

Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
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Lecture - 07
Cubism & Picasso

Hello viewers. Welcome to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art. Today in this module we will be looking at one of the most significant art movements of early twentieth century called cubism. Cubism in many ways it is not really a movement, but it is a kind of earth shaking, you can say a discovery of a certain kind of art language which was going to alter the way, we perceive art make art and understand art once and forever, and like futurism or fauvism.

Cubism also in the beginning at least was not a very favourable project for many are critics instead of appreciation in the beginning cubism rather received lot of criticisms and very negative criticisms notwithstanding all these resistances cubism. And the two most important leaders of the cubism movement Picasso and Braque went on with their project and pave the way for an entirely different kind of aesthetics that was going to rule the modern art ideas for a long time to come.

Now, the beginning of cubism, well this particular painting by Pablo Picasso and the title of the painting in French is les Demoisells d Avignon, is suppose to be the first ever cubist painting painted by anybody. And these particular paintings introduce a revolutionary changed in the logic of representation. If you look at this painting carefully you will see that the figuration, the method of representing a figure to begin with defies all logic of traditional representational norms. To use a common plus word this kind of figuration involves a rampant distortion, but once again like I mean the way fauvists used colours the cubists also did not distorts just for the sake of distortion or the distortion toward the distortion looks rampant and arbitrary, it is not arbitrary it was basically in the process of altering the usual common traditional representational method.

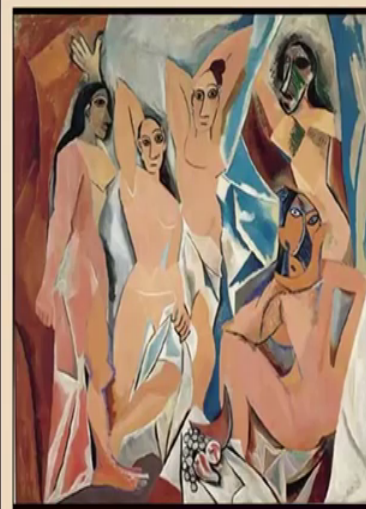
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- Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque

- 1907-1914
- Emphasizes flat, two-dimensional surface
- Rejects perspective, chiaroscuro

So, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, they were the two foremost latest of cubism and more or less the time frame is from 1907 to 1914, and if we look at any cubist painting primarily cubist paintings emphasise flat two dimensional surface cubist paintings reject perspective, chiaroscuro and cubist paintings also reject very easily legible kind of subject matter.

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Picasso, LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON (1907)

I mean in many cubist paintings the subject matter once told is something very easy to understand, but something extremely difficult to see there are many cubist paintings where the subject matter despite of a very indicative title.

Usually the subject matter is not visible or very abstract, because the subject matter or the object in the painting has undergone saviour linguistic operation and experimentations, and the result is a cubist painting or a cubist sculpture. Now as you can seeing this painting which is considered to be the first ever cubist painting painted by anybody in this case it is Picasso in 1907, not a single figure confers to the normal representational method. All the figures have very sharp distorted features including the two on the right hand side, whose faces do not look like faces they look like mask we will come back to that later on, but also look at the face around this figure not realistic not representational and moreover this face around this figures is very ambiguous confusing and nonspecific to say the list.

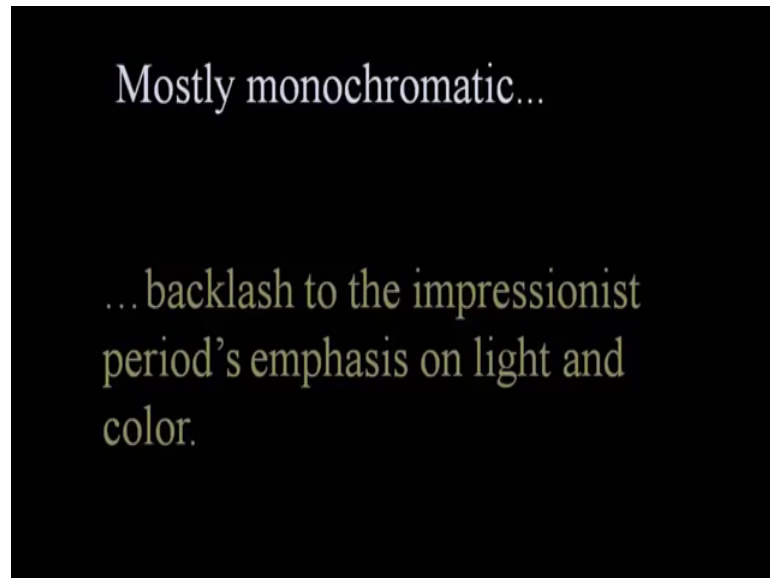
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- Geometric forms without realistic detail
- Refutes art as the imitation of nature
- “Conceived rather than perceived reality”
- Capture essence of object by showing it from multiple points of view simultaneously

So, in once of the cubist a painting is a geometric forms dominating without the realistic detail. Cubist paintings refute art as the imitation of nature it rather follows the certain concept of representation rather than following or imitating nature itself. In cubist paintings what you see is a conceived image of an idea or an object rather than a perceived reality; and cubist paintings usually try to capture the essence of object by

showing it from multiple perspectives or multiple points of view simultaneously instead of going for a single point perspective.

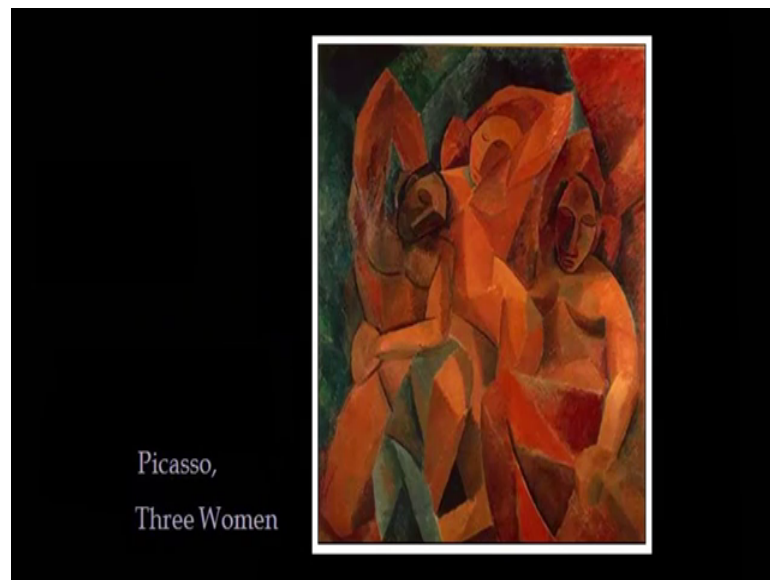
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And interestingly most of the cubist paintings at least in the early face are monochromatic; it is only in the later face of cubism that you get to see some amount of colours applied on the painting.

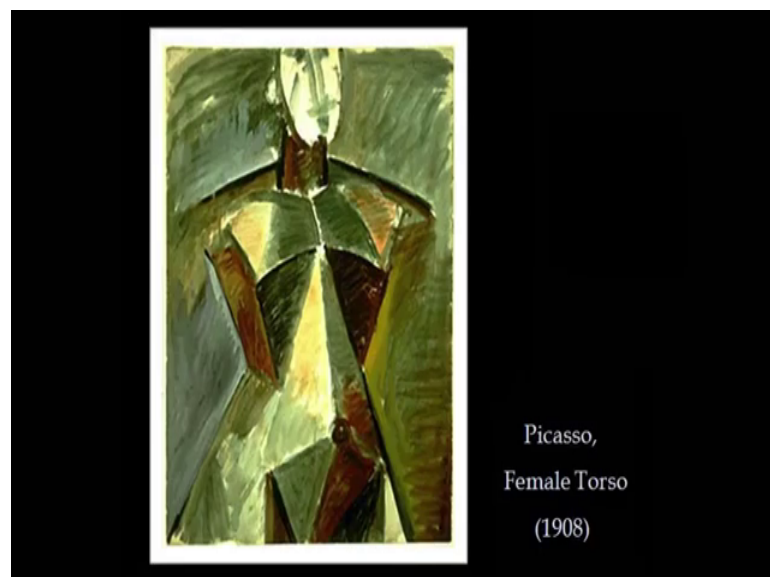
But in the beginning they are monochromatic in order to foreground and enhance the flat quality, the cubist forms and facets and also in order to stop and resist any suggestion of depth. Some people think that cubism is a backlash to the impressionist periods emphasis on light and colour and thereby tending towards an optical reality.

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After all cubist paintings in spite of some figurative and objective references in some of their paintings like this one, cubist paintings are by and large they are not at all interested or bothered with optical reality, they are more interested to deal with the conceptual reality a certain way of perceiving things and looking at things.

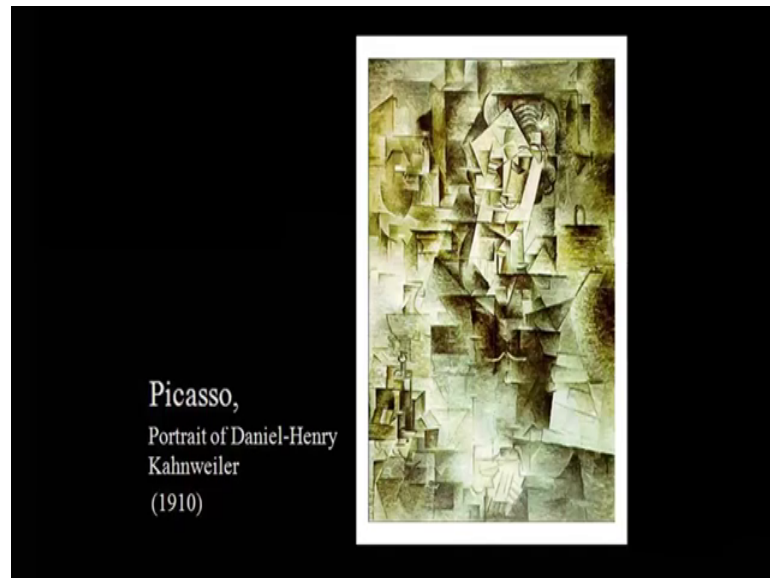
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Now, though some of the early cubist paintings you do find thus strong presence of a reference, even if the reference is not realistic, but at least you can make out that this

image refers to the figure of a man or a woman or a bottle or a guitar, but these references are going to disappear very soon.

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And sooner or later cubist paintings are going to get very abstract like this one. Though there is a very clear cut title very specific title here of this painting, and as the title goes this painting is suppose to be the portrait of Daniel Henri Kahnweiler.

But where is he even if you do forayed some elements some suggestions of a face of a man, it is so removed from a representational reality, from a realistic imaging, that you almost do not want to claim that you have been able to spot that man. But you actually see is a an array of a whole arrangement of geometric forms angular shapes and a mixed all these shapes in forms perhaps at least in this painting the image of a man surfaces, but that to in a very very limited extension or for that matter when Picasso titles is painting guitar player.

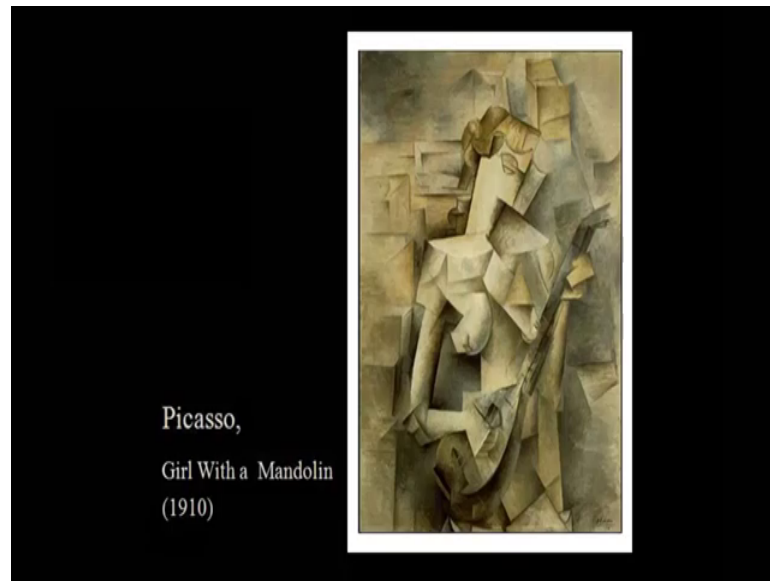
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It could be very irritating for a viewer, to say that this painting has a title called guitar player, but when you look at the painting very carefully you cannot see anything neither guitar nor player. So, now, this becomes increasingly clear that in cubist paintings as the movement progresses, in the cubist paintings or sculptures later on the subject matter for the artists is only a pretext a pretext or an opportunity to experiment with the language of representation.

An opportunity to go beyond the imitative or mimetic language, and to produce a work of art which is highly conceptual in nature and also abstract in terms of it is pictorial quality.

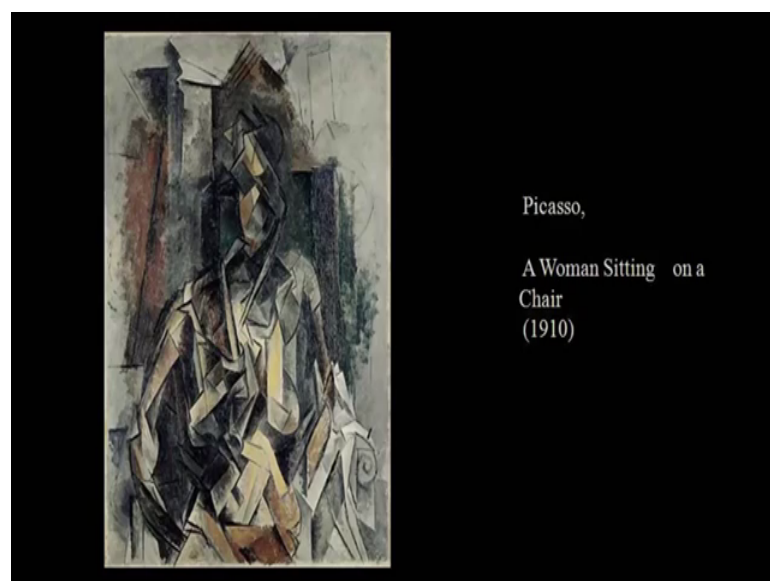
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Here of course, even if we did not have this very specific title called girl with a mandolin, but the painting still has a better visual reference to the image of a women who is holding a mandolin, but what you see here is that the body of the women as well as the object called mandolin has been broken in to fragments.

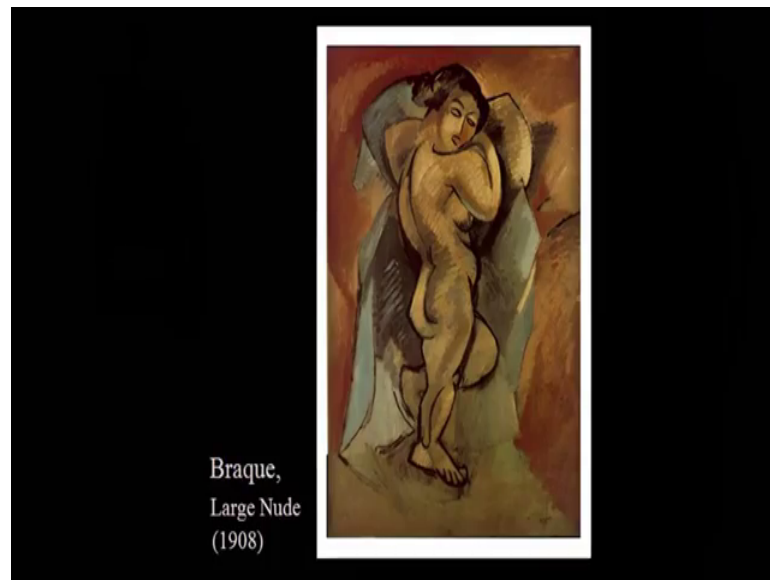
So, fragmentation then appears to be a very significant a very important and a useful tool for the cubist painters and sculptures in order to create a cubist image.

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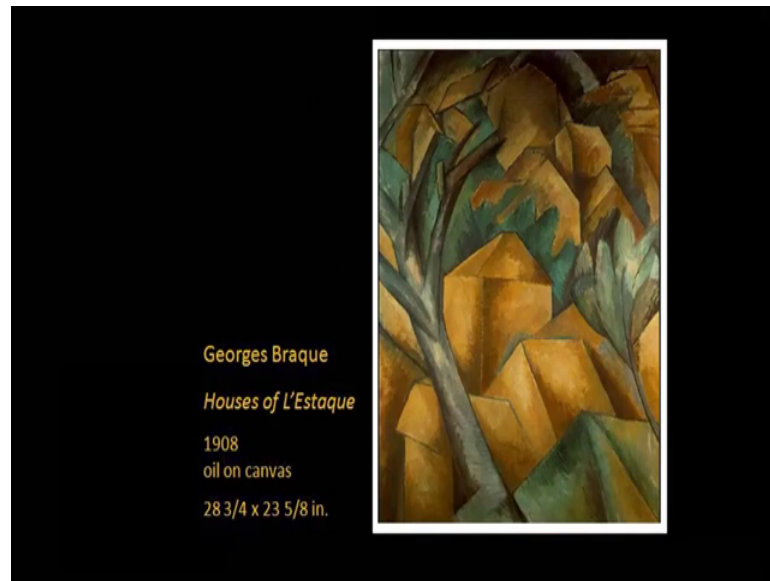
So, multiple perspectives to show an object from multiple points of view, and also to fragment to create fragments from a single object, these are some of the significant and salient features of cubist work. And the reference to a real human being or a real object or a real space is only marginal.

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This is what we need to take care of. So, Braque one Braque used like Picassos (Refer Time: 12:19) in this cubist movement. Even when he also when he starts his cubist painting in the beginning he is also having a very strong reference to a readable legible image.

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But like Picasso in barques paintings also these references are going to disappear very soon and what we will be left with is abstract forms, cubist forms, angular shapes and the flatness of the surface, lack of any pictorial depth in the painting like Picasso Braque also picks up.

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Ordinary subject matters in fact, very simple subject matters like a fruit bowl, full of fruits or a small little landscape or a man or a women or a human being or a human

figure, but again for them it is only a pretext an opportunity a situation to experiment with their cubists language.

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So, cubism as a movement is an idea which is based heavily on the assumption that in painting and sculpture we can create an alternative language. It is not necessary that a painting or a sculpture has to be a representation or imitation of nature, it can create its own language of representation where the final image may not look like the original object at all, yet it is a justified piece of art work.

So, the titles in the cubist paintings of course, help us to get an entry into the painting, but in order to enjoy cubist paintings, we need to forget the title very soon and enjoy the creative process in which a particular painting cubist painting or a cubist sculpture has been found.

So, we have seen this painting before, we are looking at it once again though in this painting the references are pretty clear than many other paintings by either Braque or Picasso, but it would be a good exercise on our part to try to forget this recognisable elements and get in to the what we call the abstracts structure of the painting, where the realistic references will play a minimum or no role and what we are suppose to enjoy is it is abstract construction. And this is what cubists paintings or sculptures also expect us the viewers to do.

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In fact, which is often said that cubist works or a challenge to our cognitive order, because our cognitive order is programmed in a way which makes it difficult for us at least in the beginning to enjoy a cubist painting or sculpture. In fact, for Picasso and Braque too it was getting slightly difficult, because if it was getting too abstract even for them after a few years.

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So, after 1912 both Picasso and Braque thought of bringing in some references some visible clues in their paintings.

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Synthetic Cubism

In 1912 Braque and Picasso realized that Analytical Cubism was becoming more and more abstract and the visual interaction with painting was becoming increasingly difficult for the viewers.

Adopted a new approach now known as Synthetic Cubism.

The most important aspect of this development was the introduction of collage.

Instead of breaking down their objects into facets and reconstructing them, they started with a set of ready made fragments –wallpapers, fake chair caning, newspapers with patches of paint which they built up or synthesized into more concrete images.

So, what we see from 1912 is another phase within cubism. If the first face that is from 1907 to 1911 can be called analytic cubism, where the painters and sculptures were mostly analyzing a form and breaking down the forms in fragments, and rearranging the forms once again in a different order then the second face can be called synthetic cubism; when Braque and Picasso both realised that analytical cubism was becoming more and more abstract and the visual interaction with painting was becoming increasingly difficult for the viewers.

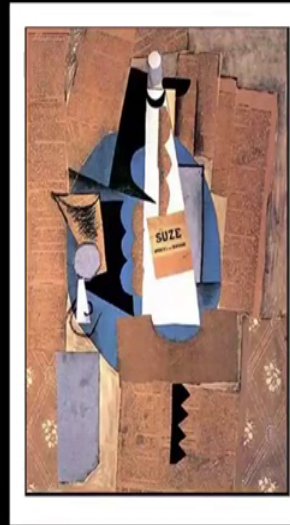
So, they were certainly thinking about the reception of their art, and both these artists adopted a new approach now known as synthetic cubism. The most important aspect of this development was introduction of collage, not that collage was unknown till then, but until Picasso and Braque use collage in their work, collage was never considered as a serious medium for a serious work of art.

So, instead of breaking down their objects into facets and reconstructing them, they started with a set of readymade fragments; wallpapers, fake chair caning, newspapers with patches of paint which they built up or synthesized into more concrete images.

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Medium of collage allowed a spatial relationships without resorting to the use of conventional perspective

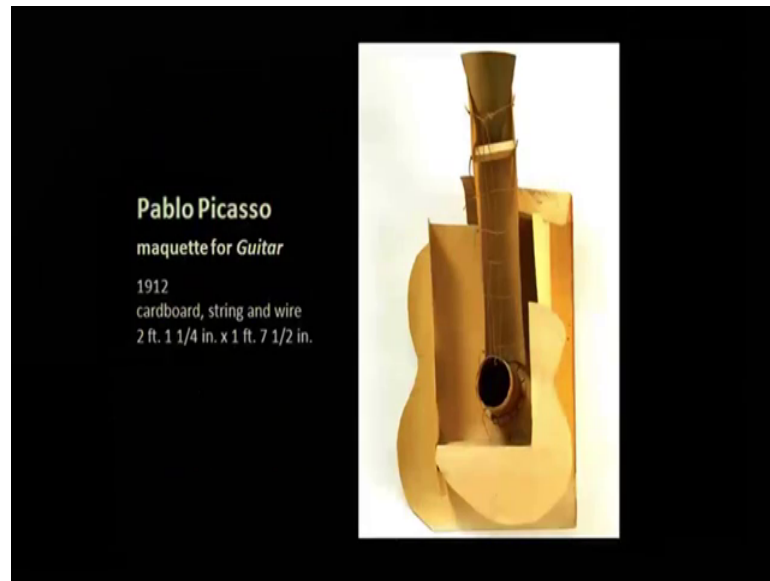
As observed in the collage the glass drawn on top of a piece of pasted newspaper could be understood as a glass actually standing on a paper placed beside a stack of newspapers without recourse to a realistic perspective.



So, now we shall look at a few examples from this second face of cubism called synthetic cubism. The medium of collage certainly allowed a spatial relationships without resorting to the use of conventional perspective, the medium of collage also allowed the artists to use most non conventional and surprising elements visual elements like a piece of news paper or a magazine cutting or an object pasted on the canvas. So, in the sense it changed also the notion of painting, not only the language of painting, but also the notion of painting. Because until then in a painting viewers always expected a painted image, but now viewers can see that a painting may also have pasted elements. So, collage gets elevated collage assumes a dignified status in the hands of Picasso and Braque.

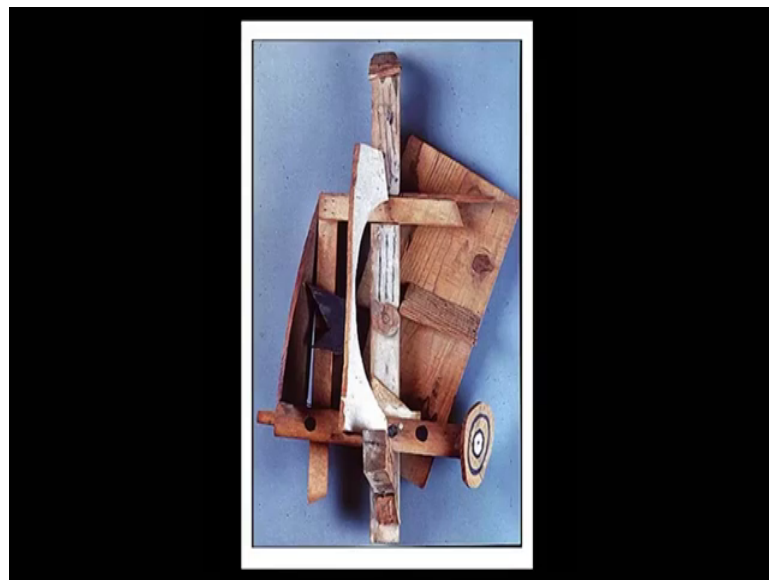
So, the pasted news paper and also the juxtaposition of a newspaper piece exactly beside something else with a brown paper and I think this collage also allowed both this artists to introduce textual materials as a part of their painting.

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This is very interesting because the movement there is a text because text is something immediately legible, the viewer gets tempted to read the text which perhaps allows her or him to withdrawn in to the language of the painting.

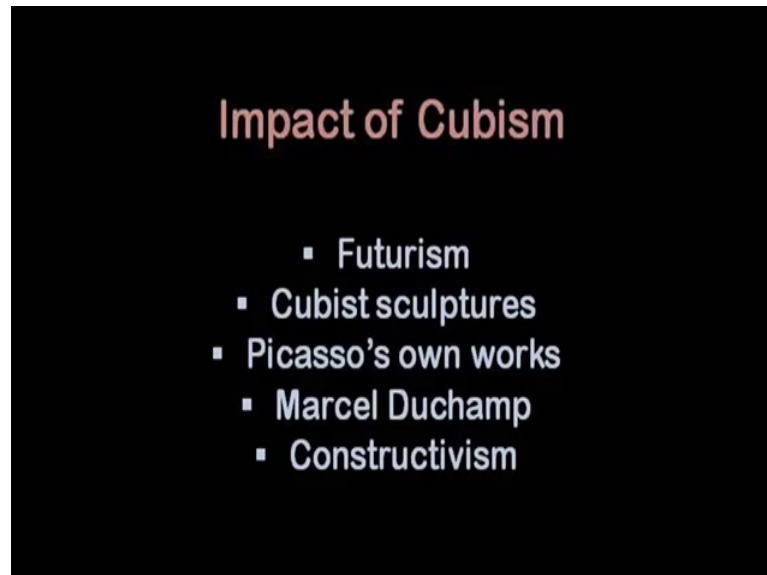
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So, introduction of textual materials, as a part of their painting also started from cubism and later on and particularly in the contemporary art scenario, we see a lot of artists across the world are using text and textual materials is a part of their art work. The legacy can be traced back to cubism, now cubism or cubist approach also allowed the

artists not only Picasso and Braque, but other artists as well to imagine some cubist sculptures. Not only that they imagined only they actually executed cubist sculptures.

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Where once again like paintings and sculptures would refuse to be recognised immediately with reference to any one particular object.

But being a three dimensional thing as you keep looking at this sculpture and as you keep moving around this sculpture not only that you begin to recognise the references embedded in this sculpture, but also you became to enjoy the method of construction. And this is what exactly cubism and many other art movements in twentieth century tried to tell us.

That you are looking at a work of art not simply to recognise or identify the object, but also and perhaps sometimes only to enjoy the process of constructive a work of art. Now with regard to the impact of cubism, many later art movements like futurism and of cubist sculptures Picassos own works Marcel Duchamp constructivism and many other individual artists I am got highly inspired by the cubist notion of space, colour, three dimensionality, fragmentation and the linguistic experimentations. So, though the movement as cubism might have come to an end around 1916 and 17, but the impact remained and it left cubism left a very very strong impact on the succeeding generations of artists and art movements.

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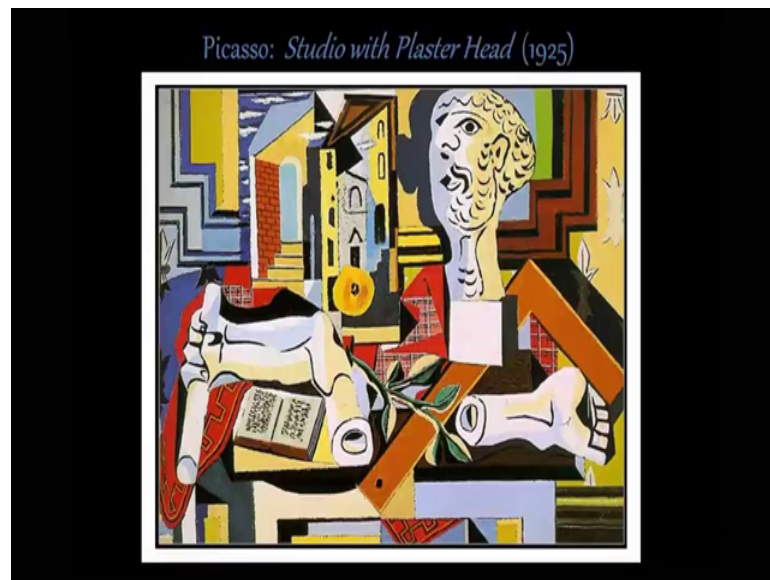
Now, let us look at a few key works by Picasso now you look at Picassos sculptures though Picasso made this sculptures likely later after the cubist movement, but the foundation of this sculptures they looked in the appearance of this sculptures, the construction of this sculptures are clearly strong kind of reflection of Picassos own cubist leading or for that matter look at this sculptures.

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It is not only fragmentations; it is also about rearrangement of the individual forms, independent forms, parts of a form into something else.

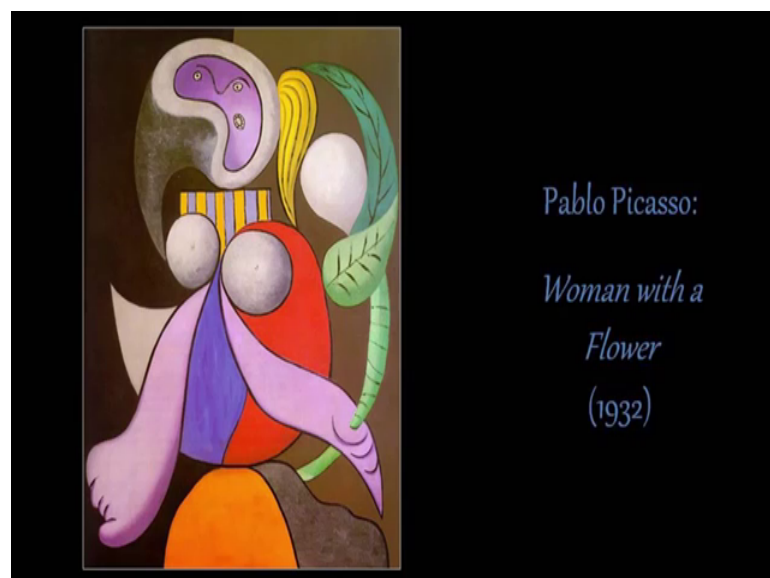
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And it is this rearrangement that later much later even in 1925 allows Picasso to come up with this kind of fascinating compositions.

They look absolutely in order yet there is a huge amount of rearrangement, in a with a cubist attitude which something that we have never seen before.

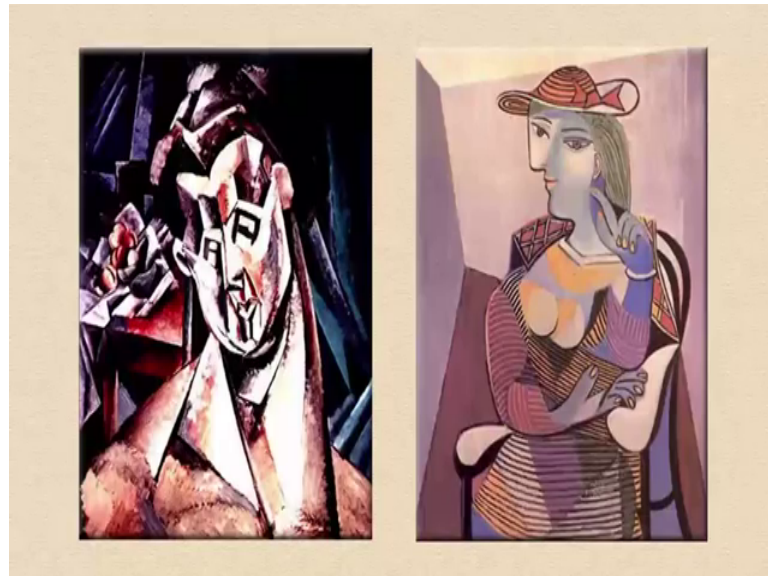
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Now, even when Picasso is approaching a single form, like you seen this painting called women with a flower in 1932, vaguely there is a reference there is a trace of a figure of a women or maybe even a flower, but what eventually appears a stage in the painting is

neither the women nor the flower, but a peculiar arrangement and a configuration of shapes and colours and patterns.

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So, Picasso goes on extending the idea of cubism in his own works for a long period of time till the end of his carrier.

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Like when you look at these kinds of paintings, though these paintings were never a part of the main cubist movement, but these paintings evidently carry a strong impression of cubism. If you look at the fragments if you look at the rearrangement of the forms, if you

also look at the element of abstraction in this paintings cubism or the idea of cubism is clearly visible in this paintings.

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Picasso's favourite subjects were musical instruments, still life objects and his own friends. He worked for sometime in a style using flat colours and simplified forms all this is true, but he could and. In fact, because of throughout his carrier changed his style again and again. No one artists has ever changed his styles as much as Picasso did though out his carrier.

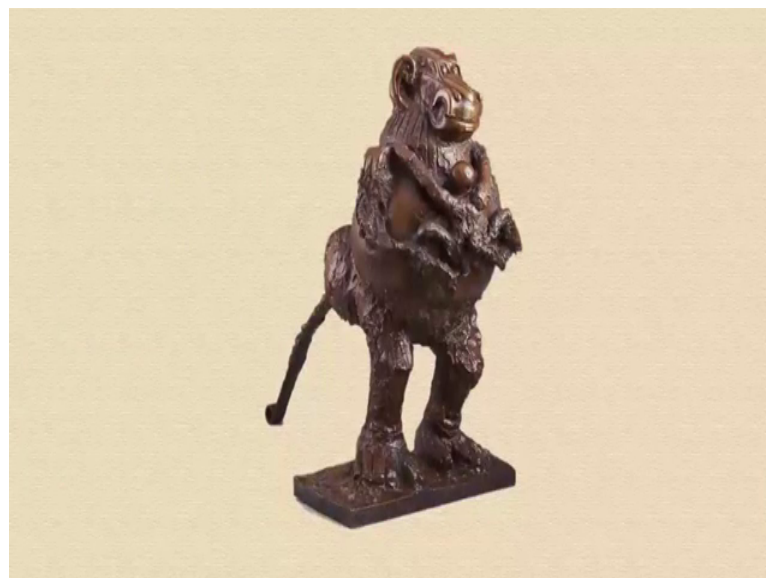
But despite all these changes stylistic changed that Picasso went though in his own work, the impact and the presence of cubism remade as a very strong element though out his life.

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To the extent that even when he was making small little objects or very simple paintings or reconfiguring a very common object or a figure like a hen like a cock or head of a women and all that, everywhere you see that Picasso is very intelligently using if not cubist language, but the possibilities of using cubist elements within a work of art. So, Picasso himself was inspired by the experimental freedom of cubism, and Picasso went on to create a magnificent range of art works with a playfulness and skill never seen before.

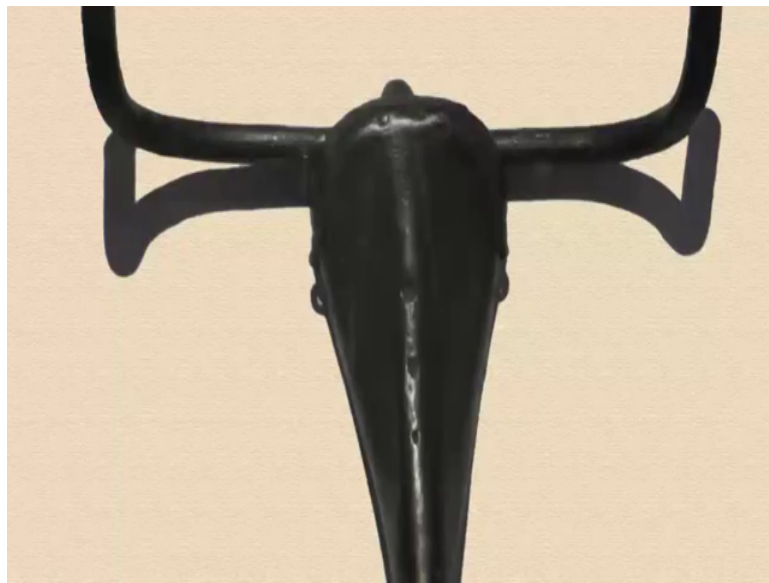
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In fact, when you look at some of his very interesting sculptures like this, they are playful yes true, but at the same time these sculpture artist (Refer Time: 27:11) to his extremely intelligent way of handling different mediums and objects.

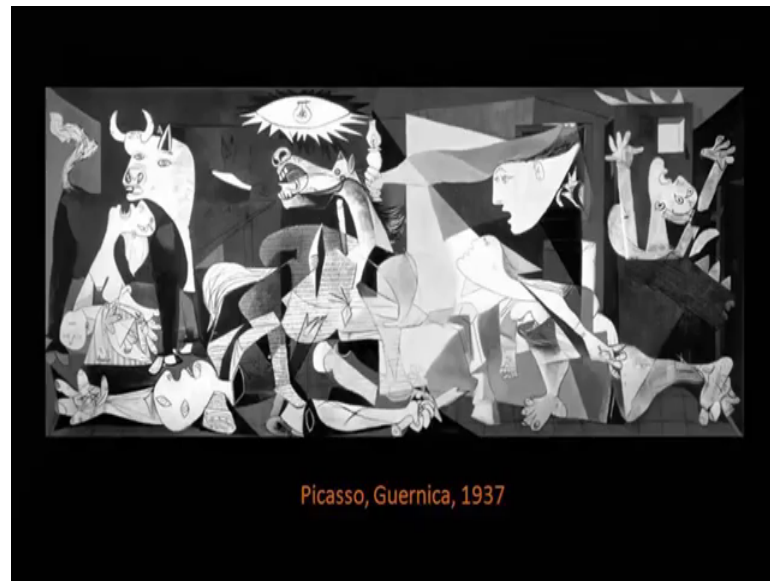
Otherwise no other artist would have even imagined to use a toy motor car, as the head and face official pansy or for that a matter. To use a bicycle seat and the handle bar and reorganised them in a way that they look like the head of a bull.

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Now we think that even this playfulness this quality of playfulness that is evident in many of the works including sculptures and paintings by Picasso is directly or indirectly a by product of cubism.

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To the extent that when in 1937 Picasso painted his famous Guernica as a response to the bombardment and the very very brutal kind of incident that happened in Guernica in 1937 there is a Spanish fascist rulers, they bombarded a small little place in Guernica.

So, this was Picassos response, he reacted to that brutality and, but the way he expressed the brutality and anguish and violence in this painting, he did not follow either any realistic or representational method. He rather followed a cubist methodology to express the violence the brutality and the tragedy of the most the human cremated out to innocent people by a very powerful fascist government.

So, cubism did have a long impact not only on the history of modern art, but also on the individual artists like Picasso himself.

Thank you.