

THE HISTORY OF CUBISM

Cubism was a 20th century art movement that revolutionized European painting and sculpture, and inspired related movements in music and literature. It initially developed as a short but highly significant art movement from around 1907 until 1914 in France. In cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form — instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context. Often the surfaces intersect at seemingly random angles presenting no coherent sense of depth. The background and object planes interpenetrate one another to create the ambiguous shallow space characteristic of cubism.

Some believe that the roots of cubism are to be found in the two distinct tendencies of Paul Cézanne's later work: firstly to break the painted surface into small multifaceted areas of paint, thereby emphasizing the plural viewpoint given by binocular vision, and secondly his interest in the simplification of natural forms into cylinders, spheres, and cones.

The cubists went farther than Cézanne; they represented all the surfaces of depicted objects in a single picture plane as if the objects had had all their faces visible at the same time, in the same plane. This new kind of depiction revolutionized the way in which objects could be visualized in painting and art.

The invention of Cubism was a joint effort between Picasso and Braque, then residents of Montmartre, Paris. These artists were the movement's main innovators. A later active participant was the Spaniard Juan Gris. After meeting in 1907 Braque and Picasso in particular began working on the development of Cubism in 1908 and worked closely together until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The movement spread quickly throughout Paris and Europe.

French art critic Louis Vauxcelles first used the term "cubism", or "bizarre cubiques", in 1908 after seeing a picture by Braque. He described it as 'full of little cubes', after which the term quickly gained wide use although the two creators did not initially adopt it. Art historian 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 colored canvas."

Cubism was taken up by many artists in Montparnasse and promoted by art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, becoming popular so quickly that by 1911 critics were referring to a "cubist school" of artists. However, many of the artists who thought of themselves as cubists went in directions quite different from Braque and Picasso. The Puteaux Group was a significant offshoot of the Cubist movement, and included artists like Guillaume Apollinaire, Robert Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, his brother Jacques Villon, and Fernand Léger.

In 1913 the United States was exposed to cubism and modern European art when Jacques Villon exhibited seven important and large drypoints at the famous Armory Show in New York City. Braque and Picasso themselves went through several distinct phases before 1920, and some of these works had been seen in New York prior to the Armory Show, at Alfred Stieglitz's "291" gallery.

Czech artists who realized the epochal significance of cubism of Picasso and Braque attempted to extract its components for their own work in all branches of artistic creativity - especially painting and architecture. This developed into so-called Czech Cubism which was an avant-garde art movement of Czech proponents of cubism active mostly in Prague from 1910 to 1914.

Georges Braque

Georges Braque was born in Argenteuil-sur-Seine, France. He grew up in Le Havre and trained to be a house painter and decorator as his father and grandfather were, but he also studied painting in the evenings at the École des Beaux-Arts in Le Havre from about 1897 to 1899.

He apprenticed in Paris under a decorator and was awarded his certificate in 1902. The following year he attended the Académie Humbert, also in Paris, and painted there until 1904. It was here that he met Marie Laurencin and Francis Picabia.

Fauvism

His earliest works were impressionistic, but after seeing the work exhibited by the Fauves in 1905 Braque adopted a Fauvist style. The Fauves, a group that included Henri Matisse and Andre Derain among others, used brilliant colors and loose structures of forms to capture the most intense emotional response. Braque worked most closely with the artists Raoul Dufy and Othon Friesz, who shared Braque's hometown of Le Havre, to develop a somewhat more subdued Fauvist style. In 1906, Braque traveled with Friesz to L'Estaque, to Antwerp, and home to Le Havre to paint.

In May 1907, Braque successfully exhibited works in the Fauve style in the Salon des Indépendants. The same year, Braque's style began a slow evolution as he came under the strong influence of Paul Cézanne, who died in 1906, and whose works were exhibited in Paris for the first time in September 1907.

Cubism

Braque's paintings of 1908–1913 began to reflect 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, appearing to question the most standard of artistic conventions. In his village scenes, for example, Braque frequently reduced an architectural structure to a geometric form approximating a cube, yet rendered its shading so that it looked both flat and three-dimensional. In this way Braque called attention to the very nature of visual illusion and artistic representation. Beginning in 1909, Braque began to work closely with Pablo Picasso who had been developing a similar approach to painting. In 1914 when Braque enlisted in the French Army, leaving Paris to fight in the First World War.

Later work

Braque was severely wounded in the war, and when he resumed his artistic career in 1917 he moved away from the harsher abstraction of cubism. Working alone, he developed a more personal style, characterized by brilliant color and textured surfaces and—following his move to the Normandy seacoast—the reappearance of the human figure. He painted many still life subjects during this time, maintaining his emphasis on structure. During his recovery he became a close friend of the cubist artist Juan Gris.

He continued to work throughout the remainder of his life, producing a considerable number of distinguished paintings, graphics, and sculptures, all imbued with a pervasive contemplative quality. He died August 31, 1963, in Paris.



Woman with a guitar, painted 1913, in the Musée Nationale d' Art Moderne



Houses at L'Estaque
L'Estaque, [August] 1908
Oil on canvas



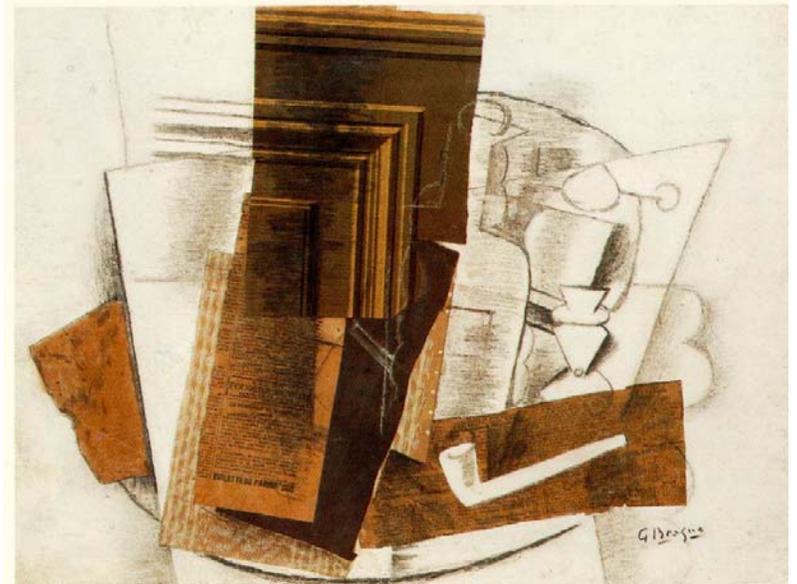
Musical Instruments
[Paris, autumn 1908]
Oil on canvas



Violin and Pitcher
Paris, [early 1910]
Oil on canvas



The Fruitdish
1912
Oil and sand on canvas



Bottle, Newspaper, Pipe, and Glass
1913
Charcoal and various papers pasted on paper



Glass, Carafe and Newspapers
1914
Pasted papers, chalk and charcoal on cardboard



Interior with Palette
1942
Oil on canvas