

CUBISM!

1907 – c. 1940

AVI 4M1

Cubism was the second major Modernist Art movement after Expressionism and proved to be revolutionary and enduring in influence. **The early Cubists fully discarded the urge to copy the real world that had dominated Western Art since the Renaissance. Instead they started with an object from which they abstracted its inherent geometric shapes.**

Analytic Cubism

Inspired and influenced by the artwork of the Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cezanne and the traditional art of Polynesia and Africa, **Pablo Picasso** and **George Braque** began in 1907 to try new things:



- * **faceting**; the breaking down of surfaces into simplified geometric, flat divisions. This became known as faceting because of its similarity to the faceted surface of a diamond.
- * **simultaneity**; depicting an object from more than one point of view at the same time. The background became an integral part of the whole design and thus ceased to be a background. Objects were broken apart, reorganized, overlapped, made transparent and layered in shallow space.
- * **neutral colour**; hues were purposely neutral – just browns and grays at first – so as to not distract the eye from the design.
- * **collage**; cut out bits from newspapers and other sources began to be used in the compositions. Now that there was no desire to *copy* the world, they were free to actually use the real world in their artwork!

These developments perfectly embodied **spirit of the time** - one of faith in industrial progress and a desire to leave behind the old-fashioned ways of the past. Cubism was exciting, radical and truly modern and caught the imagination of young modernist artists all over Europe:

- By 1909 a group of Italian artists calling themselves the **Futurists**, in love with the speed and violence of the modern world, adopted Cubist ideas to express their Fascist doctrines (Boccioni, Balla);
- By 1912 dozens of artists in France were doing their own, more aesthetically-driven versions (most notably Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Gris, Chagall and Leger);
- By 1913 communist Russian artists adopted cubist ideas as the ideal visual expression of the Revolution. It was, before Stalin took over, the official artistic style of post-revolutionary Russia (Tatlin, Malevitch);
- By 1913 even some Americans had taken up the style (Demuth, Stella).

Synthetic Cubism

As the style evolved, artworks became more open to experimentation and less tied to the object being depicted. Later Cubism is referred to as “Synthetic” because artists began to synthesize invented elements with observed objects, incorporating **invented patterns and designs** and **bright colours**.



Even though the subject matter of cubist art continued to be traditional (people, still life scenes, etc.) the approach was fresh and new. This movement sent Western art into new directions where abstract inventions of the artist's mind could be valued as artistic statements without needing to copy the visible world.

Every subsequent abstract art movement owes some debt to Cubism. That is Cubism's lasting influence.