



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

This presentation uses AI tools including Anthropic's Claude, ElevenLabs, and HeyGen. The art-historical content and editorial judgement remain my own.

- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Claude, Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



41-01 CUBISM ABSTRACTION AND THE BRITISH AVANT GARDE

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Georges Braque
*Clarinet and Bottle of
Rum on a Mantelpiece*
1911
Tate, London

This talk traces the revolution that transformed Western art in the early twentieth century. We begin with Monet's industrial paintings, then move through Cubism — examining Braque, Picasso, and Duchamp — before turning to pure abstraction in Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky. From there we cross to Britain, where Roger Fry's landmark 1910 exhibition cracked open the established order, and a generation of painters — Bomberg, Nevinson, Nash, Gertler, and Spencer — remade British art in the aftermath.



Claude Monet (1840-1926)
The Gare St-Lazare
1877
54.3 x 73.6 cm
National Gallery, London

Claude Monet (1840-1926), The Gare St-Lazare, 1877, 54.3 x 73.6 cm, National Gallery, London

We begin this talk with we reminder that I have traced the arc from Constable and Turner through to Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, and it's worth pausing on one question those movements leave open: if the modern world moves faster than any previous era, how do you make a painting that **feels** like that?

Monet's answer, most vividly in the **Gare Saint-Lazare** series of **1877**, was to make the style itself carry the meaning. He rented a studio close to the station and exhibited seven canvases of it in the Third Impressionist Exhibition that April. What he painted was smoke, steam, iron and glass — the industrial sublime — but the method matched the subject: swift, broken brushstrokes that refuse to resolve into solid form, light that shifts before you can fix it. The National Gallery notes that the drifting engine smoke functions exactly as clouds do in a landscape, which tells us something important: Monet was not abandoning tradition but transforming it from within. This is the deeper point about **Impressionism** as a movement. Its sketchy,

flickering surfaces are not technical shorthand — they are an argument. The feeling of dislocation and excitement those surfaces produce in a viewer mirrors precisely the experience of living through **modernity** itself. That alignment of form and meaning is what the avant-garde after Monet inherited and pushed much further.

Notes

Last week we briefly considered the development of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Before continuing I would like to remind you of the innovation of Impressionism. Although, as we saw, it had precursors, such as John Constable and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), it was a new way of seeing the world.

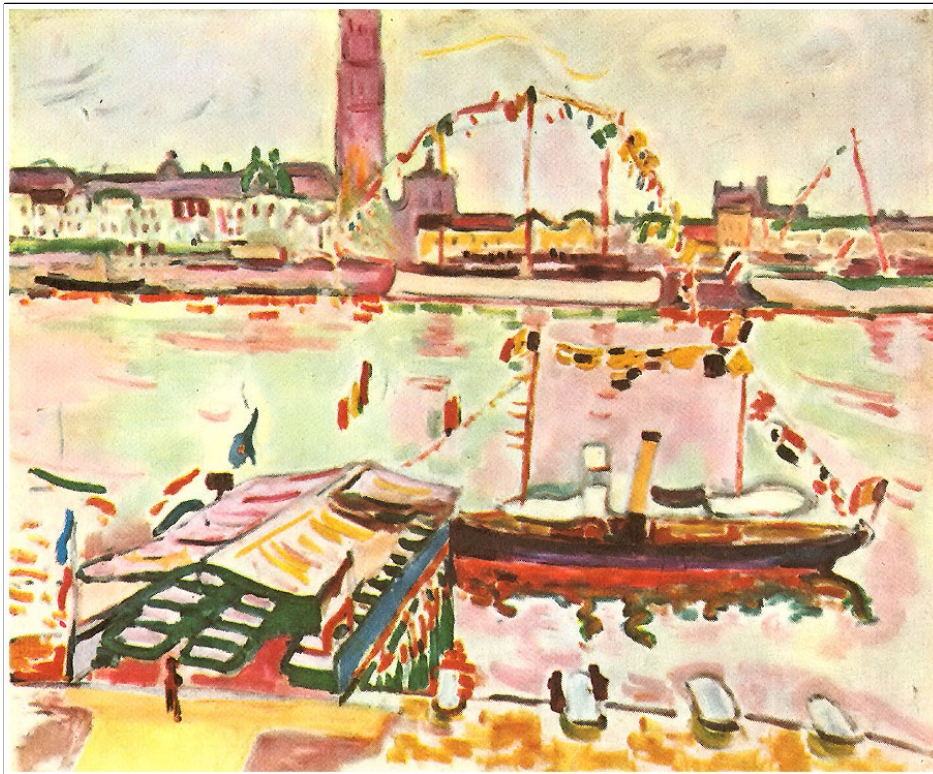
Monet captures the essence of the modern world. Even today, modernity is associated with rapid change, technological marvels, a disconnect between the young and the old, difficulty in keeping up with changes and excitement at the pace of change and what wonders will appear next. How do we translate that feeling of fear and excitement into paint? To represent the world in the same way it has been painted for centuries seems to miss the point but how else can it be done?

When we describe the style of Monet's painting many of the concepts coincide with the impact of the modern world on our lives. The style is new, different, sketchy, difficult to grasp, fleeting yet it is bright and exciting. Modern paintings often give rise to a feeling of unease or dislocation, the same feeling that is brought about by constant change. If we think of a modern change, such as the use of social media then many of the same words are used to describe it. In other words Monet has found a new style that itself embodies the very essence of modernity.

Notes

National Gallery on The Gare St-Lazare, "After his return to France from London, Monet lived from 1871-78 at Argenteuil, on the Seine near Paris. In January 1877 he rented a small flat and a studio near the Gare St-Lazare, and in the Third Impressionist exhibition which opened in April of that year, he exhibited seven canvases of the railway station. This painting is one of four surviving canvases representing the interior of the station. Trains and railways had been depicted in earlier Impressionist works (and by Turner in his Rain,

Steam and Speed), but were not generally regarded as aesthetically palatable subjects. Monet's exceptional views of the Gare St-Lazare resemble interior landscapes, with smoke from the engines creating the same effect as clouds in the sky. Swift brushstrokes indicate the gleaming engines to the right and the crowd of passengers on the platform."



Georges Braque (1882-1963)
Antwerp Harbour
1905
Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

Georges Braque (1882-1963), Antwerp Harbour, 1905, Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

That alignment of form and meaning — Impressionism as argument rather than style — is precisely what the generation working in Paris after **1900** inherited and then dismantled entirely. **Georges Braque** came to painting through a thoroughly working-class route: his father and grandfather were both house painters and decorators, and Braque trained in that trade before studying painting in evening classes and arriving at a Paris atelier in **1904**. His earliest work was Impressionist, but the **1905 Salon d'Automne** changed his direction sharply. That was the exhibition where Louis Vauxcelles famously coined the term **Fauves** — wild beasts — for the group around **Henri Matisse** and **André Derain**, who were using colour not to describe the visible world but to express an emotional state. Braque adopted their approach almost immediately. Then, in September **1907**, the same Salon d'Automne mounted a retrospective of **Paul Cézanne**, who had died the previous year. Its impact on the Parisian avant-garde was immediate and decisive. Where the Fauves had liberated colour, Cézanne had done

something structurally more radical: he had shown that a painting could analyse form rather than simply record it. For Braque, that was the opening through which **Cubism** would emerge.

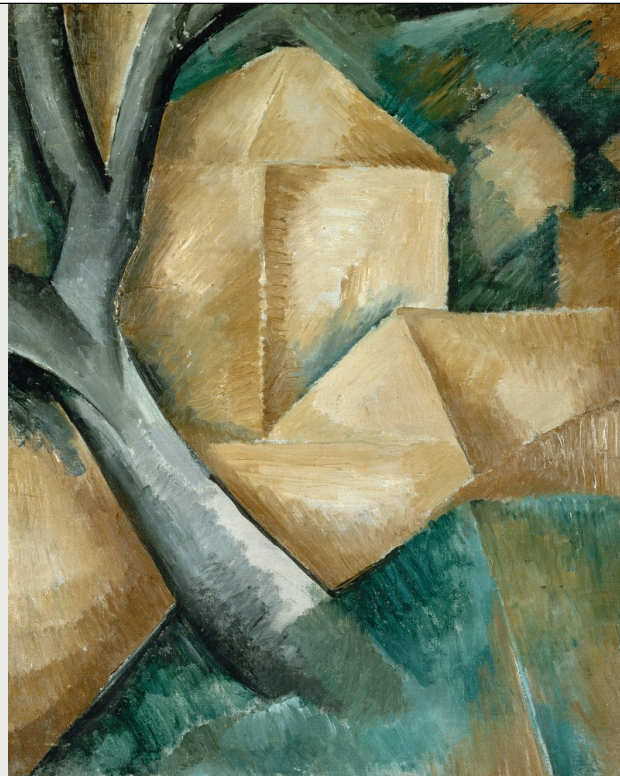
Notes

The period from 1900 to 1914 was a time of excitement and experimentation among artists in Paris.

Braque trained as a house painter and decorator like his father and grandfather but he studied painting in the evenings before travelling to Paris and entering an atelier in 1904.

His early work was impressionist but after seeing the Fauves exhibit in 1905 he adopted their style. The Fauves were a group that included Henri Matisse and André Derain and they used brilliant colours to represent their emotional response rather than to depict colours realistically.

In 1907 he exhibited paintings in the Fauvre style but was influenced by the work of Paul Cézanne who had died the year before and whose works were exhibited in Paris for the first time in September 1907. This exhibition at the Salon d'Automne had an immediate and dramatic influence on the avant-garde artists of Paris, and led to Cubism.



Georges Braque (1882-1963)

Maisons et arbre (Houses at l'Estaque)

1908

40.5 x 32.5 cm

Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Lille

Georges Braque (1882-1963), *Maisons et arbre (Houses at l'Estaque)*, 1908, 40.5 x 32.5 cm, Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Lille

That retrospective of Cézanne, then, was not just an inspiration — it was the structural blueprint for what came next. **Georges Braque** visited **l'Estaque**, a small fishing village west of Marseille, in **1908**, and the paintings he made there show exactly what that blueprint produced. In **Houses at l'Estaque**, buildings are reduced to interlocking cubes, shaded in a way that makes them read simultaneously as flat and three-dimensional. The image is not fragmented by accident — it is fragmented by argument. Braque was dismantling the single-point perspective that European painting had taken for granted since the **Renaissance**, replacing it with what we now call simultaneous perspective: showing the same object from multiple viewpoints at once. When **Henri Matisse** saw these l'Estaque paintings at the **1908 Salon d'Automne**, he reportedly dismissed them as nothing but little cubes — and in doing so accidentally gave **Cubism** its name, the same accidental christening that produced the word Fauves three years earlier. From **1909** onward, Braque worked so

closely with **Pablo Picasso** that the two men's canvases became genuinely indistinguishable. Art historian **John Richardson** was direct on this point: Braque's contribution to what became **Analytic Cubism** has been systematically underestimated simply because Picasso's celebrity consumed the history around him.

Notes

Cubism was developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque working together and inspired by Paul Cezanne and the Post Impressionists.

Georges Braque was one of the leading innovators and he made his name as a Fauvist in 1906 before developing Cubism with Picasso from about 1908 onwards. The work of Braque and Picasso was indistinguishable for a period yet Braque's role is often overlooked because of Picasso's fame.

In 1908, Braque visited l'Estaque, a small French fishing village just west of Marseille, and painted many works, such as this one, that reflected his new interest in geometry and simultaneous perspective (seeing the same object from different points of view at the same time). He studied the ways that painters represent light and perspective and changed the most basic conventions that had been used since the Renaissance. For example, in *Houses at l'Estaque* we can see how he simplified a building to a cube and shaded it to look both flat and three-dimensional at the same time, so fragmenting the image.

Wikipedia,

Beginning in 1909, Braque began to work closely with Pablo Picasso who had been developing a similar proto-Cubist style of painting. At the time, Pablo Picasso was influenced by Gauguin, Cézanne, African masks and Iberian sculpture while Braque was interested mainly in developing Cézanne's ideas of multiple perspectives. "A comparison of the works of Picasso and Braque during 1908 reveals that the effect of his encounter with Picasso was more to accelerate and intensify Braque's exploration of Cézanne's ideas, rather than to divert his thinking in any essential way." Braque's essential subject is the ordinary objects he has known practically forever. Picasso celebrates animation, while Braque celebrates contemplation. Thus, the invention of Cubism was a joint effort between Picasso and Braque, then residents of Montmartre, Paris. These artists were the style's main innovators. After

meeting in October or November 1907, Braque and Picasso, in particular, began working on the development of Cubism in 1908. Both artists produced paintings of monochromatic colour and complex patterns of faceted form, now termed Analytic Cubism.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Braque

Georges Braque (1882–1963)
Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece
1911
81 x 60 cm
Tate, London



Georges Braque (1882–1963), *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece*, 1911, 81 x 60 cm, Tate, London

Carrying forward the point about Picasso's celebrity consuming the history around him, this painting makes the strongest possible case for taking Braque on his own terms. **Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece**, painted in **1911**, looks abstract at first glance, but the title is a deliberate key. Look carefully and the clarinet emerges, running across the centre, its bell turned to face us end-on even as the instrument's body reads left to right — two viewpoints held simultaneously in a single image. Fragments of letters spell out VALSE, meaning waltz, and RHU, the opening of the French word for rum, anchoring the composition to a specific domestic scene. At the base, a carved corbel scroll confirms the mantelpiece itself. Braque explained the logic directly: fragmentation, he said, was "a way of getting closest to the object." What looks like destruction is actually accumulation — not one view, but the layered memory of many. He stripped colour back to ochres and greys precisely to force attention onto that structure of form and space. One detail cuts against the whole system:

just right of centre, a nail is painted with complete conventional shadow, as though genuinely piercing the canvas. It is a witticism, but also a philosophical statement — **illusionism** is a choice, not a law, and **Analytic Cubism** makes that choice visible by placing the two systems side by side.

Notes

Should I also cover Fernand Léger, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Juan Gris, Francis Picabia, Robert Delaunay and Marcel Duchamp?

This is *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece* by Georges Braque and it was painted in 1911.

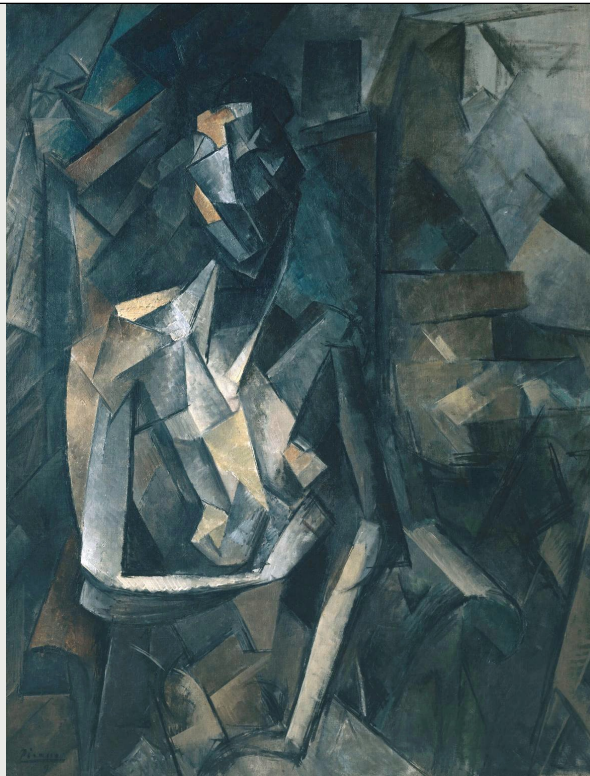
At first it looks abstract but the title gives us a clue. If we look carefully we can make out certain objects. Across the centre is something that could be a clarinet. We can see words, such as 'VALSE', meaning Waltz, and on a grey square the letters 'RHU', the beginning of the French word for rum over what could be the shape of a bottle. At the bottom is a scroll of the type that forms a corbel that you often get below a mantelpiece which taken together gives us the title, *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece*. Only parts of the various objects are shown and some parts are shown at different angles from others. For example, although the clarinet appears to go from right to left its bell is shown end on. The bottle of rum has three 'shoulders' and hidden in the centre left is a cup that might be on a table or a mantelpiece.

So why did the artist, Georges Braque, represent the objects in this way? Conventionally, since the Renaissance, artists have represented objects using the rules of perspective and shown them as if seen from a single position. This is where the artist is assumed to have stood and where the artist forces the viewer to view the scene. However, as we move around we see objects from different views and we retain memories of these different views that we combine to form our complete understanding of the form of an object. Braque is therefore representing his different views and different memories of a scene. He restricted the number of colours to concentrate our attention on the forms and their interaction. Braque described, 'objects shattered into fragments... [as] a way of getting closest to the object... Fragmentation helped me to establish space and movement in space'.

Between about 1908 and 1912 Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque created this new way of painting that corresponds more closely to the way we see the

world over time. Braque recalled 'We were like mountain-climbers roped together' as they struggled to break free from the conventions of the past. This new style they created is called Cubism. There were two stages, the first stage, produced pieces like this one and is called 'Analytical Cubism' and the second is called 'Synthetic Cubism'.

There is one anomaly in the painting that stands out once you have spotted it. Just right of centre about one third down from the top is a nail that has been painted conventionally and it casts a shadow across the canvas as if it were nailed through the surface. Perhaps, it is a witticism, Braque is showing us the nail on which to hang the picture but he painted a nail and its shadow on other works so it may be more significant. Perhaps, he is reminding us that a painting is an illusion and the artist can mix a conventional three-dimensional representation with these flat hints of parts of objects seen from different angles.



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
Figure dans un Fauteuil (Woman in an Armchair, Seated Nude, Femme nue assise)
1909-10
92.1 x 73 cm
Tate, London

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Figure dans un Fauteuil (Woman in an Armchair, Seated Nude, Femme nue assise)*, 1909-10, 92.1 x 73 cm, Tate, London

Picasso takes the same philosophical freedom and uses it for something far more unsettling. **Seated Nude**, painted in **1909 to 1910**, is often read alongside Braque's work as proof of the two men's shared visual language, but the emotional register here is quite different. Where Braque's fragmentation feels analytical and even playful, Picasso turns it towards a kind of estrangement. The woman has been disaggregated into interlocking facets — a plane suggesting a bicep, another hinting at a collarbone — but no single plane resolves into a definitive body part. Picasso himself described this relationship to reality as being like a perfume: it pervades the picture, but, in his words, "it's not a reality you can take in your hands." The tonal restraint is deliberate. By suppressing colour down to ochres and cool greys, Picasso forces all attention onto volume and interval. Look carefully and a seated figure becomes legible — right arm folded across the body, left arm hanging — posed in the half-length format

that reaches straight back through **Ingres** to the Italian Renaissance. **Analytic Cubism** does not reject tradition; it dismantles and reassembles it, and the humanity of the sitter flickers in and out of those assembled planes.

Notes

In the early years of Cubism, Picasso, like Braque, constructed his images using small facets, or geometric planes, and represented objects from different viewpoints. Many critics of the period believed the artist aimed to represent reality in a new, almost scientific manner. However, as this atmospheric painting shows, Picasso could use this technique for expressive ends. Here, the woman has been all but stripped of her humanity and appears strangely mechanistic. At the same time, Picasso demonstrates his awareness of tradition in her pose and in the play of light within the picture.

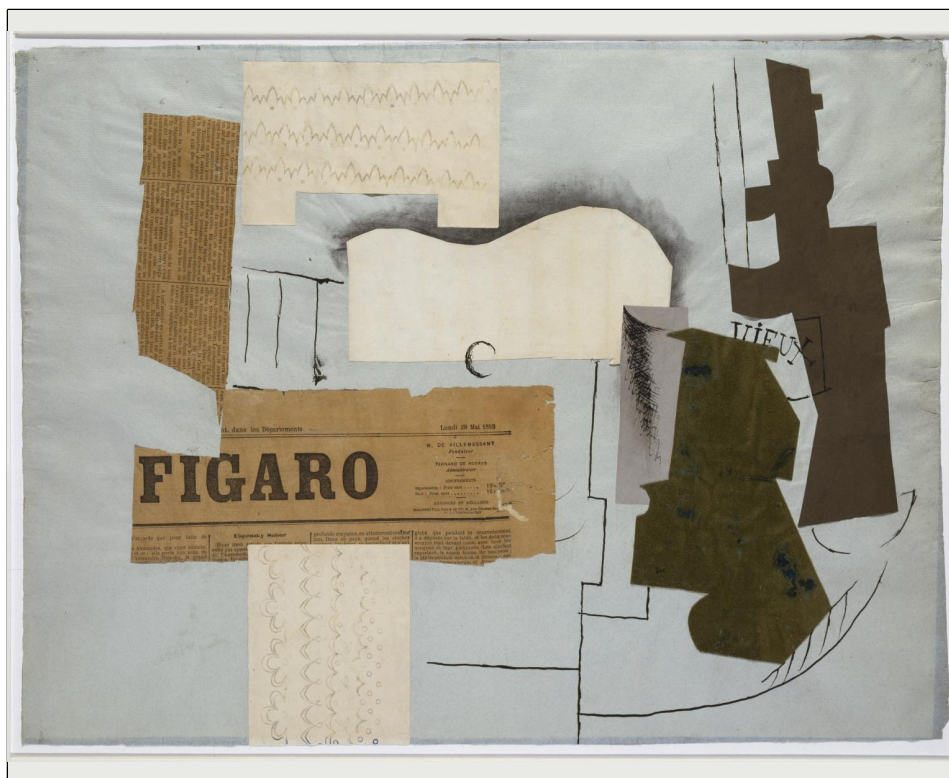
Although these paintings are often described as conveying reality Picasso described it as like a perfume. It is as if reality pervades the picture but 'it's not a reality you can take in your hands'. Like a scent it is everywhere but we don't know where it comes from. Individual planes correspond in some way with features of the body but the relationship is never one-to-one but suggestive. One plane might suggest a bicep, another a collar bone or a breast but the exact correspondence eludes us.

Look carefully and you can see a woman with her right arm across her body and her left arm hanging down. There are no bright colours and the tonal range is low which focuses our attention on the volumes, shapes and spaces. Although the various viewpoints cannot be disentangled the picture gives the impression of a woman whose appearance has been disassociated into shapes and flat surfaces placed at different angles. This is sometimes described as examining the woman from different view points. This is an early Cubist work and although the approach is entirely new Picasso references traditional fine art concepts such as a half-length female figure lit from the top left.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-seated-nude-n05904>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-seated-nude-n05904/text-catalogue-entry>



Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
***Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar
 and Newspaper***
 1913
 printed papers and ink on paper
 46.7 x 62.5 cm
 Tate, London

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper*, 1913, 46.7 x 62.5 cm, Tate, London

The humanity flickering in those assembled planes points directly to a broader theoretical shift that underpinned everything Picasso and Braque were doing. As early as **1890**, the French painter and theorist **Maurice Denis** articulated what would become a founding principle of modernist art: "a painting — before becoming a war horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote or other — is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order." The statement sounds simple, but its implications were radical. The Renaissance ambition to fool the eye into believing it gazed through a window onto three-dimensional space was increasingly left to photography. Painting was to be understood on its own terms. Historians now map Cubism across two broad phases. **Analytic Cubism**, running roughly **1908 to 1912**, broke the image into interlocking geometric fragments — exactly what we saw in the *Seated Nude*. **Synthetic Cubism**, from **1912 to 1914**, reversed the logic: rather than dismantling a form, it built one up from flat planes, patterned paper, and collaged newspaper.

Picasso's **papier collés** are the clearest examples. **Jean Metzinger**, painter, poet, and the movement's most rigorous theorist, insisted that painting was a language with its own syntax. The flat surface was not a limitation — it was the foundation.

Notes

In the 1890s the artist Maurice Denis pointed out that 'a painting – before becoming a war horse, a nude woman or some anecdote or other – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order'. Denis later became a leading theorist of Modernism. The quotation may seem trite but the emphasis on drawing attention to the work as a flat surface covered in coloured pigments or other materials would form the basis of most modern art. The 'trick' of creating an image that fools the eye into believing it is a looking at window into a three-dimensional world was regarded as outmoded and the proper province of photography. Increasingly artists wanted to convey their personal feelings ('expressionism') and explore the potential of shapes and lines not drawn from nature ('abstraction').

Picasso and Braque started to take their work in new directions. It became flatter and they used collage and section of newspapers. Historians now divide Cubism into two stage, the first was Analytical Cubism (1908-1912) and the second Synthetic Cubism (1912-14). Analytical Cubism was concerned with breaking down the image into geometric shapes while Synthetic Cubism built up structures from areas of colour or cut-out flat surfaces. The second stage is sometimes called Crystal Cubism although some historians use this term for a third stage between 1915 and 1920 with a strong emphasis on flat overlapping surface areas. This range of styles of painting and sculpture was especially significant between 1917 and 1920 (also referred to as the Crystal Period, classical Cubism, pure Cubism, advanced Cubism, late Cubism, synthetic Cubism, or the second phase of Cubism).

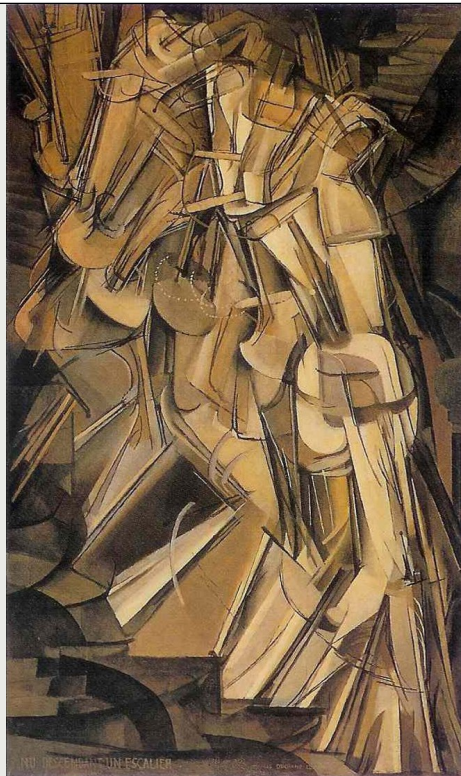
Synthetic Cubism is characterised by flatter forms, simpler shapes and brighter colours. They started adding textures and patterns to their paintings, experimenting with collage using newspaper print and patterned paper. Analytical Cubism was about breaking down an object (like a bottle) viewpoint-by-viewpoint, into a fragmentary image; whereas synthetic cubism was about flattening out the image and sweeping away the last traces of allusion to three-dimensional space. The flat surface became the starting

point for a revaluation of the fundamental principles of painting.
Picasso's papier collés are a good example of Synthetic Cubism.

"If painting was an end in itself it would enter into the category of the minor arts which appeal only to physical pleasure... No. Painting is a language—and it has its syntax and its laws. To shake up that framework a bit to give more strength or life to what you want to say, that isn't just a right, it's a duty; but you must never lose sight of the End. The End, however, isn't the subject, nor the object, nor even the picture—the End, it is the idea." (Jean Metzinger, 26 July 1916)

Jean Metzinger (1883-1956) was a French painter, theorist, critic and poet who was widely influential in theorizing about Cubism.

Another vigorous supporter of Cubism was the art dealer and collector Léonce Rosenberg. By the end of 1918—filling in the vacuum left in the wake of D. H. Kahnweiler's (1884-1979) imposed exile—Rosenberg purchased works by almost all of the Cubists. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 not only ruptured the Cubist experiments in art but resulted in Kahnweiler, of German origin, being considered by the French as an alien; and being forced to live in exile in Switzerland.



Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)
Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2
1912
147 x 89.2 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912, 147 x 89.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Metzinger's insistence on painting as a language with its own syntax found an extreme test case in **1912**, when **Marcel Duchamp** completed **Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2**. The canvas pushes both Analytic Cubism's fragmentation and the **Futurists'** obsession with movement into a single churning image — successive positions of a figure overlaid so that motion itself becomes the subject. **Eadweard Muybridge's** sequential photographs of a naked woman descending stairs, published in **Animal Locomotion** in **1887**, offered a clear precedent, though Duchamp was synthesising, not copying. The painting's public debut was fractious. The hanging committee of the **Salon des Indépendants** rejected it — nudes reclined, they did not descend staircases — and Duchamp never forgave his two brothers who sat on that committee. The real explosion came at the **1913 Armory Show** in New York. A critic described it as "an explosion in a shingle factory." **American Art News** offered ten dollars to any reader who could find the woman. President **Theodore Roosevelt** compared it

to his Navajo bathroom rug. Yet Duchamp was delighted. The scandal made his name in America and convinced him to emigrate to New York in **1915**, where his influence on the avant-garde would prove enormous.

Notes

Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2 (French: Nu descendant un escalier n° 2) was painted in 1912 by Marcel Duchamp. The work is widely regarded as a Modernist classic and has become one of the most famous of its time.

In March 1912 his two brother and other members of the hanging committee of the Salon des Indépendants exhibition in Paris rejected the work on the grounds that nudes always reclined, they never descended a staircase. In October it was exhibited but Duchamp never forgave his brothers.

The work was exhibited in Barcelona in 1912 and subsequently caused a huge stir during its exhibition at the 1913 Armory Show (the International Exhibition of Modern Art held at the National Guard 69th Regiment Armory) in New York.

Most people could not see the fragmented person in the painting and President Theodore Roosevelt thought the image was purely decorative and that a random title had been attached. He compared it with the decorative Navajo rug in his bathroom which he thought would fit the title 'Naked Man Going Down Stairs' just as well. It is not clear why he regarded it as a naked man and why the figures in the cartoon are men. Perhaps the idea of walking down stairs was associated more with naked men than with naked women.

Duchamp did later say that he had seen moving images that influenced him, like this one, but he did not copy them. He was also influenced by Futurism but was never a Futurist. This was also a time when the motion picture was being shown for the first time and the idea of movement and speed was in the air. Eadweard Muybridge's book Animal Locomotion, of 1887 included a sequence of twenty-four images of a naked woman descending a flight of stairs and this was a possible source for the work.

The art critic for the New York Times wrote that the work resembled "an explosion in a shingle factory," and cartoonists satirized the piece. The American Art News offered a ten dollar reward to the first reader who could "find the lady" within the jumble of interlocking planes and jagged lines and it spawned dozens of parodies in the years that followed. Duchamp was delighted by all the publicity and it encouraged him to move to New York

two years later. The painting made his name in New York and although it was satirized the mood of America was very receptive to new ideas. America saw itself as catching up and passing the new art of Europe.

Notes

Henri-Robert-Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) grew up in Normandy and art filled the house. His grandfather was an artist and two of his brothers and his sister became artists. He was not an outstanding student at school but he won two mathematics prizes and two prizes for art. He studied art in Paris in 1904-05 but preferred billiards and drawing and selling cartoons. The cartoons used visual and verbal puns and this playing with words and images engaged his imagination for the rest of his life.

He was a French, later naturalized American painter, sculptor, chess player and writer whose work is associated with Cubism, conceptual art and Dada.

Duchamp is commonly regarded, along with Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, as one of the three artists who helped to define the revolutionary developments in the plastic arts in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Duchamp has had an immense impact on twentieth-century and twenty first-century art. By World War I, he had rejected the work of many of his fellow artists (like Henri Matisse) as "retinal" art, intended only to please the eye. Instead, Duchamp wanted to put art back in the service of the mind.

Duchamp's first work to provoke significant controversy was *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (Nu descendant un escalier n° 2) (1912). The painting depicts the mechanistic motion of a nude, with superimposed facets, similar to motion pictures. It shows elements of both the fragmentation and synthesis of the Cubists, and the movement and dynamism of the Futurists. He later submitted the painting to the 1913 Armory Show in New York City. In addition to displaying works of American artists, this show was the first major exhibition of modern trends coming out of Paris, encompassing experimental styles of the European avant-garde, including Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism. American show-goers, accustomed to realistic art, were scandalized, and the *Nude* was at the centre of much of the controversy. However, cultured Americans in New York wanted to lead the world in modern art and Duchamp had a significant impact.

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_Descending_a_Staircase,_No._2

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)
1907
243.9 × 233.7 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)*, 1907, 243.9 × 233.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Duchamp's scandalous nude leads us back to Paris, and to the painting that made such experiments conceivable in the first place. **Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)**, completed by Picasso in 1907, is the work that cleared the ground for everything that followed. Five nude figures from a Barcelona brothel confront the viewer with angular, fractured bodies — not passive or idealised, but aggressive and destabilising. The two figures on the right wear faces that draw directly on **African masks**, which Picasso had encountered at the Trocadéro ethnographic museum. The rejection of Western perspective, the compressed shallow space, the jagged intersecting planes — these mark a decisive break. The art historian **Rosalind Krauss** describes the painting's effect as a "trauma of the gaze," and that phrase is exact. The viewer has stepped into the position of the sailor and medical student visible in the earliest preparatory sketches, and the painting becomes a meditation on danger rather than desire. Picasso himself called it an exorcism, and his biographer **John Richardson** wrote that for Picasso it

was "a rite of passage." The shock was immediate even among allies — **Matisse** called it a bad joke, and **Braque** was repelled. Yet both studied it obsessively, and within a year Braque and Picasso were roped together, as Braque put it, climbing the same mountain.

Notes

Like Monet, Picasso also sought radical solutions to the opportunities surrounding him in a fast changing modern world. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* is one of the most influential paintings of the twentieth century and its extreme distortions of the conventional representation of the world banished the artist's demons and cleared the way for Cubism. Later, these demons would return and require further exorcism. For the next decade, however, Picasso would feel as free and creative and 'as overworked' as God." The creation of new styles of painting can therefore enable the artist to break free from conventions that can inhibit and restrict their ability to represent the modern world in all its complexity and freshness.

Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.) shows five nude prostitutes from a brothel in Barcelona. None of the figures is conventionally feminine; they are angular, confrontational and menacing. The two figures on the right have heads that look like African masks. The rejection of perspective and the embracing of primitivism marks a break from traditional European art. This work is generally regarded as proto-Cubist because of the flat surface, angular forms and limited colour range. It was regarded at the time as deeply revolutionary and it led to anger even amongst his friends. Matisse considered it a bad joke and Braque disliked the painting but both artists studied it in detail and responded to it.

Notes

One of Picasso's biographers, John Richardson, wrote, "*Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* is the first unequivocally 20th-century masterpiece, a principal detonator of the modern movement, the cornerstone of 20th-century art. For Picasso it would also be a rite of passage: what he called an exorcism.'

It was painted when Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had become famous and his theories included the existence of libido, an energy with which mental processes and structures are invested and which generates erotic attachments, and a death drive, the source of compulsive repetition, hate and

aggression. In 1899 he published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which Freud interprets his own and his patients' dreams in terms of wish-fulfillments. He sets out the theoretical model of the unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious in the book which is published in abridged form as *On Dreams* in 1901. He went on to publish other works which won him a more general readership including *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

It has been pointed out by later critics that *Les Femmes d'Alger* resembles Cézanne's *Les Grandes Baigneuses*, Paul Gauguin's statue *Oviri* and El Greco's *Opening of the Fifth Seal*.

When it was first exhibited in 1916 it was regarded as immoral. The organiser of the exhibition gave the work its current title replacing Picasso's title *Le Bordel d'Alger*. He did this to lessen the scandal he knew it would cause but Picasso never liked the new title. The painting was intended to shock. It is clumsy, overworked and unfinished and the women show no sign of humanity or emotion.

The earliest sketches of the brothel include two men, a sailor and a medical student holding a book or skull. The viewer has replaced the men and it has become a meditation on the dangers of sex. The art historian Rosalind Krauss describes the 'trauma of the gaze' and the implied threat of violence.

In July 2007, *Newsweek* published a two-page article about *Les Femmes d'Alger* describing it as the "most influential work of art of the last 100 years".

Cubism - Climbing the Mountain

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) worked closely together between 1907 and 1914. Braque wrote, 'We were like mountain-climbers roped together'. Picasso said, 'Almost every evening either I went to Braque's studio or Braque came to mine. Each of us had to see what the other had done during the day.'

'The pioneering of Cubism by Picasso and Braque is the most passionate adventure in our century's art.' (William Rubin)

'Cubism is like standing at a certain point on a mountain and looking around. If you go higher, things will look different; if you go lower, again they will look

different. It is a point of view.' (Jacques Lipchitz (Cubist sculptor, 1891-1973)

This period was when they invented a new way of painting called Cubism. It arose from their close friendship and their different approaches to art. Picasso suppressed his natural virtuosity and love of narrative imagery and became committed to finding new ways of expressing himself. Braque was not a child prodigy like Picasso but was inventive in regard to materials and textures and he had an outstanding appreciation of space and light. It was Braque's technical innovations that formed the basis of Cubism's most important breakthroughs but it was Picasso's flare that exploited their full potential.

By 1910, Picasso and Braque had developed Cubism into a new way of representing the world. The first stage, known as Analytical Cubism (1910-1912), was concerned with producing a conceptual image of the object rather than a visual one. Objects were deconstructed into their components. In some cases, different viewpoints were shown alongside each other. The aim was not a mimetic representation but to provide a summary of the facts concerning the object. The second stage was called Synthetic Cubism and used non-art materials as abstract signs. The use of a grid or framework, the shallow space and the use of abstract signs influenced later artists such as Piet Mondrian.

Notes

'The period from 1910 to 1912 is referred to as Analytical Cubism. Paintings executed during this period showed the breaking down, or analysis, of form. Right-angle and straight-line construction were favoured, though occasionally some areas of the painting appeared sculptural ... Colour schemes were simplified, tending to be nearly monochromatic (hues of tan, brown, grey, cream, green, or blue preferred) in order not to distract the viewer from the artist's primary interest--the structure of form itself. The monochromatic colour scheme was suited to the presentation of complex, multiple views of the object, which was now reduced to overlapping opaque and transparent planes. These planes appear to ascend the surface of the canvas rather than to recede in depth.'

Cubism was one of the most influential visual art styles of the early twentieth century. It was created by. Pablo Picasso. (Spanish, 1881–1973) and Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963) in Paris between 1907 and 1914.

Cubism began between 1907 and 1911. Pablo Picasso's 1907 painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* has often been considered a proto-Cubist work. Georges Braque's 1908 *Houses at L'Estaque* (and related works) prompted the critic Louis Vauxcelles to refer to 'bizarreries cubiques' (cubic oddities). Gertrude Stein referred to landscapes made by Picasso in 1909, such as *Reservoir at Horta de Ebro*, as the first Cubist paintings. The first organized group exhibition by Cubists took place at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris during the spring of 1911 in a room called 'Salle 41'; it included works by Jean Metzinger, Albert Gleizes, Fernand Léger, Robert Delaunay and Henri Le Fauconnier, yet no works by Picasso or Braque were exhibited.

By 1911 Picasso was recognized as the inventor of Cubism, while Braque's importance and precedence was argued later, with respect to his treatment of space, volume and mass in the *L'Estaque* landscapes. But 'this view of Cubism is associated with a distinctly restrictive definition of which artists are properly to be called Cubists'. wrote the art historian Christopher Green

The roots of cubism are to be found in the two distinct tendencies of Cézanne's later work: first his breaking of the painted surface into small multifaceted areas of paint, thereby emphasizing the plural viewpoint given by binocular vision, and second his interest in the simplification of natural forms into cylinders, spheres, and cones. However, the cubists explored this concept further than Cézanne. They represented all the surfaces of depicted objects in a single picture plane, as if the objects had all their faces visible at the same time. This new kind of depiction revolutionized the way objects could be visualized in painting and art

Cubism has been divided into phases. Under one scheme there was:

Analytical Cubism between 1910 and 1912,

Synthetic or Crystal Cubism between 1912 and 1919 when Surrealism gained in popularity.

One might also talk of Early Cubism between 1907 and 1910.

References

<http://www.pablocpicasso.org/avignon.jsp>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Femmes_d%27Alger

<http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/cubism>



Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)
Spring sun (Lentezon): castle ruin Brederode
 c. late 1909 - early 1910
 62 x 72 cm
 Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), *Spring sun (Lentezon): castle ruin Brederode*, c. late 1909 - early 1910, 62 x 72 cm, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas

Braque and Picasso's mountain-climbing analogy is apt, because the summit they were reaching for — the complete dissolution of the object — was being approached simultaneously from entirely different directions by artists working independently across Europe. The three figures most closely associated with this development are **Piet Mondrian**, **Wassily Kandinsky**, and **Kazimir Malevich**. What is striking is that none of them arrived at abstraction by fiat. Each moved through a long process of gradual reduction, which is why **Theo van Doesburg** later drew a useful distinction between **abstract** art — work that begins with a recognisable image and progressively strips it back — and **concrete** art, which constructs entirely from mental or formal principles, with no figurative starting point at all. Mondrian is the clearest illustration of the first path. Born **Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan** in **1872**, he came from a cultured Dutch Protestant household — his father was a drawing teacher — and he trained as both a teacher and a

landscape painter. His early work was firmly representational. Encounters with **Pointillism** and **Fauvism** began to loosen his handling, and from roughly **1905** onwards the flat Dutch landscape — its insistent horizontals, its enormous skies — started pulling his compositions towards the grid that would eventually define him. Mondrian wrote that beauty is always "hindered by the particular appearance of an object," and so the object had to go.

Notes

The most influential idea to arise in painting during this period was abstraction and it developed in the work of a number of artists at the same time. There are three key artists normally associated with the development of abstraction—Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935).

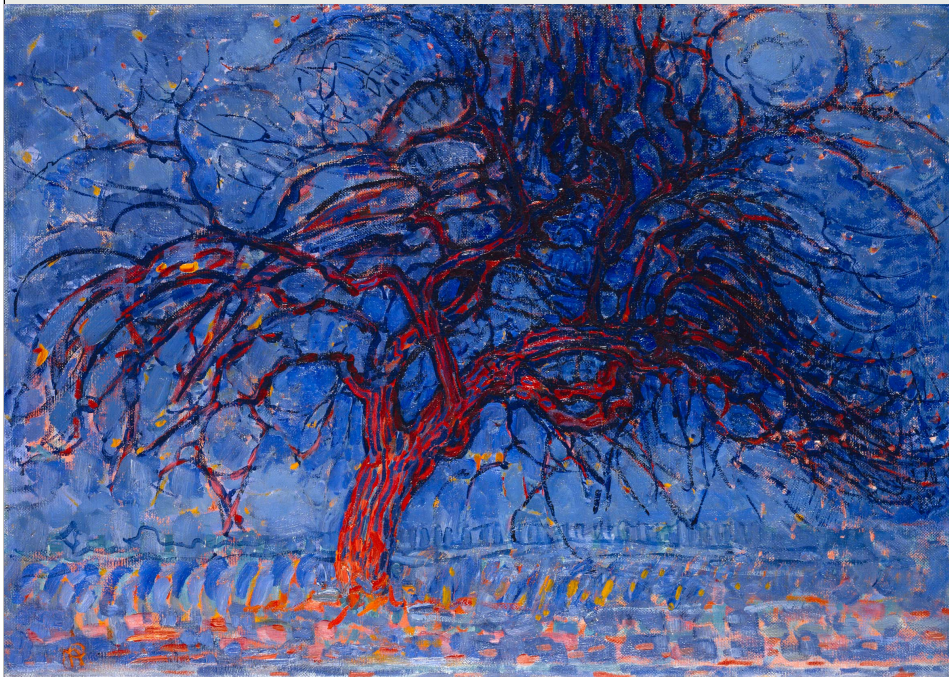
I will start with Mondrian as we have a number of his works that help understand the gradual process of abstracting features. Later, the abstract painter Theo van Doesburg suggested a distinction between 'abstract' art, whose starting point was a recognisable image which was progressively abstracted, and 'concrete' art, which stemmed solely from the mind of the artist or the process of making.

Abstraction has (at least) two meanings. To abstract means to take away, so a painter can paint nature but start to take away elements of the representations, for example, by simplifying forms. There is also non-figurative, sometimes called non-objective art that constructs a work using abstract elements that are not based on nature, such as the line, circle, square and triangle.

Pieter Cornelis 'Piet' Mondriaan (after 1906 Mondrian, 1872–1944) was a Dutch painter who contributed to the De Stijl (1917-1928/31, pronounced 'duh style') art movement founded by Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931). Mondrian evolved a non-representational style which he termed Neoplasticism (or De Stijl). He was an artist of great integrity who wrote, 'the emotion of beauty is always hindered by particular appearance of an 'object'; the object must therefore be abstracted from any figurative representation.

His father was a drawing teacher and Mondrian started to draw at an early age. He began as a teacher and a landscape painter. His early work was representational but he became influenced by pointillism and Fauvism. Mondrian's work may be inspired by the horizontals and verticals of the hill-

less Dutch landscape and he began to move towards abstraction in 1905-08.



Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)
Evening; Red Tree (Avond; De rode boom)
1908–10
70 × 99 cm
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), *Evening; Red Tree (Avond; De rode boom)*, 1908–10, 70 × 99 cm, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

That conviction — that the particular had to be stripped away to reach the universal — was not simply a formal position for Mondrian. It was a spiritual one. In **1909**, he joined the Dutch branch of the **Theosophical Society**, the movement founded by **Helena Blavatsky** in the late nineteenth century. Theosophy held that beneath the visible surface of the world lay hidden universal principles, and for Mondrian this doctrine gave philosophical grounding to what he was already pursuing on canvas. Reducing painting to its essentials was not aesthetic experiment for its own sake — it was a form of revelation. The painting that marks this turn is **Evening: The Red Tree**, completed around **1908 to 1910**. It is still recognisably a tree, a single bare oak silhouetted against a deep blue sky, but the handling has already shifted decisively. The branches fracture into something close to a network of lines rather than organic growth, and the colours — **red**, **blue**, and **yellow**, the three primaries — appear here together for the first time in his work. Mondrian is not describing the tree so much as

extracting a principle from it. The landscape is still present, but only just. It functions less as a subject than as a scaffold Mondrian was in the process of dismantling.

Notes

Mondrian's art was intimately related to his spiritual and philosophical studies. In 1908, he became interested in the theosophical movement launched by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the late 19th century, and in 1909 he joined the Dutch branch of the Theosophical Society.

One of Mondrian's earliest paintings, this was the first in which he implemented his colour palette of red, blue and yellow, the three primary colours. It was still a clearly representational form of a tree. As a budding artist, Mondrian began painting simple pastoral landscapes of his home country, and these paintings evolved from those beginning artistic ideas. In the abstraction of the colour of the tree and the simple design, Mondrian's aesthetic style is already present in this simple landscape.

References

<http://www.wikiart.org/en/piet-mondrian/avond-evening-the-red-tree-1910>



Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)
Gray Tree
1911

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), *Gray Tree*, 1911

The scaffold Mondrian had been dismantling in **Evening: The Red Tree** collapses entirely in his next major phase — and the catalyst was Paris. In **1911**, at the age of thirty-nine, Mondrian made a decisive break: he abandoned his career in Amsterdam, left his fiancée, and moved to the French capital. Even the spelling of his name changed — he dropped the double 'a' of the Dutch 'Mondriaan' and adopted the single 'a' that sits more naturally in French, a small but telling act of self-reinvention. In Paris he encountered **Cubism** at close quarters, studying the work of **Picasso** and **Braque** with intense purpose. But where Braque and Picasso used the fracturing of form to interrogate perception, Mondrian wanted to push further — beyond the object entirely, toward pure structure. **The Grey Tree**, painted in **1911**, is the clearest evidence of that ambition in action. It takes up the same bare oak from the Red Tree series begun in **1908**, but now the organic silhouette is dissolving into an interlocking grid of arcs and lines. The tree is still legible, but only as a pretext. Mondrian is using Cubist fragmentation not to analyse the subject but to erase it, one careful step at a time.

Notes

In 1911, at the age of 39, Mondrian gave up his career, left his fiancée and moved to Paris. He changed the double 'aa' in his name to a single 'a' to fit in better with the French artists. He met other artists and was keen to assimilate Cubism but he wanted to take it further.

The Gray Tree is one of the first paintings in which Mondrian applied to a natural subject the principles of cubist composition that he was in the process of assimilating and working out in his own way. At the same time, it is a continuation of the series on the tree theme, which began with the studies for the Red Tree of 1908. Although four years elapsed between the Red Tree and the Gray Tree, it would be a mistake not to see them as two links in a single chain of development.

References

<http://www.piet-mondrian.org/the-gray-tree.jsp>



Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)
Flowering Apple Tree
1912
78.5 x 107.5 cm
Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), *Flowering Apple Tree*, 1912, 78.5 x 107.5 cm, Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

The Grey Tree still carried the ghost of a recognisable form. **Flowering Apple Tree**, painted in the spring of **1912**, takes the next step — and what is striking is how different the means are, even from a work made only months earlier. Where *The Grey Tree* built its structure through telling brushwork, individual strokes asserting themselves as marks, *Flowering Apple Tree* applies paint in thin, almost transparent layers. The surface is quieter, more even, and that restraint forces the underlying architecture to carry everything. **Mondrian** has abandoned descriptive brushwork as a tool and replaced it with pure compositional rhythm. The result is what the art historian **Carel Blotkamp** and others have described in terms of visual rhyme — forms that echo and respond to one another across the canvas rather than pointing outward to a subject in the world. The branching network of the apple tree has lost what we might call its thing-value entirely. It exists now as a set of rhythmic accents, arcs rhyming with arcs, intervals answering intervals. What makes the painting remarkable is that it

achieves this while retaining something genuinely tender. Mondrian was still working from direct observation of nature in **1912**, translating it into an increasingly rigorous language — but the lyric delicacy of a tree in spring blossom has not yet been argued out of existence.

Notes

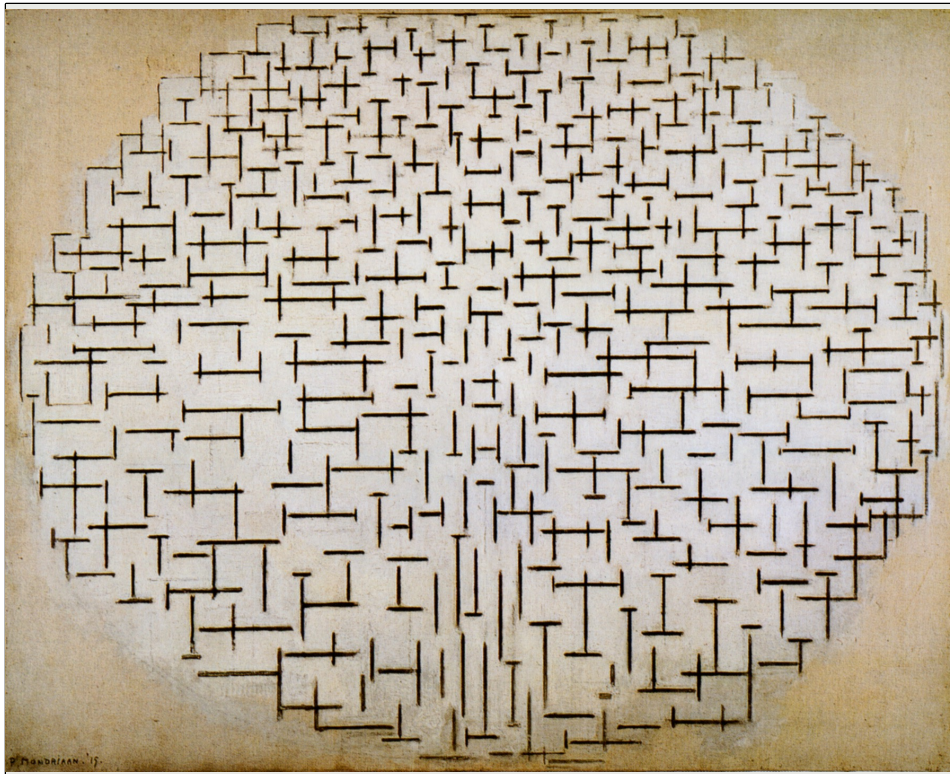
As compared with the only slightly earlier Gray Tree, the Flowering Apple Tree is far less painterly in surface treatment. In the earlier work, telling strokes and accents defined the form; here a thinly applied layer of paint is the means by which the structure of the whole is brought out.

Flowering Apple Tree, probably done in the spring of 1912, was shown in October and November of that year at the second exhibition of the Moderne Kunstkring in Amsterdam, together with the Still Life with Gingerpot II. The two paintings represent the same phase in Mondrian's development. Like the second version of the still life, the Flowering Apple Tree painting has discarded the descriptive function of the pictorial language and been transmuted entirely into the poetic forms of "visual rhyme" and "optical alliteration." The forms of the tree have lost all thing - value and are transposed into rhythmic accents in the composition as a whole.

Despite the tendency of the painting toward abstraction - the paring down of form to essentials and then using this bare form compositionally - it possesses the tender lyric delicacy always associated with a flowering apple tree. For that reason we should not forget that Mondrian at this period, although strongly inclined to abstraction, continued to work from an impression of nature, translating it into his rigorous but still figurative language.

References

<http://www.piet-mondrian.org/the-flowering-apple-tree.jsp>



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)
Pier and Ocean (Composition No. 10)
1915
State Museum Kroller-Muller, Otterlo

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), *Pier and Ocean (Composition No. 10)*, 1915, State Museum Kroller-Muller, Otterlo

That lyric delicacy, as we noted, was still present in 1912. Within a year it had largely dissolved. By **1913**, Mondrian was fusing his painting practice with the theosophical ideas he had been studying since around 1908 — the belief that beneath the visible world lay universal spiritual laws expressible in pure form. ***Pier and Ocean***, painted in **1914**, marks a definitive threshold. Every diagonal and curved line has been eliminated. Colour has gone. What remains is a field of short horizontal and vertical strokes held within an oval boundary — the horizontals evoking the sea's horizon, the verticals the timber pilings of the pier. The title is the only concession to the visible world. **Theo van Doesburg**, reviewing the work, wrote: "Spiritually, this work is more important than the others. It conveys the impression of peace; the stillness of the soul." That response is telling. The painting's power is not representational but rhythmic — alternating strokes of varying length generating what Mondrian would later describe as asymmetrical equilibrium, the visual pulse of opposing forces held in balance. In his

1937 essay *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* he wrote: "Vertical and horizontal lines are the expression of two opposing forces; they exist everywhere and dominate everything; their reciprocal action constitutes life." The biographical circumstances matter here. War broke out while Mondrian was visiting the **Netherlands** in 1914, stranding him until **1918** — the very years in which his abstract language fully crystallised.

Notes

In 1913 Mondrian began to fuse his painting with his spiritual studies. In 1914 he was visiting his home in the Netherlands when war broke out and he was forced until 1918 when he returned to Paris. He stayed in Paris until 1938 when advancing fascism forced him to London and from there to Manhattan where he stayed until his death.

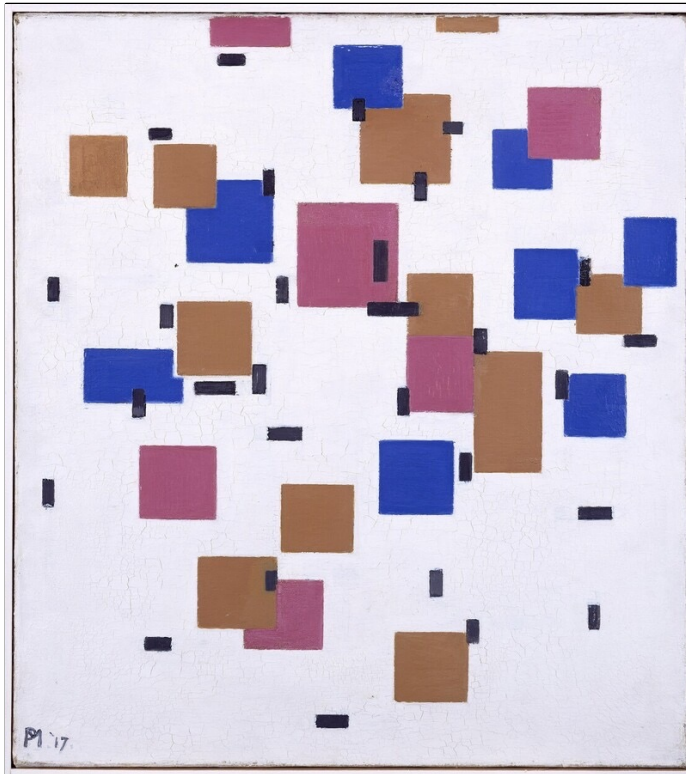
Pier and Ocean marks a definitive step in Mondrian's path toward pure abstraction. Here he has eliminated diagonal and curved lines as well as colour; the only true reference to nature is found within the title and the horizontal lines that allude to the horizon and the verticals that evoke the pilings of the pier. The rhythms created by the alternating lines and their varying lengths presages Mondrian's mature dynamic, depicting an asymmetrical balance as well as the pulse of the ocean waves. Reviewing this work, Theo van Doesburg wrote: "Spiritually, this work is more important than the others. It conveys the impression of peace; the stillness of the soul." Mondrian had begun to translate what he saw as the underlying ordered patterns of nature into a pure abstract language.

"Vertical and horizontal lines are the expression of two opposing forces; they exist everywhere and dominate everything; their reciprocal action constitutes 'life'. I recognized that the equilibrium of any particular aspect of nature rests on the equivalence of its opposites." 'Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art', Piet Mondrian (1937)

References

<http://arthistoryproject.com/artists/piet-mondrian/>

http://www.theartstory.org/artist-mondrian-piet-artworks.htm#pnt_2



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)
Composition with Colours A
 1917

Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), *Composition with Colours A*, 1917, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Netherlands

Those stranding years in the Netherlands proved unexpectedly fertile. By **1917**, Mondrian had found his collaborators, and the movement that would codify his ideas into a shared programme was born. **De Stijl** — meaning simply "The Style" — was founded that year by Mondrian, **Theo van Doesburg**, and **Bart van der Leck**, alongside the architect **J.J.P. Oud** and others. Their journal of the same name became the vehicle for a radical proposition: that art, stripped of all personal expression and national sentiment, could model the harmony of a new and better world. The timing was deliberate — Europe was consuming itself in war, and the De Stijl circle believed that universal visual laws offered something politics had failed to provide. The term Mondrian used for his own contribution to that programme was **Neo-Plasticism** — **nieuwe beelding** in Dutch, meaning roughly "new forming." **Composition in Colour A**, painted in **1917**, is an early demonstration of the idea in practice. The palette is a muted version of the primaries — dark rose, deep blue, dark ochre — and the white is

not background but active form, as structurally present as any coloured plane. The elements float without hierarchy. In the years immediately following, Mondrian would tighten the grammar further still, eliminating those muted variants and admitting only pure red, yellow, and blue.

Notes

De Stijl

Piet Mondriaan, together with Bart van der Leek and Theo van Doesburg, establish the De Stijl movement in 1917. They aim to create a new kind of art, for a new and better world. In his work, Mondriaan seeks a balance between lines and colours and strives for an abstraction that evokes a universal and timeless image.

Pure neo-plasticism

Composition in colour A is a study towards that 'pure, neo-plasticism'. The colours in this work are a muted version of the primary colours: dark rose red, deep blue and dark ochre. The clearly delineated coloured areas are linked in all possible ways, together with one or more black line fragments. Sometimes they are placed side-by-side, sometimes overlapping, with no obvious system. The result is that the different elements appear to float in an indefinable space. The white is not a neutral background, but a living component of the painting. It is just as much a form as the surfaces and lines.

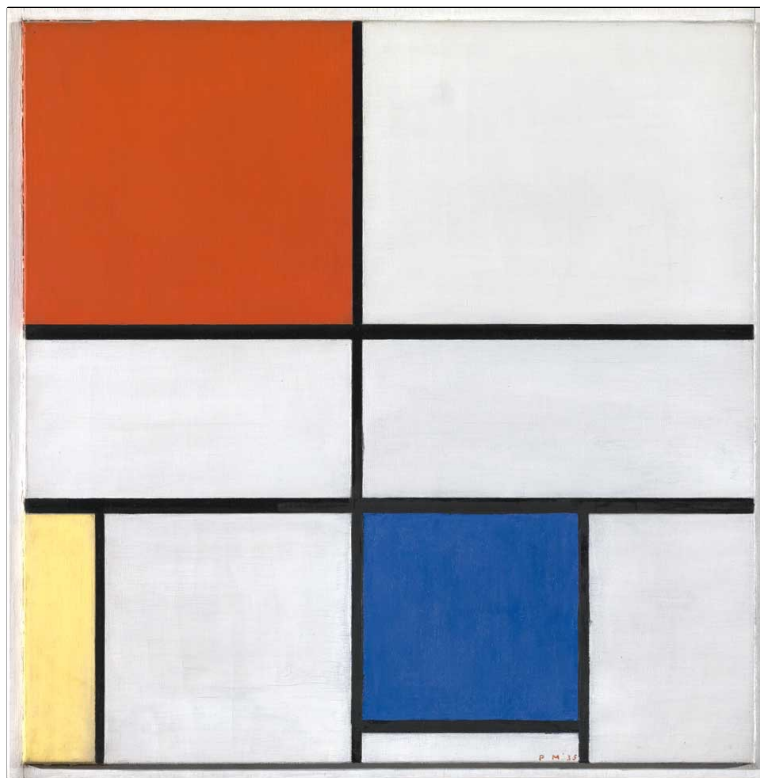
Rhythmically arranged

Composition in colour A still consists of rhythmically arranged coloured areas, but in the years that follow, Mondriaan does away with any suggestion of movement and depth in his paintings and uses only red, yellow and blue.

Notes

Neo-plasticism is a term adopted by the Dutch pioneer of abstract art, Piet Mondrian, for his own type of abstract painting which used only horizontal and vertical lines and primary colours. It is an austere, geometric style that is sometimes referred to as concrete art.

Concrete art is a term that was coined by the Dutch artist and designer Theo Van Doesburg (1883-1931), and it refers to any type of abstract art which has no figurative or symbolic references. The term was first used in Doesburg's Manifesto of Concrete Art, which was issued in Paris in 1930.



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)
***Composition C (No. III) with Red,
Yellow and Blue***
1935
56 x 55.2 cm
Tate, London

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), *Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1935, 56 x 55.2 cm, Tate, London

By **1920 and 1921**, Mondrian's paintings arrive at what most observers take to be their definitive form. The black lines thicken, the colour planes grow fewer and larger, and white claims ever more of the surface. But to treat this as an endpoint is to misread the work entirely — the evolution continued, its refinements simply growing subtler. ***Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue***, painted in **1935**, rewards exactly that kind of close attention. The red rectangle is fractionally wider than it is tall. The dominant vertical black line sits off-centre. Mondrian never used a ruler and never squeezed paint directly from the tube — every line and plane was built from layers of carefully mixed colour. **Sidney Janis**, visiting the studio in **1932**, hoped to purchase a painting and was told it was unfinished; a single small area of blue required another coat. He waited a year. The apparent coldness is equally misleading. Mondrian wrote, "I wish to approach truth as closely as is possible, and therefore I abstract everything until I arrive at the fundamental quality of objects." The asymmetry in these

compositions is deliberate: he wanted balance without symmetry, vitality without cancellation — the vertical and horizontal held in what he called **dynamic equilibrium**, a tension that, in his belief, pointed toward nothing less than spiritual transformation.

Notes

During late 1920 and 1921, Mondrian's paintings arrive at what is to casual observers their definitive and mature form. Thick black lines now separate the forms, which are larger and fewer in number, and more of the forms are left white. This was not the culmination of his artistic evolution, however. Although the refinements became subtler, Mondrian's work continued to evolve during his years in Paris.

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1935

Description. Piet Mondrian is one of the best known abstract artists but perhaps the most misunderstood. You might think he produced these painting in a few hours using a ruler and primary colours straight from the tube. In fact, he never measured or used a ruler, he carefully painted every area and line. What appear to be squares are often rectangles. This is Composition C (No. III) with Red, Yellow and Blue and the red square, for example, is slightly wider than it is tall and the vertical black line is not central. Mondrian would only use vertical and horizontal lines and he fell out with his friend Theo van Doesburg [whose work is on display round the corner] over the use diagonal lines. The colours are built up from layers of mixed paint, never squeezed direct from the tube. One day an art dealer (New York, Sidney Janis, 1932) came to his studio to buy a painting and Mondrian told him it was not quite finished as one small area of blue needed a further coat of paint. The dealer later said, 'I didn't get the picture for a whole year'.

Background. So, how did he arrive at these grid-like paintings? His early work was representational and he painted conventional landscapes but in 1908 he came under the influence of the spiritual and philosophical writings of the Theosophy Society. He spent the rest of his life searching for a way to represent that spiritual knowledge in art. He simplified and simplified as he looked for the essence of the objects.

The artist. Looking at these black lines and flat areas of colour some people

think of his paintings as 'cold' and 'calculated' but he was a deeply passionate artist. When he was 39 (1911) he left his fiancée and his job in Amsterdam to move to Paris and pursue a new type of art. In order to integrate with the Parisian avant-garde, he changed the double 'aa' in his name to a single 'a'. He had few personal contacts when he first moved but it was a very productive period artistically. The other influence on his art was music; he loved jazz and his use of the word 'composition' in the title invokes musical associations. Later, he was labelled degenerate by the Nazis and moved to London and then New York.

Avoiding balance. He thought long and hard about achieving balance but he also wanted to avoid symmetry and he often put a large area of colour on one side of the painting. He argued with other artists about this as they sometimes found his paintings unbalanced and the colours inharmonious, but this was intentional as he was seeking for a different form of balance. Balance is easy if it involves one thing cancelling another but he wanted to retain vitality and energy in the painting. Mondrian regarded the vertical as the spiritual, the male, the inner mind where the ideal resides and the horizontal as the material, women, the outward form, the sea, the horizon and nature. He thought that harmony could be achieved by combining the vertical and the horizontal in certain ways.

Save the world. Mondrian thought that we are all evolving to a higher state and his paintings would light a path that would help people achieve this state. Unlike Kazimir Malevich, who thought abstract art would bring political reform, Mondrian believed his art would bring about spiritual reform and his abstract paintings were his mission to help save the world. Let us look next at a very different relationship between art and society.

Notes on Piet Mondrian, Composition C (No.III) with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1935

Mondrian's art was linked to his spiritual studies and in 1909 he joined the Theosophical Movement founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and others. For the rest of his life his work was inspired by the search for spiritual knowledge underlying nature. He believed that his vision of modern art would transcend divisions in culture and become a new common language based on the pure primary colours, flatness of forms, and dynamic tension. He wrote, 'What art makes us see and feel ... is...beauty, truth, goodness, grandeur, and richness – the universe, man, nature...universal equilibrium.'

Mondrian gradually decluttered his home and studio and they became a place of pilgrimage. The artist Ben Nicholson described the astonishing quietness and repose. The paintings were never framed as they were extensions of the world; the world reduced to the simplest possible forms and colours.

He was an artist who thought he could elevate us all and make the world a better place. He wrote, 'I wish to approach truth as closely as is possible, and therefore I abstract everything until I arrive at the fundamental quality of objects.' As Maurice Denis said (in 1890), 'Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude, an anecdote or whatnot, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.' In the terminology of Clive Bell (1914, Bloomsbury Group) it is the 'significant form' which he defined as 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, [that] stir our aesthetic emotions'.

He was labelled a 'degenerate' artist by the Nazis and just before World War II (1938) he fled Paris for London and then New York. Mondrian loved dancing, jazz and the energy of the Charleston. In the mid-1920s he bought a record player and began to collect records and his studio became a place to dance. Music is an abstract art and his paintings reflect a lot of the syncopation and energy of jazz. Mondrian called this his 'boogie woogie' and in New York he painted *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1942-43, MoMA). He never married and thought women were put on earth to be dancing partners. Mondrian danced 'very stiffly, awkwardly and seriously', usually with the wives or mistresses of other artists and he never looked at his partner or spoke on the dance floor.

The Greek philosopher Plato (c.429-347 BCE) wrote, 'I do not now intend by beauty of shapes what most people would expect, such as that of living creatures or pictures, but ... straight lines and curves and the surfaces or solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares ... These things are not beautiful relatively, like other things, but always naturally and absolutely.' Plato thought that world we directly experience is but a shadow of an absolute world of pure ideas, such a truth and goodness. Therefore, most representational art takes us further away from understanding this world by making a representation of a representation.

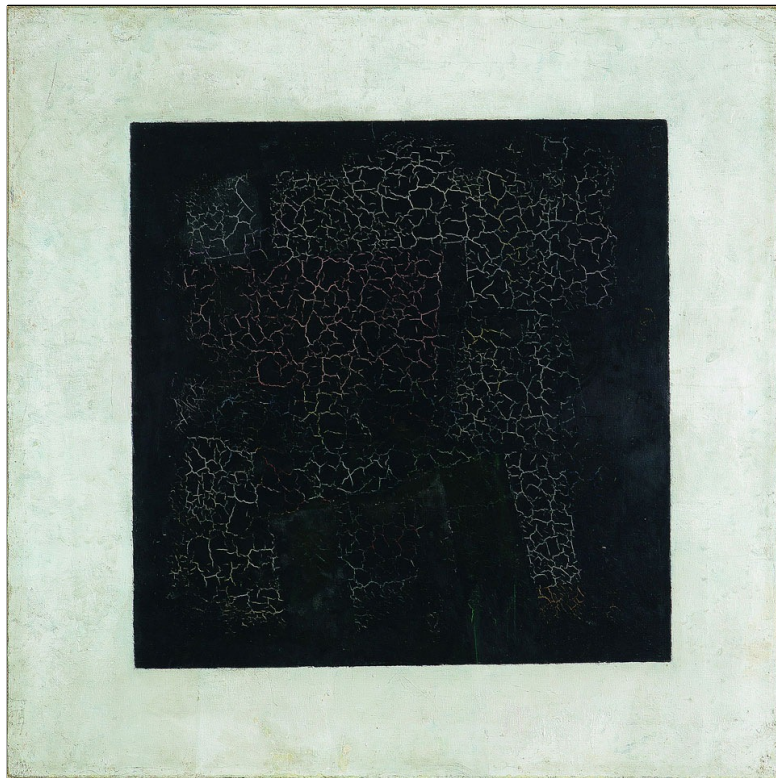
See the article on 'Mondrian's Balance' by the University of Maryland. They have tested people using genuine Mondrian paintings and Mondrian-like paintings and people choose the Mondrian so his paintings are not as easy to

copy as the naïve viewer might believe.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mondrian-composition-c-noiii-with-red-yellow-and-blue-l00097>

<http://faculty.philosophy.umd.edu/jhbrown/mondriansbalance/index.html>



Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935)
Black Square
1915
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935), *Black Square*, 1915, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Mondrian's spiritual ambitions were shared across Europe, and nowhere more dramatically than in revolutionary Russia. **Kazimir Malevich**, working in the years immediately surrounding the **1917 Revolution**, pursued abstraction with a similar fervour — but arrived at a radically different visual language. The rejection of representation found its most radical expression in a single image: **Malevich's Black Square**. First exhibited at **The Last Futurist Exhibition 0,10 in Petrograd in 1915**, the Black Square was hung high in the corner of the room — precisely the position that Russian Orthodox families reserved for their devotional icons. The placement was a deliberate provocation and a declaration simultaneously: this object demands the same contemplative attention as a sacred image, but its content is pure negation. A black square on a white ground. Nothing depicted. Nothing symbolised. The work is routinely described as the **zero point of painting**, a phrase critics and curators use to paraphrase Malevich himself. It is, in one sense, the first painting in history that is not a

painting *of* anything. Malevich had originally conceived it in **1913** as a stage curtain design for **Victory Over the Sun** — the same cubo-futurist opera mentioned on our previous slide — and he later backdated the canvas to that year, perhaps positioning himself as abstraction's founding father before anyone else could claim the title.

Notes

Black Square. The Black Square was first shown in The Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10 in 1915. The work is frequently invoked by critics, historians, curators, and artists as the "zero point of painting", referring to the painting's historical significance and paraphrasing Malevich. The work was exhibited in the corner of the room, high up, in a position typical of religious icons in many Russian homes. The implication being that the works should be considered as the secular equivalent of a religious icon—worthy of meditative contemplation.

It is the first time someone made a painting that wasn't of something.

It began life as a stage curtain. Tate, 'The first Black Square (Malevich actually painted not one, but four versions between 1915 and 1930) was (we believe) painted in 1915, although Malevich actually dated it 1913 - maybe with an eye to his legacy as the father of abstraction. In any case, the square's first appearance was indeed in 1913, as the design for a stage curtain in the futurist opera Victory over the Sun.

It was a revolutionary symbol and indicated the zero point from which all other artworks could develop.

There's no 'right' way to look at it, it is not an aesthetic object but a starting point.

Socialist Realism. Unfortunately for Malevich, Stalin did not agree and so this form of abstract art did not last long in Russia. By the mid-1920s Stalin had taken absolute control and abstract art was denounced as bourgeoisie. Artists had to produce art that glorified Russian history and its working-class heroes, so called Socialist Realism. However, abstract continued elsewhere.

Notes

Kasimir Malevich was born Kazimierz Malewicz to a Polish family who fled

Poland to settle near Kiev, He spoke Polish and Russian. His father managed a sugar factory and Kasimir was the youngest of 14 children. He spent most of his childhood in the villages of the Ukraine. Until the age of 12 he knew nothing of professional artists. When his father died in 1904, when he was 26, he moved to Moscow to study art.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/five-ways-look-Malevich-Black-Square>



Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935)
Dynamic Suprematism
1915-16
Tate, London

Kasimir Malevich (1878-1935), *Dynamic Suprematism*, 1915-16, Tate, London

Dynamic Suprematism, painted in **1915**, shows three clusters of multi-coloured geometric forms arranged across a grey-white ground. Nothing sits horizontally or vertically — every element is diagonal, generating a restless, lurching energy that Malevich called **Suprematism**, a word he chose deliberately. He wrote, "By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art." The goal was not to depict the world but to transcend it entirely. Malevich had collaborated on the cubo-futurist opera **Victory Over the Sun** in **1913**, and he acknowledged debts to both Cubism and Futurism. But he believed he had moved beyond them. Reproducing corners of nature, he said, was like a thief being enraptured by his own leg irons. He rejected portraits of the wealthy, devotional Madonnas, and what he called "shameless nudes" — the entire apparatus of bourgeois representation — insisting that pure painting demanded the rejection of what he memorably dismissed as "bits of nature." But the political ground was already shifting. By the mid-1920s, **Stalin's**

Socialist Realism had made this kind of radical abstraction officially impossible in Russia.

Notes

Many artists painted abstract art as a representation of a higher, spiritual realm whose contemplation could lead to peace, harmony and a Utopian society.

Description. Look at this example by Kazimir Malevich called Dynamic Suprematism. We can see three groups of carefully delineated, multi-coloured objects at the corners of a grey-white triangle. If you look closely the objects have been carefully marked using pencil and there are no horizontals or verticals, everything is placed on a diagonal which gives it a feeling of instability and action. Malevich was working in Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution and he and other artists wanted to discover a new form of art that was free from what he called 'the dead weight of the material world'. He rejected capitalist art, such as portraits of wealthy people and thought that art should represent the spiritual, higher realms.

Suprematism. The diagonal lines give a feeling of dynamism but what about the other part of the title, 'Suprematism'? It was an art movement founded by Malevich two years before he painted this work. He wrote, 'By Suprematism I mean the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art' rather than the visual depiction of objects. He created a type of language or grammar of abstract objects, such as triangles, squares and circles and he was reacting against both academic art and the utilitarian art that had come before [called Constructivism]. This was the time of revolutions in Russia and Malevich wanted a complete break from the old world of bourgeois art and imagined a world of pure feeling where people would live in harmony with nature.

Rejects 'bits of nature'. It was a revolutionary time in art. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque had developed Cubism in Paris a few years earlier and in Italy, the Futurists were excited by modernity as represented by mechanical power and speed. Malevich believed he had gone beyond both Cubism and Futurism by developing a world of pure abstraction. He believed only the cowardly base their art on the forms of nature and that reproducing little corners of nature was like a thief being enraptured by his leg irons. Malevich thought that 'pure painting' required the rejection of what he called 'bits of nature, Madonnas and shameless nudes'.

Notes on Kazimir Malevich, Dynamic Suprematism

Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (pronounced 'Malayvitch', 1879 1935) was born Kazimierz Malewicz to a Polish family who moved to Ukraine and Russified their Polish names. Kazimir was born in a sugar beet growing region close to Kiev and his father was the manager of a sugar processing factory. Malevich studied drawing in Kiev (1895/6) and from 1904 at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. His father died in 1904. Malevich, up to his mid-thirties was interested in peasant art and became a member of the Moscow avant-garde, although he was not at the leading edge, and he collaborated in a successful cubofuturist opera called 'Victory Over the Sun' in 1913.

In 1915, Malevich published his manifesto 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism' and he participated in an exhibition entitled the 'Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10' (Zero-Ten) in St Petersburg. He declared the Suprematist experiment was finished in 1919 but published 'The Non-Objective World' in 1927. His career languished following Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death in 1924. Stalin promoted Socialist Realism as the only permitted form of art. The Agitprop movement started in the 1920s in communist countries and it urged (agitated) people through propaganda to do what their leaders expected them to do. Malevich prudently left his works in Switzerland after an exhibition there, possibly saving them from obscurity or destruction. Allegedly a handsome man who had a wide, popular following. When he died he was exhibited with Black Square above his grave. Communist critics derided abstract art as bourgeois as they felt it could not express social realities. Malevich was derided [by Western critic Alexandre Benois] for negating everything good and pure: love of life and love of nature. Malevich responded that art can advance for art's sake alone, regardless of its pleasure: art does not need us, and it has never needed us since stars first shone in the sky.

Malevich contemporaneously influenced major artists such as El Lissitzky and Olga Rozanova. She in turn is thought to have influenced Mark Rothko, eight of whose works have a room to themselves on the other side of this level. His legacy continues with the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. On the wall over there we can see his Metaesquema (1958) which was inspired by Malevich.

Malevich wrote, 'To the Suprematist the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless: the significant thing is feeling' and 'I

transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is to Suprematism'.

Constructivism was an artistic philosophy that originated in Russia in 1919 and it rejected the idea that art is independent from society. Constructivism influenced many modern art movements such as the Bauhaus and De Stijl.

The term Construction Art was first used as a derisive term by Malevich to describe the work of Alexander Rodchenko in 1917. Constructivism first appears as a positive term in Naum Gabo's Realistic Manifesto of 1920.

Constructivism was a post-World War I development of Russian Futurism

Malevich, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky are regarded as the fathers of abstraction and competed to show they were first. It is believed Malevich backdated some 1915 works to 1913 in order to establish his primacy.

However, the earliest abstract artist may, in fact, be Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) a previously unknown Swedish artist who started painting abstract art in 1905.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/malevich-dynamic-suprematism-t02319>

Aleksandra Shatskikh, Black Square: Malevich and the Origin of Suprematism,
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=dXeon9f210MC>

<https://youtu.be/cBBJYKhZvw0> (October 2014 Malevich exhibition at Tate Modern)



Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)
Cossacks
1910-11
Tate, London

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), *Cossacks*, 1910-11, Tate, London

While Malevich was draining painting of all content in Russia, **Wassily Kandinsky** was arriving at abstraction through a different route entirely — one rooted not in negation but in sensation. Born in Moscow in **1866**, Kandinsky spent his childhood in Odessa before studying law and economics at Moscow University. He was successful enough to be offered a professorship, but at thirty he abandoned it all and moved to Munich to study painting. The decision was triggered, at least in part, by a chance encounter with **Monet's Haystacks** series at a Moscow exhibition in 1896. He later described the shock of failing to recognise the subject: "I could not recognize it. This non-recognition was painful to me... And I noticed with surprise and confusion that the picture not only gripped me, but impressed itself ineradicably on my memory." Colour, he realised, could act independently of the object it described. That insight shaped everything. Like **Mondrian**, Kandinsky drew on the theosophical writings of **Madame Blavatsky**, whose geometrical cosmology — creation descending through points, circles, triangles, and squares — runs directly through his two major texts, **Concerning**

the **Spiritual in Art** published in 1910 and **Point and Line to Plane** published in 1926. He returned to Moscow in 1914, but found Soviet cultural policy hostile to his ideas, and by 1921 was teaching at the **Bauhaus** in Germany.

Notes

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), in 1896, at the age of 30, gave up a career teaching law and economics to enrol in the Munich Academy. He was not immediately granted admission, and began learning art on his own. That same year, before leaving Moscow, he saw an exhibit of paintings by Monet. He was particularly taken with the impressionistic style of Haystacks; this, to him, had a powerful sense of colour almost independent of the objects themselves. Later, he would write about this experience:

That it was a haystack the catalogue informed me. I could not recognize it. This non-recognition was painful to me. I considered that the painter had no right to paint indistinctly. I dully felt that the object of the painting was missing. And I noticed with surprise and confusion that the picture not only gripped me, but impressed itself ineradicably on my memory. Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendour. — Wassily Kandinsky

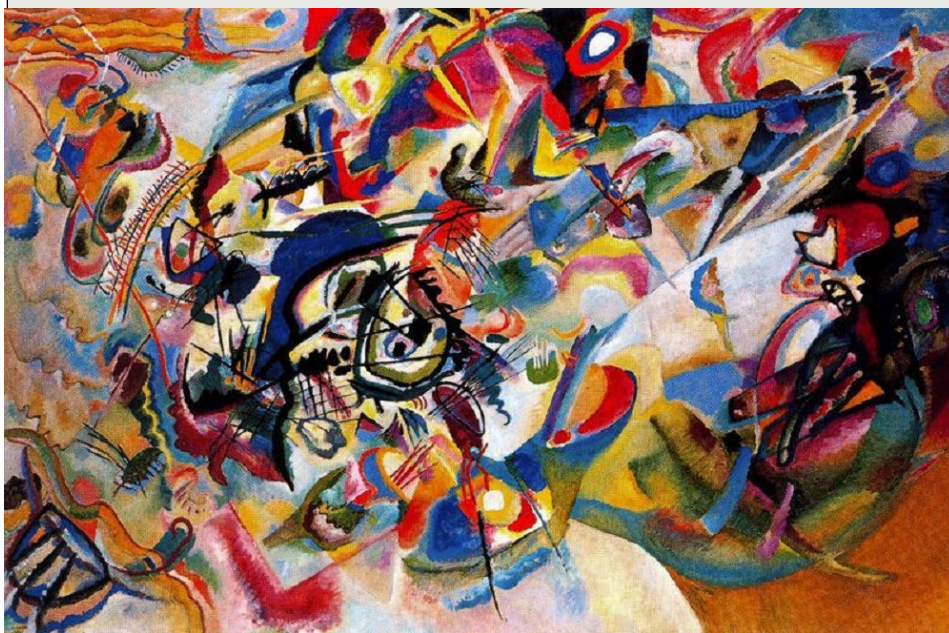
Like Mondrian, Kandinsky was spiritually influenced by Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891), the best-known exponent of theosophy. Theosophical theory postulates that creation is a geometrical progression, beginning with a single point. The creative aspect of the form is expressed by a descending series of circles, triangles and squares. Kandinsky's book *Concerning the Spiritual In Art* (1910) and *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) echoed this theosophical tenet.

Notes

He was born in Moscow, spent his childhood in Odessa and went to the Grekov Odessa Art School before enrolling at the Moscow University to study law and economics. He was successful but began painting at the age of 30 and moved to Munich to study art. He returned to Moscow in 1914 but was unsympathetic to the Communist views about art and returned to Germany in 1921 to teach at the Bauhaus school of art and architecture until the Nazis closed it in 1933. He then moved to France where he spent the rest of his life and he became a French citizen in 1939.

References

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haystacks_\(Monet_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haystacks_(Monet_series))



Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)
Composition VII
1913
200.7 × 302.3 cm
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), *Composition VII*, 1913, 200.7 × 302.3 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

Kandinsky described the **Compositions** series as the most complex works he ever undertook — large-scale canvases prepared through exhaustive studies, each one an attempt to translate inner spiritual experience into pure pictorial form. Writing in "**Concerning the Spiritual in Art**", published in 1911, he argued that an authentic artist creating from what he called "an internal necessity" stands at the apex of an upward-moving pyramid, penetrating into the future — understood by few today, common knowledge tomorrow. The story of **Composition IV** illustrates exactly that liberation in practice. Returning from a walk, Kandinsky found his friend and companion **Gabriele Münter** had turned the canvas on its side. Not immediately recognising the image, he fell to his knees — moved to tears by the sheer beauty of what he saw. It was the same shock of non-recognition he had felt before Monet's haystacks years earlier, now confirmed from the inside: the object was irrelevant; sensation was everything. The first three *Compositions* survive only in black-and-white photographs.

Confiscated during a Nazi raid on the **Bauhaus** in the 1930s, they were displayed in the infamous "**Degenerate Art**" exhibition alongside works by **Paul Klee** and **Franz Marc**, then destroyed. The loss is irreplaceable.

Notes

According to Kandinsky, the most complex piece he ever painted

Writing that 'music is the ultimate teacher,' Kandinsky embarked upon the first seven of his ten Compositions. The first three survive only in black-and-white photographs. A Nazi raid on the Bauhaus in the 1930s resulted in the confiscation of Kandinsky's first three Compositions. They were displayed in the State-sponsored exhibit "Degenerate Art", and then destroyed (along with works by Paul Klee, Franz Marc and other modern artists).

As he stated in *Concerning the Spiritual In Art* Kandinsky felt that an authentic artist creating art from "an internal necessity" inhabits the tip of an upward-moving pyramid. This progressing pyramid is penetrating and proceeding into the future. What was odd or inconceivable yesterday is commonplace today; what is avant garde today (and understood only by the few) is common knowledge tomorrow. The modern artist–prophet stands alone at the apex of the pyramid, making new discoveries and ushering in tomorrow's reality. Kandinsky was aware of recent scientific developments and the advances of modern artists who had contributed to radically new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

During the studies Kandinsky made in preparation for Composition IV, he became exhausted while working on a painting and went for a walk. While he was out, his friend, Gabriele Münter tidied his studio and inadvertently turned his canvas on its side. Upon returning and seeing the canvas (but not yet recognizing it) Kandinsky fell to his knees and wept, saying it was the most beautiful painting he had ever seen. He had been liberated from attachment to an object. As when he first viewed Monet's *Haystacks*, the experience would change his life.

"Abstract art places a new world, which on the surface has nothing to do with "reality," next to the "real" world. Deeper down, it is subject to the common laws of the "cosmic world." And so a "new world of art" is juxtaposed to the "world of nature." This "world of art" is just as real, just as concrete. For this reason I prefer to call so-called "abstract art" "concrete art." Kandinsky

References

<http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/>



Paul Klee (1879–1940)

Comedy

1921

Watercolour and oil paint on paper
30.5 x 45.4 cm

Tate, London

Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Comedy*, 1921, 30.5 x 45.4 cm, Tate, London

Paul Klee was among the artists whose work was destroyed in that Nazi purge — a loss that makes the surviving pieces more precious still. Born in Switzerland in 1879 to a German father, Klee occupies a genuinely unusual position in early twentieth-century art: deeply connected to **Der Blaue Reiter** and later the **Bauhaus**, where he taught from 1920 for a decade, yet impossible to confine within either movement. Klee believed the visible world was only one of many accessible realities, and his art was a sustained attempt to open the others. The **Surrealists** recognised in his odd conjunctions of signs and symbols something close to dream logic, and drew on that freely. Yet Klee's sensibility was his own — childlike, fantastic, occasionally witty in ways that keep the viewer slightly off-balance. His formation as a violinist was central. He explicitly compared the visual rhythms in his drawings to the contrapuntal structures of **Johann Sebastian Bach**, treating the picture plane as something closer to a musical score than an illusionistic window. He also studied children's drawing seriously, valuing its capacity to invent representational forms without inherited

models. He was denounced as degenerate when **Hitler** came to power in 1933, fled to Switzerland, and died there in **1940**, his application for citizenship still unresolved.

Notes

Klee was a German artist born in Switzerland and is associated with the German Expressionist movement Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider). In 1920 he accepted a post at the Bauhaus where he taught for ten years. When Hitler was declared Chancellor in 1933 Klee was denounced as degenerate and fled to Switzerland. He fell ill with an autoimmune disease and died in 1940 before his application for Swiss citizenship had been granted.

He was widely influential but cannot easily be categorized under any of the movements of the period. The Surrealists found his odd juxtapositions of signs and symbols suggestive of a dream-like state and found his work inspirational in terms of accessing new states of mind. He is childlike, fantastic and sometimes witty.

He believed that the physical world is only one of many 'realities' that we can access. His art was an attempt to open up these other worlds.

Klee was a musician who used to play the violin before painting. Klee even compared the visual rhythm in drawings to the structural, percussive rhythms of a musical composition by the master of counterpoint, Johann Sebastian Bach. He explored the visual language of rhythm, poetry and music but without using specific symbols for specific functions.

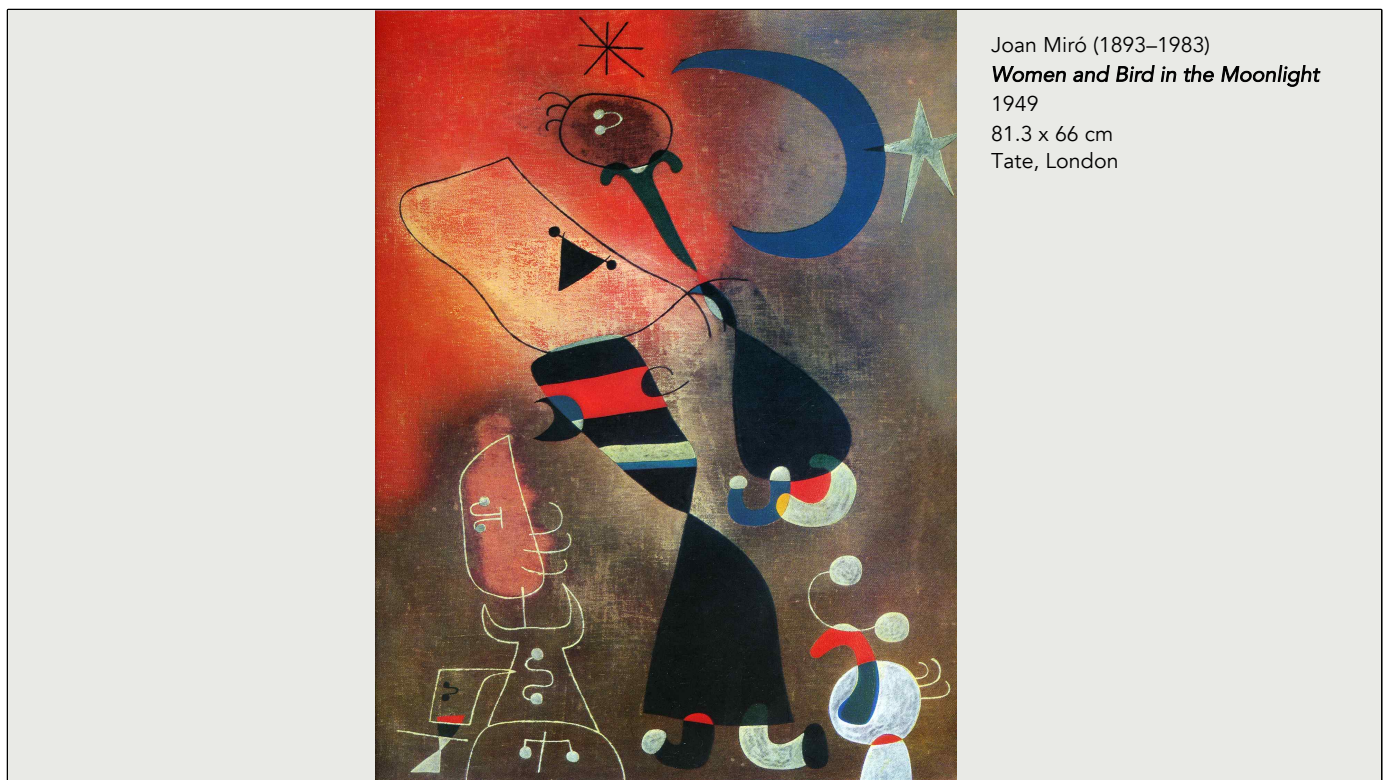
He admired the work of children as they are able to create new forms of representation without using previous models or styles.

He continually experimented with new materials, such as using cloth, and new ways of applying paint, such as spraying and stamping.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/klee-comedy-n05657>

Susanna Partsch, Paul Klee 1879-1940, 1990



Joan Miró (1893–1983), *Women and Bird in the Moonlight*, 1949, 81.3 x 66 cm, Tate, London

Where Klee used musical structure to organise his invented signs, **Joan Miró** arrived at a comparable language of symbols through a very different route — hunger, hallucination, and a sustained assault on everything painting had been. Miró was born in **Barcelona in 1893**, and his earliest professional life was genuinely difficult. His first solo show, in 1918, was ridiculed and works were defaced by visitors. Moving to Paris in **1920**, he fell in with the Montparnasse avant-garde and by 1924 had joined the **Surrealist** group. The fit was natural: Miró later described lying hungry in his studio on the Rue Blomet, seeing shapes on the ceiling and jotting them down in a notebook. Those visions fed directly into what became known as his **dream paintings**. Through the mid-1920s he refined a distinctive pictorial sign language — biomorphic forms, flat colour, vast empty grounds — that owed something to **automatism** but was never wholly subservient to it. His famous declaration that he wanted to assassinate painting was aimed specifically at bourgeois appropriation of art; his remark "I will break

their guitar" targeted the political assimilation of **Picasso's** Cubism. His own statement from 1958 is unambiguous: "Empty spaces, empty horizons, empty plains — everything which is bare has always greatly impressed me."

Notes

Miró was a Spanish painter, sculptor, and ceramicist born in Barcelona. A museum dedicated to his work, the Fundació Joan Miró, was established in his native city of Barcelona in 1975. Miró went to drawing classes at the age of seven and later went to art college and business college. He worked as a clerk and continued his art and had his first solo show in 1918 where his work was ridiculed and defaced. Inspired by Cubist and surrealist exhibitions from abroad, Miró was drawn towards the arts community that was gathering in Montparnasse and in 1920 moved to Paris.

In 1924, Miró joined the Surrealist group. The already symbolic and poetic nature of Miró's work, as well as the dualities and contradictions inherent to it, fit well within the context of dream-like automatism espoused by the group. Much of Miró's work lost the cluttered chaotic lack of focus that had defined his work thus far, and he experimented with collage and the process of painting within his work so as to reject the framing that traditional painting provided. The paintings that came out of this period were eventually dubbed Miró's dream paintings. Through the mid-1920s Miró developed the pictorial sign language which would be central throughout the rest of his career.

"How did I think up my drawings and my ideas for painting? Well I'd come home to my Paris studio in Rue Blomet at night, I'd go to bed, and sometimes I hadn't any supper. I saw things, and I jotted them down in a notebook. I saw shapes on the ceiling.." Janis Mink, Miró (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2003), p. 43

Miró was among the first artists to develop automatic drawing as a way to undo previous established techniques in painting and was therefore one of the early innovators involved with the ideas of Surrealism. However, Miró chose not to become an official member of the Surrealists in order to be free to experiment with other artistic styles without compromising his position within the group. He pursued his own interests in the art world, ranging from automatic drawing and surrealism, to expressionism, Lyrical Abstraction, and Colour Field painting.

Miró's oft-quoted interest in the assassination of painting is derived from a dislike of bourgeois art, which he believed was used as a way to promote propaganda and cultural identity among the wealthy. He responded to Cubism in this way, which by the time of his quote had become an established art form in France. He is quoted as saying "I will break their guitar," referring to Picasso's paintings, with the intent to attack the popularity and appropriation of Picasso's art by politics.

"The spectacle of the sky overwhelms me. I'm overwhelmed when I see, in an immense sky, the crescent of the moon, or the sun. There, in my pictures, tiny forms in huge empty spaces. Empty spaces, empty horizons, empty plains - everything which is bare has always greatly impressed me." Joan Miró, 1958, quoted in Twentieth-Century Artists on Art

Notes

Miró created over 250 illustrated books.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/miro-women-and-bird-in-the-moonlight-n06007>



Van Gogh, *Wheatfield with Crows*, 1890, 50.2 x 103 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (one of Van Gogh's last paintings)

Van Gogh, *Wheatfield with Crows*, 1890, 50.5 x 103 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (one of Van Gogh's last paintings)

From the hallucinated biomorphs of Miró's Paris studio, we move to a country where Continental modernism arrived late and hit hard. For most of the nineteenth century, British painters worked in relative isolation from French developments, though **James McNeill Whistler** and **John Singer Sargent** were significant early bridges. Whistler's pupils **Walter Sickert** and **Philip Wilson Steer** studied in France and, on their return, helped found the **New English Art Club in 1886**, which became the main conduit for Impressionist-adjacent ideas in Britain. The real rupture came with **Roger Fry's** exhibition **Manet and the Post-Impressionists**, held in London from November 1910 to January 1911. Fry had coined the term "Post-Impressionist" essentially on the spot. The show included twenty-two works by **Cézanne**, forty-six by **Gauguin**, and twenty-two by Van Gogh including this one 'Wheatfield with Crows'. There were also a handful by Matisse and Picasso — most made in the 1880s and 90s, so already a generation old, yet to British eyes utterly alien. Critics described them as "the visualised ravings of a

maniac" and "a widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European art." Virginia Woolf, reflecting in 1924, famously placed the cultural rupture precisely: "On or about **December 1910** human character changed."

Notes

During the first three-quarters of the 19th century there was little awareness of Continental art in Britain although there were exceptions, such as James McNeil Whistler and Frederick Leighton. In the last quarter of the century Whistler's pupils Walter Richard Sickert and Wilson Steer went to France and brought back ideas that were promoted by the New English Art Club founded in 1886. Meanwhile in 1885, John Singer Sargent arrived from France and settled in London. Bastien Lepage was very influential as a middle ground between Impressionism and conventional styles.

However, when Stephen Fry put on the Manet and the Post-Impressionists exhibition in London most of the artists shown had rarely been seen by the British public and by British artists. One of the great patrons of avant-garde twentieth-century British art was Edward Marsh. He was Churchill's private secretary and had inherited a perpetual pension granted to descendants of Spencer Perceval, the only Prime Minister to be assassinated. He supported many contemporary artists; he bought Duncan Grant's Parrot Tulips, Paul Nash, and Stanley Spencer's Apple Gatherers, the first of a succession of purchases which made him Spencer's most important early patron. Marsh 'took what some of his friends saw as an erratic leap into the contemporary' (Haycock, p.160).

Notes

Manet and the Post-Impressionists, Nov 1910 - January 1911

The exhibition occupied 4-5 rooms.

It was the turning point in the appreciation of French art in Britain. The impact was recognised at the time and was talked up afterwards. Virginia Wolfe said in 1924, "On or about December 1910 human character changed".

Edward VI had just died and Irish Home Rule was being discussed. The Suffragettes had started their hunger strikes. There was a pervading fear of invasion by France (or Germany). So these artists had a resonance. It was seen by many as a violent assault on British society.

The exhibition was prepared in just four weeks including a visit to Paris to find

the paintings.

Oliver Brown, an art dealer, was told by a friend of his father, "Don't go in there young man, it will do you harm. The pictures are evil."

Influential teachers such as Henry Tonks who had previously supported the new turned on the Post-Impressionists and at the 1912 exhibition begged his students not to go and see it to avoid contamination.

There were few works by Manet but, nevertheless, his name was put in the title to add credibility as by this time his work was known and respected. The exhibition firmly established his reputation with the public. From 1880 to WWI he influenced John Singer Sargent, Wilson Steer, Walter Sickert, Henry Tonks, John Lavery, and William Orpen.

Most of the major Paris art dealers supported the exhibition including Clovis Sagot, Ambroise Vollard and Daniel Kahnweiler.

There were 20-21 works by Cezanne, two by Seurat, 40 by Gauguin, some by van Gogh which were supplied by Theo's widow, two by Picasso, three by Matisse. In fact, nearly all the paintings were from the 1880s and 90s and so were up to 30 years out of date. One exception was Picasso's Portrait of Clovis Sagot of 1909. Cezanne was still virtually unknown and Gauguin was acceptable as his work was categorized as 'exotic'.

Critics wrote "the output of a lunatic asylum", "the visualized ravings of a maniac", "a widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European art." Even Augustus John said of a Matisse that it was "devoid of every genuine quality - vulgar and spurious work", although he thought Picasso "wonderfully fine" and Cezanne "one of the greatest". It was ten more years before he came round to admiring Matisse. There was no positive press but a few critics thought it was the future.

There was a Bateman cartoon 'Post Impressions of the Post-Impressionists' in the Bystander of 1910.

It included Bateman's impression of van Gogh's Portrait of the Postman (1888).

Roger Fry made his money purchasing Old Masters for American galleries. His uncle was one of the chocolate Fry's. It was a strongly Quaker family and so totally sincere but he was considered overly enthusiastic. He had become interested in modern art. Vanessa Bell bumped into him at Cambridge railway station and had spent the train journey arguing for an exhibition of modern

art in London.

Wheatfield with Crows was exhibited at the Grafton Galleries, London, as catalogue number 71 in *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, 8 November 1910 – 15 January 1911. [Van Gogh Museum](#). In 1910 the painting was in the possession of Jo Bonger (Johanna van Gogh-Bonger), Theo's widow, who was the primary lender of Van Gogh works to the exhibition. She lent several canvases — the catalogue records show loans from "Mme. Gosschalk-Bonger" for works including *Garden of Daubigny* and *Orchard in Provence*. The painting only entered the Van Gogh Museum collection much later (it is now registered as S0149V1962, indicating it came to the foundation in 1962). The exhibition included 22 Van Goghs among its 228 catalogued items. That was a substantial showing — roughly on par with Matisse (22) and exceeded only by Gauguin (46)

There was a huge attendance and most of the works were sold to American and private British individuals. So commercially it was a great success.

It was originally entitled the 'Expressionists' exhibition but his friends convinced him to change it. He pulled the term Post-Impressionists out of thin air.

The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition of 1910 was showing the Newlyn School, Alma-Tadema, and Scottish landscapes were very popular. It is interesting to compare Robert Noble (RA, RSA, 1857-1917) with van Gogh's *Crows over Cornfield*.

Frank Dicksee, Charlotte Mary Emily Nugent-Dunbar (d.1951), Wife of 3rd Baron Inverclyde, 1910 v. Matisse *Girl with Green Eyes*.

Fry talked about the form and colour ('extraordinary intensity'). Bell's book *Art* describes how art's role is to produce beauty by means of 'significant form'. This was not clearly defined but depends on the work of Heinrich Wölfflin in the 1880s and 90s. Wölfflin (1864–1945) was a Swiss art historian, whose objective classifying principles ("painterly" vs. "linear" and the like) were influential in the development of formal analysis in art history in the early 20th century. He taught at Basel, Berlin and Munich in the generation that raised German art history to pre-eminence.

Vanessa Bell's style changed, see *Studland Beach* (1911-12).

The 1912 exhibition was far more radical and didn't sell well.

References

David Boyd Haycock, *Crisis of Brilliance*



Unknown / Anonymous
Slade School of Art picnic
circa 1912
Tate, London

Unknown / Anonymous, Slade School of Art picnic, circa 1912, Tate, London

The photograph on your screen fixes a remarkable moment. Taken at a **Slade School of Art** picnic around **1912**, it shows, in a single casual frame, much of the generation that would define British modernism and suffer its losses in the war that was two years away. The Slade, founded in **1868** as part of University College London, had by this point produced what its formidable drawing master **Henry Tonks** called two distinct crises of brilliance. The first had delivered **Augustus John**, **William Orpen**, and **Wyndham Lewis**. The second — commemorated in David Boyd Haycock's study of five young British artists and the Great War — gave the world **Dora Carrington**, **Mark Gertler**, **Paul Nash**, **C.R.W. Nevinson**, and **Stanley Spencer**. Tonks himself is in this photograph. Surgeon, draughtsman, and the most demanding teacher of his generation, he was already exhibiting at the **New English Art Club** — that same institution we encountered earlier as a conduit for French ideas returning with British painters from Paris. He trained his students rigorously in academic drawing, yet several of them would

push straight past everything he valued, into the fractured geometries of Continental modernism.

Notes

Slade School of Art picnic, circa 1912. Front row (left to right): Dora Carrington, Barbara Hiles, Richard Nevinson, Mark Gertler, Edward Wadsworth, Adrian Allinson (with dog), and then Stanley Spencer. Second row: Dorothy Brett sits behind Nevinson and Gertler. Kneeling to the left is Isaac Rosenberg. Back row: David Bomberg (shirtsleeves) and Professor Fred Brown. Murihead Bone, Henry Tonks, Howard Gilman, Augustus John and the Nash's also appear but positions unknown. Presented by Angelica Garnett, 1981 and 1988-92 to Tate and part of the Vanessa Bell Collection. © Tate, London 2015 © Vanessa Bell/Tate, London 2015

David Bomberg, back row, in shirtsleeves

Professor Fred Brown, back row, fourth from left

Henry Tonks, back row, far right (he was 6' 4")

Augustus John, back row, second from left (with beard)

Dora Carrington, front row, far left

C.R.W Nevinson, front row, second from left

Mark Gertler, front row, third from left (with feminine features)

Stanley Spencer, front row, second from right

Henry Tonks (1862-1937) was a surgeon and artist and teacher at the Slade. He exhibited at the New England Art Club which was founded in 1885 and is still an active society. It was founded as an alternative to the Royal Academy by young English artists returning from studying in Paris. Among them were Thomas Cooper Gotch, Frank Bramley, John Singer Sargent, Philip Wilson Steer, George Clausen and Stanhope Forbes. Henry Tonks, Philip Wilson Steer and Frederick Brown became teachers at the Slade and they were all members of the New English Art Club. The Slade School of Fine Art is part of University College London and is consistently ranked the UK's top art and design educational institution. It was founded in 1868 by Felix Slade who bequeathed funds to establish three Chairs in fine art at Oxford, Cambridge and London universities. Tonks became "the most renowned and formidable

teacher of his generation". Two of its most important periods were immediately before, and immediately after, the turn of the twentieth century, described by Henry Tonks as its two 'crises of brilliance'. The first included the students Augustus John, William Orpen and Percy Wyndham Lewis; the second – which has been chronicled in David Boyd Haycock's *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War* (Old Street Publishing, 2009) – included the students Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson and Stanley Spencer. At the start of the war Tonks resumed his medical career in Dorchester, where he did drawing of the refugee Auguste Rodin, and then in France and later Italy. He became a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1916, and produced pastel drawings recording facial injury cases at the Cambridge military hospital in Aldershot and the Queen's Hospital, Sidcup. Tonks became an official war artist in 1918, and he accompanied John Singer Sargent on tours of the Western Front. In August 1918, they both witnessed a field of wounded men near Le Bac du Sud which became the basis for Sargent's vast canvas, *Gassed*. Tonks went to Archangel in Russia in 1919 as a war artist with a British expeditionary force. He succeeded Frederick Brown as Slade Professor of Fine Art from 1918 to 1930, although he initially turned down the appointment in favour of Walter Sickert, only taking it up when Sickert declined the position.



Vanessa Bell (1879–1961)
Studland Beach, verso: Group of Male Nudes by Duncan Grant
 c.1912
 76.2 x 101.6 cm
 Tate, London

Vanessa Bell (1879–1961), *Studland Beach, verso: Group of Male Nudes by Duncan Grant*, c.1912, 76.2 x 101.6 cm, Tate, London

The Slade's most adventurous students didn't stay within the academy's walls, and **Vanessa Bell** is exactly the figure who shows us why. Born in **1879** into the Stephen family — her father was the critic and biographer Leslie Stephen — she trained at the Royal Academy Schools before her world shifted entirely. After both parents died young, she and her siblings Virginia, Thoby, and Adrian abandoned the family home in Hyde Park Gate and settled in **Gordon Square, Bloomsbury**, and in doing so effectively founded the intellectual circle that would bear the neighbourhood's name. **Studland Beach**, painted in **1911**, is our focus. The setting is a quiet bay in Dorset where Bell and her Bloomsbury friends holidayed — itself a marker of their modernity, the seaside resort being a relatively recent cultural institution. The painting owes a clear debt to **Matisse**: flattened planes, bold simplified colour, figures dissolved almost into pure shape. It embodies what Bell's husband, the critic **Clive Bell**, theorised in his **1914** book **Art** as **significant form** — the idea that lines and colours

arranged in a particular way generate aesthetic emotion entirely independent of subject matter. As Clive Bell put it, the question is simply: "What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions?" His answer pointed away from representation and directly towards abstraction.

Notes

Vanessa Bell is one of the most celebrated painters of the Bloomsbury group. She exhibited in London and Paris during her lifetime, and has been praised for innovative works during her early maturity and for her contributions to design

Bell has an exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery which opens on 8 February 2017. The Gallery says she "stands on her own as a pivotal player in 20th century British art, inventing a new language of visual expression forged from British and continental influences."

Studland Beach is in a quiet bay in Dorset. The idea of the beach as a place for leisure activities was relatively new in 1912. It is a sign of their modernity that Vanessa Bell and her Bloomsbury Group friends holidayed there. This is one of several works by Bell from 1911–2 which show a debt to Matisse in their simplified design and bold colouring. Though an exercise in what her friends called 'significant form' (emphasising form rather than subject matter), the picture retains some of the feel of a sunny day spent on the sand and in the water.

Bell visited Studland in 1909, 1910 and 1911 and there is some evidence that the figure in the foreground represents Virginia Woolf. This would date the painting to 19-27th September 1911. Bell's son believes it was painted in 1912 or 1913 when Mr Gibbons visited. He achieved celebrity status by being rescued from the Titanic after keeping himself afloat by tying empty whisky bottles around his body.

Notes

Roger Fry (1866-1934) introduced modern art to England. Fry came from a wealthy Quaker family. He went to Cambridge university and was a scholar who did more than anyone to introduce modernism into England and who invented the term 'Post-Impressionism'. He married in 1896 and had two children but his wife became seriously mentally ill in 1910 and had to spend

the rest of her life in a mental institution. Fry looked after the children with his sister. The same year he met the artist Vanessa Bell (née Stephen; 1879–1961) and her husband Clive Bell. It was an open marriage and both took lovers. Vanessa had a brief affair with Roger Fry and they remained friends the rest of their lives. Vanessa had a lifelong relationship with Duncan Grant and they had a daughter called Angelica whom Clive raised as his own child. Grant continued to have physical affairs including one with David Garnett who would one day marry Angelica. Vanessa relationship with Grant deeply upset Roger Fry who had affairs with other artists before finding Helen Anrep who he stayed with but never married for the rest of his life. Kenneth Clarke described Fry as “the greatest influence since Ruskin”. He taught art history at the Slade from the 1900s, founded the Omega Workshops and in 1934 unexpectedly died after a fall in his home in London.

Vanessa Bell (1879-1961, née Stephens) was educated at home, went to art school and then studied art at the Royal Academy in 1901. Both her parents (Leslie Stephen 1832-1904 and the model Julia Prinsep Duckworth 1846-1895) died and she and her siblings Virginia, Thoby and Adrian and her half-brothers, George and Gerald Duckworth, sold the family home at 22 Hyde Park Gate and bought a house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury which became the beginning of the Bloomsbury Group. In 1907 she married Clive Bell (1881-1964) an art critic from a wealthy family who has been described as a snob, hedonist, womaniser, racist and anti-Semite. They had two sons Julian, who was killed in the Spanish Civil War, and Quentin. By the start of WWI their marriage was effectively over although they never divorced and Vanessa spent most of the rest of her life with Duncan Grant (1885-1978). Grant's father was a major in the army and he spent his youth in India and Burma. Grant's early affairs were all homosexual and included his cousin, the writer Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes. Bell had a child, Angelica, with Grant and he continued to have physical affairs including one with David Garnett who later married Angelica. Bell also had an affair with Roger Fry (1866-1934). Vanessa, Clive, Duncan Grant and his lover, the bisexual writer David Garnett all moved to Charleston farmhouse in East Sussex in 1916. Grant was exempt from military service and worked on a farm with David Garnett. Clive Bell and Maynard Keynes lived at Charleston for considerable periods and Virginia and Leonard Woolf, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry were frequent visitors.

Significant form: a term coined by art critic Clive Bell in 1914 to describe the idea that the form of an artwork or forms within an artwork can be expressive, even if largely or completely divorced from a recognizable reality. Clive Bell's theory of significant form was explained in his book *Art* published in 1914. He begins the book with the lines: 'What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions?'. The answer, according to Bell, is 'significant form' which he goes on to loosely describe as: 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, [that] stir our aesthetic emotions'. In treating or creating form in art the artist aims to modify natural appearances in order to make a new form that is expressive, that is, conveys some sensation or meaning in itself. In modern art the idea grew that form could be expressive even if largely or completely divorced from appearances. These ideas were important to the development of abstract art. In 1914 the British pioneer abstract painter David Bomberg wrote: 'I appeal to a sense of form – where I use naturalistic form I have stripped it of all irrelevant matter...My object is the construction of Pure Form.'

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bell-studland-beach-verso-group-of-male-nudes-by-duncan-grant-t02080/text-catalogue-entry>



David Bomberg (1890–1957)
In the Hold
c.1913–4
196.2 x 231.1 cm
Tate, London

David Bomberg (1890–1957), *In the Hold*, c.1913–4, 196.2 x 231.1 cm, Tate, London

If Vanessa Bell showed us one path out of the Slade's conventions, **David Bomberg** showed us something far more explosive. Born in **1890** in Birmingham to Polish-Jewish parents who moved to Whitechapel when he was still a child, Bomberg belonged to what became known as the **Whitechapel Boys** — a loose constellation of Anglo-Jewish artists that included his fellow Slade student **Mark Gertler**. He got to the Slade partly through the intervention of **John Singer Sargent** and the Jewish Education Aid Society, and he arrived already formed by **Walter Sickert's** teaching and by Roger Fry's landmark **1910** exhibition, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*. His time at the Slade was brief and incendiary. **Henry Tonks**, Gertler, Nash and the others may have constituted a generation of brilliance, but Bomberg was expelled in **1913** — Tonks, Frederick Brown and Philip Wilson Steer all agreeing his radicalism had gone too far. ***In the Hold***, painted that same year, shows exactly what alarmed them. Dockers labouring in a ship's hold are dissolved into angular facets through a

deliberate squaring-up grid Bomberg left fully visible. As he wrote himself: "the new life should find its expression in a new art... I want to translate the life of a great city, its motion, its machinery, into an art that shall not be photographic, but expressive."

Notes

David Bomberg, Dora Carrington, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash, C.R.W. Nevinson and Stanley Spencer - six of the most important and distinctive British artists of the twentieth century - had all been students together at the Slade School of Art in London. They formed part of what their drawing teacher, Henry Tonks, described as the school's last 'crisis of brilliance'. For young British artists working in the years immediately before the Great War it was an exciting and demanding time as various Modernist movements fought for precedence: Primitivism, Futurism, Cubism, Vorticism and Expressionism.

In the Hold is based on a scene of dockers working in the hold of a ship. A ladder, seen in the lower right of the picture, connects the hold with the deck above. In the centre left one of the dockers can be seen, wearing a hat. Bomberg has left visible the squaring-up grid, used to enlarge accurately the preliminary drawing. He has then used this geometrical framework to dissolve the subject of the picture into dynamic angular facets. Bomberg was aware of the militancy of the dockworkers which was much publicised at the time.

Bomberg was searching for a visual language to express his view of the modern urban environment. He wrote: 'the new life should find its expression in a new art, which has been stimulated by new perceptions. I want to translate the life of a great city, its motion, its machinery, into an art that shall not be photographic, but expressive'.

Notes

David Bomberg (1890–1957) was an English painter who was born in Birmingham as the seventh of eleven children. He had Polish-Jewish parents who moved to Whitechapel when he was a child. Between 1908 and 1910 he studied under Sickert and was deeply influenced by Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition Manet and the Post-Impressionists. He was one of the 'Whitechapel Boys', a term applied much later to a loose group of Anglo-Jewish writers and artists including Mark Gertler. He was helped by John

Singer Sargent and the Jewish Education Aid Society to get into the Slade. Bomberg was one of the most audacious of the exceptional generation of artists who studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks. So audacious that he was expelled from the Slade after one year because of his radical style despite the fact that he was a brilliant draughtsman.

He went to France and Italy with Jacob Epstein and met Modigliani, Derain and Picasso. On his return he had an acrimonious relationship with the Omega Workshop and worked with Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism. He joined the London Group in 1914 which had been formed in 1913 from the Camden Town Group and the Fitzroy Street Group. The London Group still exists today. Bomberg combined Cubism and Futurism although in the 1920s he changed back to a more figurative style. Between 1945 and 1953 he was a teacher at Borough Polytechnic and taught Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossof. Bomberg painted a series of complex geometric compositions combining the influences of Cubism and Futurism in the years immediately preceding World War I; typically using a limited number of striking colours, turning humans into simple, angular shapes, and sometimes overlaying the whole painting a strong grid-work colouring scheme. He was expelled from the Slade School of Art in 1913, with agreement between the senior teachers Tonks, Frederick Brown and Philip Wilson Steer, because of the audacity of his breach from the conventional approach of that time.

Whether because his faith in the machine age had been shattered by his experiences as a private soldier in the trenches or because of the pervasive retrogressive attitude towards modernism (the so-called 'return to order') in Britain Bomberg moved to a more figurative style in the 1920s and his work became increasingly dominated by portraits and landscapes drawn from nature. Gradually developing a more expressionist technique he travelled widely through the Middle East and Europe.

References

Tate website



Dora Carrington (1893-1932)
Lytton Strachey
1916
50.8 x 60.9 cm
National Portrait Gallery

Dora Carrington (1893-1932), Lytton Strachey, 1916, 50.8 x 60.9 cm,
National Portrait Gallery

Bomberg's expulsion from the Slade in 1913 was, in a sense, that institution's loss and the wider avant-garde's gain — and it brought him into orbit with figures whose lives were no less vivid than his own. **Dora Carrington**, born in **1893**, had arrived at the Slade through a scholarship, and the same corridors that shaped Bomberg, **Paul Nash**, **Christopher Nevinson**, and **Mark Gertler** shaped her too. Gertler pursued her for years with an intensity that bordered on obsession, and they had a brief relationship during the First World War. John Nash, Paul's younger brother, hoped to marry her. She remained simply Carrington to everyone — a habit that began at the Slade and stuck. Virginia Woolf, writing in her diary in **1918**, caught something essential about her: "She is odd from her mixture of impulse and self-consciousness... so eager to please, conciliatory, restless, and active... so red and solid, and at the same time inquisitive, that one can't help liking her." That portrait in words matters here because it was also in 1918 that Carrington painted **Lytton Strachey**, the critic and biographer

whose **Eminent Victorians** that same year transformed the art of literary biography. Carrington and Strachey shared a household at **Mill House, Tidmarsh** — a relationship that defined both their lives.

Notes

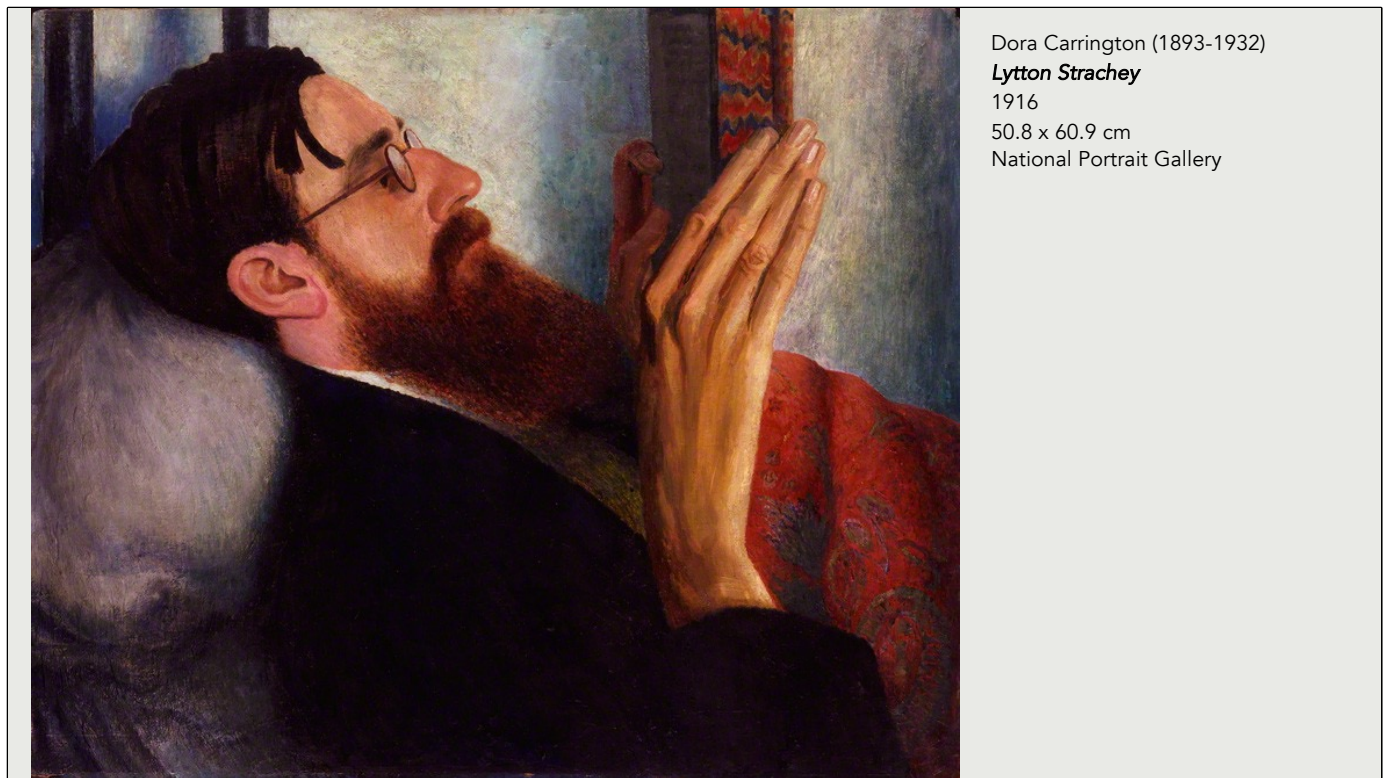
Dora Carrington (1893-1932) was the daughter of a Liverpool merchant who attended an all girls that specialised in art before attending the Slade where she won a scholarship. Her fellow students included Paul Nash, Christopher R. W. Nevinson and Mark Gertler. All at one time or another were in love with her, as was Nash's younger brother John Nash, who hoped to marry her. Gertler pursued Carrington for a number of years, and they had a brief sexual relationship during the years of the First World War. From her time at the Slade onwards, she was commonly known simply by her surname. She had, for that time an unusual pageboy hairstyle and was always eager to please, active, bustling and inquisitive. She was not a member of the Bloomsbury Group although closely associated with it.

Notes

(Giles) Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) was a critic and biographer. Strachey went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1899. While at Cambridge, Strachey joined the ranks of the 'Apostles', a select group including Roger Fry, Maynard Keynes and E.M. Forster. These individuals later formed the nucleus of the Bloomsbury Group, and Strachey remained a central figure throughout the heyday of Old Bloomsbury, prior to the outbreak of the First World War. His iconoclastic biographical essays *Eminent Victorians* (1918), set a new standard for biography for the twentieth century, and *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), about Queen Elizabeth I, was influential in the way it mixed biography with fiction. During the First World War, when this portrait was made, he was a conscientious objector. Conscientious objectors who refused to fight were compelled to do non-military war work, and some were jailed. He wrote for various journals and magazines while *Eminent Victorians* and his essays on Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale and General Gordon, made his name and set standards for literary biography for the twentieth century.

In 1918, Virginia Woolf described Carrington in her diary, 'She is odd from her mixture of impulse & self consciousness. I wonder sometimes what she's at: so eager to please, conciliatory, restless, & active.... [B]ut she is such a

bustling eager creature, so red & solid, & at the same time inquisitive, that one can't help liking her'.



Dora Carrington (1893-1932)
Lytton Strachey
1916
50.8 x 60.9 cm
National Portrait Gallery

Dora Carrington (1893-1932), Lytton Strachey, 1916, 50.8 x 60.9 cm,
National Portrait Gallery

The relationship between Carrington and **Lytton Strachey** defied easy categorisation. Strachey was homosexual, and his deeper erotic attachments were to men — including **Ralph Partridge**, whom Carrington agreed to marry in **1921**, not out of love but to preserve their shared domestic life at **Mill House, Tidmarsh**. When Partridge left her in **1926** for **Frances Marshall**, Carrington entered a relationship with **Bernard Penrose**, brother of the Surrealist collector **Roland Penrose**. By 1928 she had ended that too. When Strachey died in **1932**, she borrowed a gun and shot herself two months later. The devotion was absolute and, in the end, fatal. Her painting career operated almost entirely outside public view. She rarely exhibited, almost never signed her work, and treated art as something closer to a private practice than a profession. She produced woodcuts for the **Hogarth Press** and worked at the **Omega Workshops**, but her name circulated in studios rather than galleries. **John Rothenstein**, director of the **Tate**, later called her "the most neglected serious painter of our time" — a

judgement that feels both accurate and damning, given how much of that neglect she engineered herself.

Notes

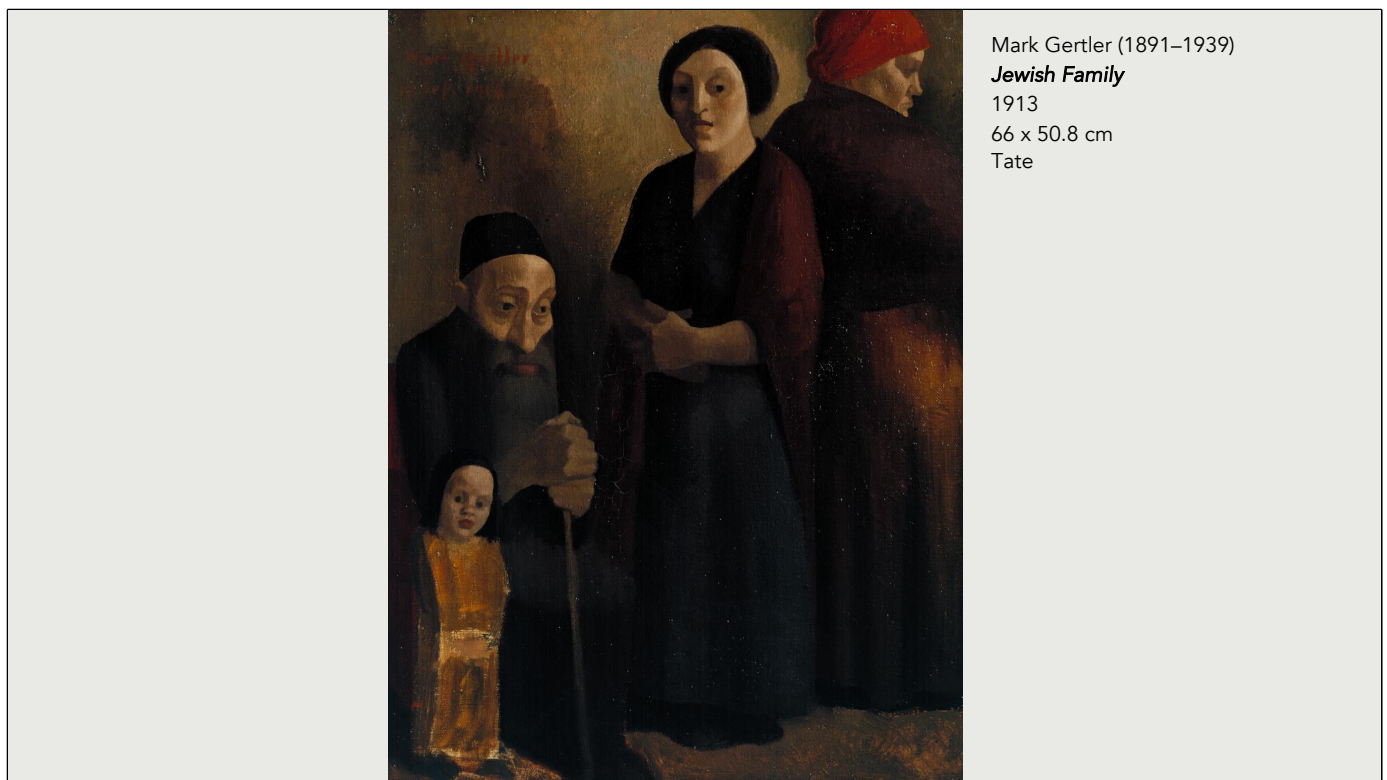
Dora Carrington had a long relationship with the homosexual writer Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) and she had a brief affair with Henrietta Bingham. In 1921 Carrington agreed to marry Ralph Partridge, not for love but to secure the three-way relationship. He left Carrington in 1926 for Frances Marshall and Carrington had an affair with Bernard Penrose, brother of Roland Penrose. In 1928 she became pregnant, had an abortion and left Penrose. She committed suicide two months after Strachey's death in 1932 after borrowing a gun from a friend. Strachey himself had been much more interested sexually in Partridge, as well as in various other young men, including a secret sadomasochistic relationship with Roger Senhouse. She was not well known as a painter during her lifetime, as she rarely exhibited and did not sign her work. She worked for a while at the Omega Workshops, and for the Hogarth Press, designing woodcuts. Tate Director, John Rothenstein (1901-1992) described her as 'the most neglected serious painter of our time'.

Notes

(Giles) Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) was a critic and biographer. Strachey went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1899. While at Cambridge, Strachey joined the ranks of the 'Apostles', a select group including Roger Fry, Maynard Keynes and E.M. Forster. These individuals later formed the nucleus of the Bloomsbury Group, and Strachey remained a central figure throughout the heyday of Old Bloomsbury, prior to the outbreak of the First World War. His iconoclastic biographical essays *Eminent Victorians* (1918), set a new standard for biography for the twentieth century, and *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), about Queen Elizabeth I, was influential in the way it mixed biography with fiction. During the First World War, when this portrait was made, he was a conscientious objector. Conscientious objectors who refused to fight were compelled to do non-military war work, and some were jailed. He wrote for various journals and magazines while *Eminent Victorians* and his essays on Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale and General Gordon, made his name and set standards for literary biography for the twentieth century.

In 1918, Virginia Woolf described Carrington in her diary, 'She is odd from

her mixture of impulse & self consciousness. I wonder sometimes what she's at: so eager to please, conciliatory, restless, & active.... [B]ut she is such a bustling eager creature, so red & solid, & at the same time inquisitive, that one can't help liking her'.



Mark Gertler (1891–1939), *Jewish Family*, 1913, 66 x 50.8 cm, Tate

The neglect Carrington cultivated stands in sharp contrast to **Mark Gertler**, who actively sought recognition — and found it complicated by everything his background represented. Gertler grew up in **Whitechapel**, the son of Austro-Galician Jewish immigrants, and that community became his primary subject matter in the years around **1910 to 1914**. Where Carrington drew from English pastoral tradition, Gertler looked to the streets and tenements he had known as a child. In works presenting archetypal Jewish family groups, he adopted simplified, monumental forms drawn from two sources he found equally compelling: **Eastern European Jewish folk art** and **early Italian painting** — the kind of pre-Renaissance frontality that Bloomsbury painters also admired. The result is consciously archaic, figures flattened and solidified rather than naturalistically rendered. His mother appeared in his work repeatedly, and the variations between portraits are telling. In earlier canvases she sits as a smartly dressed Edwardian matron — aspirational, assimilated. Here she is recast as a peasant in a headscarf, elemental and Old World. Gertler was not

simply depicting a woman; he was negotiating competing constructions of **Jewish identity** — what it meant to come from somewhere, and what it cost to leave it behind.

Notes

Mark Gertler often took his subjects from the Jewish community in Whitechapel where he had grown up. Here he presents an archetypal Jewish family using simplified forms and consciously archaic figure types, inspired by folk art and early Italian painting, sources which were influential among the Bloomsbury artists with whom he was associated at this time. Gertler's mother regularly modelled for him, and his depictions of her reveal a complex interplay between different constructions of Jewish identity and artistic influences. This shows her as a peasant wearing a headscarf, although she had appeared in earlier portraits as a smartly-dressed Edwardian matron.

Mark Gertler (1891–1939)
Merry-Go-Round
1916
142.2 x 189.2 cm
Tate, London



Mark Gertler (1891–1939), *Merry-Go-Round*, 1916, 142.2 x 189.2 cm, Tate, London

That negotiation of identity — between assimilation and origin, aspiration and rootedness — never resolved itself comfortably for Gertler, and his biography bears that out with painful clarity. Born **Marks Gertler** in **1891**, he won a scholarship from the Jewish Education Aid Society that took him from a stained-glass workshop he despised to the **Slade School of Art**, where he encountered Carrington. His route into Bloomsbury ran through **Lady Ottoline Morrell**, who introduced him to **Walter Sickert** and a world of patronage that sat uneasily with his temperament and his politics. When **Edward Marsh** became his patron in **1914**, the relationship fractured within two years: Gertler was a conscientious objector, and Marsh was secretary to Winston Churchill. It is precisely from that period of wartime anguish that **Merry-Go-Round** emerged in **1916** — the painting D. H. Lawrence called "the best modern picture I have seen." The mechanical carousel, its figures locked in joyless rotation, reads as a direct indictment of the war machine. Gertler died by suicide in **1939**, his final years shadowed by

illness, financial ruin, and the memory of Carrington, who had taken her own life seven years earlier. The Times judged his death a serious loss to British art.

Notes

Mark Gertler (1891–1939), born Marks Gertler, was a British painter of figure subjects, portraits and still-life. His early life and his relationship with Dora Carrington were the inspiration for Gilbert Cannan's novel *Mendel*. The characters of Loerke in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and Gombauld in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow* were based on him.

He came from a poor Jewish-Polish family that settled in London. He could draw from a young age and enrolled at Regents Street Polytechnic but had to leave because of his family's poverty. He started work at a stained glass company, which he hated, but the following year he came third in an national art competition and was awarded a scholarship from the Jewish Education Aid Society and enrolled at the Slade School of Art.

At the Slade he met Dora Carrington who he pursued for years without success. Carrington spent most of her life living with the homosexual author Lytton Strachey, with whom she was deeply in love. Carrington's unconventional relationship with Strachey, of whom Gertler was extremely jealous, and her eventual marriage to Ralph Partridge, destroyed her equally complex relationship with Gertler. He had been so distraught when he learned of Carrington's marriage that he tried to purchase a revolver, and threatened to commit suicide.

Gertler became acquainted with the Bloomsbury Group through his patron Lady Ottoline Morrell. She introduced him to Walter Sickert, the nominal leader of the Camden Town Group. Gertler became successful as a painter of society portraits, but his temperamental manner and devotion to advancing his work according to his own vision led to increasing personal frustration and the alienation of potential sitters and buyers. As a result, he struggled frequently with poverty.

In 1914 the polymath art collector Edward Marsh became Gertler's patron. The relationship between the two men proved a difficult one, as Gertler felt that the system of patronage and the circle in which he moved were in direct conflict with his sense of self. In 1916, as World War I dragged on, Gertler ended the relationship due to his pacifism and conscientious objection (Marsh

was secretary to Winston Churchill and patron to some of the war poets). Gertler's major painting, *Merry-Go-Round*, was created in the midst of the war years and was described by Lawrence as "the best modern picture I have seen" (Letters, 9 October 1916).

In 1920, Gertler suffered from tuberculosis which killed his friend D.H. Lawrence. He married in 1930 but they were both ill and he felt constrained. He became a part-time art teacher and in 1939 he had financial difficulties, his wife had recently left him, an exhibition was badly received, his mother had died in 1932, the same year Carrington committed suicide and he was filled with fear over the imminent war and he gassed himself in his London studio. The Times described his death as a serious loss to British art and rated him one of the top half-dozen artists under fifty working in England.

A record price for his work is £542,500 for *The Violinist* (1912) in 2015.



Winifred Knights (1899-1947)
The Deluge
1920
152.9 x 183.5 cm
Tate, London

Winifred Knights (1899-1947), *The Deluge*, 1920, 152.9 x 183.5 cm, Tate, London

From the anguish of Gertler's wartime London, we turn to a very different response to modernity — one rooted not in expressionist fury but in the disciplines of the Italian Renaissance. **Winifred Knights** was born in **1899** in Streatham and studied at the **Slade School of Art** under **Henry Tonks**, the same formidable draughtsman who had shaped Gertler's training. In **1917**, she witnessed the **Silvertown explosion** — a catastrophic TNT factory disaster in east London — an experience that traumatised her profoundly and interrupted her studies. That rupture may explain the peculiar intensity of ***The Deluge***, painted in **1920** as her entry for the **British School at Rome** scholarship in decorative painting. Knights won, becoming the first woman in England to take that prize. The painting synthesises the frieze-like procession of **fifteenth-century Italian painting** with something of the kinetic urgency of Futurism: figures flee across the foreground while the ark sits small and indifferent in the distance. Knights herself appears centre right; her mother modelled the woman holding a child; her fellow student **Arnold**

Mason modelled two of the male figures. *The Daily Graphic* declared her a genius. The Tate now holds the work, and the retrospective at **Dulwich Picture Gallery** in **2016** confirmed how seriously overdue her reappraisal was.

Notes

Inspired by the masterpieces of Italian Early Renaissance artists, painstakingly exact in her working methods, and even declared a genius, Winifred Knights (1899-1947) is one of the most original, pioneering British artists of the first half of the 20th century. However, she produced little during the war and died in 1947.

This painting was produced for the 1920 Prix de Rome scholarship which she won despite intense competition from other Slade School students and tonsillitis and eye problems during the eight weeks allowed for the task.

Initially she planned a scene of figures and animals entering Noah's ark but this final design is more dramatic with figures fleeing the flood. The ark is a small windowless vessel in the background while in the foreground fleeing figures create a sense of dynamic movement that combines the frieze-like structure of fifteenth-century Italian painting with the energy of Futurism. The Daily Graphic (8 February 1921), declared the painter a genius.

Knights herself appears as the woman centre right in the foreground and her mother modelled for the woman holding a baby. Her friend Arnold Mason (1885-1963) modelled for the man next to her and the crouching figure scaling the hill behind them.

Knights continued to paint religious subjects for the rest of her life like fellow artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959).

The first major retrospective of the award-winning Slade School artist, this exhibition will reunite all her completed paintings for the first time since their creation, including the apocalyptic masterpiece *The Deluge*, 1920, which attracted immense critical acclaim.

Knights worked with determination and extreme attention to detail, and all five of her major works were supported by exquisite and numerous studies. As well as her five most famous works - *A Scene in a Village Street, with Mill Hands Conversing* (1919), *The Deluge* (1920), *The Marriage at Cana* (1923), *Santissima Trinita* (1924-30) and *Scenes From The Life of St Martin of Tours* (1928-1933) - nearly 120 intricate preparatory studies, illustrations and portraits will provide a true insight into the artistic processes

of this incredibly talented and under-appreciated woman artist.

Notes

Knights was born in Streatham and went to school in Dulwich where she showed artistic talent early on. She went to the Slade School of Art from 1915-17 and 1918-20 under Henry Tonks and Fred Brown. During World War One, Knights was traumatised after witnessing the Silvertown explosion at a TNT processing works in January 1917, which led to the break in her studies while she recuperated on the farm of her father's cousin. In 1920, she became the first woman in England to win the prestigious Scholarship in Decorative Painting awarded by the British School at Rome with her critically acclaimed painting *The Deluge*. That year she became engaged to fellow student Arnold Mason and moved to Italy to complete her scholarship, living in a small village south of Rome. The relationship with Mason ended and she married fellow Rome Scholar Thomas Monnington in 1924. On her return to England in 1926 she returned to the Slade for a year. In 1933 she worked on the decoration of Eltham Palace for Stephen Courtauld. She died of a brain tumour in 1947, aged 47. Her first major retrospective was at Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2016 and typical reviews were:

'Spellbinding genius of a neglected artist' - The Telegraph, Five stars

'The lost talent of Winifred Knights' - The Times

'An intensely sensitive and compelling exhibition' - The Guardian

Amongst her most notable works are *The Marriage at Cana* produced for the British School at Rome, which is now in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and her winning Rome Scholarship entry *The Deluge* which is now held by Tate Britain. Knights' style was much influenced by the Italian Quattrocento and she was one of several British artists who participated in a revival of religious imagery in the 1920s, while retaining some elements of a modernist style.

Knights died in 1947 at the young age of 48, leaving behind unfinished works. She had a retrospective at Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2016 and her work is being re-evaluated. However, her portfolio is very small.

References

Jacky Klein, 2002, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/knights-the-deluge-t05532/text-summary>

<http://artuk.org/discover/artists/knights-winfred-18991946>

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/knights-the-deluge-t05532>



Paul Nash (1889-1946)

A Drawing

1913

Watercolour, pen, ink, pencil, crayon and chalk

55.9 x 38.1 cm

Private collection

Paul Nash (1889-1946), A Drawing, 1913, 55.9 x 38.1 cm, Private collection

Knights won her Rome scholarship painting a world overwhelmed by elemental catastrophe. **Paul Nash** would spend much of his career doing something similar — finding in the English landscape, and then in the landscapes of war, a world simultaneously beautiful and annihilating. Nash was born in London in **1889**, the son of a barrister, and grew up partly in Buckinghamshire, where trees — those in Kensington Gardens especially — made an impression on him that never left. He trained first at the London County Council art school and then at the **Slade**, where, like Gertler and Knights before him, he sat under **Henry Tonks**. Figure painting defeated him, so he turned to landscape, and by **1912 and 1913** he was already exhibiting. **A Drawing**, made in **1913**, shows that early sensibility with remarkable directness. Tall elms stripped bare by winter expose their full eccentric structure against a cooling sky; a group of birds enters the picture from beyond the frame, asserting life and freedom against the stillness. Nash spoke of trees as possessing genuine spiritual presence, and the

feeling here — serene yet strangely charged — carries that conviction absolutely. The work sold for **£212,500** at Bonhams in **2014**, a measure of how completely his reputation has been recovered.

Notes

Paul Nash (1889-1946) was one of the most important landscape painters in the first half of the twentieth century. He was a well known war artist, photographer, writer and designer. He was born in London, the son of a barrister, and moved to Iwer Heath, Buckinghamshire as a child. His mother became mentally ill and died in 1910. He was destined for the Navy but failed the entrance exam despite special tuition and studied engraving at the London County Council art school. He went to the Slade School of Art but was poor at figure painting and so concentrated on landscapes. He had shows in 1912 and 1913 and was influenced by William Blake, Samuel Palmer and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In 1914 he joined the Omega Workshops which were founded in 1914 by Roger Fry to remove what he considered to be the false distinction between decorative and fine art. He helped Roger Fry restore the Mantegna paintings at Hampton Court. In 1914 he enlisted and married the suffragette Margaret Odeh.

In 1917 he was sent to the Western Front but it was a quiet period. He fell down a hole and broke a rib so was sent back to London and at this time there was a massive battle and most of his unit were killed. In London he produced 20 drawings with a Vorticist influence. He became an official war artist with batman and chauffeur. He came under constant fire and suffered rain, mud and flooding. He became angry and disillusioned with what he described as a nightmare from Dante, 'unspeakable, godless, hopeless'. He was making a dozen sketches a day and held a one-man show in 1918 of his watercolours, drawings and lithographs (which he had been taught to produce by Nevinson). It was not until 1918 that he started to paint in oils and he painted *We are Making a New World* which has been described as like a 'nuclear winter' with no people. The censor thought it was a bad joke against the British people but it was critically acclaimed and he was commissioned in 1918 to produce *Menin Road*, a 60 square foot canvas. After the war he struggled with depression and money. He took up engraving but in 1921 had an emotional collapse and moved to Dymchurch to recover. He taught Eric Ravilious at the Royal College of Art and travelled to Nice, Florence and Pisa. He moved to Iden near Rye and in 1928 he moved to abstraction and had

another successful exhibition. He did engraving, fabric design, china design and photography and in 1930 became art critic for The Listener.

He was a pioneer of modernism and was later influenced by Giorgio de Chirico. In 1933 he co-founded Unit One with Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. In 1933 to 1935 he painted around Silbury and Avebury and John Betjeman asked him to write the Shell Guide to Dorset. He moved to Swanage and then in 1936 to Hampstead. When World War II started he became a war artist for the Royal Air Force but his modernist style was unpopular with the Committee as they wanted portraits of aircrew. His contract was terminated in 1940 but Kenneth Clark (1903-1983) was so aghast he had the Committee agree to pay Nash £500 for whatever work he produced. He produced four paintings by 1944 including Totes Meers which Clark described as his 'best picture so far'. He also painted Battle of Germany an unconventional abstract. He suffered from asthma and towards the end of his life he returned to painting one of his childhood haunts Wittenham Clumps in a mystical, symbolic style. He died in 1946.

His war paintings became the most memorable and iconic images of the conflict. During the 1930s, his work became increasingly abstract and surreal and he would place everyday objects in the landscape to give them new significance. In 1933 he co-founded the influential modern art movement Unit One with fellow artists Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and the critic Herbert Read. It was a short-lived but important move towards the revitalisation of British art in the inter-war period. He continued to paint during World War II despite an asthmatic condition that would kill him. His late landscapes are full of symbolism and possess a powerful mystical quality.

This watercolour was painted in 1913, the humble nature of this period in Nash's development as an artist is reflected in the ultimate simplicity of the title, A Drawing. The bare branches of the tall elm trees that marked the garden's boundary coupled with the light and colour of the composition indicate the end of a cool winter day. Indeed, the present work is remarkable both for its generous size and vivid colours that are rare in a period that was dominated by ink drawing with mild washes of predominantly blue. Trees in particular had always held a spiritual quality for the artist who was drawn to them as a child on visits to Kensington Gardens. Stripped of their leaves and foliage, the structure of the trees in A Drawing are fully exposed for us to appreciate their eccentric growth. The shadows that are cast across the land from the foreground of the composition add an element of mystery to the

scene whilst the arrival of a group of birds into the pictorial space from outside celebrates life and freedom. The serenity of the scene and that of the few others from this period is juxtaposed with Nash's imminent enlisting as part of the war effort and subsequent deployment to the front.

Notes

This drawing sold for £212,500 at Bonhams in 2014

'Paul Nash', a major exhibition will be held between 26 October 2016 and 5 March 2017 at Tate Britain, London.

References

Bonhams website



Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson
(1889–1946)
Dance Hall Scene
c.1913–4
gouache and graphite on paper
22.2 x 19.7 cm
Tate

Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889–1946), *Dance Hall Scene*, c.1913–4, 22.2 x 19.7 cm, Tate

Where Nash found spiritual charge in the English landscape, **Christopher Nevinson** turned his gaze toward speed, noise, and human mass — and toward the continental movement that gave those energies their aesthetic grammar. Nevinson was born in **1889**, the same year as Nash, and trained at the **Slade** between 1909 and 1912, where he was friends with Spencer and Gertler. The pivotal moment came in March 1912, when the **Futurist Exhibition** at the Sackville Gallery in London arrived like a detonation. Nevinson befriended **Filippo Marinetti**, and became the only British artist to wholeheartedly embrace Futurism, co-signing the manifesto **Vital English Art**, which called out the English cultural establishment for its embrace of the pretty-pretty and the mediocre. His painting of dancers, probably inspired by the **Albert Hall Ball of December 1913**, shows what that commitment meant in practice. The composition does not simply depict movement — it enacts it, fracturing figures across the canvas so that the experience of dancing overwhelms any single viewpoint. This

is **simultaneity** as Futurism understood it. The enthusiasm made enemies. **Wyndham Lewis**, hostile to Futurist influence on British art, founded **Vorticism** in direct opposition and refused Nevinson entry. The London avant-garde was fracturing, and that fracture would deepen dramatically once war arrived.

Notes

Christopher Nevinson was the son of a war correspondent and was a student at the Slade School of Art between 1909 and 1912. The Futurist Exhibition of March 1912, held at the Sackville Gallery, London, proved decisive for his development.

This scene of wild partying was probably inspired by the Albert Hall Ball, held in London on 3 December 1913. Nevinson was fascinated by the idea of 'simultaneity'. His composition here is not just depicting dancers, but conveys the experience of dancing. He was the only British artist to wholeheartedly embrace Futurism, co-signing the manifesto *Vital English Art* which rejected 'the pretty-pretty, the commonplace, the soft, sweet, and mediocre' in English culture, in favour of the modern and dynamic.

Notes

Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson (1889–1946) was one of the most famous of all the World War One artists. He was a friend of Stanley Spencer and Mark Gertler at the Slade. He befriended Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944), the founder of Futurism in 1908, and became a signed up Futurist. As a result he fell out with Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957) who immediately founded Vorticism and refused to let Nevinson join. Nevinson joined the Ambulance Service but fell ill and joined the Royal Army Medical Corp in the UK. He painted *La Mitrailleuse* in 1915, described by Walter Sickert in 1916 as 'the most authoritative and concentrated utterance on the war in the history of painting'. In 1917 he was appointed official war artist but no longer found modernism adequate to express his feelings. After the war he travelled to New York but his boasting, depressive and volatile temperament made him many enemies. One critic wrote, 'It is something, at the age of thirty one, to be among the most discussed, most successful, most promising, most admired and most hated British artists.' His post-war career was not so distinguished and his 1937 memoirs, *Paint and Prejudice*, have been described as inaccurate, inconsistent and misleading.

Futurism had by now become a catchword in London for anything new and outrageous, and the British avant-garde grew resentful of its influence. Nevinson continued to make Futurist paintings of machine-age London, celebrating the dynamism of the underground Tube trains, the traffic in the Strand, and a Bank Holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. The advent of World War I changed his mind. Having gone to France with the Red Cross and been invalided home soon afterwards, he announced that he would be using 'Futurist technique' to express the reality of war in his new work. In subsequent paintings Nevinson confirmed that he saw the Great War essentially as a tragic event. Bleak, outspoken and often angry, his paintings of 1915–16 are among the masterpieces of his career, bravely opposing the prevailing jingoistic tendency. By 1919 he had given up Futurism. Retreating instead to a more traditional vision, he painted lively interpretations of New York, which fuse a lingering love of Futurist angularity with a new respect for naturalistic observation. Nevinson was at his best when dealing with the dynamism and vertiginous scale of big-city life. In later years he concentrated more on pastoral scenes and flower pieces, where a gentler mood prevailed. In 1918, Nevinson was the person who showed Paul Nash how to produce lithographs.

References

Tate website



Stanley Spencer (1891–1959)
Apple Gatherers
1912–3
71.4 x 92.4 cm
Tate

Stanley Spencer (1891–1959), *Apple Gatherers*, 1912–3, 71.4 x 92.4 cm, Tate

That fracture within the avant-garde was partly playing out inside a single cohort at the Slade — and no figure from that group moved in a more singular direction than **Stanley Spencer**. Spencer was born in **Cookham**, the Berkshire village that would remain his imaginative home for life. His father was a music teacher and church organist, and Spencer was educated at home by his sisters before studying at the **Slade** from 1908 to 1912 under **Henry Tonks**, alongside Nevinson, Nash, Gertler, and Bomberg. He was so devoted to Cookham that Nevinson gave him the nickname — simply, Cookham — because Spencer took the train home each evening to be back for tea. His painting **Apple Gatherers**, begun in 1912, was his first large-scale attempt to articulate a coherent vision. Spencer himself wrote that he had wished to say what life was — a pantheistic sense of connection between man, woman, nature, and fertility. The subject was partly prompted by an orchard landscape near Taunton where his teacher Tonks had arranged for him to stay over the Christmas holiday of 1911

to 1912. That same year Spencer won the **Slade composition prize** and showed work in **Roger Fry's** Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition. He was twenty-one, and already forming a personal mythology entirely distinct from anything Futurism or Vorticism could offer.

Notes

Stanley Spencer wrote, in 1939, that 'This picture was my first ambitious work and I have in it wished to say what life was' (Tate Archive 733.3.21). The subject, however, was chosen for him, as it was set by the Slade School for their annual drawing competition. Spencer's teacher, Henry Tonks, had arranged for him to spend part of the 1911-12 Christmas holiday with an old Slade student near Taunton. The surrounding orchards must partly have been an inspiration. In the painting Spencer sought to give form to a pantheistic vision of connection between man, woman, nature and fertility.

Spencer was born in Cookham where the Stanley Spencer Gallery is now based. His father was a music teacher and church organist and he was educated at home by his sisters as his parents did not like the local school. He took drawing lessons as part of his education and although he later went to a school in Maidenhead he developed into a solitary teenager who took long walks in the countryside on his own. From 1908 to 1912 he studied at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks with Dora Carrington, Christopher Nevinson, Mark Gertler, Paul Nash and David Bomberg. He would take the train back to Cookham to arrive in time for tea so often that Nevinson gave him the nickname Cookham.

In 1912 he won the Slade composition prize and exhibited John Donne Arriving in Heaven and some drawings in the British section of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition organised by Roger Fry in London. That year he began painting Apple Gatherers, which was shown in the first Contemporary Art Society exhibition the following year.



Stanley Spencer
(1891–1959)
Apple Gatherers
1912–3

41-01 CUBISM ABSTRACTION AND THE BRITISH AVANT GARDE

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



From Monet's steam-filled station to Mondrian's grids, Malevich's black square, and Kandinsky's spiritual abstractions, this talk has traced how form progressively liberated itself from representation. We then followed those energies into Britain — through Roger Fry's landmark 1910 exhibition, the Slade generation, and figures as distinct as Bomberg, Gertler, Nevinson, and Spencer — showing how a country initially resistant to Continental modernism produced, in the years around the First World War, one of its most vivid avant-garde moments.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

