

## Developments of Cubism with reference to Picasso.

*Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso's earliest cubist work, was an important painting because it represented a fundamental change and breakthrough in the history of modern art. It indicates the new direction of Cubism that he was pursuing and introduced a new way of handling pictorial space and form. One that did not simply seek to imitate nature as if 'seen through a window' but assumed a more objective approach of analysing form depicting what we know to be there rather than just what we see.

Iberian and African sculpture and the Post – Impressionist Paul Cezanne, the most prominent influences in Picasso's beginnings with Cubism, are particularly evident in *Les Femmes d'Alger*. He was struck by the impact of the bold shapes and the energy conveyed in primitive art, reflected in his simplifying of forms geometrically, and deforming them with definite contours and sharp edges. He uses mask-like faces for the two women on the right. The compression of space is extreme with a repetition of angular lines and planes, creating a similar tension to that of primitive art.

Picasso was inspired by Cezanne's search for form's underlying structure and his experimentation with flattened space. Like the dark contours used to describe form in his *Boy Leading a Horse*, and his later landscapes of *Monte Sainte-Victoire*, *Les Femmes d'Alger* stresses the physicality of form through bold blocks of colour, angular shapes and strong outlines. It shows a concentration on this basic structure and what we know to be there - a more truthful approach than the illusion of three dimensionality. He experimented with portraying multiple viewpoints simultaneously as opposed to a single, limited viewpoint. eg. The seated woman has her back to us and yet we see her face. The still life is shown from above, contrary to the straight-on viewpoint of the rest of the work.

Picasso treats form structurally and geometrically, simplifying the women's bodies into flat, angular planes. For example, the triangular shape of the upper body of the second figure on the left. Her arms are formed out of two arc shapes that meet sharply at a point. Combining fractured blocks of colour with strong contours, flattens the form and emphasises its structure and design. The far left figure shows how I have analysed restructured the ideal nude- it is extremely geometric and consists of sharp vertexes for contours.

The drapery and background with the same fractured approach, confusing the typical formal separation of figures in a distinct space. They are conscious of their space and integrated with it, which unifies the picture whilst making void and solid ambiguous.

Renaissance perspective, where everything recedes in space is abandoned. Overlapping of figures and colour is used to convey spatial depth. Eg. the seated woman overlaps the form above her, so we know she is in front and the warm pink and brown skin colours advance towards the viewer while the cooler background blues recede, also adding to perspective. Fragments of the background are highlighted with light colours (eg. the blue drapery) which then advance towards the viewer, creating a claustrophobic tension.

The overall composition is circular and symmetrical. The women are framed by drapery which cuts the corners of the painting's border. There are three distinct areas – the two left figures, the two right figures and the central figure. The central woman anchors the work by creating a stable vertical, and leads the eye up the painting. The two groups of women on either side are each contained in elliptical shapes that rotate around the central figure. The triangular shape of the still life and table is reflected in the central woman's stretched arms at the top of the painting. She is the focal point as everything is structured around her. The balance and harmony of the symmetry counteracts the intensity of the paintings shallow pictorial space, harsh fragmentation and multiple viewpoints.

Picasso uses a limited palette of dull browns, pinks, tan cream and blue, so as not to distract from or compete with my primary interest; the structure of the forms. It also maintains unity and indicates different forms. eg. the central woman stands out against the blue drapery.

Analytical Cubism highpoint of Cubism, where the subject became so abstracted that all sense of recognisable form almost disappears. In the *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* Picasso fragments the human form into an entire work of transparent geometric planes that intersect at a variety of angles. His experiments with structure are heightened with the idea of viewing a subject from different angles simultaneously, to show more of what is there. For example, the various views in his face. Fragmentation dismantles conventional ideas of integral three dimensional forms. He has extended Cezanne's 'passage technique' in which forms and their environment are given barely any distinctions as separate entities. Ambroise Vollard's face and body merge with the faceted background, creating visual consistence but increasing ambiguity between what is space and what is solid. The planes have 'open-edges' which overlap and intersect, making the viewer aware of the space the form occupies and emphasises its structure in the geometrical nature of the planes – the use of right angles and prismatic shapes, giving the impression a mirror smashed whilst Vollard was looking into it.

Evident in *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, Analytical Cubism removed all bright colours to allow entire focus on structure. *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* conveys this severely limited palette of sepia, grey, brown, and black tones, with occasional tan and cream, used to highlight his facial features.

Typical of this period, Vollard's form is densely compiled in the centre and the planes grow as they extend outwards. His facial features are recognisable and the density draws the eye into this focus of the work, which stabilises the confusion between what is space and solid. Compositionally the work advances towards the viewer, as most Analytical Cubist paintings.

*Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912, is one of Picasso's most famous Synthetic Cubist works. With Analytical Cubism's severe palette and indecipherable forms, Synthetic Cubism saw a return to more identifiable form, increased colour tonalities and a more decorative approach.

With *Still Life with Chair Caning*, Picasso began exploring new pictorial issues. The innovation of collage and the idea of construction - consciously cutting and

assembling individual parts in combination to form a whole work - proved that art could be made unconventionally with the use of glue and scissors alongside paints and brushes and reinforced the individual components of a painting.

*Still Life with Chair Caning* questions the relationship between the realm of reality and the realm of illusion. Collage began to incorporate everyday elements of the 'real' world, usually foreign to art (glass, tin, stenciling, newsprint) intermingling them with the illusionistic world of art, blurring their boundaries and creating a new interplay between the two. Combining an oilcloth simulation of a cane chair (an illusion of an everyday object) with abstracted more ambiguous shapes, questions what is real and what is illusion and where the two coincide. The letters 'Jou' is a reference to the newspaper '*Le Journal*' – intended to remind the viewer of the reality, but simultaneously it is a pun, being the three letters of '*jouer*,' meaning '*to play/to run the risk*.' The Cubists considered pasting symbols of everyday life to be more real than imitating nature directly as these elements make the viewer more conscious of the canvas itself and that it is capable of deceit.

A contrast in surface textures is created by collage, and allowed Synthetic Cubism to expand its materials and create variety, a change from Analytical's severity. eg. the oilcloth, the paint and the rope. Being his first collage, this work retains a limited palette, however colour came to play a major role in Synthetic Cubism's decoration and return to identity.