

CUBISM

CUBISM

UNDERSTANDING CUBISM

CUBISM

76-77

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The paper should  
have been about  
3000 words. You have  
about 1500 words.

Good, as far as it goes  
A-

## OUTLINE

- I. Preface
- II. Roots
  - A. Impressionism
  - B. Post-impressionism
  - C. Paul Cezzane
    - 1. Geometry
    - 2. More than one viewpoint
  - D. African sculpture
- III. Picasso
  - A. "Les Demoise d'Avignon"
    - 1. Group of female nudes
    - 2. Two African faces
    - 3. First Cubist rendering
  - B. Meets Georges Braque
- IV. Analytical phase
  - A. Fourth Dimension
  - B. Broken perspective
  - C. Paintings
    - 1. "Houses at L'Estaque"
    - 2. "Portrait of Ambrois Vollard"
  - D. Distorted reality
- V. Synthetic Cubism
  - A. Collage
  - B. Color
- VI. Summary

Preface

I have never liked Cubism. To me it was nothing more than a mumbo jumbo of lines, geometric shapes, and dull ugly color on a canvas which held no particular interest for me. In high school there was an art teacher that I respected very much, and he also condemned Cubism. His opinion was the deciding vote so that Cubism simply did not appeal to me. I did not particularly like Picasso, the founder of Cubism, because of my dislike for his sculpture in downtown Chicago. This was, of course, when I knew nothing about him or the movement of Cubism itself. Having a very reason-oriented mind, I figured the reason I do not like Cubism is because I do not know anything about it. I have always said the reason someone does not like something is because they do not really fully understand it. This applies to all art. So, I said to myself, why not try and understand Cubism?

Faced with a research paper I quickly figured a topic: Understanding Cubism. This was my chance to study out and try to understand the form of art called Cubism. So I studied and researched and found out a lot about Picasso and Braque. I came across many Cubist paintings. I learned the different phases of Cubism, how it was created, what it meant. I do believe I can say that I understand the basic ideas of Cubism. But, I still do not like it.

*(It will take a little more time. Look at more Cubist works in Art Institute and other museums as you travel.)*

Each style in art is capitalized as Proper Nouns or Names.

Cubism

Cezanne

P I

Cubism has its roots in the post-impressionism of Paul Cezanne.<sup>1</sup> The post-impressionists in general had new ideas that spread rapidly throughout the art world. Unlike the impressionists who would view their subject matter and put down their impression of it,<sup>2</sup> the post-impressionists would view reality, analyze the reality while rearranging any aspect of it that would not correspond to a good composition, and then put down their impression of it.<sup>3</sup> Paul Cezanne was a leader of this group of artists.

Cezanne would view a scene and render it in basic geometric shapes to enhance the composition.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, also, his work seems as if the person observing the scene would be standing in more than one place at the same time. In other words an observer can see both the front and back of a house.<sup>5</sup>

Picasso liked this idea of geometric shapes and the many viewpoints. He also liked African sculpture with its mean and terrible energy.<sup>6</sup> So in 1907 in Paris, Picasso decided to create a painting in the geometric manner of Paul Cezanne. Picasso was a member of the "new breed of artists" that concentrated not on the emotional or moral meaning of a work of art, but on the visual impact of color and composition.<sup>7</sup> Modern art at that time was not interested in creating a duplicate of reality. It left that to photographers. Its purpose was to re-interpret reality to make a painting a thing

of beauty in itself.<sup>8</sup> Picasso was working in this manner.

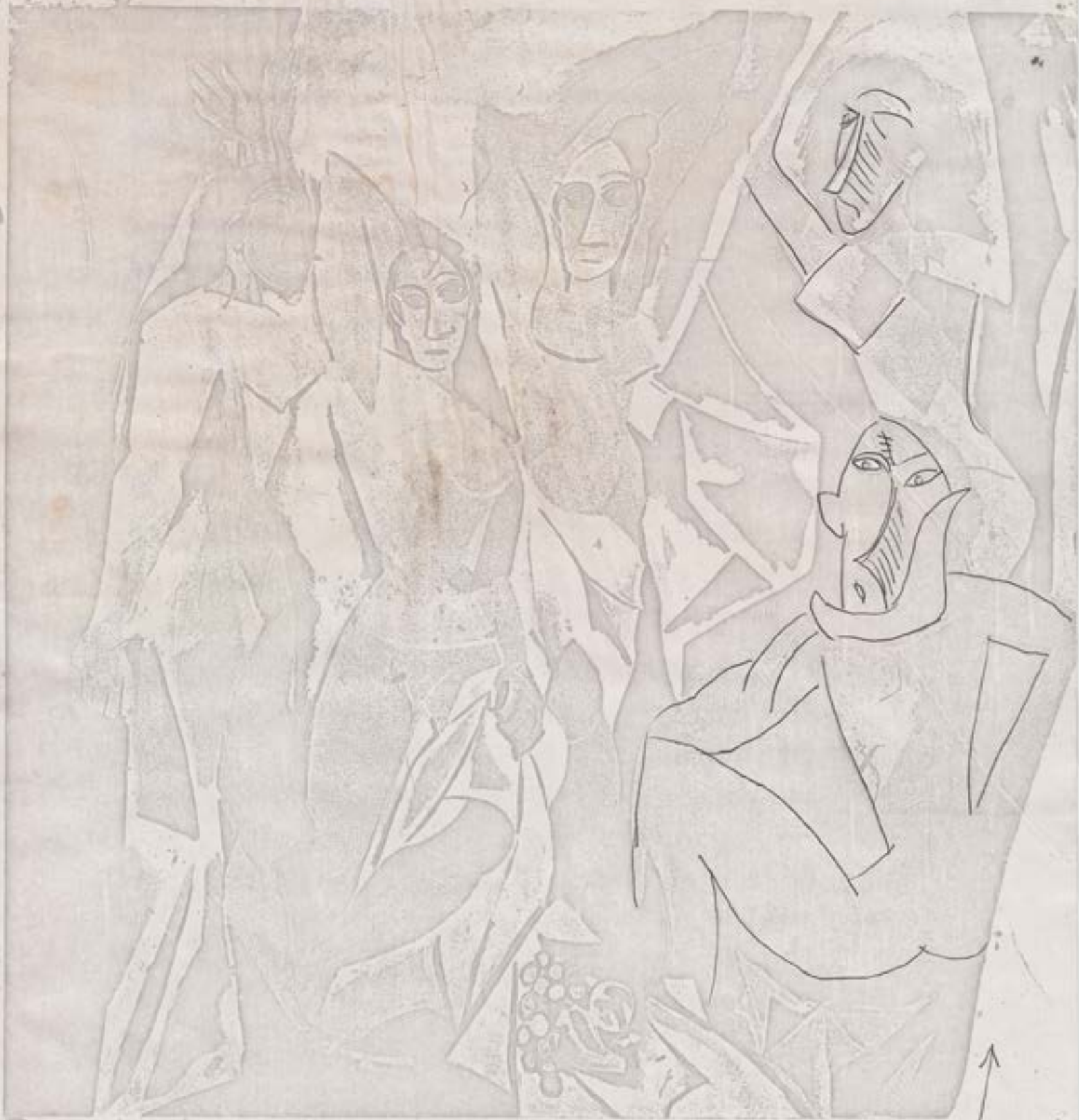
The painting he was to do was a group of female nudes. He had recently been to see an exhibition by Cezzane<sup>9</sup> and the "Bathers" series had impressed him. Throughout the history of art the nude was a classic figure. A group of nudes was not uncommon, so that Picasso was using an ancient motif in modern art.<sup>10</sup>

When a person looks at Picasso's nude females, entitled "Les Demoise d'Avignon", which is translated "The Young Ladies of Avignon",<sup>11</sup> he would think that Picasso whipped it all together in one day. The truth is, however, that Picasso made more than thirty preliminary versions and many sketches before beginning.<sup>12</sup> A month or so after he finished the figures, Picasso changed the two on the right so that their heads were African masks, giving the painting a "savage power that up to then was unmatched in modern art."<sup>13</sup> It is a good thing that Picasso changed the figures, because without the African touch the painting would have been a failure.<sup>14</sup> *in fact*

In fact it is the squatted figure on the right that first renders a true cubist pose because we see her front, back and sides at the same time.<sup>15</sup> This revolutionary figure started the Cubist mode of expression. With this work Picasso broke with the traditionally accepted rules of painting that artists have been using since the Renaissance.<sup>16</sup> Perspective was the rule that Picasso especially killed. In "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon" there is no illusion of depth at all. The traditional way of portraying the human figure is also wiped out.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after completing the painting "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon", Picasso met and became close friends with Georges

The  
**terrible  
ladies**  
of Avignon



FIRST CUBIST Rendering

Braque.<sup>18</sup> Together they began to develop this new type of expression. This started the "Analytic Phase" of Cubism.<sup>19</sup> This phase of Cubism was to create a number of paintings by Picasso and Braque working so closely together that it was hard to tell them apart. One such painting by Braque is "Houses at L'Estaque".

The "Houses at L'Estaque", done in 1908 by Braque, illustrates the strong influence that the works of Cezanne had on early Cubists. In the painting one can see the simple geometric renderings of the houses on a hill. It was from this painting with its collection of cube-like houses and buildings that the term Cubism came into being.<sup>20</sup>

The first Cubist portrait was done by Picasso in 1910. By this time Cubism had changed from a type of geometric shaping to the fragmentations of lines and planes. The subject matter is difficult to recognize but you can still make out the face of Ambrois Vollard, a Parisian art dealer, the subject of the portrait.<sup>21</sup>

In this era color was not very important to the cubists. They worked to render the form of an object by attempting to record all sides of it simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> The artists would analyze an object for the aspect of it which revealed its form most effectively.<sup>23</sup> This "walking around" an object would incorporate into the painting the sense of time as a fourth dimension.<sup>24</sup> In other words, this analytical phase of Cubism portrays the world an omnipresent God would see, all at once. This phase lasted until 1912.

The paintings near the end of the analytical phase lose all contact with reality because the subject matter is



unrecognizable amidst the maze of lines and flat planes.<sup>25</sup> This distortion of reality was not the purpose of the artists. Picasso and Braque knew it would not be good to return to their earlier style of cubes.

They came up with the idea of pasting clues into their paintings. This begins the synthetic phase for Cubism.<sup>36</sup>

The first synthetic painting was done by Picasso and was entitled "Still Life with Chair Caning." In this painting a rope is glued around the edges to give the impression of a rug. This painting starts a new technique called "collage".<sup>27</sup> In this phase of Cubism, color became more important than in the analytical phase.<sup>28</sup>

Soon the Cubists were putting everything into their pictures: newspaper clippings, bottle labels, even wallpaper. Some examples of these paintings are "Still Life with Violin and Fruit", in 1913 by Picasso, and "Mandolin and Guitar", which Picasso painted shortly before World War I.<sup>29</sup> In these paintings Picasso attempted to put back density into his work. He attempted to discover the basic elements of an object and organize them into a "sincere image". When painting a glass, he sought after the "principle" of it.<sup>30</sup>

There has been no Cubism done since the First World War. Art historians look back on the period as an experiment that did not last very long.<sup>31</sup> Still, modern art would not be as it is today if Cubism had not entered the picture. The ideas of creating a painting as a thing of beauty in itself have lasted and is the basis of twentieth-century art.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Sheldon Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art(New York, 1966) page 99.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>4</sup>John Edwin Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art (New York, 1959), p. 454.

<sup>5</sup>Tom Prideaux, "Picasso: Adventure of Cubism Began with a Shocker", Life, 65 (December 27, 1968), p. 52.

<sup>6</sup>Canaday, p. 455.

<sup>7</sup>Prideaux, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Guy Habasque, Cubism: Biographical and Critical Study, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York; 1959), p. 62.

<sup>17</sup>Prideaux, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>19</sup>Habasque, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup>Prideaux, p. 56.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 57.

<sup>22</sup>Habasque, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Canaday, p. 485.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p. 460.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>28</sup>Prideaux, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>30</sup>Habasque, pp. 74-75.

<sup>31</sup>Katharine Kreh, "Many Sides of Cubism: Albright-Knox Art Gallery Recent Acquisitions", Saturday Review, 48 (August 28, 1965), p. 53.

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