

## Cubist Developments



*"It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of Cubism. It was a revolution in the visual arts as great as that which took place in the early Renaissance. Its effects on later art, on film, and of architecture are already so numerous that we hardly notice them."*

John Berger

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

### Crystal Cubism

*"To understand Cézanne is to foresee Cubism."*

*"Let the picture imitate nothing; let it nakedly present its raison d'être."*

Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger in *Du Cubism* 1912

Between 1915 and 1916 there was a shift in cubist painting towards a strong emphasis on flat surface activity and large overlapping geometric planes. The primacy of the underlying geometric structure, rooted in the abstract, controls practically all of the elements of the artwork. This tendency, practiced in varying degrees by a multitude of artists, was referred to by the French poet and art critic Maurice Raynal as 'crystal' Cubism, Characterised by a tightening of the compositions, and a greater clarity and sense of order.

Considerations manifested by Cubists prior to the outset of World War I – such as the fourth dimension, the dynamism of modern life, the occult, and Henri Bergson's concept of duration – had now been vacated, replaced by a purely formal frame of reference that proceeded from a cohesive stance toward art and life.

The **Section d'Or** ("Golden Section"), was a collective of painters, sculptors, poets and critics. Based in the Parisian suburbs, the group held regular meetings at the home of the Duchamp brothers in and at the studio of Albert Gleizes. Active from 1911 to around 1914, members of the collective came to prominence in the wake of their controversial showing at the *Salon des Indépendants* in the spring of 1911. This showing by Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Robert Delaunay, Henri le Falconnier, Fernand Léger and Marie Laurencin (at the request of Apollinaire), created a scandal that brought Cubism to the attention of the general public for the first time. Louis Vauxcelles, in his review of the exhibition made a passing reference to the artists as "ignorant geometers, reducing the human body, the site, to pallid cubes."

**Albert Gleizes** (1881–1953) artist, theoretician, philosopher, was a self-proclaimed founder of Cubism. His many theoretical writings were originally most appreciated in Germany and influenced the Bauhaus teaching.

His *Portrait of Jacques Nayral* was exhibited in Paris at the *Salon d'Automne* of 1911, and purchased in 1979 by the Tate Gallery. In a departure from the static nature of single-point perspective Gleizes simplifies, interpenetrates volumes and fuses the landscape with the model, to form a homogeneous picture.

The Neo-Symbolist writer Jacques Nayral (a pseudonym for Joseph Houot) was a young modernist poet, dramatist, publisher and occasional sports writer, who shared with Gleizes a passion for the theories of Henri Bergson. The year following the painting of his portrait he married Gleizes' sister. The interfusion and interrelation between the sitter and the background of the painting reflect Bergson's concepts about the simultaneity of experience. He was killed in action in December 1914.

The portrait, begun at Nayral's request in 1910, was completed after many studies. Gleizes wrote: "One day he asked me to do his portrait. I agreed with joy, all the more so because his head and his whole personality [*personne*] seemed to me to be perfect models for emphasising the plastic elements I was trying to develop. His face with clearly demarcated surfaces that made up a passionate interplay of facets—his hair in dark masses projecting lightly in waves over his temples, his solidly constructed body—straightaway suggested to me equivalences, echoes [*rappels*], interpenetrations, rhythmic correspondences with the surrounding elements, fields, trees, houses. So I suggested painting him in my garden, where I found easily to hand an environment that was highly suitable for my model."



To conservative critics and the public the cubist paintings in the salon were an outrage. Gabriel Mournay in his review of the Salon d'Automne of 1911 for *Le Journal*, wrote: "so doubtless the excesses of the anarchists and saboteurs of French painting will contribute to reviving, in artists and amateurs worthy of the name, the taste for true art and true beauty."

Gleizes, later recorded: "... the fury broke out again, just as violent as it had been at the *Indépendants*. I remember this Room 8 in the Grand Palais on the opening day. People were crushed together, shouting,

laughing, calling for our heads. And what had we hung? Metzinger his lovely canvas entitled *Le Goûter*; Léger his sombre *Nus dans un Paysage*; Le Fauconnier, landscapes done in the Savoie; myself *La Chasse* and the *Portrait de Jacques Nayral*. How distant it all seems now! But I can still see the crowd gathering together in the doors of the room, pushing at those who were already pressed into it, wanting to get in to see for themselves the monsters that we were."

In 1912 Metzinger and Gleizes wrote and published *Du Cubisme* in an effort to clarify their aims. It was the first theoretical treatise on Cubism, and still remains the clearest and most intelligible explanation.

The concept developed in *Du "Cubisme"* is of observing a subject from different points in space and time simultaneously, i.e., the act of moving around an object to observe it from several successive angles fused into a single image is a generally recognized device used by the Cubists.

Cézanne's technique of *passage*, in the Bergsonian sense, was used by the Cubists to stimulate a presentiment, an awareness of *the dynamism of form*. "Between sculpturally bold reliefs", wrote Gleizes and Metzinger, "let us throw slender shafts which do not define, but which suggest. Certain forms must remain implicit, so that the mind of the spectator is the chosen place of their concrete birth. Let us also contrive to cut by large restful surfaces any area where activity exaggerated by excessive contiguities

**Jean Metzinger** (1883–1956) was influenced by the neo-Impressionism of Georges Seurat and Henri-Edmond Cross in his earliest works, from 1900 to 1904. Between 1904 and 1907 Metzinger worked in the Divisionist and Fauvist styles with a strong component from Cézanne, leading to some of the first proto-Cubist works.



The complex forms that defined Metzinger's paintings of the period, as may be seen in *Man on a Balcony* (1912), serve to *suggest* the underlying imagery (e.g., a nude, a horse, a dancer, a café-concert), rather than *define* the imagery; arousing the viewer's own creative intuition to decipher the 'total image.' No longer did the artist have to define or reproduce, painstakingly, the subject matter of a painting. The artist became to a large extent free to place lines, shapes, forms and colours onto the canvas in accord with his or her own creative intuition.

Reviewing the Salon d'Automne of 1911, Huntly Carter in *The New Age* writes that "art is not an accessory to life; it is life itself carried to the greatest heights of personal expression." Carter continues:

"It was at the *Salon d'Automne*, amid the Rhythmists, I found the desired sensation. The exuberant eagerness and vitality of their region, consisting of two rooms remotely situated, was a complete contrast to the morgue I was compelled to pass through in order to reach it. Though marked by extremes, it was clearly the starting point of a new movement in painting, per-

haps the most remarkable in modern times, It revealed not only that artists are beginning to recognise the unity of art and life, but that some of them have discovered life is based on rhythmic vitality, and underlying all things is the perfect rhythm that continues and unites them. Consciously, or unconsciously, many are seeking for the perfect rhythm, and in so doing are attaining a liberty or wideness of expression unattained through several centuries of painting."

The Cubist contribution to the 1912 *Salon d'Automne* created a scandal regarding the use of government owned buildings, such as the Grand Palais, to exhibit such artwork. With indignant comments from a politician on the front page of *Le Journal*, 5 October 1912. The controversy spread to the Municipal Council of Paris, leading to a debate in the Chambre des Députés about the use of public funds to provide the venue for such art. The Cubists were defended by the Socialist deputy, Marcel Sembat.

It was against this background of public anger that Metzinger and Gleizes wrote *Du Cubisme* in 1912, (translated to English and Russian in 1913).

**Juan Gris** (1887–1927) was a Spanish painter born in Madrid who lived and worked in France for most of his active period. Closely connected to Cubism his works are among the movement's most distinctive. His *Man in a Café* (1912) is constructed largely out of rectangles and triangles, with very few curved lines.

Juan Gris was the only artist included in the 1912 *Salon de la Section d'Or* who actually used the ideal mathematical proportions of the Golden Section to construct his compositions, as seen in the complex system of grids and geometrical forms that make up this image of a café-terrace dandy. This modern man of taste, complete with top hat and black suit, rests one hand on a chair, while cradling a glass of absinthe in the other. The inclusion of the letters "PIC"





and "AP" to the left of the man's shoulder can be understood as a reference to Picasso, the co-creator of Cubism, and Guillaume Apollinaire, the movement's fervent critical champion.

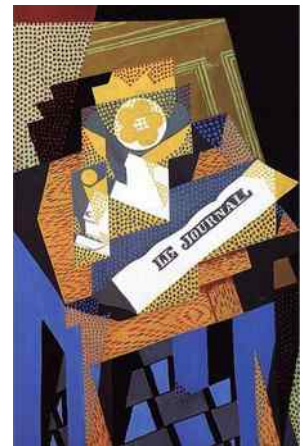


Gris, is a master of disguised images. In his *Still-Life with Checked Tablecloth* (1915) he presents a table brimming with coffee cups, stemmed wineglasses, a large white-footed fruit compote (seen from the side and from above) containing thickly painted grapes, a bottle of red wine, a bottle of Bass extra stout ale with its distinctive red diamond logo, a newspaper, and a guitar. Yet this painting has another equally compelling identity: a bull's head. The coffee cup at lower centre doubles as the animal's snout, a black-and-white concentric circle at left is a "bull's eye," the bottle of ale is an ear, and the sinuous edge of the guitar is a horn. The letters "EAU" on the wine label, which ostensibly stand for "bEAUjolais" can just as easily represent "taurEAU" (bull).

In finding the bull, we share a brief bond with the artist. We recognize his humour, his wink of approval, and realize that he has laid bare a universal truth, namely that things are rarely what they at first seem.

**Gris's Newspaper and Fruit Dish** (1916) transgresses the boundary between the real world and the fabricated world of art.

Composed of a variety of angular abstract shapes, fitting together like a jig-saw puzzle it is painted as if 'cut out' from coloured paper and assembled like a collage. An actual newspaper heading is pasted on, alongside simulations of 'wood grained' wallpaper. The wood-grained coloured table merges into the blue of the floor and in the 'background' a fragment of (possibly) a door lurches in at an unexpected angle. There are segments painted with brown or red dots, which evoke the visible Ben-Day dots of enlarged printed illustrations, and anticipate the paintings of Roy Lichtenstein. The work is said to prefigure the pop art of the sixties.



In a further playful mood **Gris** reprises **Corot's** 1860 *Girl with Mandolin*, converting it into a cubist symphony.

Similarly **Gleizes' Woman with Black Glove** (1920) abstracts the forms of the seen world into a pattern of shapes which evoke the sense of a seated woman with elegant clothes and gloves. A parallel reality, rather than an 'accurate' depiction of a fragment of the real world, seen from a single point of view.

Cubism's paradox is that the goal of its abstract approach is to achieve a greater sense of reality. Think back to Seurat's attempt to achieve greater luminosity by not pre-mixing colours, but rather creating the sense of unified colours through small dots and patches of different colours. Cubism similarly postulated that reality is not perceived from a single vantage point. Humans perceive objects by looking at them from every possible perspective. We combine those perspectives with memories of how objects look at different times of day, in different lighting, both while standing still and while moving. Our minds then combine those points of view to come up with representative concepts of reality. Cubism was an attempt to achieve that same hyper-realistic sense of life through abstraction. In a way the style was four-dimensional by combining length, area, volume and the passage of time.



John Berger identifies the essence of Cubism with the mechanical diagram. "The metaphorical model of Cubism is the diagram: The diagram being a visible symbolic representation of invisible processes, forces,

structures. A diagram need not eschew certain aspects of appearance but these too will be treated as signs not as imitations or re-creations."

Daniel Robbins, writing for the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) says that in *Painting and its Laws (La Peinture et ses lois)* "Gleizes deduced the rules of painting from the picture plane, its proportions, the movement of the human eye and the laws of the universe. This theory, later referred to as *translation-rotation*, ranks with the writings of Mondrian and Malevich as one of the most thorough expositions of the principles of abstract art, which in his case entailed the rejection not only of representation but also of geometric forms." Hence flat planes were set in motion simultaneously to evoke space by shifting across one another, as if rotating and tilting on oblique axes. Diagrams entitled "*Simultaneous movements of rotation and shifting of the plane on its axis*" were published to illustrate the concept.

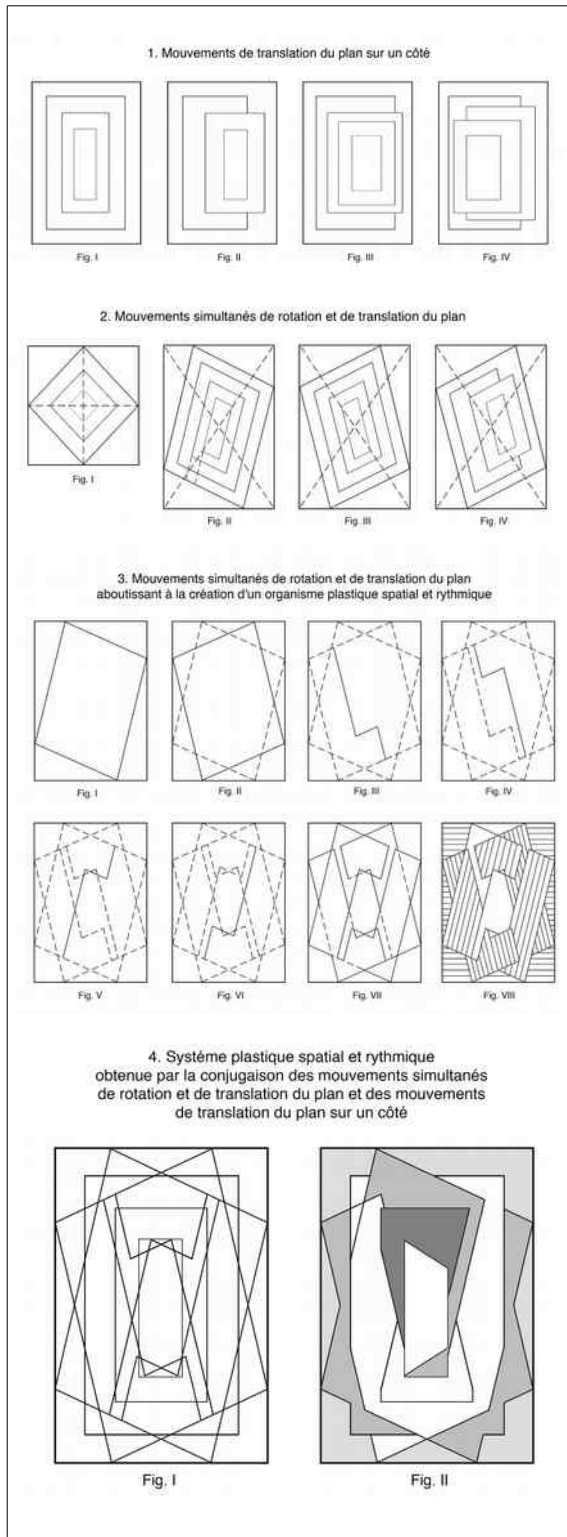


Diagram 1

Space and rhythm, according to Gleizes, are perceptible by the extent of movement (displacement) of planar surfaces. These elemental transformations modify the position and importance of the initial plane, whether they converge or diverge ('recede' or 'advance') from the eye, creating a series of new and separate spatial planes appreciable physiologically by the observer.

Diagram 2

Another movement is added to the first movement of translation of the plane to one side: Rotation of the plane. Fig. I shows the resulting formation that follows from simultaneous movements of rotation and translation of the initial plane produced on the axis. Fig. II and Fig. III represent the simultaneous movements of rotation and translation of the rectangle, inclined to the right and to the left. The axis point at which movement is realized is established by the observer. Fig. IV represents the simultaneous movements of rotation and translation of the rectangle plane, with the position of the eye of the observed displaced left of the axis. Displacement toward the right (though not represented) is straightforward enough to imagine

Diagram 3

With these figures Gleizes attempts to present, under the most simple conditions possible (simultaneous movements of rotation and translation of the plane), the creation of a spatial and rhythmic organism (Fig. VIII), with practically no initiative taken on the part of the artist who controls the evolutionary process. The planar surfaces of Fig. VIII are filled with hatching espousing the 'direction' of the planes. What emerges in the inert plane, according to Gleizes, through the movement followed by the eye of the observer, is "a visible imprint of successive stages of which the initial rhythmic cadence coordinated a succession of differing states". These successive stages permit the perception of space. The initial state, by consequence of the transformation, has become a spatial and rhythmic organism.

Diagram 4

Fig. I and Fig. II obtain mechanically, Gleizes writes, with minimal personal initiative, a "plastic spatial and rhythmic system", by the conjugation of simultaneous movements of rotation and translation of the plane and from the movements of translation of the plane to one side. The result is a spatial and rhythmic organism more *complex* than shown in Fig. VIII; demonstrating through mechanical, purely plastic means, the realization of a material universe independent of intentional intervention by the artist. This is sufficient to demonstrate, according to Gleizes, the *possibilities of the plane* to serve spatially and rhythmically by its own power



In 1911 Gleizes remarked that Metzinger is "haunted by the desire to inscribe a total image":

"He will put down the greatest number of possible planes: to purely objective truth he wishes to add a new truth, born from what his intelligence permits him to know. Thus—and he said himself: to space he will join time. [...] he wishes to develop the visual field by multiplying it, to inscribe them all in the space of the same canvas: it is then that the cube will play a role, for Metzinger will utilize this means to reestablish the equilibrium that these audacious inscriptions will have momentarily broken."

***Dancer in a Café*** by Metzinger was exhibited in Paris at the *Salon d'Automne* of 1912.

The painting represents a woman dancing in a *café-concert*. She is shown on the right half of the canvas wearing an elaborate gown and holding in her right hand a bouquet of flowers. In the café scene, four others, two women and two men, can be observed on the left of the painting, three of whom are seated in front of a table upon which various items are placed (including beverages), and one of whom is placed seemingly in the background (upper left).

Metzinger's "enchanting" *Dancer in a Café*, writes art historian Daniel Robbins, "exults in the exoticism of the moment, playing off the feathers or plumes of fashionable dressed Parisian women in their Worth gowns against an Amerindian pattern on the costume of the dancer, wittily comparing the height of European fashion with the anthropologically arcane."



As in other works by Metzinger of the same period, there are elements to be found of the real world, e.g., lighting fixtures, flowers, feathers and lace. The rest of the canvas consists of a series of crescendos and diminuendos of greater or lesser abstraction, of convex and concave forms, of hyperbolic and spherical surfaces, that stem from the teachings of Georges Seurat and Paul Cézanne. The divisionist brushwork, mosaic-like 'cubes', present in his earlier Neo-Impressionist phase have returned giving texture and rhythm to vast areas of the canvas, visible both in the figures and background.



**Metzinger's *Le Goûter* (Tea-Time), or *Femme à la Cuillère* (Woman with a teaspoon)** (1911), represents a barely draped (nude) woman holding a spoon, seated at a table with a cup of tea. In the 'background', the upper left quadrant, stands a vase on a commode, table or shelf. A square or cubic shape, a chair or painting behind the model, espouses the shape of the stretcher. The painting is practically square, like the side of a cube. The woman's head is highly stylized, divided into geometric facets, planes and curves (the forehead, nose, cheeks, hair). The source of light appears to be off to her right, with some reflected light on the left side of her face. Reflected light, consistently, can be seen on other parts of her body (breast, shoulder, arm). Her breast is composed of a triangle and a sphere. The faceting of the rest of her body, to some extent, coincides

with actual muscular and skeletal features (collar bone, ribcage, pectorals, deltoids, neck tissue). Both of her shoulders are coupled with elements of the background, superimposed, gradational and transparent to varying degrees. Unidentified elements are composed of alternating angular structures. The colours employed by Metzinger are subdued, mixed (either on a palette or directly on the surface), with an overall natural allure.

*Le goûter* translates to 'afternoon snack' but also alludes to 'taste' in an abstract sense. This painting, writes Christopher Green, "can seem the outcome of a meditation on intelligence and the senses, conception and sensation. The word in French for tea-time is "le goûter"; as a verb. "goûter" refers to the experience of tasting.



Peter Brooke in *On Cubism* writes of Metzinger's *Tea-Time*: "The whole is inscribed in a beautifully constructed armature of straight lines and curves whose relation to each other is not determined by the figuration (the woman enjoying her tea) but interweaves with it in a manner that is entirely intelligible. We can see clearly how the lines interact with each other."



In *A Life of Picasso*, John Richardson writes that *Tea-Time* persuaded Juan Gris of the importance of mathematics (numbers) in painting. As Brooke points out, **Gris** started painting persistently in 1911 and first exhibited at the 1912 *Salon des Indépendants* the painting ***Hommage à Pablo Picasso***. "He appears with two styles", writes Brooke, "In one of them a grid structure appears that is clearly reminiscent of the *Goûter* and of Metzinger's later work in 1912."

Gris's style draws upon Analytic Cubism—with its deconstruction and simultaneous viewpoint of objects—but is distinguished by a more systematic geometry and crystalline structure. Here he fractured his sitter's head, neck, and torso into various planes and simple, geometric shapes but organized them within a regulated, compositional structure of diagonals. The artist further ordered the composition of this portrait by limiting his palette to cool blue, brown, and grey tones that, in juxtaposition, appear luminous and produce a gentle undulating rhythm

across the surface of the painting. Gris depicted Picasso as a painter, palette in hand. The inscription, "*Hommage à Pablo Picasso*," at the bottom right of the painting demonstrates Gris's respect for Picasso as a leader of the artistic circles of Paris and as an innovator of Cubism. At the same time, the inscription helped Gris solidify his own place within the Paris art world when he exhibited the portrait at the *Salon des Indépendants* in the spring of 1912.

In ***Woman with a Horse (The Rider)*** (1911-12) **Metzinger** breaks down the picture plane into facets, presenting multiple aspects of the subject in succession and/or simultaneously. Based to some extent on non-Euclidean geometry, denying the illusion of Renaissance perspective, the artist breaks down the figures and background into facets and planes, presenting multiple aspects of the subject all at once. This can be seen in the deliberate positioning of light, shadow, form and colour, in the way in which Metzinger assimilates the union of the background, woman and horse. For example, the division of the model's features generates a subtle profile view, the vase is shown both from above and the side.



The concept of simultaneity, first pronounced by Metzinger in 1910, and considered a founding principle of Cubism, would soon find its way into the foundations of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics; the fact that a complete description of one and the same subject may require diverse points of view which defy a unique description. In 1938 *Woman with a Horse* was purchased by Danish physicist Niels Bohr.

The painting depicts a rather elegant woman wearing only a pearl necklace and a horse immersed in a landscape with trees and a window (in the 'background'), a vase, with fruits and vegetation (in the 'foreground') clearly taken from the natural world. The nude woman is in fact *not* perched side-saddle on the horse, but is seated on what appears to be a rectangular block or cube, perhaps a model's pedestal (visible to the left). The horse occupies the upper right-hand quadrant as if observed from above. Its head is turned toward the monumental nude while she strokes the horse's right ear with her left hand. She cups her hand underneath the horse's mouth, as if feeding the horse a piece of fruit.

The reconstruction of the *total image* was left, according to Metzinger, to 'creative intuition' of the observer. While one viewer may see a woman riding a horse, another may see her sitting beside the horse, and yet others may not see a horse at all. That there even exists such ambiguity with respect to what is transpiring on the canvas is remarkable. According to the founders of Cubist theory, objects possess no absolute or essential form. "There are as many images of an object as there are eyes which look at it; there are as many essential images of it as there are minds which comprehend it."

Poet and critic André Salmon, and an early champion of the cubists, thanked Metzinger for having, for the first time, 'illuminated a cubist figure with the virtues of a smile'.

David Cottington in *Cubism and its Histories* wrote: "In the absence of more evidence than such brief snatches of commentary in wide-ranging salon reviews can provide, we can only speculate as to whether Metzinger intended, or its initial audience read, the provocative juxtaposition in this painting of a naked woman with horse, and of natural with cosmetic adornment, as a follow-up to *Tea Time's* essay on sensation and the viewer's apprehension of it....After the clarity and measure of the demonstration piece that was *Tea-Time*, Metzinger reprised those qualities in the large *Woman on a Horse*, shown at the *Indépendants* of 1912. Through its fussy geometry we can discern a nude woman, her limbs and upper torso picked out in sensuous chiaroscuro, perched side-saddle on a studio prop-horse and stroking its mane (visible top right)..."





finish of the 1912 winner Charles Crupeland, captured in a series of frames during the final sprint at the end of a race.

The presence of the other bicyclist is revealed by the rear wheel to the left of the canvas. Metzinger's painting appears to show the handlebars in two positions, but the handlebars along with sections of the bicycle frame are actually superimposed as a transparency (over the left hand, left foot of the cyclist and over the drive-wheel), representing two consecutive frames, one subtracted from the other, i.e., the road is visible 'through' the racer where the bicycle had been a fraction of a second earlier, as if to show motion through absence. With this type of game playing with contradictory visual codes (positive and negative space), Metzinger discerns the past and the present infinitesimally separated in time; while the perception of the future is left to the intellectual discretion of the observer to contemplate.

Cubist and Futurist devices appear superimposed, creating an image that is readable yet essentially anti-naturalistic. Cubist elements include the reduction of the geometric schema to simplified shapes, and the juxtaposition of rotating planes to define spatial qualities, printed-paper collage, the incorporation of a granular surface and multiple perspective. Parallels with Futurism include the choice of a subject in motion (the bicyclist), the suggestion of velocity (motion blur on the wheel spokes), and the fusing of forms in a static picture plane. Metzinger's work integrates the idea of an aesthetic generated by the modern myth of the machine and speed.

**The Blue Bird** (1912-13) depicts three nude women in a scene that contains a wide variety of components, and uses a wealth of anecdotal detail comprising of a compendium of motifs found in many paintings by Metzinger: bathers, fan, mirror, ibis, necklace, a boat with water, foliage and an urban scene. "It is a *mélange* of interior and exterior elements integrated into one of Metzinger's most intriguing and successful compositions."



The central standing 'foreground' figure is shown affectionately holding in both hands a *blue bird*. The reclining figure in the lower centre, wearing a necklace, is next to a pedestal fruit bowl and another bird with the unmistakable colouration of the rare Scarlet ibis, a rich symbol for both exoticism and fashion. The ancient Egyptians worshiped the Ibis and attributed to it a 'virgin purity'. A mysterious pyramidal shape, with a resemblance to a sundial in front (perhaps meant as the element of time, or 'duration') is seen as if through a porthole to the right of the reclining figure's head. Two other birds can be seen in the composition, one resembling a green heron. A large steamship can be seen bellowing gaseous vapour from its funnel in the distant sea or ocean, and a smaller boat is visible below.



On the left half is a seated nude holding in her right hand a yellow fan and in her left a mirror into which she gazes. In the rest of the scene, various items and divers elements are depicted, including in the upper centre the *Sacre-Cœur* Basilica, located at the highest point of the city and just up the hill from where Metzinger lived and worked and also a short distance from *Le Bateau-Lavoir*, the artists' studios widely known as the birthplace of Cubism.

In 1913, Apollinaire wrote in *Les Peintres Cubistes*:

"...in the art of Metzinger, [there is] nothing which is not the

fruit of a rigorous logic. A painting by Metzinger always contains its own explanation ...

"The new structures he is composing are stripped of everything that was known before him... Each of his paintings contains a judgement of the universe, and his work is like the sky at night: when, cleared of the clouds, it trembles with lovely lights. There is nothing unrealized in Metzinger's works: poetry ennobles their slightest details."

**Metzinger's** evolution toward synthesis in 1914–15 has its origins in the configuration of flat squares, trape-zoidal and rectangular planes that overlap and interweave, a "new perspective" in accord with the "law of displacement". In the case of *The Smoker* (1913) Metzinger filled in these simple shapes with gradations of colour, wallpaper-like patterns and rhythmic curves. But the underlying armature upon which all is built is palpable. The face, clothes, hat are a complex series of profile and frontal views seen simultaneously. The chairs, table and objects place on it, are seen from entirely different angles from the sitter.

The vertical composition is painted in a geometrically **Cubist** style. The sitter, smoking a pipe and wearing a fashionable black felt derby hat, is seen in multiple perspective; from different points of view simultaneously, has been identified as Guillaume Apollinaire or Max Jacob.

The complete composition is highly geometricized, with various planes, angles, layers and facets, as are specific elements depicted on the trompe-l'œil wooden table in the foreground (as if seen from above). The roundness and shading of the man's attire (particularly in the sleeves) stands in sharp contrast to the angular momentum engendered by the overall cubic construction of the piece; while the chairs in the lower half of the work and flowered wallpaper of the background are treated in comparatively naturalistic detail, similar to the backgrounds of late 19th century portraits.

The colours used, accentuated by a contrasting range of blacks and whites, are bright and largely unmixed.



During March 1915, **Metzinger** was called to serve in the military, and was invalided out of service later that year. *Soldier at a Game of Chess* was painted either before or during his mobilization.

This distilled form of Cubism, soon to be known as Crystal Cubism, is consistent with Metzinger's shift, between 1914 and 1916, towards a strong emphasis on large, flat surface activity, with overlapping geometric planes. The manifest primacy of the underlying architectonics of the composition, entrenched in the abstract, controls practically all of the elements of the painting. Colour remains primordial but is moderate and sharply delineated by boundaries.

The soldier's head and hat are seen in both frontal side views simultaneously. His facial features are eminently stylized, simple, geometric, resting on rounded shoulders delineated by a rectangular structure superimposed with elemental monochromatic planes that compose the

background. Depth of field is practically nonexistent. Blues, reds, green and black dominate the composition. The table—treated in faux bois or trompe-l'œil—and the chessboard are practically seen from above, while the chess pieces are observed from the side; his right hand is fused within.

In a letter written in Paris to Albert Gleizes in Barcelona during the war, dated 4 July 1916, Metzinger writes:

"After two years of study I have succeeded in establishing the basis of this new perspective I have talked about so much. It is not the materialist perspective of Gris, nor the romantic perspective of Picasso. It is rather a metaphysical perspective—I take full responsibility for the word. You can't begin to imagine what I've found out since the beginning of the war, working outside painting but for painting. The geometry of the fourth space has no more secret for me. Previously I had only intuitions, now I have certainty. I have made a whole series of theorems on the laws of displacement [*déplacement*], of reversal [*retournement*] etc. I have read Schoute, Rieman (sic), Argand, Schlegel etc.

"The actual result? A new harmony. Don't take this word harmony in its ordinary [*banal*] everyday sense, take it in its original [*primitif*] sense. Everything is number. The mind [*esprit*] hates what cannot be measured: it must be reduced and made comprehensible.

"That is the secret. There is nothing more to it [*pas de reste à l'opération*]. Painting, sculpture, music, architecture, *lasting art* is never anything more than a mathematical expression of the relations that exist between the internal and the external, the self [*le moi*] and the world."



The study for the head of *The Nurse* (1916) shows Metzinger's method of rotating the forms through planes, resulting in an ever more geometricization of the painting.

Albert Gleizes, in *La Peinture et ses lois* (1922), later referred to this method of 'crystalline' composition as "simultaneous movements of translation and rotation of the plane"



*Woman with a Mirror or Lady at her Dressing Table*, is a distilled synthetic form of Cubism exemplifying Metzinger's continued interest, in 1916, towards less surface activity, with a strong emphasis on larger, flatter, overlapping abstract planes. The manifest primacy of the underlying geometric configuration, rooted in the abstract, controls nearly every element of the composition. The role of colour remains primordial, but is now restrained within sharp delineated boundaries in comparison with several earlier works.

The vertical composition is painted in a geometrically Cubist style, representing a woman holding a mirror in her left hand, seated behind a dressing table upon which rests a perfume atomizer. She has her back to an angled window with an awning above, and blue sky beyond. The setting appears to be an interior.

The woman appears simultaneously clothed and unclothed in an interplay of transparencies and spaces, evoking associations between past, present and future. Her pose is elegant and her left breast is seen both from the front and from the side simultaneously. The face is stylized with a tubiform neck and realistic fringe to her hair as if combed onto the canvas. From her box-like shoulders emanate long slender arms superimposed with geometric elements that compose the background. Depth of field is practically non-present. Blues, whites and reds dominate the composition. Greens and ochers serve to delineate elements in the foreground (arms, leg, table).

Metzinger's works from 1915 and 1916 show a more restrained use of rectilinear grids, heavy surface texture and bold decorative patterning. The manifest primacy of the geometric armature strikingly controls nearly every element of the composition, ensuring the synthetic unity of the whole.

### Cubist Sculpture

Cubist sculpture is rooted in Paul Cézanne's reduction of painted objects into component planes and geometric solids (cubes, spheres, cylinders, and cones). And just as in painting, it became a pervasive influence and contributed fundamentally to Constructivism and Futurism.

According to Douglas Cooper: "The first true Cubist sculpture was **Picasso's** impressive *Head of a Woman (Fernande)*, modelled in 1909–10, a counterpart in three dimensions to many similar analytical and faceted heads in his paintings at the time." with positive features depicted by negative space and vice versa. These positive/negative reversals were ambitiously exploited in 1912–13, by Alexander Archipenko for example in *Woman Walking*.



The Hungarian, Joseph Csaky after Archipenko, was the first sculptor in Paris to join the Cubists, with whom he exhibited from 1911 onwards. They were followed by Raymond Duchamp-Villon and then in 1914 by Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Laurens and Ossip Zadkine.



**Picasso's *Glass of Absinthe*** is a series of six sculptures, cast from an original modelled in wax, created in the first half of 1914. The sculpture depicts a drinking glass with the front cut away to reveal the liquid inside, and perched on the rim is an absinthe spoon with a sugar cube on top. Each of the

casts is painted differently on an identical bronze form. In this sculpture he broke new ground by incorporating a real object, the spoon, into his sculpture.

Picasso spoke of his desire to explore different modes of representation: "I was interested in the relation

between the real spoon and the modelled glass. In the way they clashed with each other."

In this assemblage Picasso illustrates the correct method for consuming absinthe—a potent but toxic green-coloured liquor (known as the "*Green Fairy*"). Absinthe became popular in Parisian cafés in the decades before and after 1900. Its bitter taste led to the specific serving method shown here: slowly pouring water over a sugar cube resting on a slotted spoon. The sugared water combines with absinthe at the bottom of the glass.

The challenge for Picasso in this sculpture is how to represent the transparency of the glass in contrast to the hardness of the spoon. He does this by cutting away the side and revealing the 'journey' through the glass to the absinthe in the form of a dark descending curved line, and the red and green bubbles, possibly representing the louching or cloudiness which results from the mixture of sugar and cold water.

The Surrealists celebrated this work—a hybrid of a painted bronze sculpture and an everyday item—for sabotaging the line between art and reality.

**Jacques Lipchitz** (1891–1973) was born in Lithuania, then within the Russian Empire. He studied engineering but in 1909 moved to Paris to study sculpture at the *Académie Julian*. It was there, in the artistic communities of Montmartre and Montparnasse, that he joined a group of artists that included Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso.

He retained highly figurative and legible components in his work leading up to 1915–16, after which naturalistic and descriptive elements were muted, dominated by a synthetic style of Crystal Cubism.

Lipchitz's *Seated Man with a Guitar* (1918) consists of a number of flat, concave and convex surfaces, which are arranged in different positions relative to each other. Although the head, in which only one eye is indicated, the shoulders, the guitar, hands and legs are easily distinguishable, the precise pose of the man is difficult to determine. The observer has to complete the image him/herself, as it were. Using minimal means and abstract sculptural elements, Lipchitz manages to create a lively image of the figure and the characteristic pose. With its highly simplified geometric forms, *Seated Man with a Guitar* can be regarded as a three-dimensional counterpart to the cubist paintings by Picasso, Braque and Gris. The musical theme is also typical of this art movement.



**Henri Laurens** (1885–1954) was born in Paris and worked first as a stonemason before turning to sculpture. He was later drawn to the new gathering of artistic creativity in Montparnasse. From 1915, he began to work in the cubist style after meeting Picasso, Braque, Gris and Fernand Léger.



*The Little Boxer* (1920) is in a condensed, columnar form.

The concept of Cubist sculpture may seem "paradoxical" or contradictory, as we think chiefly of cubism as being a technique for representing the three dimensional, in the round, reality of an object (or group of objects) on a two dimensional surface; portraying all sides instantaneously. Thereby recording our movement, or memory of our movement around the object: incorporating time sequence into the static work. Cubist sculptures tend to have a frontal viewpoint, and fragment the forms, not in order to represent the various views, but to 'abstract' the fragments and reconstruct them into an intriguing formalised new whole.

**Alexander Archipenko** (1887–1964) was born in Kyiv in Ukraine. In addition to sculpture he worked as a graphic artist. In 1909 he moved to Paris, and was a resident in the artist's colony *La Ruche*, among other émigré Ukrainian artists: Barranoff-Rossine, Sonia Delaunay-Terk and Nathan Altman. He exhibited after 1910 at the *Salon des Indépendants*, along with Braque, Derain and others. In 1923 he emigrated to the United States, becoming a US citizen in 1929. He was one of the first to apply the principles of Cubism to architecture, and the analysis of the human figure into geometrical forms.



Archipenko departed from the neo-classical sculpture of his time, using faceted planes and negative space, as in *Statuette* of 1916, to create a new way of looking at the human figure: showing a number of views of the subject simultaneously. He is known for introducing sculptural voids, as in his 1912 *Woman Walking*, and for his inventive mixing of genres throughout his career; devising 'sculpto-paintings', and later experimenting with materials such as clear acrylic and terra cotta. Inspired by the works of Picasso and Braque, he is also credited for introducing the collage to wider audiences with his *Medrano* series



**Joseph Csaky** (1888–1971) was a Hungarian avant-garde artist, sculptor, and graphic artist, best known for his early participation in the Cubist movement as a sculptor. Csaky was one of the first sculptors in Paris to apply the principles of pictorial Cubism to his art. As a pioneer of modern sculpture he is among the most important sculptors of the early 20th century. He was an active member of the *Section d'Or* group between 1911 and 1914, and closely associated with Crystal Cubism, Purism, De Stijl, abstract art and Art Deco throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Attracted by its reputation for lights and great artists, Csaky made the decision to move to Paris. He traveled mostly by foot, walking fifty or sixty kilometres per day during the summer of 1908, and arrived with only forty francs in his pocket. Shortly after he found a studio at the artists' collective *La Ruche* in Montparnasse.

Csaky's work of this time, as in his 1912 *Woman with a Fan*, is already distinguished by a Cubist understanding of volumetric and spatial relationships, with the integration of armature and open space, and the rhythmic use of geometry. Planes are faceted into abstract architectonic forms. His sculptural interpretation of Cubist painting is marked by elements employed in non-Western sculpture (Cycladic art, Oceanic art and the art of ancient Egypt).



**La Ruche** ("the beehive") was an artist's residence located in the *Passage Dantzig*, in the 15<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* of Paris. An old three-storey circular structure, it got its name because it looked more like a large beehive than a dwelling for humans. Originally a temporary building designed by Gustave Eiffel for use as a wine rotunda at the Great Exhibition of 1900, it was dismantled and re-erected as low-cost studios for artists by sculptor Alfred Boucher (1850–1934) to help young artists by providing them with shared models and an exhibition space open to all residents. As well as to artists, *La Ruche* became a home to an array of drunks, misfits, drifters and people that just needed a place to stay.

At *La Ruche* the rent was cheap; and no one was evicted for non-payment. When hungry, many would wander over to artist Marie Vassilieff's soup kitchen for a meal and conversation with fellow starving artists. The Russian painter Pinchus Kremegne arrived at the Gare de l'Est with three rubles in his pocket. The only words in French he knew was the phrase "*Passage Dantzig*"; but that was all he needed to get him there.

At one time or another in the early 20th century, such luminaries as Guillaume Apollinaire, Alexander Archipenko, Josef Csaky, Gustave Miklos, Ossip Zadkine, Moise Kisling, Marc Chagall, Max Pechstein, Nina Hammnet, Fernand Léger, Jacques Lipchitz, Pinchus Kremegne, Max Jacob, Blaise Cendrars, Chaïm Soutine, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Amadeo Modigliani, Jean Arp, Constantin Brâncusi, Diego Rivera, and others, called the place home or frequented it.

*La Ruche* went into decline during World War II; and by the time of the 1968 real estate boom, it was threatened with demolition by developers. However, with the support of well known artists, new management with a preservation mission took it over in 1971, and turned it into a collection of working studios.

Its interior is not open to the general public, although the exterior of *La Ruche* alone is worth a visit.



La Ruche c. 1918



and today

## Purism

Purism in the arts refers to a movement that took place between 1918 and 1925 that influenced French painting and architecture. The main proponents were Amédée Ozenfant (1886–1866) and Charles Edward Jeanneret (known as Le Corbusier) (1887–1965) They formulated an aesthetic doctrine born from a criticism of Cubism and called it Purism since objects are represented as elementary forms devoid of detail. The main concepts were presented in their short essay *Après le Cubisme* (After Cubism) published in 1918.



Purism was an attempt to restore regularity in a war-torn France post World War I. Unlike what they saw as 'decorative' fragmentation of objects in Cubism, Purism proposed a style of painting where elements were represented as robust simplified forms with minimal detail, while embracing technology and the machine.

Purism culminated in Le Corbusier's *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau* (Pavilion of the New Spirit), constructed for the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in 1925. This included the work of Cubists Juan Gris and Jaques Lipchitz. Following this exhibition the relationship between Le Corbusier and Ozenfant declined.

In **Le Corbusier's *Vertical Still Life*** (1922) a complex collection of pure shapes and objects are depicted side on as in an engineer's diagram. It is composed entirely of straight lines—vertical and horizontal, with a few diagonals—and curves. The colour is restricted to a range of neutral and tinted greys, with the addition of a few notes of primary colours.

The Purist Manifesto lays out the rules Ozenfant and Le Corbusier created to govern the Purist movement.

- Purism does not intend to be a scientific art, which it is in no sense.
- Cubism has become a decorative art of romantic ornamentism.
- There is a hierarchy in the arts: decorative art is at the base, the human figure at the summit.
- Painting is as good as the intrinsic qualities of its plastic elements, not their representative or narrative possibilities.
- Purism wants to conceive clearly, execute loyally, exactly without deceits; it abandons troubled conceptions, summary or bristling executions. A serious art must banish all techniques not faithful to the real value of the conception.
- Art consists in the conception before anything else.
- Technique is only a tool, humbly at the service of the conception.
- Purism fears the bizarre and the *original*. It seeks the pure element in order to reconstruct organized paintings that seem to be facts from nature herself.
- The method must be sure enough not to hinder the conception.
- Purism does not believe that returning to nature signifies the copying of nature.
- It admits all deformation is justified by the search for the invariant.
- All liberties are accepted in art except those that are unclear.



**Le Corbusier**  
***Vertical Guitar*** (1920)



**Le Corbusier**  
***Still-Life*** (1920)



**Le Corbusier**  
***Still-Life*** (1921)

In the early Purist manifestoes, colour was deemed secondary to form, and this could be seen in the careful placing of colour to reinforce discrete architectural elements by Le Corbusier in his work of the mid-1920s

Ozenfant and Le Corbusier wrote *La Peinture moderne* in 1925 and in 1928 Ozenfant published *Art*, which was subsequently published in English as *The Foundations of Modern Art* in 1931. In this he fully expounds his theory of Purism, and it is remarkable for its idiosyncratic and aphoristic style.





**Ozenfant**  
**Still Life with Glass of Red Wine** (1920)



**Ozenfant**  
**Still Life, Dishes** (1920)



**Ozenfant**  
**Still Life** (1920-21)

Ozenfant later founded his own atelier, *l'Académie Ozenfant*, in the residence and studio that Le Corbusier had designed for him. He moved to London in 1936, where he set up the Ozenfant Academy of Fine Arts in May of that year, before moving to New York City some two years later. His students in London included Leonora Carrington, Sari Dienes and Stella Snead.

## Orphism

*"...the art of painting new totalities with elements that the artist does not take from visual reality, but creates entirely by himself. [...] An Orphic painter's works should convey an 'untroubled aesthetic pleasure', a meaningful structure and sublime significance." – Apollinaire Les Peintres Cubistes, Méditations Esthétiques 1913*

Orphism or Orphic Cubism, a term coined by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1912, was an offshoot of Cubism that focused on pure abstraction and bright colours, influenced by Fauvism; also by the theoretical writings of Paul Signac, Charles Henry, the dye chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul and the colour theorist Ogden Rood. This movement, perceived as key in the transition from Cubism to abstract art, was pioneered by František Kupka (1871–1957), Robert Delaunay (1885–1941) and Sonia Delaunay–Terk (1885–1979), who relaunched the use of colour during the monochromatic phase of Cubism. The meaning of the term Orphism alludes to the myth of Orpheus but was elusive when it first appeared and remains to some extent vague.

**The Cardiff Team** (1913) by **Robert Delaunay** combines a number of different viewpoints (simultaneity), lettering in the form of posters and a variety of forms of action and movement. Along with the figures of rugby players, it includes recognisable objects signifying the technological advances of the modern world: an early box-winged aeroplane, a ferris wheel and the striking silhouette of the Eiffel Tower.



In his 1913 *Les Peintres Cubistes, Méditations Esthétiques* Apollinaire described Orphism as "the art of painting new totalities with elements that the artist does not take from visual reality, but creates entirely by himself. [...] An Orphic painter's works should convey an 'untroubled aesthetic pleasure', a meaningful structure and sublime significance."

*"All the spaces are broken down and divided in every direction to an infinitesimal dimension." – Robert Delaunay*



From 1909 to 1911, Robert Delaunay undertook a series of eight paintings devoted to the theme of the city. Exhibited at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1911, **La ville no. 2** (1910) is a view of Paris from above. We recognise the pointillist silhouette of the Eiffel Tower in the background of the urban landscape, filtered by the transparent screen of a window framed by curtains. The very extreme fragmentation of planes and monochrome tones reflects the influence of Braque and Picasso's Cubism. The dots which fragment the surface convey a sense that we are looking at the scene through frosted glass.

In **Eiffel Tower** (1911) columns of buildings hang like curtains framing the tower. Delaunay's choice of subject allowed him to convey a sense of wide space atmosphere and light while depicting elements of modern progress.



Taking inspiration from a postcard showing the Eiffel Tower overlooking rooftops, the subject appealed to him as a uniquely French symbol of invention and aspiration. It appears in many of his works, early on as if near to, and later as a curving silhouette bathed in atmospheric light. When the tower was built, twenty five years earlier, it caused controversy. Critics called it a 'ridiculous tower dominating Paris like a gigantic black smokestack'.

Delaunay was influenced to paint in bright spots of colour by seeing coloured light streaming through the stained-glass windows onto the floor of the Gothic church of Saint-Séverin. This became the subject of his first series of paintings, in which he charted the modulations of light and the resulting perceptual distortion of the architecture.

"This happened in 1912. Cubism was in full force. I made paintings that seemed like prisms compared to the Cubism my fellow artists were producing. I was the heretic of Cubism. I had great arguments with my comrades who banned colour from their palette, depriving it of all elemental mobility. I was accused of returning to Impressionism, of making decorative paintings, etc.... I felt I had almost reached my goal."



**Simultaneous Windows on the City** (1912) conveys a complex, enigmatic vision. Where is the city? Where are the windows? At first (and possibly second and third) glance what we see is a fractured pattern of mostly rectangular planes painted in the colours of the spectrum over both a canvas and its wooden frame. If we consider the post-Renaissance Western conception of a painting as being like a window, then we might interpret the painted frame as a window frame and the canvas inside as representing the city, but this does little to help us see a city depicted in the painting. The fractured planes of different colours mimic the way light reflects off glass and suggests when we look out of a window how we can often simultaneously see the view outside and reflections of objects inside. The curved orange and yellow planes on the right may be a curtain but also, it has been suggested, the reflection of a head with a dark spot for an eye and an ear jutting out.

As we look at the painting, the more possible are the readings that are suggested. Delaunay's painting is not only about vision, it is also about painting itself and the way its coloured shapes and relationships structure vision. We are led to realize this because the lack of clear representational imagery constantly reminds that we are looking at colours painted on the flat surface of the canvas.

**Sonia Delaunay's Prismes électriques** (1914) painting takes on a cosmic dimension, in close correspondence with the vitalist energy and the poetry of the "mental photographs" of Blaise Cendrars, whose name appears inserted, like a symbolic standard, in the text.

In 1911, Sonia Delaunay made a patchwork quilt for her child's cot. This quilt was created spontaneously and uses geometry and colour. She accounted its influence on her painting.

"About 1911 I had the idea of making for my son, who had just been born, a blanket composed of bits of fabric like those I had seen in the houses of Ukrainian peasants. When it was finished, the arrangement of the pieces of material seemed to me to evoke cubist conceptions and we then tried to apply the same process to other objects and paintings."



The modern beauty of electric light bulbs and rail travel inspired the artist for this composition vibrating with colour.

**The Cathedral** (1912-13) is one of a series of abstract works that **Kupka** termed Vertical and Diagonal Planes. Vertical lines, running the entire length of the canvas are intersected by diagonal lines to form rectilinear shapes of various sizes. The diagonal lines run from the top left to the bottom right and from the top right to the bottom left of the painting. These rectilinear shapes are composed of blocks of black, white, and a range of blue, red, purple, grey, and brown colour. The large black space between the two clusters of the shapes, and the arching of the top of the right cluster, brings to the viewer's mind two stained glass windows illuminated by light in a dark cathedral.



Kupka was inspired by the shape and colour present within the architecture of French cathedrals, especially in the stained glass and his transition into abstraction is marked by studies of light within cathedrals. *The Cathedral* developed from his studies of the light that shone through the red and blue stained glass of Chartres Cathedral. Kupka's fascination with cathedrals also serves as the inspiration for his other works of vertical and diagonal lines that he created at this same time. *Vertical and Diagonal Planes* (c. 1913–14), for example, employs the same rectilinear shapes and a similar colour scheme as *The Cathedral*. In both of these works, the vertical lines created a sense of stability, while the diagonal lines created tension.

Born in a small city in eastern Bohemia, Kupka studied in Prague and Vienna and then settled permanently in Paris in 1896. By 1912 his painting had evolved to a radically abstract style, establishing him as one of the earliest pioneers of abstraction in European painting. His visionary paintings and watercolours are a product of his mystical belief that rhythmic forms in pure colours can reflect the forces of the cosmos.

In an analogy with musical composition **Kupka** seems to have arrived at ***Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colours*** and similar compositions gradually, beginning in 1907–8 with a drawing of a girl holding a ball in her hand, as if she were about to play or dance with it. He then developed progressively more diagrammatic images of her circular motion, ultimately arriving at a series of fully abstract drawings. In a limited palette of red, blue, black, and white, ribbons of colour morph across the canvas. The radically fluid relationship they establish between foreground and background, line and plane, signals Kupka's prescient renunciation of the aesthetic conventions of perspective. When it was shown at the 1912 *Salon d'Automne*, a watershed event in the history of modernist abstraction, it was one of the very first abstract paintings to be publicly exhibited in Paris.



He made twenty-seven studies for the painting, in which the irregularly shaped and patterned panes recall the complexity and translucency of stained-glass windows. The final composition is simplified into broad planes of colour that constitute a single monumental arabesque.

Whereas Kupka's original motifs had been inspired by nature, his final gouache studies and the painting itself were totally abstract and distilled to two colours, red and blue. These were intended to represent the interlacing voices of a fugue, in which, as he himself wrote, "the sounds evolve like veritable physical entities, intertwine, come and go."

### Tubism

**Fernand Léger** (1881–1955) was a French painter, sculptor and filmmaker. After seeing the Cézanne retrospective in 1907, his work became more focused on geometry and on the representation of a three-dimensional object on a two dimensional support. In his early works he created a personal form of cubism which he gradually modified into a more figurative, populist style. His boldly simplified treatment of modern subject matter has caused him to be regarded as a forerunner of pop art.

Meant as a term of derision Tubism is a term coined by the art critic Louis Vauxcelles in 1911 to describe Léger's idiosyncratic version of Cubism which emphasized cylindrical shapes.



Shown at the 1910 *Salon d'Automne*, ***Nudes in the Forest*** depicts a geometric, mechanical landscape in which three nude figures can be identified. The figures are composed of cylindrical forms: to the left one figure raises its arms, in the centre the figure is seated and to the right the third figure twists away from the viewer. This composition, combined with the undulating volumes that make up the abstract background creates a sense of mechanical, robotic movement across the landscape. The colour palette, which is secondary to the volumes of the composition, is comprised of shades of blue, green, grey and white. When talking about his process of creating *Nudes in the Forest*, Léger stated: "I

wanted to carry the volumes to the extreme" and he summarised the composition as "a fight of volumes".

Art historian and critic Michel Seuphor proclaimed that 1912 was "perhaps the most beautiful date in the whole history of painting in France." That year marked the culmination of Analytic Cubism in the work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque as well as the maturation of Fernand Léger's idiosyncratic Cubist style, as manifested in his lively painting *The Smokers*. All three artists were inspired by Paul Cézanne in their quest for a means by which to accurately describe three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional canvas.

By breaking the represented figures or items into series of splintered planes and rendering them against—or within—a similarly faceted background, they created an entirely integrated space in which field and object interpenetrate one another.

Of the three painters, Léger developed a vocabulary of more precisely delineated forms—his fragmented units are larger, arcs predominate, and colour prevails.

For Léger, smoke and smokers were symbols of modern industrial life and the working class, with whom he closely identified.

In both *The Smokers* (1911-12) and *Nude Model in the Studio* [see gallery below] the curving, overlapping planes describe the corporeal forms of each painting's subject while articulating an all-over, rhythmically patterned surface. The resulting oscillation between volumetric body and dynamic space owes as much to Futurist aesthetics as to Analytic Cubism.

Toward the end of 1912, Léger made among the most defiantly abstract works yet seen. Over the next two years he worked intensely in this experimental idiom, producing the fifty or so canvases, and twice as many



works on paper, that constitute his *Contrasts of Forms* (1913) series. An inventory of repeated forms—geometric cones, cubes, cylinders—jostle and pile across the surfaces of these works. Here, Léger rejects illusion to focus on the mechanics of representation, drawing attention to them with roughly blocked forms, exposed supports, unmodulated colour straight from the tube applied in painterly patches, and highlights detached from any light source. Chiaroscuro, the traditional technique of light and shadow used to create the illusion of three-dimensionality within the two-dimensional reality of the picture plane, becomes a language of absolute contrasts: strident black and white or coloured striations clash with one another across the works.

During his military service Léger was limited in his access to art materials. He produced many sketches of artillery pieces, airplanes, and fellow soldiers while in the trenches, and painted *Soldier with a Pipe* (1916) while on leave.

The drab greys reflect the conditions under which the soldiers lived, but may also be due to restrictions on the colours that he was able to obtain in wartime. The only touch of colour is a slight reddening at the side of the face. The smoke rising from the pipe is represented by a series of globes, surrounding and almost engulfing the head. Although the head is reduced to a set of cuboid shapes, Léger manages to convey a sense of mood and resigned expression on the soldier's face.

During a period of convalescence he painted *The Card Players* (1917), a canvas whose robot-like, monstrous figures reflect his experience of the war. As he explained:



"...I was stunned by the sight of the breach of a 75 millimetre in the sunlight. It was the magic of light on the white metal. That's all it took for me to forget the abstract art of 1912–1913. The crudeness, variety, humour, and downright perfection of certain men around me, their precise sense of utilitarian reality and its application in the midst of the life-and-death drama we were in ... made me want to paint in slang with all its colour and mobility."

A reference to Cézanne in this painting has been remarked on: the two main protagonists are seated either side of a table with a standing figure in the background, as appears in the earlier works in the *Card Players* series. The curved helmet of the right hand figure, and 'top hat' of the left are similar to the hats of the two figures in the later paintings in the series.

This work marked the beginning of his "mechanical period", during which the figures and objects he painted were characterized by sleekly rendered





tubular and machine-like forms. Starting in 1918, he also produced the first paintings in the *Disk* series, in which disks suggestive of traffic lights figure prominently.

*“The Beautiful is everywhere, perhaps [more so] in the arrangement of your saucepans on the white walls of your kitchen than in your eighteenth-century living room or in the official museums.” – Fernand Léger*



Léger was also a principle associate of Purism, as reflected in his *Still Life with a Beer Mug* of 1921

His boldly simplified treatment of modern subject matter has caused him to be regarded as a forerunner of Pop Art. The painting depicts a traditional Bavarian-style beer mug in the forefront of the composition sitting on a simple, square wooden table which is surrounded by everyday lunch items, such as butter pots, a knife and a fruit plate. The table and beer mug are painted in vibrant colours including yellow, orange, red and blue, while the surrounding elements are executed in a contrasting palette consisting of black, grey and white, with some patches of colour. The colourful table is juxtaposed against a flat geometric kitchen backdrop, represented by a black and white diamond-patterned floor and a gridded kitchen wall and window frame. The flat geometry of the kitchen is interrupted on the right by a dark blue curtain, which, like the beer mug and its surrounding objects, is rendered in a slightly more naturalistic style due to the employment of light and shade.

Deeply affected by his experiences on the front line during the First World War, Léger abandoned the form of cubism he had been pursuing up until 1914 and turned instead to what he called a new ‘reality of objects’.

Art historian Robert Herbert notes that Léger’s move away from the severe abstraction of his pre-war compositions and his return to classical subjects (the still life and the nude) was in part connected to a broader cultural movement in France during the 1920s that has been called the ‘Return to Order’. “By taking up a theme sanctioned by tradition, [Léger] hoped to integrate art history, as well as past time, into the present.”

His Later work, from the nineteen twenties, is seen by some critics as a pre-cursor to the Pop Art of Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselmann etc.

## GALLERY

### Gleizes



*The Bridges of Paris* 1912



*Portrait of an Army Doctor* 1914-15



*Cubist Landscape* 1920

### Metzinger



*Two Nudes* 1910



*Dancer in a Cafe* 1912



*Woman with a Fan* 1913



*Fruit and Jug on a Table* 1916



**Marcoussis**



**The Bar at the Port**  
1913



**Violin Bottle and Cards**  
1919



**Person Writing**  
c.1931



**Green Pear and Knife**  
before 1941

**Gris**



**Still-life Before an Open Window** 1915



**The Checkerboard**  
1915



**Harlequin With Guitar**  
1917



**Seated Woman**  
1917

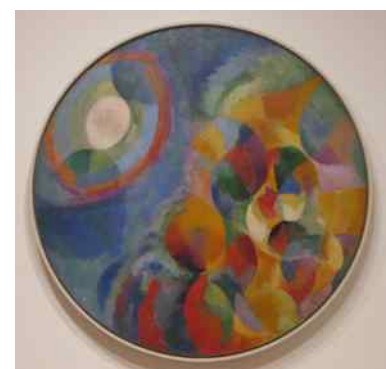
**Delaunay**



**Self Portrait**  
1909



**Windows on the City No. 3**  
1911-12



**Simultaneous Contrasts  
- Sun and Moon** 1912-13



**Windows Open Simultaneously 1<sup>st</sup> Part, 3<sup>rd</sup> Motif**  
1912



**La Ville de Paris - The Three Graces**  
1912



**Leger**



**Nude Model in the Studio** 1912-13



**The railway Crossing** 1919



**Mother and Child** 1922

Cubism has directly influenced many other movements in the twentieth century:

**Futurism**



**Boccioni**  
**Dynamism of a Cyclist** 1913

**Vorticism**



**Wyndham Lewis**  
**Workshop** c.1914

**Suprematism**



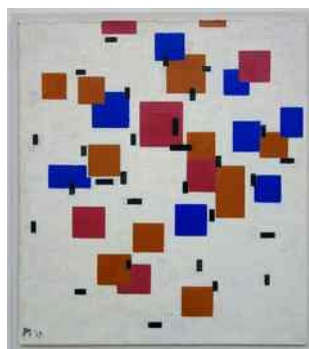
**Malevich**  
**Supremus 55** 1916

**Constructivism**



**Naum Gabo**  
**Head no 2** 1916

**De Stijl**



**Mondrian**  
**Composition - colour A** 1917

**Neo-Plasticism**



**van Doesburg**  
**Composition VII (The Three Graces)** 1917

**Dada**



**Hans Arp**  
**Shirt Front and Fork** 1922

**Photomontage**



**Hausmann**  
**ABCD Self Portrait** 1923-24

**Art Deco**



**Wallis, Gilbert and Partners**  
**The Hoover Building Canteen, Perivale, London** 1938