CUBISM

The Cubist art movement developed between 1907 and 1912. Its key concept was that the substance of objects could only be captured on canvas by showing it from multiple points of view simultaneously. It was begun by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso and French artist Georges Braque who were inspired not only by African sculpture, but also by the artist Paul Cézanne who advised that nature should be thought of as cylinders, cones, and spheres. The name “Cubism” came from an art critic who said that Braque reduced everything to geometric forms and cubes.

Braque and Picasso broke their subjects into flat surfaces, or planes, with one or more open edges so that they slid into each other and had no depth. A grayish tan color and other muted colors were applied in small brushstrokes. They painted highlights on these flat planes. Eventually, they began adding elements of relief on their paintings like sand or sawdust and used parts of words, lettering, or musical notes. By 1912, they were also producing collages, or papiers collés, with much more color added. They used found objects such as playing cards, musical scores, newsprint to add to their artwork, and some artists created construction pieces where they cut out and assembled geometric planes to glue on their work. The Cubist group remained active until the 1920s.

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso created The Factory at Horta de Ebro in the summer of 1909. You can see the abstract and cubist forms of the buildings and smokestack. Color added to the forms created highlights. Notice that Picasso added flat planes of color to the background or sky as well as the ground.

Juan Gris

Although a cityscape is recognizable in The Village by Juan Gris, it is clearly a Cubist work. Notice that Gris used elements such as the dots, small, shaped lines, and colored shapes in the work for added interest.

Georges Braque

Bottle and Fishes was created by Georges Braque and clearly shows all of the characteristics of the Cubist style – flat planes, geometric shapes, open edges, short brushstrokes, and muted colors.

Lyonel Feininger

American painter Lyonel Feininger created Sailboat in 1917. Not only were the boats and their sails broken up into many geometric shapes and broken forms, but the sky and water as well. He emphasized movement in the water and rays of light in the sky with color.

Other Notable Cubist Artists

- Robert Delaunay
- Marcel Duchamp
- Robert de la Fresnaye
- Henri Laurens
- Fernand Léger
- Jacques Lipchitz