vogue* but at such reduced size that Horst's *Mainbocher Corset* image was robbed of its considerable aesthetic power. By the time the photograph was published, both the photographer and the corset's couturier had relocated from Paris to the United States, far from both the center of fashion and the European theater of war.

From *Vogue* to vogueing



Figure 8.1.4.9:Horst P. Horst, *Mainbocher Corset*, modeled by Madame Bernon, photographed Aug. 15, 1939, gelatin silver print, published in American *Vogue* (Sept. 15, 1939), pg.19; published in French *Vogue* Dec. 1939 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

What is it about this photograph that continues to speak to us today? The stark lighting and dramatic contrast draw our attention to the model's bowed head and the hidden face, a posture that expresses fear or sorrow. The corset was being relaunched as a fashion accessory for the 1939 fall collections in Paris. This can be read as the tragic trapping of woman in an uncomfortable and fetishized garment that she cannot even put on or remove by herself. The tangled, falling ribbons streaming from the back of the confining contraption add a chaotic element that belies the straitlaced attempt at maintaining control. The model's posture, and the lack of visible lower limbs, add to the sense that this is an image of entrapment and bound stasis, on the brink of collapse. While the photograph conveys the timeless qualities of elegance that were so prized in Horst's fashion work, the emotional impact he achieved rises above any simple product advertisement.



Figure **8.1.4.10**: Still from Madonna, “Vogue” official music video, directed by David Fincher, recorded in December 1989, released on March 27, 1990

It is precisely this emotional impact that Madonna seized upon and reinvested for her own purpose in her music video for *Vogue*. In the Material Girl’s multiple layered appropriation (she not only appropriates Horst’s image, but also the dance and aesthetics of New York Drag Ball culture, created by gay men of color in the 1980s), she dials down the melancholy, strikes the pose, and turns the entrapment into agency as a signifier for the only power women are afforded under patriarchy: sexual allure.



Madonna, “Vogue” official music video (beginning at 4:26), directed by David Fincher, recorded in December 1989, released on March 27, 1990

David Fincher, the video’s director, takes advantage of the moving image and shows Madonna’s back, filmed in elegantly lit black and white, seated on a similar marble balustrade. Writing in her corset near the culmination of the video, as she sings “let your

body move to the music," she lifts her arms while she wriggles. Unlike Horst's model in the *Mainbocher Corset*, Fincher finally gives us a full profile view of Madonna's face as she powerfully speaks the word "Vogue."

Horst, in 1939, as Europe was on the brink of war, makes a final image in Paris that journeys across oceans and time to fifty years later transform a magazine title into a concept and a verb.

Notes:

[1] "Paris puts you back in laced corsets—and here they are. Detolle made the extreme, back-lacing corset…to bind you in for the Velasquez silhouette." Horst P. Horst, "From Paris – The New Detolle Corset with Back Lacing," *Vogue* (New York), Vol. 94, Issue 6 (Sept. 15, 1939): 76-76a.

[2] Horst is quoted in: Susanna Brown, "Mainbocher Corset" in *Horst: Photographer of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 2014), 76.

Additional resources:

Susanna Brown, ed., *Horst: Photographer of Style* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2014).

Valentine Lawford, *Horst: His World and His Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

Victoria and Albert Museum. Collections: "Mainbocher Corset"

This page titled 8.1.4: Horst P. Horst, Mainbocher Corset, Paris is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Dr. Gretchen Gasterland-Gustafsson, "Horst P. Horst, Mainbocher Corset, Paris," in Smarthistory, July 23, 2021, accessed January 4, 2023, https://smarthistory.org/horst-corset/. via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

8.1.5: Lotte Jacobi, Head of a Dancer

by **DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON**

Page ID
188300



Figure **8.1.5.1**: Lotte Jacobi, *Head of a Dancer*, 1929, gelatin silver print, 1929, printed later, 17.8 x 22.8 cm (Saint Louis Art Museum, © Lotte Jacobi Archive, University of New Hampshire)

We are preconditioned to be attracted to human faces and Lotte Jacobi gives us such a face, and little else, served up on a dark platter and staring at us. Facial features stand out as dark areas, bowing eyebrow lines, and assertively made-up lips against pale gray, with the highest contrast reserved for the highlight on the black irises against the white of the eyes. These facial features, enhanced by the dark lipstick, eyeliner, and eyebrow pencil typical of stage make-up, also reflect the prevailing fashion and beauty standards of the late 1920s. The eyes meet the viewer's gaze and are also positioned below the center of the frame. But then, nothing in the composition is truly centered. The chin is cut off by the photograph's lower edge, and the oval of the hat's wide, black brim is cropped on every side. The incomplete curve of the hat frames and isolates the face. It adds a dynamism and tension that makes the stillness and cut-off chin of the frontal face even more striking. The subject's dark hair is barely visible against the black of the hat behind it.

A dancer?

The title of Jacobi's photograph informs us that this is no ordinary head. It is "the head of a dancer." But really, it is only her face. The context of the making of this photograph is not known. It is a curious photograph of a dancer because we are not shown her full body or any of the lines—like the curves and angles made by the spine, neck, and limbs—that are so crucial in the art of dance. Movement is quietly implied by the composition through the interrupted spiral that begins at the chin and moves outward through the hat brim rather than any visible bodily movement having been captured in it. *Head of a Dancer* is primarily a composition of visual elements—including a face— rather than a portrait. The sitter is not even named in the title.



Figure **8.1.5.2**: Lotte Jacobi, *Portrait of Anna May Wong*, gelatin Silver Print, 1930

In contrast, Jacobi's 1930 Portrait of Anna May Wong is more of a traditional portrait depiction of a dancer, and less of an abstract composition. Anna May Wong was an American actress working in Berlin. In Jacobi's photograph we see the actress's whole body, captured while dancing in an elaborate costume.

While Jacobi's photographs from this period frequently name the sitter in the title, *Head of a Dancer* is an exception. Who was this dancer, and why was her body not shown? Many museum collections (but not all) identify the model for *Head of a Dancer* as Russian dancer Niura Norskaya who performed with ballerina Anna Pavlova. The fact that the sitter is not always identified by name in the photograph's title may tell us something about what was important to Jacobi: it is more composition than portrait.

Lotte Jacobi: fourth generation photographer for the Atelier Jacobi

Lotte Jacobi made *Head of a Dancer* while she was still living in Berlin, an entertainment capital during the Weimar Republic (1919–33). She came from a family of photographers. Her great-grandfather visited Paris between 1839 and 1842, purchased a camera and a license to use it, and according to family lore, was trained by the pioneering French portrait photographer Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. Her grandfather and her father ran the Atelier Jacobi. She grew up around her father's photography studio, first in Posen (before it became Polish) until 1921, when they moved the business to Berlin. Jacobi made her first pictures with a pin-hole camera her father made for her in about 1909. She graduated with formal training from the State Academy for Photo Design in Munich before returning to Berlin in 1927.

With her family's commercial photography studio as her background, it is notable that Jacobi graduated from her formal training just as many artists were embracing the medium of photography for artistic ends and not just for reportage, advertising, and portraiture. By 1929, according to The Museum of Modern Art, Jacobi was one of the artists included in the traveling international exhibition of the "New Photography," Fotografie der Gegenwart (Photography of Today), though her name did not appear on the pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition. [1]

While working as a young photographer in Berlin, she photographed people from the entertainment world, as well as literary and scientific figures such as Thomas and Heinrich Mann and Albert Einstein.

Leaving Berlin for the United States

Jacobi left Berlin behind in 1935 to avoid Nazi persecution as a Jewish woman, a leftist, and a so-called "Degenerate Artist." She would have left earlier, but her father's ill health stalled her departure. His death prompted her emigration to the United States.

There are no known prints of *Head of a Dancer* from the time it was taken. Jacobi was not able to take many prints with her as she left Germany, and retained only a small portion of her glass plates and negatives. Much of her work from Berlin was destroyed by the Nazis after she left. She was able to return to Germany after World War II, in 1962 and later in 1970, but she was never able to find and recover her earlier work in spite of repeated efforts to contact family, friends, newspapers, and publishing houses. [2] *Head of a Dancer* was important enough to Jacobi as an artist that she saved it among the few negatives she brought with her to the United States. The photograph is now widely reproduced and appears in several museum collections, thus having more impact than it did in 1929 when it was taken.

Compositional precedents

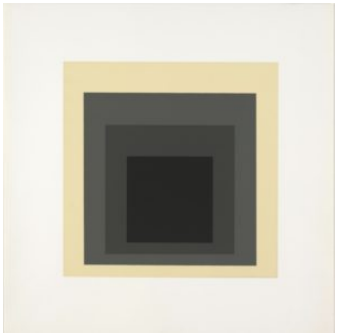


Figure **8.1.5.3**: Josef Albers, *Shielded* from *Homage to the Square: Ten Works by Josef Albers*, 1962, one from a portfolio of ten screenprints, 43 x 42.9 cm (MoMA)

The composition is at once deceptively simple and complexly balanced. It evokes the color and tonal studies that fellow German-American expatriate artist Josef Albers explored in his decades-long painting series *Homage to the Square*. Jacobi gives us the "squaring of the circle" instead. Whereas Albers paints tonally contrasting, stable concentric squares, Jacobi offers her tonal contrasts in dynamically arrayed ovals, the face being the smaller oval inserted in the larger oval of the hat brim. This dynamism is then contained by the frame which squares off the circling curves.



Figure **8.1.5.4**: Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*, 1927, oil on canvas, 139.5 x 95.5 cm (Harvard Art Museums)

Lotte Jacobi's photograph was right in step with the **Neue Sachlichkeit** (or New Objectivity) movement of her own time. We can see the same frank, pitilessly "objective," almost confrontational, acknowledgement of the viewer that Jacobi offers in *Head of a Dancer* in Max Beckmann's celebrated 1927 painting *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*. In its shared concern with stark contrasts and abstract shapes, Beckmann's dark self-portrait is also equally a tonal composition. Jacobi's radically cropped and framed composition was also a hallmark of New Vision photography from the late 1920s, practiced by her contemporaries like Lucia Moholy and Florence Henri. New Vision's unexpected angles and unforgiving detail offered viewers a fresh perspective on their known world, just as Jacobi's portrait reveals a disembodied, face-only view of a dancer.

Anticipating later experimental photographs

We may look at this 1929 *Head of a Dancer* as a composition that anticipated Jacobi's later experimental photographs in the 1940s and 50s that she called ***Photogenics***. In these late works she fully embraced abstract tonal composition that she had begun to explore in *Head of a Dancer,* becoming completely non-objective in her later work. *Head of a Dancer* exemplifies Jacobi's lifelong commitment to photography as a fine art practice not always wedded to journalism or commercial ends.

Notes

[1] **Walter Dexel, Pamphlet for the Exhibition Fotografie der Gegenwart (Contemporary Photography), Magdeburg, 1929. Letterpress, 20.9 x 29.8 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)**

[2] Kelly Wise, "Forward: Gentle Persuasions and a Benign Predator's Eye" in *Lotte Jacobi*, Kelly Wise, ed. (Donbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1978), p. 8.

Additional Resources

Lotte Jacobi, ed. Kelly Wise (Donbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1978).

Barbara Probst Solomon, “PHOTOGRAPHY: Ghosts of Weimar Preserved on Film,” ***New York Times*** (February 2, 2004).

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8.1.6: Gertrud Arndt, Self-Portrait with Veil

by **DR. GRETCHEN GASTERLAND-GUSTAFSSON**

Page ID
188301



Figure **8.1.6.1**: Gertrud Arndt, *Self-Portrait with Veil*, 1930, gelatinous silver print, 22.9 x 14.3 cm (MoMA)

Femininity and masquerade

In Arndt's *Self-Portrait with Veil*, we see a woman with tightly pursed lips staring straight ahead with a doll-like expression. Layers of lace and fringe cover her upper body and lace veils her face. Her head is crowned with abundant flowers. Without knowing that the picture was taken in 1930, we might assume that it belonged to a less modern era because of the antiquated details she presents.

Why would quintessentially modern "New Woman" Gertrud Arndt represent herself as trapped in the layers of ultra-feminine attire reminiscent of traditional folk costume?

This portrait is part of a series of 43 staged self-portraits Arndt called *Maskenporträts* (Masked Portraits). Arndt took her *Self-Portrait with Veil* by shooting into the bathroom mirror. The "drag bag" that she used for her costuming in these photos contained veils, hats, bits of lace, paper flowers, and other fancy, feminine—but outmoded—accessories. Layers of lace, floral patterns, and feathers—various competing textures for connotations of femininity—cover every area of the portrait. The artist may have taken some inspiration from traditional folk dress from her birthplace in a border region now part of Poland.

In the photographs from this series, Arndt tacitly refers to Joan Riviere's 1929 psychoanalytical essay "Womanliness as Masquerade," which suggested that women use their femininity as a form of Masquerade—or "drag"—to make themselves seem less threatening in the face of anticipated retribution from men when women dare to seek power or respect in a patriarchal society. [1]

Arndt's layers and textures almost merge the figure and the background, wedding the subject to these gendered accessories. The textiles suffocate her, domesticize her, and mark her as someone subsumed by traditional gender roles that indicated that women should be confined to the home. The veil, the flowers, and the feathers hide her short, bobbed "New Woman" haircut. Arndt's choice to pose herself among so many textures, clothes, and props in *Self-Portrait with Veil* suggests she was well aware of the power of photography to interrogate gender roles. She created an ironic image of herself as an old fashioned woman, blandly merging with her dated, over-decorative interior (even though her actual house interior was strikingly modern).



Figure **8.1.6.2**: Gertrud Arndt, *Self-Portrait*, 1926 (Bauhaus Archive)

In a very different self-portrait she made at her studio in 1926, Arndt styled herself in short sleeves and a knee-length skirt with her short-bobbed hairstyle (all modern stylistic departures from the corseted hour-glass figures and elaborate upswept long hair-dos of the prior era). *Self-Portrait with Veil*, made just four years later, provides a stark contrast with Arndt's 1926, *Self-Portrait*.



Figure **8.1.6.3**: Florence Henri, Self-Portrait, gelatin silver print, 1928

Self-Portrait with Veil also contrasts with images of the New Woman who are shown outdoors, with cars, dressed in knee-length, loose-fitting dresses, and cloche hats. Arndt's departure from the commonly seen image of the "New Woman" is clear if we compare her *Self-Portrait with Veil* to Florence Henri's *Self-Portrait*. Henri, like Arndt, was a woman photographer at the Bauhaus, a prominent modernist institution. Her portrait was made one year earlier than Arndt's veiled portrait. While Arndt's self-portrait displays a masquerade of femininity, Henri's focuses on the gender-boundary-questioning that was typical of the "New Woman."

In *Self-Portrait*, Henri has negated nearly all visible signifiers for femininity—except her use of lipstick and eyeshadow—and even added a pair of reflective "balls" to reinforce her point. Henri's experimental framing, strong diagonal lines, and hard-edged modernism echo the work of László Moholy-Nagy who taught at the Bauhaus. While just one year later, Arndt seems aligned with the Bauhaus Photography Master (teacher) Walter Peterhans in his concern for soft textures and layering.



Figure **8.1.6.4**: Walter Peterhans, *Portrait of the Beloved*, 1929, gelatin silver print, 28.3 × 25.7 cm (Smart Museum of Art, Chicago)



Figure **8.1.6.5**: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #17*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 19.1 x 24 cm (MoMA)

For Gertrud Arndt, taking photographs of herself in various costumes and accessories while playing roles became a private form of entertainment, and reflected the common use of photography at the Bauhaus. Arndt was an enrolled student at the Bauhaus from 1923–1927, and after she graduated and was living in Bauhaus faculty housing with her instructor husband, she was a guest student in the Photography workshop from 1929–1932. Arndt's *Masked Portraits* preceded Cindy Sherman's well-known *Untitled Film Still* self-portrait series by almost 50 years, but provided a clear precedent for the examination of traditional gender roles using photography.

With her heavy-lidded, faraway gaze and her prim pursed lips, in 1930 Gertrud Arndt was living in the middle of a mature Modernist project in which, as a woman, she could not participate as much as she once hoped. She could not study architecture at the Bauhaus, and she was placed in the Weaving workshop (with most other Bauhaus women) while she was a student. While she turned her back on textile production, in her self-portrait she buries herself in layers of textiles and accessories coded as "feminine" to make an ironic point about the too often stifling position for women at the Bauhaus. The youthful hope embedded in her 1926 "New Woman" self-portrait from her student days had only four years later drowned in a costumed image of an old doll, when she was only 27.

Notes:

[1] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness As a Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929):, pp. 303–313.

Additional resources

"Female Bauhaus: Gertrud Arndt, Weaver and Photographer, 1923–1931." Bauhaus-Archiv Museum für Gestaltung (January 1, 2013). Accessed June 21, 2021.

Anja Guttenberger, "Festive and Theatrical—The Mask Photos of Gertrud Arndt and Josef Albers as an Expression of Festival Culture," Bauhaus Imaginista Journal (2019). Accessed June 21, 2021.

Ulrike Müller and Ingrid Radewaldt, "Gertrud Arndt (1903-2000)," in Bauhaus Women. Trans. Emer Lettow and Sarah Kane (Paris: Flammarion, 2009). 56–61.

Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler, *Bauhaus Women: A Global Perspective* (New York: Herbert Press, 2019).

Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2019).

Alice Rawsthorn. "Female Pioneers of the Bauhaus," *New York Times* (March 22, 2013). Accessed June 21, 2021.

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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8.2.2: The Bauhaus and Bau

8.2.3: The Bauhaus- Marcel Breuer

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8.2.5: Lyonel Feininger, Cathedral for Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar

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- 8.2.7.1: Telephone Pictures
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- 8.2.7.3: Composition A.XX
- 8.2.7.4: Climbing the Mast

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8.2.1: The Bauhaus, an Introduction

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188303



Figure 8.2.1.1: Left: Marianne Brandt, Kandem Bedside Table Lamp, 1928, lacquered steel, 23.5 x 18.4 cm (MoMA). Right: Marcel Breuer, Chair (model B33), 1927-28, chrome-plated tubular steel with steel-thread seat and back, 83.7 x 49 x 64.5 cm (MoMA).

The Bauhaus was an art and design school in Germany whose importance is astonishing given its very brief and tenuous existence. The desk lamp and chair illustrated here are so familiar and so simple that they don't seem to have required a designer, but they were as radical in their time as they are commonplace now, and their apparent simplicity was the result of a thoughtful and meticulous design education and design process that remains a model today.

During its fourteen years of existence the Bauhaus was forced to change location three times and was ultimately closed as a result of political pressure from the Nazi party. Founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, the school originally had three aims: to abolish the "arrogant" distinction between artist and craftsperson by recognizing the knowledge and skills common to both; to mobilize all arts and crafts towards the creation of total design environments; and, to foster links between the school and local manufacturers.

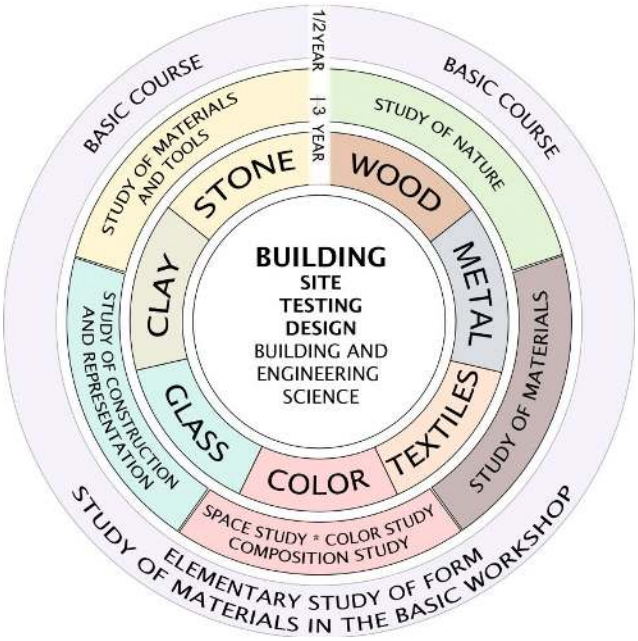


Figure 8.2.1.2: Diagram of the Bauhaus curriculum (image: SuperManu, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Art education and the "Vorkurs" (preliminary course)

The Bauhaus program of study is diagrammed above as a circle. Students began in the outer ring with the half-year Vorkurs or preliminary course (later expanded to a full year) before moving into one of several workshops to concentrate on a specific medium such as ceramics, woodworking, weaving, metalworking, and so on. Once they had achieved a degree of proficiency in their chosen medium all students converged again in Bau (building), to construct total environments, designing everything from the architecture to the furniture, carpets, dishes, and flatware.

The Vorkurs, which taught skills common to all areas of art and design, was one enduring innovation of the Bauhaus. Today's art students will recognize in the Vorkurs the progenitor of their first-year 2-D Design and 3-D Design "foundations" courses. The original head of the Vorkurs was a charismatic Swiss art teacher named Johannes Itten, a follower of Mazdaznan (related to the ancient Persian religion Zoroastrianism) who wore monk-like clothing and encouraged students to meditate, do breathing exercises, and eat a vegetarian diet as aids to creativity.

Projects assigned in the Vorkurs were free-form and generally without practical application. They were intended to develop students' perception, creativity, and understanding of materials. For one typical project Itten collected disparate materials such as wool, rope, and wood shavings.

> ***The students had to feel these sequences of textures with their fingertips, their eyes closed. After a short while their sense of touch improved dramatically. I then asked them to make texture montages of contrasting materials. Fantastic structures were produced and their effects were completely novel at the time.***
>
> ***Johannes Itten, Design and Form: The Basic Course at the Bauhaus and Later (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), p. 34***

Experimental constructions

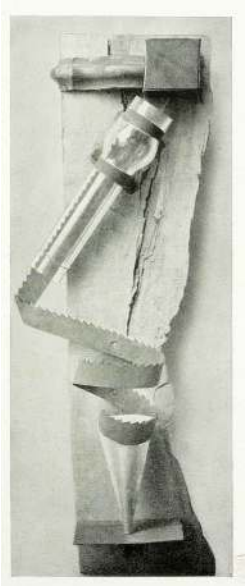


Figure **8.2.1.3**: Moses Mirkin, *Contrast study in various materials*, 1920, photo of the original work as it appeared in the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition catalog

Very few of these Vorkurs projects have survived as they were only intended to be exercises. The work above is described in the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition catalog as a "combined contrast effect: material contrast (glass, wood, iron), contrast of expressive forms (jagged-smooth); rhythmic contrast." In addition to demonstrating these formal contrasts, its purpose was to understand the nature and potential of different materials.

For example, the wood is left rough and unfinished in order to demonstrate its grain, texture, and color variations. Similarly, the saw blade shows the dull sheen of its surface and has been curled into a spiral to demonstrate the flexibility of metal. The rust on the saw blade's surface and the knots and splits in the wood are not sanded or polished; instead, they are featured as qualities of those materials that need to be understood by the design students who will be working with them.

From craft to industry

The early Bauhaus concentrated primarily on hand-made crafts, but it soon became evident that, in order to survive, the school needed to reorient its goals toward industrial production. Bauhaus headmaster Walter Gropius asserted in the keynote address for

the school exhibition of 1923, “The Bauhaus believes the machine to be our modern medium of design and seeks to come to terms with it.”[1]

Itten, whose spiritual and expressionist orientation did not fit with these aims, was replaced by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and later Josef Albers, as head of the Vorkurs. The traditional medieval titles from craft workshops initially used in the Bauhaus, where instructors were called “Masters” and students were called “Apprentices” or “Journeymen,” were replaced by the more modern titles of professor and student.



Figure 8.2.1.4: Left: Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral*, cover for *Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar*, 1919, woodcut, 41 x 31 cm (MoMA); right: Herbert Bayer, Bauhaus Exhibition poster, 1923, lithograph, 15 x 10 cm (MoMA).

The reorientation toward the modern machine age is most obvious in **products designed** by the Bauhaus for **mass production**, but it is also visible in the graphic branding of the Bauhaus itself. In 1919, the founding manifesto of the Bauhaus was published with a cover by **Lyonel Feininger** that featured a cathedral crowned by three radiant stars. Both the medieval subject and the woodcut technique are deliberately old-fashioned, reflecting the guild structure of the school itself and its emphasis on hand making and personal expression.

By contrast, the poster designed for the 1923 exhibition is a lithograph, a more modern printmaking technology. It uses only rational geometric shapes and the primary colors red and blue, along with black and the white of the paper. Dotted lines and arcs made by a compass reinforce the overall sense of precise, mechanical execution, very different from the uneven, expressive marks of Feininger’s print. Even the letter forms reinforce the impression of clean, rationalized modernity: sans-serif, upright, and with a consistent (monoline) weight. Such “modern” typefaces are very familiar today, but were quite different from the medieval blackletter or gothic typeface that was common in Germany until the 1940s.



Figure 8.2.1.5: Walter Gropius, Shop Wing, Bauhaus building, Dessau, 1925-26

The Bauhaus is dead … long live the Bauhaus

In 1925, the Bauhaus was forced to flee from its original location in Weimar, Germany. The right-wing nationalists who came to power in the region saw the school as a hotbed of foreigners sympathetic to Communism. The school lasted only seven years in its next location, Dessau, before being forced to move to Berlin. When the Nazi party came to national power under Chancellor Adolf Hitler in 1933 the Bauhaus closed for good.

Despite its relatively brief existence, the Bauhaus had an enormous influence on our contemporary visual environment. Fleeing Nazi Germany, its professors disseminated the school's curriculum and ideals across the United States. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius went on to teach at the Harvard School of Design, along with furniture designer **Marcel Breuer**. Vorkurs instructors **Moholy-Nagy** and **Josef Albers** also continued their influential teaching careers: Moholy-Nagy at the New Bauhaus in Chicago and Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in North Carolina and Yale University in New Haven, CT.

Generations of art and design students have absorbed their instruction not only directly, in foundation courses that adopt the aims and sometimes sometimes even exact projects of the Bauhaus Vorkurs, but also by osmosis, living in dorms, sitting in chairs, and using desk lamps that are the direct descendants of Bauhaus designs.

Notes:

1. Cited in William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 193.

Additional resources:

Bauhaus: Building the New Artist at the Getty Research Institute

Magdalena Droste. *Bauhaus: 1919-1933* (Köln: Taschen, 2006).

Elaine S. Hochman. *Bauhaus: Crucible of Modernism* (New York: Fromm International, 1997).

Frank Whitford. *Bauhaus* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1984).

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8.2.2: The Bauhaus and Bau

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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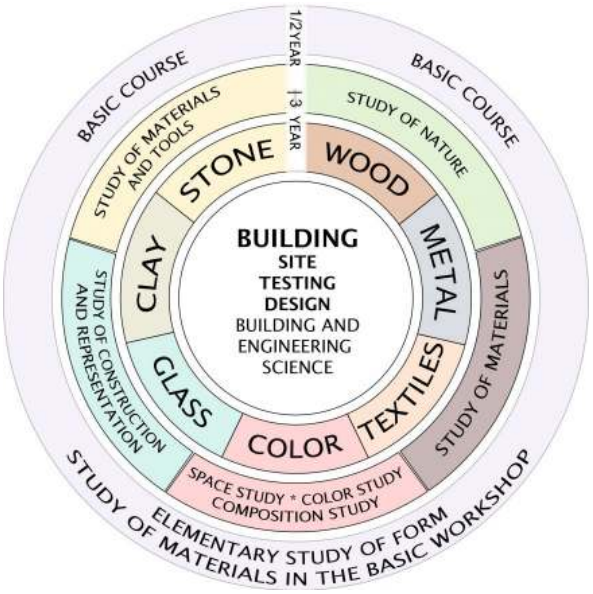


Figure **8.2.2.1**: Diagram of the Bauhaus curriculum (image: **SuperManu**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Although it did not have an architecture department until 1927, the 1919 Bauhaus charter called the "complete building" the "ultimate aim of the visual arts." Architecture requires a unification of all media, both arts and crafts:

> ***Let us conceive, consider, and create together the new building of the future that will bring all into one simple integrated creation: architecture, painting, and sculpture rising to heaven out of the hands of a million craftsmen, the crystal symbol of the new faith of the future.***
>
> ***Translated in William J. R. Curtis, Modern Architecture since 1900 (Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 184.***

In the Bauhaus **program of study**, diagrammed above as a movement towards the center of a series of concentric circles, all students would start in a half-year or yearlong foundations course in the elements and principles of design, and then each would choose a medium to specialize in: textiles, glass, metal, and so on. The goal was for all of these different specializations to come together in *Bau* or "building," the creation of total designed environments, from the structure, to the furniture and tableware, to the rugs on the floor and the paintings on the walls.

The Haus am Horn



Figure **8.2.2.2**: Left: Georg Muche, Haus am Horn exterior (photo: **Sailko**, CC BY-SA 3.0). Right: plan (image: **socks-studio**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

This goal was tested in 1923, when the struggling school was given a state loan on the condition that it prove its worth by showing concrete results in a public exhibition. Part of that exhibition was a conventional display of sculptures, paintings, ceramics, textiles, and other objects produced by Bauhaus students and staff. In addition to this, it was decided to build a model house near the school to display Bauhaus designs in a practical, everyday context.

Designed by Georg Muche (oddly, the Bauhaus weaving master), the Haus am Horn is a flat-roofed white cube centered around a living room as the main gathering place for the family. Because it is almost completely surrounded by other rooms, the living room projects above the rest of the house to let in light through clerestory windows. Surrounding it are four bedrooms, along with the entryway, kitchen, pantry, dining room, bathroom, and a small work niche.



Figure **8.2.2.3**: Georg Muche, Haus am Horn, living room with rug by Marta Erps and chairs by Marcel Breuer (photo: **socks-studio**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

A group effort

All the Bauhaus workshops were involved in the project. The furniture was designed by **Marcel Breuer**, a student in the woodworking workshop; the rugs by textile students Marta Erps and Gunta Stölzl (who later became head of the weaving workshop); and the lighting fixtures by **Lázló Moholy-Nagy** in the metal workshop.

Despite the diversity of designers involved, a surprising degree of unity was achieved because every aspect of the project was based on the basic **Bauhaus principles** of functionalism and geometric rationalism. Purely “decorative” elements were eliminated for the sake of cost-effectiveness in manufacture, efficiency in usage, and harmony in aesthetics. The straight-edge and right-angle

geometry of almost all of the objects, from the walls, to the window trim, to the furniture, makes them all harmonize with one another, as does the largely white and cream color scheme, enlivened with a few quiet colors.

The Bauhaus rejection of decoration did not imply a neglect of aesthetics. For Bauhaus designers, beauty was not something to be added to a functional item in the form of extra frills; instead, it was achieved through careful choices of materials, proportions, textures, and colors for the functional features of the objects.



Figure **8.2.2.4**: Georg Muche, Haus am Horn, kitchen (photo: **Rainer Halama**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

The kitchen is a particularly good example of modern functionalist design. Wall-mounted cabinets are built in over a continuous countertop resting on more built-in cabinets between the sink and the cooker. A large horizontal window brings plenty of light into the room during the day, and all necessary items are available at arm's reach while standing at the counter.

The faces of the cabinets are flush and smooth, apart from simple projecting knobs; there are no moldings, panels, or decorative elements that would collect dirt. The floors throughout are rubber or Triolin, a linoleum substitute, so that all surfaces are easy to clean with a quick wipe. These features are commonplace today, but in the 1920s dedicated kitchens were rare outside upper class households. Most poor and middle-class people had none of the modern appliances seen here. They cooked on a stove in the living room, and used separate furniture for food storage and preparation, rather than an integrated design of built-in cupboards and countertops.

The Bauhaus building, Dessau



Figure **8.2.2.5**: Bauhaus Building, Dessau, exterior, 1925-26 (photo: **Martavictor**, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Due to the hostile political environment in Weimar, after 1924 the Bauhaus was forced to move to Dessau, Germany. The more sympathetic local government there provided the Bauhaus with land and a budget to build its own campus, giving the school another opportunity to fulfill its vision of a holistically-designed modern environment.

The Dessau building was constructed using aggressively modern materials appropriate to the machine age: steel, reinforced concrete, and glass, none of which are disguised with a false facade or ornamented with non-structural embellishments. The three main buildings — shop block, vocational school, and living quarters — are simple rectangular cubes of different dimensions, joined into an asymmetrical pinwheel plan by two connectors: a two-story bridge used for administrative offices, and a one-story building with an auditorium and cafeteria.



Figure **8.2.2.6**: Bauhaus Building, shop block with glass corner (photo: **Hic et**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The most precociously modern of the three main buildings was the shop block, which is sheathed entirely in glass to let in plenty of natural light. The steel frame structure, proudly visible through the transparent walls, has been recessed, allowing the two glass curtain walls to meet at a corner without a masonry joint.



Figure **8.2.2.7**: Bauhaus building, auditorium (photo: **Cethegus**, CC BY-SA 3.0)

The interior spaces are as starkly geometric and functionalist as the exterior, with the furniture and hardware all designed in the school's workshops. In the auditorium, **Marcel Breuer** designed the tube-steel seating and Max Krajewski designed the lighting. The 28 apartments for students and junior instructors, each measuring 20 square meters (approximately 215 square feet), are models of spartan efficiency and have shared bathrooms. But there are also surprising amenities, including a small balcony for every room, a roof terrace, and a food lift to connect the ground-floor canteen to the shared kitchens on every floor.



Figure 8.2.2.8: Bauhaus building, student apartment (**Harvard Art Museums**)

Legacy of the Bauhaus

Just seven years after it moved to Dessau, the Bauhaus was forced to move again, this time to Berlin, where it stayed for only one year before being disbanded by the rising Nazi government. Fleeing the unfavorable political environment as well as a disastrous economic situation, Bauhaus students and instructors spread across Europe and the United States, bringing their modern design principles with them. Two of the former directors of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, went to teach in the United States (in Boston and Chicago respectively), where their designs and teaching helped to form the International Style of corporate architecture that now dominates the urban environment.



Figure 8.2.2.9: Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, New York, 1958 (photo: **Steven Zucker**, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The promise of the Bauhaus shop block, a building apparently made entirely of glass and steel without the comforting presence of a masonry bulwark, is fulfilled in Mies van der Rohe's **Seagram Building** in New York City. Its clear glass ground-floor lobby shows the steel frame and reinforced concrete core that hold the building up, so that its 38-story height appears to stand on stilts. Like the Dessau shop block, there are no decorative flourishes. Mies's famous motto, "less is more," embodies the Bauhaus creed that design should be about careful attention to function, materials, engineering, and proportion, not useless decoration. Whether this creed results in livable environments is perhaps a matter of taste, but Bauhaus ideals and designs continue to have an enormous influence today.

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8.2.3: The Bauhaus- Marcel Breuer

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Figure **8.2.3.1**: Walter Gropius, Shop Wing, Bauhaus building, Dessau, 1925-26

The **Bauhaus** was an art and design school founded in Germany in 1919. In its early years, the Bauhaus concentrated primarily on hand-made crafts, but it soon became evident that, in order to survive, the school needed to reorient its goals toward industrial production. It therefore underwent a major overhaul in the early 1920s to shift its orientation toward mechanical production. Four chairs by Bauhaus student—and later professor—Marcel Breuer encapsulate the famous design school's history and changing philosophy in a nutshell.

An Expressionist chair

Made when he was still a student, Breuer's painted ***African Chair*** exemplifies the early, expressionist phase of Bauhaus design. In keeping with the Arts and Crafts creed that hand making is superior to machine making, the carved wood in *African Chair* is left unplaned to retain a hand-hewn look. Gunta Stölzl, a fellow student in the Bauhaus textile workshop, used the chair frame itself as a loom, weaving the brightly colored geometric patterns of the seat back in place to complete the highly expressive and individualistic piece of furniture.

As its name suggests, *African Chair* participates in a primitivist aesthetic that was widespread among those seeking an antidote to the ills of urban and industrial life. African art, in particular, inspired many early twentieth-century European modernists, although often, as here in Breuer's chair, that inspiration is vaguely evocative rather than referring to any specific African cultural tradition.

Coming to terms with industry

Breuer produced *African Chair* under the tutelage of Johannes Itten, the master of the Bauhaus carpentry workshop. The year after it was produced, the Bauhaus turned away from the expressionist aesthetic promoted by Itten and embraced a machine aesthetic. A major influence on this shift was **De Stijl** co-founder Theo van Doesburg, who came to Germany in 1921 to offer courses on De Stijl principles of design that were attended by many Bauhaus students.

Van Doesburg's teaching drove the final wedge between two competing schools of thought at the Bauhaus: one, led by Itten, that embraced individualistic, hand-making, spiritual, and expressionist aims; and the other that thought the school should be oriented toward impersonal, rational, industrial manufacture. Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius originally hoped the school could find a middle path, but in a 1922 memorandum he declared that

> ***the world of forms which emerged from and in company with the machine asserts itself … Some Bauhaus students worship a misunderstood "return to nature" à la Rousseau; they want to shoot with bow and arrow rather than with a rifle. But then why not throw stones and go about naked?***

> ***Cited in Frank Whitford, Bauhaus (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 120.***

Gropius persuaded Itten to resign in 1923, and in his keynote address for the Bauhaus exhibition of that year, declared, "The Bauhaus believes the machine to be our modern medium of design and seeks to come to terms with it."[1]



Figure **8.2.3.2**: Gerrit Rietveld, *Red Blue Chair*, 1918-23, painted wood, 86.7 x 66 x 83.8 cm, (**MoMA**)

Learning from De Stijl

In practice, this meant adopting a cleaner, more rational geometric aesthetic similar to De Stijl's reduction of design to its basic elements: horizontal and vertical lines; the primary colors red, yellow, and blue; and the values black and white. Gerrit Rietveld's *Red Blue Chair* is a prime example of **De Stijl design**; all the structural members are oriented on a perfect grid, meeting at 90 degree angles in what are still called "Rietveld Joints." Only the seat and back are inclined at an angle, because it would be very uncomfortable to sit in a perfectly vertical chair. The chair was originally stained beechwood, but in 1923 Rietveld painted it the iconic primary colors of De Stijl.



Figure **8.2.3.3**: Marcel Breuer, *Armchair*, 1922, Stained oak and hand-woven wool, 94.6 x 55.9 x 57.2 cm (**MoMA**)

Breuer's armchair, designed a year after his *African Chair*, shows the clear influence of De Stijl. The structural framework is composed entirely of straight horizontal and vertical members meeting at perfect right angles. Like Rietveld, Breuer recognizes the need for some compromise with perfect geometric rationalism where the chair interfaces with the organic human body. The design is softened with a fabric seat that slopes down toward the back, and two slightly offset bands that cradle the lower back and just below the shoulder blades. Although the joinery (mortise-and-tenon, with some lap joints) would be somewhat time-consuming, the wood stock is of an even thickness and width throughout and joins meet exclusively at right angles, making the chair relatively easy to mass produce.

Turning to tubular steel

After he graduated, Breuer left the Bauhaus briefly in 1924 to work in Paris, but when the school moved to Dessau he returned to become head of the carpentry workshop. Ironically, at that time he changed materials and began producing furniture using an unabashedly industrial material: tubular steel rather than wood. Breuer's switch to tube steel was prompted by his admiration for the frame of a bicycle he bought to ride around Dessau. Extruded from a mold, the seamless tubes could be produced in any length

needed, then bent around forms into any desired shape. A plumber taught Breuer how to weld the tubes together, and with the Bauhaus weaving workshop to make the fabric, all of the parts came together for what would become Breuer's signature style.



Figure **8.2.3.4**: Marcel Breuer, The B3 "Wassily" Armchair, 1925, chrome-plated steel, canvas upholstery, 76.8 × 76.8 × 67.9 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Although it looks complex, Breuer's first version of the tube steel chair has a simple geometric basis worthy of De Stijl. The arms and legs form the armature of a cube, while the seat and back suggest a second cube nested within, tilted backwards at an ergonomic angle that almost appears to float. As with Breuer's earlier wood slat chair, within the rigid, rationalized geometric armature, the parts that interface with the human body are made of soft fabric. This is not only ergonomic, it gives an interesting contrast between hard and soft, flexible and rigid, shiny and matte that seems to have come right out of the **Bauhaus Vorkurs** exercises.

A design classic



Figure **8.2.3.5**: Marcel Breuer, Chair (model B33), 1927-28, chrome-plated tubular steel with steel-thread seat and back, 83.7 x 49 x 64.5 cm (**MoMA**)

Breuer continued to refine the design, and the B33 version of the tube steel chair surprisingly has no back legs. Taking advantage of the strength of the steel, the seat is cantilevered off its front legs (a cantilever occurs when a beam or plane projects beyond its vertical support). There was some dispute about who was responsible for the first cantilevered tubular steel chair. Dutch architect Mart Stam was demonstrably the first to make one, but Breuer claimed he did so after a visit to his studio, during which Breuer showed Stam his ideas for a chair based on a tubular steel table turned on its side.

Breuer had used cantilevers in his furniture design as early as 1922: notice that the arms of his wooden armchair are cantilevered and not supported in front. The cantilevered seat marks the logical conclusion of the tube-steel chair, and is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece of design. The use of a cantilever achieves several things at once. First, it allows the chair to be made of seemingly one single, continuous length of tubing, with just twelve right-angle bends, although cross braces were frequently welded beneath the seat for added rigidity. This considerably simplifies the manufacturing process in comparison to the much more complicated, multi-part, multi-weld Wassily armchair above.

Second, the cantilever takes advantage of the flexibility of the metal; when someone sits in it, the chair has a slight spring. This not only acts as a shock absorber while sitting (and provides a slight boost when standing up), it also allows the chair to maintain a rigidly rational horizontal-and-vertical form when empty, but provides a slight recline when it is occupied — simultaneously fulfilling the Bauhaus principles of geometric rationalism and ergonomic **functionalism**.

Notes:

1. Cited in William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), p. 193.

Additional resources:

Bauhaus: Building the New Artist at the Getty Research Institute

Read more about primitivism in modern art

Sigrid Wortmann Wellige, *Women's Work: Textile art from the Bauhaus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

Frank Whitford, *Bauhaus* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1984).

Christopher Wilk, *Marcel Breuer: Furniture and Interiors* (New York: MoMA, 1981).

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8.2.4: The Bauhaus- Marianne Brandt

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Figure 8.2.4.1: Marianne Brandt, Kandem Bedside Table Lamp, 1928, lacquered steel, 23.5 x 18.4 cm (MoMA)

Chances are you have owned a lamp just like this one. It has no decoration or added “flair” that would distinguish it as being in the style of any particular designer, or even any particular decade. It appears absolutely generic — and yet it is the result of a very thoughtful design process in which each feature has been carefully considered.

The hood is long to protect the viewer from the glare of the raw bulb. A pin attaches the hood to the arm, allowing it to pivot slightly to direct the light. The wedge shape of the base helps in this regard as well, and provides ergonomic access to an obvious on-off switch. (How many times have you had to search to find the switch on a lamp?)

Its few, geometrically-regular parts are easy to manufacture and very efficient — notice the way the steel is rolled under at the opening of the hood to smooth the rough edge, as well as to provide additional rigidity. The lack of decoration keeps down manufacturing costs, but the proportions of the parts and the sheen on the curves of the lacquered steel are attractive in themselves.

Although it looks like it could have been made yesterday, this desk lamp was in fact designed in 1928 by a remarkable woman named Marianne Brandt at the **Bauhaus**, a famous design school in Germany. Brandt was exceptional not only as a designer, but also as a woman in the male-dominated field of metalwork.

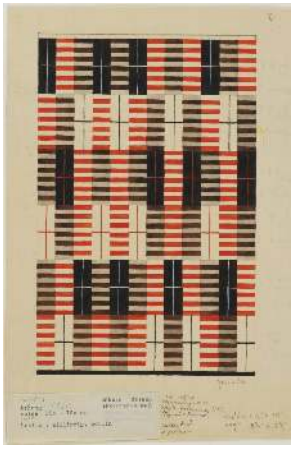


Figure 8.2.4.2: Anni Albers, Design for Wall Hanging, 1926, gouache on paper, 30.8 x 22.2 cm (MoMA)

Women at the Bauhaus

The charter of the Bauhaus stated that “any person of good repute, without regard to age or sex … will be admitted,” but when female applicants unexpectedly threatened to equal or even outnumber male applicants, the masters at the school agreed to limit their numbers and channel women exclusively into the pottery, bookbinding, and weaving workshops.[1]

The pottery master resisted, and the bookbinding workshop was dissolved in 1922, so as a consequence almost all the women at the Bauhaus studied textiles such as weaving, embroidery, decorative edging, crocheting, sewing, and macrame. Anni Albers, for

example, came to the Bauhaus in 1922 to study painting, but went into textiles instead, and by 1931 was appointed the head of the weaving workshop. When the Bauhaus closed in 1933, Albers emigrated to the United States, where she continued to teach. In 1949 Albers was the first female textile artist to have **a solo show** at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

An exception to the rule

Brandt was an exception to this tendency to direct women into what were seen as gender-appropriate media. When she came to the Bauhaus in 1923, her work in the **preliminary course** caught the eye of the head of the metal workshop, **László Moholy-Nagy**, who made her his assistant. She designed the lighting fixtures for the new building when the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, and secured a number of important contracts with local manufacturers, helping to fund the school. When Moholy-Nagy left the Bauhaus in 1928, Brandt became acting director of the metal workshop before leaving the Bauhaus herself to work in industry.



Figure **8.2.4.3**: Marianne Brandt, Ceiling Lamp, 1925, spun aluminum and milk glass shade, 105.4 x 38.1 cm (**MoMA**)

Key Bauhaus design principles

Brandt's works exemplify the key principles of Bauhaus design: rationalism, functionalism, formalism, and design for manufacture:

Rationalism signifies the design of objects using a limited repertory of elementary shapes and colors. Geometric shapes such as circles, squares, cylinders, and cones, and primary colors and values such as red, yellow, blue, black, and white, are to be preferred wherever possible over more complex shapes and mixed colors.

Functionalism signifies a primary emphasis on making the object as easy and efficient as possible to use. "Pure" functionalism takes this creed to an extreme in which the design has no features that do not serve some necessary function: no merely decorative frills whatsoever, however attractive they may be.

Formalism signifies the use of materials in ways that suit their inherent properties: the transparency and brittleness of glass, the sheen and flexibility of metal, and so on. Ideally, those materials are to be left in their raw state and not disguised. Paint as a protective coat is permissible, but not giving plastic a fake wood veneer, for example.

Design for Manufacture takes into account how the object will be mass-produced by machines, and attempts to make that process as efficient as possible. Objects are designed with few (ideally modular) parts with simple shapes that can be produced and assembled easily and inexpensively.

Sometimes compromises were necessary. For example, rational shapes are not always the most functional or ergonomic, and in such cases functionalism tended to override other principles. The Bauhaus is thus associated primarily with functionalism in design.



Figure 8.2.4.4: George Christian Gebelein, Five-Piece Coffee and Tea Service, 1929, silver and ebony wood (**MFA Boston**)

To see how these design principles work in practice, we can compare a Marianne Brandt teapot with a roughly contemporaneous one by George Christian Gebelein. The biggest difference is the amount of added decoration in the Gebelein, most obviously the fluting (vertical grooves) and engraved designs that serve no functional purpose but would considerably increase the difficulty, time, and hence expense of manufacture. By contrast, Brandt's teapot — a handmade model for a design intended for manufacture — is made of as few parts as possible, and all of those parts are reduced to simple, rational forms.



Figure 8.2.4.5: Marianne Brandt, Tea Pot, 1924, nickel silver and ebony (photo: **Sailko**, CC BY 3.0)

It is largely a study in circles: the overall hemispheric shape of the body is complemented by a circular opening and a half-circular handle. The strainer insert (not shown here) is similarly a cylinder with a hemispherical base, topped with a circular rim, and its handle is a perfect half-circle with an inset half-circle thumb grip. These simple shapes are not only easy to manufacture, their repetition gives an overall harmony to the work.

If we look closely, though, within this highly rationalized, geometric design there are a number of subtle choices. The spout is not a perfect circle, since that would cause the pot to dribble, so a slight lip helps to project the tea when it is poured. This is an example of functionalism superseding rationalism.

Similarly, notice that the fill opening is offset towards the back of the pot, and the handle is similarly not centered. This unexpected asymmetry seems capricious, but in fact it prevents the tea from sloshing out of the lid when it pours, and helps to keep the center of gravity consistent in the pot as it is tilted. Notice that the ebony wood handle — a material chosen for the handle and lid knob because it does not conduct heat — is similarly set backwards to prompt the user to grip it appropriately.



Figure **8.2.4.6**: Marianne Brandt, Tea Infuser and strainer, 1924, Silver and ebony wood, 8.3 x 10.8 x 16.5 cm (**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**)

Design experimentation

Another mock-up of the tea infuser design shows some slightly different balances among the principles of rationalism, functionalism, and design for manufacture. Here, the hinged handle has been replaced by a half-disk of ebony wood attached to the side with flanges. This design is simpler, and has the benefit of keeping the handle from getting in the way when filling the pot and accessing the infuser. Brandt probably tested this option because it would be easier and cheaper to manufacture.

This version of the tea pot would not, however, be as easy to hold and pour. Considerable grip strength would be required to pinch the wooden handle securely, especially when the kettle was full of water, and the weight would not be evenly balanced throughout the pour. This comparison does show that, while the Bauhaus principles were not conducive to stylistic flair or personal expression on the part of the designer, a good deal of thoughtful attention did go into their apparently obvious, generic designs.

Notes:

1. Sigrid Wortmann Wellige. *Women's Work: Textile art from the Bauhaus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), pp. 41-42.

Additional resources:

Bauhaus: Building the New Artist at the Getty Research Institute

Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus: 1919-1933* (Köln: Taschen, 2006).

Sigrid Wortmann Wellige, *Women's Work: Textile art from the Bauhaus* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

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8.2.5: Lyonel Feininger, Cathedral for Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. JULIANA KREINIK

Page ID
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Video 8.2.5.1: Lyonel Feininger, *Cathedral for Program of the State Bauhaus in Weimar*, 1919, woodcut (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Additional resources:

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8.2.6: Paul Klee, Twittering Machine (Die Zwitscher-Maschine)

by DR. JULIANA KREINIK and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
188308



Video **8.2.6.4**: Paul Klee, *Twittering Machine (Die Zwitscher-Maschine)*, 1922, watercolor, ink, and gouache on paper, 25 1/4 x 19″ (Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.2.7: László Moholy-Nagy

8.2.7.1: Telephone Pictures

8.2.7.2: Photogram

8.2.7.3: Composition A.XX

8.2.7.4: Climbing the Mast

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8.2.7.1: Telephone Pictures

by **DR. ELIZABETH OTTO** and **DR. STEVEN ZUCKER**

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László Moholy-Nagy, *EM1, EM2, and EM3 (Telephone Pictures)*, 1923, porcelain enamel on steel, 95.2 x 60.3 cm, 47.5 x 30.1 cm, and 24 x 15 cm (The Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Additional resources:

Bauhaus: Building the New Artist at the Getty Research Institute

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8.2.7.2: Photogram

by **DR. KAREN BARBER**

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Figure **8.2.7.2.1**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Fotogramm* (Photogram), 1926, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 7 1/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Looking at Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy's abstract photogram (a photograph made without a camera) we are left pondering what it is, precisely, we are looking at. At first glance, we can make out the outline of an outstretched hand that has traced itself by light onto the sensitized paper surface. Superimposed over the hand are a series of diagonal lines, that vary in tone from nearly white to dark gray to nearly black. Above these abstract lines is the outline of what appears to be a paintbrush filled with disembodied fingers, positioned as if to suggest that it was once held in the hand observed below.

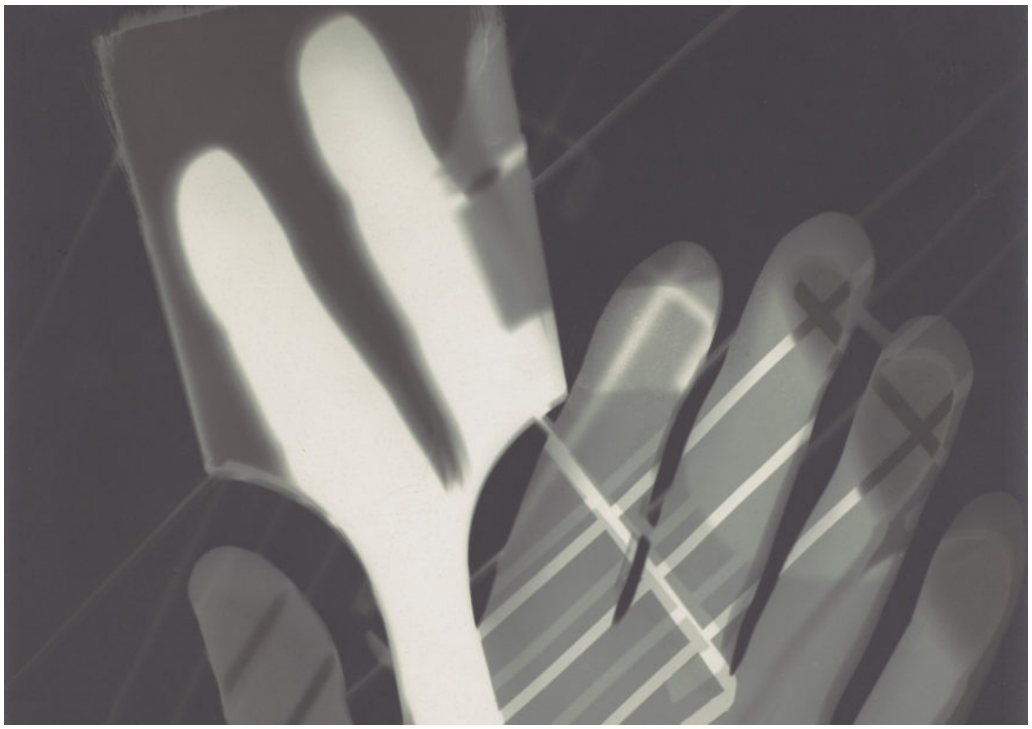


Figure **8.2.7.2.2**: Detail, László Moholy-Nagy, *Fotogramm (Photogram)*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 × 7 1/16 inches (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The photogram is the end result of a sophisticated darkroom practice. It features a series of shadows layered one atop another, suggesting that the photogram was not made in a single moment, but in a series of moments. Taken as a whole, the composition is at once abstract and representational, richly toned and starkly black and white, it is darkness and light, suggestive of photography but also divorced from photography's presumed truth to appearance. This is not the sort of view typically produced by the camera. Instead, it forces the viewer to question what a photograph is and what sort of vision this "new" form of photography produces.

For Moholy-Nagy, the photogram was exemplary of a new experimental, and inherently modern, approach to photography that he called the New Vision, which put the technological medium of photography on par with **abstract painting**.



Figure **8.2.7.2.3**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Yellow Circle*, 1921, oil on canvas, 135 x 114.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Fotogramm's date and its abstraction from observed reality situates it within the larger context of interwar avant-garde art and photography, but its resistance to the clearly defined categories of painting or photography gets to the ambivalent nature of this cameraless form of photography. Moholy-Nagy's photograms from this period reflect his preoccupation with overlapping, often intersecting, geometric forms of varying transparencies seen in his **earlier paintings**.

Moholy-Nagy's experimentation with cameraless photograms brought together his interests in technology, in materials (taken from the Constructivist *faktura* and the Bauhaus emphasis on materials), in new ways of seeing, and in his belief that art could bring about a positive change in the world.

Like the other avant-garde artists who took up photograms in the interwar period (Christian Schad, Man Ray, El Lissitzky, Alice Lex-Nerlinger, and Rosa Rolanda), Moholy-Nagy was not a professional photographer with an established professional or studio practice. Instead, like his colleagues (who were affiliated with Dada, Surrealism, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus), he was a painter seeking to break from the constraints of traditional easel painting.

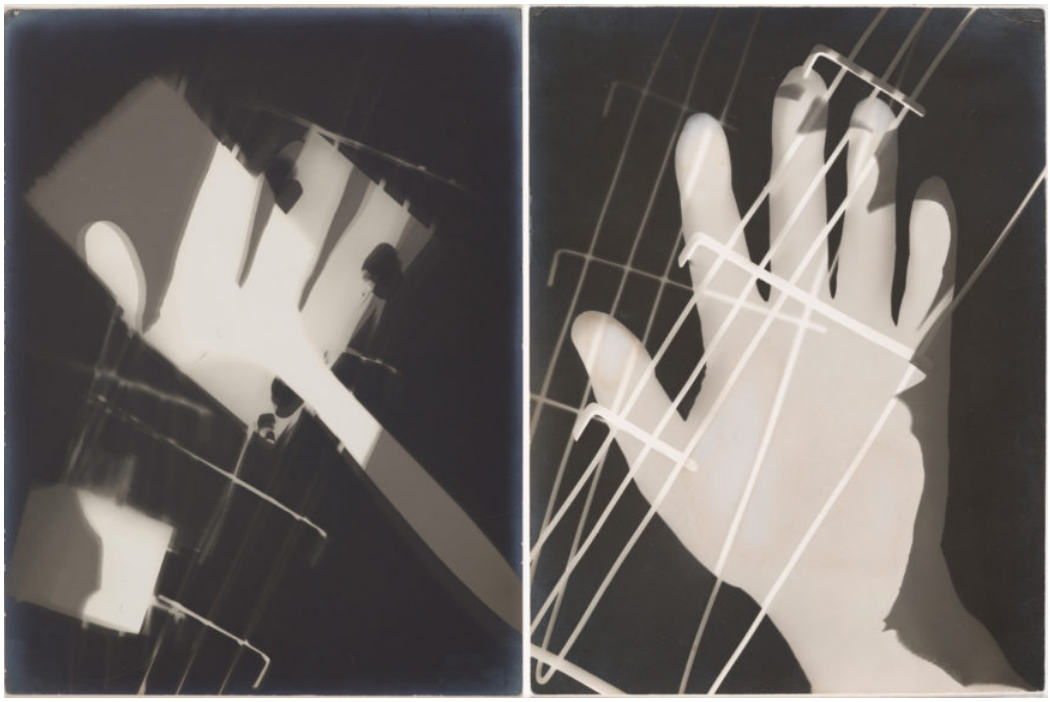


Figure **8.2.7.2.4**: Left: László Moholy-Nagy, *Photogram*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 23.9 x 18 cm (Museum Folkwang, Essen; photo: Moholy-Nagy Foundation); right: László Moholy-Nagy, *Photogram*, 1926, gelatin silver print, 23.97 × 17.94 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

What did photography offer that painting and sculpture did not? For Moholy-Nagy, photography, especially its cameraless form, represented a new way of seeing and experiencing the world, and a means of expanding our sensory perception by bringing it into alignment with the modern world—the world of industry, technology, new materials, and a burgeoning mass media that bombarded people as never before with images in the pages of magazines and illustrated newspapers. By showing us a new way of looking at the world, photograms, Moholy-Nagy believed, could aid in expanding our visual literacy, making us more critical consumers of visual culture.

What is a photogram?

Although the literature on photograms in the 1920s speaks frequently of "invention," recounting dramatic origin stories by self-serving avant-garde artists, the practice of placing sundry objects on sheets of (light) sensitized paper is as old as photography itself. In fact, it's older. Experiments with cameraless image making date to the late 18th century, and were described by Thomas Wedgwood and Humphry Davy in 1802, several decades before the announcement of the invention of the medium of photography:

> ***When the shadow of any figure is thrown upon the prepared surface, the part concealed by it remains white, and the other parts speedily become dark.[1]***



Figure **8.2.7.2.5**: Anna Atkins, *Spiraea aruncus (Tyrol)*, 1851–54, cyanotype, 35.1 x 24.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure **8.2.7.2.6**: An example of pictorialism. Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter, Fifth Avenue*, 1893, printed 1894, carbon print, mount: 55.8 × 45.2 cm (National Gallery of Art)

The basic process for creating a photogram, later taken up by William Henry Fox Talbot, Anna Atkins, and countless others, remained largely unchanged throughout the 19th and into the 20th centuries. Maintained through the decades by amateurs and scientists in the form of hand and leaf prints, the photogram took on a new life and new subject matter in the 1920s.

At a moment when modern art fully embraced abstraction, "art" photography in the early part of the 20th century was decidedly less modern and still in the throes of pictorialism. In Moholy-Nagy's eyes, pictorialist-inspired photography "misunderstood" the basic tenets of the medium and was too much like Impressionism to be of use to the modern artist. [2] Instead, he proposed a novel approach: photography should make use of those materials fundamental to itself—light and the sensitive surface.

> ***The photosensitive layer—plate or paper—is a tabula rasa where we can sketch with light in the same way that the painter works in a sovereign manner on the canvas with his own instruments of paint-brush and pigment. . . . Whoever obtains a sense of writing with light by making photograms without a camera, will be able to work in the most subtle way with the camera as well.[3]***

For Moholy-Nagy, photograms were the true basis for photography, not the camera. Therefore, for Moholy-Nagy, photography was about more than just photographic semblance and the use of a camera to reproduce nature. Photography was about light. Despite

eschewing the camera, photograms could still evoke the technological (and modernity) through the use of electric light. Light was the medium and the message.



Figure **8.2.7.2.7**: Lucia Moholy, *László Moholy-Nagy*, 1925, gelatin silver print, 9.3 x 6.3 cm (The Museum of Modern Art)

Production—Reproduction

In July 1922, before Moholy-Nagy and his then-wife, Lucia Moholy, began experimenting with photograms, he published the essay "Production—Reproduction," in which he advocated for the "productive" use of media traditionally used for reproduction—photography, film, and the phonograph/gramophone. [4] Moholy-Nagy believed that photography was only capable of moving forward if it was used in innovative ways to expand sensory perception and allow for new visual experiences. By using light sensitive plates or paper (without the aid of the camera) to create images that captured light effects produced by mirrors and lenses (and a range of other substances like oils and gels), photograms could bring about new relationships and new ways of seeing—a "new vision." He believed that this "New Vision" was more closely aligned with the rapidly changing experience of the modern world. Moholy-Nagy's "truth to materials" approach echoed the goals of Constructivism, his teaching at the Bauhaus, and his utopian views about art's capacity to initiate positive change in society if utilized in a "productive" way.

Painting, Photography, Film



Figure **8.2.7.2.8**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei, Photographie, Film (Painting, Photography, and Film)*, Bauhaus Bücher 8 (Bauhaus Books), 1927 (The Museum of Modern Art

The cameraless photograph was key to Moholy-Nagy's theorization of photography in his book *Malerei, Photographie, Film (Painting, Photography, and Film)*, which was published in 1925 by Bauhaus Books. The book was concerned with teaching people to see the modern world in new ways through the "productive" use of photographic techniques that offered new perspectives. The photogram was key to this new approach to photography, which he linked visually, and in writing, to such practices such as the X-ray and astronomical photography. Although a number of artists had been working with photograms since

the early 1920s, *Painting, Photography, and Film* helped bring Moholy-Nagy's "new vision" for photography, with photograms at its center, to the broader public, thus initiating a conversation about photography as a modern art form.

Notes:

[1] Thomas Wedgwood and Sir Humphry Davy, "An Account of a Method of Copying Paintings Upon Glass, and of Making Profiles, by the Agency of Light Upon the Nitrate of Silver" (1802), in *Photography: Essays & Images*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 15.

[2] László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1969), p. 49.

[3] László Moholy-Nagy, "Photography is Creation with Light," in Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

[4] László Moholy-Nagy, "Production—Reproduction," in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), pp. 79–82.

[5] Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography Film*, p. 30.

Additional resources

Read more about the New Vision from the Tate.

Geoffrey Batchen, *Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph* (New York: Prestel, 2016).

Oliver A. I. Botar, "László Moholy-Nagy's New Vision and the Aestheticization of Scientific Photography in Weimar Germany," *Science in Context* 17, no. 4 (2004): pp. 525–56.

Andreas Haus, *Moholy-Nagy: Photographs and Photograms*, trans. Frederic Samson (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Renate Heyne and Floris Michael Neusüss, eds. *Moholy-Nagy: The Photograms: Catalogue Raisonné* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

Eleanor M. Hight, *Picturing Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

Andrea Nelson, "László Moholy-Nagy and Painting Photography Film: A Guide to Narrative Montage," *History of Photography* 30, no. 3 (2006): pp. 258–269.

Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

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8.2.7.3: Composition A.XX

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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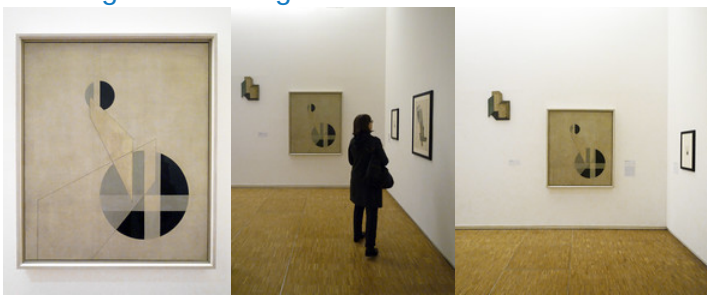


Video **8.2.7.3.6**: László Moholy-Nagy, *Composition A.XX*, 1924, oil on canvas, 135.5 x 115cm (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris)

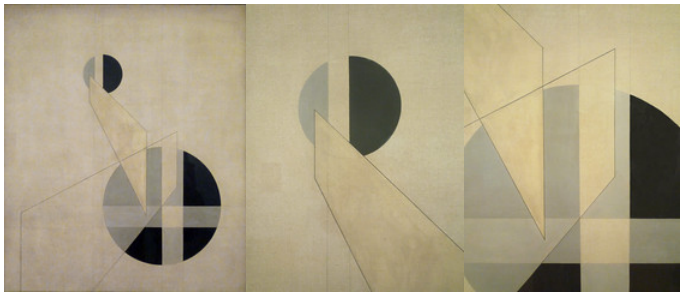
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8.2.7.4: Climbing the Mast

- *by DR. JULIANA KREINIK and DR. VANESSA ROCCO*

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188313



Video 8.2.7.4.1: László Moholy-Nagy, *Climbing the Mast*, 1928, gelatin silver print, 13 15/16″ x 11″ (5.4 x 28 cm) (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Additional resources:

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SECTION OVERVIEW

8.3: New Objectivity

8.3.1: Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) – An Introduction

8.3.2: Christian Schad, Self-Portrait

8.3.3: George Grosz, Remembering

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8.3.1: Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) – An Introduction

by DR. CHARLES CRAMER and DR. KIM GRANT

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188315



Figure **8.3.1.1**: Otto Dix, *Dr. Mayer-Hermann*, 1926, oil and tempera on wood, 58 3/4 x 39 inches (**MoMA**)



Figure **8.3.1.2**: Jan Gossaert, *Portrait of a Merchant*, c. 1530, oil on panel, 25 x 18 3/4 inches (National Gallery of Art, Washington)

Otto Dix painted the successful Berlin throat specialist Dr. Wilhelm Mayer-Hermann surrounded by medical equipment in his own examination room. Wearing the white smock and head mirror of his profession he stares straight out of the painting at us. The reflective globe of a machine used for light treatments seems to be part of his head and intensifies our sense of being under close observation.

Just as we are being observed by the doctor, we are observing him. Dix painted Dr. Mayer-Hermann using a painstaking, realistic technique, showing us that Dix himself carefully studied the doctor and his surroundings. Both the realistic style and the medium (oil and tempera paint on a wood panel) are old-fashioned and consciously imitate the highly-refined portraits of Northern Renaissance painters. In *Portrait of a Merchant*, Jan Gossaert depicted the 16th-century merchant surrounded by the tools of his trade, just as Dix does in his portrait of the 20th-century throat specialist.

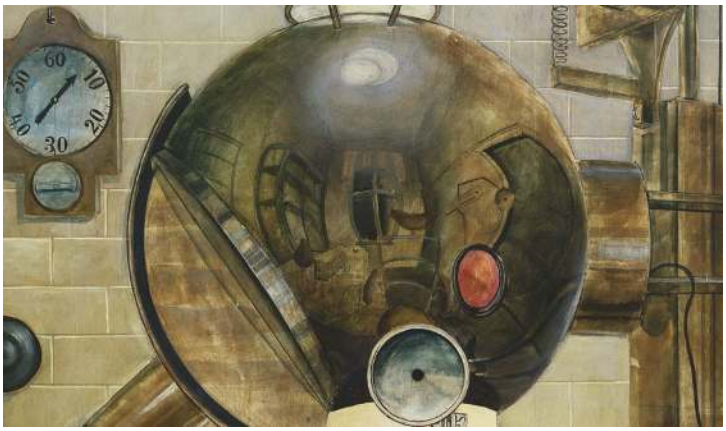


Figure 8.3.1.3: Detail, Otto Dix, *Dr. Mayer-Hermann*, 1926, oil and tempera on wood, 58 3/4 x 39 inches (MoMA)

The convex reflective surface of the light machine above the doctor's head shows us a distorted image of the rest of the examination room. Dix is here quoting another very famous Renaissance painting, Jan van Eyck's ***Arnolfini Portrait***, in which a convex mirror similarly reflects the room in front of the depicted figures.



Figure 8.3.1.4: Left: Jan van Eyck, *Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434, oil on panel, 82.2 x 60 cm (**National Gallery, London**); right: Otto Dix, *Dr. Mayer-Hermann*, 1926, oil and tempera on wood, 58 3/4 x 39 inches (MoMA)

Realism and abstract forms

The meticulous realism used in Renaissance portraits by van Eyck and Gossaert reveals a world of deep colors and rich, soft textures that is very different from the metal machinery, hard tile surfaces, and dirty white, grays, and browns of the modern doctor's examination room. In addition, the flat composition shows Dix's modernist concern with abstract geometric form. The doctor is centered in the painting, framed by the metal structure of the machine on the right and the hanging electrical cord on the left. Seated in a symmetrical pose that emphasizes his rotundity, he is positioned squarely in front of a flat wall covered in a grid of tiles. Above his curved shoulders various mechanical objects create a repeating pattern of circles that echoes his round torso and face. The effect is both humorous and ominous.

A critical attitude

Dix was a leading representative of the realist tendency in post-World War I German art known as *Neue Sachlichkeit*, usually translated as New Objectivity. The name of the tendency originated in a 1925 exhibition of figurative painters that included Dix, George Grosz, and Max Beckmann. Some of the painters associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* had previously been associated with

German Expressionism or the **Dada movement** and maintained a critical attitude toward modern Germany. Dix abandoned his early Expressionist style to paint what he saw as a corrupt contemporary German society with a pitiless “objective” eye.



Figure 8.3.1.5: Otto Dix, *The Skat Players — Card-Playing War Invalids*, 1920, oil and collage on canvas, 110 x 87 cm (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

In *The Skat Players* Dix depicted disabled war veterans in excruciating detail. The combination of collage and oil paint he used in this work reflects early plastic surgery (first practiced on a mass scale in World War I), which was often unsuccessful and extremely disfiguring. Dix shows the veterans enjoying a card game together despite their severe physical mutilations.



Figure 8.3.1.6: Otto Dix, *Sylvia von Harden*, 1926, oil and tempera on wood, 121 x 89 cm (MNAM, Pompidou Center, Paris)

Dix also painted successful members of German society in unflattering, even caricatural ways. He depicted the writer Sylvia von Harden as an androgynous “new woman” — a then-popular term for the modern, sexually-liberated woman. She seems vaguely menacing with her gesturing, over-large hands, lit cigarette, and black-rimmed monocle. Posed to emphasize the sharp angles of her head and body, and dressed in a boldly-patterned red and black check dress, she clashes with the traditionally feminine curves of the table, chair and glass, as well as the pink walls behind her.



Figure **8.3.1.7**: Christian Schad, *Count St. Genois d'Anneaucourt*, 1927, oil on panel, 86 x 63 cm (MNAM, Pompidou Center, Paris)

Christian Schad, previously associated with the Dada movement, was another artist associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit* who adopted a meticulous realistic painting technique. His portrait C*ount St. Genois d'Anneaucourt* depicts the subject as part of a decadent bohemian world. Standing on a balcony with a Paris skyline in the background, the Count is dressed in an evening jacket and black tie. He looks out at us while two large, rather masculine-looking women in transparent dresses lock gazes behind him. In fact, the heavily made-up figure on the right was a cross-dresser from the Eldorado cabaret in Berlin, adding to the sexual tension created by the figures' transparent dresses and challenging stares.

George Grosz's *Pillars of Society* uses caricature to condemn the ruling classes of Germany's Weimar Republic. In the foreground, a member of the old aristocracy, holding beer mug and sword, sports a Nazi swastika pin on his tie. The top of his head is cut off to reveal his outdated dreams of military triumph on horseback.



Figure **8.3.1.8**: George Grosz, *Pillars of Society*, 1926, oil on canvas, 200 x 108 cm (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

Rising behind him are a journalist (wearing a chamber pot on his head), a politician (with a pile of excrement in his head), a church minister (with his arms out to embrace the burning city), and helmeted soldiers, one carrying a bloody sword and gun. Here, *Neue Sachlichkeit* can be seen as more an attempt to reveal the truth about the ruling classes in a direct manner than a realistic style of painting.



Figure 8.3.1.9: George Grosz, *Max Hermann Neisse*, 1925, oil on canvas, 100 x 101 cm (Kunsthalle Mannheim)

Grosz did occasionally use the realist style most often associated with *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In a portrait of the writer Max Hermann Neiss, Grosz emphasizes his friend's large head and hands and coldly records their wrinkles, veins, bone structure, and tonal variations. The brightly flowered cushions create a marked contrast to the frail figure dressed in his black suit and slumped down in the chair. This is a portrait in which it would seem objective truth takes precedence over affection for his friend.



Figure 8.3.1.10: Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait with Cigarette*, 1923, oil on canvas, 23 3/4 x 15 7/8 inches (MoMA)

Exposing the corruption of society

Max Beckmann participated in the original *Neue Sachlichkeit* exhibition in 1925 and is considered an important representative of the tendency, although his painting remained generally expressionist in style through the 1920s. Beckmann's subject matter was also often highly personal, idiosyncratic, and allegorical rather than an objective depiction of reality. He is, however, similar to other *Neue Sachlichkeit* painters in his dedication to exposing the corruption of modern society, which he saw in terms of the spiritually fallen condition of humanity.



Figure **8.3.1.11**: Max Beckmann, *The Night*, 1918-19, oil on canvas, 133 x 153 cm (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf)

The Night is a claustrophobic scene of seven people crammed into a small space. Violence and torture are illuminated by a large burning candle in the foreground, while the window in the background opens onto black night. On the left a man in a nightshirt is being hanged with a scarf. Another man with a bandaged head squats barefoot on a table and smokes a pipe while he twists the arm of the hanged man. On the right we see a woman with her hands bound and her legs split apart. She appears to have been violated; her corset hangs open to reveal her bare torso and buttocks, her red stockings slide down, and she is only wearing one shoe. A girl is being carried upside down by a man wearing a cap pulled down over his eyes. He reaches behind himself to lower a blind over the window. Although the painting has been interpreted in relation to contemporary events, it is an image of human brutality and degradation that takes no explicit political stand.

The German *Neue Sachlichkeit* painters lived through the violence of World War I and its aftermath. Their art reveals the disillusionment and cynicism that resulted from their often psychologically-shattering experiences. The political upheavals of the post-war period and the brief economic boom of the 1920s were reflected in their paintings, which depict German society and its people as decadent and corrupt.

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8.3.2: Christian Schad, Self-Portrait

- *by DR. BETH HARRIS and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER*

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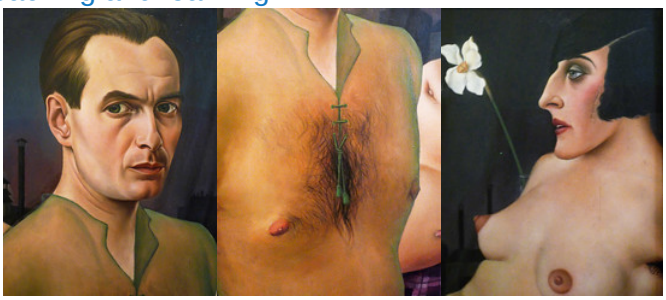
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Video **8.3.2.1**: Christian Schad, *Self-Portrait*, 1927, oil on wood, 29 x 24-3/8″ / 76 x 62 cm (Tate Modern, London)

Unusually, two figures make up this self-portrait, which is all sexuality but no passion.

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8.3.3: George Grosz, Remembering

by DR. ROBERT COZZOLINO, MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART and DR. STEVEN ZUCKER

Page ID
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Video **8.3.3.1**: George Grosz, *Remembering*, 1937, oil on canvas, 71.2 x 91.76 cm (Minneapolis Institute of Art, © Estate of George Grosz)

Nazi violence forced many artists and intellectuals to leave Germany in the 1930s, and like Grosz, many came to the United States.

Additional resources:

This work at the Minneapolis Institute of Art

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SECTION OVERVIEW

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8.4.1: Paul Troost, House of (German) Art

by DR. STEVEN ZUCKER and DR. BETH HARRIS

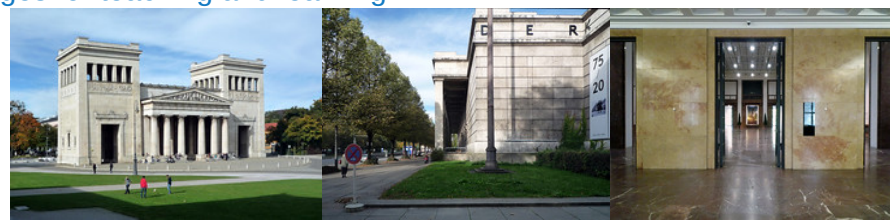
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Video **8.4.1.1**: Paul Troost, House of (German) Art, 1933-37

This video discusses Troost's building in relation to the "Great Exhibition of German Art" and the "Entartete Kunst" exhibitions of 1937 in Munich. The House of German Art now exhibits international contemporary art in direct opposition to the original National Socialist intent.

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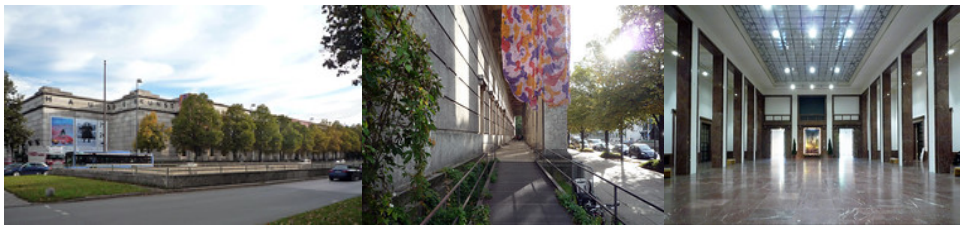
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8.4.2: Art in Nazi Germany

by DR. NAUSIKAÄ EL-MECKY

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Nazi art policy

How do you destroy an artwork? You can hide it, scratch it, tear it, put a slogan over it, burn it, or, as the Nazis did in 1937, simply show it to millions of people.

If you visited Munich in the summer of that year, you could see two spectacular exhibitions that were held only a few hundred meters apart. One was the *Great Exhibition of German Art*, showcasing recent leading examples of 'Aryan' art. The other was the *Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art)* Exhibition, which offered a tour through the art that the National Socialist Party had rejected on ideological grounds. It was made up of art that was not considered 'Aryan' and offered a last glimpse before these works of art disappeared.



Figure **8.4.2.1**: Great Exhibition of German Art catalogue cover, 1937 (left) and *Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art)* exhibition, catalogue cover, 1937 (right)

The *Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art)* Exhibition cleverly manipulated visitors to loathe and ridicule the art on exhibit, in part by erasing their original meaning. Until shortly before the exhibition, these paintings and sculptures had been displayed at the nation's greatest museums, but now they were the principal performers in a freak show. The shock-value was enhanced by only allowing over-18s into the exhibition. The lines for the *Degenerate Art* Exhibition went around the block. Inside, many pictures had been taken out of their frames, and were attached to walls that were emblazoned with outraged slogans. Rather than whispering respectfully, people pointed and snickered. The paintings and sculptures had lost their status as artworks, and were now reduced to dangerous and outrageous rubbish.



Figure **8.4.2.2**: Opening of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition at the Schulausstellungsgebaude, Hamburg, 1938

Visual symbolism was important to the Nazis, and Hitler himself had been a painter, so it is not surprising that they dedicated significant resources promoting their ideals through art. So how was the decision made? How were 'degenerate' and 'Aryan' artworks selected? If you look at the works of art that were glorified and compare them to those that were attacked by the Nazis, the differences usually seem clear enough; experimental, personal, non-representational art was rejected, whilst conventionally 'beautiful,' stereotypically heroic art was revered. This seems like an obvious line to be taken by a totalitarian regime: everyone will find these artworks beautiful, and everyone will feel and think the same thing about them, without the risk of unwanted, random, personal, or unclear interpretations.



Figure **8.4.2.3**: Adolf Hitler and Adolf Ziegler inspect the installation by Willrich and Hansen of the *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich, 1937

A simple decision

And the Nazis presented it as a simple decision, any true German would immediately be able to tell the difference. But in reality, a four-year battle was fought all the way to the top echelons of the Nazi hierarchy over what 'Aryan' art was supposed to be, exactly. The opinions on this could not have been more contradictory, and top Nazi officials such as Heinrich Himmler, Joseph Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg championed the art they each preferred.

Surprisingly, before 1937, Goebbels–and many other Nazis–collected modern art. Goebbels had works of modern art in his study, his living room and was a fan of many artists that eventually ended up in the Degenerate Art Exhibition. Heinrich Himmler was interested in mystical, Germanic art that harked back to a tribal past. Another influential Nazi, Alfred Rosenberg, liked the pastoral, romantic style that depicted humble farmers, rural landscapes and blond maidens.

Hitler would have none of it. He loathed Expressionism and modern art whilst pastoral idylls were not serious enough. Goebbels reversed himself and became one of the driving forces behind the *Degenerate Art* Exhibition, prosecuting the same artworks he had

once enjoyed. Rosenberg also let go, albeit reluctantly, whilst Himmler changed tack and stole artworks by the wagonload behind Hitler's back throughout the war.

How was "Aryan" art defined?

In a sense, the concept of "Aryan" art was defined by what it was not: anything that was ideologically problematic (that did not fit with the extremist beliefs of the regime) was removed until there little left but an academic style that celebrated youth, optimism, power and eternal triumph. Nevertheless, it remained difficult for even the most influential Nazis to understand the selection criteria for art sanctioned by the state.



Figure 8.4.2.4: Hitler and Ziegler judging the *Great German Art Exhibition*, 1937

Take for example Adolf Ziegler, who had been in charge of selecting the artwork to be exhibited in the *Great Exhibition of German Art*. Just before the show opened, Hitler visited in order to inspect the artwork chosen to represent the eternal future of Nazi Germany. He was not pleased with the selection his most loyal followers had made. On the 5th of June, 1937, Goebbels wrote in his diary that the Führer was "wild with rage" and subsequently issued a statement declaring "I will not tolerate unfinished paintings," meaning that the exhibition had to be reconceived at the last minute.

Even opportunistic "hard-liners" like Adolf Ziegler, an artist favored by Hitler, were not quite able to fulfill their patron's vision. However, it would not be right to conclude that the criteria for art that represented the 'Aryan' state appears to have been based principally on the eye of Adolf Hitler rather than a set of delineated characteristics. Even Hitler's taste was not the ultimate indicator of 'Aryan' art: whilst planning what great artworks he would take from the conquered museums of Europe for his never-realized Führer-Museum, he was convinced by his newly appointed museum director that his taste was not up to standard for the world-class museum he envisaged. Rather than firing the man, Hitler deferred to this Dr. Hans Posse, despite the fact that he had recently been fired from his post as museum director in Dresden for endorsing "degenerate art."

What was actually on display in the two exhibitions?



Figure 8.4.2.5: Ernst Barlach, *The Reunion (Das Wiedersehen)*, 1926, mahogany, 90 x 38 x 25 cm (Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg), (photo: Rufus46, CC-BY-SA 3.0)

The *Degenerate Art* Exhibition mostly exhibited Expressionism, New Objectivism and some abstract art. Strangely, very few works came from Jewish artists, and a lot of artworks had until recently been favorites of many Nazis. Renowned works by artists such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rotluff and Ernst Barlach now hung on walls marked with graffiti. The works ranged from quiet and traditional looking, such as Ernst Barlach's *The Reunion (Das Wiedersehen)*, 1926 which showed two poised, realistically carved wooden figures holding each other, to more grotesquely painted works, such as Otto Dix' *War Cripples (Kriegskrüppel)*, 1920. This work shows a procession of cartoonesque yet morbid war veterans, painfully moving forward with the aid of pushchairs, prosthetic legs and crutches, smoking cheerfully, though one soldier's face is half eaten away, revealing a rictus grin of clenched teeth.



Figure 8.4.2.6: Otto Dix, *War Cripples (45% Fit for Service)*, 1920, oil on canvas, lost work



Figure **8.4.2.7**: Arno Breker, *Decathlon Athlete (Zehnkämpfer)*, 1936, bronze

In contrast, the *Great Exhibition of German Art* showed art with the hallmarks of classical tradition, large sculptures of tall and muscular bodies and paintings of heroic soldiers by artists such as Josef Thorak and Arno Breker. Prominent position was given to Breker's *Decathlete ('Zehnkämpfer')* and *Victory ('Siegerin')*, both made in 1936, showing two bronze figures over three metres high, their impersonal facial expressions and perfectly proportioned bodies almost archetypical examples of the classical style.

However, in later editions of the *Great Exhibition of German Art*, works that did not fit the ideals of beauty, youth and optimism crept back in. Realistically painted works depicting soldiers despairing in the trenches by Albert Heinrich and sad, emaciated figures like the bust *Der Walzmeister* by Fritz Koelle began to share the space with oversized muscular bronze men and paintings of serene nude women.

The random nature of Nazi art policy continued after these exhibitions closed. Breker and Thorak, superstars of the Nazi regime, actually had some works branded as degenerate (though this was quickly covered up), whereas the artist Emil Nolde, who joined the Nazi party and was an early and enthusiastic supporter, had been issued a so-called *Malverbot* forbidding him to paint even in the privacy of his own home. He received regular visits from the Gestapo, the secret police, who came to touch his brushes to ensure that they had not been used. Nolde became a water-color painter. The brushes dried a lot faster than with oil paint.



Figure **8.4.2.51**: View of sculpture exhibited at the Haus of German Art, n.d.

Additional Resources:

Website for this building today: The House of Art

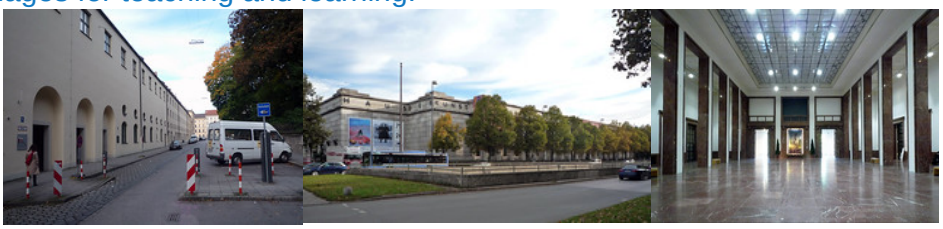
Dr. Nausikaa El-Mecky, "Monuments men are all the rage, but we're still afraid of Nazi art," *The Conversation*

Culture in the Third Reich: Disseminating the Nazi Worldview

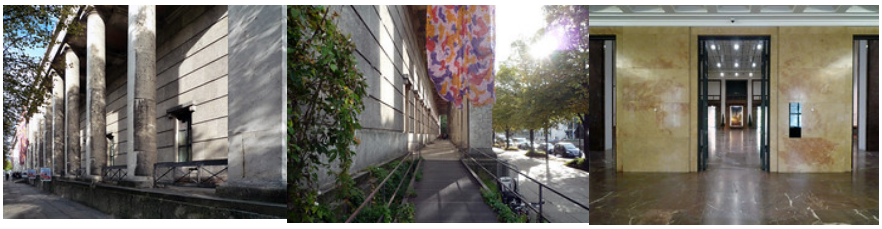
A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust

Excerpt of Hitler's Speech at the inauguration of the House of German Art

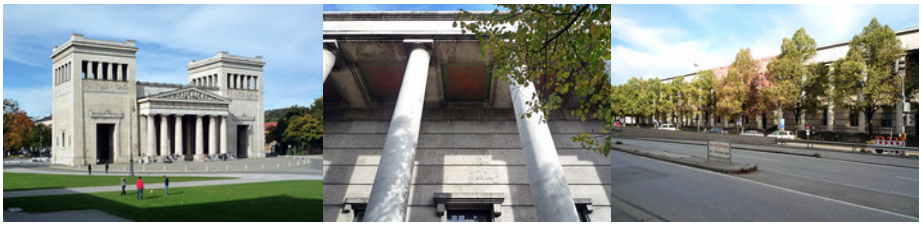
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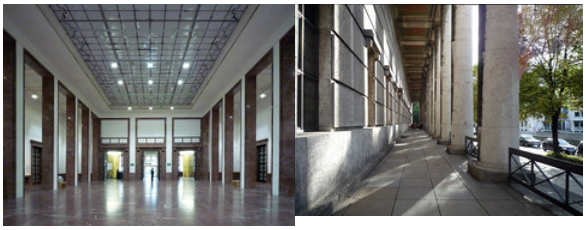
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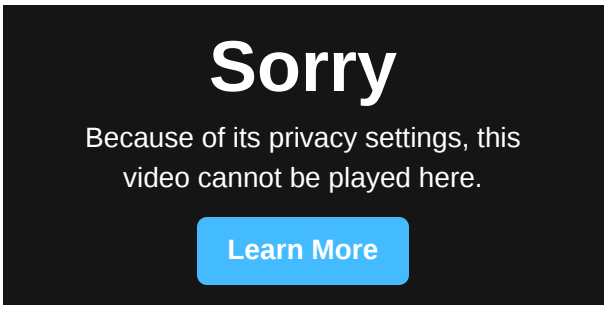
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8.4.3: What is- Degenerate Art?

by **HENI TALKS**

Page ID
188321



What is: Degenerate Art? from **HENI Talks** on **Vimeo**.

‘When art is condemned, fascism prevails.’ — Dr. Brad Evans

Political Philosopher Dr. Brad Evans explores the concept of ‘Degenerate Art’, a term adopted by the Nazi Party in 1920s Germany to describe art that did not conform to their ideal vision of the world, culminating in the now infamous Degenerate Art exhibition held in Munich in 1937.

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8.4.4: Murals and Public Art in 1930s Rome

Page ID 188322

We expect to find paintings in art galleries, museums, and homes, but paintings also appear on the walls of municipal buildings, post offices, hospitals, and palaces; and they are often monumental in scale. These paintings are called murals. Murals, or artworks painted on plaster walls, ceilings, or other permanent surfaces, are among the oldest forms of public art. In the city of Rome murals have a particularly strong association with architecture—they appear in ancient Roman villas, as well as in medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque churches and palaces. Murals also have a more recent Roman history, when they were harnessed to the political agenda of 1930s Fascism, a one-party state led by an authoritarian ruler.



Figure **8.4.4.1**: Benito Mussolini reviewing military parade beside a statue of the emperor Nerva, Via dei Fori Imperiali, Rome, 1943 (newsreel still)

Propaganda

The dictator Benito Mussolini ruled Italy from 1922–1943. He understood the value of art for propaganda, to influence his audiences, and to spread his political message. Mussolini espoused an extreme nationalism. He promoted the interests of the state above all else, and held an abiding and cultish connection to the greatness of ancient **Imperial Rome**, which he strove to emulate as he conquered Ethiopia.

Mussolini even envisioned the formation of a "Third Rome"—his Rome—following in the footsteps of the ancient emperors and the Catholic Church. He promoted a militaristic culture that celebrated physical robustness, labor and agriculture, and the family for the purpose of perpetuating the Italian nation. Mussolini understood that large, public murals painted onto the walls of Fascist-era buildings, with easily understandable **iconography** (symbolism) could transform architectural spaces and proclaim the state's political message to the public.



Figure 8.4.4.2: Men saluting banner with bust of Mussolini between fasci, Mekelle, Italian East Africa (Ethiopia), 1935 (Archiwa Panstwowe, Poland)

The manifesto of muralism

Many Italian artists and architects of different movements and styles worked under Mussolini's Fascist regime, promoting it with their painting and sculpture. However only some, not all, actually supported Fascist beliefs. Mario Sironi, a prolific draughtsman, painter, and mosaicist was one of Mussolini's most ardent loyalists. He was also a strong proponent of mural painting, having rejected painting on canvas because he considered it an exclusive art for the elite. In 1933, Sironi (with fellow artists Massimo Campigli, Carlo Carrà, and Achille Funi) presented and signed a hugely influential declaration called *Il Manifesto della Pittura Murale* (*The Manifesto of Muralism*). It stated,

> ***Mural painting is social painting, par excellence. It works upon the popular imagination more directly than any other form of painting, . . . [and is tied to] the practical nature of sites for murals (public buildings, places endowed with civic functions) . . . [and their] intimate relation to the art of architecture. . . . A "Fascist style" will arise out of mural painting: a style in which our new civilization will recognize its likeness. [1]***

This document, which advanced the artist as a proud craftsman and worker in society, aligned with other current writings by, for example, Mexican muralists—though the two were politically opposed, with the themes of the Italian painters being autocratic and attuned to the "grand myths and gigantic revolutions" of the Fascist regime. [2]



Figure **8.4.4.3**: Sapienza Università di Roma (photo: Corrado Bonora, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Città Universitaria (Sapienza University)

In 1935, Mario Sironi painted the fresco, *Italy Among the Arts and Sciences (Italia tra le arti e le scienze*), for the main auditorium of Rome's new Città Universitaria, also called Sapienza University. This was one of fascism's most significant architectural projects, consisting of sixteen buildings designed by eleven architects. [3]



Figure 8.4.4.4: Mario Sironi, *Italia tra le arti e le scienze* (*Italy Among the Arts and Sciences*), 1935, 140 square meters (Sapienza University, Rome, photo: Sapienza Università di Roma, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The mural is among Sironi's most celebrated monumental works and although it measures an enormous 140 square meters, it was completed in only two months, in time for the university's grand inauguration. In his archaizing style, Sironi presented an allegory of Italy and its quasi-mythical origins.

Figures are rendered with simplified masses and dressed in classical togas. They symbolize academic subjects such as astronomy, botany, geography, architecture, literature, and history. Placed amidst a backdrop of craggy rocks and an ancient triumphal arch, the figures are harmoniously placed within their surroundings. A victory figure flies overhead wearing a military-style helmet and wings in the shape of fasci (bundled rods with an ax carried by ancient Roman soldiers that became a symbol of the Fascist regime). An image of Mussolini on horseback appears at the arch's center and the date of the mural is indicated by the Roman numeral XIV, indicating the fourteenth year of the regime. In this mural, ancient Roman splendor is joined to the imagined grandeur of the modern present under Fascist rule.



Figure 8.4.4.5: Enrico Del Debbio and Luigi Moretti, Foro Italico, formerly Foro Mussolini, Rome (photo: Fred Romero, CC BY 2.0)

Foro Italico, formerly Foro Mussolini

Rome's Foro Mussolini, a vast sports complex initially constructed in the spirit of ancient open-air fora and named for the dictator but now called Foro Italico, represents an unrivaled integration of architecture and art in the service of fascism. Set outside amidst a pool house, fencing center, and other gymnasium buildings, classically inspired mosaics depict athletes and sport, Roman antiquity, imperial conquest, and fascist slogans. Also present are sculptures of heroically male nudes and an obelisk inscribed with Mussolini's name.



Figure **8.4.4.6**: Luigi Montamarini, *Apotheosis of Fascism* (detail), 1942, fresco (conference room, Foro Italico, Rome)

In the foro's largest conference room within the main building, Luigi Montamarini created the monumental mural *Apotheosis of Fascism*. In shades of green, red, and white (the colors of the Italian flag), the artist painted a crowded scene of supporters saluting and paying homage to Mussolini. Standing atop a red banner displaying the Roman eagle draped on a marble altar, the dictator appears, like the title suggests, as one elevated to divine status. Communism, depicted as a warrior with serpent hair in the lower left foreground, lies dead at the feet of a heroically nude soldier carrying a fascist flag. In the politically chaotic aftermath of World War I, far-right Fascists engaged in violence against far-left Communists as both sides sought to gain power. Italian warplanes fill the sky above warships as a winged Victory (common in ancient Roman art) signals the Roman Empire's return. In this mural, fascist power and its Roman ancestry prevail. [4]



Figure 8.4.4.7: Marcello Piacentini, Home for Wounded War Veterans (Casa Madre Dell'Associazione Nazionale dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra), Rome (photo: Alberti1492, CC0 1.0 Universal)

Home for Wounded War Veterans, Rome

Rome's Home for Wounded War Veterans (Casa Madre dei Mutilati ed Invalidi) serves as the national headquarters of AMNIG, the National Association of Disabled and Invalid War Veterans, founded in 1917 during the First World War. [5] Later, the Fascist Regime embraced AMNIG and sought to link the triumphs of World War I with its imperialist campaigns and nationalist ideals. [6] "Fortress-like" in design [7] and located next to Castel Sant'Angelo (emperor Hadrian's mausoleum), the Casa Madre dei Mutilati was conceived as a "place for battle and prayer." [8]



Figure 8.4.4.8: Antonio Giuseppe Santagata, *The Offer of the Casa Madre to Victory*, 1932, fresco (apse, assembly hall, Home for Wounded War Veterans, Rome, photo ©ANMIG)

The sacred character of the assembly hall (built between 1926–1932), mimics the Greek cross plan of many early churches, and is accentuated with frescoes by the painter Antonio Giuseppe Santagata. Santagata drew on established Medieval ecclesiastical narrative traditions and war-related themes, to create four frescoes that represent distinct phases of war: ***Partenza* (*Departure*), *Assalto* (*Assault*), *Ritorno* (*Return*), and *Vittoria* (*Victory*)**. [9]

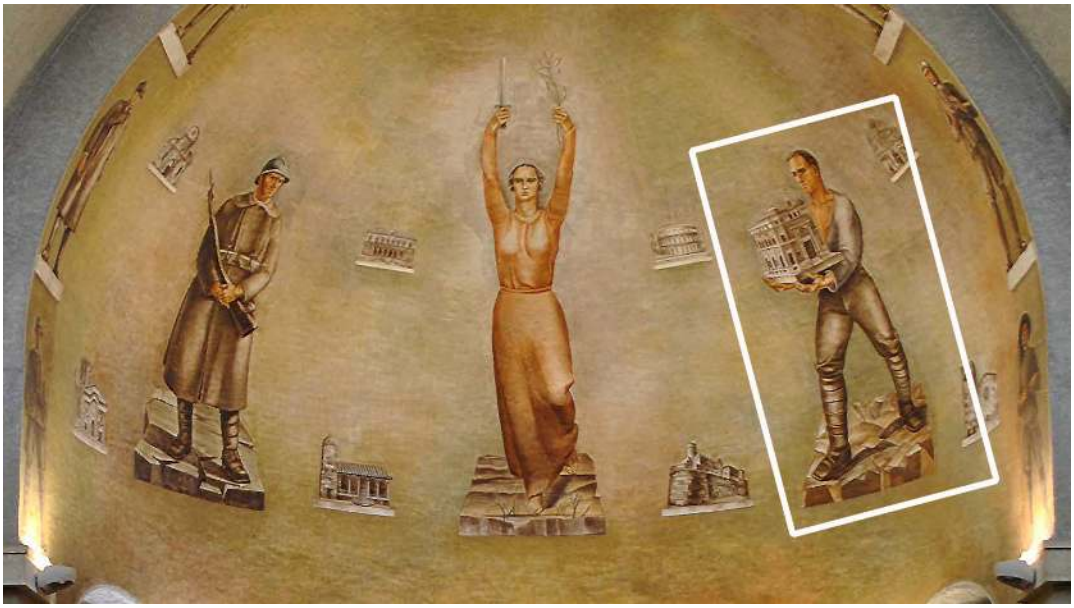


Figure 8.4.4.9: Carlo Delcroix presenting the Casa Madre (highlighted) to Victory. Antonio Giuseppe Santagata, *The Offer of the Casa Madre to Victory*, 1932, fresco (apse, assembly hall, Home for Wounded War Veterans, Rome, photo ©ANMIG)



Figure 8.4.4.10: The patron, Enrico Scrovegni presenting the Arena Chapel to the Three Marys (detail), Giotto, *Last Judgment*, Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel, 1305-06, fresco, Padua (photo: Steven Zucker: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In the apse, or semicircular recess, *The Offer of the Casa Madre to Victory* (L'Offerta della Casa Madre alla Vittoria) fresco recalls medieval apse decorative schemes with Christ surrounded by saints to whom the Church is dedicated. Santagata replaced Mary with a triumphant and wingless figure representing Victory, and he replaced saints with sentries. The charismatic wounded veteran Carlo Delcroix, who became the AMNIG president, is depicted presenting a model of the Casa Madre to Victory (not unlike the medieval patron **Enrico Scrovegni**, who offered the Arena chapel he commissioned to the Virgin Mary).

Additional fresco cycles in the **Courtyard of Victory** portray theaters of war and battle maps (including Ethiopia). In a less public below-ground-shrine, Mario Sironi (the artist responsible for the Sapienza mural), painted highly charged frescoes of King Vittorio Emanuele III and Dictator Mussolini as warriors on horseback. [10] Painted to celebrate Fascism's newly-founded "empire" after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, Sironi's murals stridently reflect the propaganda of a belligerent nation. [11]



Figure 8.4.4.11: Antonio Giuseppe Santagata, detail of fresco cycle, Courtyard of Victory, Home for Wounded War Veterans, Rome, 1936-38

Fascist propaganda after the fall of Mussolini

What does a country do with propaganda art after a dictatorship falls? In the case of Italy, the propaganda was so blatant that, after Mussolini was overthrown and Fascism fell, some murals and public art were covered up (though not destroyed, as they were in Nazi Germany). Only since the 1980s have public artworks produced under Fascism been uncovered and in some cases restored to their original condition.

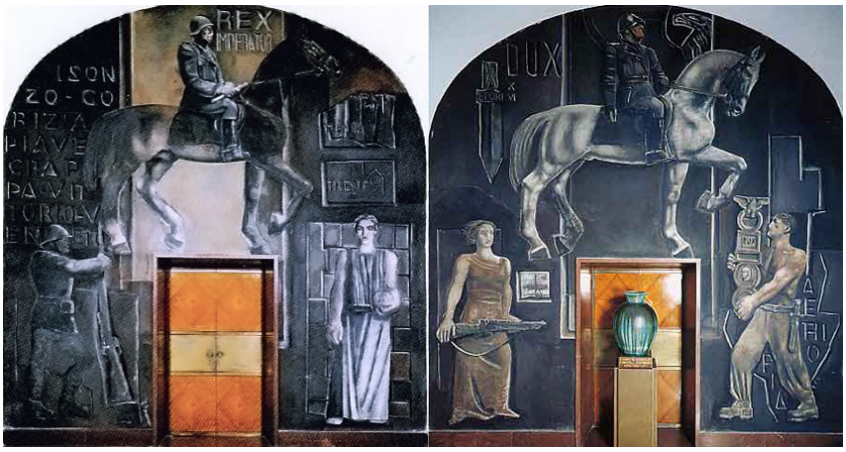


Figure 8.4.4.12: Mario Sironi, *Rex Imperator* (Vittorio Emanuele III) and *Mussolini*, 1936–39, affresco a tempera grassa, 4.95 x 4.88 m each, Sacrario, Home for Wounded War Veterans (Casa Madre dei Mutilati di guerra, Rome)

Immediately after World War II, for example, Mario Sironi's giant mural *Italy Among the Arts and Sciences (Italia tra le arti e le scienze*) was hidden under thick paper glued onto the painting's surface. Five years later, in 1950, the mural was uncovered and "restored," although with the removal of all fascist references. Not until 2017 did the famous mural undergo complete conservation revealing the original fascist symbols, including Mussolini on horseback and an enormous Roman Fasces (*fascio littorio*).

Likewise, Luigi Montamarini's *Apotheosis of Fascism*, which could not be read as anything but a "fascist mural," was hidden behind a green curtain after World War II. In 1996 the Superintendent for Environmental and Architectural Heritage in Rome ordered the fresco uncovered for purposes of restoration and display in the Foro Italico's original conference room. [12] Though technically a public building like Sapienza University and Foro Italico, the Home for Wounded War Veterans never had a wide public audience. For this reason, Santagata's and others murals have remained mostly in their original state. [13]

Only those frescoes by Sironi, *Rex Imperator and Dux*, because of their provocative warlike theme, were covered in 1946. [14]

Historical distance and an emphasis on cultural heritage preservation have made it acceptable to appreciate art and architecture with explicitly Fascist meaning and observe its artistic quality and value. However, the majority of these restorations fail to include a critical explanation of the works' original meaning and purpose, even though they represent the material remains of an ideology that caused great harm. These works cannot be erased and need to be protected as a reminder of political violence of the 20th century. [15]

Notes:

[1] "Appendix: Mario Sironi, 'The Manifesto of Muralism," translated by J. Schnapp, in *Donatello Among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, edited by C. Lazzaro and R. Crum (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 238–240.

[2] Schnapp, "Manifesto," p. 238.

[3] Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, pp. 178–179.

[4] Nick Carter and Simon Martin, "The Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art in Postwar and Contemporary Italy: The Case of Luigi Montanarini's Apotheosis of Fascism." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 22: 3 (2017), p. 339.

[5] Silvia Barisione, "The Construction of the Case del Mutilato," in Antonio G. Santagata, *Rappresentare La Guerra Rendering War* (Genova: Sagep Editori, 2014), pp. 57–65.

[6] Barisione, "Case del Mutilato," pp. 57, 64–65.

[7] Barisione, "Case del Mutilato," p. 62; Marcello Piacentini, Mussolini's lead architect, led the design of Casa Madre dei Mutilati ed Invalidi and La Citta' Universitaria di Roma.

[8] Dobler in Marcello, "Between Censure and Celebration."

[9] Matteo Fochessati, “Santagata and Mural Painting,” In Antonio G. Santagata, *Rappresentare La Guerra Rendering War* (Genova: Sagep Editori, 2014), p. 40.

[10] Flavia Marcello, “Between Censure and Celebration: The Decorative Plan of the Casa Madre dei Mutilati in Rome (1926-1939),” *Modern Italy*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2019), pp. 191-194.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Carter and Martin, “Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art.”

[13] Battle scene frescoes in the Cortile della Vittoria, painted by Antonio Santagata and Cipriani Efisio Oppo underwent conservation in 2018, due to exposure and neglect.

[14] Carter and Martin, “Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art.”

[15] Marcello,”Between Censure and Celebration;” Carter and Martin, “Management and Memory of Fascist Monumental Art.”

Additional resources

Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics Under Fascism* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

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8.4.5: The Mausoleum of Augustus and the Piazza Augusto Imperatore in Rome

by DR. LAURIE KALB COSMO

Page ID
188323



Figure 8.4.5.1: Ruins of the Mausoleum of Augustus, 28 B.C.E. as it appeared in 2019 (photo: Jamie Heath, CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome, a large circular tomb is a key monument for exploring the reuse, reinterpretation, and rediscovery of antiquities over time, and it has a long, complex history that continues to resonate today.



Figure 8.4.5.2: Map ofthe City of Rome

The tomb was constructed in 28 B.C.E. on the ancient military training grounds known as the Campus Martius (Field of Mars). It was commissioned by Gaius Octavius, the thirty-year old adopted heir to Julius Caesar who would become Emperor Augustus the following year. Enormous and elaborate, the Mausoleum represented the political ambitions of Augustus and his family, and made a public statement about his aspirations for permanent rule. The tomb's burial chamber eventually held the ashes of Augustus, his family, and succeeding emperors of the patrician (noble) Julio-Claudian family. The maintenance of his legacy was so important to

him that Augustus denied burial in the tomb to family members he considered disloyal to him—even his beloved and only natural-born child Julia.

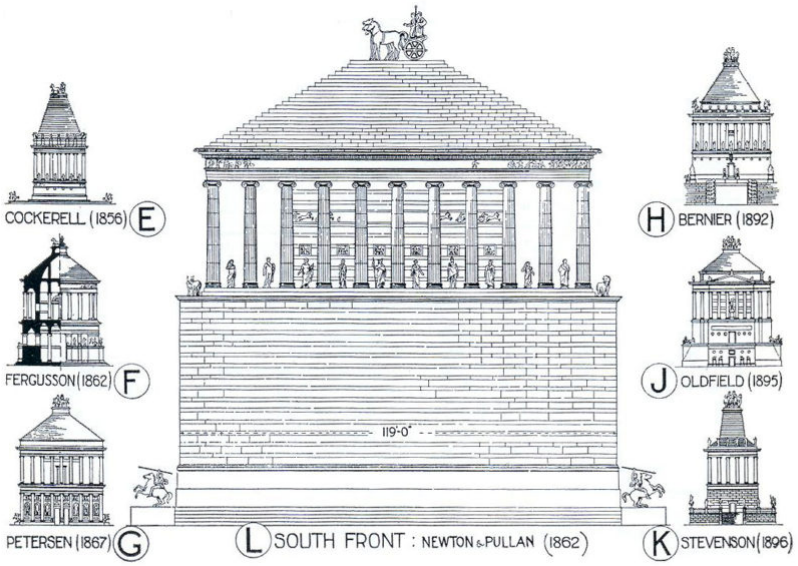


Figure **8.4.5.3**: Speculative reconstructions of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassos from Sir Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for Students, Craftsmen & Amateurs* (London, : B. T. Batsford, 1924), page 113.

Once likely clad in travertine (a light-colored limestone), Augustus' mausoleum consisted of five concentric walls, with rooms in the outer two corridors supporting the building's weight, and, following earlier Hellenistic tombs such as the monumental Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (c. 350 B.C.E.), a funerary room in the center contained family urns. Augustus' urn was probably located in the middle of this room, directly below what is thought to have been a bronze statue of him in heroic pose atop the mausoleum.



Figure **8.4.5.4**: Aerial view of the mausoleum in 2019 showing the central cylinder housing Augustus's burial chamber (photo: Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali – Roma Capitale)

Archaeologists believe the mausoleum's entry arch was approximately fifteen feet high and flanked by two bronze plaques engraved with Augustus' ***Res Gestae Divi Augusti*** (*Deeds of the Divine Augustus*)—Augustus' first-person account of his life and accomplishments. The entryway also displayed two pink granite obelisks that Augustus brought to Rome after his victory against Roman general Marcus Antonius (better known as Mark Antony) and his lover, Egyptian queen Cleopatra VII, at the naval battle of Actium (31 B.C.E.).



Figure 8.4.5.5: Medieval fortifications and traces of ancient travertine cladding, Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel Sant'Angelo), Rome (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Mausoleum through the ages

After being used as a tomb for more than a century, the mausoleum was abandoned. In the twelfth century, the noble Colonna family occupied the mausoleum and transformed it into a defensive castle. (Emperor Hadrian's mausoleum across the Tiber River would undergo a similar transformation two centuries later, becoming the Castel Sant'Angelo). In the sixteenth century, the Florentine Soderini family purchased the mausoleum, and constructed a fashionable outdoor museum at the top with a hanging garden adorned with ancient statues.

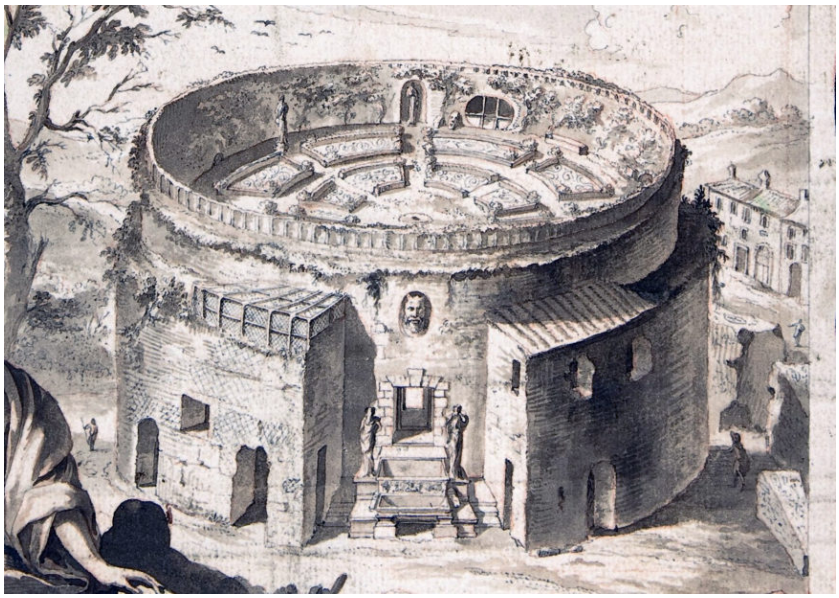


Figure 8.4.5.6: Garden (detail), Jan Goeree, *A Reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Augustus and a View of the Ruins*, before 1704, pen and black ink, brush and brown wash, red chalk, 33.4 x 20.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure 8.4.5.7: Auditorium Augusteo, 1890

By the eighteenth century, the Portuguese Marquis Benedetto Correa de Sylva transformed the mausoleum's roof into an arena for the "Game of the Buffalo" ("*Giostra della Bufala*"—a spectacle resembling Spanish bullfights), and other tournaments and firework displays. Though the amphitheater subsequently changed owners, it continued as a venue for entertainment, even after passing into the hands of the Papal State (1802), the Kingdom of Italy (1873), and finally the Rome Municipality.

In 1908, restored and with a new stage on its ancient cylindrical base, the mausoleum was renamed the *Auditorium Augusteo*, and became one of the most renowned concert halls in Europe.



Figure 8.4.5.8: *Primo colpo di piccone* (First stroke of the pick), Mussolini swinging pickaxe near Mausoleum of Augustus from Giuseppe Moretti, "Lo scavo e la ricostruzione dell'Ara Pacis Augustae." *Capitolium*, 1938: 479–490.

The Mausoleum in the early 20th century: fascism and a new piazza (*Piazza Augusto Imperatore*)

On October 22, 1934, during the height of the authoritarian Italian fascist regime (1922–45), the Mausoleum underwent a new, long-lasting refashioning. Dictator Benito Mussolini wielded a pickaxe for the cameras while he launched the massive demolition of more than 100 late-Renaissance buildings and other structures that had accumulated around Augustus' Mausoleum over the centuries, and cleared nearly 100,000 square feet of land. Inspired by *Romanita*', a cultish approach to Roman classical tradition, Mussolini wanted to "liberate" the ancient tomb of Augustus from later architecture and celebrate its imperial origins. Declaring (incorrectly) that countless archaeological treasures still existed inside the mausoleum, Mussolini toppled the famous *Auditorium Augusteo* and surrounded the mausoleum with roads and buildings, creating what is today the Piazza of Emperor Augustus (Piazza Augusto Imperatore) by 1937.



Mussolini initiates demolition to isolate the Mausoleum of Augustus, Newsreel, 1937 (Istituto Luce Cinecittà)

Mussolini's unearthing of the Mausoleum was part of a larger government program called the *Bimillenario* that took place in 1938 to honor Emperor Augustus' 2000th birthday. The fascist government considered the Emperor Augustus a "rare genius" who embodied the ideal imperial culture of ancient Rome. By associating Mussolini with Augustus, the administration felt they could further their propagandist goal of influencing their audiences and spreading their political message of the "genius of the dictator" (*genio del duce*).



Figure 8.4.5.9: Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace), 9 B.C.E. (photo: Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Figure 8.4.5.10: Mussolini at the inauguration of the Ara Pacis pavilion, September 23, 1938

A dictator's reinterpretation of antiquity

During the construction of the Piazza of Emperor Augustus, fragments of the Augustan Altar of Peace (*Ara Pacis*) were unearthed from another part of the ancient Field of Mars, from beneath Palazzo Chigi (the official residence of the Italian prime minister). The Altar of Peace is an elaborate sacrificial altar built by Roman senators in 9 B.C.E. to honor Emperor Augustus' military victories in Spain and Gaul. The altar's decorative relief carvings included mythical founders of Rome and members of the Iulio-Claudian family. Such decoration appealed to the Fascist government as they sought to visually align their politics with a mythic, sacred past. Famous among antiquarians, pieces of the *Ara Pacis* had already been extracted in the 16th century and scattered all over the world, from the Uffizi in Florence to the Louvre in Paris.

As part of the Augustan celebrations, Mussolini ordered the repatriation, or return, of the missing pieces of the *Ara Pacis*, its full restoration, and a new highly visible location for it adjacent to the Mausoleum of Augustus (which was not its original site). Although it proved impossible to acquire all the missing pieces, the altar was reconstructed within a concrete-and-glass enclosure designed by architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo and a bronze copy of the *Res Gestae* was installed on its eastern side. On September 23, 1938, the 2000th birthday of Augustus, the Piazza of Emperor Augustus was inaugurated.



Figure 8.4.5.11: Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, Instituto Nazionale office building also known as Palace B or Palazzo Nord, 1936–38 (photo: Bulgari Hotel Roma)

Palace B (Palazzo Nord) and buildings framing the piazza

To further define the Piazza of Emperor Augustus, Morpurgo designed three monumental buildings, fusing modern and classical styles and incorporating ancient Roman types of ornamentation, such as mosaics, relief carvings, and Latin inscriptions.



Figure 8.4.5.12: Ferruccio Ferrazzi, *The Birth of Rome*, 1938, mosaic, Istituto Nazionale Fascista Previdenza (Reed College)

A striking mosaic designed by Ferruccio Ferrazzi depicting “The Myth of Rome” appears on the façade of Morpurgo’s Palace B or Palazzo Nord, located along the north side of the mausoleum. Made with glazed ceramic *tesserae* (tiles) and divided into three sections, the standing youth in the center represents Rome’s Tiber River holding a boat containing Romulus and Remus, twin brothers of semi-divine parentage discovered on the river and believed to have founded Rome. A she-wolf, who nursed the twins, looks up from below. Above, Neptune, god of the sea, leads his horses. On either side, six divinities represent work and prosperity, themes important to the Fascist party.



Figure **8.4.5.13**: One of a pair of angels carrying a fasces, 1938, travertine relief, Istituto Nazionale Fascista Previdenza (photo: Martin G. Conde, FLICKR / RARA 2022 (11 June 2020, all rights reserved).

A Neo-Latin inscription below Ferrazzi's mosaic, installed against rusticated stones and between two winged victories holding *fasces* (bundles of rods with axes symbolizing power in ancient Rome and reappropriated as a Fascist party symbol), honors and links Augustus and Mussolini.



Figure **8.4.5.14**: Piazza Augusto Imperatore

Mussolini kept three Renaissance and Baroque churches intact in the Piazza of Emperor Augustus. Politics likely motivated his preservation of these ecclesiastical buildings, given a treaty he signed with the Vatican in 1929 that protected the Church financially and established Catholicism as the state religion. Morpurgo designed a brick overpass connecting two of the churches on the piazza's west side (see photo above). Additionally, the imposing Baroque apse of Basilica of SS. Ambrose and San Carlo al Corso juts into the piazza's east side. In this way, Mussolini literally framed the ancient Mausoleum of Augustus and unified Augustan, Christian, and Fascist Rome.



Figure **8.4.5.15**: Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, Instituto Nazionale office building also known as Palace A or Palazzo Est, Piazza Augusto Imperatore, 1936–38 (photo: Lalupa, CC BY-SA 4.0)

In the same year that Mussolini celebrated the *Bimillenario* of Augustus, he also established the Italian Racial Laws (*Leggi Razziali*), directed mainly against Jews and immigrants from Italy's colonies in North and East Africa. Vittorio Morpurgo, the architect of Piazza Augusto Imperatore, was Jewish on his father's side. In order to shield himself (the laws excluded Jews from holding public office, working in higher education, or for the fascist government), he declared himself non-religious and added his Catholic mother's surname Ballio to Morpurgo.

Antiquity revealed in the 20th and 21st centuries

While Italy's Fascist government was defeated at the end of World War II, the Piazza of Emperor Augustus and the ruins that Mussolini excavated remain, as do the Fascist-era buildings that frame them. Outlasting a fallen dictator, these important antiquities and surrounding modern buildings continue to be put to new uses and to offer new discoveries.

Over time, popular responses to the piazza and its ruins have changed. After World War II, the Piazza of Emperor Augustus became controversial, criticized as "blatantly Fascist." By the early twenty-first century, the antiquities revealed by Mussolini, separate from their Fascist associations, became celebrated as exquisite objects of national, archaeological, and cultural significance. Today, while the Fascist-era decorations and architecture remain protected by a government zoning plan, the archaeological monuments such as the Ara Pacis Augustae are emphasized.



Figure 8.4.5.16: Richard Meier & Partners, Ara Pacis Augustae Museum, 1995–2006, Rome (photo: Steven Zucker CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

In 2006, American architect Richard Meier designed a new enclosure for the Ara Pacis that replaced the protective shell created by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo. With a fountain in front of the entrance, the new building is oriented on a north-south axis and has less of an association with the adjacent piazza. The museum display, supplemented with portraits of the Julio-Claudian family and a scale model of the Ara Pacis in its ancient setting, focuses more on Augustus than Mussolini.

Although long designated as a heritage site, Augustus' Mausoleum itself is also undergoing a re-discovery. Archaeologists, architects, and curators are working with Rome's Superintendency of Archaeology to complete archaeological fieldwork and prepare the site for visitor access. Although a difference in height exists between the original level of the mausoleum and the surrounding area, lead architect Francesco Cellini has designed a new entrance that meets the mausoleum's original grade level and reveals more ancient travertine pavements, including the remains of a possible paved processional route that linked the tomb with the Pantheon in the Campus Martius. In this way, he and his team hope to "reinsert the monument into a network of urban relations."

Reuse of Vittorio Morpurgo's Palace B is also planned. The Italian luxury brand Bulgari, known for its glamorous jewelry, will install a high-end hotel inside. Palace B's original ornamental features will reportedly be retained. But as with the new Ara Pacis Museum, the Bulgari Hotel emphasizes the ancient Imperial rather than the fascist past, quoting in their publicity only a portion of the façade's Latin inscription devoted to Augustus: *"This is the place where the Emperor Augustus' soul flies through the air."* Mussolini, originally included in the inscription, is not mentioned, reminiscent of the ancient practice of *damnatio memoriae*, a Latin phrase meaning "condemnation of memory," when a person is excluded from official historical accounts.

Additional resources

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