

The background is a complex abstract painting in a Cubist style. It features a dense arrangement of geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of blue, green, and brown. The composition is dynamic, with sharp lines and a sense of depth created through overlapping planes and varying tones. The overall effect is one of a fragmented, three-dimensional space.

# Cubism

Guillaume Apollinaire & Dorothea Eimert



Authors: Guillaume Apollinaire, Dorothea Eimert, Anatoli Podoksik

Layout:

Baseline Co. Ltd

61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street

4<sup>th</sup> Floor

District 3, Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnam

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ISBN : 978-1-78042-800-0

Guillaume Apollinaire, Dorothea Eimert, Anatoli Podoksik

# CUBISM



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# I. *Aesthetic Meditations on Painting: The Cubist Painters*

## by Guillaume Apollinaire

I  
The plastic virtues, purity, unity and truth, hold nature down beneath their feet. In vain the rainbow is bent, the seasons vibrate, the crowds rush on to death, science undoes and remakes that which already exists, whole worlds withdraw forever from our conception, our transitory images repeat themselves or revive their unconsciousness, and the colours, odours, sounds which follow astonish us, then disappear from nature.

This monster of beauty is not eternal.

We know that our breath has had no beginning, and will have no end, but we conceive first of all the creation and the end of the world.

Nevertheless, too many artists still adore plants, stones, waves, or men.

One quickly becomes accustomed to the bondage of the mysterious. And this servitude ends by creating soft leisure.

One allows the labourer to dominate the universe, and gardeners have less respect for nature than the artists.

It is time to be masters. Good will does not insure victory.

The mortal forms of love dance on this side of eternity, and the name of nature sums up their accursed discipline.

The flame is the symbol of painting, and the three plastic virtues radiate in burning.

The flame is of a purity which tolerates nothing alien, and cruelly transforms in its own image that which it touches.

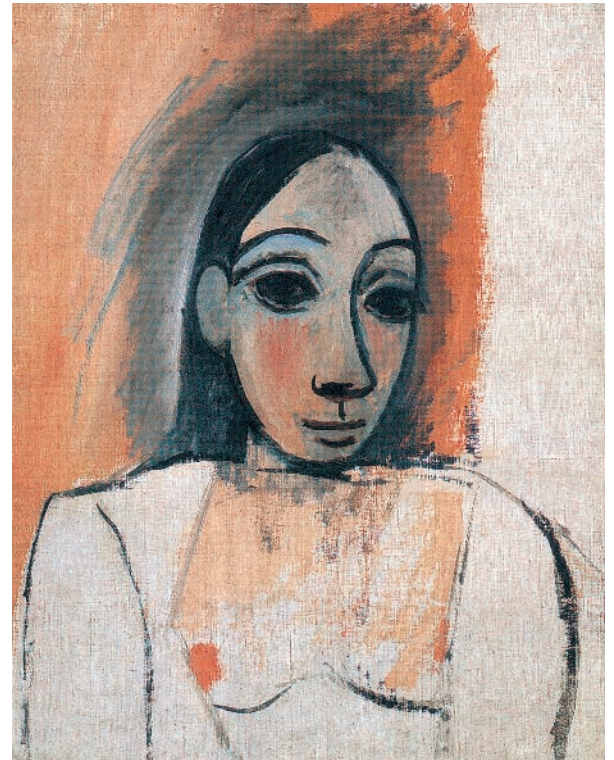
The flame has a magic unity—if it is divided, each spark is like unto the single flame.

It has, finally, the sublime truth of its own light, which no one can deny.

In spite of natural forces, the virtuous artist painters of this occidental epoch contemplate their purity.

It is forgetfulness after study. And, if a pure artist should ever die it would be necessary that all those of the past ages should not have existed.

In the Occident, painting purifies itself with this ideal logic which the old painters have transmitted to the new as if they had given them life.



**Pablo Picasso,**  
*Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907.  
Oil on canvas, 243.9 x 233.7 cm.  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

**Pablo Picasso,**  
*Bust of a Woman* (study for *Les Femmes d'Alger*), 1907.  
Oil on canvas, 58.5 x 46 cm.  
Musée Picasso, Paris.

And that is all.

No one can carry his father's body everywhere with him. He abandons it to the company of the other dead. And he remembers it, regrets it, speaks of it with admiration. And, if he becomes a father himself, he must not expect any of his children to multiply themselves for the life of his corpse.

But, it is in vain that our feet detach themselves from the soil that holds the dead.

To contemplate purity is to baptise instinct, to humanise art, and to deify personality.

The root, the stalk and the flower of the lily show the progress of purity to its symbolic bloom.

All bodies are equal before the light and their modifications come from this luminous power which moulds them according to its will.

We do not know all the colours, and each man invents new ones.

But the painter must, above all, become himself the spectator of his own divinity, and the pictures which he offers to the admiration of men will confer upon them also the glory of exercising for the moment their own divinity.

For this it is necessary to embrace at a glance the past, present and future.

The canvas should present that essential unity which alone can produce ecstasy.

Then, nothing transient will be dashed off at random. We will not suddenly be turning backwards. Free spectators, we will not give up our life because of our curiosity. The salt smugglers of appearances will not be able to pass our statues of salt before the custom house of reason.

We will not go astray in the unknown future, which, separated from eternity, is only a word designed to tempt man.

We will not exhaust ourselves seizing the too fugitive present, for fashion after all can only be for the artist the mask of death.

The picture will exist inevitably. The vision will be entire, complete, and its infinity, instead of marking an imperfection, will only bring out the relation between a new creature and a new creator, only this and nothing more. Otherwise there will be no unity, and the connection which the different points of the canvas have with different geniuses, with different objects, with different lights, will show only a multiplicity of inharmonious dissimilarities.

For, if there can be an infinite number of creatures, each one attesting to its creator, with no creation to block the extent of those coexistences, it is impossible to conceive of them at one and the same time, and death is the result of their juxtaposition, of their mingling, of their love.

Each divinity creates after his own image: so too, the painters. And it is only photographers who manufacture reproductions of nature.

Neither purity nor unity count without the truth, which cannot be compared to reality, since truth is always the same, outside all nature, which exerts itself to hold us within the fatal order of things wherein we are only animals.

**Pablo Picasso,**  
*Nude (Bust)*, 1907.  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 46.5 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum,  
St. Petersburg.











Above all, artists are men who wish to become inhuman. They seek painfully the traces of inhumanity, traces which are never found in nature. These are the real truths, and beyond them we know no reality.

But reality is never discovered once and for all. The truth will always be new. Otherwise, truth would be a system even more miserable than nature.

In this case, the deplorable truth, every day more distant, less distinct, less real, would reduce painting to a state of plastic writing destined simply to facilitate the relations between people of the same race.

In our day, a machine would quickly be invented which without our comprehension reproduced such signs.

## II

Many of the new painters paint only pictures which have no actual subject. And the titles which one finds in the catalogues play merely the role of the names that designate men without characterising them.

I have seen canvases entitled: *Solitude*, where there were several people, just as there are Mr. Stouts who are very thin, and Mr. Blonds who are very dark.

In the cases in question, the artists even condescend occasionally to make use of vaguely explicative terms, such as *portrait*, *landscape*, *still life*; many, however, of the young artists use only the general term, *painting*.

These painters, even if they still observe nature, no longer imitate her, and they carefully avoid the representation of natural scenes studiously observed and reconstructed.

Actual resemblance no longer has any importance because everything is sacrificed by the artists to the verities, to the necessities of a superior nature which he presupposes without exposing. The subject no longer counts, or if it counts at all, counts for very little.

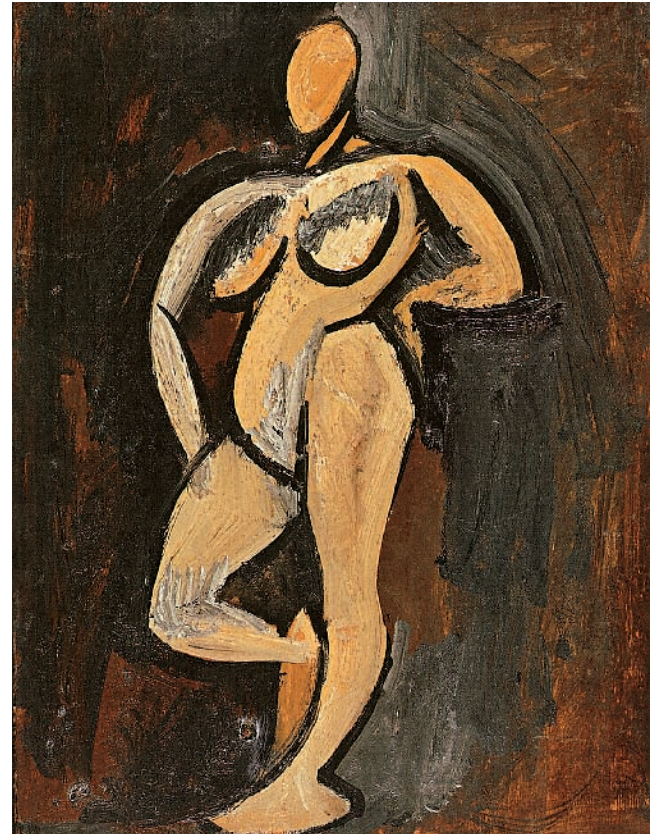
Generally speaking, modern art repudiates most of the means of pleasing which were used by the great artists of past times.

Today, as formerly, the aim of painting is still the pleasure of the eye, but the demand henceforward made upon the amateur is to find a pleasure other than the one which the spectacle of natural things could just as well provide.

Thus one travels toward an entirely new art, which compared to painting as it has been looked upon heretofore, shall be what music is to literature.

It will be the essence of painting, just as music is the essence of literature.

The amateur of music experiences, in listening to a concert, joy of a different order from the joy he feels in listening to natural sounds, like the murmur of a stream, the roar of a waterfall, the whistling of the wind in a forest, or the harmonies of human language founded on reason and not on aesthetics.



Georges Braque,  
*Large Nude*, 1907-1908.  
Oil on canvas, 142 x 102 cm.  
Private collection.

Pablo Picasso,  
*Standing Nude*, 1908.  
Oil on canvas, 27 x 21 cm.  
Musée Picasso, Paris.



In the same way, the new painters will provide their admirers with artistic sensations due solely to the harmony of odd lights.

Everyone knows Pliny's anecdote of Apelles and Protogenes. It demonstrates clearly the aesthetic pleasure resulting solely from this odd combination of which I have spoken.

Apelles landed one day on the Isle of Rhodes to see the works of Protogenes, who lived there. Protogenes was not in his studio when Apelles arrived. An old woman was there guarding a large canvas ready to be painted. Instead of leaving his name, Apelles drew on the canvas a line so delicate that nothing subtler could be conceived.

On his return Protogenes, seeing the drawn line, recognised the hand of Apelles, and traced thereupon a line of another colour even more subtle, in such a way that there appeared to be three.

Apelles came back again the next day, without finding him whom he sought, and the subtlety of the line he drew that day reduced Protogenes to despair. This sketch was for a long time the admiration of connoisseurs who viewed it with as much pleasure as if gods and goddesses had been depicted instead of almost invisible tracings.

The secret aim of the young artists of the extreme schools is to produce pure painting. It is an entirely new art. It is still in its first stage, and is not yet as abstract as it would like to be. Most of the young painters work a great deal with mathematics without knowing it, but they have not yet abandoned nature whom they patiently question so that she may teach them the way of life. A Picasso studies an object as a surgeon dissects a body.

This art of pure painting, if it succeeds in disengaging itself entirely from the ancient school of painting, will not necessarily cause such painting to disappear, any more than the development of music has caused the disappearance of different kinds of literature, or than the acridity of tobacco has replaced the savour of food.

### III

The new artists have been violently reproached for their geometric preoccupations. And yet, geometric figures are the essence of drawing. Geometry, the science which has for its scope space, its measurements and its relations, has been from time immemorial the rule even of painting.

Up to now, the three dimensions of the Euclidean geometry have sufficed for the solicitude which the sentiment of the infinite arouses in the soul of great artists.

The new painters do not propose, any more than did the old, to be geometricians. But, it may be said that geometry is to the plastic arts what grammar is to the art of the writer. Today scholars no longer hold to the three dimensions of the Euclidean geometries. The painters have been led quite naturally and, so to speak, by intuition, to preoccupy themselves with possible new measures of space, which in the language of modern studios has been designated briefly and altogether by the term the *fourth* dimension.

The fourth dimension as it is presented to the understanding from the plastic point of view would be engendered by the three known dimensions; it would show the immensity of space

**Pablo Picasso,**  
*Bread and Fruit Bowl on a Table,*  
1908-1909.  
Oil on canvas, 164 x 132.5 cm.  
Kunstmuseum, Basel.













**Georges Braque,**  
*The Factories of Rio-Tinto in Estaque*,  
1910.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm.  
Musée National d'Art Moderne,  
Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

**Georges Braque,**  
*Pitcher and Violin*, 1909-1910.  
Oil on canvas, 117 x 73.5 cm.  
Kunstmuseum, Basel.

**Pablo Picasso,**  
*Nude Woman*, 1910.  
Oil on canvas, 187.3 x 61 cm.  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

**Sonia Delaunay,**  
*La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite  
Jehanne de France (Prose of the Trans-  
Siberian and Little Jehanne of France)*,  
1913.  
Collaborative artists' book by  
Blaise Cendrars, Copy 139.  
Watercolour and text printed on  
Japanese paper, open book:  
199 x 36 cm; closed book: 18 x 11 cm.  
Musée National d'Art Moderne,  
Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris.

**Robert Delaunay,**  
*Eiffel Tower*, 1911.  
Oil on canvas, 202 x 138.4 cm.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,  
New York.







eternalised in every direction at a given moment. It is space itself, the dimension of the infinite: it is this which endows objects with their plasticity. It gives them the proportions which they merit as a part of the whole, whereas, in Greek art, for example, a somewhat mechanical rhythm unceasingly destroys the proportions.

Greek art had a purely human conception of beauty. It took man as the standard of perfection. The art of the new painters takes the infinite universe as the ideal, and it is this ideal that necessitates a new measure of perfection, which permits the artist to give to the object proportions which conform to the degree of plasticity to which he desires to bring it.

Nietzsche divined the possibility of such an art: "O divine Dionysius, why dost thou pull my ears?" Ariadne demands of her philosophical lover in one of the celebrated dialogues on *The Isle of Naxos*. "I find something pleasant and agreeable in thy ears, Ariadne. Why are they not still longer?"

Nietzsche, when he recalled this anecdote, put into the mouth of Dionysius the condemnation of Greek art.

Let us add, in order that today nothing more than an historical interest may attach to the utopian expression—the fourth dimension—which must be noted and explained, that it was only a manifestation of the aspirations and disquietudes of a large number of young artists contemplating the Egyptian and Oceanic sculptures, meditating on the works of science, and awaiting a sublime art.

#### IV

Wishing to attain the proportions of the idea, not limiting themselves to humanity, the young painters offer us works which are more cerebral than sensual. To express the grandeur of metaphysical forms, they withdraw further and further from the former art of optical illusions and local proportions. This is why the present art, even if it is not the direct emanation of determined religious beliefs, presents nevertheless several characteristics of religious art.

#### V

It is the social function of the great poets and the great painters to renew unceasingly the appearance which nature assumes in the eyes of men.

Without the poets, without the artists, men would quickly tire of the monotony of natural phenomena.

The sublime idea which they have of the universe would come tumbling down with a vertiginous rapidity.

The order which appears in nature and which is only an effect of art would immediately vanish. Everything would break up in chaos. No more seasons, no more civilisation, no more thought, no more humanity, no more of life itself; impotent obscurity would reign forever. By mutual consent the poets and the artists determine the features of their epoch and docilely the future falls in with their plan.

The general structure of an Egyptian mummy conforms to the figures outlined by the Egyptian artists, and yet the ancient Egyptians differed greatly from each other. They conformed to the art of their epoch.







To create the illusion—the type—is the real quality of art, its social role. God knows how the pictures of Manet and Renoir were mocked! It sufficed to cast an eye upon the photographs of their epoch to see how the people and things conform to the pictures which these great artists have painted.

The works of art being, from the plastic point of view, the most energetic products of a period, this illusion appears to me quite natural. This energy imposes itself on men and is for them the plastic measure of an epoch. Thus, those who mock the new painters make fun of their own features, for the people of the future will imagine the human beings of today as they have been represented by the artists of the most vital, that is to say, the newest art. Do not say to me that there are today other artists who paint in such a way that mankind will recognise itself as portrayed in their image. All the works of art of an epoch end by resembling the most expressive and the most typical art of that period. Dolls are the outlet of a popular art; they seem always to be inspired by the great art of the same epoch. This is a truth easy to verify. And yet who would dare to say that the dolls which were sold in the bazaars of 1880 had been manufactured with a sentiment analogous to that of Renoir when he painted his portraits? Then, nobody noticed it. It signifies, nevertheless, that the art of Renoir was energetic enough and vital enough to impose itself on our senses, while to the great public at the time when he started his conceptions appeared to be mad absurdities.

## VI

One has often, and notably in the case of the most recent painters, been confronted by the possibility of a mystification or of a collective error.

But no one knows, in all the history of art, of a single collective mystification any more than of a collective artistic error. There are isolated cases of mystification and error, but the conventional elements of which in part the works of art are composed assure us that errors would not know how to exist collectively.

If the new school of painting had presented us with one of these cases, it would be an event so extraordinary that it could be called a miracle. To conceive a case of this sort would be to conceive that suddenly in a nation all the children should be born without heads or with only one arm or leg, a conception evidently absurd. There are no collective errors or mystifications in art. There are only diverse epochs—diverse schools of art. If the end pursued by each one is not equally elevated, equally pure, all are equally respectable, and according to the ideas which each has of beauty, each school of art is successively admired, despised and again admired.

## VII

The new school of painting bears the name of Cubism; it was so called in derision by Henri Matisse, who in the autumn of 1908 had just seen a picture representing houses, the cubic appearance of which had greatly impressed him.

These new aesthetics were first elaborated in the mind of André Derain, but the most important and audacious works which the movement at once produced were those of a great







