Cubism

Cubism revolutionized European painting and sculpture, and has been considered the most influential art movement of the 20th century. It inspired related movements in music, literature and architecture. In Cubist artwork, objects are analysed, broken up and reassembled in an abstracted form—instead of depicting objects from a single viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context.

The movement was pioneered by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963), others, such as Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Robert Delaunay, Juan Gris and Fernand Léger are associated with the style.

A brief overview of the development of western art will show to what extent it built on but finally overthrew the 'norms' of Western representational art.

Pre-Renaissance

The Legend of Saint Francis (1295, ascribed to Giotto) demonstrates an endeavour towards greater realism, in contrast to Medieval art. The figures are solid looking with feet firmly planted on the ground, there is light and shade, the sky is painted blue, instead of faced with gold leaf, signifying the heavenly realm; and there is an attempt at rendering the buildings in perspective – albeit inconsistent and out of proportion.

Renaissance

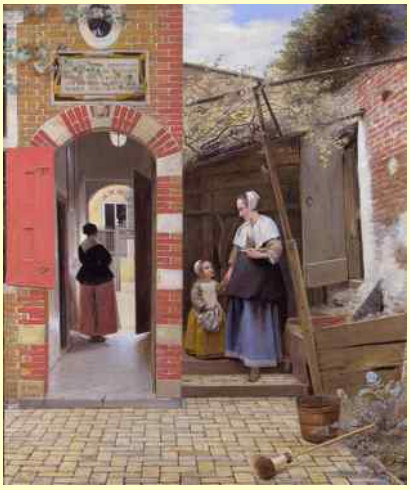
The Florentine architect Filippo Brunelleschi is generally credited, between 1415 and 1420, as the first person to describe a precise system of linear perspective.

Two centuries later Raphael's *School of Athens* (1509-11) structures the scene around scientific linear perspective, conforming consistently to a single, unified, static viewpoint. The proportions of the figures are anatomically correct, and are in scale with the architectural background. Unlike as in the Giotto, the participants are now depicted as individual portraits, their clothing draped convincingly on their bodies The scene is lit with a single consistent light source and there is some sense of atmospheric effects.

Baroque c.1600 to early 18th century.

Over the next three centuries artists became ever more skilled at rendering light, space and atmosphere to create an ever more 'convincing' illusion of the world lying behind the picture plane.

Claude Lorraine's *Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Sylvia* (1682) creates a perfectly believable (albeit largely imaginary) landscape in which to set his storytelling from Classical mythology. He was the greatest master of rendering light, and his use of atmospheric perspective produces an impression of deep space and recession from the tonal contrasts of the foreground to the pale blue greys of the distant mountains.



Dutch Golden Age 17th Century

The Courtyard of a House in Delft (1658) by Pieter de Hooch is divided into discreet areas to illustrate various incidents in the ordinary life of the people.

Perspective is used to create an illusion of recession behind the picture plane. The deep space through the corridor is contrasted with the scene on the right: the shallow space up a few steps, cut off by the flat plane of the wall, serves to exaggerate the sense of deep enclosed space leading to the distant street. The whole scene is enveloped by a tangible sense of an all enveloping and unifying light and soft northern atmosphere.

Rococo from the 1730s

The Rococo style began in France as a reaction against the more formal and geometric Louis XIV style. Rococo manifests in architecture and furniture as well as painting, and features exuberant decoration, with an abundance of curves, counter-curves, undulations and elements modelled on nature. It was characterized above all by its hedonistic and aristocratic character, manifested in delicacy, elegance, sensuality, and grace, and in the preference for light and sentimental themes, where curved line, light colours, and asymmetry played a fundamental role in the composition of the work.

Boucher's *The Triumph of Venus* (1740) is highly theatrical, and 'polished' to a high degree of 'finish.' It caters to a market for paintings of voluptuous nudes, thinly disguised as episodes from classical mythology. It concentrates on the rendering of fleshy nymphs and athletic young men sporting in the water; it is easily understood and leaves nothing to the imagination of the viewer.

Neo-Classicism from c. 1760

Neo-Classical art was a reaction to the excesses and the often frivolities of Rococo. It is characterised by well balanced, harmonious proportions' influenced by the sculptures of Rome and Hellenistic Greece. The writings of Johanne Wincklemann, in particular *"The History of Art in Antiquity"*, published in 1764, brought the art and architecture of the ancient world once more to the attention of the educated public and to the artists of the day.

Ingres' *The Envoys of Agamemmnon* (1801) typifies the high point of Neo-classical painting. Although an ostensibly anti-romantic movement, by 'illustrating' an episode from Homer with heroic male nudes the artist has to an extent romanticised it. However, divisions of the space, the placement of the figures and the general organisation of the parts into a harmonious whole, along with the careful consideration of colour, mark it out as an intellectual exercise in classical composition. Although reacting against the rigid, cold academicism that the Beaux Arte tradition had declined into in the late nineteenth century, artists such as Picasso held Ingres, in particular his drawings, in high regard.

So, we may ask, what constitutes the aim or purpose of art? If we consider that it is a steady progress towards a more technically 'accurate' and more perfect representation of the world as seen from a single viewpoint; a moment frozen in time like a photograph, and perhaps illustrating an edifying story, then a painting such as Alexandre Cabenel's *Ophelia* (1883) would be among its highest achievements.

And (notwithstanding the perfection of human form, and prodigious skill in rendering flesh, light and atmosphere) the mawkish, ostentation Pierre Cot's *Primavera* (1873), ...

….would be considered more advanced and superior to Botticelli's *Primavera* (c.1482).

But this would be a 'progressive' view of the course of art, in which each successive phase renders obsolete what went before. Art is not progressive, but reactive. Each new generation of artists, if they are not content to follow in the well trod path of their elders, reacts against them, sometimes taking inspiration from new ideas that are in the air, sometimes looking to earlier styles for motivation in renewing their art.

Impressionism from 1860's

The younger generation of artists, led by Manet, Degas, Monet and Pissarro, who came to be known as Impressionists, rejected the dry academicism of the Beaux Arts professors and the highly finished studio pieces in the 'grand manner', with their classical and mythological references and insipid, sanitized acceptable nudes which, however well accomplished in their technical skills, were the staple of the Annual Salon, but detached from the realities of the times in which they lived. The Impressionists, however, embraced technology and advances, such as the railway, modern lifestyles and the everyday pastimes of the day; and in the freshness of *en plein air* paintings they tried to capture and represent the fleeting moment and the rapid changes of atmosphere through vigorous and visible brushwork. Monet's *Impression Sunrise* with its sketch view of ship's masts, harbour cranes and smoking chimneys across an estuary is typical of the artists' brevity and spontaneity. When exhibited in 1872 their work caused a scandal, and it gave the name to the new movement

....followed by **Fauvism**

"Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse' a female nude or some sort of anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order." Maurice Denis (*Art et Critique,* August 1890)

The Fauvists rejected linear and aerial perspective, the depiction of 'atmosphere'; along with the grand manner and the 'story telling' of the academic tradition. They asserted the flatness of the canvas and the materiality of paint. Painting directly onto the canvas, without preliminary drawing, colour became the means of structuring their work; as may be seen in Matisse's *The Roofs of Collioure* (1905)

….and **Cubism**

"Perspective is a ghastly mistake, which has taken four centuries to redress." **–** Georges Braque

"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." **–** Pablo Picasso

Proto-Cubism is regarded as a transitional phase extending from 1906 to 1910 – characterized by a move towards the radical geometricization of form and a reduction or limitation of the colour palette (in comparison with Fauvism). It evolved from a wide range of sources and influences and is generally regarded as the first experimental and exploratory phase of Cubism. Although, the aims are somewhat different.

The aims of Picasso and Braque during this time, following on from the revolutionary paintings of Gauguin, van Gogh and Cézanne, which stemmed from the rejection by the Impressionists of literary references, the illusionistic tricks and the artificiality of style into which art had evolved, was to seek a renewal of art that engaged with 'how to make a picture' without resorting to the techniques that had developed from the Renaissance onwards, and was advocated by academic artists. In this endeavour they sought examples from ancient art – Egyptian and Etruscan (early Greek) – the unsophisticated art of children and folk art; ethnographic and primitive art of African and Oceanic communities: artefacts which weren't regarded as 'high art'.

Around 1906, Picasso met Matisse through Gertrude Stein. Picasso was entering a new period in his work marked later by the influence of Greek, Iberian and African art.

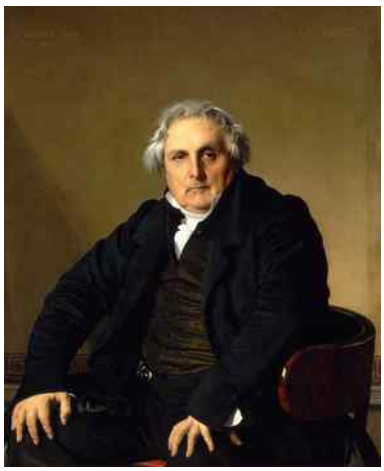
Gertrude Stein was a wealthy American poet. She and her brother Leo became important collectors and supporters of the younger artists who were exploring new ways of making art. They held regular soirées in their apartment in Paris, commissioning Picasso to paint her portrait.

He began the ***Portrait of Gertrude Stein*** (1906) in a naturalistic style, and then according to Stein, after, "eighty or ninety sittings" Picasso suddenly painted out the head and irritably said, "I can't see you any longer when I look."

He went with his mistress, Fernand Olivier, to the village of Gósol in Spain for the summer, where he reportedly encountered in the church the 12th century wooden sculpture of a ***Virgin and Child***. The simplicity of this Iberian sculpture was to have a profound effect on his subsequent development.

After returning from the trip to Spain, Picasso completed the head without even seeing Stein again. The face is influenced by his experience of Iberian sculpture.

When she saw the result she apparently exclaimed "I don't look like that, Pablo!" To which he replied "but you will Gertrude, you will." However Stein later said of the portrait, "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."



Picasso was an admirer of Ingres. In particular his mastery of line. His portrait of Gertrude Stein presents a monumental figure in the manner of Ingres' ***Portrait of Monsieur Bertin*** (1832). Both figures are seated in three quarter view, and in both paintings the hands have the same prominence.

A major difference is that in the Ingres the figure is isolated against the background, whereas in Picasso's portrait the forms of the figure seem to fold into the background, unifying the foreground and background into a single form.

Picasso said about painting "It's not an aesthetic process; it's a form of magic that interposes itself between us and the hostile universe, a means of seizing power by imposing a form on our terrors as well as on our desires." In May or June 1907 he experienced a "revelation" while viewing African art at the ethnographic museum.

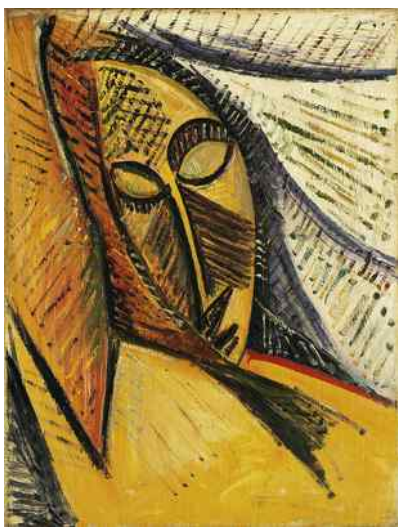
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon (1907) is set in a brothel in a street in Barcelona, and is widely considered to be seminal in the early development of both cubism and modern art. It evolved through several stages during its execution.

The figures are derived from a number of sources. Each figure is depicted in a disconcerting confrontational manner and none is conventionally feminine. The women appear slightly menacing and are rendered with angular and disjointed body shapes. The figure on the left exhibits facial features and dress of Egyptian or southern Asian style. The two adjacent figures are derived from the Iberian Spanish sculptures, while the heads of the two on the right are derived from African masks. The primitivism of these masks, according to Picasso, moved him to "liberate an utterly original artistic style of compelling, even savage force." This adaptation of primitivism and the abandonment of perspective in favour of a flat, two-dimensional picture plane is a radical departure from traditional European painting.

From October 1906 when he began preparatory work for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, until its completion in March 1907, Picasso was vying with Matisse to be perceived as the leader of Modern painting. Upon its completion the shock and the impact of the painting propelled Picasso into the centre of controversy and all but knocked Matisse and Fauvism off the map. Matisse was reportedly enraged when he saw it. He regarded the painting as an attempt to ridicule the modern movement referring to Picasso's "hideous" whores. He vowed to get even and make Picasso beg for mercy.

At the time of its first exhibition in 1916, it was deemed immoral. The exhibition was organized by the poet André Salmon, who first named the work with its current, less scandalous title, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, instead of the title originally chosen by Picasso, *Le Bordel d'Avignon*.

Until then he had shown it (somewhat reluctantly) only to his friends, to a mixed reception; some enthusiastic, others hating it. Braque's initial view was dubious but later became more appreciative.

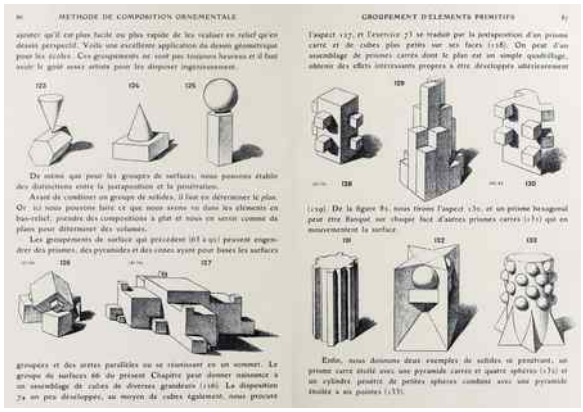


Three studies of 1907 painted during the process or following the completion of Les Demoiselles. **The *Nude with Towel*** bears a resemblance to the two central figures, influenced by Iberian sculptures. While the ***Head of a Sleeping Woman (Study for Nude with Drapery)*** and ***Female Nude*** display the influence of African masks, as in the two figures on the right.

It is suggested that in 1907 Picasso visited the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* (later named the *Musée de l'Homme*) where he would have encountered African and Oceanic art, specifically masks. The African ***Fang Mask*** in the Louvre, which he would also have seen, is remarkable in the 'reverse representation' of various features: hollowing out the cheek area and the eyes carved in relief instead of sunk into the head. Devices which had an impact on Picasso's art and the development of Cubism.

Similarly with the ***Brag Sebug Mask*** from the Murik Lagoon, lower Sepik region of Papua New Guinea.

The disproportionate features of the ***Ceremonial Roof Figure*** (1600-1890), also from Papua New Guinea, in particular the elongation of the torso and the bending of the limbs to an unnatural extent, also has parallels in many of Picasso's subsequent works; see for instance the spreadeagled legs of the seated figure in the *Demoiselles*, which, as has been pointed out, is depicted with her back to the viewer, while the mask-like head is turned to face us.



A further influence on the geometicization of Picasso's and Braque's art was Eugène Grassets ***Méthode de Composition Ornementale, Éléments Rectilignes, Groupement d'Eléments Primitifs*** (1905).

Eugène Samuel Grasset (1845–1917) was a decorative artist who worked in a variety of creative design fields. He is considered a pioneer in art Nouveau design.

His method systematically explores the decorative (ornamental) aspects of geometric elements, forms, motifs and their variations. Grasset stresses the principle that various simple geometric shapes (e.g., the circle, triangle, the square, along with their respective volumes, spheres, cones and cubes) are the basis of all compositional arrangements.

Picasso retreated to some extent from the excesses of *Les Demoiselles,* somewhat disappointed by the scant enthusiasm by his friends for the painting, some of whom were openly hostile.

Influenced by Cézanne, in ***Woman with a Fan*** (1907) **Picasso** is exploring geometricized methods of constructing paintings through the themes of single figures and still-life. The theme of a woman seated in a chair is an often repeated motif in Picasso's oeuvre, and a common subject of European painting.

The painting is constructed from geometric planes filled with colour. It is divided by a slightly leaning centrally placed rectangle describing the chair with its high back, and in which the figure is 'contained'. Colour is restricted to an arrangement of greys and ochres, broken only by the dramatic white triangular planes of the sunlit parts of the dress.

Ex-rays have shown that originally the face of the woman was looking straight out at the viewer. By lowering it and casting it into shadow the brighter, vertical line of the highlight of the nose is repeated by the line of her thumb, linking the grey, curved shadow of her face to the lines and curves of the fan.

A direct connection between this painting may be made with the late ***Portrait of Mme Cézanne*** (c.1890) by the master of Aix, which has the same frontal monumentality and placement of the hands, forming a foil with the oval of the head indispensable to the overall composition.

Painted after he had seen *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* **Braque's *Large Nude*** (1908) betrays obvious connections with Picasso's painting. Although initially unconvinced by its savage reconstructions of the figure, he later came to see its importance in the development of Cubism.

Braque believed that an artist experienced beauty "… in terms of volume, of line, of mass, of weight, and through that beauty [he] interpret[s] [his] subjective impression..." He described "objects shattered into fragments... [as] a way of getting closest to the object...Fragmentation helped me to establish space and movement in space". Having previously being associated with Fauvism, and the use of very bright colours, the monochromatic and neutral colour palette that he adopted for paintings in this period was in the belief that the use of limited colours would emphasize the structure of the composition and subject matter.

A retrospective of Paul Cézanne's paintings was held at the *Salon d'Automne* of 1904. His late works were a primary influence leading to Cubism.

In the 'blockiness' of the sandy coloured rocks of ***The Quarry at Bibémus*** (1895) we see Cézanne's search for a geometric structure of the natural landscape. The colour range is restricted to the yellow ochres and orange-red rocks, in contrast with the greens of the trees. Most striking are the purplish shadows, which are treated as considered shapes with definite form; which, rather than creating a sense of independent shape and enveloping and diffuse atmosphere, as in more traditional landscapes, serves to lock the elements of the painting into a unified whole, rather like pieces of a jigsaw all lying on the same plane.

In 1908, in his review of Georges Braque's exhibition at Kahnweiler's gallery, the critic Louis Vauxcelles called Braque a daring man who despises form, "reducing everything, places and figures and houses, to geometric schemas, to cubes".

"Art is a harmony parallel with nature"— Paul Cézanne

Painted at L'Estaque, where Cézanne had also lived and painted, **Braque's *Houses and Trees*** (1908) is a response to Cézanne's landscapes and is considered to be the first Cubist landscape. Buildings are reduced to simplified geometric forms, without depiction of windows or doors. Space or distance is only suggested by the smaller size of the house on the right. Colour is also restricted to symbolic emblems: ochres stand for buildings, greens for foliage; there is no indication of sky.

The simplified forms and emphasis on the flatness of the canvas prompted Louis Vauxcelles to mock it as being composed of cubes which led to the name of the movement.

Braque's *Viaduct at L'Estaque* (1908) was among the paintings in his new cubist style refused at the Salon d'Automne in 1908. Matisse was a member of the selection committee which refused the work.

Vauxcelles recounts how Matisse told him at the time, "Braque has just sent in a painting made of little cubes".The critic Charles Morice relayed Matisse's words and spoke of Braque's little cubes. The motif of the viaduct at l'Estaque had inspired Braque to produce three paintings marked by the simplification of form and deconstruction of perspective.

This painting shows a considerable advance on the previous one: the trees have become framing motives flanking the central area (as Cézanne frequently used them, in particular in the arches formed by the trees in his late *Grands Baigneurs* series.) The rocks, buildings and viaduct are reduced to simple elements in a tightly structured whole. The debt to Cézanne is clearly apparent in this carefully considered composition.

The roots of cubism can be traced to two distinct tendencies of Cézanne's later work. First; breaking of the painted surface into small multifaceted areas of paint, thereby emphasizing the plural viewpoint given by binocular vision, Second his interest in the simplification of natural forms into cylinders, spheres, and cones.

For example in his ***Still Life with Fruit Basket*** (1888-90) the basket of fruit is out of perspective scale with the table and its still-life in front – which appears thrust up against the picture plane close to the viewer, causing the chair at the far corner of the studio appear too large in comparison. While we are looking down at the table from a forty five degree angle, the ginger jar (which doesn't appear to be supported by the table) is tipped so that we are looking down into it, compared with the coffee pot and the lidded pot which are seen from near side view; nor do the front edges of the table line up. All these 'mistakes' however, are not the result of Cézanne's ineptitude in 'accurate' representation, but stem from his desire to construct a representation of the world closer to how it is actually experienced – from a multiplicity of shifting viewpoints and fragments of memory – rather than as if seen through the lens of a camera.

> ***"The whole Renaissance tradition is antipathetic to me. The hard-and-fast rules of perspective which it succeeded in imposing on art were a ghastly mistake which it has taken four centuries to redress; Cezanne and after him Picasso and myself can take a lot of credit for this. Scientific perspective forces the objects in a picture to disappear away from the beholder instead of bringing them within his reach as painting should."*** ~ Georges Braque

Cubism emerged during an era of dissatisfaction with materialist and positivist philosophies. New scientific and philosophical ideas were in the air: disseminated and debated in widely available popularized publications, and read by writers and artists and the educated classes.

The philosophy of Henry Bergson and the mathematics of Henri Poincaré were influencing modern ideas about the nature of reality. Bergson argued that immediate experience and intuition are more significant than abstract rationalism and science for understanding reality. In May 1911, Bergson gave two lectures entitled *The Perception of Change* in Oxford.

Poincaré developed theories which led to Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* first published in 1905, which overthrew Newtonian physics and introduced the concept of Space and Time existing in a continuum. These new philosophical and scientific ideas based on non-Euclidean geometry, contradicted notions of absolute truth.

Following on from Cézanne's lead, in his 1908 ***Pitcher and Bowls*** **Picasso** depicts the vessels from different points of view and in a restricted colour range, which is doubtless different from their actual colours. The small goblet, balanced on top of the bottle (in a precarious position where we would not normally find it) it has been suggested is suggestive of a female profile.

The similarities of **Picasso's *Still Life with Brioche*** (1909) and the still-lifes of Cézanne are apparent. He places his objects on a simple kitchen table which is very similar to the one used in many of Cézanne's paintings (and which still exists in his studio in Aix), even to the slightly open cutlery drawer. It is placed square on to the picture plane, the far edges do not line up; and the sides are shown in reverse perspective. The glass, the cup, the fruit, the dish with a loaf of bread and the rolled napkin suggest a simple meal, and are also the accoutrements found in the master's work. Multiple viewpoints are incorporated in the same object; and related together through repetition of shapes. The colour is restricted to ochres, grey and whites in order to emphasise the linear and geometric structure of the painting.

Head of a Woman (1909) dates to one of the most productive and inventive periods of Picasso's career, a summer stay in the town of Horta de Ebro, in Spain. During these months, Picasso produced a series of landscapes, heads, and still-lifes that are among the most highly acclaimed achievements of early Cubism. Picasso's companion, Fernande Olivier, was the model for the series of heads.

In this painting the contrast between the more naturalistic still life in the background and the boldly faceted figure in the foreground illustrates an important stage in Picasso's evolution at the time.

It conveys information about the underlying structure of the subject's head, about its development in the round (Olivier's bun, for example, which would normally not be visible from the front, is brought into full view), and a remarkably tactile sense of its projections and recessions. Following the example of African masks (for example the 19th-20th century ***Statuette*;** by the Mambila people from Nigeria), Picasso 'scoops out' into hollows parts which would naturally be swelling forms.

Braque's early cubist works, such as ***Fruit Dish*** (1908-09) suggest the passage of time, the fusing of the past and the present, the representation of different views of the subject pictured at the same time or successively: that is multiple perspective, simultaneity or multiplicity,

During 1908 Braque and Picasso, discovered the advantages of painting still-lifes in order to develop their ideas of representing space. Braque explained that he "... began to concentrate on still-lifes, because in the still-life you have a tactile, I might almost say a manual space... This answered to the hankering I have always had to touch things and not merely see them... In tactile space you measure the distance separating you from the object, whereas in visual space you measure the distance separating things from each other. This is what led me, long ago, from landscape to still-life"

A still life was also more accessible, in relation to perspective, than landscape, and permitted the artist to see the multiple perspectives of the object.

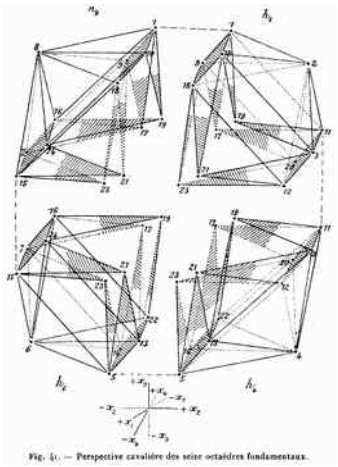
Picasso's *Brick Factory at Tortosa* (1909) was painted in Horta de Saint Joan in Cataluña where he stayed with Fernande from June to September. He had first visited the town as a teenager in 1896 with a friend and fellow art student, when he said that the place gave him a new sense of freedom, released from the academic restraints of his father and the *Academia de Bellas Artes*. He stated, "Everything that I know I have learned in Horta".

The influence of Cézanne is apparent. Thinking back to the Giotto (above) the perspective is inconsistent, the buildings are portrayed as geometric blocks and with multiple viewpoints, and the trees are simplified.

Braque's paintings of 1908–1912 reflected his new interest in geometry and simultaneous perspective. He conducted an intense study of the effects of light and perspective and the technical means that painters use to represent these effects, seeming to question the most standard of artistic conventions.

For example, in ***The Castle at Roche Guyon*** (1909) **Braque** reduces the architectural structures to simple geometric forms approximating cubes, yet renders the shading so that the image is fragmented in such a way that the buildings appear both flat and three-dimensional.

Maurice Princet (1875–1973) was a French Mathematician and actuary who played a role in the birth of Cubism as an associate of Pablo Picasso, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Jean Metzinger, Robert Delaunay, Juan Gris and later Marcel Duchamp. He became known as "the mathematician of cubism".



Esprit Jouffret (1837–1904) was a French mathematician. His *Elementary Treatise on the Geometry of Four Dimensions*, (1903), was a popularization of Henri Poincaré's *Science and Hypothesis* in which Jouffret described hypercubes and other complex polyhedra in four dimensions and projected them onto the two-dimensional page. Maurice Princet gave a copy of the Treatise to Picasso, introducing the concept of the “fourth dimension” to artists at the Bateau-Lavoir.

Jouffret described hypercubes and other complex polyhedra in four dimensions and projected them onto the two-dimensional surface. Picasso's sketchbooks for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* illustrate Jouffret's influence on the artist's work.

To justify such a radical move towards the depiction of the world in unrecognizable terms it is argued that the emergence of Cubism transpired during an era of dissatisfaction with positivism, materialism and determinism. The 19th century theories upon which such philosophies were based, came under attack by intellectuals such as the philosophers Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, William James and the mathematician Henri Poincaré. New philosophical and scientific ideas emerged based on non-Euclidean geometry, Riemannian geometry and the relativity of knowledge, contradicting notions of absolute truth. These ideas were disseminated and debated in widely available popularized publications, and read by writers and artists associated with the advent of Cubism. Popularized too were new scientific discoveries such as Röntgen's X rays, Hertzian electromagnetic radiation and radio waves propagating through space, revealing realities not only hidden from human observation, but beyond the sphere of sensory perception. Perception was no longer associated solely with the static, passive receipt of visible signals, but became dynamically shaped by learning, memory and expectation.

Analytical Cubism

> ***"If we wished to relate the space of the [Cubist] painters to geometry, we should have to refer it to the non-Euclidian Mathematicians; we should have to study, at some length, certain of Riemann's Theorems."*** – Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, *Du Cubism* 1912

Ernst Gombrich described Cubism as "the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of the picture—that of a man-made construction, a coloured canvas."

In the first, Analytical phase of Cubism Picasso and Braque are attempting to represent the concept of time (the fourth dimension) and Henri Bergson's concept of duration: that is that our perception of time is mobile and incomplete.

By walking around the objects and examining them from a variety of viewpoints, and fragmenting them into details they achieved a new construction of reality in which the totality of the object (or figure) is built from identically painted basic blocks. By this means their essential nature could be conveyed through reduction.

Braque said: "When objects shattered into fragments appeared in my painting about 1909, this for me was a way of getting closest to the object... Fragmentation helped me to establish space and movement in space."

In his ***Violin and Palette*** (1909) **Braque** represents all the surfaces of the depicted objects in a single picture plane, as if having all their faces visible at the same time. This new kind of depiction revolutionized the way objects could be visualized and represented.

As can be seen in this detail the 'fragments' are in their turn constructed from discrete brush strokes, as in the subatomic world individual molecules, the smallest fundamental particle of a chemical compound, is constructed of a group of atoms bonded together.

In Analytical Cubism the use of colour is mostly reduced to ochres and greys, and shading is largely avoided or schematised into the building blocks of the composition. By limiting the colour palette a greater sense of flatness is achieved, which gives equal importance to all perspectives and elements in the picture. By neglecting shading they created a sense of two-dimensionality that democratized space. The combined effect of these simplified techniques drew attention to the individual elements that made up the image: colour, line and form.

Picasso's, *Seated Nude* (1909-10) portrays a figure sitting in a high-backed arm chair. Different views of his subject are shown together in the same picture; notably the model's right shoulder is pulled around so that a view of the upper back is apparent.

At this early transitional point in the development of Analytical cubism the traditional form of a seated figure is still very recognizable and portrayed largely from a frontal viewpoint. The seated position is clearly a slightly three quarter view, with the head turned to the left, which along with the faceting introduces a sense of shallow depth. The upper, right-hand slightly lighter section, possibly suggests a window or mirror, with a chair and other objects in front, again with a hint of depth in that portion.

"I couldn't portray a women in all her natural loveliness.. I haven't the skill. No one has. I must, therefore, create a new sort of beauty, the beauty that appears to me in terms of volume of line, of mass, of weight, and through that beauty interpret my subjective impression. Nature is mere a pretext for decorative composition, plus sentiment. It suggests emotion, and I translate that emotion into art. I want to express the absolute, not merely the factitious woman." ~ Georges Braque

The fragmentation of the surface and the flattening of the picture in **Braque's *Woman Playing a Mandolin*** (1910) is taken further. But the figure and the mandolin are still very much apparent. We do not need to tease them out of the screen of marks and splintered shapes.

The use of an oval helps dispense with the tricky problem of how to deal with the (left over) corners in the fragmented portrait, and concentrates the vision.

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1884–1979) was a German-born art collector, and one of the most notable French art dealers of the 20th century. Despite having no knowledge about selling art, he did have a keen interest in the new movements and opened his first gallery in Paris in 1907, at the age of twenty three.

He was among the first champions of Picasso and Braque and in 1920 publishing a book titled *The Rise of Cubism,* in which he made the assertion that the Cubist depiction of space, mass, time, and volume supports (rather than contradicts) the flatness of the canvas. When Picasso's Cubist portrait of him was first viewed, it caused "a great deal of controversy" from art critics who considered it an outrage and an insult against serious, traditional art.

"I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them." –- Pablo Picasso

Kahnweiller met Picasso in 1908 and sat for his ***Portrait of Daniel Henry Kahnweiler*** (1910) at least 30 times. At its heart, the painting is a rather traditional portrait of a man sitting with his hands placed in his lap. However, rather than portraying Kahnweiler in a realistic way, Picasso builds the figure from squares, rectangles and triangular forms constructed from small dashes of greys and ochres. Although the resulting image is fractured into planes and faceted shapes some features of the subject can still be detected, such as a wave of his hair, eyes, brow and chin and the knot of his tie and his watch chain.

Museu Picasso comments that, "Kahnweiler's punctilious time-keeping and legendary patience are epitomised by the eye-catching sign for the watch-chain straddling the waistcoat of his immaculate dark suit and the prominence given to his neatly clasped hands resting in his lap."

"Cubism is not a reality you can take in your hand. It's more like a perfume, in front of you, behind you, to the sides, the scent is everywhere but you don't quite know where it comes from." – Pablo Picasso

Girl with a Mandolin (1910) and ***Woman with a Violin*** (1911) shows the radical evolution of **Picasso's** cubism within the course of a year. The earlier painting depicts an easily recognisable nude female, her head bent in concentration as she plays a stringed instrument, while in the later work the rigorous faceted details, possibly taken from all views of the model, combines into a concentrated image which is difficult to interpret as a figure or instrument. It is if the whole surface has become a study of visual music composed mainly of straight lines and angled planes, modelled from little dashes, or individual 'notes' of brown and grey paint.

Nineteen eleven was a decisive time in the development of cubism when Braque and Picasso painted side by side in Céret in the French Pyrenees, during the summer; each artist producing paintings that are difficult — sometimes virtually impossible — to distinguish from those of the other.

The Poet (1911) was one of the first paintings that **Picasso** made during their sojourn in Céret, painting it before Braque arrived, and signing it only some years later (and wrongly dated 1910). During this time they did not sign their pictures, working as a team in friendly rivalry, urging each other on.

No hint of Mediterranean colour permeates its dense network of linear elements and daubs of shadow and light. Among the shimmering planes can be identified the moustache, the pipe and pipe rack, and wine glass.

The image of the poet manifests, (or fails to manifest) amidst a pyramidal matrix of shimmering planes, which at one moment appear solid, at another transparent. Does he sit in an armchair? Is he reading a book? He appears to be looking down. A diagonal space indicates an empty page, perhaps waiting to be written on.

"The things that Picasso and I said to one another during those years will never be said again, and even if they were, no one would understand them anymore. It was like being roped together on a mountain." – Georges Braque, reporting later on his cooperation with Picasso in Cerét

The Portuguese (1911) was begun by **Braque** soon after arriving in Céret. Inspired by memories of a Portuguese musician in Marseilles, it marks a revolutionary change in Cubist art. He introduces stencilled lettering at the top right. D. BAL, with Roman numerals below. Although he had included numbers and letters into a still life in 1910, they were a representational element of the painting. In this piece, the letters and numbers are a purely compositional addition. Braque's intentions at adding the letters are many, but mostly they are added to make the viewer aware of the canvas itself. In representational paintings, the canvas is there only as a surface to hold whatever image the painter desires. According to the artist by adding numbers, out of context elements, and surface textures, the surface is brought closer to the viewer's real experience, and is made aware of the fact that the canvas can also hold outside elements, making the surface of the painting just as important as what is put on top of it: the flat canvas becomes part of the 'presence' of the object.

The flat surface of the canvas becomes in modern art, not an opportunity to create an illusion of real life, but a field of action for the artist's thoughts and sensations.

Braque's *Still Life (The Pedestal Table)* and **Picasso's *Still Life with a Bottle of Rum*** both of 1911 show how close, at this time, the two artists were working together.

Also apparent is the centralised composition and vertical format, most characteristic of works during the analytical phase of cubism

Unusually there is no figure in **Picasso's *Violin*** (1911-12), just the instrument and the shapes it inspires to make a sort of parallel visual music, perhaps evocative of a Bach sonata for violin and piano accompaniment. Most of the cubist works of this period have a static appearance; however the slight diagonals in this composition imparts a sense of movement, contributing to the musicality of the piece,

Cubist artists delighted in puns and multivalent references. Any word containing the sound “cube” delighted them, for instance the widely advertised dehydrated broth cubes (bouillon KUB). Here in ***Violin, Mozart Kubelick*** (1912) **Braque** is punning on the name of the celebrated Czech violinist Jan Kubelík.

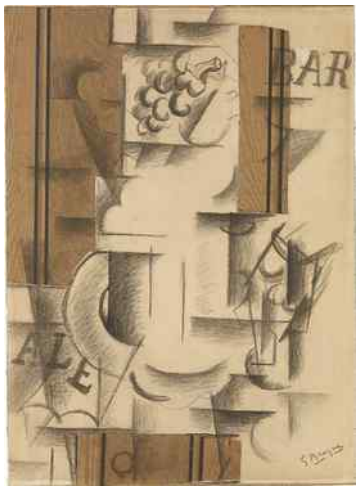
In spring 1912, in connection with a retrospective of work by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Kubelík performed a concert of Ingres’s favourite musical pieces on the deceased artist’s violin. The year after it was finished, the painting was included in the Armory Show, the exhibition that introduced modern art to America. One critic pointed out that even though Braque had misspelled Kubelík’s name, he had succeeded in putting the “art” in “Mozart.”

Synthetic Cubism

"Whatever is valuable in painting is precisely what one is incapable of talking about." ~ Georges Braque

In parallel to chemical terminology: Analytical Cubism breaks down the substance to examine its parts and how it is constituted; Synthetic Cubism puts the component parts together, synthesises the substance, to make a synthetic or parallel reality. We might say that the cubist artists were alchemists – using base substances to create artistic gold.

Synthetic Cubism was more symbolic than Analytical Cubism. It did not strive to achieve a heightened view of four-dimensional reality. Rather it strived to achieve a hint at reality, but in a distorted way. It was a transformation that contributed immensely to the theories and investigations surrounding Surrealism.



According to **Braque** ***Fruit Dish and Glass*** (1912) was his first papier collé, created in September 1912 with mass-produced faux bois wallpaper purchased in Avignon. To gain a surreptitious advantage over his partner and rival, Braque waited until Picasso had left Avignon for Paris before beginning to incorporate strips from the roll into his charcoal drawings. The machine-printed wallpaper was designed to be a cheap alternative to artisan-painted imitation wood, which was itself a cheaper alternative to real tongue-and-groove oak paneling. By using the three offcuts to frame his hand-drawn still life, Braque merged bargain-basement *trompe l'oeil* and avant-garde Cubist abstraction. He then shaded the piece using paint filled with sand, adding depth and texture to the image.

The inclusion of text in this piece, the words "Ale" and "Bar," challenge the distinctions between advertising imagery and so-called high art. The combination of all three of these techniques would eventually prove to be a major influence on the Dadaists, who relied heavily on collage and text to confuse and obfuscate the apparent meanings in their works and to challenge Bourgeois notions of art.

Still Life with Chair Caning (1912) is considered **Picasso's** first collage, and a defining example of Synthetic Cubism.

The work is a representation of a café table. He attached a piece of oilcloth with simulated chair caning to the canvas with painted lines suggesting the edge of a table. The top half is occupied by a cubist still-life on which cubist glasses, bottle, newspaper and other cafe paraphernalia cast drawn shadows. The letters JOU indicate the beginning of the word journal (newspaper) or diary, but spoken can also be understood as 'game' (jeu) or 'play' (jouer) or 'cheek' (joue), a fact which has contributed to the sense that Picasso intended Synthetic Cubism to add a sense of frivolity into art after the academic seriousness of Analytical Cubism.

On the right a knife bisects an orange, and in the centre is a wine glass, described from different points of view. A piece of rope is wrapped around the canvas to make a frame, another link to real objects. The oval shape suggests the decorative panels of eighteenth century rococo boudoirs; but also could suggest a mirror in which a chair or table top still-life is reflected.

Spanish Still Life (1912) was painted by **Picasso** shortly after his stay in Céret near the Spanish border. It represents a bottle, three glasses, a squared goblet in the background at the left, a rounded glass with a cigarette in front on a cafe table. An inkwell on the left, together with an envelope partially addressed with the words Don and Barcel, suggests that the painting is a recollection of a letter to his father in Barcelona written in the cafe, and a memento of his family and friends in Spain.

In the painting we can interpret a bottle of Spanish anisette, identified by the letters OJEN. Also a fragment of the heading of the Barcelona newspaper, La Publicidad: ICIDAD. At the bottom is a ticket for a bullfight, painted in the colours of the Spanish flag, with the word SOL and SOMBRE: sun and shade. The still life is set against a red background, suggestive of a sunset, and possibly a mood of regret for the passage of his youth in his native country.

Picasso's *Musical Score and Guitar* (1912) is entirely made of paper shapes glued or pinned to a piece of cardboard. The body of the guitar is made by the interaction of the curved, locking shapes, in a 90 degree orientation (vertical to horizontal), while a white trapezoid suggests the fingerboard with a single tuning key. A rectangle of paper with two black stripes in charcoal – the only evidence of the artist's 'hand' – is pinned over the white paper representing the horizontal body. The dressmaking pin stands in for the strings, suggesting the metallic 'twang' of the guitar string. The sheets of music 'appear' to lie behind the body of the guitar, but are carefully cut to lie alongside and reinforce the curves of the instrument; thereby emphasising the flatness of the composition.

Bottle, Glass and Violin (1912) by **Picasso** represents a still-life on a table. A collage which initially looks simple is in reality quite complex, and a witty play on ideas of reality and illusion. It combines pieces of actual newspaper (elements plucked from the real world) with illusionistic drawing: a visual game of machine made print and hand drawing. A blank piece of newspaper at the foot of the composition declares the material reality of the work, while, by contrast, the printed fragments suggests or declares the reportage – the story – introducing the concept of memory and abstract thought.

The table is barely suggested by the (not quite) vertical line on the right edge, and is continued on the far edge by the lower line of a rectangle, which doubles as a folded newspaper. The title; JOURNAL, (diary) suggesting the passage of time, is cut from an actual newspaper; mixing fact and symbol.

A glass is drawn on another piece of newsprint, combining a side view with a plan view of the rim. A diagonal on the right defines both the right edge of the glass and simultaneously the shadow cast by the glass. The sharp cornered cut of the newspaper makes one angular shoulder of the violin.

Above the glass is an illustration showing a ship at sea with the caption “How to lay a line at a depth of a 1,000 meters.” A vertical drawn line 'anchors' the ship to the glass; thereby creating a play on the idea of water/liquid – sea/drink; and to the idea that there may be more 'depth' to the piece than is immediately apparent.

The bottle on the left occupies a more open space. Initially it appears to be symmetrical, but when we realise that the curved white space intruding over the shoulder of the bottle reads as a reflection of the light (another play on illusionism) then an imaginary line forms in the mind completing the left hand edge of the bottle. The protrusion on the left suggests that it is a soda syphon (linking it in our imagination to the glass). The base is represented by a straight line while the top of the neck is curved as if seen from slightly above. The flatness of the side on view of the bottle is reinforced by the print. Picasso has cut the paper so that the rectangle of an advertisement appears to be a label, intriguingly headed *Proposition Interesante.*

The most complex part is the violin, which also plays with the interplay of realism and illusion. A 'B' shape of cut out paper, painted to resemble woodgraining, forms the right side of the violin. Another piece of newspaper, while being flat is cut with converging sides, creating a suggestion of perspective recession of a plane, as does the converging lines of the violin strings. A shaded area running below the strings further indicates spacial recession, as do the the different sized f holes.

Guitar was assembled by **Picasso** from cardboard and string in 1912. Photos in his studio show it surrounded by collages of guitars. He makes a radical break with tradition, not only in the choice of material but in making a sculpture of an object in its own right, rather than a figure.

The volume of the guitar is represented without making a solid object or 'mass.' The 'volume' and contour of the body is created by a series of jutting perpendicular and parallel elements working forward from a ground plane of cut out shapes. The sound hole, rather than being an empty space cut in the body of the guitar, is a piece of cardboard tube; inverting what should be a hole into a solid cylinder. The 'solid' body of the guitar is thereby converted to empty space. Our reading of the surfaces oscillates between surface and void, powered by our imagination.

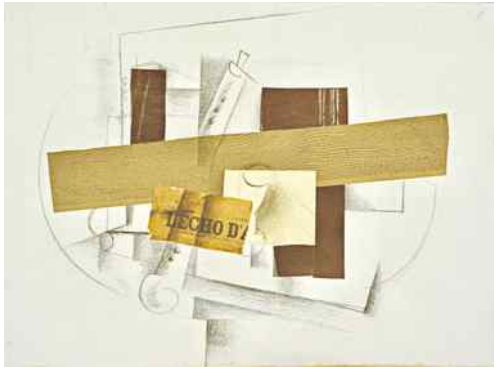
He later made another versions of *Guitar* in sheet metal.

The inspiration for *Guitar* is linked to Picasso's purchase of an African mask. The geometric representation of faces in masks was unfamiliar to western audiences at the time. The ***Grebo Mask*** is assembled from disparate fragments unrelated in form to the natural features they represent, or stand in for: a block protruding forward, painted with two stripes, becomes a mouth; the eyes are two pieces of dowel, similarly protruding – reversing (as does Picasso) the normal surface to space relationship. Like cartoon faces, it is the relative position of these 'signs' which makes the sculpture 'readable' as a head.

This revelation to Picasso meant that henceforth he could move elements around so that they could represent different things according to location. A circle could become an eye or a face, could become a breast or a nipple; or the negative space of a guitar's sound hole.

In November 1913 Apollinaire published in the journal *Les Soirées de Paris* photographs of **Picasso's** latest innovations: constructions which were a sort of hybrid between collage and sculpture, including ***Guitar and Bottle of Bass.*** As a result lots of people cancelled their subscriptions, appalled at being asked to take these assemblages seriously as art.

Constructed of pieces of wood, some painted, the work as shown in Apollinaire's photograph was later partially taken apart and reassembled in it present form.



Still Life with Tenora (1913) is a consummate example of **Braque's** *papier collé* (literally, pasted paper) style. The bold geometric fragments of contrasting types of paper interlaced with the figurative motifs drawn in charcoal evoke the structure of a fugue, in which two distinct melodies intertwine in a rich, sonorous composition, each acting as a foil to the other's reality.

The significance of this breakthrough cannot be overestimated because through this technique.... (Braque and Picasso, followed by other artists] declared the autonomy of the painted or drawn image, and radically severed it from any attempt at representation. The fragments attached to the picture's surface rarely followed the contours or silhouettes of the drawn motifs (glasses, bottles, or musical instruments), but, paradoxically, contradicted them. Thus, they countered the conventional devices of modelling and depth perspective, and drew attention to the absolute flatness of the two-dimensional plane. [MOMA description]

Braque includes, in ***Woman with Guitar*** of 1913, cut paper with imitation wood graining, fragments of lettering, oil paint and charcoal.

The painting depicts a young woman, possibly seated in a high backed chair, as denoted by the black areas to right and left. Multiple views of the face indicate that she is looking down with half closed eyes, concentrating on the playing of the guitar. Three series of parallel lines define the three elements of music making and unifies the theme: guitar strings, lines of music, and curved lines representing fingers.

In his ***Still Life with Compote and Glass*** (1914-15) painted during the winter of World War I **Picasso** has created a complex arrangement of different coloured shapes and faceted objects, which includes a wood-grained tabletop, swatches of wallpaper, spots of various shades, some food items, and segments of wood moulding.

He again plays off the abstract shapes with illusionistic elements, using fake marble surfaces, a shadow from a key or handle in the drawer of the table, pieces of fruit in cross-section and profile, and picture planes that are level against the surface or that sit at an angle and cast shadows.

Signs of festive eating and drinking — a compote piled with fruit and cakes, with a black, raffia-encased bottle of rum to its left; a peeled apple; a wineglass — are counteracted by splitting the newspaper banner, *Le Journal,* and turning it black. The adjoining crumpled napkin is painted an ominous leaden grey. The imitation cutouts with multi-coloured dots mimic faux-granite wallpapers, and, on the right, the truncated marble panel and wooden chair rail are only paper imitations, representations of the real thing. The apparent grandeur of the composition is manifestly a pretence.

Cézanne, in his ***Mardi gras (Pierrot et Arlequin)*** of 1888, is here identifying himself with Harlequin, the light hearted, comic and nimble character of the *Commedia dell'arte*. His son, Paul, modelled for Harlequin and his friend Louis Guillaume was Pierrot. It is suggested that Pierrot represents Emile Zola, his friend from his boyhood who in his recently published novel *L'Oevre*, about the life and suicide of a failed artist, Cézanne took to be a reference to himself, and therefore causing a rift in their friendship. Pierrot is shown here as sneaking up behind Harlequin and stealing his baton, used to change the scenery and the symbol of his comic genius.

Picasso also in a number of paintings characterised himself as the mischievous trickster Harlequin. The enclosed space and triangular format in **Picasso's *Arlequin (Harlequin)*** (1917) are evidently based on Cézanne's painting; however, the enclosed space and the flattened, squared off shapes make it look like a cardboard cut-out, or exhibition display stand. The green and white diamond ornamentation may be based on a wallpaper pattern.

Braque's *The Mandolin Player* (1917) is painted to look like a collage of cut out coloured shapes. Only one shape is speckled with white dots perhaps to simulate wallpaper. While the mandolin sits comfortably between the woman's hands, the grey curved lines on the left and the area outlined in black on the right suggests a curvaceous form of a female body, and at the same time may read as the body of a stringed musical instrument, such as a guitar, while the brown, dotted area perhaps doubles as her blouse (as signified by the button with four holes) and the neck of the guitar.

The head is a complex composition of lines and shapes, forming a combined frontal and profile view. A grey line in the form of an inverted T (echoed by the dotted 'blouse') shapes the nose, the right edge making the profile of the face. The mouth is depicted full on and in profile.

….and by other artists and graphic designers since.

The invention of a double image cubist head was employed by Braque and especially by Picasso in many of their subsequent works....

Braque was the more cerebral of the pair. His mature work is characterised by compositions expressing harmony and inviting contemplation.

The close toned subtle harmonies of ***Rum and Guitar*** (1918) is a feature of **Braque's** mature art. The composition presents an assemblage of flattened shapes, painted but having the appearance of cut paper, amongst which we can make out the bottle of rum, with a label, and the guitar and sheet of music. He includes two sections of simulated wood-grain creating the table on which his objects are found. Charcoal shading along the edges creates an impression of shallow relief.

Braque's early interest in still-lifes revived during the 1930s. The studio and its accoutrements became a theme which gave him a wide range of motives: easels, canvases and brushes, completed pictures and other paraphernalia; and gave him the opportunity to meditate on the artist's environment and practice.

Braque always had a tendency to fill his canvases, leaving little empty space, known as a *'horror vacui'.* In ***Studio with Black Vase*** (1938) **Braque** creates an overall mosaic effect.

> The Latin phrase 'horror vacui' describes **a fear of, or aversion to, empty space**. In physics, it is expressed in the axiom 'nature abhors a vacuum'; what surrounds a void will reflexively fill it. In art criticism, 'horror vacui' labels the apparent impulse to crowd every available space with detail or decoration.

During the period between the wars, Braque exhibited a freer, more relaxed style of Cubism, intensifying his colour and using a looser rendering of objects. However, he still remained committed to the cubist method of simultaneous perspective and fragmentation, producing luminous, other-worldly still life and figure compositions; in contrast to Picasso, who continuously reinvented his style of painting, producing both representational and cubist images.

> ***"What greatly attracted me – and it was the main line of advance for Cubism – was how to give material expression to this new space of which I had an inkling. So I began to paint chiefly still-lifes, because in nature there is a tactile, I would almost say a manual space... that was the earliest Cubist painting – the quest for space."*** – George Braque

Cubist Developments

In France, offshoots of Cubism developed, including Orphism, abstraction and later Purism. The impact of Cubism was far-reaching and wide-ranging. In France and other countries Futurism, Suprematism, Dada, Constructivism, Vorticism. De Stijl and Art Deco developed in response to Cubism.

GALLERY

Proto-Cubism

Picasso

Two Trees (1907)

Dryad (1908)

Woman's Head (1908)

Seated Woman (1909)

Braque

Houses at L'Estaque (1908)

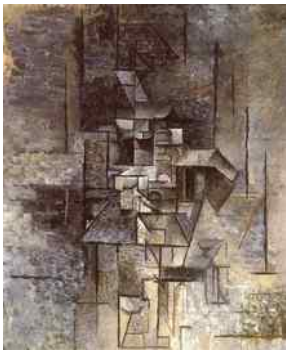
Plate and Fruit Dish (1908)

Little Harbour in Normandy (1909)

Glass on a Table (1909)

Analytical Cubism

Picasso



Woman Playing a Guitar (1910-11)

The Piano Accordionist (1911)

Still Life with a Bottle of Rum (1911)

Landscape at Cerét (1911)

Braque

Still Life with Mandola and Metronome (1909)

Portrait of a Woman (1910)

Violin and Candlestick (1910)

Rooftops at Cerét (1911)

Synthetic Cubism

Picasso

Bottle, Clarinette, Violin, Newspaper and Glass (1913)

Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper (1913)

Composition with Guitar (1914)

Bottle of Anis del Mono (1916)

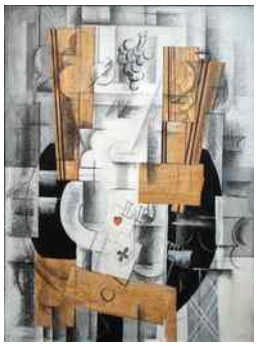
Still-life with Door, Guitar and Bottles (1916)

Harlequin with Violin (1918)

Harlequin Playing a Guitar (1918)

Three Musicians (1921)

Braque



Fruit Dish with Ace of Clubs (1913)

Violin and Glass (1914)

Man With a Guitar (1914)

Guitar and Glass (1917)

The Round Table (1929)

Guéridon (1935)

Still-Life with Guitar I (Red Tablecloth) (1936)

The Billiard Table (1942-52)