Collage

Collage is an artistic technique first used in the 20th century, which comprises of gluing paper, photographs, fabric and other items onto paper or canvas. Collage was central to the development of Cubism and, in particular, in the work of Pablo Picasso and George Braque. Braque is said to have invented *papier collé*, a specific form of collage in which paper strips and fragments are pasted onto the drawing or painting. In 1912 the two artists began to introduce paper, cigarette packets, newspapers and other items that suggested everyday life into their canvases; Braque stated that he introduced these items into his work for their ‘materiality.’ Picasso wrote:

‘…the purpose of *papier collé* was to give the idea that different textures can enter into a composition to become reality in the painting that competes with reality in nature.’

The artist would introduce, for example, paper that represented wood panelling for an image of a guitar. This countered the trompe l’oeil effects of painting, with Picasso proposing that it was a ‘displaced object’ that reflected their ‘strange’ world. It can be argued that these fragments reflected the fragmentation of the modern world under capitalism and is closing aligned to the montage technique found in modernist writing, such as that of Walter Benjamin, and modernist photography (Hannah Höch) and film (Dziga Vertov).

Clement Greenberg, argued that, after Cubism, collage was used to ‘shock’; the technique was adopted by the Surrealists and also by artists associated with Dada to create ‘surreal’ ensembles in keeping with the movements’ imagery. However, not all of it was shocking, Dawn Ades suggests that by creating simple, geometric collages Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber could make art that was both ‘anonymous and collective.’ The use of chance further contributed to the eradication of the artist’s hand in these works.

Perhaps one of the most iconic uses of collage in British Modernist art is Richard Hamilton’s *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?* (1956) which clearly shows the modern world through collaging advertising imagery to create a modern-day ‘home’ scene. Here, the connection between capitalism, modernity and collage is not lost.

**Further reading**

Ades, D. (2001) ‘Cubism’ in *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, London: Thames and Hudson, pp.110-137.

Golding, J. (2001) ‘Cubism’ in *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, London: Thames and Hudson, pp.50-78.

Greenberg, C. (1961/1982) ‘Collage’ in Frascina and Harrison (ed) *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, pp.105-108.

Suggested images:

Picasso, Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass, Guitar and Newspaper (1913), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/picasso-bottle-of-vieux-marc-glass-guitar-and-newspaper-t00414>

Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?* (1956), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hamilton-appealing2.jpg>

Jean Arp, *Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged according to the Laws of Chance)* (1917), http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\_learning/jean-hans-arp-untitled-collage-with-squares-arranged-according-to-the-laws-of-chance-1916-17