

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)

Course Title

Visual Perception and Art: A survey across the cultures.

Lecture - 17

Breakthrough in Visual Perception

by

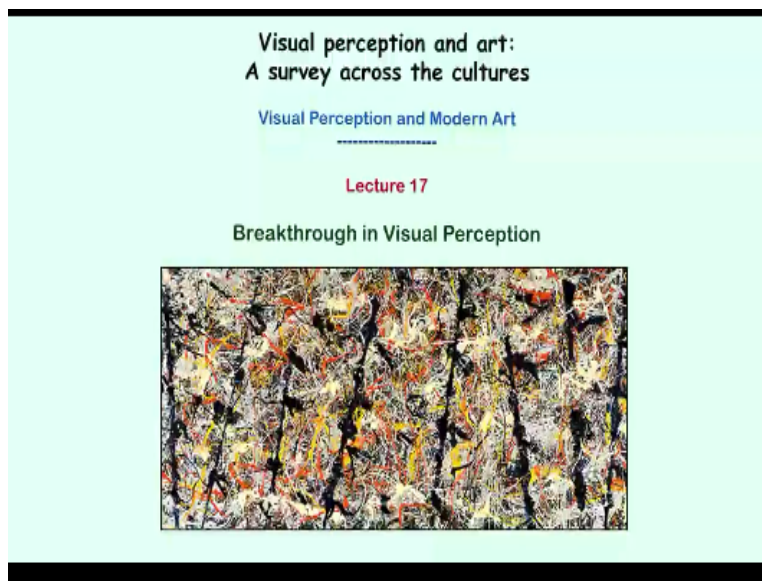
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Visva-Bharati

Hello viewers, welcome to my online course on visual perception and art: A survey across the cultures.

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This is the 17th lecture and in this lecture we will discuss in surfing major breakthrough in visual perception that was happen in the history of modern western arts.

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As I told you in the last class that for quite some time, in the beginning of modern western art, when we look at the painting by Van Gogh and Turner, or Manet. In spite of the fact that their methods of depiction since drastically and see obviously pose certain challenges to our all mimetic visual perception, yet they were all working within the orbit of a normal visual representation.

In 1907 onwards we witness the emergence of a very radical art movement called cubism. Spurred on by the famous artist Picasso and his artist friend Georges Braque, now what happens with the emergence of cubism was that though represent presents and was in issue then or two, but it is not a very serious fool more than that it was the method of addressing a certain object. In a sense cubism was more conceptual than visual.

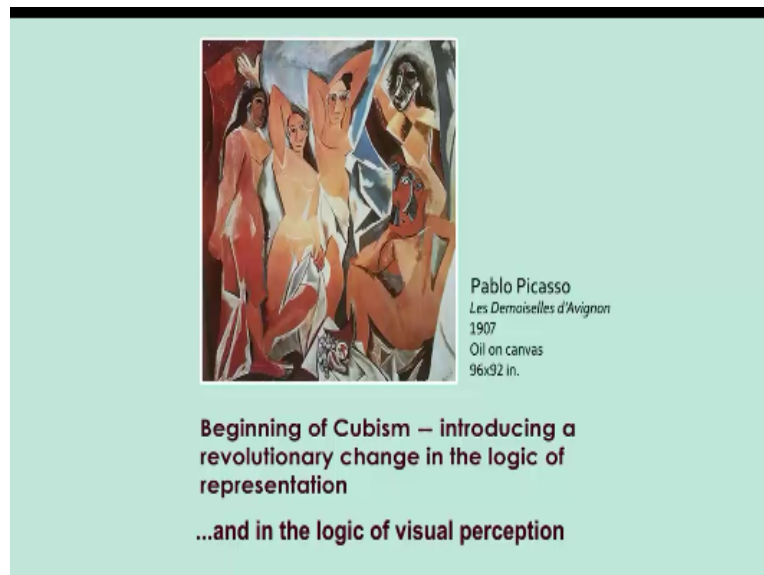
Yet cubist painters like Picasso Braque and others they certainly with lot of paintings and related Picasso also did certain by the fluke, this the sculptures and in all these painting which has— which come under the larger category of cubism, then more or less try to depict not only what we see but also what we know. So they introduce the element of knowledge within the preview of visual representation.

Now you may ask does not that happen also in a visual perception and in when we perceive something visually do not think that what we see is also largely informed by what we know exactly in other words the whole tradition of visual perception across the globe. Varies primarily because the context and not to save. Because visual perception has we have been repeatedly telling that is not a method simple biological filament.

Because visual perception is formed it is firm perception. It has its own knowledge visual perception may also have its own memory, it has its habit, it has its own prior experiences. Now this what exactly cubist artist like because in Brock at drawing to take advantage off. This fact that visual perception has its knowledge visual perception is not only about the victim realistic manner.

We can in fact fragment objects in to various small little fragment we can see an object as it is but has it is known to us things like this.

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Now 1907 when Picasso came up with this painting called *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O)*, this was known as the beginning of cubism introducing a revolution we change in the logic of representation as well as a revolution we change in the logic of visual perception.

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Picasso, LES DEMOISELLES D' AVIGNON (1907)

When we look at the painting by Picasso, Les Demoiselles D Avignon, what is happening here is that do the intension is divinely representation but the he also brings in factors like what happens to an object when they look at it not from one angle but from several angles at the same time. This can be understood as simultaneity of we mean. To simultaneity is way is not very possible in the normal course of visual perception.

Because in our daily life in our real life pursue a thing visually only where we looking at scenery or an object or a figure or anything you want particular angle. We usually do not look we cannot actually do not look at any object from multiple angles at the same time. So this is what is purse cubbies painter is particularly Picasso Brock, where trying to introduce. What happen finally in the painting to the forms which have been look at form multiple points of views simultaneously.

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Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque

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

Now this is something that is observed in real life, but it is possible in the pictorial life. It is possible in the painting. It is possible in the sculpture, so Picasso and Braque together they were trying to introduce an idea, an experience which is actual possible in conceptually but may not be possible in real life when we experience the visual world in terms of a normal visual perception.

And in order to in order to calculation, this new notion of painting with cubism as its fundamental theory Picasso and Braque they emphasize flat, two dimensional surface and they reject out rightly any presents of perspective, chiaroscuro.

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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

In other words both Picasso and Brock discarded that this presents of light and shade the creating a volume of presence of any sense of that so that wanted to discard perspective and things like that they emphasize more on the geometric forms without any realistic details and cubism really speaking try to refutes art as the imitation of nature. When art tries to imitate nature, it is called mimetic art.

We have discussed before cubism refutes to be a mimetic art. Hence it refutes the whole idea of art as the imitation of the nature. Cubism is conceived rather than perceive reality. And this makes it really really very problematic in the context form the visual perception. In fact when cubism initially criticized heavily and why arthritics that were outraged by this new form of painting which actually did not match with the way would actually see the real life in real timing. They were the different outrage and hence they had this problem cubism.

That cubism not only was a kind of failing in other words they will not satisfy the expectation of a visual perception with cubism has got nothing to do with the conceive reality. In fact cubism had something to do with the conceive reality rather than a perceive reality. And that is why many artist say many artistries say that cubism is all about a conceive visualization of form rather than a visualization of form.

So but the problem is looking at a cubbies paint thing you cannot denied the fact that actually looking at a cubbies painting. I am not simply talking about cubism and actually showing you of you cubbies painting. So the act of looking is always that even if the cubbies paintings can to this

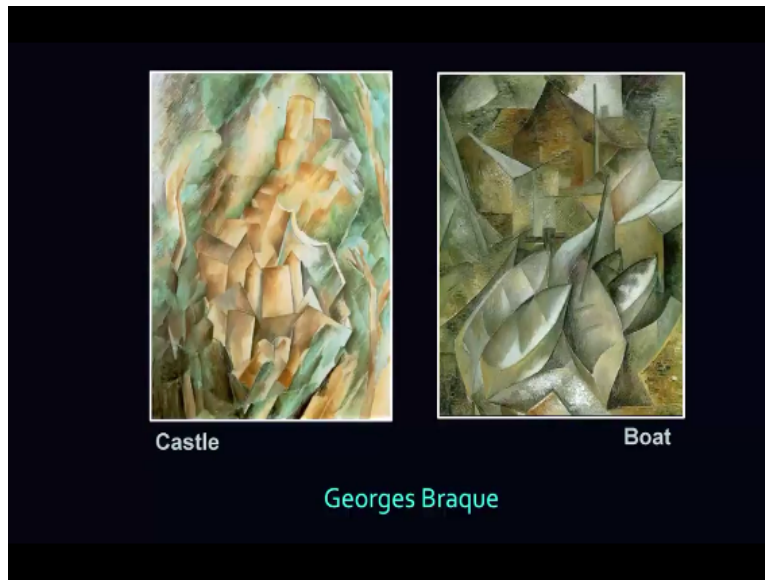
discard the perceptual reality. Even if they tend to discard the visual perception they cannot really deny this fact that ultimately a cubist painting has to be looked at.

Ultimately a cubist sculpture has to be looked at so here is a paradox in cubism. And it is very interesting of visual perception. That when we encountered a cubist work for example you are looking at to doubt about that but it is not only looking a visual perception that is going to help you to understand a cubist painting. So it is interesting that the reason amount of looking that is going into it.

Because without looking you would not be able to see what a cubist painting is doing in the paintings and the other hand just visually looking is not enough cubist painting is not about any convincing realism. Which is not even about in any alternative realism? It is about how we conceive an object through not only looking but also through knowing. And that is one of the reasons why they emphasize more on the geometric forms.

And they also emphasize that your presentation of an object. For a depiction of an object becomes really very acceptable only when you are able to show it from multiple points of view simultaneously.

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So let us look at a few examples of cubist paintings, painted by Braque and Picasso though they did give titles of castles to the paintings for example the left one is called castle and the right one is called boat. And in fact we look at this painting carefully you might also spot some forms, some rudimentary forms of boat and castle in the paintings. But at the same time you immediately realize that these paintings are actually not about either boats or castle.

It is just a starting point for the cubist painters, but they move on to a peculiar kind of painting where representation takes a back seat and reconstruction of a concept visually becomes more important from them.

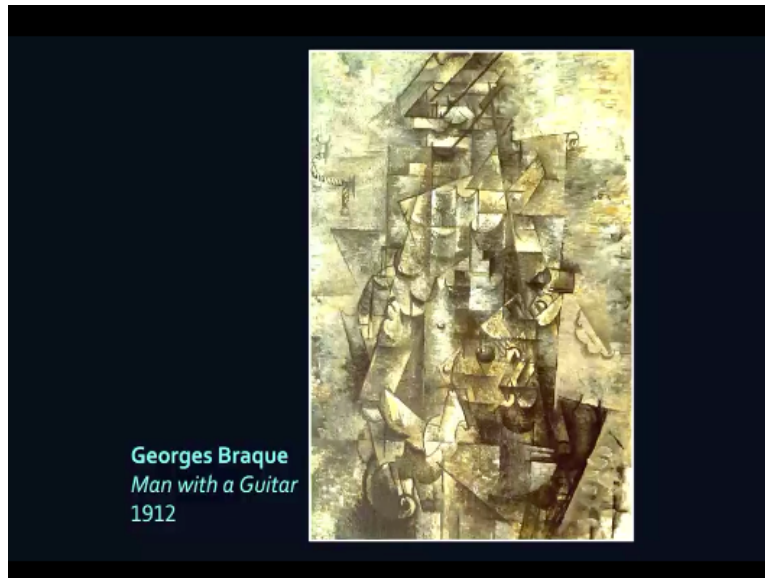
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Now you look at this painting for that matter of course that is a title called fruit wall of fruit wall table cloth and the title is good enough to suggest that what is objects are all about even if we do not to do that title still. It is not difficult for us to identify so there is an element of identification here, which is not difficult. But at the same time when we look at space the special organization in the painting.

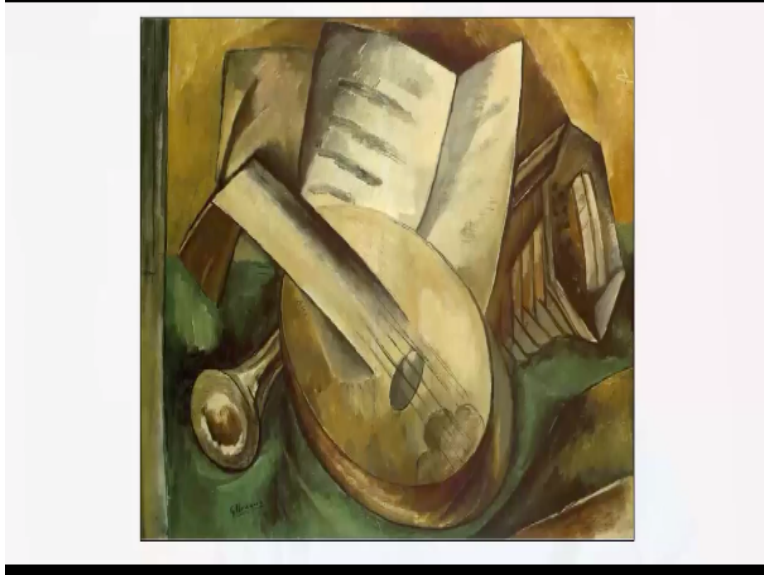
When you look at the back ground object relationships then you begin to have a feeling that probably this painting and in the other painting of cubism depiction of object is not their concern. Even the method of painting like the way turner painted or Van cog painted is not there also concerned. Their concern is something else and that is more to do the pictorial reconstruction of a conceive reality.

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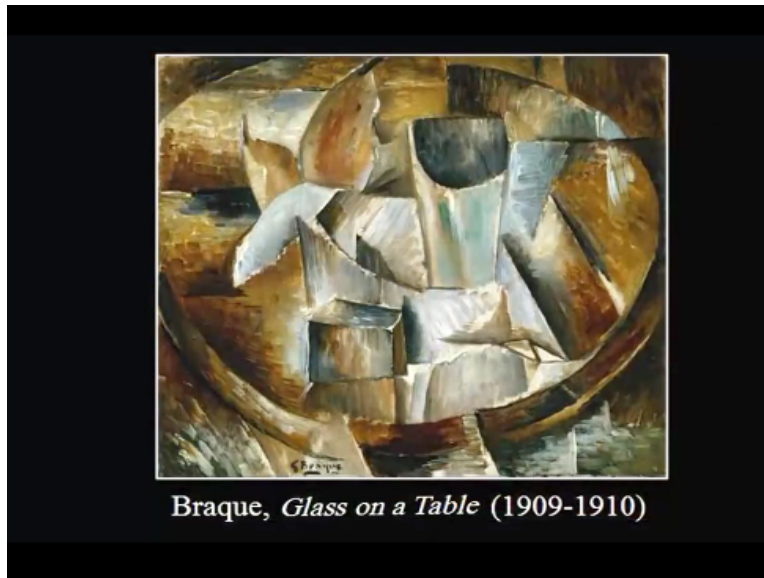
A reality we have conceive not just by looking but also by starting from different angles by observing and simultaneously if possible or conceptually from different angles, different perceptive. And then you forget about representation and you begin a process of reconstruction on the canvas of paper.

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So this painting Picasso called man and the guitar or for that method this painting by George Braque and I mean there are the elements and objects. Because these painting are not completely obstruct. In that what happens to a visual perception when we look at abstract painting is a subject that will be dealt subsequently in the following lectures.

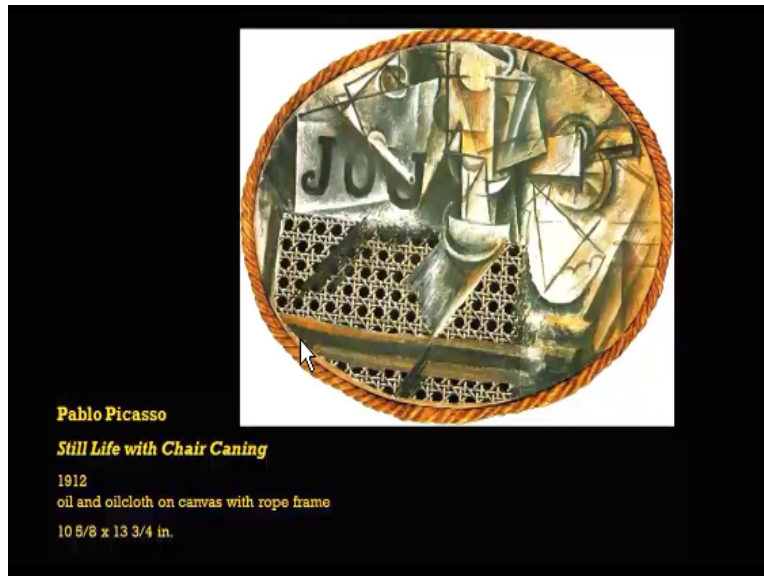
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But as if now we are looking a certain major breakthrough in visual perception form are by the artist of the most radical moments of modern art. For example of cubism so when Braque paints this painting and titles it as glass on the table. So because there is a title and on mind follows that title then we can to see may a glass and also a circular table and all that but very soon this identity stop and make any sense to us.

In fact we soon find out that okay. Might be at glass is true that the glass might be kept in the circular of table and so. What is the painting about the glass on the table of course not? Is about the fragments, is about the geometrical angles and the shapes. Which is about the space to be shown? Which is about a most non realistic reconstruction of a space? Do not the reason element of contact between the pictorial space and the real object in real life. And for that contact is very thin vey minimum and sometimes it is in difficult also.

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Pablo Picasso

Still Life with Chair Caning

1912

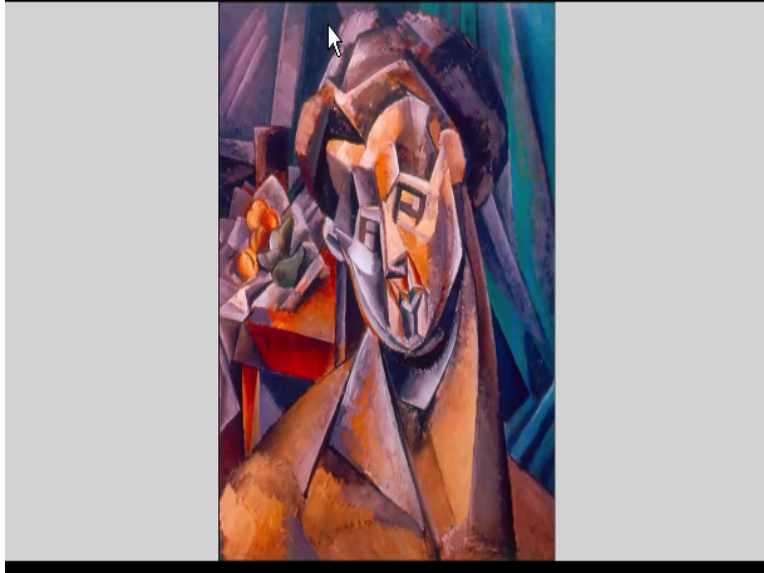
oil and oilcloth on canvas with rope frame

10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in.

So in fact it becomes in more difficult for a visual perception to make a sense of it, when there is a title. Because the moment to read the title you begin to expect on you feast you brain begins to expect what you read in the title in the painting. And it is that expectation that is a completely challenge by this kind of painting. So when Picasso has the painting ready in 1912 and it is called still life with Chair Caning okay.

To some extent you may identify and our knowledge of visual perception and our experiences definitely help along that direction but then after a while we understand this very well that the simple visual perception not enough.

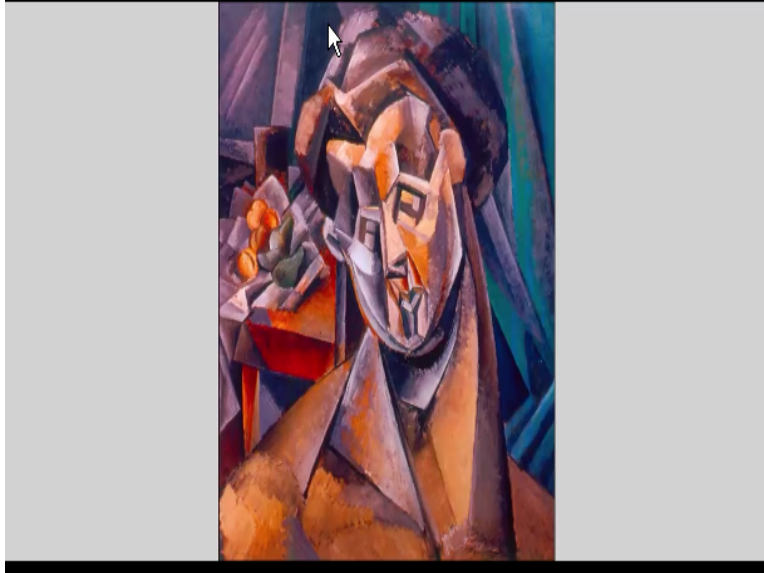
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We need to approach this painting with the different philosophical and conceptual and understanding. In other words we need to know what we listen is all about and what the purpose was. So in this painting for us today for familiar with various kindisations is in painting I just not entirely difficult to figure out that okay it is looks like a face of a man, when you looks like that okay?

He is wearing a coat and behind him it seems there is table and maybe a g\few fruits lying on the table. But why the painter has to show everything in fragment. Why it seems that all the objects where a broken apart and now the painter is trying to re address those book in parts in a given shape in a given shapes.

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And this makes cubist painting very very curious. Particularly follow visual perception to make any sense.. and Braque also has made this kind of paintings where the figures are more identifiable but even in this paintings like this one called large viewed by George Braque painted in 1908. That tendency is to move towards a cubist statement.

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An then of course we have this kind of painting is by Picasso where the three musicians are shown in a way that we will never see them. They have fragmented their bodies, they are dismantled. They have been cut into various shapes, they have been formed into geometry. So it is possible that the initial impulse came from this idea and this subject matter of three musicians.

But ultimately Picasso what Picasso was exploring was not the subject matter, but the possible transformation of subject matter into geometry into shapes into fragments. In other words he was creating a cubist reality out of a very very simple subject matter like three musicians.

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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.

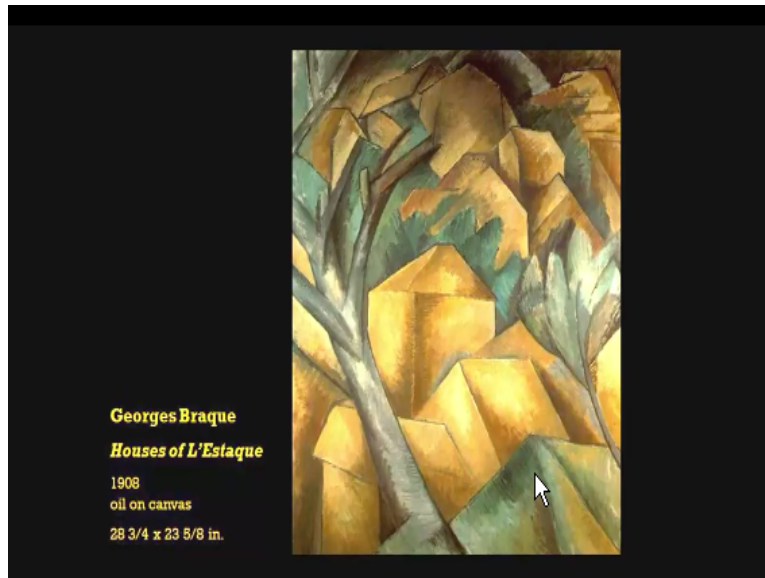


Our visual perception got even more complicated in the way of cubism, when cubist artists we can using collage as a very useful medium for their project. The medium of collage allow a special relationship without resorting to the use of conventional perspective. So when you paint either you go for a conventional perspective system one in simply try to do something abstract and its discarding the conventional perspective.

But in collage what happens because you are using real materials because you are using news paper cuttings and your wasting the other and the top of the other. So what is happening is that your creating not only the realistic space but you creating that space which can be perceive visually. So visual perception gets once again challenge that how to make sense of this kind of spaces which is real but at the same time not real.

Which is there with the real material? But at the same time not there. So as observe in the collage then the glass drawn on a top of a wasted news paper here could be understood as have lost actually standing on a paper place beside the stack of news papers without reports to a realistic prospect.

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And George Braque paints and landscape in cubism method, but now he has got some information and some knowledge of cubism. We know that again for him and at least for this painting the landscape was merely a text. What he was trying to do here is to explore this idea of reorganization of pictorial space using certain cubist methods and rely heavily on geometric shapes and forms.

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At home that is in India, we have this very well known artist belonging to the famous Tagore family in Calcutta called Rabindranath Tagore. Who followed this cubist method of creating various layers of spaces but for Rabindranath he is in became a very handy technique to create the most mysterious atmosphere of light and shade. Now why I am using this example simply because one that a particular modern language can have across cultural migration.

And secondly it can be used for a completely in different purpose. The Rabindranath Tagore used cubism must not actually the way it was confidentially by Picasso or Braque.

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- The paintings of the Fauves were made by seemingly wild brush strokes and strident colors, while they had a high degree of simplification and abstraction. It appears to be random in application but in reality Fauvism emerged as a careful yet intuitive method of color juxtaposition – to a large extent overruling the representational logic of colour!

Henri Matisse's *Portrait of Madame Matisse*



Then of course we have Matisse whose painting and particularly this painting will saw in the last lecture and he spheres the movement called fauvism where color dominated the visual perception.

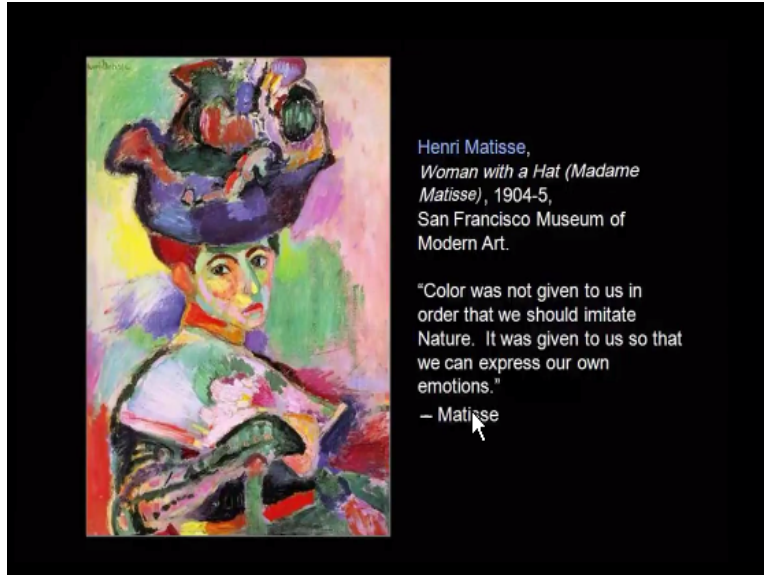
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The Fauves represented the first break with the artistic traditions of the past. The movement's emphasis on formal values and expressive use of colour, line, and brushwork helped liberate painting from the representational expectations that had dominated Western art since the Renaissance. Fauvism was the first explosive 20th-century art movement.

Now in real life we know the color is may not a more often than it is not the most dominating feature. We have to at least a visual perception has to also deal with space shapes figuration into relationship between various objects and that kind, and then we are visual perception responds to color. But when fauves painter the fauvism is a movement try to represent the visual reality in terms of color. When the colors became the building blocks.

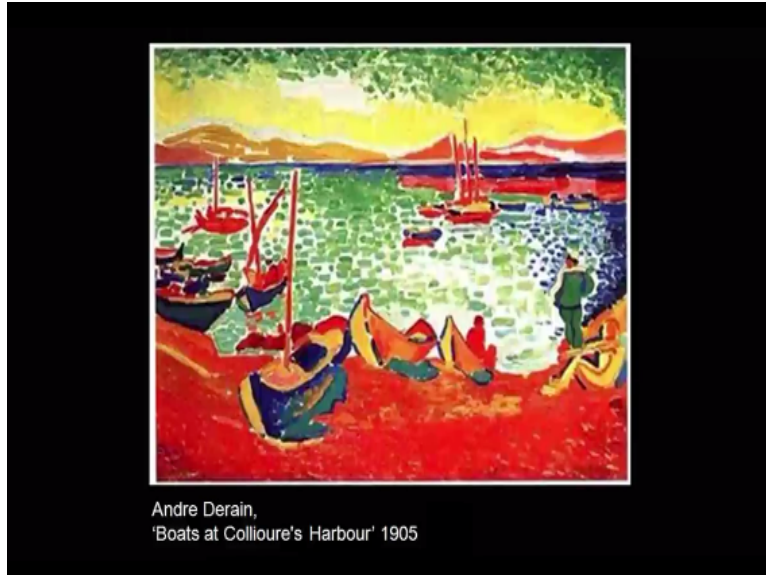
Then what happens to the visual perception, how we deal with this kind of paintings and these are is our visual experience in a real life.

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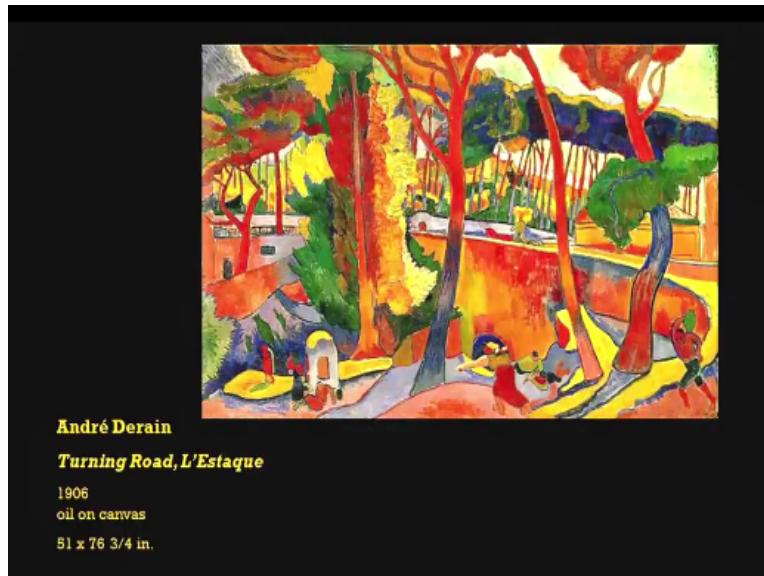
Again our visual perception then needs to adjust. Next to read it differently otherwise on might in the thinking that most of the figures painted by Matisse, they always got their faces colored or painted. It is not cannot read these colors surfaces on the body or on the paint on the face in the Matisse painting in the realistic terms. It is something that he is emphasizing in pictorial terms. Which our brain does not respond to immediately.

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But when we know when we see look at fauves paintings mode not only Fauves painted by Matisse but also Fauves paintings painted by Andre Derain and Lavin and others.

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Then we slowly realize that it is a different notion of painting was the building block of a painting is not really line and space but it is color. Through color you are trying to look at the world. I actually I would like to suggest that why do not you once twice try to do this. Go out look at the wall, look out the surrounding in terms of color come back to your room and try to imagine what you have observed with the help of color is not with the help of shades or forms or identity with the help of color.

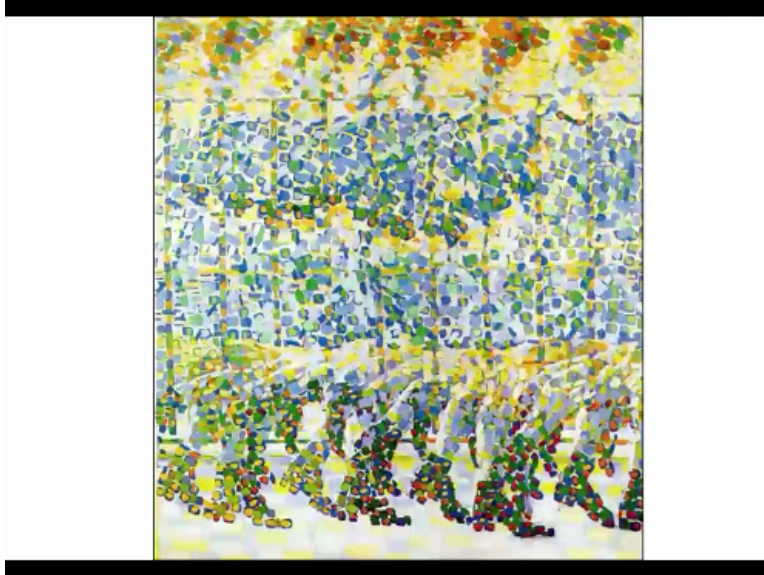
Colors of the dress, colors of the buildings, colors of the objects. How often we remember visually a house or interior or a gathering or a locale or any place in terms of color we remember objects in terms of color. We can recall a person by remembering okay, he wore a blue shirt that in while lecturing across. But how many of us remembering the entire location and entire space and entire visual experience in terms of color. Usually we do not some of you might be but initially we do not.

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And this Fauves painter exactly this is what they were trying to do. And then we also have movement in the early morning western art call feature is movement and there we have this fantastic painter called Giacomo Balla.

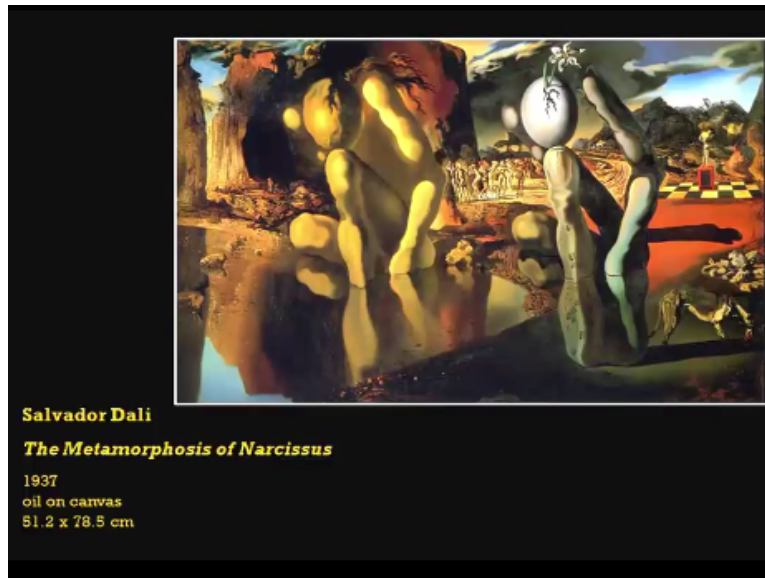
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Who was trying to capture the movements of paths of movements of onto movements of machines in painting and there by not only using the possibility of abstraction but also introducing different challenge to a visual perception. For example of this one, because this not how may actually see a moving person. If it this particular painting about one single person moving across they would either in real life, either seen a feel of a sense of movement and wherever we are looking at that person, we will see one person on move.

But if a painter like here tries to show that entire movement across the tan verse. Then he has to pay the same figure several times, because the same figure was passing through all these point.

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Now scientifically it is true probably our visual perception subconsciously may be also responding to this. But consciously this does not happen Fauvism makes it happen to overrides. Similarly and on a different noted, at the same time cubbies I am sorry so realist painter they were also making a visual reality possible for us which is otherwise is firmly observed. Th is not a way we can see thing in real life.

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These are scenes derived from our dream life, not the waking life. These are the scenes and even and visual configuration that we might observe in our imagination in our subconscious in our dreams. But certainly not in real life but look at this painting by Galley and you can actually figure out how continuously our visual perception is adjusting to find out of the presence of different forms at the same time.

We do one simple games like whether it is rabbit or a dark thinks like that, once it is black white drawings available now on a reasonable points. But this is a complex painting. Immediately it is not possible at once to fine to notice the diary is dog, at the same time there is a fruit bowl and the both occupy the same space and same form but when we became to know cut that it clearly suggest that our visual experiences do not unfold in one register.

Our visual experiences even in the waking life of course in our dream life are a conscious life they unfold simultaneously at several register.

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And it is the simultaneously of visual that you may to extremely observe excretion of this kind.

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On very very accepts simultaneity of vision and very Gory and makeable and a kind of imagination in a dream as it is seen in this painting.

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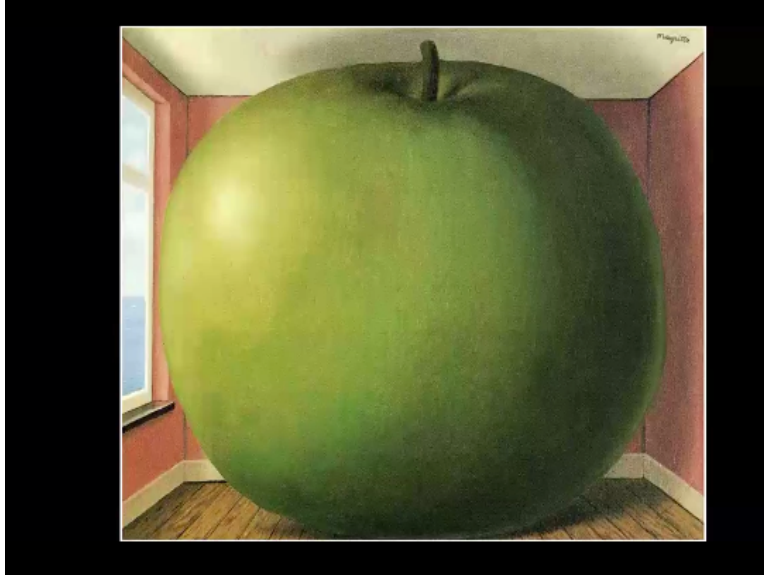


In this painting by another very famous realist painter called René Magritte he just makes things very accepted and very impossible by altering the scale and space relationships. So when you keep a comb on your cot or bed the scale that you expect then to relate with each other is not exactly the way shown here. Because how do we interpret. If the comb scale of the comb is considered to be the real scale then the cot is too small.

If the Almeria with the mirror on the door panels I suppose to be in the right scale. Then the shaving brush top of the Almeria is extremely big. So if you believe in one reality you have to take it for granted then the other object does not belong to that same reality. It is very interesting and very challenging for a visual perception to comprehend that all these objects that share the same space but they do not share the reality.

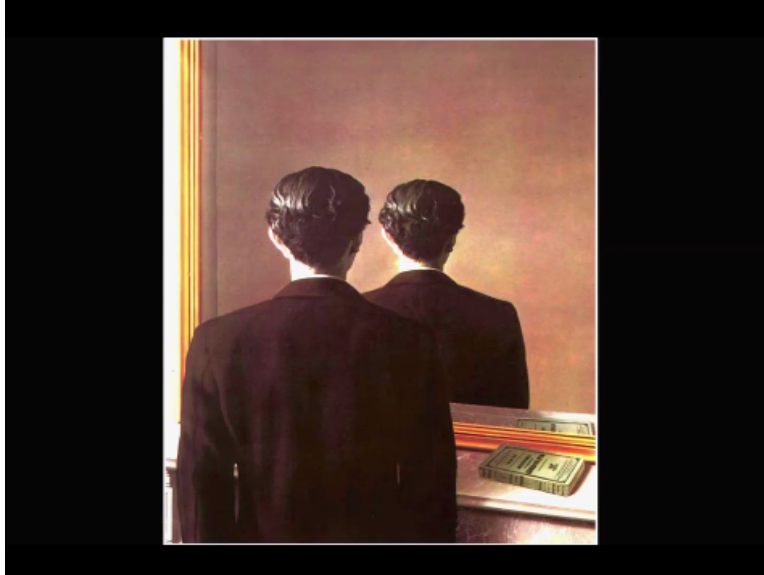
And it is just a contradiction that makes this painting where things are real and at the same time very problematic for our visual perception to understand.

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Of for that method this one, either the fruit is gigantic or if you consider the fruit as something in normal scale then the room in which the fruit is kept was extremely small. So small that it cannot adjust any more.

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Now how does our brain initially of re respond to a painting like this. It is extremely shocking to say the waste. Because you standing front of a mirror, except you accept your face to the scene. But instead what you see is the back of the same person which cannot happen because the this is not the function of need. So in order to play with the visual perception here in this painting when you mark with the alters the function of the mirror itself.

And if at one the mirror begins the function. In a completely observe in a different ways. Our visual perception is bound to that not only the challenged but crazy. Now it is this is a reality, the possibility of this absurdity. That the realist painters were trying to exploring the paintings. And their why challenging the normal, the common notion of visual perception that we shared everything. Thank you.

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