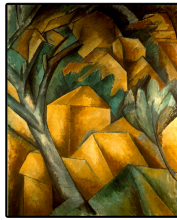


Still Life

The painting is a still life containing 2 bottles, a glass and a knife. To the cubists, landscape was no longer a common subject because they were focused on developing their style rather than their being picky with their subject matter. This allowed artists to paint in their studios rather than traveling such as Georges Braque did with his painting Houses at L'Estaque in the proto cubist period. Instead of finding these landscapes that a camera could perfectly replicate, they instead painted the objects around them. Another advantage of painting in their studios is that a lot of the artists from this movement lived together, which allowed for near instantaneous feedback which contributed to the rapid development of the movement.



Houses at L'Estaque
Georges Braque

Words

Another distinction between proto cubism and analytical cubism is the use inclusion of words in the painting. The cubists had already started working on capturing the conceptual rather than replicating the perceptual, something that a camera could do much better, so it was no surprise that they turned to words to help them. Words themselves are a conceptual idea. They are meaningless lines and squiggles joined together in shapes and used to represent things that we perceive in reality. This is very similar to what the cubists had hoped to achieve through using their style to represent the concept and meaning of their subject rather than just replicating the subject they saw before them as had been tradition for centuries before.

Another aspect that appealed to the cubists was that words are two dimensional. This meant that using them in their work would not interfere with their careful lack of depth in any way. Words also often helped to explain their ideas or were used to represent something. Words could also only be partially completed and the artists meaning would still get across. An example of this would be "Journ", commonly used in place of "Le Journal", a newspaper that was often read by the cubists.



Bottles and Knife
Juan Gris
Detail



The Portuguese
Georges Braque

In this painting, the use of words (see above left) is not as clear as other works (see above right). We see what looks to be a wine label, with fine print which we can not read. Perhaps Gris had something in mind regarding the incomprehensible nature of the paintings for the general public, however this is in the eye of the beholder as art can be incredibly subjective.

Monochromatic Palette

Another main aspect of change between proto and analytical cubism is the monochromatic palette that the artists used. We see heavy use blacks, whites, greys and 'earth tones' such as ochre and dark greens. The driving force behind the change is the theory that we as humans often associate colours with meaning based on prior experience. Examples being blue with sadness, yellow with happiness, red with danger or importance. In the Renaissance, colour was often used to direct the viewer's eye around the painting, with red being the first to focus on. The Cubists wanted to abandon this sense of colour being associated with meaning, they had their own agenda. They were more interested in the style, and the idea of a painting being an object in its own right rather than a replication. The painting was to be viewed as a whole, with each part being equally important and not standing out from the rest.



The Last Supper
Leonardo Da Vinci
Detail - eyes directed to Jesus, in red and blue.

Flattened Picture Plane

With the progression of proto cubism towards analytical cubism, the picture plane became increasingly flat. The depth in the painting disappeared with the removal of perceptive techniques such as atmospheric and one point perspective. For the cubists, depth was a lie; the canvas is flat so why try to make it seem three dimensional? The subject matter was flattened and arranged into facets and planes that run parallel with the canvas instead of receding as they had in proto cubism. These planes were connected and unified with a technique called Passage. This is where lines are used to join different areas of the painting, you can see the diagonal lines below really help to merge these fragments in order to unify the paintings surface. Volume of the bottles in this painting is also limited. Despite the use of shadow behind the bottles, they still seem two dimensional. This technique of using light to differentiate shapes from one another was popular among cubists. What's interesting is that while they have been separated, they are still joined by Passage.



Painting: Bottles and Knife
Artist: Juan Gris
Start Date: 1911
Completion Date: 1912
Style: Analytical Cubism
Genre: Still life
Technique: Oil
Material: Canvas
Dimensions: 54.6 x 46 cm

Gallery: Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands

Brushwork

Brushwork was less important to the cubists as it was to renaissance painters such as Da Vinci. To the cubists, showing the hand of the maker was incredibly important. Why spend plenty of time hiding brushstrokes when you could be progressing your ideas and style as an artist? Looking closer at the work, you can see the thick, rough directional brushstrokes that Gris has made. This technique is known as Impasto. This made it clear to the viewer that the work was a painting, and not a mimesis of nature. It was an object in its own right. Gris has stated, "I prefer the emotion that corrects the rule." Meaning he paints what his mind sees rather than what his eyes see, i.e. conceptually rather than perceptively. He had no problem with breaking the tradition that the academic artists of the Renaissance had set, and to him, this made for better artwork.



Bottles and Knife
Juan Gris
Detail



Meeting of Anna and Joachim
Giotto di Bondone
Detail

You can see the stark contrast between the works above, with the analytical cubist work on the left compared with the more traditional proto-renaissance work by the famous Giotto di Bondone. On the left image above, you can also see the difference in texture between the bottle and the background and even different areas of the same bottle. This helps to distinguish between the planes of the image without getting rid of the unity achieved by monochromatic palette and passage. This technique was made easier with the flexibility of oil paints. Oil paint can be made as thin or thick as you want it by adding more or less oil to the paint respectively as well as manipulating the quantity of pigments. This allowed artists such as Giotto to achieve an incredibly lifelike image through thin paint and techniques such as chiaroscuro (contrasted light and shadow) and sfumato (gentle blending of colours to create a smoky haze) to create realistic images. But the flexibility of oil paint allowed the cubists to show the hand of the maker with their works through impasto. They broke the tradition of replicating a scene as they had done in proto cubism to instead focus upon making their painting a painting: an object in its own right. Their avant garde techniques and concepts also paved the way for future artists to begin experimenting with texture in their works. Although it is also important to note that the cubists were not solely responsible for this shift to impasto. Expressionists such as Vincent van Gogh had worked heavily with texture in the late 19th century, a couple of decades before the cubists incorporated this use of texture in their own work.



Starry Night
Vincent van Gogh



Starry Night Over the Rhone
Vincent van Gogh



The Sower
Vincent van Gogh



Craggs and Crevices
Jane Frank
1960

By Matt McConway