

## Artyfacts Episode 2

### What is Cubism?

#### Intro

To those that think Cubism is nothing more than applying unneeded structure, to an otherwise complete canvas I ask you to open your eyes. Cubism is about adding form but for the reason of creating a refined visual experience, the Cubists looked to control the vision of the viewer by providing a guide for the eye; via a complex series of straight lines, complimented by a hint of color. This was all in an effort to guide a new form of art, much like the impressionists did before them, the only difference between these two movements however is their basis in art theory. Where one sought an imposable dream of creating a pure white though the use of color, the other wished to create a perfect artistic design with the use of straight lines and an absence of curves.

Cubism is about form, compacting and completing the color it surrounds. We can understand this much by looking at the Cubist Manifesto also known as Du Cubist written by Albert Gleizes and JEAN Metzinger 1912. Let's start off this manifesto with this important factor about plastic.

‘the objects which most forcibly impress us are not always those whose existence is richest in plastic truths.’

I believe there to be two meanings assigned to the term plastic used thought this manifesto, one referring to the nature of plastic materials; be it impressionable, moldable

and transparent. The second is the idea that plastic is a creation of human kind and at the time a modern innovation that changed everything and made our lives easier.

‘The reality impulse is divided into superficial realism and profound realism. ... The art of the impressionists involves an absurdity : by diversity of color it seeks to create life, and it promotes a feeble and in-effectual quality of drawing.’

This tries to state that they are two forms of painting, one being that of Realism where you paint exactly what you see and the other being Impressionism where you paint with your emotions as well, which is an abstract concept in and of itself. It then states the personal thoughts of Albert , where by exaggerating color to represent one’s feelings you are also masking laziness or ineptitude and that the very goals of the impressionists are unattainable.

‘We must not regard Impressionism as a false departure. The only possible error in art is imagination; it infringes the law of time, which is the Law. Merely by the liberty of dispelled by the technique, or shown in constituent element of tint, Monet and his disciples helped to widen the field of effort.

Albert believed that no artist should be belittled or chastised for their creativity, he saw impressionism as a form of evaluation of the artist form and that the impressionist should be celebrated for their accomplishments. However, he also believed that the grandiose use of hue overshadowed the importance of shape and form, which in the eyes of the Cubists gives frame and reference to a painting.

‘If they were not great painters then they were painters, and for this reason we should respect them.’

I just felt like this quite needed to be framed somewhere, as I believe it is important for all of us to respect other artist no matter their skill level, age, style or academic knowledge.

‘To understand Cézanne is to foresee Cubism.’

It can be seen in Paul Cézanne’s work the early stages in the development of Cubism.

‘The deceptive work of art exists only by virtue of its destination; it is animated only by the relations existing between it and determined objects. Essentially dependent, necessarily in-complete,... it is a medium, an instrument... It does not harmonise with this or that environment; it harmonises with thing in general, with the universe: It is an organism.’

This statement tries to give credence to the ideas of the impressionists, by stating that a painting is independent from the subject shown within its frame; as well as the real life equivalent of said subject. The new environment in which said painting is placed also has no bearing on the denotation, connotation or beauty of the piece; every drawing exists in its own reality displaced from our understanding of time and space.

‘Do not let us dispute as to the prime object of our art. Formerly the fresco incited the artist to represent distinct objects, evoking a simple rhythm, on which the light was spread at the limit of a synchronic vision, rendered necessary by the amplitude of the surfaces; to-day painting in oils allows us to press notions of death, density, and duration

supported to be inexpressible, and incites us to represent in terms of a complex rhythm, a veritable fusion of objects, within a limited space.’

This insight the importance of art as being a form of communication; in any form of language there must be a lexicon, of which we can navigate in order to express ourselves. That being said this paragraph mentions the fresco painting style, where one would use plaster, water and pigment to impress their images straight into the building itself. As such when they painting these marvels they had to consider, the space, curvature and lighting within the room; how will each portion of the painting look at different times at day? will they be able to see the image under candle light? will the walls be too reflective to make out the intended quality's? How will the level of the ceiling effect the viewing of the work?

As such these works were not only masterful in their use of color, but also in their use of design and form. Now days we can use oil paints to gain the same effects, due to their long drying time; we have plenty of time to adjust and rearrange our works, until they have the same quality perfection as the frescos.

‘Dose the difficulty which even a sensible and cultivated public experiences in reading modern works result from present conditions? We will admit that it dose; but it may be transformed into a source of enjoyment.’

By asking how the current cultural can affect how people view art, they are suggesting that the impression of a piece might depend on how educated the people are in the matter. As we advance in new means of communication, we enable our audience to gain a better understanding of the medium though critics and galleries displayed in the media. As such advertising has a large hold over the potential audience an artist might have, this suggest that they can make the experience more enjoyable for the viewers.

‘The artist having discerned a form which presents a certain degree of analogy with his pre-existing idea, prefers it to other forms, and consequently- for we like to force our preferences on others-endeavours to enclose the quality of this form (the incommensurable sum of the affinities perceived between the visible manifestation and tendency of his mind) in a symbol likely to impress others. When he succeeds he forces the crowd to assume, in respect of his integrated plastic consciousness, the attitude that he himself assumed in respect of nature. But while the painter, eager to create, rejects the natural image directly he has made use of it, the crowd long remains the slave of the painted image, and persists in seeing the world only through the symbol adopted.’

Our imagination is impressionable, we paint what we hear, see and experience in conjunction with our morals and set philosophy. As such we embed our ideals into our work, via a symbol perhaps the use of iconography; it is this symbolism in the form of a style or motive, this methodology usually yields a creation that others can identify with, due to the nature of psychology and social constructs. Once an artist has gained validity with the masses, their ideal image which can be seen in their style and themes become ingrained into the subconscious of the public. As such a new modern work becomes infamous, a frame of reference to uphold and judge all art with, but this modern work isn't just the prosecutor and defender it's also the jury and the gavel that shapes the framework for all future creations. Even once the creator moves on and starts making new works, in new mediums, they will forever be held to their claim to fame and dismissed for their efforts to reinvent themselves. As such the populous adopts this style as part of their visual language and it becomes ingrained into art history.

‘Let the artist's function grow profounder rather than more extensive. Let the forms which he discerns and the symbols in which he incorporates their quilts be sufficiently

remote from the imagination of the vulgar to reprint the truth which they convey from assuming a vernal charter.’

Artist should not be judged or held to account on their previous works or the works of others. The point of art is to create new and exciting things, not to simply continue making the same old drab thing again and again, just with a different face. We went to explore and concur new mediums not just reprint our images from profit, art should be more than a one of famous image, it should be a multitude of works, some stunning, some bland and some too weird to fully understand.

‘Above all, let no one be decoyed by the appearance of objectivity with which many imprudent artists endow their pictures.’

To not allow the audience to be misled by the symbolism within a given piece artwork, as many artists will embed their ideals into the works they create.

‘Let us remind them that we visit exhibitions to contemplate painting and to enjoy it: not to enlarge our knowledge of geography, anatomy, etc... Nevertheless let us admit that the reminiscence of natural forms cannot be absolutely banished;... An art cannot be raised to the level of pure effusion at the first step. This is understood by the cubist painters who indefatigably study pectoral forms and the space which it engenders.’

The Cubists believe that painting purely decorative pieces of art, is a waste of talent as art should have more thought and emotion that cannot be produced via replication. However that they do see the joy in creating without thinking and just enjoying the natural world,

they also realize that people will always paint the landscapes; as one must always start from the basics before they can move on to more advanced topics.

‘There are only nuances; form appears endowed with properties identical with those of color. It is tempered or augmented by contact with another form; it is destroyed or emphasised; It is manipulated or disappears... To compose, to construct, to design, reduces itself to this: to determine by our own activity the dynamism of the form.’

Color and form are two opposing forces, much like the balance between Yin and Yang. If too much color were to take over the image, it would be deprived of form and become an abstract work. However if form is valued more and build upon layer by layer leaving no room for color then the piece might as well become the work of a designer. Color must have some shape to it in order to convey any form of symbolism and form must have some hue to it in order to be more than a monochrome image. They two visual forces are an in-synchronous and inseparable from one another at least when it concerns an artist that wishes to avoid design and abstraction.

‘In short, the science of design consists in instituting relations between straight lines and curves. A picture which contained only straight lines or curves would not express life. It would be the same with a picture in which curves and straight lines exactly compensated one another, for exact equivalence is equal to zero. The diversity of the relations of line to line must be indefinite; the incommensurable sum of the affinities perceived between that which we discern and that we pre-exists within us: on this condition a work of art is able to move us.

What the curve is to the straight line the cold tone is to the warm tone in the domain of color.’

Lines are the building block of form, straight lines emphasize a sturdy nature a solid object, while curves give the feeling of a smooth service or a more malleable object. Too many straight lines would give the feeling of a dense or impervious building, whilst too many curves might give the impression of a fluid surface such a great sea. However if straight lines and curved lines are in exact relation to one another, the look is almost natural a hard to describe visual form. However our knowledge is what guides your personal understanding between the relation of one line to another, understanding a work of art says more about us than it does the work. If a painting is done right and we can relate to it, then it can truly give rise to our emotions; this is the main point behind the philosophy of the Cubists.

‘Suppose this were possible. A thousand little touches of pure color analyse white light, and the synthesis thereof should be accomplished in the eye of the spectator... the result of the sum of complementaries in the dingy grey not a luminous white. This contradiction arrests us... The Neo-Impressionists will claim that it is no light they have divided, but color; they know too well that color in art is a quality of light, and that one cannot divide a quality. It is light they divide. For their theory to be perfect, they ought to be able to produce the sensation of white with the seven fundamentals.... The most disturbing point of their theory is an obvious tendency to eliminate those elements which are termed neutral, which, on canvas or elsewhere, form the indefinite, The Law of contrast, old as the human eye, on which Seurat judiciously insisted, was promulgated with much clamour, and among those who flattered themselves most on their sensitiveness, none was sufficiently sensible to perceive that to apply the law of complementaries which-out tact is to deny it, since it is only of value by there fact of automatic applications, and only demands a delicate handles of values.’



The Impressionist believed that with the right combination of contrasting colors would create a purer hue of white, however this isn't the case by ignoring the art's basic teachings of color theory they ignore the fact that combining colors needlessly will result in a grey. The quality of a color in art is referred to as a hue, which is a representation of light, each variation of hue has a different implication or meaning. Within these hues there exists a system and application method called color theory, what needs to be followed in order to yield something harmonious or pleasing to the eye. However ignoring this the Neo- Impressionists covered up anything natural, being that of white or something lacking an abundance of color; in doing this they remove form from their art making their works seem almost abstract in nature. The law of contrasting colors is a basic principle of color theory, where different shades and tints of color can be used in order to create the illusion of form. Georges Seurat a famous French post-impressionist is a good example of the law of contrasts, however much of his work ignores the law of complementaries; which one done wrong can make a work hard to look at due to the effect it can have on our eyes. By applying color without thought almost autonomously can create works of utter chaos, the application of color requires an educated hand.

‘It was then that the Cubists taught a new manner of regarding light. According to them, the illumine is to reveal; to color is to specify the mode of revelation. They call luminous that which impresses the imagination, and dark that which the imagination has to penetrate. We do not mechanically connect the sensation of white with the idea of light, any more than we connect the sensation of black with the idea of darkness.’

These days we see white as a blank space and black as occupied space, using these down colors in contrast we get the idea of form. I believe this to be start of the Gestalt's Theory of design which I will talk more about in my next episode.

‘Taste immediately dictates a rule: we must paint so that no two portions of similar extent are to be found in the picture. Common sense approves and explains: let one portion repeat another portion, and the whole becomes measurable, and the work, ceasing to be expression of our personality (incommensurable, in which nothing is ever repeated), fails to do what is expected of it.’

This is one of the major problems with the works of the impressionists, with wanting to cover up all neutral space; they do not allow for any breathing room. They also try not to repeat themselves in the sense of no two corners of the painting being similar in terms of color, this works against them as the real world does repeat itself in our streets, in nature and even at sea.

Repetition is a natural thing and to exclude it, is to create a work which doesn't reflect reality.

‘There are two methods of regarding the division of a canvas.

According to the first all parts are connected by a rhythmic convention with is decremented by one of them. This is portion on the canvas matters little-gives the painting a centre whence the degradation of color proceeds to whither the tend, according as the maximum or minimum of intensity red sites there.

According to the second, in order that the spectator, himself to establish unity, may apprehend all elements in order to assigned to them by creative insertions, the prosperities of each portion must be left independent, and the plastic continuity must be broken into a hundred surprises of light and shade.’

This is a statement on how people tend to read an image, the first method suggests some read it like a book taking in every word and going over it in detail; however in doing so

they are online reading what the painting denotes but not what the painting connotes. The second method is where one looks at a painting as if they were contemplating a moving image, where they see one frame, then they look to the next and the one after that. Seeing every position an object has and has had; in other words seeing what the image is of and then visualizing what the image implies or perhaps thinking about the intent of the artist. But an important point is to mention is that it's not up to the people, how they view a painting, but the viewing method is dictated by what is on the canvas more so than the people themselves. It is one of the Cubists painters intentions to create works that can be view in both methods simultaneously.

‘It therefore amazes us when well-meaning critics explain the remarkable differences between the form attributed to nature and those of the modern painting, by a desire to represent thing not at they appear , but as they are. As they are! How are they, what are they? According to them them object possesses an absurdity form and we should suppress chiaroscuro and the traditional perspective in order to present it. What simplicity! An object has not one absolute form it has many.’

This is basically a statement about creativity being more important than realist representation. How an art style, methodology, medium and even philosophy can differ such Mach from one generation to another; some critics believe that one form of art is more prevalent than another and the prior should be ignored by the masses. However no style of art should be ignored as art has no final form, only many different faces from all the separate lives lived by the artist that contributed to its body.

‘Does it mean that a work of art must necessarily be unintelligible to the majority No: here we have only a consequence, which is merely temporary, and by no means a necessity. We should be the first to blame those who, to hide their incapacity, should

attempt to fabricate puzzles. Systematic obscurity betrays itself by its resistances.... Moreover, let us remark that all plastic qualities guarantee a preliminary emotion, and every emotion certifies a concrete existence, so that it is enough for a picture to be well painted to assure us of a veridicality of its author, and that our indelicate efforts will be rewarded.'

With every new art movement comes a new visual language to be learned, as such it may take time for the masses to understand the meaning behind a given painting. The blame those who with an inability to create and imagine new concept, instead come up with an unreadable visual language in order to capture the viewers' attention. By constantly withholding information that should be included in your images, you are only making your own work less potent in its overall meaning. They state that all works of art made by man have an initial emotion behind them, of which the emotion gives life to the work and cements its value. Lastly that if a painting is well done then it should only take that to persuade us of the artists intent and trustworthiness.

'We will even willingly confess that it is impossible to write without employing ready-made phrases, or to paint if we totally neglect the familiar symbols... A painter takes note of all the elements with experiences reveals to him, even if these are neutral or vulgar. It is a matter of tact... That the ultimate aim of painting is to touch the crowd we have admitted; but painting must not address the crowd in the language of the crowd; it must employ its own language in order to move, dominate, and direct the crowd, not in order to be understood. It is so with religions and philosophies.'

It is their belief that a new form of visual symbolism must be employed, in order to create new emotions and to inspire new ideas. They do admit it is hard to do so, but they will

not give up on trying willingly. The point of art is not to be understood, but to be looked and deciphered by the viewer, in order to bring about change in one form or another.

‘To sum up , Cubism, which has been reproached for being a system, condemns all systems... Let us grant that there is a method here, but do not let us confound method with system.... Hence objective knowable is at last regarded as chimerical, and all the crowd understands by natural form is convention, so that the painter knows no other law than those of Taste.’

Cubism isn't a system, a philosophy or a set artistic theory. It is an artistic collective and style with an intent of the creation under a set theme and style in order to move the viewer. It justifies itself by specifying that there is no ultimate goal of art just a series of evolving ideas though the form of visual representation and that an artist taste be it developed or new born; should dictate their methodology and the works they empower.

‘Henceforth by study of the manifestations of physical and mental life, the painters will learn to apply them. But if he ventures into the metaphysics, cosmogony, or mathematics let him content himself with obtaining their savour, and obtain from demanding of them certitudes, which they do not possess. A realist, he will fashion the real in the image of his mind, for there is only one truth, and that is our own, when we impose it on others. And it is the faith in Beauty which supplies the necessary strength.’

The only thing that should guide an artist is their own understanding, be it in any field, genre or style. It is up to them which course they take and what subject they paint, however they should know as they learn their style will change and they will develop

their taste. Their imagination will be their resolve where by they will guide others and may the beauty of the world give them a courage in this endeavor.

With that out of the way, hopefully some of you understand the reasoning behind this art movement. Now let's talk about the other sides of cubism, being that of the differences across the sub-genres of cubistic art. For this I will be looking at some cubist media from each sub-genre that I can think of at this moment in time, however I will be limiting it to one artist per sub-genre to help move things along.

## Painting

### Porto-Cubism

Often refer to as Pre-Cubism is considered to be the transitional phase where the flaws of impressionism became evident to the artists that wished to evolve their methodology. This period can be seen occurring from 1906 to 1910, where more attention started to be place of form and less on color; which shows a larger attention to detail and a better understanding of color theory. For this I will be looking at two paintings by Pablo Picasso one being the Dance with Veils, 1907 and the other being Girl with Mandolin, 1910.

With the Dance with Veils shown on the left, you can see the beginnings of what we now think of today as Cubism. With the colors in the painting having little contrast in overall tone other than a slight variation in hue, with almost all the lines representing depth and texture being straight. Lastly with the few lines being used to show form being strong and bold, with only a slight curve as to represent the female form.

Now let's look at Girl with Mandolin, shown on the right, in this image you can see immediately that there is for the most part no color whatsoever; with the entire image looking almost monochrome in its entirety. The few tints of hues that are shown are very

washed out primary colors, making the painting as whole feel harmonic, while giving us a feel of depth and texture. The use of lines to show depth are all together gone, showing us an increased confidence in this new style and the few lines reprinting form are all straight over than thaw few curved lines that represent femininity and define the musician's instrument.

## Early-Cubism

Can be seen as the periods 1909 to 1914, for this I will be looking at the painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912 by Marcel Duchamp. It is easy see the clear attention to the movement of the moving figure. It is a common theme amongst works around the time of 1910 to contain clear features of the two artistic movements of futurism and cubism; this is partly due to the clashing times where the art movements were established. Please now notice that all the lines in this image protecting to shape of the nude figure are straight, other than the lines that wish to clearly define the torso or head; which are perhaps the most important parts of identifying the movement of this person's limbs. This is almost no color leaving this partly image monochrome in nature, using tone and contrast to identify and separate the background from the figure. This allows more attention to the almost frame like nature of the persons movement, with the respirations of this person towards the top left side severing as an almost afterimage; something akin to a long exposure photograph. It is a truly marvelous work which helps us understand this period of art to the fullest.

## Orphic Cubism

Or Orphism is a sub-genre of cubism with the term being defined by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1912. For this I would like to look at *Discs of Newton*, 1912 by František Kupka, the most important aspects of this image and those that full under the sub-genre of Orphism; is the attention paid to the use of color. The hue is bright and bold with many different variations of the same colors used, however you can still see the effort put into making this image a true respiration of the significance of color theory, with it itself looking like a perfect guide on how to follow the rules. Another key thing to note is that art work within this sub-genre do not feel the need to follow the idea of perfect form using primary straight lines, rather they keep this idea in mind to achieve a unique feel of abstraction; although they just follow the idea of perfect contrast though the use of tone variation, in order to bring form to color.

## Crystal Cubism

This short-lived period in Cubism lasted between 1915 and 1916, for this I will be looking at the painting *Woman*, 1915-1917 by Juan Gris. In this painting and quite a few works alike it during this period, you can note the stronger highlight in the style placed upon a larger and flatter surface which take up the majority of the canvases. Whilst still keeping the color and tone subdued, however a greater variety in completely hues create contrasts, it becomes quite hard to tell what is background and what highlight of the image. This is all an attention effect to draw the eye to the center off the painting, however it, might also be used to create the illusion of depth, where there truly is none. Over all I have to say that works during this proud remind me more of a stage set than anything else.

## Architecture

All in all, Cubism is a love note to structure and form, be it following artistic theory as a law set in stone or using one's philosophy as a stepping stone in which to guide you. It was up to them in which way they interpreted or denounced the teaches of the past and it is up to us to do the same; whether you like Cubism or not you have to admit they they set the frame work for many artists to come. Which is something we should respect be it by following their example or expanding upon the building they made but in your own way.