

MODERN ART  
PRACTICES AND DEBATES

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*Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism*  
*Art between the Wars*

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CHAPTER 1  
'THIS LIBERTY AND THIS ORDER': ART IN FRANCE  
AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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by David Batchelor

*Introduction*

Early in 1926 Alexandre Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* of 1863 was consigned to the basement of the Musée du Luxembourg, together with 180 other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Academic paintings considered 'too space-consuming for their pictorial value' (quoted in C. Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, p.131). Their place in the main galleries of the museum, alongside what remained of the Academic collection belonging to the French state, was to be filled with works by Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh, Degas, Matisse, Bonnard and other artists associated with the Modern Movement. In this way works associated with unofficial and anti-Academic interests, from Impressionism to Fauvism, became visibly absorbed into the pantheon of officially sanctioned art in France.

By admitting non-Academic art into the Luxembourg, the trustees of official art were probably doing little more than symbolically and belatedly recognizing that Academic training and values had become largely irrelevant in the contemporary world, and in the world of contemporary art. They had become irrelevant both culturally and economically, in the culmination of a process that began in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Put briefly, the annual official exhibitions, or Salons, had been displaced from the cultural and economic centre of art by a number of forces, including the development of a substantial network of independent dealers and collectors in Paris. We know (from M. Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors of Modern Painting*) that this market became the main arena within which non-Academic art was displayed, bought and sold. Before and after the First World War this market expanded massively, to the point where there was little need for an artist to submit work to one of the annual Salons if he or she could secure regular, one-person exhibitions in a reputable commercial gallery. By the 1920s, depending on the status of the gallery, such exhibitions had become more likely than the official Salons to generate both income for the artists and critical attention.

But it does not follow that, because there was no significant Academic mainstream (in relation to which independent artists could position themselves in critical opposition), modern art developed freely and without contest and division. On the contrary: if anything the divisions became sharper between the two world wars. The difference is that they were enacted *within* the range of work that is loosely grouped under the umbrella of modern or independent art. The history of this period is, to some extent, a history of interest-groups vying over the status and significance of the recent, and not so recent, history of art; over the meaning of modern art; and over the nature of modern life.

It is important to stress that inquiring into the character and content of such divisions is not merely a matter of sociological detail. It is rather more basic to the questions of meaning in art. For example, in the same way as the character and quality of Édouard

Manet's *Olympia* of 1863 had been established, in part, by its self-conscious differentiation from models of Academic competence embodied in work such as Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*, so we might expect work from the inter-war period to have been engaged in similar processes of playing itself off against more established or competing paradigms of taste and artistic competence. It is in no small part through such a process of association and dissociation that works of art acquire meaning, or that meanings are attached to works of art. The implication here is that a significant aspect of the meaning, or expressive character, of works of art is established by their being placed within a framework of alternatives.

An example might clarify this. The expressive character of a wavy line, such as Figure A, is in itself indeterminate. It seems fairly meaningless to ask, 'does this express order or chaos?' But if it is placed near an irregular zigzag such as Figure B, the same question becomes answerable. We would probably reply that Figure A is 'more like order' than Figure B. If, however, in place of Figure B we introduced a smoother line, Figure C, and asked the same question, we would probably see Figure C as more expressive of order. That is to say, a different context of alternatives will probably alter what we perceive the expressive character to be. So, if Figure A is the conventional way of representing chaos, Figure B will look like overstatement; whereas in the context where Figure B is the norm, Figure A will appear as understatement.

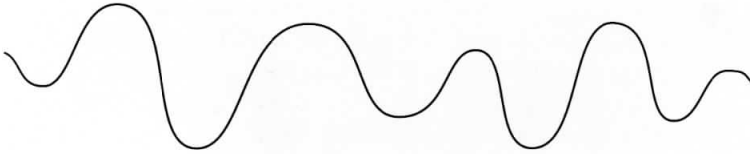


Figure A

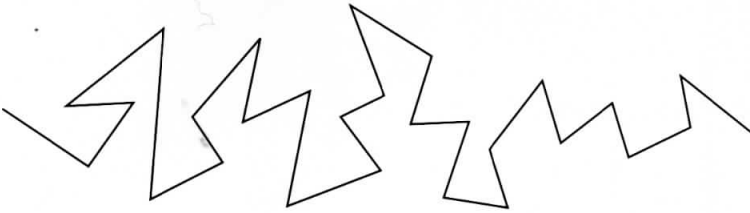


Figure B



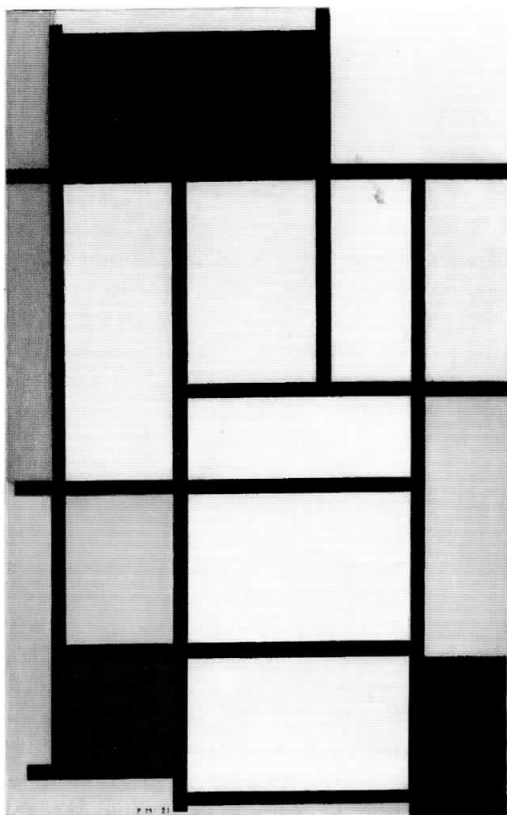
Figure C

Works of art are, on the whole, more complex things than wavy lines or zigzags. But it will be part of the aim of this chapter to show how such exercises are relevant to the investigation of meaning in art in general, and how they are useful to the study of this period in particular.

Consider the following small selection of paintings produced or exhibited in Paris within a year or two of 1921: *The Three Musicians* by Picasso (Plate 1); *The Odalisque with Red Culottes* by Matisse (Plate 2); *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue* by Mondrian (Plate 3); *The Nantes Road* by Vlaminck (Plate 4); *Still-life with Pile of Plates* by Jeanneret (Plate 18); *The Two Punchinellos* by Severini (Plate 5); and *The Child Carburettor* by Picabia (Plate 6).



**Plate 2** Henri Matisse, *L'Odalisque à la culotte rouge* (*The Odalisque with Red Culottes*), 1921, oil on canvas, 65 x 90 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. © Succession Matisse, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.



**Plate 3** Piet Mondrian, *Compositie met rood, geel en blauw* (*Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue*), 1921, oil on canvas, 80 x 50 cm. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. © DACS, London, 1993.



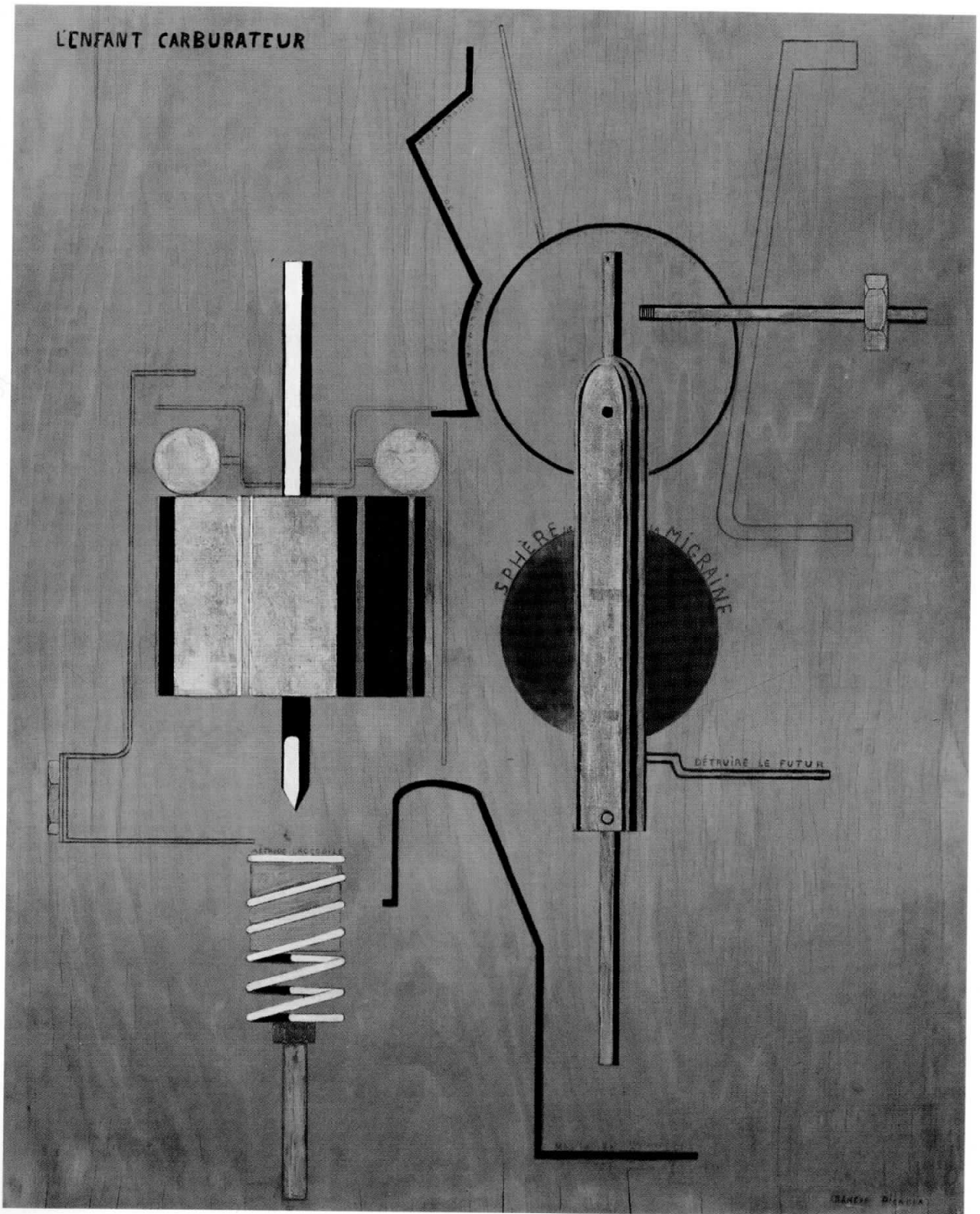
**Plate 4** Maurice Vlaminck, *La Route de Nantes (The Nantes Road)*, 1922–23, oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. Photographic Archives of The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, from a negative by Taylor and Dull for Parke-Bernet Galleries Inc. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.

All of these artists exhibited more or less regularly in commercial galleries and public exhibitions immediately after the First World War. Their work was bought and sold through dealers at auctions, and was discussed and criticized in newspapers and the art press. That is to say, they all worked within the same broad cultural and economic space, even if they did not enjoy equal critical and commercial success within it. Clearly, though, as we can see from the examples, this space sustained a considerable diversity of work.

Not all the commentators of the period categorized and differentiated this range of material in the same way. Rather, the structure of differentiation was itself a matter of argument and dispute. Even within a group of pro-Cubist commentators there were evident differences of emphasis. Fernand Léger, for example, at the time of the Salon des Indépendants of 1921, recognized ‘three groups ... the sub-Impressionists, the Cubists and the Sunday painters’. The minor Cubist painter André Lhote detected four categories instead of Léger’s three: ‘1 academicism; 2 impressionism; 3 constructive naturalism; 4 cubism’. The critic Maurice Raynal, on the other hand, conceived of only two distinct tendencies, ‘Realism and Idealism’; for him the division boiled down to a question of whether the painting was based on a naturalistic rendering of observed forms (Realism), or whether the artist ‘lifts [his art] above nature’ to produce an autonomous composition ‘born of the artist’s imagination’ (quoted in Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, pp.124–5). This latter category – Idealism – he associated with the work of the Cubist painters. Nevertheless a common thread runs through these commentators’ classifications: each assumes a fundamental distinction between a pre-Cubist and a post-Cubist picture-space, although each may also have viewed that distinction from a somewhat different perspective.



**Plate 5** Gino Severini, *Les Deux Polichinelles* (*The Two Punchinellos*), 1922, oil on canvas, 92 x 61 cm. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.



**Plate 6** Francis Picabia, *L'Enfant carburateur* (*The Child Carburettor*), 1919, oil, gilt, pencil and metallic paint on plywood, 126 x 101 cm. Collection of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. © ADAGP/SPADEM, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.

## Naturalism, Classicism, the School of Paris

The kinds of differentiation we have just looked at, between pre- and post-Cubist picture-space, seem straightforward enough. They were also made topical immediately after the war – especially, perhaps, for these Cubist-oriented writers – when a wide variety of naturalistic painting re-emerged in Paris. The return to more conservative styles of painting by the erstwhile Fauves Matisse, Vlaminck and Derain (see Derain's *The Laden Table*, Plate 7) was regarded by these writers as a retreat from the achievements of pre-war Cubism. Furthermore, a group of artists whose work had not acquired prominence before the war – among them de Segonzac, Utrillo, Kisling and Laurencin (see de Segonzac's *Still-life with Eggs*, Plate 19, and Utrillo's *Bernot's*, Plate 8) – began by the early twenties to attract considerable critical and commercial attention.

The label 'School of Paris' is often applied to this loose grouping of painters working in an informal, naturalistic style around this time. In fact the term was conceived only in the late twenties and applied retrospectively – and then in differing ways by various authors. Nevertheless, by the middle of the decade this type of work was enjoying immense commercial success, while Cubist-oriented work was fetching very low prices in comparison. Some examples will illustrate this point. In 1924 Juan Gris's *Washstand* (1912) made only 330 francs at a sale. Pablo Picasso's *Ma Jolie* (1911) fetched 6,500 francs later that year, whereas de Segonzac's *Drinkers* (1910) went for over 100,000 francs in 1925. By 1926, when the market for Cubist-oriented work had generally improved, a more abstract painting by Mondrian could still fetch only 700 francs. (Green gives more details of prices in Chapter 8 of his *Cubism and its Enemies*.)

The overwhelming commercial success of artists such as de Segonzac, Vlaminck and Derain was accompanied by an equal amount of critical acclaim. One of their most prominent and respected advocates was the critic Louis Vauxcelles. For him, the work of these artists embodied a cluster of related virtues – in particular, a love of and respect for nature, and an intuitive and sensuous approach based on feeling, honesty, directness and innocence. Clearly de Segonzac's c.1923 *Still-life with Eggs* (Plate 19) is based on observation; in addition, its rustic motif, earth colours, dark tonal range, heavy surface and handling were evocative of a group of rural and Realist still-lives from Courbet to Van Gogh. Together these elements could be taken to point in the general direction suggested by Vauxcelles. But this hardly seems sufficient reason for Vauxcelles and others to



**Plate 7** André Derain, *La Table de cuisine* (*The Laden Table*), 1921–22, oil on canvas, 59 x 58 cm. Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walther and Paul Guillaume, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.





**Plate 8** Maurice Utrillo, *La Maison Bernot (Bernot's)*, 1924, oil on canvas, 99 x 146 cm. Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walther and Paul Guillaume, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © ADAGP/SPADEM, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.

make the claims that they did. Rather, the authors gave weight to their claims, not so much by analysing individual works as by carefully positioning them within a network of strategic oppositions. In particular, the value of these naturalistic works was established by setting them in direct contrast with the 'excesses' and 'failings' of Cubism. For Vauxcelles, Cubism had always encapsulated the antithesis of everything of value in art: it was excessively intellectual, cold, calculated, artificial and lacking spontaneity or feeling. Most of all it seemed to reject nature:

But nothing valid is created without nature. One only creates with her. And without her, Cubist, you will end up only with spectres, with abstract phantasms, with bizarre arabesques ... that is to say with nothingness.

(Vauxcelles, quoted in Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, p.168)

In the 1920s Vauxcelles was still warning against the 'perils of seductive intellectualism, of unbridled logic and algebra!' Thus in the face of such disasters, naturalistic paintings such as de Segonzac's or Vlaminck's could be regarded as vehicles for warmth, intuition, realism and so forth – everything denied in Cubism. Many of the contemporary commentaries on these artists put less stress on the naturalism of the work than on the naturalness of the artists' temperaments and their highly personal approach to their work. De Segonzac 'enclosed himself in his naturalism', thereby 'keeping away from all [Cubist] influence', according to the critic Roger Allard. And the artist himself put it:

As for me, I aim to express to the best of my ability, with all my love, that which I love: a French landscape, a beautiful woman with a noble body. One will see later if it is art ... I believe a great deal in solitary work; the state of grace is revealed in contact with nature. A French peasant said to me one day: 'It's odd how the world becomes stupid when it has too much teaching.'

(de Segonzac, quoted in Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, p.174)

We will look later at some of the Cubist-oriented work of this period. Before doing so, it is important to note that there were significant differences within the range of naturalistic painting being produced in Paris at the time. For example, while there was enough in Matisse's *Odalisque* (Plate 2) to appeal to pro-naturalist commentators, it is in almost every respect a very different type of painting from de Segonzac's or Vlaminck's. Its exotic subject-matter, bright colour, lightness of touch and attention to the decorative, point in a very different direction from the provincial rusticity of de Segonzac. Matisse was far from alone in using a loosely naturalistic technique to portray distant and apparently unrealistic scenes. Picasso, Derain, Severini, Gris and others all adopted a naturalistic technique within a conventional perspective framework in the depiction of single- or multiple-figure compositions. The majority of these depicted, not a rural present but images of a Classical past. This range of painting also dealt more in generalized themes of human existence than in the specifics of time, place and character.

We will discuss shortly some of the explanations that have been offered for the emergence of overtly Classical themes and naturalistic techniques in non-Academic circles. For the moment it is worth noting some of the characteristics of work of this kind. The theme of maternity became one of the most common in the representation of women, together with the associated image of the female figure, often in simple Hellenic costume, carrying freshly harvested produce or freshly drawn spring-water. In each of these cases woman is represented primarily as an image of fertility – the bearer of new life and sustenance, be it animal, vegetable or mineral. (Matisse's paintings are a notable exception.) In Picasso's



**Plate 9** Pablo Picasso, *Trois Femmes à la source* (*Three Women at the Spring*), 1921, oil on canvas, 204 x 174 cm. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; gift of Mr and Mrs Allan D. Emil. © DACS, London, 1993.

**Plate 10** Gino Severini, *Maternità* (*Maternity*), 1916, oil on canvas, 92 x 65 cm. Collection Jeanne Severini. Photo: Giraudon. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 1993.



paintings she is usually a monumental figure in a Classical cotton shift (see Picasso's *Three Women at the Spring*, Plate 9, and untitled drawing, c.1922, Plate 61). Severini's rather earlier representation of motherhood, *Maternity* (Plate 10), is dressed in more modern costume, but its rather bland naturalism evokes more of an abstract, universal theme than a particular instance of child-rearing. Braque's large *The Basket-carrier* (Plate 11) is considerably less naturalistic, but even more Classical and monumental in its orientation.

The preferred theme through which the male figure was represented was at least as generalized and historicized as in the treatment of woman. Picasso, Gris, Derain, Severini, Metzinger and others all depicted male figures in the costumes of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* (see Picasso's *Seated Harlequin*, Plate 12, and Severini's *The Two Punchinellos*, Plate 5). All these works are laden with self-conscious reference to historical themes and art-historical sources. Picasso's *Seated Harlequin* was even painted in tempera, a traditional medium of Italian painting which went into decline with the development of oil paint. It is as if the overriding aim were to evacuate the picture of any specific reference to the modern world and to invoke instead that side of art connected with tradition and continuity. Painterly naturalism in these works seems entirely devoid of contemporary realism. It appears to have been used for ends that were quite distinct from the naturalism of Vlaminck, de Segonzac and their circle. Local detail, rustic simplicity and their association with direct and uncomplicated aims on the part of the artist are replaced by art-historical reference, quotation of Classical sources, allegory, self-conscious artifice and the associations of erudition and sophistication. At the risk of over-simplification, it could be said that while for one group of artists naturalism is used to invoke the values of nature, for another it is mobilized in a reflection on culture.



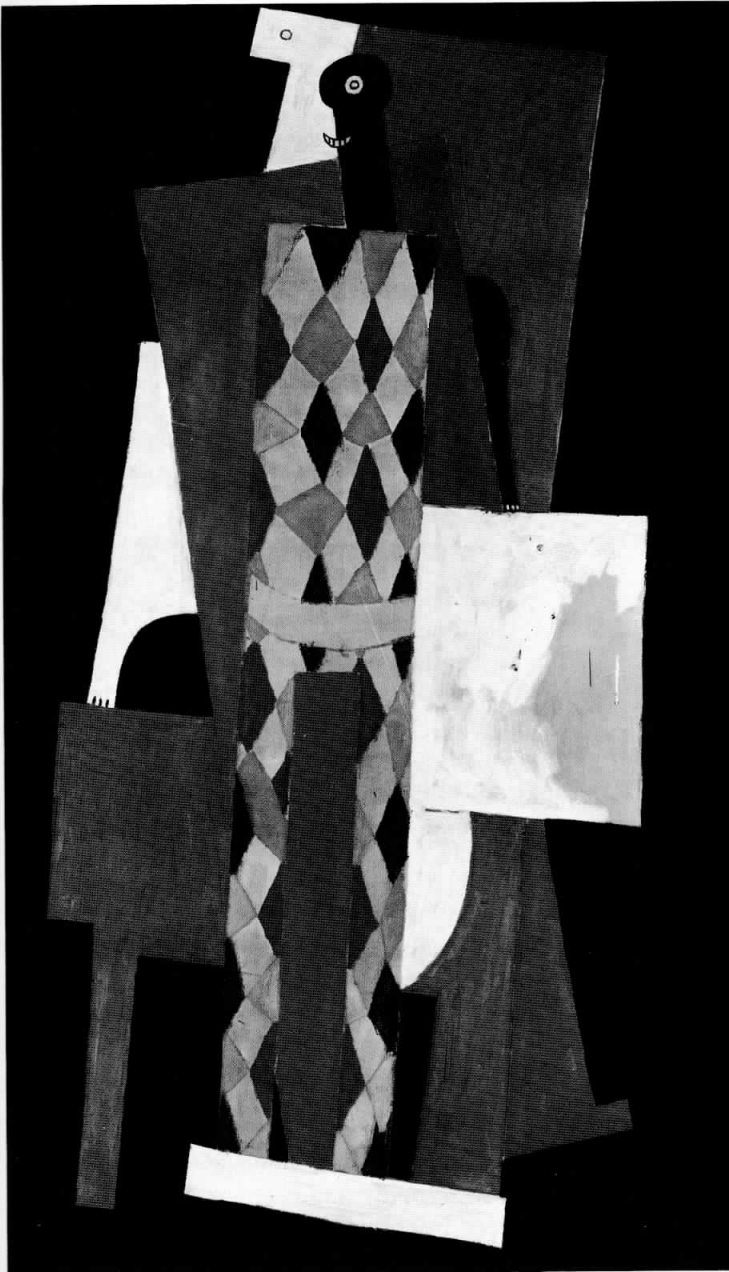
**Plate 11** Georges Braque,  
*Le Canéphore (The Basket-carrier)*,  
1922, oil on canvas, 180 x 73 cm.  
Musée National d'Art Moderne,  
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.  
© ADAGP, Paris and  
DACS, London, 1993.

The issue of naturalistic painting during this period is further complicated by the fact that some of the most apparently ardent Classicist painters also continued to work in overtly Cubist styles. Picasso's large painting of *The Three Musicians* (Plate 1), for example, treats the same *commedia dell'arte* subject in an explicitly Cubist manner, as had his earlier

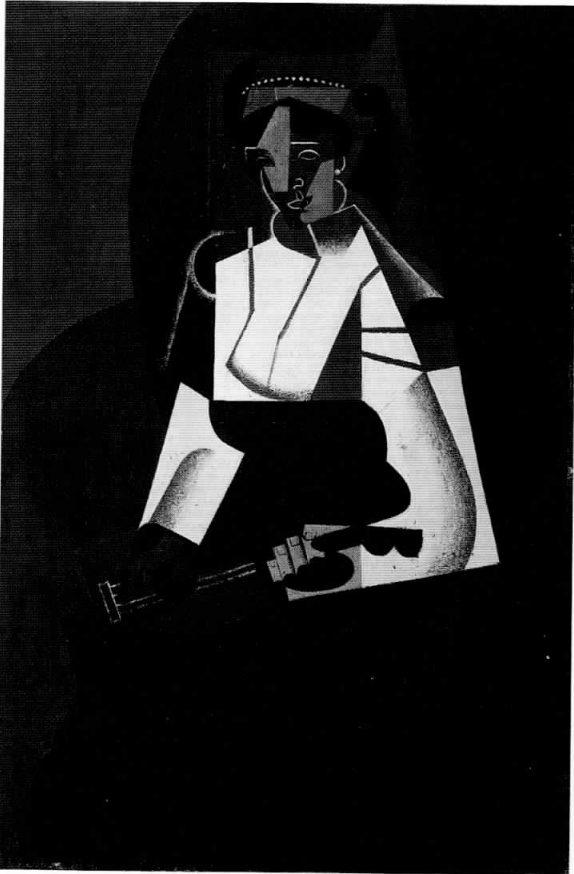


**Plate 12** Pablo Picasso, *Arlequin assis (Seated Harlequin)*, 1923, tempera on canvas, 130 x 98 cm. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kunstmuseum Basel, G1967.9. Photo: Colorphoto Hinz. © DACS, London, 1993.

*Harlequin* of 1915 (Plate 13). In each painting all modelling and perspective are eliminated as the schematic figures are set in a shallow space of apparently overlapping or intersecting planes of flat colour. A similar use of shallow space and blocks of flat colour is evident in Braque's *The Basket-carrier* (Plate 11), although the result is a far less abstracted picture than Picasso's. Gris also sought to combine his Cubist technique with explicitly historical themes, but in his case by producing Cubistic updates of some historical paintings. His *The Woman with a Mandolin* of 1916 (Plate 14) is a reworking of Corot's c.1865 *Dreamer with a Mandolin* (Plate 15), where the main compositional elements have been schematized, arranged as flattened coloured shapes and combined with a certain amount of residual graphic detail.



**Plate 13** Pablo Picasso, *Arlequin* (*Harlequin*), 1915, oil on canvas, 184 x 105 cm. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. © DACS, London, 1993.



**Plate 14** Juan Gris, *La Femme à la mandoline (d'après Corot)* (*The Woman with a Mandolin (after Corot)*), 1916, oil on canvas, 92 x 60 cm. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kunstmuseum Basel.



**Plate 15** Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Rêveuse à la mandoline (Dreamer with a Mandolin)*, 1860–65, oil on canvas, 51 x 37 cm. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, 31:1988.

Thus even within the range of naturalistic painting produced during and after the war, there are signs of diversity and in some cases direct incompatibility of aims and interests. But the question remains: how can we account for this apparent withdrawal from the radicalism of pre-war non-Academic art in favour of more conventional forms of representation? In recent years several art historians have argued that the reasons for these shifts lie outside the immediate realm of art and within wider cultural developments precipitated by the effects of the 1914–18 War. It is hard to imagine that events of such global significance as the First World War and the October Revolution in Russia did not affect the outlook of artists – as they did of other people. But it may be another matter to indicate exactly how a response to these events was embodied in particular works of art. There were of course some quite practical ways in which the First World War affected the development of modern art. For example, the Parisian art economy was effectively shattered during the war: some artists, including Braque and Léger, were mobilized; some died; others emigrated; a few stayed in Paris as foreign non-combatants. Exhibitions, including the annual Salons, were cancelled; trade dried up; and the key independent dealer from the pre-war period – the German, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler – had his entire stock of work sequestered and was prevented from conducting business. So, as we might expect, the period after the war was characterized by confusion and a lack of cohesion as

artists, dealers, critics and others sought to regroup, recover lost momentum, pick up old threads and re-establish their position in relation to the currents of pre-war art.

In itself this doesn't say much about specific types of painting; it only sketches an approximate set of social relations within which pictures were made and circulated. The art historian Kenneth Silver has argued that the spectres of war and revolution exerted a much more direct and visible influence on the development of art in this period (K. Silver, *Esprit de Corps*). He has pointed out the similarity between the rhetoric of right-wing political commentators in France and the rhetoric of many artists, critics and cultural theorists. In particular he has noted how the clusters of terms and ideas that sustained the idea of the 'call to order' and 'reconstruction' in post-war France were echoed in the writing and statements of artists, and incorporated in the styles and themes of their art. The imagery of the 'call to order' was itself established by setting up oppositions between the claimed virtues of the post-war period and the alleged decadence of the period before the war, with the war itself cast in the role of precipitating the changes. First, pre-war France was represented as having lapsed into moral and spiritual decay: the country and its people were frivolous, weak, disorganized and capricious. Then, through the agency of the war, it had been purged of these afflictions to emerge true to its real self: disciplined, strong, organized and clear-minded. In the cultural rhetoric of reconstruction, this latter cluster of terms was brought together under a single unifying heading – Classicism. The Classical tradition, it was argued, was the true tradition of French culture, but one from which the nation had been lured by various foreign influences, most of which were taken to be German in origin. Thus the rhetoric of Classicism was, in one respect at least, the vehicle for a thinly veiled ideology of nationalism. So far so clear. But the similarities that Silver noted between the political and the aesthetic rhetoric of the period have become converted by some authors into less flexible kinds of relation. It has been assumed, and in some cases explicitly argued, that the more traditional, more 'conservative' forms and techniques of painting are the direct effects of a more authoritarian, more 'conservative' political culture (see, for example, B. Buchloh, 'Figures of authority, ciphers of regression'). This assumption is itself usually based on a prior one, namely the commonplace idea that forms of artistic 'radicalism' (a term usually standing for technical innovation) are themselves ciphers of political 'radicalism'. Is it then reasonable to assert that the entire range of Classically oriented work from this period is just so much evidence of artists' having internalized reactionary political ideas? Are these therefore reactionary paintings? Is it the case that the widespread move towards more 'conservative', naturalistic painting is a direct analogue of the more 'conservative' political climate in post-war France? Questions of this sort seem important, and they have been asked a lot in recent years. They seek to address a basic issue about the relation of art to the wider ideological and political forces at work in a culture. They ask about the relationship of politics to aesthetics.

These are important questions to ask, but it is also important to hesitate before answering them, and to look at the terms in which they are put. We should note that they often deal in broad generalizations, treat a wide range of individual works as if they were all the same and, above all, make judgements in advance of viewing the evidence of the work. While the issue of the relations between art and politics lies close to the heart of this chapter, I also want to resist reducing these questions to a formula, to a kind of litmus test by which art may be assumed, because of some *general* characteristics, to display a certain political colour. I am not convinced that issues in art can be decided in such ways. It is unwarranted to assume, simply because a group of paintings treats the same basic subject in the same general style, that they are in any *significant* ways similar as works of art. What we may be able to say, for example, about a *commedia dell'arte* scene by Severini will not necessarily be applicable to a painting on the same theme by Picasso. Rather, it is necessary to look at details of particular works and argue the issue case by case.



## *Groups, magazines, programmes*

So far we have considered only works produced by individuals working in approximately the same cultural and economic conditions in post-war Paris. To treat all work in this manner would be to ignore an important feature of much artistic production of the period – that many artists organized themselves into identifiable groups and issued a range of textual, pictorial and organizational work in the name of that group.

Indeed, part of the history of modern art is a history of artists organizing themselves into groups. When artists and other members of the cultural intelligentsia began to perceive their interests as distinct from, or in opposition to, those of the Academy or of official art, they were forced to look for some independent framework within which to pursue those interests. Such a framework would have to provide space in which to work – actual space to publicize and exhibit work, but also, and just as important, intellectual space in which to develop and to defend the interests of the group. The Impressionist group is the obvious early example of this tendency, although Courbet's independent Realism exhibition at the 1855 Paris Exposition Universelle was arguably the first such event. Self-conscious displays of independence, in one form or another, are a feature of most of the main moments of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art. A list of such moments would include the Pont Aven group formed in Brittany around Gauguin during the late 1880s, the Fauve room at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, the Die Brücke exhibition at the Seifert factory in Dresden during 1906, the Blaue Reiter exhibitions of 1911–12 in Munich, the Cubist room at the 1911 Salon des Indépendants, and the Futurist activities in Milan from around 1910. Furthermore, as organization of this sort became a prerequisite of avant-garde art, so it tended to become more a focus of attention in itself. Essays and manifestos declaring the aims of the groups and proclaiming the allegiance of various figures increasingly became a feature of such work to the point where, in the case of the Futurists, it became one of the main sites of production for the group.

It's significant that many of these groups attracted not only artists, but a broad range of individuals involved in one or other aspect of cultural production. Poets, writers, critics, musicians and architects have all, at one time or another, become integral parts of such allegiances. The period between the wars is characterized not only by the proliferation of artists' groups of this kind, but also by the high profile that such groups acquired. Considerable attention was given to developing the theoretical side of the groups' work, and to developing strategies of self-promotion. Typically a group would take a number of initiatives. It would give itself a name (and, as we shall see, this often carried considerable significance); publish a manifesto of aims and interests; produce a magazine; organize meetings, conferences, exhibitions or events; and, in some cases, do whatever was possible to sabotage the work of others. The groups aimed to do far more than merely promote a novel style or technique. The three groups we will consider in the next three sections (on Purism, Dada and Surrealism), and many others besides, saw their work as actively engaged in tackling the problems of a dramatically changing world.

It is at this point that similarities begin to give way to differences, and that differences begin to breed complications. While all these groups regarded themselves as significantly involved in substantial processes of change, there was little consensus over what kinds of change were being experienced or should be encouraged, and equally little agreement over what part artists could, or should, play in bringing them about. Some regarded themselves as prophets of change, others as analysts, or agitators, others as observers. It was through their magazines and manifestos that these claims and projections were presented, debated, responded to, and developed. There's a case for saying that the importance of these magazines and their attendant forms of activity was often equal to, and at times greater than, much of the art produced under the aegis of the group. At least it is likely that if we look at the art independently of the wider range of activities, we risk developing a very restricted sense of what that art might have meant.

There might be many reasons for a particular group of artists, poets, writers and so on to organize themselves in such a way. And different individuals might be attracted to the group for different motives. Certainly the aim was usually to take a public stance outside and in opposition to the conventional intellectual and institutional forms of legitimation. Attachment to a group may also have provided little-known artists with a way of making themselves visible to curators, critics, etc. where otherwise they might have remained in obscurity. By the 1920s it seems that the formation of radical independent groups could serve both these purposes: as much as they represented a stance outside the established norms and forms of legitimation, they could also represent a stepping stone in the pursuit of a more orthodox artistic career.

## *Purism and L'Esprit Nouveau*

In Paris, during March 1920, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret and Amédée Ozenfant, the artists who together founded the Purist group, published their manifesto, 'Purism', in the group's journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* ('the new spirit'). It declared:

Logic, born of human constants and without which nothing is human, is an instrument of control and, for he who is inventive, a guide towards discovery; it corrects and controls the sometimes capricious march of intuition and permits one to go ahead with certainty ...

One of the highest delights of the human mind is to perceive the order of nature and to measure its own participation in the scheme of things; the work of art seems to us to be a labour of putting into order, a masterpiece of human order ...

Now a law is nothing other than the verification of an order. In summary, a work of art should induce the sensation of mathematical order, and the means of inducing this mathematical order should be sought among universal means.

(C.-E. Jeanneret and A. Ozenfant, 'Purism', pp.59, 61)

*L'Esprit Nouveau* was published 28 times between 1920 and 1925, contained an average of over 100 pages per issue, was produced on good quality paper and included colour reproductions. It was made up of lengthy, scholarly-looking essays on a wide range of subjects, interspersed with photographic reproductions and advertisements. Its cover design and internal layout remained unchanged throughout the five years of its publication. Each cover listed the contents of that issue, and the general headings 'experimental aesthetics, painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, engineering aesthetics, theatre, music-hall, cinema, circus, sports, fashion, books, furniture and aesthetics of modern life'. Overall the magazine's size, layout and consistency of appearance graphically reinforced the implication given in the clipped tone of the manifesto: Purism was a serious, thoughtful and ambitious project (Plate 16).

In spite of the considerable quantity of material produced by contributors, the magazine remained largely the vehicle of its two editors. Jeanneret, the painter and writer, is better known as Le Corbusier, which was the pseudonym he adopted in the early 1920s for his work as journalist and architect. Ozenfant, also a painter and writer, had earlier edited a small magazine during 1915 and 1916, entitled *L'Élan*. Their first collaboration was to produce an exhibition, and an accompanying booklet entitled *Après le Cubisme* that was published in November 1918, a few days after the signing of the armistice. It was a collaboration that ended, effectively, with the demise of *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1925.

In the same year in which their manifesto, 'Purism', was published in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, Ozenfant and Jeanneret produced a series of still-life paintings (for example, Plates 17 and 18). Clearly they saw their painting and writing as mutually supporting components of the same project. The opening section of their text gives considerable