Braque, Georges (1882-1963)

Georges Braque was a major French modernist painter of the twentieth century, who alongside Pablo Picasso, created and developed the Cubist painting technique. Upon meeting Picasso in 1907, Braque quickly shifted his attention away from the Fauvist techniques and bold, Neo-Impressionist colors of his early years, toward the reduced color palette, the emphasis on geometry and the confrontation with the canvas picture plane of Analytic Cubism. After 1912, Braque and Picasso began to experiment with Synthetic Cubism and the integration of collage into their painting techniques. Braque developed the practice of papier colliés, or collage-like paintings on alternative painting surfaces such as newspaper or wood. The close friendship between Braque and Picasso ended at the start of World War I, during which Braque suffered a traumatic head injury, leaving him in convalescence until 1917. Following the war, Braque reintroduced figures into his paintings; his still-lifes continued to gain popular success among collectors. During his later years, Braque experimented with lithography and printing techniques, and painted the studio he built near Varengeville. His legacy as a prolific, imaginative Cubist painter contributed to the evolution of painting during a crucial moment of modernism. of modernism.

Born in Argenteuil, France, Georges Braque was the son of a second-generation house painter and decorator. He learned the craft of his father and grandfather as an apprentice to the decorator M. Roney. With a growing interest in the fine arts, Braque enrolled in evening courses at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1897 under M. Courchet. Moving to Paris in 1900, Braque, cautious and prudent, continued his craft training as a house painter and decorator, and did not commit himself to painting until finishing his military service in 1902. His rare paintings from 1902-1905 mostly depict seascapes in which Braque explored the Pointillist style. His friendships with artists including Othon Friesz, Raoul Dufy and Francis Picabia, influenced Braque’s investigation of the painting techniques of Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism.

In 1905, Braque visited Fauvist exhibitions, and dramatically altered his paintings to reflect his new interests. The legacy of the Post-Impressionist master Cézanne largely informed Braque’s evolution. Braque enjoyed increasing popularity, including an exhibition at the gallery of friend and dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in 1906; Braque sent seven paintings to the Salon des Independants of 1907, all of which sold. Guillaume Apollinaire, the playwright and novelist, acquainted Braque with Picasso while the latter was painting *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. Braque’s encounter with the painting marked a turning point in his painterly evolution toward Cubism. Braque and Picasso quickly became close friends, spending a lot of time together and their work intertwined in parallel. Braque’s *Large Nude* (1908) is seen as a response to *Demoiselles d’Avignon*, with flattened forms, an extreme reduction of colour, and dramatic brushstrokes.

Braque’s Analytical Cubist paintings (1909-1911) depict figures and still-life compositions, often of musical instruments, from multiple points of view and with various modes of lighting. The space of these paintings does not rely on traditional perspectival recession; they often employ trompe l’oeil representations of familiar objects. As Cubism evolved, Braque and Picasso’s palettes reduced to brown or tan. Louis Vauxcelles referred to Braque as a painter of ‘cubes’ in a review of the Kahnweiler 1908 exhibition of Braque’s landscapes, giving the movement its title which Braque and Picasso did not initially embrace.

Synthetic Cubism further engaged with questions of pictorial field and painting surfaces. In 1911 Braque began working with new media, completing engravings and incorporating collage techniques into his paintings. He developed the technique of papier collé, in which he created a composite surface on which to paint by attaching wood-grain paper or newspaper to canvas or paper. Though he was yet uninterested in introducing found/everyday objects into his works, he began to depart from his monochrome compositions by adding coloured paper to his papier collés.

After his debilitating head injury in 1914, Braque started painting again in 1917. His paintings following the war experimented with scale and format. Braque produced large-scale still-life compositions, and painted on oblong, oval, or diamond canvases. His works mastered the depiction of space without reliance on illusionistic traditions. Braque reintroduced the figure to his paintings in the early 1920s. In his *Canephori* paintings, Braque continued to engage with views and perspectives, painting basket bearers from various standpoints simultaneously. Braque maintained commercial success through the 1920s, selling all of his works exhibited at the 1922 *Salon d’Automne*.

Braque’s focus shifted toward wide interiors in the 1930s. Braque briefly went to Limoges following the German occupation in 1940, but returned to Paris where his work grew austere and somber during World War II. Following the end of the war, Braque began working with colour lithography.

**References and further reading**

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