

# Cubism

## Definition

Cubism is an art movement that was developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1907) by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. The cubist style developed mainly in painting and sculpture, and emphasized the representation of natural forms as geometric shapes seen from several angles. Cubism derived its name from remarks that were made by the critic Louis Vauxcelles, who described Braque's 1908 work **Houses at L'Estaque** as composed of cubes.



**Fruit Dish** 1908-1909 Oil on Canvas 54 x 65 cm

Cubism was considered a revolutionary departure from representational art. The Cubist style emphasised the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, rejecting traditional techniques like perspective, foreshortening, modelling, and chiaroscuro and ignoring time-honoured theories of art as the imitation of nature. Cubist painters were not bound to copying form, texture, colour, and space.

The period from 1910 to 1912 is often referred to as that of Analytical Cubism. In an analytical cubist painting, the object was 'taken apart' and reshaped with the use of flat intersecting planes. Paintings frequently combined representational motifs with letters; favourite motifs were musical instruments, bottles, pitchers, glasses, newspapers, still life, and the human face and figure.

The second phase of Cubism, which began after 1912, is called Synthetic Cubism. Works of this phase emphasised the combination of forms in the picture. Colour plays an important role in the work; shapes, while remaining fragmented and flat, are larger and more decorative. Newspaper and tobacco wrappers were often used as motifs. They were pasted on the canvas in combination with painted areas. This technique known as collage was the main style of the second phase of Cubism. Musical instruments, especially guitars and violins, are often found in works from this period.

The influence that Cubism had on other forms of art and other artists is significant; the movement inspired architecture, sculptures, clothes, and even literature.

## A Master of Cubism

**Georges Braque** (b. May 13, 1882, Argenteuil-sur-Seine - d. Aug- 31, 1963, Paris)

Braque was born in Argenteuil-sur-Seine, near Paris. He was deeply impressed by the bold style of works exhibited in 1905 by a group of artists known as the Fauves (French for 'the wild beasts'). The Fauves included Henri Matisse and Andre Derain, who painted with brilliant colours and a loose structure of forms to capture the most intense emotional response. Braque adopted Fauvism from 1906 to 1907.



**Violin and Candlestick** 1910 Oil on Canvas 61x50 cm

By 1908, however, Braque had shifted his attention to the paintings of Paul Cezanne. Braque's interest in Cezanne's strangely distorted forms and unconventional perspective led him to paint in the cubist style. In his works of 1908 to 1913 Braque conducted an intense study of the effects of light and perspective and the technical means that painters use to represent these effects. During the summer of 1908 in southern France, he painted a series of radically innovative canvases, of which the most celebrated is House at L'Estaque. In this painting can be seen the slab volumes, sober colouring, and warped perspective typical of the first part of what has been called the analytical phase of Cubism.



**Houses at L'Estaque** 1908 Oil on Canvas 73 x 60 cm

### Cubist Artists to Research

Pablo Picasso, Kazimir Malevitch, Juan Gris, Fernand Leger, The Park Avenue Cubists - Suzy Freylinghuysen, Charles G Shaw, George L K Morris, Albert Eugene Gallatin

### Artwords and Artists to Remember

Georges Braque, Cubism, Analytical Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, picture plane, foreshortening, modelling, chiaroscuro, motif, collage, perspective, representational, Fauves.



**Musical Instruments** 1908 Oil on Canvas 50 x 61 cm

### Questions to Answer

1. Other than painting and sculpture, what other things have been inspired by Cubism?
2. Write down a definition for collage.
3. List some of the favoured Cubist motifs.
4. Name the two types of Cubism.
5. What does the Cubist style emphasise?
6. List the traditional art techniques that the Cubist's rejected.
7. Name the three artists that influenced Braque's interest in Cubism.
8. How did Cubism get its name?