



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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98-05 TATE MODERN IN THE STUDIO

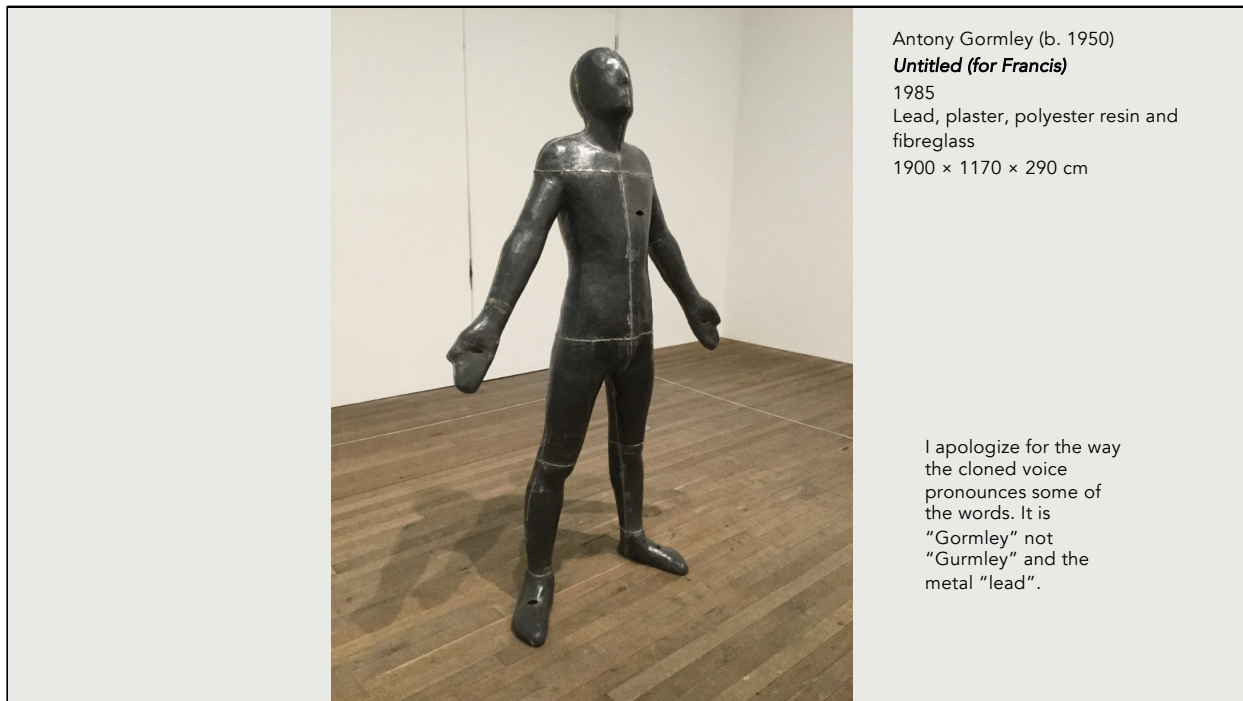
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Antony Gormley
(b. 1950)
Untitled (for
Francis)
1985

This talk moves through Tate Modern's studio-focused collection as it stood in an earlier configuration, tracing what artists do when they turn the act of making itself into a subject. From Gormley's lead-encased body and Hesse's drooping ropes, through Picasso, Matisse, Monet, and Rothko, to Krasner's grief and Riley's jubilation, we track how the studio becomes a site of experiment, mourning, obsession, and radical reinvention across roughly a century of modern art.



Antony Gormley (b. 1950), *Untitled (for Francis)*, 1985, 1900 × 1170 × 290 cm

We turn now to the works themselves, keeping in mind that this survey reflects an earlier configuration of the collection. Two figures anchor this room: an abstract work by **Eva Hesse** and, facing it, a human figure by **Antony Gormley**. The contrast is deliberate — and it sets up the argument running through the rooms that follow. Gormley was born in London in **1950**, read archaeology, anthropology and art history at Cambridge, spent three years in India studying Buddhist meditation, and trained in sculpture at the **Slade** in the late seventies. He won the **Turner Prize in 1994**. His most publicly recognised work is **The Angel of the North**, the vast steel figure completed in 1998 outside Gateshead. The work before us, **Untitled (for Francis)**, made in **1985**, begins with his own body. His wife, the painter **Vicken Parsons**, wrapped him in clingfilm, applied two layers of plaster and jute, cut the set shell free, reassembled it, and reinforced it with resin and fibreglass. Twenty-four sheets of standard roofing lead were then hammered over the cast and soldered together. The lead surface shifts from dark to light grey across the figure. Look closely and you will see five eye-shaped apertures pierced through the lead — at the hands, feet, and breast. The standing figure, head tilted back, arms extended, palms displayed, invokes a saint receiving the **stigmata**.

Notes

Finding Meaning. In this room we have two apparently contrasting works. Over there an abstract work by Eva Hesse and here a human figure by Antony Gormley. They represent contrasting approaches that are explored in the following rooms. Gormley is best known for The Angel of the North (see Visual Aids) an enormous sculpture on a hill near Newcastle.

Construction. This work is called Untitled (for Francis) and was made in 1985. Like many of his other works it was made directly from his own body. He was wrapped in clingfilm by his wife, who is also an artist, and then covered in two layers of plaster. When it had dried the cast was cut from his body, reassembled and then covered in fibreglass and resin. Twenty-four sheets of lead were then hammered over the figure and soldered together. If you look closely you will see that the figure has been pierced in the breast, hands and feet by small holes cut in the lead.

St. Francis. The attitude of the eyeless figure, standing with head tilted back, feet apart and arms extended to display the palms of its hands, resembles that of a Christian saint receiving the stigmata. Stigmata are the five marks left on Christ's body by the Crucifixion although one of the wounds here is in the breast, rather than, as tradition dictates, in the side. The title Untitled (for Francis) refers to Saint Francis of Assisi who allegedly received the wounds of Christ in 1224 and specifically it refers to a fifteenth-century Italian painting by Giovanni Bellini called St Francis in Ecstasy.

Buddhist. Although Gormley was brought up as a Catholic he lost his faith after spending three years in India studying Buddhist meditation. His ability to meditate enables him to stay still while his body is covered in plaster. He uses his own body not to produce a self-portrait but to represent humanity and to examine the physical and spiritual relationships between all of us and the world around us. The sculpture represents the relationship between our external appearance and our interior feelings and thoughts.

Boundaries. What does the work mean? Always a difficult and very personal question that we might all answer in different ways. Gormley is not afraid to use the figurative when a lot of contemporary art is abstract and conceptual, but the body is not a representation of a particular person but a universal symbol. Gormley has said his work is about our inner life, the boundary between each of us and the world and the relationship between all of us and the natural world. He did not want to create a beautiful object for our enjoyment but to create something that makes us think about who we are and our relationship with the world. According to Gormley, this work is

concerned with our openness to outside experiences and it reflects his concerns about the survival of the world and the human beings in it. So, we can see that what appears to be a figure is being used to convey abstract ideas. Gormley says, 'sculpture, for me, uses the physical as a means to talk about the spirit ... a visual means to refer to things which cannot be seen.' Let us now turn to an abstract artist.

Notes

Antony Gormley was born in 1950 in London where he continues to live and work. In the late 60s he studied archaeology, anthropology and art history at Cambridge. He spent three years in India studying Buddhist meditation and healing and in the late 70s he studied sculpture at the Slade School of Art. Since the 1980s he has worked with the human figure and often works directly from his own body. He was awarded the Tate Turner Prize in 1994 for *Testing a World View* (five identical iron figures bent at a right angle at the waist). His best-known work is *The Angel of the North* which was completed in 1998.

He uses his own body to capture a lived moment which is then transformed into another zone of time. The body is a place where 'meaning can arise'. Gormley uses lead to provide a shield or shell that conceals and protects an inner space. Lead is heavy and impenetrable, but it is also poisonous.

'Untitled (for Francis)' is a plaster mould of the artist's body, reinforced with fibreglass and encased in a skin made from sheets of soldered lead. His wife, the painter Vicken Parsons, first wrapped his body in clingfilm then covered it in two layers of plaster and jute cloth. When set the shell was cut open, reassembled and reinforced with resin. Twenty-four pieces of standard roofing lead were then hammered over the cast. The lead surface varies in colour from dark to light grey. Gormley said that it is untitled to discourage too specific an iconographic reading. However, he explained that its subtitle refers to Giovanni Bellini's *St Francis in Ecstasy*. It shows St Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) receiving the stigmata in 1224. St Francis was chosen as he 'realised the interdependency of life', a very modern concept, and the work is concerned with our openness to outside experiences. It is one of a group of seven standing figures made around the same time. The five eye-shaped 'wounds' suggest an openness to outside experience and provide access to the centre of the work. It is one of only two of Gormley's works dedicated to individuals. The other is 'Desert to Walter' dedicated to American land artist Walter de Maria. This work is to do with openness to all levels of being. The

aperture in the breast has four slits extending from cardinal points around it. He could have welded them slits together but he liked the pentagram or house shaped wound. He said, 'For me the work suggests that in order to be whole you have to be wounded.'

Gormley comments, 'I am interested in the body but not as appearance...Your body belongs to my visual experience more than it does to you.' I had a choice to either pursue a spiritual life and not engage with the world or become a sculptor and engage with real things in the world.

Gormley was brought up as a strict Catholic and attended a Benedictine boarding school but has lost his faith. Buddhist meditation has taught him to deal with the here and now.

His best-known works include Angel of the North (1994-98, Gateshead), Event Horizon (2007, 31 figures on rooftops in London and New York), Another Place (2007, 100 figures on Crosby beach, Liverpool), Asian Field (2006, 180,000 clay figurines) and Exposure (2010, giant trellis figure in the Netherlands).

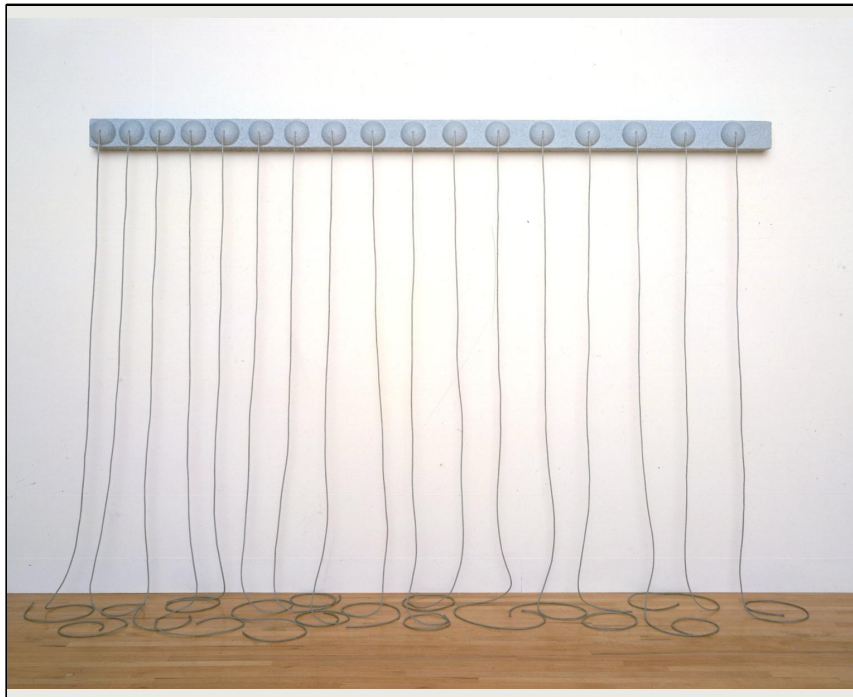
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Eva Hesse (1936–1970)
Addendum
1967
Papier mâché, wood, and rope

Eva Hesse (1936–1970), *Addendum*, 1967

Facing Gormley's lead-encased body stands **Eva Hesse's** *Addendum*, made in **1966**, and the dialogue between the two works is immediate. Where Gormley seals the body inside a rigid metal skin, Hesse lets things droop, sag, and fall where they will. **Addendum** consists of seventeen papier-mâché hemispheres fixed to a wooden bar at head height, their spacing increasing by a quarter inch with each interval — a mathematical sequence, rigorous as anything **Carl Andre** ever placed on a gallery floor. But that logic is immediately undercut. Each dome is hand-moulded, bearing the pressure of fingers in its surface, and from each hangs a ten-foot coil of rope that falls to the ground in its own unpredictable loops. Order and chance are held in deliberate tension. This is the central gesture of **Post-Minimalism**. Hesse absorbed the structural thinking of Minimalism and then reintroduced the body — its touch, its weight, its organic irregularity. She wrote, "It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know." That restlessness runs through everything she made. Born in **Hamburg in 1936**, Hesse fled Nazi Germany with her family as a child, eventually settling in New York. Her life was marked by loss — her mother's suicide, her father's death, a marriage that collapsed — and she died of a brain tumour in **1970**, aged thirty-four, with barely a decade of mature work behind her.

Notes

This is *Addendum* by Eva Hesse. It is a sculptural wall installation consisting of seventeen light grey papier mâché hemispheres arranged at increasing intervals on a wooden bar that is seven-foot high. The papier mâché around the bar and the hemispheres are hand moulded. Like a lot of Minimalist art there is a mathematical sequence, but the pure logic of mathematics is counterpoised with the physical act of the hand-moulding and the arbitrary way the coils of rope fall.

The ten-foot long coils of rope can be seen as almost organic as they fall to the ground in unpredictable loops. This is an example of Post-Minimalism. It was a reaction against the cold, hard, formal approach of the Minimalists such as Carl Andre and his bricks. The Post-Minimalists remained interested in abstraction but introduced more expressive and emotional qualities, often evoking the body and the sensual. They often rejected industrial materials such as bricks and used softer more expressive materials such as the paper mâché and rope used here. This introduces an element of the un-composed as elements droop and sag and they often retain the mark of the artist.

Eva Hesse was a German-Jewish artist who had a difficult life. She and her family fled Nazi Germany when World War II started, and she went to New York when she was three. Her parents separated five years later, and her mother committed suicide the following year. Eva's own marriage only lasted five years and her father died the year she was divorced. She died of a brain tumour when she was only 34 and although her working life was only ten years she is now regarded as one of the leading artists in New York at the time.

I have been calling her 'hess', the way she pronounced it, but many art historians pronounce it 'Hess-a', to link her work to her German-Jewish background. Her work is also seen as some of the earliest feminist art and the hemispheres have been described as female breasts that are too perfect, perhaps a result of silicone implants. However, it is too simplistic to link the components to parts of the body. Her work is a combination of opposites such as organic/inorganic, hard/soft, and order/chaos assembled with a humour that sometimes borders on the absurd. She said, "I think art is a total thing. A total person giving a contribution. It is an essence, a soul ... In my inner soul art and life are inseparable."

She said she was influenced by Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and the looping cables remind me of his *Lavender Disaster* (1964) a set of screen prints of the electric chair used to execute Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953. They were

a Jewish-American couple accused of spying for the Soviet Union. In this case, the hemispheres take on an electrical function and there is a suggestion of violence and death and a possible link to the Holocaust. This interpretation suggests the way that charismatic leaders can use national identity, nationalism and immigration to lead the public down a path that leads ultimately to state authorised torture and death.

Notes

Eva Hesse (1936-1970, she pronounced it 'hess' but many art historians pronounce it the German way as 'hessa') was a German Jewish artist who fled Nazi Germany and came to New York in 1939. Her parents separated when she was 8 and her mother committed suicide when she was ten. She obtained a degree from Yale and was influenced by the Abstract Expressionists. She married in 1962 and they went to Germany to work but Hesse was not happy, and she returned to New York in 1965 and they divorced the following year. Her father died the same year. She taught at the School of Visual Arts, New York, until her death from a brain tumour in 1970. In Germany, she had started to work with industrial and 'found' materials and on her return to New York continued to work with latex, fibreglass and plastics. She was motivated by the ideas of Minimalism and was one of the first artists to move to Postminimalism which is known for its jokiness, exploration of psychological moods and sexual innuendo in a whimsical fashion. She developed the form of abstract sculpture shown here to express her ideas. Hesse's life was plagued by family illness and depression and she finally died of a brain tumour aged only 34. She was one of the first artists of the 1960s to work with the fluid contours of the organic world combined with simple artistic gestures. She was fascinated by the absurd and her work is often self-contradictory, and the possible meaning of her work is shrouded in mystery. She is regarded as a precursor to the feminist art movement although her work is never obviously political. She found it difficult to find an authentic artistic identity but when she moved from painting to working with her hands with plaster and string that she found what she wanted to say.

Hesse wrote, "It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know." She is an artist who is often described as a Post-Minimalist because of her works hand-made and sensual qualities.

Addendum is seventeen, five-inch diameter hemispheres spaced $1/8$, $3/8$, $5/8$, $7/8$, $9/8$, $11/8$, $13/8$ and $15/8$ apart. The interval between the

hemispheres increases by a ¼ inch for each gap. The monochrome colour is a light neutral grey. The large size, small hemispheres and the thin rope as different from each other as possible. The bar is seven-foot-high, and the ropes are ten-foot long. She wrote that art through its significant form enables an observer to experience an aesthetic emotion rather than a 'meaning'. Her work is an open diary on her 'soul', her inner self and feelings.

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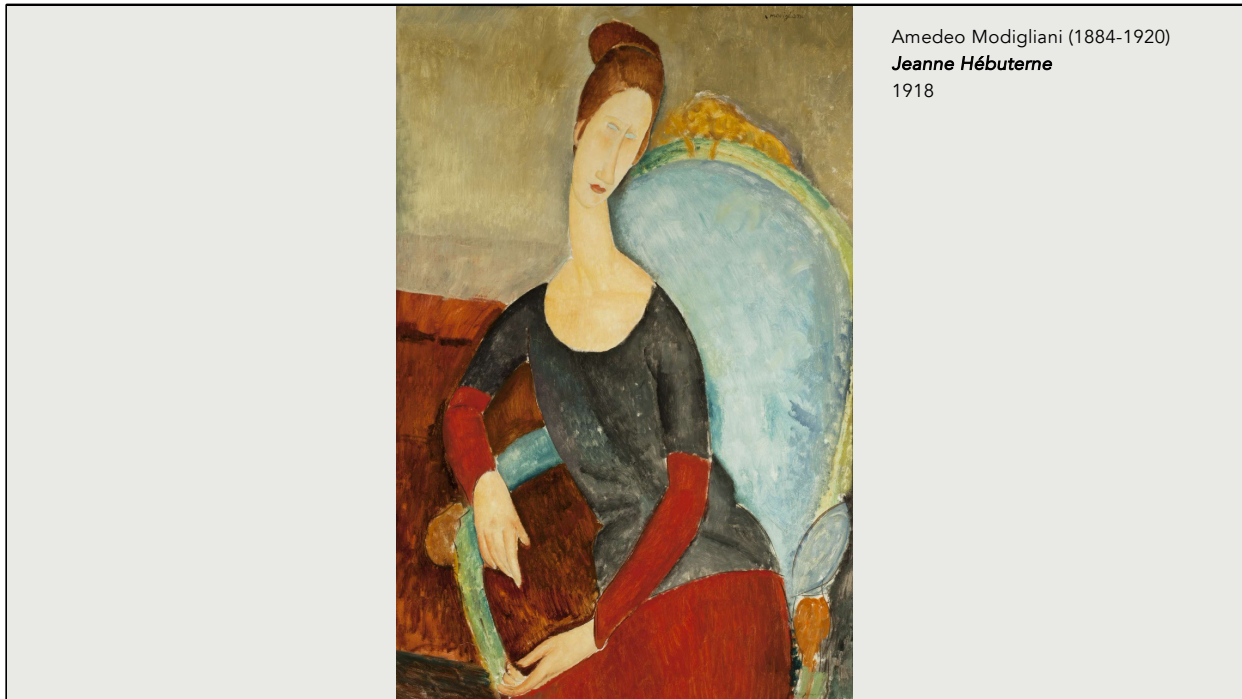
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Chapter 2, Eva Hesse: Longing, Belonging and Displacement by Vanessa Corby and Eva Hesse



Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Jeanne Hébuterne, 1918

From Eva Hesse's radical vulnerability we move to a very different kind of intimacy — the painted love letters of **Amadeo Modigliani**. Modigliani was born in **Livorno** in **1884** into an Italian Jewish family, and arrived in **Paris** in **1906**, quickly finding himself among the city's most vital artistic minds — **Picasso**, **Brâncuși**, and **Jacob Epstein**, with whom he briefly shared a studio. He destroyed his early academic work, dismissing it as "childish baubles, done when I was a dirty bourgeois," and reinvented himself entirely. His figures are unmistakable: elongated necks, tilted heads, and those characteristic blank, almond-shaped eyes. He once told a model, "When I know your soul, I will paint your eyes" — which explains why painted eyes in his portraits signal a profound intimacy. In **1917** he met **Jeanne Hébuterne**, a nineteen-year-old art student who became both his companion and his primary subject. He painted her **twenty-six times**. She was a trained painter in her own right, yet — like **Victorine Meurent** before her — she has been largely remembered through the eyes of the man who painted her rather than through her own work. Modigliani died of **tubercular meningitis** in **1920**. Jeanne, eight months pregnant, threw herself from a fifth-floor window the following day.

Notes

This is Jeanne Hébuterne by Amadeo Modigliani. Modigliani was one of the

most outrageous artists in Paris of the early twentieth century. He took drugs and drank to excess; some say to hide his tuberculosis. His thin, elongated women often with blank eyes are instantly recognizable as by Modigliani. In 1917 he met the young Jeanne Hébuterne who came from a wealthy family and they fell in love and they moved in together despite her family's strenuous objections.

She became the principal subject for his art and he painted twenty-six portraits of her, each one described by one historian as a love letter to her. They have a child in 1918 and became engaged but his tuberculosis became worse and before they could marry, he died aged only 35. She committed suicide the next day by throwing herself from a fifth-floor window despite being eight-months pregnant.

Notes

Modigliani was an Italian Jewish painter and sculptor who worked mainly in France. He was born in Livorno and travelled to Paris in 1906 where he met Pablo Picasso and Constantin Brâncuși and shared a studio with Jacob Epstein. He transformed himself from a dapper academician artist into a sort of prince of vagabonds. He set about destroying all his early work which he described as 'Childish baubles, done when I was a dirty bourgeois'. In 1917 he met a beautiful 19-year-old art student named Jeanne Hébuterne. Despite her family's objections they were soon living together. Modigliani ended his relationship with the English poet and art critic Beatrice Hastings. In 1918, she gave birth to a daughter whom they named Jeanne (1918–1984). Hébuterne became pregnant again and Modigliani got engaged to her but their plans were shattered when he found his tuberculosis was severe. He died in January the following year and, inconsolable, she threw herself from a fifth-floor window the day after he died killing herself and her unborn child.

His modern figures with their elongated bodies and blank eyes are distinctively 'Modigliani'. His nudes drew large crowds and it is said that the police ordered them to be taken down as they displayed pubic hair. This may not be true, but it created a legend of a scandalous playboy. His nudes are today viewed as 'modern women' because of their forthright stare and unashamed poses at a time when models were relatively well paid. He loved poetry and could recite Dante and other poets from memory. He was an obsessive draughtsman and would pull out pencil and paper at every occasion. He would also use photographs, but these drawings were essential

preliminaries to his painting. He abandoned painting for sculpture in 1912 but could not afford the stone and it is thought he took it from the many building sites in the area. He was never deferential to established artists and always spoke his mind. He always exhibited the greatest respect to his models and on one occasion cut his conversation with Pierre-Auguste Renoir short when the latter said he did not believe a painting of a nude was finished unless he felt the urge to slap her backside.

He died of tubercular meningitis when he was 35 following a troubled life filled with alcohol and drugs. The day after his death, his eight-months pregnant young fiancée, Jeanne Hébuterne committed suicide by throwing herself from a fifth-floor window. 'The life of Modigliani, wandering artist, so often resembles a legend it is difficult to determine fact from fiction'.

Jeanne Hébuterne was a trained and proficient painter in her own right but like many women artists, such as Elizabeth Siddal and Victorine Meurent, who had to turn to modelling she is often overlooked as an artist. She also played the violin and designed and made her own clothes yet she became defined by her beauty, she had light blue eyes and dark auburn hair. She was described by one acquaintance as 'gentle, shy, quiet and delicate'.

Modigliani painted her 26 times and all the paintings are like love letters. Their orphaned daughter, Jeanne Modigliani (1918–1984), was adopted by her father's sister in Florence, Italy. She grew up knowing virtually nothing of her parents and as an adult began researching their lives. In 1958, she wrote a biography of her father that was published in the English language in the United States as *Modigliani: Man and Myth*. Jeanne Hébuterne's art was exhibited in 2000 but in 2010 all her alleged work was exposed as forgeries drawn by her grandnephew.

'When I know your soul, I will paint your eyes'



Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947)
Coffee
 1915

Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), *Coffee*, 1915

The tragedy of Modigliani and Jeanne brings us to another artist defined by a lifelong devotion to a single woman — the French painter **Pierre Bonnard**, and his 1915 painting **Coffee**. The work is immediately disorienting. The back wall refuses to resolve into either interior surface or window. The table tilts so steeply it reads as a cliff-face, forming a barrier between the viewer and the woman seated behind it. A vertical bar on the right echoes the space behind the dog, yet the two have no logical connection. This is Bonnard at his most characteristic — whimsical, puzzle-like, edged with a dreamlike unease that never tips into chaos because his visual taste holds everything in check. That dreamlike quality was entirely deliberate. Bonnard worked not from life but from drawings and colour notes made on the spot, returning to his studio to reconstruct the scene from memory and reflection. He wrote: "I take notes. Then I go home. And before I start painting I reflect, I dream." The woman on the left is **Marthe de Méligny**, his companion of thirty years before they finally married. He had painted her across decades — including many paintings of her bathing — yet she was deeply reclusive, and Bonnard admitted in **1930** that her growing antisocial behaviour had left him "obliged to avoid all contact with other people."

Notes

Whimsy with taste. This is *Coffee* by the French painter Pierre Bonnard and it

was painted in 1915. The work contains a number of puzzles. Look at the back wall, is it the outside with a curtain on the left or a painting? The perspective of the table looks wrong making it look like a cliff. Why is it vertical? It creates a barrier between us and the woman. On the right there is a vertical bar that matches the area behind the dog but the two have no logical connection. Bonnard's paintings often exhibit this type of eccentricity and whimsy and have a dreamlike quality. His paintings often included a cat or dog staring out at us, a patterned edge with no apparent purpose, or a wildly tilting table, or a cut-off figure leaning in from the side but above all they often included his wife Marthe. His visual taste meant that he never takes his idiosyncratic approach too far and we are left with a puzzle, a wry smile or a poetic feeling rather than being offended by a gross over-statement or too much decoration.

Working methods. Bonnard did not paint from life but drew his subject, which he sometimes photographed, and made notes on the colours. He then went back to his studio where he painted from his drawings and notes. He wrote, 'I take notes. Then I go home. And before I start painting I reflect, I dream.' The dreaming is important as it takes us from a mere representation of a scene to the edgy, whimsical puzzles I mentioned. We can see from the sketches, for example, that he has explored different tilts of the head and we can also see that the figure on the right is a late addition. In his small studio he worked on many canvases at the same time, which he tacked onto the walls. In this way he could switch between works, dream a little more, and more freely determine the final form of a painting.

Marthe de M  ligny. The woman on the left is his wife Marthe ('Mart') de M  ligny who he met when he was 26 and she was 16. At least she told him she was 16. It was not until they married over 30 years later that he found out that when they first met she had been 24. She was a compulsive washer and didn't like to go out or have company at home. She took an umbrella when they went out to hide her face from other people. Nevertheless, she did not object to being painted including many paintings of her in the bath. She inspired his life and his work and was one of his main subjects for many decades, but Bonnard wrote to a friend in 1930, 'For quite some time now I have been living a very secluded life as Marthe has become completely anti-social and I am obliged to avoid all contact with other people.' He was a quiet, idiosyncratic painter who worked quietly in his studio at home for sixty years.

Notes

Pierre Bonnard (3 October 1867 — 23 January 1947) was born in Northern France and his father was an important official in the Ministry of War. He studied law and briefly became a barrister but he studied art on the side and decided to become an artist. In 1891, aged 24, he met Toulouse-Lautrec and began showing his work at the annual exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants.

He was a French painter and printmaker who, in the 1890s, was a founding member, with Maurice Denis and Édouard Vuillard, of the Post-Impressionist group of avant-garde painters Les Nabis (pronounced nah-BEE, it means 'the prophets' in Hebrew and Arabic). Most of them studied at the Académie Julian in Paris.

Bonnard preferred to work from memory, using drawings as a reference, and his paintings are often characterized by a dreamlike quality. The intimate domestic scenes, for which he is perhaps best known, often include his wife Marthe de Méligny (1869-1942, pronounced 'Mart de Melinee'), who he met in Paris in 1893 crossing a boulevard. He was a quiet man and his life never suffered from disasters and reversals in circumstances. Marthe's real name was Maria Boursin but she broke off contact with her family before moving to Paris. She came from a lower-class family which is why Bonnard did not tell his family and did not marry for 30 years. Marthe died in January 1942, aged 73, after fifty years of poor health.

There are three preparatory sketches on display.

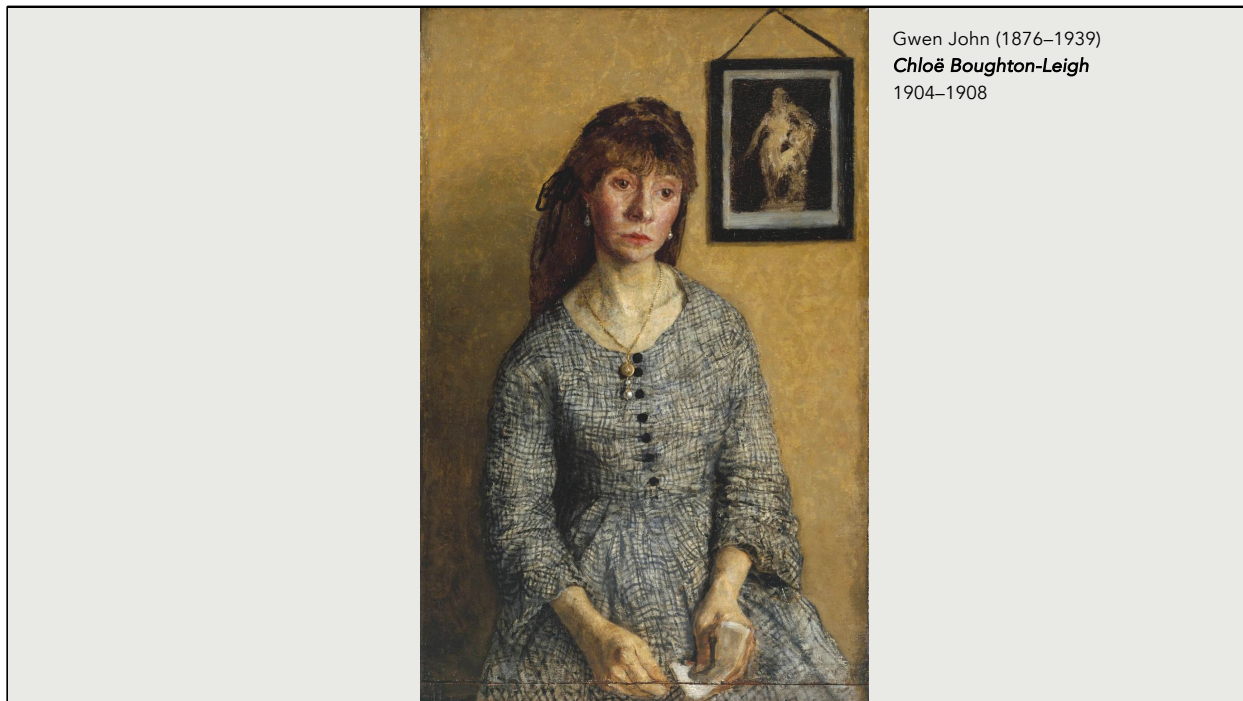
Bonnard's record sale price at Christies in 2011 was £7 million.

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Gwen John (1876–1939), Chloë Boughton-Leigh, 1904–1908

From Bonnard's dreamlike domesticity, we turn to a very different kind of quiet intensity — the Welsh painter **Gwen John** and her portrait of **Chloë Boughton-Leigh**, painted around **1907** and shown at the **New English Art Club** in London. The composition is stripped bare. The sitter's downward gaze, an open book, the compressed foreground, the subdued tonal range — all of it closes the image in on itself, creating an atmosphere of deep self-containment. John trained at the **Slade School of Art** alongside her brother **Augustus John**, and later under **James McNeill Whistler** at the Académie Carmen in Paris, where she absorbed his discipline of closely controlled colour relationships. That training is legible here. Her reputation was long overshadowed by Augustus's celebrity, but critical opinion reversed sharply. Augustus himself anticipated it, saying: "In fifty years' time I shall be known as the brother of Gwen John." **John Rothenstein** called her "one of the finest painters of our time and country," and one reviewer drew a comparison to **Morandi**, citing her "almost obsessive reticence" and "power within awesomely restricted means." John settled permanently in Paris in **1904**, became **Auguste Rodin's** lover, and after that affair ended, converted to Catholicism and spent the rest of her life working in near-solitude — what she called being "God's little artist."

Notes

The solitary figure, her downward gaze and the open book in her hand produce a sense of calmness and intensity that was typical of her work. Gwen John's quiet art with its subtle colour relationships, stands in contrast to her brother, Augustus John's, far more assertive work. She was once overshadowed by his work and his enormous reputation at the time, but critical opinion now tends to view her as the more talented. Augustus predicted this reversal, saying 'In 50 years' time I will be known as the brother of Gwen John.' And in 1952 she was described as 'one of the finest painters of our time and country' [John Rothenstein, *Modern English Painters*].

Gwen John's work never exhibits any flashiness or contrived effects; it is always simple, plain yet deeply moving. This portrait was described by one critic [T. Martin Wood in *Studio*] as 'one of the greatest achievements in this exhibition because of its sincerity' and in 1926 she was described as 'a sort of modern Vermeer'. One reviewer [Nigel Gosling, 1968, *Observer Review*] 'The force of this almost obsessive reticence is astonishing ... the extreme subtlety and reticence of the exquisite tonal arrangements ... is a chief source of delight ... Its power within awesomely restricted means is reminiscent of Morandi's.'

Ellen Theodosia Boughton-Leigh was known by her family as Chloë and met John through her sister Maude who studied at the Slade with John. Gwen John had to work as a model to survive in Paris and she posed nude for Auguste Rodin and became his lover. Rodin was much older and was the most famous artist of his time. John became fiercely attached to him and when the affair ended she became a Catholic and spent the rest of her life alone in a Paris suburb working as what she called 'God's little artist'.

Notes

The portrait shown here is of a Paris friend, Chloë Boughton-Leigh. The subdued colouring, short foreground and self-absorption of the sitter create a deeply intense atmosphere. John showed it in London, at the New English Art Club. Ellen Theodosia Boughton-Leigh (1868–1947), known by her family as Chloë, was, like Gwen John, a Catholic convert and latterly she and her sister Maude (q.v.) lived on Canvey Island. Maude was Gwen John's friend; both had studied at the Slade and probably met in Paris.

Gwen John (1876-1939) was a Welsh artist who worked in France most of her life. She trained at the Slade School of Art where her younger brother, Augustus John, had already begun his studies. They lived together on fruit

and nuts and even as students her brother's personal glamour made him a celebrity. Gwen was quieter, and her reputation has steadily grown since her death. She neglected her health throughout her life and in 1900-01 she lived as a squatter in a derelict building.

She and was taught in the traditional manner, which involved copying Old Master paintings. This training shows in the naturalism and carefully controlled colour range of this picture. As a woman in a career still largely dominated by men, including her successful brother Augustus, Gwen had to struggle for recognition. The self-scrutinizing intensity of this image, and the isolation of the figure, registers some sense of this struggle.

She settled in Paris in 1904, working as a model, becoming Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) mistress and immersing herself in the artistic world of the metropolis. She lived in France for the rest of her life, exhibiting on both sides of the Channel. From 1910 to 1924 nearly all her work was purchased by her patron John Quinn an American art collector and this freed her from having to work as a model, mostly for women artists. Most of her works are portraits, mainly of female sitters and her oeuvre is small, consisting of only 158 oil paintings. In 1939 she wrote her will, travelled to Dieppe, collapsed and died. One art historian wrote, "she appears to have starved to death".

She drew thousands of drawings and thought a painting should be finished in one or two sittings and 'For that one must paint a lot of canvases probably and waste them'. Her meticulous preparation shows the influence of James McNeill Whistler who she trained under in Paris at the Académie Carmen.

Like many women artists she tried drawing her own body in the mirror, but she complained in a letter to her brother about how difficult it was. Even the Slade imposed restrictions of women drawing from female models and so friends would draw each other but kept silent about the practice as 'the respectability of these middle-class women students would have been jeopardized if they had acknowledged at the time that they had worked from studies of their own bodies rather than those of anonymous working-class models'.

When she lived in Paris she had to work as a model to survive. She posed nude for Auguste Rodin and for other artists, mostly women. In her dairies she wrote of many occasions when, working as a model, she felt harassed or abused by both men and women artists. For example, one of her clients, a woman artist, was kissing a man all afternoon and then told her not to tell anyone if she wanted to keep her job as a model, treating her as a child and

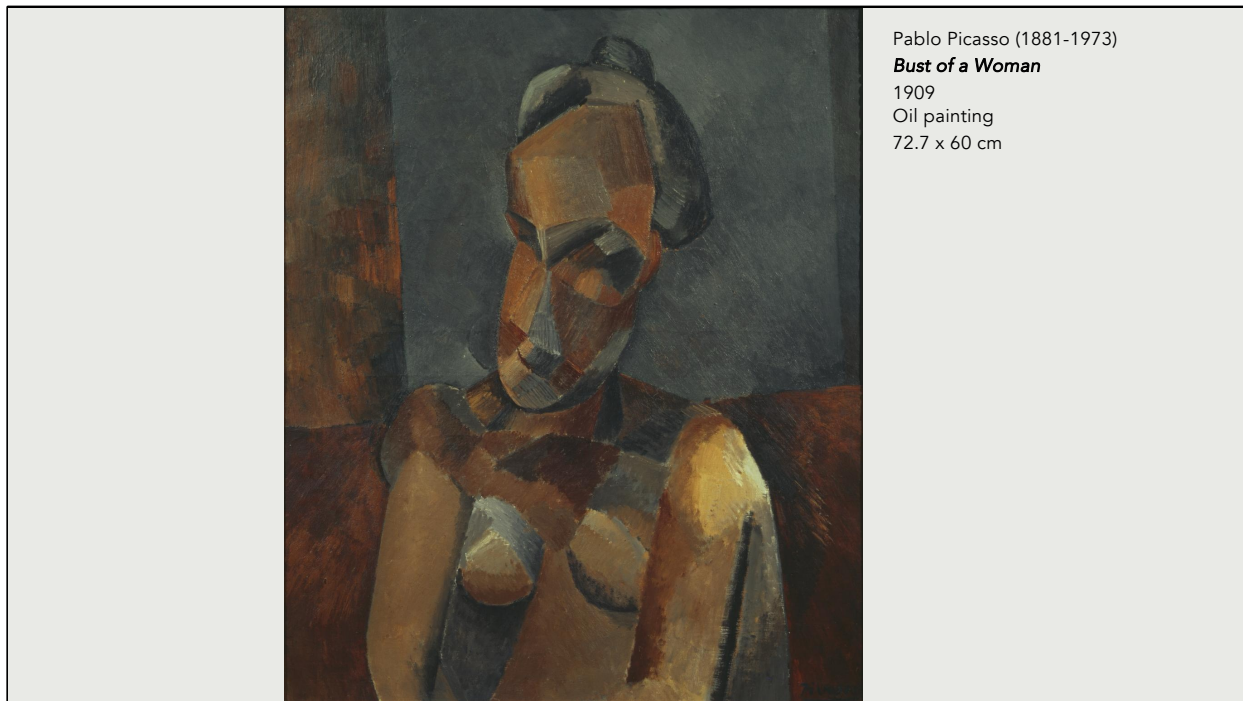
discussing her as if she was not there. As a model she would be kept waiting for hours, shouted at, ignored, given no breaks, and propositioned by male artists. She developed fierce attachments to both men and women that worried some people and she later became Rodin's lover.

She added a strip of wood at the bottom of the picture to enable her to paint the whole of the hands.

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<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/john-chloe-boughton-leigh-n04088>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/02/gwen-john-hero-anne-enright>



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Bust of a Woman*, 1909, 72.7 x 60 cm

From Gwen John's almost ascetic self-containment, we move to a very different kind of radical compression — **Pablo Picasso** and the moment in **1907** when he began dismantling the Western figurative tradition from within. The painting before us — a half-length female nude — sits precisely at the threshold between his **Rose Period** and the full development of **Cubism**. The body is fractured into geometric planes, and the brushwork itself defines those angles rather than describing volume in the conventional sense. Art historians call this phase **proto-Cubism**, because the figure remains recognisably present even as the surface breaks apart. Picasso's fully developed **Analytical Cubism** came between **1908 and 1912**, followed by **Synthetic Cubism** from **1912 to 1919**. The mask-like face signals Picasso's encounter with African sculpture, which struck him with what he described as sudden, overwhelming force. Alongside the painting hangs **Georges Braque's** **Mandora**, from **1909 to 1910**, where fragmentation has become rhythmic, almost musical. Both the painting and the nearby sculpture **Head of a Woman (Fernande)** from **1909** are thought to be portraits of **Fernande Olivier**, Picasso's lover and companion for seven years. From two plaster casts of that head, at least sixteen bronze examples were eventually cast.

Notes

A small oil painting in a dark palette of a half-length female nude. It is painted

in a cubist style with her breasts, head and shoulders fractured into geometric shapes. The brushstrokes are used to define the angles of the geometric shapes such as the sunken eye sockets. This technique of using rough brushstrokes to define the forms was used by Picasso from 1906. Its flat, planed surface relates the work to his Cubist paintings of the same period but its strong figurative elements make this piece an important transitional work between his earlier figurative work of the Blue and the Rose periods and the full blown Cubist work he began painting at this time. In Cubism, objects are analyzed, broken up and reassembled in abstract forms and instead of depicting objects from a single viewpoint, they are shown from many viewpoints.

The work is alongside George Braque's *Mandora* of 1909-10. A mandora is a small lute and Braque the full fragmented style we call Cubism. In this case the fragmentation suggests a rhythm that matches the subject matter.

The head is thought to have been influenced by Picasso's discovery of African art. He said, 'My greatest artistic emotions were aroused when the sublime beauty of the sculptures created by anonymous artists in Africa was suddenly revealed to me'.

The head also relates to the head in the cabinet in front of us by Picasso. It is called *Head of a Woman (Fernande)* and was produced the same year. It is thought that both these works are portraits of his lover Fernande Olivier (1881-1966) who lived with him for seven years before he became famous.

Notes

Picasso Analytical Cubist period was from 1908 to 1912 but this work is best described as proto-cubist as it still retains figurative elements. It has been suggested that this work is influenced by Picasso's awareness of African and Polynesian art but no single source is recognizable. The mask like structure of the face suggests African art but the female nude is in the Western art tradition. Picasso's Analytical Cubist period was from 1908 to 1912 followed by his Synthetic Cubism period 1912 to 1919.

It can be compared with *Seated Nude* of 1909-10 which is an example of his fully developed Analytical Cubism period and his sculpture *Head of a Woman (Fernande)*, 1909 (Tate).

Pablo Ruiz y Picasso (Málaga 25 Oct 1881-8 April 1973). Blue Period (1901–1904), Rose Period (1904–1906), African-influenced Period (1907–1909),

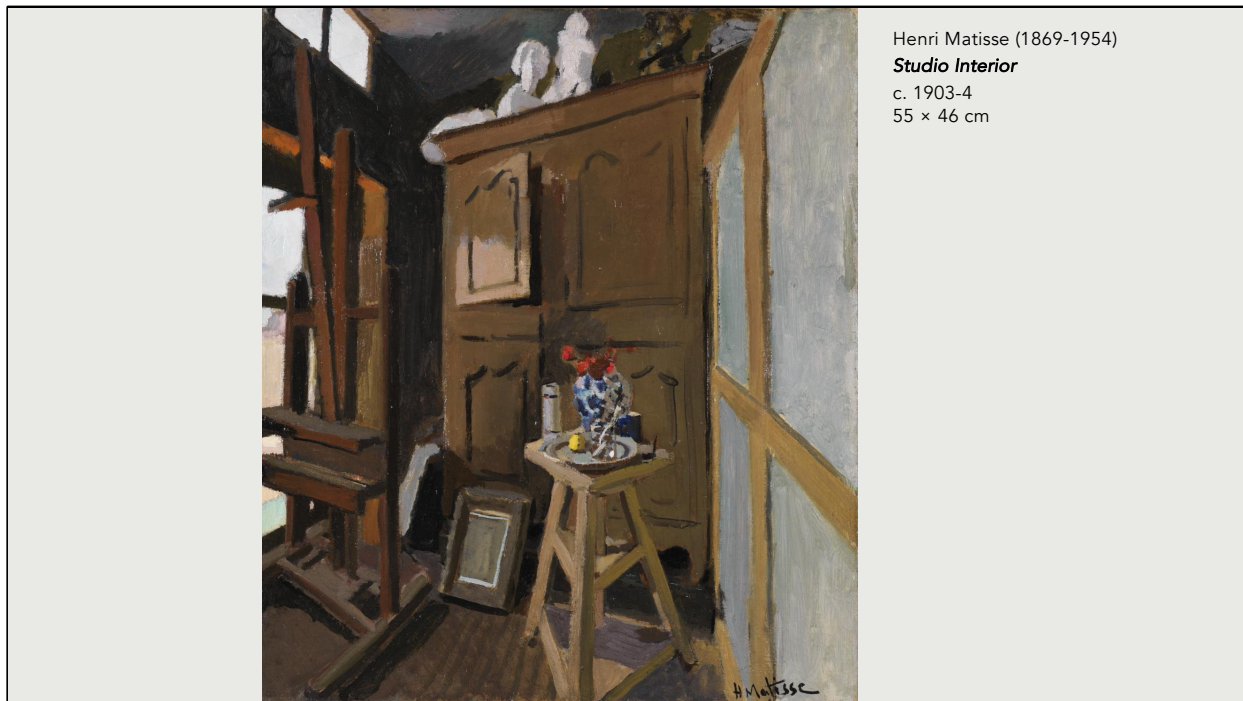
Analytic Cubism (1909–1912), and Synthetic Cubism or Crystal Period (1912–1919). In 1899 he met his closest friend Carlos Casagemas (1881-1901) who shot himself in 1901 and this precipitated Picasso's Blue Period. In 1904, Picasso met Fernande Olivier, a bohemian artist who became his mistress. Picasso left Olivier for the frail and enigmatic Eva Gouel, who called herself Marcelle Humbert when she arrived in Paris, and he was devastated when she died of tuberculosis or cancer in 1915 aged 30. After the loss of Eva Gouel, Picasso had an affair with Gaby Depeyre (later Lespinasse) and, in 1918, he married the respectable and elitist Ukrainian ballet dancer Olga Khokhlova and they had a child Paulo. In 1927 Picasso met 17-year-old Marie-Thérèse Walter and began a long affair and fathered a daughter Maya. To avoid splitting his estate he never divorced and was married to Khokhlova until her death in 1955. In the 1930s and 40s the artist Dora Maar (born Theodora Marković) was a constant companion and lover and she documented *Guernica*. In 1944, aged 63, he began an affair with Françoise Gilot aged 23. Dora Maar famously said, 'After Picasso, only God' and when he left her in 1946 she became a Roman Catholic. Their split was painful and Picasso found ways to inflict pain but she outlived Picasso and continued to paint into the 1990s and was still exhibiting two years before she died aged 89. When Picasso grew tired of Dora Maar he and Gilot began to live together. They had two children: Claude, born in 1947 and Paloma, born in 1949. She described his abusive treatment and many affairs including Geneviève Laporte. He met Jacqueline Roque in 1953 and she became his second wife in 1961 until his death in 1973. She shot herself in 1986 aged 59.

Fernande Oliver (1881-1966) was born out-of-wedlock and brought up by an aunt and uncle. She ran away and married a man who abused her, so she fled to Paris where she met Picasso in 1904. In 1907 she adopted a 13-year old girl from an orphanage but when she discovered explicit drawings made by Picasso, she sent the girl back. It was a tempestuous relationship as both were jealous lovers. When he became famous, he left her and twenty years later wrote memoirs of their relationship which were suppressed by Picasso. They were only finally published in their entirety in 1988 after both Olivier and Picasso had died.

The flat, planed surfaces of *Head of a Woman (Fernande)* relate the work to his Cubist paintings of the same period. Picasso made two plaster casts of the head, from which at least sixteen bronze examples were cast.

References

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-bust-of-a-woman-n05915>



Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Studio Interior*, c. 1903-4, 55 × 46 cm

We move now from Picasso's fractured studio experiments to a very different artist's interior — **Henri Matisse**, and his painting **Studio Interior**, made in **1903 to 1904**. The room is section of Matisse's Paris studio, meticulously recorded: a still life of flowers, jugs, a glass holding a long spoon and a lemon sits on a small stand, while a large canvas fills the right edge. A photograph of the studio taken in **1904** confirms the arrangement with striking precision. Even the plaster casts visible on the cupboard have been identified, the second from the left almost certainly being the **Bust of a Woman** he had cast in bronze in **1900**. Matisse came to painting late. Trained first as a lawyer, he picked up a brush at twenty while convalescing from appendicitis, and immediately found, in his own words, "a kind of paradise." By the time he painted this work he was thirty-five, respected but not yet commercially secure. Debt accumulated because he had bought works by **Rodin**, **Gauguin**, van Gogh, and **Cézanne**, while supporting a wife and three children. The palette here is comparatively sombre — sober, form-preoccupied work painted just before his encounter with **André Derain** transformed everything and led critics to brand them both **Fauves**, wild beasts.

Notes

This room is called 'In the Studio' and this work shows a corner of Henri Matisse's studio in Paris. On the small stand we can see a carefully arranged

still life of a vase of flowers, jugs, a glass containing a long spoon and a lemon. It was painted in 1903-4 and around this time he was attending life drawing and sculpture classes and a lot of his work revolved around his classes. A photograph taken of his studio in 1904 shows many of the items recorded in this painting including the large canvas on the right. Even the casts on the cupboard have been identified. The cast which can be identified with the most certainty is the second on the left, which appears to be that for Bust of a Woman which he cast in bronze in 1900.

Matisse came late to art. He originally trained as a lawyer and it was only when he was 20 and was convalescing from an appendicitis operation that started to draw and paint and, in his words, discovered 'a kind of paradise'. This painting was produced when he was about 35 and by that time he was a proficient and well-known artist, but he was not yet commercially successful. This was produced at a financial low-point in his life. He got into debt because he bought the works of all the artists he most admired such as Rodin, Gauguin, van Gogh and Cézanne, and he had a wife and two young children to support. The paintings he produced at this period were comparatively sombre and reveal a preoccupation with form.

He had just met André Derain and the two of them founded what the critics called Fauvism or 'wild beasts'. His first exhibition of Fauvist work was in the summer of 1904 and his palette changed to the bright and expressive use of colour.

Notes

Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse (31 December 1869 – 3 November 1954) was a French artist, known for both his use of colour and his fluid and original draughtsmanship. Matisse, Picasso and Marcel Duchamp are generally regarded as the three who helped define the revolutionary changes in the plastic arts throughout the opening decades of the twentieth century. Although he was initially labelled a Fauve (wild beast), by the 1920s he was increasingly hailed as an upholder of the classical tradition in French painting. He was born in Northern France, the oldest son of a wealthy grain merchant and went to Paris to study law. He started to paint when he was 20 following an operation for appendicitis and he discovered 'a kind of paradise'. In 1891 he returned to Paris to study art at the Académie Julian and became a student of William-Adolphe Bouguereau and Gustave Moreau, an artist who was a major influence on his work. Initially Matisse painted still lifes and

landscapes in a traditional style, at which he achieved reasonable proficiency. Matisse was influenced by the works of earlier masters such as Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, Nicolas Poussin, and Antoine Watteau, as well as by modern artists, such as Édouard Manet, and by Japanese art. Chardin was one of the painters Matisse most admired; as an art student he made copies of four of Chardin's paintings in the Louvre.

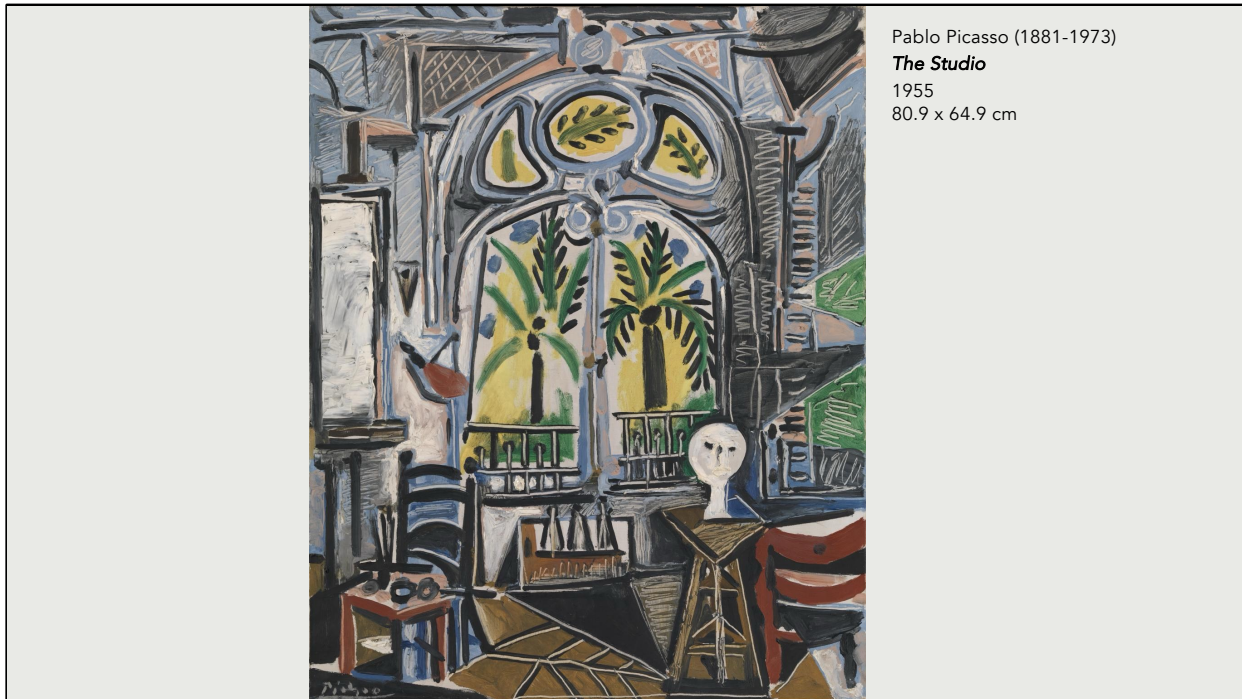
In 1896-7 he was introduced to the Impressionists and the work of van Gogh and his style changed dramatically. With the model Caroline Joblau, he had a daughter, Marguerite, born in 1894. In 1898 he married Amélie Noellie Parayre; the two raised Marguerite together and had two sons, Jean (born 1899) and Pierre (born 1900). Marguerite and Amélie often served as models for Matisse. In 1898, on the advice of Camille Pissarro, he went to London to study the paintings of J. M. W. Turner. Upon his return to Paris he met André Derain. Matisse went into debt buying work from artists he admired such as a plaster bust by Rodin, a painting by Gauguin, a drawing by van Gogh, and Cézanne's *Three Bathers*. In Cézanne's sense of pictorial structure and colour, Matisse found his main inspiration. Many of Matisse's paintings from 1898 to 1901 make use of a Divisionist technique he adopted after reading Paul Signac's essay, 'Eugène Delacroix a Neo-Impressionist'. Divisionism is the separation of colours into dots or patches that interact optically in the eye. In 1905, he held the first official exhibition of Vincent van Gogh's work, an artist who, with Gauguin, enabled him to break free from the restrictions of Divisionism. Matisse was 35 and his work was becoming more respected. At the Salon d'Automne in 1905 the public were still responding with laughter and sarcasm as if it were a freak show and Matisse's *Luxe, calme et volupté* caused a considerable stir. The critic Louis Vauxcelles disparaged Matisse, André Derain and others as 'fauves' (wild beasts).

Fauvism as a style began around 1900 and continued beyond 1910. The movement as such lasted only a few years, 1904–1908, and had three exhibitions. Fauvism's contribution was to separate the descriptive use of colour from its use to convey feeling and emotional. The Fauves also simplified forms and their saturated colours drew attention to the materiality of the medium and the flatness of the canvas. Matisse's first solo exhibition was at Ambroise Vollard's gallery in 1904, without much success. His fondness for bright and expressive colour became more pronounced after he spent the summer of 1904 painting in St. Tropez with the neo-Impressionists Paul Signac. In 1906 he was introduced to his lifelong friend and rival Pablo

Picasso by the collector Gertrude Stein. In 1917 he relocated to the French Riviera and his style softened in line with the 'return to order' that was characteristic of much post WWI art. After 1930 a new vigour and bolder simplification appeared in his work. His wife left him in 1939 and he spent the war in the south of France. In 1941 he was diagnosed with cancer and following the operation he was bedridden and developed a new form of art using paper and scissors.

References

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/matisse-studio-interior-t03889/text-summary>



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *The Studio*, 1955, 80.9 x 64.9 cm

That sombre, form-preoccupied Matisse gives way here to his great rival — and this painting is, in a very real sense, a response to Matisse's death. This is **Pablo Picasso's** **The Studio, Cannes**, painted in **1955**, one of a series of twelve studio paintings made over an intense eight-day period, with a further session two weeks later on **12 November**. Picasso had moved to **La Californie**, a grand Art Nouveau villa at the foot of the **Sainte-Victoire** mountain, with **Jacqueline Roque** that summer. The salon on the ground floor, with its sweeping views toward the coast, became both a reception room for friends and dealers and an immediate subject for painting. **Henri Matisse** had died the previous year, in **1954**, and the studio had long been Matisse's most personal territory. The debt here is unmistakable: the central window, the tension between brilliant exterior light and shadowed interior, the myriad patterns scratched into walls and floor using the end of the brush — these are Matissean preoccupations absorbed and restated in Picasso's own terms. Picasso combines thin washes with thick impasto, particularly around the sculptural bust, and deploys both palette knife and brush. All twelve paintings were exhibited in Paris in **1957**, and **Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler**, Picasso's long-time dealer, summed up his method precisely: "For Picasso only the present instant exists."

Notes

This is an important painting from the 1950s showing his studio in Cannes which he moved to with Jacqueline Roque in the summer of 1955. It was at the foot of the Sainte Victoire mountain and was built in the Art Nouveau style. The salon was on the ground floor and had extensive views to the coast and it was where he received friends and dealers.

This is one of twelve paintings he made of the studio and this work was painted over a two-day period. He used a combination of thin and thick paint and brushes and a palette knife. His lifelong rival Henri Matisse (1869-1954) had died the previous year and the studio was one of his favourite subjects. It is thought this series of paintings might have been painted in memory of Matisse as they include many elements of his work such as the central window, the contrast between the brilliant exterior and the sombre interior and the patterns scratched into the walls and floor.

Notes

Over an eight-day period and again two weeks later on 12 November he painted his studio 12 times, all except the last painting in portrait format. This work was produced over two days and on the first day he painted two other views of his studio. He uses a combination of thin paint in some areas and in others, such as the bust, a thick impasto. He used brushes and palette knife and, in some places, scrapped the paint down to the canvas using the end of the brush.

The studio was a favourite subject for his rival Henri Matisse, and it has been suggested he chose this theme as a response to the death of Matisse the previous year. Many aspects of the painting reflect Matisse's approach including the central window, the contrast between the brilliant exterior and the more sombre interior and the myriad patterns scratched into the walls and floor using the end of the brush.

All 12 studio paintings were exhibited in Paris two years later and his long-time friend the dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler paid homage to his approach. He said, 'For Picasso only the present instant exists'.



Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964)
Still Life
1946
37.5 x 45.7 cm
Presented by Studio d'Arte Palma,
Rome 1947

Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), *Still Life*, 1946, 37.5 x 45.7 cm, Presented by Studio d'Arte Palma, Rome 1947

Where Picasso commands the grand villa and its sweeping views, **Giorgio Morandi** spent virtually his entire life in a flat in **Bologna**, rarely leaving, painting the same small cluster of bottles and vases again and again. The contrast in temperament could scarcely be greater. Morandi studied in Bologna between **1907 and 1913**, and came to know the French Impressionists and **Paul Cézanne** through exhibitions in Venice and Rome — Cézanne's insistence on constructing form through colour clearly lodged deep. A brief metaphysical phase between **1918 and 1922**, influenced by **Giorgio de Chirico**, gave his objects an uncanny stillness that never entirely left him. After that, his style barely shifted across four decades. In this still life the palette runs from light to medium grey through creamy white, beige, and faint mauve — applied wet on wet in thin, vigorous layers over a white ground, with graphite underdrawing still visible around the central vase. The bottles lose all domestic identity and become, as Morandi himself wrote in **1953**, objects that recur across "several variants of the present work." The first using this same group dates to **1936**; closely related arrangements followed between **1945 and 1947**. Through that accumulated scrutiny, ordinary vessels become quietly monumental.

Notes

Morandi spent his life in Bologna painting still lifes and landscapes. He painted in a muted colour palette in this case from light to medium grey to creamy white, beige, red, purple, yellow and mauve. He used a white ground on which he drew in graphite which is visible around the central vase. The paint is applied wet on wet in thin layers using vigorous brushstrokes.

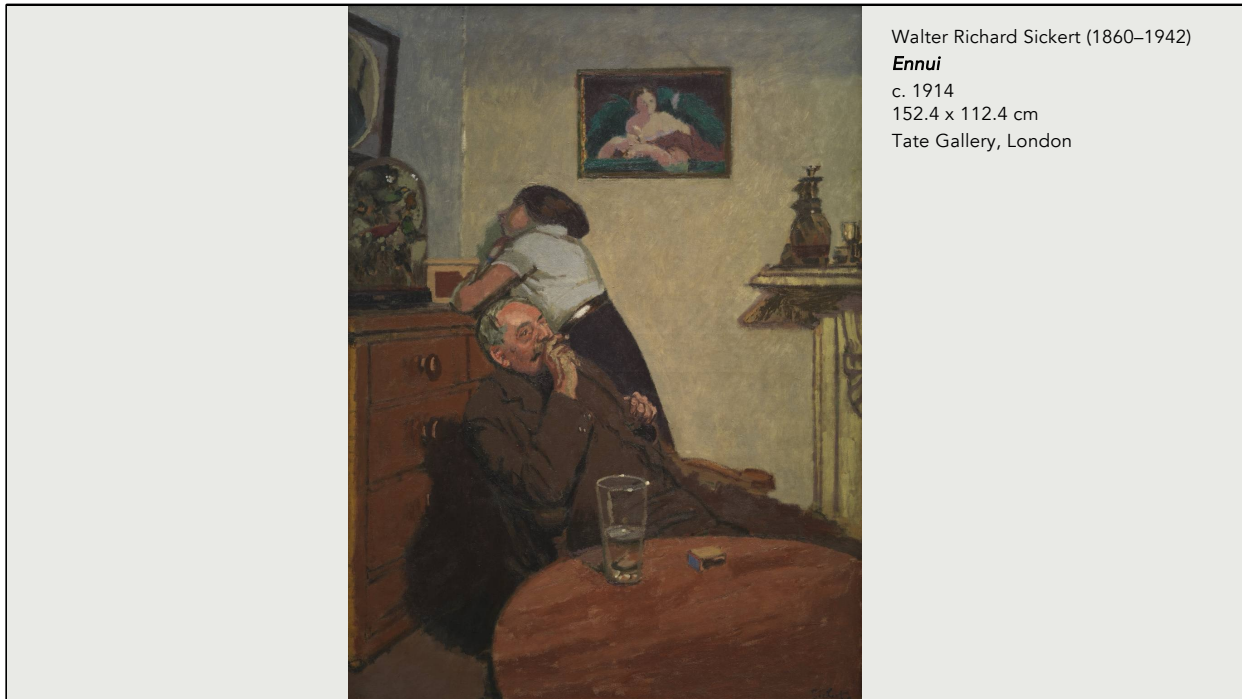
Morandi kept a supply of bottles and vases in his studio which he used again and again in various arrangements. In his paintings, they lose their domestic purpose, to become sculptural objects that invite meditation and contemplation. Through repeated scrutiny of these simple items, Morandi created a sense of timelessness. He wrote in 1953 explaining that there are "several variants of the present work and the same objects also appear in other pictures". The first using the same objects was painted in 1936 and a number of closely related works were painted between 1945 and 1947 although no two are exactly the same.

Notes

Morandi was born in Bologna and studied there between 1907 and 1913. He became familiar with the work of the French impressionist painters Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) and Claude Monet (1840–1926), as well as that of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), through exhibitions in Venice and Rome. His work was also influenced by the Italian Renaissance painters Giotto (c.1266/7–1337), Piero della Francesca (c.1415–1492) and Paolo Uccello (1397–1475).

Morandi's father died when he was 19 and he became the breadwinner of the family. He lived with his sisters in Bologna his whole life and never married. In 1915 he joined the army but suffered a breakdown and was discharged. It was during the war that his still lifes became purer in form and their complexity was reduced. He was influenced by Futurism in 1914 and went through a metaphysical phase between 1918 and 1922 but after this his style never changed and he focused on the subtle graduations of colour and tone of a small number of bottles and vases placed in crowded space and unified in tone. He was a prolific artist and painted some 1,350 oil paintings and 133 etchings. He escaped any taint of Fascism and developed a style close of modern abstraction and a forerunner of Minimalism.

The title and date are inscribed on the back of a photograph sent to the Tate in 1947 when the gift was being considered.



Walter Richard Sickert (1860–1942), *Ennui*, c. 1914, 152.4 x 112.4 cm, Tate Gallery, London

From Morandi's hermetic calm in Bologna, we move to a very different kind of interior claustrophobia — **Walter Sickert's** **Ennui**, painted around **1914** and presented to the **Tate Gallery** in **1924**. The French word *ennui* goes well beyond mere boredom. The **1913 Webster's dictionary** defines it as "a feeling of weariness and disgust, dullness and languor of spirits, arising from satiety or want of interest." Sickert chose the word precisely — he was famously fluent in French and notoriously exact in his language. A man and a woman occupy the same cramped room yet inhabit entirely separate worlds. They face opposite directions; no glance is exchanged, no word implied. **Virginia Woolf** attributed the painting's particular grimness to the fact that "there is no crisis" — nothing will happen, nothing will change. The glass bell jar of stuffed birds reinforces that sense of arrested, airless existence. The yellows, oranges, and browns build what feels like a genuinely unhealthy atmosphere. Sickert based this composition on **thirteen preliminary drawings**, each recording subtle shifts in pose and placement, and ultimately made **five painted versions** in total. The **Tate** canvas preserves the linear precision of those drawings with unusual fidelity — a quality Sickert's thin, patchy paint layers did not always guarantee.

Notes

This is *Ennui* by Walter Sickert. The title means 'boredom' in French and Sickert suggests the dysfunctional relationship between the figures by their lack of communication and their surroundings. Despite their close physical proximity, the man and woman face in opposite directions, staring off into space. The room furnishings reinforce the theme, in particular the bell jar containing stuffed birds. The man smoking the cigar has been described as having an expression ranging from 'placid contentment' to apathy and hopelessness. The title suggests boredom and the lack of engagement with the women suggests isolation, indifference and loneliness. No resolution is offered, leading Virginia Woolf to attribute the paintings 'grimness' to the fact that 'there is no crisis'.

It was described at the time it was first exhibited as one of the 'finest pictures painted in England in recent times'. And it is now Sickert's best known and most widely discussed work.

The drawing is one of 13 preliminary sketches each showing subtle variations in the positions of the people and the objects. Sickert's drawings show his interest in the linear delineation of form related to his skill at engraving. His painting was based on building up thin patches of colour and so it tended to obscure the precision of his forms. In this painting the painting preserves the precision of the drawing although he has made a number of slight changes, such as cropping the borders, the angle of the woman's back and the tilt of the man's head.

Notes

Sickert painted five versions of this painting and many drawings, studies and three etched plates. Three smaller versions are in the Royal Collection, Rockingham Castle and in private collection. A fifth half-scale version in the Ashmolean is brighter and has a patterned tablecloth. This painting, eventually presented to the Tate Gallery in 1924, was *Ennui*, which has become the most well-known and widely discussed image of Sickert's oeuvre.

The title is significant as even though he sometimes changed titles he was extremely articulate and very precise in the use of language. The 1913 edition of Webster's dictionary defines ennui as 'a feeling of weariness and disgust, dullness and languor of spirits, arising from satiety or want of interest; tedium'. Boredom is a temporary state brought about by external circumstances whereas ennui is a pervasive feeling representing a continuing state of mind. The feeling of ennui was a topic that ran through French

literature and poetry of the 19th century. In the later part of the century it was a form of world weariness associated with decadence and the use of artificial stimulants such as drugs and alcohol. Sickert's version of ennui is unusual as the subjects are lower middle or working class and the drugs are not opium and absinthe but a cigar and a beer.

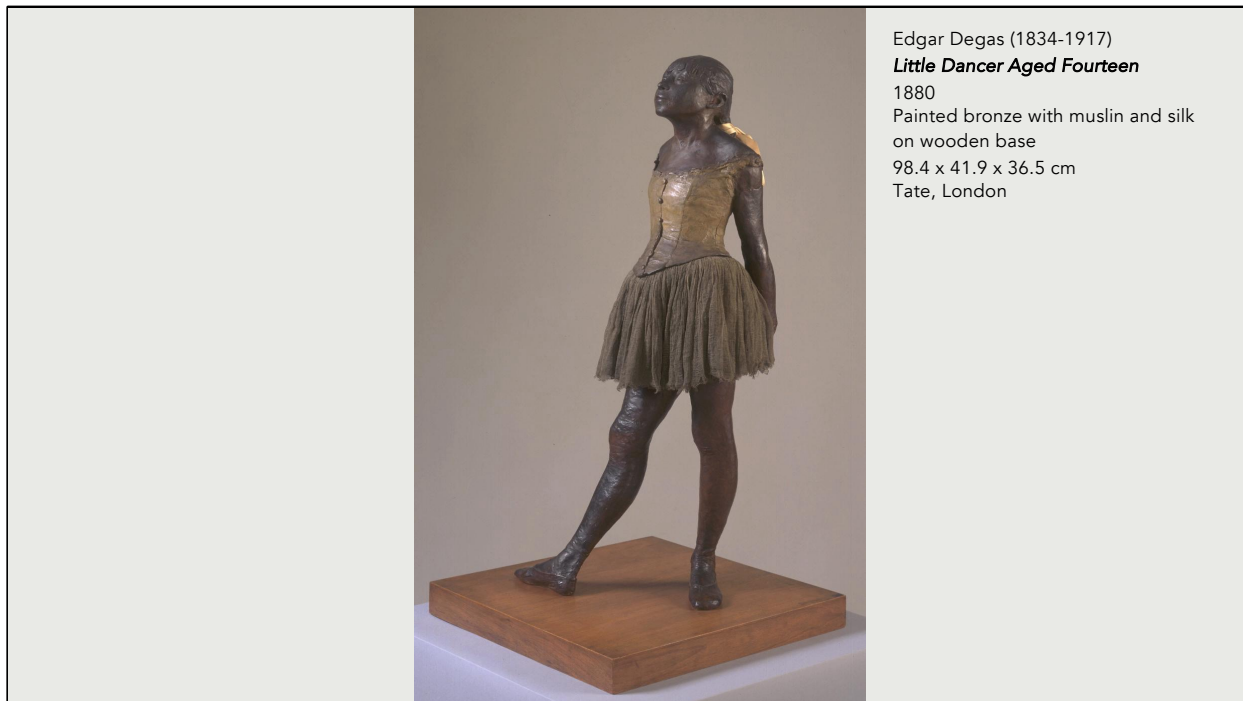
Sickert was one of the leading raconteurs of the period, a prolific writer and art critic and a famous wit who was fluent in French and German and had very good Italian as well as knowing Latin and Greek.

The models were an old school friend called Hubby and his charlady Marie. Sickert used them together for other paintings although they were not a couple in real life. Hubby became an alcoholic and engaged in petty crime and had to be dropped by Sickert. The furniture and other props in the room were used by Sickert in other paintings. The figure in the painting on the wall of a bare-shouldered woman could be Queen Victoria and the glass bell jar containing stuffed birds is also used in other works. The yellows, oranges, browns and greens create an unhealthy sickening atmosphere.

A painting by Degas (1834-1917) called Interior or Le Viol (The Rape) 1868–9 (81.3 x 114.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art) is a possible source of inspiration. Sickert knew Degas personally and visited him in France on a number of occasions. It is very likely that Sickert knew this painting, which remained in the older artist's possession during his lifetime. Degas's Interior shares Ennui's distorted perspective and crowded, congested living space which seems both to reflect and to contribute to the emotional strain implied by the formal relationship of the figures, although the situation in the Degas is considerably more menacing and more of a situation rather than a condition.

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Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
Little Dancer Aged Fourteen
1880
Painted bronze with muslin and silk
on wooden base
98.4 x 41.9 x 36.5 cm
Tate, London

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, 1880, 98.4 x 41.9 x 36.5 cm, Tate, London

From the suffocating stillness of Sickert's cramped interior, we move to one of the most unsettling works in the entire Tate collection — **Edgar Degas's** **Little Dancer Aged Fourteen**, the only sculpture he ever exhibited in his lifetime. Degas showed the work at the **Sixth Impressionist Exhibition in 1881**, and the critical reaction was immediate and disturbing. The original figure was built from a reddish-brown wax of clay and oil, then clothed in real muslin and silk, given a horsehair wig, and fitted with actual ballet shoes. Degas coloured the exposed flesh and smeared wax across the bodice and shoes to bind the whole figure into one unsettling unity. What stands in Tate Modern today is a **bronze cast made around 1922**, five years after Degas died, with the tutu and ribbon preserved separately and the bronze surface rubbed with wax and pigment to approximate the forty-year-old original, now in the **National Gallery of Art in Washington**. The dancer was **Marie van Goethem**, born **1865**, daughter of a laundress and a tailor. She was dismissed from the **Paris Opéra Ballet** the year after Degas exhibited her image, for poor attendance. No further record of her life survives. Critics called the figure a "flower of precocious depravity," her face "marked by the hateful promise of every vice." One wrote simply that she was "the beginning of a rat" — a *petits rats*, the slang for **Opéra** chorus girls whom wealthy men routinely exploited backstage. **Germaine Greer** observed that for such girls,

dancing was a one-way ticket to prostitution. Yet one critic wrote that he experienced "one of the most violent artistic impressions of my life" standing before it — and another called it "the only truly modern effort in sculpture that I know of."

Notes

Materials. This is *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* by Edgar Degas and it is the only piece of sculpture he exhibited in his lifetime. The original was made from a sort of reddish-brown wax consisting of clay and oil, a bit like Plasticine™. This bronze version was cast a few years after his death [in c. 1922]. Before starting the original he made drawings of the young ballerina and then made a nude model in wax which he clothed in muslin and silk and gave a horsehair wig. He coloured the exposed flesh to make it more realistic and added real ballet shoes and a ribbon in its hair. He then smeared the bodice and shoes with wax to blend them into the body.

Critical reaction. When it was first exhibited the unprecedented realism shocked the critics although many critics appreciated his representation of the pain and stress of ballet training. There was a darker side to the work indicated by the way some critics compared the dancer to a rat or a monkey and one referred to her as a 'flower of precocious depravity', with a face 'marked by the hateful promise of every vice' and 'With bestial effrontery she moves her face forward, or rather her little muzzle - and this word is completely correct because the little girl is the beginning of a rat.' The reason is that the adolescent dancers were known as *petits rats* and it was known that lecherous old men would prowl backstage looking for young girls. Germaine Greer described dancing as a 'one-way ticket to prostitution'.

Model. The dancer was Marie van Goethem and she was admitted to the Paris Opera Ballet the year this was made. She came from a very poor family and her father had died sometime in the previous ten years. The family lived a few streets from Degas and he had started to paint, draw and sculpt her two years previously. We know she was dismissed from the ballet school the following year for failing to attend classes and for visiting a local tavern. No further trace of her life is known but her younger sister [Charlotte] became a dancer of distinction and later taught at the dance school during her 53-year career.

Bronze. After Degas's death his heirs decided to cast a number of bronze copies of the original and in these copies, everything is bronze except for the

tutu and the silk ribbon. The foundry also attempted to copy the tones of the 40-year old sculpture by rubbing wax on the bronze and applying pigment and animal glue to the tutu. The result we see here is close to the wax original, now in America [in the National Gallery of Art, Washington].

This is one of the most brilliant examples of what is called 'Realism', the accurate and honest depiction of modern life with all its ugliness and beauty. Critics commented on the pale, sickly face contorted with the suffering necessary to become a ballet dancer. The combination of beauty and suffering caused one critic to write, 'I experienced in front of this statuette one of the most violent artistic impressions of my life'. Another critic described it as 'the only truly modern effort in sculpture that I know of.'

Bio:Degas (1834-1917)

Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was famous for his paintings, sculptures, prints and drawings. More than half of his work depicts dancers. He is regarded as one of the founders of Impressionism although he rejected the term and called himself a realist. He was a superb draftsman who could depict psychological complexity and human isolation. He trained in the classical academic tradition but became an academic painter of modern life.

He was born in Paris to a moderately wealthy family and enrolled at the Faculty of Law in Paris but did not apply himself. Two years later he was admitted to the École des Beaux-Arts and the following year travelled to Italy for three years. He enlisted with the army in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, but it was found his eyesight was defective and his eyes caused him problems for the rest of his life. His father died in 1873 and he discovered his brother had huge debts, so he sold his home and his belongings to pay off the debt and from then on had to sell paintings to survive. As his financial situation improved he began to collect Old Masters such as El Greco and modern artists such as Ingres, Delacroix and Daumier. In the late 1880s he developed a passion for photography and photographed many of his friends and often painted from photographs. As the years passed he became isolated and he never married and believed an artist could have no personal life. He was famous for his hatred of dogs and they had to be locked away before he arrived. The Dreyfus Affair brought his anti-Semitism to the fore and he broke with his Jewish friends. He was so argumentative that all his other friends slowly left him and one of the last to leave was Renoir. He never married and spent the last years of his life, nearly blind, restlessly wandering the streets of

Paris before dying in September 1917. As his vision failed his fame grew but this gave him little comfort.

Marie van Goethem (1865 – ?) mother was a laundress and her father a tailor who died when she was young. Her elder sister Antoinette was an extra at the ballet and a prostitute and her younger sister Charlotte became a successful dancer and went on to become a teacher. Marie was fired by the ballet in 1882 for poor attendance and all trace of her after that has disappeared.

The figure was found 'peculiarly disturbing'. One wrote, 'The lecherous little snout on this barely pubescent young girl, this little flower of the gutter, is unforgettable.' He continued, 'Why is she so ugly? Why is her forehead, half covered by her hair, marked already, like her lips, with a profoundly vicious character?'

As Germaine Greer has written, 'today's public is not likely to make a lecherous interest in the body of a child the fault of the child herself' and, Greer adds, she is 'an undernourished child for whom dancing was a one-way ticket to prostitution'.

The original wax version is in the Paul Mellon collection and 23 bronze versions were cast.

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Dancer-Aged-Fourteen-#.WRFtevnymE Dr Gregory Hedberg argues in his book *Degas's Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen: The Earlier Version That Helped Spark the Birth of Modern Art*, that he found a plaster cast of the original wax model as it was exhibited and before it was changed by Degas.



Dod Procter (1890-1972)
Morning
1926
76.2 x 152.4 cm
Tate, London

Dod Procter (1890-1972), *Morning*, 1926, 76.2 x 152.4 cm, Tate, London

From the disturbing objectification that Degas's critics projected onto Marie van Goethem, we turn to a work that asks us to reconsider who holds the gaze entirely. **Dod Procter's** **Morning**, painted in **1926**, shows a young woman lying on top of white sheets, eyes closed, apparently asleep or quietly daydreaming. The figure has a monumental, sculptural quality — achieved through a restricted palette of stone and flesh tones and a precisely controlled play of light across the body's volume. The Sunday Times critic **Frank Rutter** described it as "no artificial composition reeking of the studio, but a fragment of life, nobly seen and simply stated," adding that the "noble painting of a sleeping girl is the outstanding picture of the year so far as the Academy is concerned." The model was **Sarah 'Cissie' Barnes**, born **1910** in Newlyn, daughter of a fisherman. She was sixteen years old and posed almost every day for five weeks. Rutter's admiring public agreed: the work won **Portrait of the Year**, was purchased by the Daily Mail, and donated to the **Tate**, which subsequently sent it on a two-year tour through New York and Britain. Procter sold it for £300 — a tenth of what it could have fetched. That the artist was a woman matters enormously here. **Laura Mulvey** coined the term **male gaze** in **1975** to describe how art historically positions women as objects of male pleasure, stripping them of independent subjecthood. With Procter behind the easel, the sensuous warmth the press noted sits alongside a quality of stillness and dignity that resists objectification. The painting is

intimate without being voyeuristic — a distinction Procter's biography makes credible. She was born **Doris Shaw** in **1890**, grew up in Cornwall, and at fifteen joined the painting school run by **Stanhope and Elizabeth Forbes** in Newlyn. There she met **Ernest Procter**, her future husband, and **Laura Knight**, who became a lifelong friend and influence. In **1910** she travelled with her mother and Ernest to Paris, where they met **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** and **Paul Cézanne** — encounters that shaped her interest in solid form and warm, structured colour. She and Ernest married in Paris in **1912**.

Notes

This painting is called *Morning* and is by an artist called Doris 'Dod' Procter. In the 1920s she painted many female figures like this one; they were simple and monumental. The power and solidity of the figure is achieved by means of a limited palette, the use of stone colours and an emphasis on bringing out the volume of the figure through her use of strong light and shadow. The woman is lying on top of the sheets and seems to be wrapped in a sheet. She appears to be asleep, but from her pose she may be resting and daydreaming with her eyes closed. The Sunday Times critic wrote, 'Here is no artificial composition reeking of the studio, but a fragment of life, nobly seen and simply stated'. I think what the critic meant was that it is not artificially posed like a typical studio portrait but, as I said, she has manipulated the colour, form and lighting to create a particular feeling of solidity and timelessness. The Sunday Times critic went on to say it was 'a new vision of the human figure which amounts to the invention of a twentieth-century style in portraiture'.

It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1926 and was admired by the public and the press who described its 'sensuous but sombre style'. It won the Portrait of the Year award and was bought by the Daily Mail and donated to the Tate, where we see it today. It was so highly regarded that it was sent to be exhibited in New York and then went on a two-year tour of Britain.

The work reminds me of the term the 'male gaze', invented in 1975 to describe the way in which women in works of art are often depicted objects of male pleasure. It is claimed the male gaze robs women of their human identity as it relegates to the status of objects. The three elements are the artist, the person represented and the viewer. In this case the artist is a woman which raises the possibility that this is an example of the female gaze. This is difficult to define but it has been suggested that involves transparency

and the ability to connect with the person represented at a deeper level. So, the description of the painting as 'sensuous but sombre' might mean that although the sexual attractiveness of the model has been captured eroticism and objectification have been avoided.

We know who the model is. It is 'Cissie' Barnes, the daughter of a local fisherman who received some publicity at the time. She modelled for other Newlyn artists and in 1926, when she was 16, she posed almost every day for five weeks for this painting. Five years later she married, and moved to London.

I should also add that other paintings by Dod Procter were controversial. During the 1920s she painted many sensuous female nudes including young girls and when this work toured the country it was accompanied by some of these other works. As a result, some venues would not display her work and three years later a painting of a young female nude called *Virginal* that she submitted to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition was excluded on the grounds of indecency.

Ernest Procter, her man who was to become her husband, and her were both star pupils at art college and went together to Paris where they both met Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne and were influenced by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. However, like many women artists married to well-known male artists her work has often been defined in terms of her husband's art.

Bio:Procter

Dod Procter (1890-1972) was born Doris Margaret Shaw, the daughter a former art student at the Slade and her father was a ship's doctor. She was born in Hampstead, but the family moved to Cornwall when she was young. When she was 15 she joined the school of painting run by Elizabeth and Stanhope Forbes in Newlyn where she met her future husband Ernest Procter. In Newlyn, she met Laura Knight who became a lifelong friend and influence. In 1910 she went with her mother and Ernest Procter to Paris where they met Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne. They married in Paris in 1912 and the following year their son was born, and she first exhibited at the Royal Academy. During WWI Ernest worked in an ambulance unit and after the war they settled in Newlyn. They were commissioned to go to China for a year to decorate a Palace and when she returned she started painting portraits usually of young women.

Procter and her husband attended art schools in England and in Paris together, where they were both influenced by Impressionism and the Post-Impressionism movements. They also worked together at times, sometimes sharing commissions and other times showing their work together in exhibitions. Procter was a lifelong artist, active after the untimely death of her husband in 1935. After Ernest's death, Procter travelled to the United States, Canada, Jamaica and Africa.

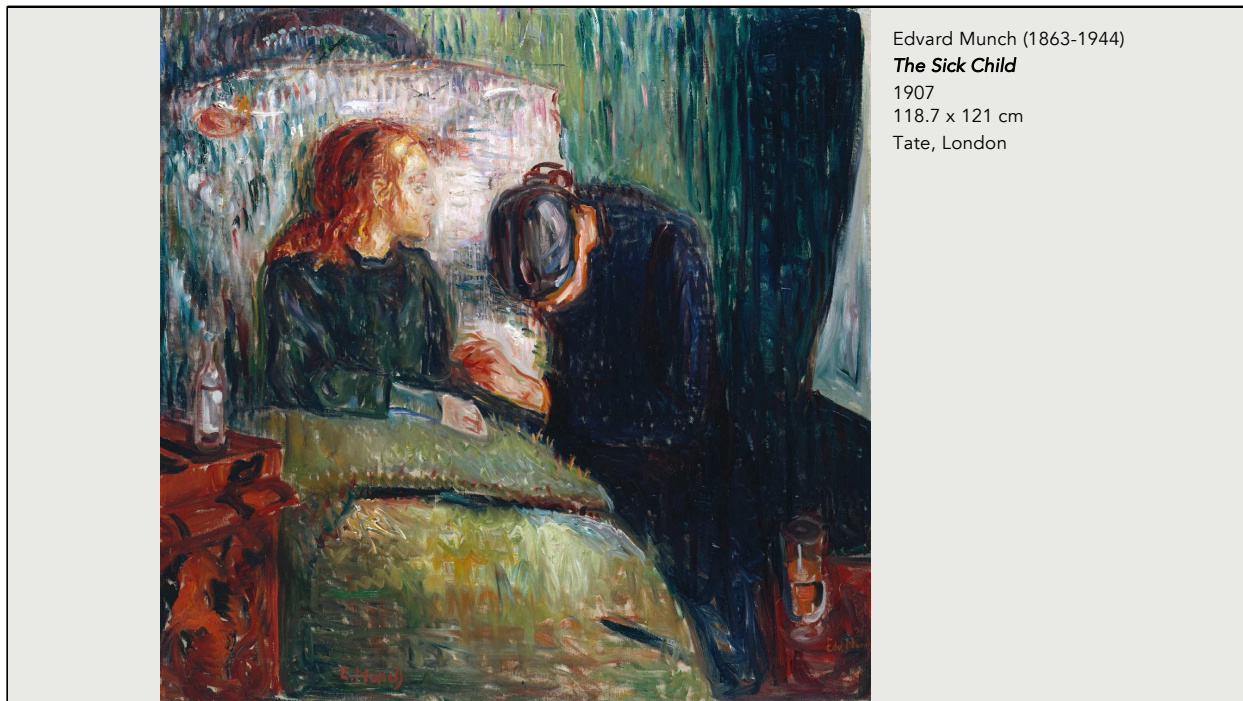
Frank Rutter, the critic for the Sunday Times wrote at the time, 'Here is no artificial composition reeking of the studio, but a fragment of life, nobly seen and simply stated. ... It is Mrs. Dod Procter's "Morning"'. He explained that this 'noble painting of a sleeping girl is the outstanding 'picture of the year' so far as the Academy is concerned. ... How exquisite is the painting of that left hand, at rest but full of life'.

She sold the work for £300 but could have achieved ten times that price. There is a smaller version called Early Morning in the Royal Pavilion, Brighton.

Her painting of Cissie Barnes was regarded as one of the best at the Royal Academy in 1925 and in 1927 this portrait of Barnes, called Morning, won Portrait of the Year. It was bought by the Daily Mail and donated to the Tate which sent it on a two-year tour of New York and Britain. She sold the work for £300 but could have achieved ten times that price. There is a smaller version called Early Morning in the Royal Pavilion, Brighton.

The model was Sarah ('Cissie') Barnes (1910-1979), born in Newlyn, Cornwall, the daughter of a fisherman or fish merchant. Her mother died when she was born, and she was brought up by maternal aunt and uncle. She modelled for other Newlyn artists and in 1926 she posed almost every day for five weeks for this painting. She married Francis Garner in 1931, the best man at her brother's wedding.

The term male gaze was coined by feminist film critic and academic Laura Mulvey in 1975.



Edvard Munch (1863-1944), *The Sick Child*, 1907, 118.7 x 121 cm, Tate, London

From Dod Procter's quietly dignified treatment of a sleeping girl, we move to a work saturated in grief that is anything but quiet. **Edvard Munch** painted six versions of **The Sick Child**, and the one before us — the fourth, completed in **1906** — returns obsessively to the death of his sister **Johanne Sophie**, who died of tuberculosis in **1877** when Munch was thirteen. His mother had died of the same disease when he was five, and tuberculosis shadowed the entire household. That he himself survived it may account for the guilt the work seems to carry. The adult woman seated beside the child is almost certainly his aunt **Karen**, who raised the family after his mother's death. Munch later recalled that the encounter inspiring the image may have involved a girl named **Betzy Nielsen**, eleven or twelve years old, distraught after her brother's accident — a memory he carried for decades. The painting is not a record of an event but of a state of mind. Munch himself called its earliest version, painted in **1886**, his first "**soul painting**" and his decisive break with **Impressionism**. Critics were hostile — one wrote that no Norwegian painting had provoked such outrage — yet Munch was unmoved, declaring, "It was a breakthrough in my art. Most of what I have done since had its birth in this picture."

Notes

This is *The Sick Child* by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, best known for his work *The Scream*.

We don't know who is represented but it is very likely that it is his sister favourite sister Johanne Sophie. She died of tuberculosis in 1877 when he was 13 years old and she was 14 years old. Munch also had tuberculosis and may have felt guilt that he was the one to survive. The woman is probably his aunt Karen who brought up the children after his mother died of tuberculosis when he was five. His father was very poor even though his father was a doctor as they lived on his military pay when his private practice failed. It may also have been Betzy Nielsen, aged 11/12, whose brother had broken his leg and she was distraught. Munch was attending with his father who was a doctor. Munch asked her mother's permission to draw her and she recounted it in 1954 when she was eighty. Munch said, "It was a breakthrough in my art. Most of what I have done since had its birth in this picture."

His father was very religious, Munch wrote "My father was temperamentally nervous and obsessively religious—to the point of psychoneurosis. From him I inherited the seeds of madness. The angels of fear, sorrow, and death stood by my side since the day I was born."

Munch drew from an early age although he father disapproved, and he went to college to study physics, chemistry and maths in which he excelled.

However, he decided to leave college to become an artist. He painted in many styles and an early version of this work was his first 'soul painting' and his first break with Impressionism. The painting received a negative reaction from the critics and from his father. Critics complained it was just a sketch and one critic wrote 'no other painting in the history of Norwegian art has provoked such outrage and indignation'. Munch was undeterred and organised his own solo exhibition which was better received.

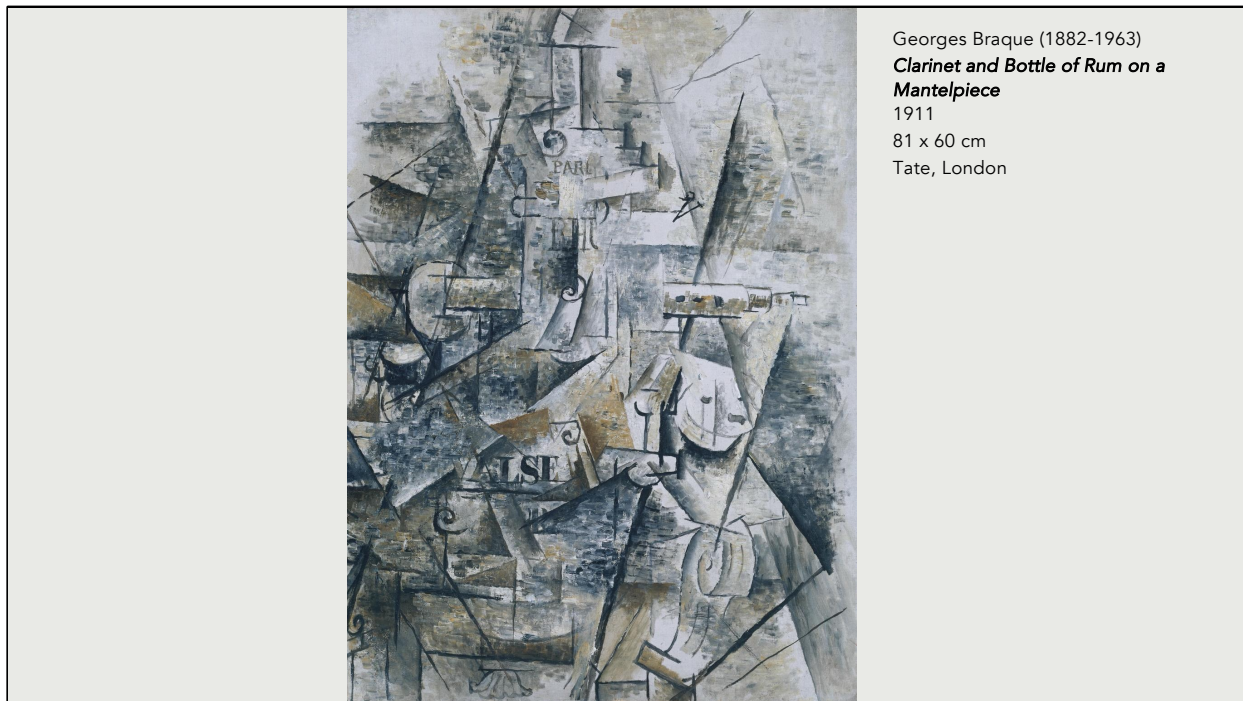
He painted six versions of this subject of which this is the fourth painted in 1906. The first was painted in 1886, nine years after his sister had died. The painting is not an attempt to represent external reality, but his state of mind and this style led to perhaps the best known of his work, *The Scream*, in 1893, fourteen years before he painted this version of *The Sick Child*.

The year after he painted this he suffered from hallucinations and feelings of persecution. He spent much of the last two decades of his life in solitude painting a stream of nudes and the life on his farm near Oslo. He was labelled a degenerate artist by the Nazis in the 1930s and he lived in fear of all his painting being seized and destroyed when Germany invaded Norway. He

lived until 1944 and died when he was 80 and luckily most of his work has survived.

Notes on Edvard Munch (1863-1944), The Sick Child, 1907

There are six versions, Tate's is the fourth. Munch was born near Oslo, father GP very religious and poorly paid, four siblings. 1868 mother died of tuberculosis. Munch drew from an early age, studied engineering, decided to become a painter, opposed by his father. The Scream 1893. Morning 1884 is his first important work and shows his style the previous year. Included in the World Exhibition but critics branded Munch 'the painter of ugly things'. It marks a turning point from Impressionism to Expressionism. In 1889 his father died, and he became financially responsible for the family. He went to Paris and was influenced by Gauguin. In 1892 he painted Despair the precursor to The Scream, he exhibited in Berlin, but his paintings were considered so shocking the exhibition closed prematurely.



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

From the raw anguish of Munch's soul painting, we move to a different kind of revolution — one concerned not with emotion but with perception itself. **Georges Braque** painted **Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece** in **1911**, and at first glance it looks almost abstract. But look closely: the clarinet runs across the centre, the letters "**RHU**" — beginning the French word for rum — sit above what reads as a bottle's shoulder, and a carved scroll at the bottom anchors the whole scene to the mantelpiece of the title. Braque is doing something philosophically precise here. Since the **Renaissance**, painting has fixed the viewer at a single point, imposing one authoritative perspective. But Braque argued that this is not how we actually know objects. We walk around them, accumulate views, build understanding over time. He described the result as objects "**shattered into fragments**" — and insisted that fragmentation was "a way of getting closest to the object." Colour is deliberately suppressed to keep attention on form and spatial interaction. This is **Analytical Cubism**, the first of two phases that **Braque** and **Pablo Picasso** developed together between roughly **1908** and **1912**. Braque later recalled their collaboration as being "like mountain-climbers roped together." One detail rewards attention: a single nail, painted with full **trompe-l'oeil** shadow, sits just right of centre. Everything else is fragmented — this alone is conventional. It reads as a quiet joke, or perhaps a pointed

reminder that a painting is always an illusion, whatever style it wears.

Notes

Cubism. We can now turn to one of the most important art movements of the twentieth century—Cubism. 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. I will let you find the clarinet, bottle of rum and mantelpiece while I describe why it was painted this way.

Why 'shattered'. 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, when we walk round a room we see objects from different views and we retain memories of these that we combine to form our complete understanding of the form of an object. Braque is therefore representing these different views and different memories of the scene. He restricted the number of colours to concentrate our attention on the forms and their interaction. Braque described them as, 'objects shattered into fragments... [as] a way of getting closest to the object... Fragmentation helped me to establish space and movement in space'.

The Picture. Have you found the elements in the title? The clarinet is across the centre. 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.

Cubism. 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'.

The nail. 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. He painted a nail like this 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 these flat hints of parts of objects seen from different angles with a conventional three-dimensional representation of a nail.

Notes

Georges Braque (13 May 1882 – 31 August 1963, pronounced 'brack') was a major 20th-century French painter, collagist, draughtsman, printmaker and sculptor. His most important contributions to the history of art were in his alliance with Fauvism from 1906, and the role he played in the development of Cubism. Braque's work between 1908 and 1912 is closely associated with that of his colleague Pablo Picasso.

Braque started life as a house painter but moved to Paris and studied there. He met other artists and in 1905 was influenced by the 'Fauvres' ('Beasts') and adopted their style. In 1907 he saw the Cézanne retrospective in Paris (Cézanne died in 1906) and was influenced by his work. Between 1908 and 1913 he studied the effect of light, colour and the use of perspective as we see in his Houses at l'Estaque of 1908.

In 1909, he began to work closely with Picasso who had been developing a similar proto-Cubist style. The two artists working together produced works in monochromatic colour with complex patterns of faceted form, a style that is now called Analytic Cubism. While their paintings shared many similarities in palette, style and subject matter, Braque stated that unlike Picasso, his work was 'devoid of iconological commentary,' and was concerned purely with pictorial space and composition. Picasso had been influenced by Gauguin, Cézanne and African masks. Braque sought balance and harmony in his compositions, especially through papier collés, a pasted paper collage technique that Picasso and Braque invented in 1912. Braque, however, took collage one-step further by gluing cut-up advertisements into his canvases. These foreshadowed modern art movements concerned with critiquing media, such as Pop art. Braque stencilled letters onto paintings, blended pigments with sand, and copied wood grain and marble to achieve great

levels of dimension in his paintings. His depictions of still lifes are so abstract that they border on becoming patterns that express an essence of the objects viewed rather than direct representations.

They worked together until Braque enlisted in 1914. He received a head injury resulting in temporary blindness. Braque resumed painting in late 1916 and continued in the Cubist style, producing luminous, other-worldly still life and figure compositions until his death in 1963, aged 81. Braque's quiet nature was partially eclipsed by the fame and notoriety of Picasso.

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Claude Monet (1840-1926)
Water-Lilies, Sea-Roses (Yellow Nirwana)
after 1916
200.7 x 432 cm
On long-term loan from the National Gallery, London

Claude Monet (1840-1926), *Water-Lilies, Sea-Roses (Yellow Nirwana)*, after 1916, 200.7 x 432 cm, On long-term loan from the National Gallery, London

Braque's painted nail — that deliberate trompe-l'oeil trick — is a useful hinge here, because it reminds us that illusion and reality are always in negotiation in a painting. **Claude Monet** spent the last thirty years of his life staging precisely that negotiation, and the result sits before us now. This is **Water-Lilies**, painted after **1916** at Monet's garden in **Giverny**, about fifty miles northwest of Paris. The garden was Monet's obsession — he imported water lilies from South America and Egypt, fought local authorities who wanted the foreign plants destroyed, and famously declared, "I'm good for nothing except painting and gardening." During those final decades he produced over **250 paintings** of this single stretch of water. What makes the late water-lily pictures so radical is the shift in the viewer's relationship to the scene. Early **Impressionist** painting presents nature as something you stand outside and survey. Here, the horizon has vanished entirely. You are not looking at the pond — you are immersed in it. Monet suffered from **cataracts** from **1912** onwards, and critics complained the works were blurred and imprecise. Those critics were largely ignored until **Abstract Expressionism** in the **1950s** reframed the water-lily series as visionary precursors — which is precisely why we are about to walk into a room of **Mark Rothko**.

Notes

Description. Before considering Rothko's work let us remind ourselves of a much earlier work that verges on the abstract. This is Water-Lilies by Claude Monet which he painted sometime after 1916 in his garden at Giverny.

250 paintings. In the last 30 years of his life he produced over 250 paintings of his garden. He spent all his time planting, remodelling the landscape and painting or, as he put it, 'I'm good for nothing except painting and gardening.' He imported water lilies from as far away as South America and Egypt and had to fight the local authorities who wanted the foreign plants destroyed. His neighbour also complained about the footbridge he built which he painted 17 times. This was painted after the death of his second wife, Alice [in 1911] and his oldest son, Jean [in 1914].

Closer and closer. Over the years Monet moved his viewpoint closer and closer to the water until the shoreline disappeared and his paintings became studies of reflections and water. Early Impressionist paintings presented a view of nature that the viewer was outside looking in but Monet's late water lily paintings envelope the viewer who becomes immersed and lost inside the painting.

Eyesight. Many critics complained that the water lily paintings were messy and blurred and suffered from his failing eyesight. For 20 years after his death the water lily paintings were largely ignored until Abstract Expressionism renewed critics interest. Earlier Impressionist paintings were scenes that the viewer could encompass and control, but the water lily series are larger than life and encircle the viewer. This immersion inside the work gives rise to new feelings about our place in nature and the joy of the natural world.

Let us now go into the next room to see a series of paintings by Mark Rothko that convey pure feeling. The room is intentionally darkened and quiet and so when we arrive could you get closer as I shall be speaking more quietly.

Notes

Claude Monet (1840-1926) was born in Paris but moved to Le Havre when he was five. His mother wanted him to become a painter, but his father wanted him to join the family grocery business. He went to a local art school and met Eugène Boudin on the beaches of Normandy when he was 16. His mother died, and he travelled to Paris and met other artists including Édouard Manet. After a period in the army he returned to Paris and met Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Frédéric Bazille and Alfred Sisley. Together they shared new

approaches to art, painting the effects of light en plein air with broken colour and rapid brushstrokes. He married in 1870 just before the Franco-Prussian war and moved to London then Argenteuil. In London he was inspired by the works of John Constable and Joseph Mallord William Turner. He was very poor during this period of his life.

The first Impressionist exhibition was in 1874 and the critic Louis Leroy coined the term 'impressionists' which he took from Monet's *Impression: Sunrise*. By 1878 Monet had serious financial problems and in 1879 his wife died aged 32. In 1883 he was struck by the beauty of Giverny when he passed through on the train and rented a house there in 1883. Giverny is in Upper Normandy about 50 miles from Paris on the right-bank of the Seine. He lived with Alice Hoschedé, her six children and his two sons from 1879 and he married her in 1892 after the death of her estranged husband. In the late 1880s Monet's fortunes began to change for the better as his dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, had increasing success in selling his paintings. By November 1890, Monet was prosperous enough to buy the house at Giverny where he remained for the rest of his life. His second wife died in 1911 after which her daughter Blanche, by then his widowed daughter-in-law, cared for him.

During the last 30 years of his life he produced about 250 paintings of water lilies. The water lilies are from his garden at Giverny and many were painted after he started suffering from cataracts in 1912. The paintings are now scattered around the world although a few are sometimes united at exhibitions. At the recent 'Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse' at the Royal Academy three water lily paintings from Cleveland Museum of Art, the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri were united and displayed as a triptych.

During the 1920s, the state of France built a pair of oval rooms at the Musée de l'Orangerie as a permanent home for eight water lily murals by Monet. The exhibit opened to the public on 16 May 1927, a few months after Monet's death and display the paintings as Monet intended by completely encircling the viewer.

This painting, *Sea-Roses (Yellow Nirwana)*, is on long-term loan from the National Gallery.

On 24 June 2008 another of Monet's water lily paintings, *Le bassin aux nymphéas*, sold for almost £41 million at Christie's in London although later sales failed to achieve a similar figure.

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Mark Rothko (1903-1970)
Seagram Murals, Black on Maroon
 1958
 Tate, London

Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Seagram Murals, Black on Maroon, 1958, Tate, London

The link the previous slide drew — between Monet's immersive late work and **Abstract Expressionism** — brings us directly here, to the room many visitors find the most affecting in **Tate Modern**: the Rothko Room, home to the **Seagram Murals**. **Mark Rothko** was born in **Dvinsk** in Russia in 1903, and his family fled antisemitism and the threat of military conscription, eventually settling in America. By **1958** he was successful enough to be offered a major commission: murals for the **Four Seasons restaurant** in **Mies van der Rohe's** Seagram Building on **Park Avenue**, New York. He accepted, he later told the editor John Fischer on a transatlantic crossing, with "strictly malicious intentions" — hoping to paint something that would "ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room." The decisive influence on how he pursued that goal came during a European trip, when he stood before **Michelangelo's** staircase in the **Laurentian Library** in Florence. Rothko said it gave him exactly the feeling he was after: the sense that viewers are "trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up." He produced around **30 canvases**, built from **12 layers** of paint on bare canvas — blacks, maroons, dark reds — before withdrawing entirely, returning his advance, and cancelling the contract.

Notes

Four Seasons. These nine paintings are by Mark Rothko and are known as the Seagram Murals. They were originally painted for the Four Seasons restaurant in New York in 1958 but after spending eight months producing them Rothko decided he would not supply them to the restaurant and returned the money he had been advanced. There is disagreement about the reason for this. Rothko's wife said he never knew it would become a restaurant but Philip Johnson, the buildings internal designer said he always knew.

Why did he stop? By chance Rothko discussed the commission with a fellow passenger on a transatlantic journey to Europe and the passenger [John Fischer, editor of Harper's magazine,] wrote notes of the chat which he later published. Rothko told him he was painting large canvases for an expensive restaurant in the Seagram building, 'a place where the richest bastards in New York will come to feed and show off'. He went on to say, 'I accepted this assignment as a challenge, with strictly malicious intentions. I hope to paint something that will ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room.'

Medici Library. When he was in Europe Rothko saw the staircase that Michelangelo designed for the Medici Library in Florence and he said this inspired the murals, as they make the viewer feel they are trapped in a room where all the windows and doors have been bricked up. Rothko painted the panels three times before he was happy with the result. He wanted an oppressive effect, darker and more sombre than anything he had tried before. To create this feeling Rothko wanted his pictures to be shown in subdued light.

Creates a mood. On his return from Europe he had his first meal in the restaurant and was appalled by the prices. Immediately afterwards he cancelled the contract and returned the advance. It is possible he realised his plan to ruin the appetite of the customers would not work with the layout and scale of the restaurant and a clientele who would never even look at the paintings. He realised his art could not change anything and would just be decorative.

Tate bequest. Rothko first mentioned the possibility of making a gift to the Tate in 1965 and discussed it with the Director Norman Reid many times during the next four years before making up his mind. He had a deep affection for England but was concerned his work would not be appreciated. The decisive factor was the thought that the pictures would be in the same building as Turner. The final selection of paintings was made towards the end

of 1969 when he chose eight to accompany the one he had presented in 1968. He planned the arrangement himself with the aid of a mock-up of the space and he even supplied a sample of the wall colour he wanted. However, by a sad coincidence the pictures arrived in London on the very day of his suicide, and he was never able to see them in position.

Notes

Mark Rothko (1903-1970) painted the nine paintings for the Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram Building on Park Avenue, New York, designed by Mies Van der Rohe and Philip Johnson. However, The Four Seasons only had space for seven murals and Rothko painted 30 and it is not clear which ones were intended for the final selection. For his retrospective in New York in 1961 he identified five paintings Mural Sections 2-5 and 7. In 1969 Rothko bequeathed nine murals to the Tate which have been displayed almost continuously, in different arrangements, in the 'Rothko Room'. Five are titled Black on Maroon and four Red on Maroon. Three of the Black on Maroon are dated 1958 and the remainder 1959.

Rothko was a Russian Jew whose parents were middle-class intellectuals. Because of the anti-Jewish feeling in Russia and the fear that his sons were about to be conscripted into the army his father (named Rothkowitz) fled to America. Rothko was very bright but a manic depressive. He got a place at Yale, married, divorced and married again, separated in 1969. He returned to Europe where he saw Michelangelo's Laurentian Library and was moved by the feeling of enclosure which he said influenced the Seagram Murals. He committed suicide when he was 66 by using a razor to cut open the veins in his wrist and elbow and by taking anti-depressants.

Rothko hated people saying his paintings are beautiful as he wanted something more than that. They are intended to express deep emotions and provide a window into a spiritual world. By the time of his death his work had become massively successful and sold for very high prices which he didn't like.

The Seagram Murals consist of 12 layers of paint built up on bare canvas and painted very slowly with the help of two studio assistants. The technique enables the viewer to see faint under layers and shapes. They were created as a space, an environment, a place of contemplation. The colours Rothko uses are darker than those he has used previously ... blacks, maroons, dark reds. He said that he feared the day 'the black swallows the red.' The murals are

Rothko's first series. For a series to be a series there needs to be a common theme to unite them and here it is the floating frame. The edges are soft and blurred and this fraying and feathering gives a feeling of the frames expanding and contracting, gently and breathing. For Rothko they weren't about the colours or technique but about feelings, such as tragedy, doom and ecstasy.

Rothko said of Michelangelo's Laurentian library staircase, "He achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after - he makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do is butt their heads for ever against the wall."

One critic has seen letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the paintings. Rothko was Jewish, born in Dvinsk, Russia, (now Latvia), spoke Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian and English. He could be difficult but had a good deal of integrity. In New York in 1958 Rothko won a major commission to provide murals for the luxury Four Seasons Restaurant in the iconic Seagram Building. He was given a \$7,000 advance and produced some 30 works. He was delighted and set to work with real enthusiasm. Then he and his wife Mell dined in the restaurant and he withdrew the paintings and returned the advance. He told his assistant, 'Anybody who will eat that kind of food for those kind of prices will never look at a painting of mine.' There are several stories but basically it seems it was a question of artistic integrity. The Four Seasons was not the right home for his paintings.

What then was the right home? Rothko had a deep affection for Turner and so he donated them to the Tate with certain specific conditions, such as the low light, the specific wall colour and located in a separate room next to the Turners. On the day in February 1970 that the paintings were being unpacked at Tate came the news that Mark Rothko had committed suicide in New York. The other influence mentioned by Rothko to John Fischer was Pompeii. In the Villa of the Mysteries he was struck by the use of surprisingly deep colours for a decorative scheme - black and red. He told Fischer that in the villa he sensed "a deep affinity" between the Seagram murals and the Roman wall paintings - "the same feeling, the same broad expanses of sombre colour". The other connection is that the fresco also decorates a dining room.

In 2012, Black on Maroon was vandalized with a black marker pen and it took eighteen months and £200,000 to repair.

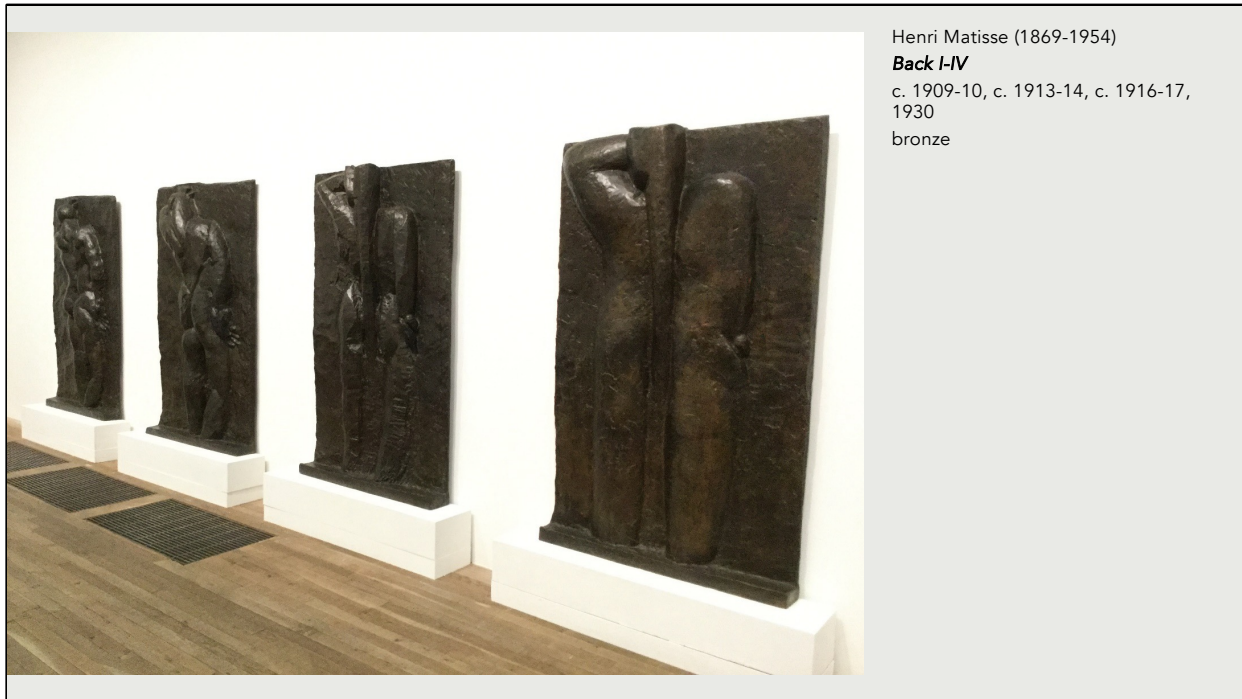
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21 Facts About Mark Rothko



Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Back I-IV, c. 1909-10, c. 1913-14, c. 1916-17, 1930

From Rothko's sealed, airless rooms, we move to a very different kind of monumental ambition — **Henri Matisse's** four relief sculptures known as **The Backs**, which Tate Modern holds in sequence and which together form one of the great sculptural achievements of the twentieth century. Matisse did not conceive them as a series. Between roughly **1909** and **1930** he simply returned, four times, to the same pose — a woman leaning against a fence, seen from behind — progressively stripping away everything incidental. The starting point was **Cézanne**. Matisse had purchased Cézanne's **Three Bathers** from the dealer **Ambroise Vollard** for 1,300 francs, and he later said, with characteristic directness, " *In moments of doubt ... I thought: 'If Cézanne is right, I am right'; because I knew that Cézanne had made no mistake.*" That painting stayed with him for decades before he donated it to the City Museum of Paris in 1936. The decision to show a monumental female nude from behind was deliberately unorthodox. By concealing the face, Matisse freed himself from the psychological pull of the model's gaze and could treat the body as pure arrangement of form. Across the four reliefs you watch flesh become architecture: the curved spine of **Back I** replaced, by **Back IV**, by an abstracted plait, the modelling of muscle giving way to androgynous, symmetrical mass.

Notes

Four versions. Henri Matisse's series of sculptures of the back is one of the great sculptures of the twentieth century. There are four versions Back I produced in c. 1909-10, Back II produced in c. 1913-14, Back III produced in c. 1916-17 and Back IV in 1930. Matisse did not conceive of the backs as a series but simply returned to the same theme over the years. One can see how he made a transition from relatively detailed naturalism to the near abstract forms of Back IV.

Cezanne. Matisse bought Cezanne's Three Bathers (see Visual Aids) and he used it as a starting point for a series of sculptures and drawings of monumental nudes seen from the back. The first work has a dynamic tension, and intertwined flowing lines; in the second the body is more erect and less fluid. Notice that the left leg has become a thick pillar; making the figure more solid. The third work leads to the fourth where Matisse suppresses physical detail, making the contours more fluid, the surface more homogeneous. The loss of expressiveness in the figure's features is made up for by the symmetrical harmony of the work as a whole.

Concealed face. Matisse's decision to show the back view of a woman on such a monumental scale was unorthodox. By concealing her face, he avoided the complexities of visual engagement between artist and model. This helped him to consider the nude as an arrangement of forms that he could simplify and stylize. In the final sculpture, the modelling of flesh has given way to the massing of androgynous bulk and the gently curved spine has been replaced by an abstracted plait.

Notes

Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse (1869 –1954) was a French artist, known for both his use of colour and his fluid and original draughtsmanship.

The Backs were Matisse's largest sculptures. Over twenty years, from 1909 to 1930, he progressively refined the original pose, based on a woman leaning on a fence, until he achieved a massive simplicity.

Although Back I had been exhibited in 1913, the series remained almost unknown until 1949–50 when the plaster Backs I, III and IV appeared in exhibitions in Paris and Lausanne. Back II was only rediscovered after Matisse's death, while an even more naturalistic first version is now only known from a photograph. All were cast posthumously in bronze. Back I, III and IV were first cast in bronze in 1955-56 and Back II was discovered in 1955

and then cast in bronze. 12 copies were cast and nine are in nine major museums around the world.

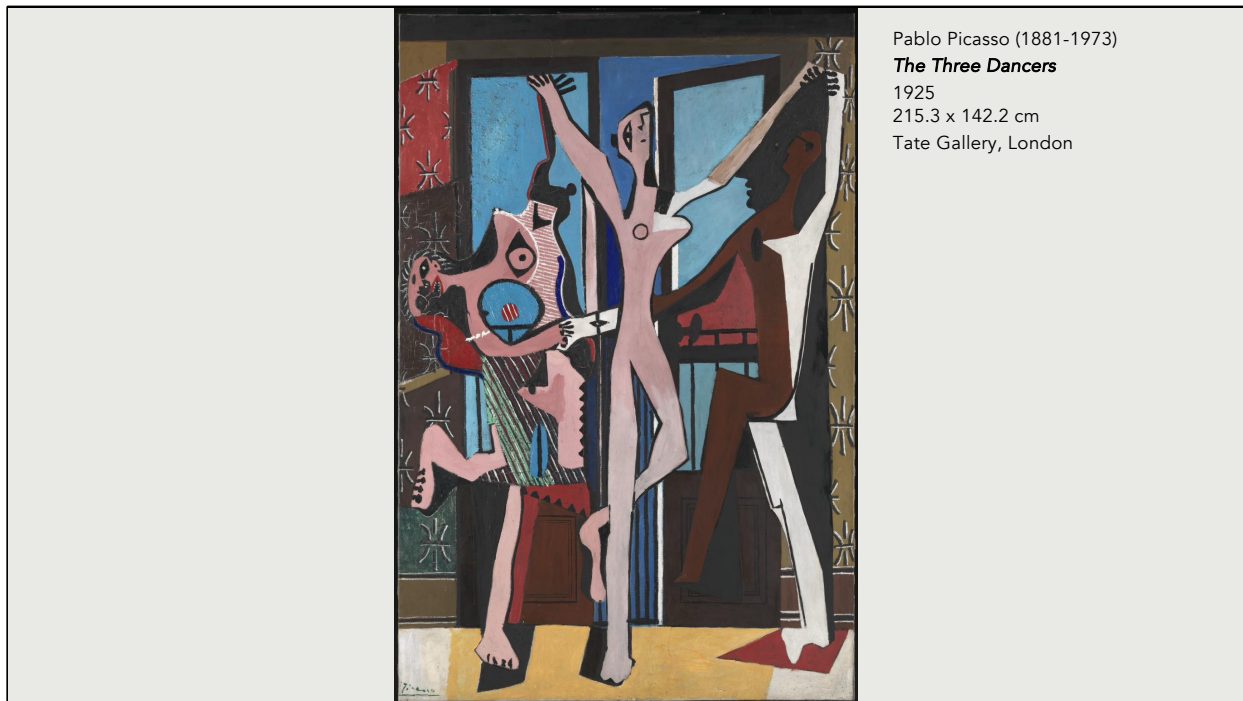
Matisse showed *Back I* at the two notorious exhibitions that first made modern art a sensation before the first world war: the second Postimpressionist show in London, and the Armory show in New York. Otherwise, none of the *Backs* was seen again in public until after the second world war.

'Cézanne was right and so am I' Matisse bought Cézanne's *Three Bathers* for the sum of 1,300 francs from the art dealer Ambroise Vollard. He later donated the Cézanne to the City Museum of Paris in 1936.

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Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *The Three Dancers*, 1925, 215.3 x 142.2 cm, Tate Gallery, London

Where Matisse stripped form back to its essentials across two decades of quiet return, **Picasso's *The Three Dancers* of 1925** arrives as an explosion — violent, personal, and saturated with a specific human tragedy. At first glance the painting looks like a celebration of movement. It is the opposite. Picasso was working in Monte Carlo designing sets for **Serge Diaghilev** when news reached him that his old friend **Ramón Pichot** had died. That death reopened a wound twenty-five years old. In **1900**, Picasso and Pichot had travelled to Paris with a fellow painter, **Carlos Casagemas**. There, Casagemas became obsessively attached to a young woman named **Germaine Gargallo**. She did not return his devotion. At a restaurant dinner with friends present, he produced a gun, shot at Germaine — wounding but not killing her — and then shot himself. He died of his injuries. Germaine subsequently married Pichot. Picasso told his dealer and friend **Roland Penrose** directly: "While I was painting this picture an old friend of mine, Ramón Pichot, died and I have always felt that it should be called 'The Death of Pichot' rather than 'The Three Dancers'." The three figures encode this triangle: Pichot as the shadowy silhouetted profile on the right, Germaine on the left wearing an aggressive **New Guinea mask**, and the crucified central figure representing Casagemas — the cross suggested by the darker blue verticals behind him.

Notes

Description. This is Pablo Picasso's *The Three Dancers*. The shadowy figure on the right whose profile is shown against the window is a man. The central figure that looks like a woman is probably a man for reasons I will explain and the figure on the left is a woman with two faces like a New Guinea mask.

Pichot. We know from X-ray analysis that the painting started out as three classical figures but the violent distortions signal a break with his classical period. Picasso told his dealer friend Roland Penrose, 'While I was painting this picture an old friend of mine, Ramón Pichot, died and I have always felt that it should be called "The Death of Pichot" rather than "The Three Dancers".' According to Picasso, the shadowy figure on the right behind the dancer is his friend Pichot. The figure on the left is female and has two faces based on a mask from New Guinea that Picasso owned. She is associated with a young model in Paris, called Germaine, who married Pichot. Although the central figure retains the female form of one of the original three classical female figures the pose and position suggest it represents Casagemas crucified between Germaine and Pichot. The cross on which he is crucified is indicated by the darker blue background behind the central figure and the closeness of the central railings which look like wood grain.

Background. In 1900, Picasso had gone with Pichot on his first long visit to Paris together with another young painter, Carlos Casagemas. In Paris, Casagemas fell in love with a young woman friend of Picasso named Germaine Gargallo. She rejected him and Casagemas committed suicide, after first taking a shot at Germaine, who soon after married Pichot. This drama greatly affected Picasso and *The Three Dancers* can be read as a reference to the affair. Pichot shot himself in front of his friends. Picasso wrote, 'My work is like a diary, to understand it you have to see how it mirrors my life.' Picasso never forgot Germaine Pichot and four decades later he took his very young lover [Françoise Gilot] to see her. She later wrote that Picasso spoke with her and left her some money. After they left she asked him why he had taken her there and he said, 'I want you to learn about life'. 'She's old and toothless and poor and unfortunate now but when she was young she was very pretty and she made a painter friend of mine suffer so much that he committed suicide ... She turned a lot of heads, now look at her'.

Guernica. This therefore, is a work expressing his deep feelings about the death of his friend Casagemas. *The Three Dancers* is the first work he sold to a gallery. He kept it for 40 years and sold it to the Tate through his friend

Roger Penrose [in 1964]. It was the first work of modern art to be purchased by the Tate. Picasso said that he had not sold the work before as it was important to him as it showed the first traces of his famous anti-war painting Guernica. If you visit the 'Artist and Society' gallery you will find Picasso's Weeping Woman, an equally emotional but much more planned and distilled work based on his reworking of the woman in Guernica.

Notes

The pattern on the wallpaper mirrors the stance of the dancers crossed by the bar of the balcony. The figures each have two faces. The one on the left has a tiny crescent-moon shaped face looking inwards and forming part of an aggressive mask-like face with sharp teeth. The vertical slit against blue could be part of the railings or a reference to female genitalia. The central figure can be read with the head upright or on its side. Read vertically the eye becomes a gaping, grinning mouth. The reading of the central figure as his friend Carlos Casagemas is contradicted by the female breasts but it has been suggested that this is a reference to Casagemas's impotence. The head on the right has a small, neat profile surrounded by a second darker more naturalistic silhouetted profile. The two faces could refer to the figures' social face or, in Jungian terms, their persona and their true nature.

Picasso in here in the Surrealist room but he claimed he was not a Surrealist. The Surrealist though loved him. This is a key work which some describe it as the most important work in Britain.

In 1925, Picasso was designing sets for Serge Diaghilev in Monte Carlo with his wife Olga Khokhlova. At first glance this painting might appear to be a celebration of the joy of dance. But it is associated with hate and violence. Picasso's old friend Ramon Pichot (pronounced 'Pee-cot', in French 'Pee-show') had just died, reviving memories of 25 years earlier when Picasso's friend Carlos Casagemas had had an affair with Germaine Gargallo (born Laure, pronounced 'law', Gargallo had, when she was very young, married a man named Florentin and changed her first name to Germaine). Germaine had an affair with Casagemas who fell deeply in love with her. Germaine slept around and Casagemas became impotent because of the drugs he'd been taking. As a result, he tried to shoot her when he arrived for a meal at a restaurant called L'Hippodrome with seven others present. He hit Germaine but did not kill her and then shot himself in the head and died later. Picasso had had an affair with her friend Louise Lenoir, known as Odette, and later he

had an affair with Germaine before she married Ramon Pichot who was also a friend of Picasso.

Other historians have equated the suppressed violence with the anger Picasso was feeling for his wife Olga Khokhlova. Olga was a dancer for Diaghilev's Ballet Russe.

The Three Dancers was based on the classical composition of The Three Graces.

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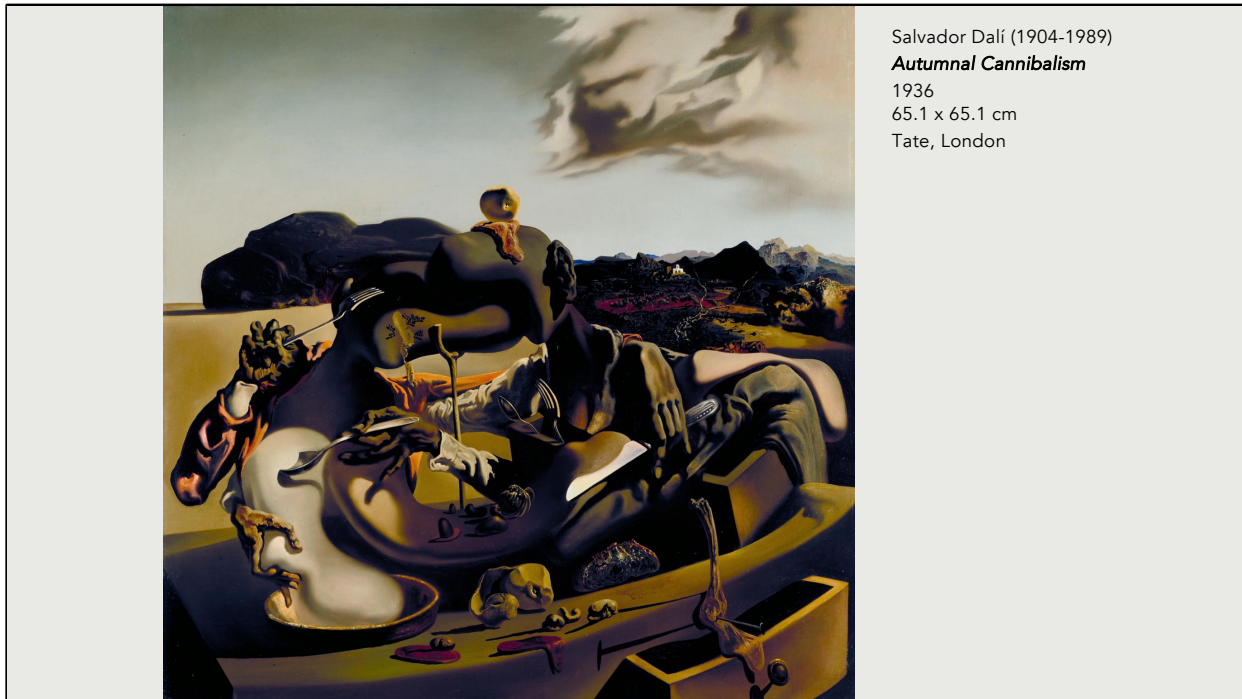
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Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), *Autumnal Cannibalism*, 1936, 65.1 x 65.1 cm, Tate, London

From the intimate tragedy of Picasso's three figures, we move to another Spaniard who mapped the same civil war onto canvas — though with a radically different diagnosis. **Salvador Dalí** painted **Autumnal Cannibalism** in **1936**, the year the **Spanish Civil War** broke out. On a Catalonian landscape, two merging figures — one evidently female, one suited and male — consume each other with bright silver cutlery. The woman slices not the man's flesh but her own elongated breast, which flows across his shoulder. The painting combines sadism, masochism, and self-destruction into a single, meticulous image. Dalí was explicit about his meaning. He wrote of "these Iberian beings mutually devouring each other" and described the war as "a pure phenomenon of natural history" — contrasting himself directly with **Picasso**, who he said "considered it a political phenomenon." Where Picasso saw a crisis demanding moral outrage, Dalí observed like a scientist watching ants — and ants appear here, crawling around a wound in the female figure's skin. Those ants carry precise symbolic weight for Dalí: childhood memories of watching ants consume his still-living pet bat gave them permanent associations with death, decay, and, in his own words, "immense sexual desire." The **open drawers** in the table store, in Freudian terms, secret and unconscious sins. Spain is eating itself alive.

Notes

Description. This is one of Salvador Dalí's greatest works. It is called *Autumnal Cannibalism*. There is what could be a beach on which we see a chest of drawers and on top two torsos. If you look closely you can see that the two figures are eating each other using bright silver cutlery. The one on the left looks female with soft milky skin and the one on the right wearing a suit could be male. The female figure has her right arm round the neck of the male and is slicing what at first looks like his flesh with a knife. However, if you look more closely you can see it is her own breast she is cutting. Her elongated breast flows across the other figure and over its shoulder and she is carving a slice from it. Sadism and masochism are combined with cannibalism and self-cannibalism. The painting is about unrestrained consumption and Dalí draws us into the horror by adding detail upon detail, encouraging our eyes to penetrate further and further until we find ourselves visually consuming the painting.

So, what is going on? It was painted in 1936, the year the Spanish Civil War started. There were atrocities on both sides—half a million people died, and a similar number fled the country but Dalí took little interest in politics. Here, he is representing the civil war as an orgy of consumption, the Spanish people are eating themselves. Dalí wrote about, 'These Iberian beings mutually devouring each other' and saw it as a 'pure phenomenon of natural history'. He compared his view with 'Picasso who considered it a political phenomenon'. In other words, he observed it as a scientist might observe the behaviour of ants and in the painting, you can see a group of ants surrounding a hole in the skin of the female figure. She has a flap of skin hanging off, but her flesh looks like the inside of a fruit. Dalí though was not an impassionate observer, for from it, as a child he was fascinated and repulsed by watching ants consume his still living, pet bat, so for him ants represented decay and decomposition and he also said they refer to enormous sexual desire. So, for Dalí, it could be death and decay or two lovers destroying themselves through their overwhelming sexual attraction.

Symbols. Ants are just one of the many symbols Dalí used. The drawers in the table, for example, store sins, unconscious and secret, often sexual desires. The apple on the figures head could represent the apple used by William Tell. Tell was a Swiss hero who resisted Austrian rule and was made to fire a crossbow bolt at an apple resting on his son's head. This was relevant to Dalí as in 1930 his father had broken off their relationship and Dalí described

William Tell as 'the man whose success depends on his son's heroism'.

William Tell represents a dangerous family conflict which in Freudian terms represents a father castrating his son.

Can art change the world? Dalí is representing the Spanish Civil War using themes of sex, violence and consumption. Two figures suck, chew, cut and eat each other surrounded by food products, such as apples, nuts, bread, slices of Spanish sausage and soft pieces of meat. For Dalí the war was a lesson in natural history and so was unavoidable; to his countryman Picasso, by contrast, it was a terrible political reality and could be resolved through conflict.

Notes

Salvador Dalí i Domènech (Figueres, Catalonia 11 May 1904-23 January 1989). Dalí had an elder brother also called Salvador who had died the year before he was born. His parents saw him as a reincarnation of his dead brother and dressed him in the same clothes and gave him the same toys. Dalí believed his father had been responsible for his brother's death and Dalí rejected and provoked his father by deliberate bed-wetting, simulated convulsions, prolonged screaming, feigned muteness and acts of random aggressiveness towards other children. Dalí first exhibited when he was 14 and even then he was recognised as someone who could become a great painter. Dalí's mother died when he was 16 leaving him devastated. The following year his father remarried his aunt and Dalí was accepted as a student at the prestigious San Fernando Academy. He disagreed with a lot of the teaching but established a relationship with Luis Buñuel and Federico García Lorca. Lorca adored Salvador Dalí and wanted a physical relationship that Dalí was too frightened to consummate.

In 1925 (aged 21) Dalí held his first one-man exhibition and in 1929 (aged 25) he met his muse Gala (1894-1982), a Russian immigrant who was married to the Surrealist Paul Éluard. Dalí is most often associated with the Surrealists but he was formally expelled in 1934 for his reactionary political views. She divorced and married Dalí in 1934. Because of Dalí's purported fear of venereal disease and female genitalia he was said to have been a virgin when they met, and he appears to have preferred masturbation to sexual intercourse. Gala was a nymphomaniac and shared Dalí's love of money, power and notoriety. Dalí was a candaulist, that is he liked to watch Gali make love to other men (the word is based on King Candaules, pronounced can-

doe-lees, who exposed his wife to one of his Ministers). Dalí was also an enthusiastic masturbator who was aroused not just by women but by objects such as church towers. He was worried about the small size of his sexual organ which he claimed gave rise to 'inextinguishable laughter' and he was also worried about the sexuality of women and he admitted to being a premature ejaculator who could achieve an orgasm just by looking.

Autumnal Cannibalism was painted the year before Guernica. The Spanish Civil War had, on one side, General Franco's Nationalist army fighting the evils of communism and on the other the Republicans were fighting the evils of fascism. The Spanish Civil War was won by General Franco and the Nationalists and he became a dictator of a one-party state in which the only legal party was the Falangist, a form of fascism that was anti-communist, nationalistic and supported the Roman Catholic Church. Franco remained in power until his death in 1975 when Juan Carlos became King.

Dalí said, 'My entire ambition in the pictorial domain consists in materializing the images of concrete irrationality with the most imperialistic rage of precision.' In other words, Dalí's aim is to turn his fantasies and dreams into a real physical landscape by making them submit to his will through precise, detailed painting. Freudian theory underpins all of his interpretations of dreams and hallucinations. Dalí draws upon autobiographical material, childhood memories and his fetishes and animal symbolism. Dalí subscribed to André Breton's theory of automatism, but he opted for a method he called 'critical paranoia', a state in which one can cultivate delusions while maintaining one's sanity.

What is Surrealism? André Breton defined it as 'Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations'. Surrealism seeks to subvert the rational basis of society and Dalí uses surrealism to attack and undermine sexual and social conventions. He had a number of personal symbols he used to represent his ideas, such as soft watches (eternity), burning giraffes (a monster of the Apocalypse), thin-legged elephants (man shackled to the earth but reaching for higher things), open drawers (the secret, hidden sins and complexes described by Freud), crutches (weaknesses but also instruments enabling superhuman performance), eggs (hope and love), ants (death, decay and immense sexual desire), snails (the human head), grasshoppers (fear, as Dalí was very scared of grasshoppers), butterflies (the soul), silhouettes (imagination, dreams, good thoughts and motivational power as well as evil inner conflicts and

inhibitions) and lion's heads (sexual savagery).

In this painting we see the Spanish countryside in the background but with disturbing changes. The mountain on the horizon looks like a sleeping dog and a gnarled tree looks like a man with branches for arms and legs. The long shadows of the setting sun suggest an end is coming and the end is also suggested by the title, 'autumnal'. But we don't know what is coming to an end is it the war or is it the lives of everyone involved?

There is an apple on the head of the male figure and another half-peeled apple on the table top perhaps representing William Tell's son's feelings after his father had fired a bolt at him—emotionally stripped. It could also represent the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden and its consumption as the beginning of sin.

The merging of the male and female heads could relate to Dalí's description of when he first kissed Gala. He wrote, 'And this first kiss, mixed with tears and saliva, punctuated by the audible contact of our teeth and furiously working tongues, touched only the fringe of the libidinous famine that made us bite and eat everything to the last! Meanwhile I was eating that mouth, whose blood already mingled with mine' (see John Richardson, *Sacred Monsters, Sacred Masters*).

Dalí made two films with Luis Buñuel, *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*. In *Un Chien Andalou* there is a man's hand coming around the edge of a door that a woman is pushing closed. The hand has a hole in the palm and is covered in ants. The hand could be linked to masturbation and the door edge to the 'castration' of the hand. The French phrase for pins and needles is to have ants in the hand ('avoir des fourmis dans la main') and 'ants in the pants' ('avoir des fourmis dans son pantalon') means to be excited or agitated. The repeated close-ups in which the frame cuts off a hand at the wrist evokes the age-old paternal threat to sons found masturbating. Fingers are often bandaged in the film and the French word for bandage ('bander') also means 'to have an erection'.

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Lee Krasner (1908-1984)
Gothic Landscape
1961
176.8 x 237.8 cm

Lee Krasner (1908-1984), Gothic Landscape, 1961, 176.8 x 237.8 cm

From Spain in flames, we cross the Atlantic to New York — where the catastrophe reshaping art was not one nation's civil war but the full horror of the **Second World War** and the shadow of nuclear annihilation that followed it. **Lee Krasner** painted **Gothic Landscape** in **1956**, the year her husband **Jackson Pollock** died. The thick, vertical slashing marks — dark, urgent, convulsive — are read by many viewers as trees, but the painting is better understood as an act of mourning made physical. Krasner was born **Lena Krassner** in Brooklyn, to Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, and trained rigorously across multiple art colleges, becoming technically fluent in Old Master methods, Cubism, and Fauvism before developing her own mature abstract voice. She and Pollock married in **1945**, and the relationship between them was far from one-directional. One dealer stated flatly that there would never have been a Jackson Pollock without a Lee Pollock. When Pollock, aged forty-four and deep in alcoholism, drove his **Oldsmobile** into a tree at speed, the car overturned and decapitated him. Krasner was in Europe; she returned immediately. Those curved, careening lines in Gothic Landscape carry that specific biographical weight — grief, violence, and the spinning wreckage of a life she had, in every sense, built alongside her own.

Notes

This room is 'The Disappearing Figure: Art after Catastrophe' and the artists

are responding to the horrific events of the Second World War including the possibility of imminent nuclear disaster. Across the world the European artistic tradition was rejected by many artists and in the United States a new form of abstract art developed. This art emphasized the physical act of mark making and therefore the presence of the artist but not as a creator of a likeness of the external world but as an emotional presence.

This work is called Gothic Landscape and the thick vertical slashing marks expressing turmoil and rage and are seen by some as trees. It has been described as purging emotional trauma. There are what look eyes and heads and the strong curved lines could represent the car spinning out of control. Why a car spinning out of control? To answer that I need to explain a bit about the life of the artist.

The artist is Lenore or Lee Krassner. She was a leading American abstract expressionist but unfortunately her work is often evaluated with respect to her better-known husband Jackson Pollock. They married in 1945 and although they worked in separate studios they did influence each other. Krasner had had an extensive education in art techniques and art history and was able to introduce Pollock to the fundamental tenets of modern art. She was also very well connected in the art scene and was able to introduce him to leading collectors, critics and dealers. One dealer said, 'there would never have been a Jackson Pollock without a Lee Pollock' and another referred to him as her 'creation, her Frankenstein ['s monster]'. By the mid-1950s their relationship became strained and Pollock, aged 44, began an affair with Ruth Kligman, aged 26, and was struggling unsuccessfully with his alcoholism. In 1956, in an alcohol-fueled rage, he drove his convertible Oldsmobile into a tree at 80mph, the car turned upside down decapitating him and killing a female passenger – and nearly killing his young mistress. At the time Krasner was visiting friends in Europe and she abruptly returned on hearing the news. For the rest of her life, Krasner managed his estate and ensured that Pollock's reputation remained strong despite changing art world trends.

She painted a number of pictures after his death representing her grief and this picture has been seen as a 'mourning' picture and the manner of his death explains why some people have seen these marks as trees and a car spinning out of control.

Notes

Lenore Krasner or 'Lee' was born Lena Krassner. She was born on Brooklyn,

New York to Russian-Jewish immigrants. From an early age she knew she wanted to be an artist. She went to various art colleges and became proficient in the techniques of the Old Masters and in accurately representing anatomically correct figures but unfortunately most of her work from this period was lost in a fire. In the 1930s she continued to attend classes to study modern art practices and worked with the nude in a cubist style and still life using the bright colours of the Fauvism. During the Great Depression she gave up her job as a waitress and joined the Works Progress Administration project producing large-scale murals. As her abstract work was not appreciated by the general public she was limited to scaling up the work of other artists. She worked with the War Services during the Second World War producing collages for the windows of department stores. She has never had a single identifiable style and has switched between monochrome and colour, hard edged and open form but her work can generally be recognized by its style, texture and rhythm and her interest in the self, nature and modern life. In 2003 one of her works sold for \$1.9 million, four times the estimate.

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Bridget Riley (b. 1931), **Evoë 3**, 2003, acrylic paint and oil paint on canvas, 193.4 x 582 cm, Tate, London

Bridget Riley (b. 1931), **Evoë 3**, 2003, 193.4 x 582 cm, Tate, London

From mourning and violence, we move to something altogether more jubilant. **Bridget Riley's Evoë 3**, painted in **2003**, is announced by its title as a shout of joy — "evoë" being the ecstatic cry heard at the festivals of **Bacchus**. Riley herself wrote that she toyed with calling it "Bacchanal without Nymphs" before remembering, as she put it, that she is "after all supposed to be an abstract artist." The curved, petal-like forms and surging rhythmic movement carry a clear debt to **Henri Matisse** — his late cut-outs in particular, and his lifelong preoccupation with dancing figures. Riley has never hidden that debt. Born in **Norwood, south London, in 1931**, Riley trained at **Goldsmiths College** and the **Royal College of Art**, excelling first as a figure painter. She later said those life-drawing lessons formed "the basis of everything I do in the studio." Her international breakthrough came with **The Responsive Eye** at **MoMA** in **1965**, and in **1968** she became the first woman and the first contemporary British painter to win the painting prize at the **Venice Biennale**. She works from an upper-floor studio in west London, going straight there each morning. Assistants execute the finished canvases from her preparatory studies. Defending the apparent narrowness of her practice, she quoted **Stravinsky**: the more constraints one imposes, the more one frees the spirit.

Notes

Description. The curved shapes recall the outline of leaves or petals, and the

sense of movement conveyed in the painting suggests the cadences of ocean waves. Riley has spoken about her great love of nature and although the forms in *Evoë 3* are not directly representational, they suggest shapes and rhythms familiar from the natural world.

Matisse. In its clear, bright palette and sense of joyous movement, the painting evokes the work of Henri Matisse (1869-1954). The rich colours and sharply delineated forms in *Evoë 3* suggest the influence of Matisse's late cut-outs. The undulating rhythm of Riley's shapes also recalls images Matisse made throughout his life of dancing figures. She said, 'the only way anyone can enter my painting is by looking; there's no theory in them ... The very habit-ridden public, and I'm not blaming them, want something that looks like a painting.'

Figure painter. As a student she was such a good figure painter that she won a place at Goldsmiths College, but she rejected 'the direct depiction of people, which I had loved and enjoyed ... to find out about this new world'.

Works alone. Bridget Riley's studio is on an upper floor of a west London terrace house where she lives and works. She gets out of bed and goes straight to the studio every day. Riley has lived alone for decades, never married, has no children. She works on her own but since the 1960s, assistants have painted Riley's works from her preparatory notes and studies.

Revelry. Riley always conceived of this painting as a festive revelry or bacchanalian cry. The title is a shout of joy at the festivals of Bacchus. She wrote that 'When I had finished *Evoë* and was thinking about its title I toyed with the idea of calling it "Bacchanal without Nymphs" ... But then I remembered, just in time, that I am after all supposed to be an abstract artist'.

Constrained but free. Her range of work may be considered narrow, but she quoted Stravinsky who said, 'The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit.'

Notes

Bridget Louise Riley (born 24 April 1931 in Norwood, London) is an English painter who is one of the foremost exponents of Op art. She spent her early years in Cornwall, and studied in London at Goldsmiths College and the Royal College of Art. She first drew critical attention with the black-and-white paintings she made from 1961, and her international breakthrough came four

years later in *The Responsive Eye* at MoMA, New York, which celebrated the Op art movement.

In 1966 Riley began her explorations of colour and form through stripes or bands across the canvas, and more recently shorter units cut by vertical, diagonal or curved lines. Her reputation was further enhanced at the 1968 Venice Biennale when she became the first woman – and the first contemporary British painter – to win the International Prize for painting.

Although Riley's work is consistently abstract, it is founded in natural experience. As she has written: 'The eye should feel caressed and soothed, experience frictions and ruptures, glide and drift.'

She currently lives and works in London, Cornwall and the Vaucluse in France.

The sketch is from fifteen works shown at the national Portrait gallery in 2010 which were made by Riley during the time she was a student at Goldsmiths College and The Royal College of Art and they offer a new source for understanding her mature paintings. The portraits, dating from the early to mid-1950s, depict Riley's family, friends and studio models. They were made in a range of media including conté crayon, pencil and oil on paper. Riley is widely celebrated as the leading exponent of Op Art and her compelling abstract paintings engage with colour, line, space and movement. In discussion of these works Riley said: 'I learnt to look for the structure, for the action or movement of the pose, the distribution of weight, the proportion of the body, the light-to-dark tonal scaled. But the most important thing was to retain the first impressions of the whole'. Riley has spoken about the important role these early works played in the emergence of her own distinct voice as an artist: 'the lessons learnt built up patterns of a practice that extended well beyond the confines of life drawing. What I learnt gave me the means to embark on my own work with confidence, and to this day this particular knowledge forms the basis of everything I do in the studio.'

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Pablo Picasso,
The Three Dancers
1925, Tate Modern

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