

# **CUBISM**

*By Emily Hammond*

Cubism was originally a movement in modern art, especially in painting. Cubism started in France and played an extremely important role in modern art. Before the twentieth century, art was recognised as an imitation of nature. Paintings and portraits were made to look as realistic and three-dimensional as possible, as if seen through a window. Artists were painting in a flamboyant style, but French postimpressionist Paul Cézanne, flattened still life images. In 1906 Cézanne held an exhibition of his paintings in Paris which Picasso visited, After seeing Cézannes work he began experimenting with Cézannes ideas. The actual movement of cubism was started by Picasso and Braque, aimed at establishing this new plastic order which was completely different to the one that existed up to that time, it brought a great revolution in visual representation. It had a wide spread, tremendous influence on art following it but it did not come out from no-where. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Europe was in many senses at a great turning point and art movements were appearing one after another all over the continent, for example Fauvism in France (a forerunner of cubism) expressionism in Germany, and Futurism in Italy. It's not hard to say that this spirit of innovation had been evolving from half way through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many people say Cubism began in 1907, this is the year which the poet Apollinaire introduced Picasso to Braque. This is when they were both greatly influenced by Cézanne and followed his lead, but searched for different plastic forms by their own respective means. After the encounter between the two artists, cubism advanced rapidly.

Picasso's famous painting, *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (p. ) was completed a little time before he met Braque, this helped in the development of cubism, along with Cézanne's influence a new search appeared due to suggestions from African Negro sculpture (p. ) Picasso's interest in African Negro sculpture led to using it as a clue to part from traditional anatomical human physical structure, to a derived form which combined different elements seen from many different angles. One of the main characteristics of cubism consisted of shifting the viewpoint of the object being drawn into different

positions, at the same time dividing it into many fragments seen from various angles, and rearranging these fragments later.

By 1908, Picasso and Braque were constructing a spatial, by the use of restrained colours and by reducing the natural forms of the images being drawn. In the same year, Braque held a one man show at the Kahnweiler Gallery, and it is said that the word "cube" used in a review by Louis Vauxcelles at the time was the origins of the term used now: - "cubism".

Up to 1910, cubism advanced even further, as Picasso and Braque continued to develop dismantling objects through Cubistic ways, still drawing the reality of the object but without using the traditional laws of perspective or shading. What you may call "Analytic cubism", reached its peak at about 1911, this was where objects did not even have clear outlines appeared and the object became remarkably different from its natural form. Cubism began to paint, as Apollinaire said, "not from visual reality but from reality of the concept." It was from this that cubism was then said to be conceptual and intellectual, and a fantastic contrast to Fauvism.

Cubism shocked art circles, and its influence spread rapidly after that. The first great group exhibition of Cubism was held in 1911 in the 41<sup>st</sup> Room, with works of Gleizes, Meltzing, Leger, Andre Lhote, La Fresnaye, La Fauconnier, Delaunay and others. Again in this same year Gleizes, Meltzing, Leger, Lhote, Jaques Villon, Marcel Duchamp, La Fresnaye, and La Fauconnier exhibited their works at the salon d'Automne, embroiling positive and negative opinions in feverent debate.

As Braque and Picasso did not participate greatly in the Salons of Paris, the term cubism came into general use through these great exhibitions. There are considerable differences in nuance between Braque and Picasso on one hand and the other artists on the other, but each artist saw cubism through their individual methods, by departing from traditional visual senses, and by overlapping planes, piling and dividing them into massive multi-surface fragments.

Picasso and Braque again entered a new phase in 1912. The extremely suppressed colours began to regain their richness, and the shape of the objects became easier to recognise again. Braque painted grain of wood in the Trope-l'oeil style, and both Picasso and Braque began each on his turn to experiment with the papier colle by pasting already printed paper onto canvas.

This invention of papier colle seemed to have been in order to introduce a new sense of material into Cubistic painting, but the collage that developed from papier colle, caused the introduction of several concrete items onto the surface of the canvas and opened to a completely new realm in art. It is also widely known that collage is broadly linked with contemporary art.

Synthetic cubism was the third and final move that Picasso and Braque made in developing cubism

Juan Gris who is regarded as the proto-type Cubist following to Picasso and Braques adopted collage very early and developed a unique dense Cubist style. Gris preserved the original form of the object more strictly combined varied, complex planes and introduced fine portions of sections d'or into his work.

Fernand Leger studied Cézanne from a different angle than Picasso and Braque and tried to express modern rhythms and mechanisms by a fundamental use of cylindrical forms, and by contrasts of colour and of straight and curved lines: this was referred to as "Cubism Mechanics". Robert Delaunay touched upon Cubism in his series of refracted works entitled "Eiffel Tower". He sought for brilliant intercourse of light and colours, and for musical rhythms, and set off in the non-figurative direction named "Orphism" by Apollinaire in 1913.

Originally Cubism arose from the problems in the two dimensional world of painting, and it also influenced sculpture. Cubism did not present as innovative a sense as it did in painting, yet nevertheless it had great significance as being the predecessor of anti -

naturalistic sculpture. Cubism halted when history changed in the year of 1914, when World war 1 started.

Picasso and Gris were not affected, but Braque and many other artists responded to the call and were rushed to the front. The cubist movements inevitably had to undergo a great change. After that, however, Picasso, while in the one hand showing a new classical metamorphosis, created such typical works of synthetic cubism as "the three Musicians"(1921).

Braque, Leger and Gris in their turn also developed individually mature synthetic cubism. Ozenfant and Jeanneret published "After Cubism"(1918) and advocated a theoretical and functional Purism as a newly developed form of Cubism to make the structure follow a pure order. Consequently if we consider cubism to be an extensive general term, we may regard it as a wide ranging art movement that lasted from 1907 until the middle of the 1920's/

There we can see various individual developments, each fairly different from the others, but in general, we can say that it was a departure from traditional, visual realism, and an autonomous establishment of painting based on new principals of form.

Braque's famous saying, "senses deform, and the spirit forms" expresses this directly. At the same time, Cubism is a new form of realism from the standpoint of its attempt from the reality of the object within the mind, and its distinction from the abstract art also lies in this point.

**Pablo Picasso Demoiselles D'Avignon 1906:**

This was to be considered as the first cubist painting. Painted by Picasso it was influence Cézannes "Bathers". It shocked those who first saw it. The figures are distorted, Faceted and fractured, three have faces like crude African masks, and two are like primitive African sculptures. The figures are flattened and there is no depth in the canvas.

**Paul Cézanne – Bathers 1897:**

This painting challenged and inspired Picasso to paint Demoiselles D'Avignon.

**Funerary Figure**

Bakota, Gabun, F.E.A 18" high, an example of African Negro sculptures



### **Braque – Le Jour**



After World War I, in which he was badly wounded, Braque veered away from the angularity of early cubism and developed a more graceful, curvilinear style, predominantly painting still life. His works showed restraint and subtlety both in design and colour.

### **Two Birds**





**Examples of picassos work after Cubism**

(left to right) Figure in red chair, The Yellow Belt, Seated woman, Seated bather

## **Bibliograpghy**

Microsoft encarta

The Guinness encyclopedia

[www.cubistca.com](http://www.cubistca.com)

notes provided

[www.global-gallery.com](http://www.global-gallery.com)