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History of Western Art
Part Five – Modernism to Post-Modernism

Assignment Five – Exercise 1

Notes on Chapter 19 – Art from 1900-1919

Early 20th c, era of revolutionary ideas in all spheres of art, architecture, science and philosophy, influencing art up to current day.

Symbolist vs Objectivism (Cezanne). Artists wrestling with dilemma between form and inner truth taking both to limits. First truly abstract art 1912 (*cp Kandinsky 1910?*). Urge to reject conventions, preconceptions. Influence of Freud and his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) strong; theories of importance of unconscious desires over rational thought dominated 20th century, inc. in art.

Artists become interested in 'native art', harking back to Gauguin's 'noble savage'; inspired by African, Oceanic ethnographic, naïve, folk art, as directly opposite to Western artistic ideals. Move from genteel to 'barbaric' (Gide) (pp768-69)

NEW WAYS OF LOOKING

Self-taught Rousseau painted naïve works, powerful, exotic, from imagination (never left Paris). African masks inspired artists, eg; Picasso *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Almost flat complex of invented forms 'first exorcism-painting'. Reworked to remove allegorical elements, emphasising erotic nature, the work a rival to Cezanne/Matisse. Taking African concept of knowing over seeing, painted figures in geometric shapes, rejecting features of conventional representational art. Strong contrast between angular, flat forms and Monet's Impressionistic, fluid, harmonious forms with delicate brushwork. Nymphs however, displays quasi-patterns of shimmering light and atmosphere. Radical if in entirely different way to Picasso. German Fauvists inspired by bold simplicity and power of African pieces in museums, now regarded as art. (Nolde). Other German artists of Der Blaue Reiter group (Marc, Kandinsky) rejected European art in favour of many global sources. (pp 769-774)

THE FAUVES AND EXPRESSIONISM

Les Fauves (Wild Beasts) exhibited in Paris Salon in 1905. Sea-change in art although Fauvism short-lived; naïve style, primitive; disharmonies of colour, deliberate clashing. Colour freeing artist, used as means of expression in its own right. (pp 774-75)

Matisse

Harmony in Red epitomises style; areas of flat colour, naivety of figures, no sense of perspective, almost playful. Light a function of flat colour. Apparently spontaneous but carefully planned. Choice of colour 'based on observation, on feeling'. Rouault greatest religious painter of time. Bold lines around blocks of colour reminiscent of stained glass (worked in 1st). Social comment in work more in common with German Expressionism. (pp775-76)

THE GERMAN EXPRESSIONISTS

Time of Nietzsche and Kafka; time of oppressiveness, guilt. Artists expressed anxiety with spontaneity of inner vision; art imbued with soul, nationalism; anti-French. Brücke group expressed sincerity of vision in simple, naïve wood/lino prints. 'Expressionism' coined by Worringer; extended to architecture (Grosse Schauspielhaus, Berlin) where brought personal vision to building design. Left-wing ideologies with Expressionist architects naturally anarchistic.

Fry, art should be synaesthetic, abstract lends itself to this. (Kandinsky) (pp 776-779)

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KANDINSKY

Initially worked in German Art Nouveau style; spiritual and anti-materialistic. Strong influence from Munch and her Bavarian stained glass art, folk art. Seeing work upside down convinced him colour more important than representation of nature. Influence from Gestalt theories (colour, spatial orientation, shape produce perceptual effects; colours and forms have inherent meaning regardless of content). Didn't, however, want art to be purely 'decorative' so imbued work with hints of meaning and spirituality. (*Improvisation no. 30*) Composition VII, however, no perspective, forms or spatial relationships. (pp 779-81)

MARC

Preferred animals to humans, influential member of Blaue group. Abstract use of colour, embryonic, dynamic shapes in *Fighting Forms* almost entirely non-representational. (pp 781-82)

CUBISM

Braque, Picasso did not see themselves as inventors of cubism (*cf p 784 'cubism was invented jointly by them'*). Picasso did not consider any art wholly non-representational 'you must always start with something'. (p 782)

PICASSO AND BRAQUE: ANALYTICAL AND SYNTHETIC CUBISM

Within 2 years, Picasso changes style dramatically from representational (*Family of Saltimbanques*) to more crudely drawn Desmoiselles. Illustrates conflict between representational yet anti-naturalistic art. Desmoiselles plays with perspective, lighting subjects from different angles, faceting of figures. Braque and Picasso work closely together (*invented cubism – but see above?*). Cezanne principle influence seen in Braque *House and Trees* and Picasso *Three Women* (repainted in more controlled way with limited palette. Faceted surface, solid mass of angular shapes; figures sculptural but image flat. Developed in what was later called 'Analytical Cubism'. Not analytical as such; no models, increasingly fragmented almost unidentifiable subjects. (*Female Nude, Picasso; The Portuguese, Braque*). To avoid total abstraction, included minor identifiable details eg stencilling. Later introduced collage, real items incorporated into painting/drawings. Flat, removing illusion of space. Use of papers to create abstract form but still indicating colour and form of objects drawn over them. Picasso makes collage items of one object from another (eg. guitar from newspaper). The one form (newspaper), displaced, gives viewer food for thought about both displaced object and object it represents (guitar). Objects held no hidden meaning; artist simply making something meaningful out of nothing. Braque made sculptures in cardboard. Picasso took new turn in sculpture by working in non-traditional materials (almost found objects) and ways (*guitar*). Most sculptors continued to work in conventional materials with conventional subjects (esp. nudes). Synthetic Cubism, inverse of Analytical; object depicted with forms not within it (eg. oblongs), shapes arranged on canvas (similar to collage), layers added, end result is of flat forms unlike object portrayed but a recognisable facsimile of it. (*Harlequin, Picasso*). (pp 782-89)

Orphic Cubism

A form of 'pure' painting in which subject would not be relevant (Apollinaire). Should give aesthetic pleasure, clear structure, meaning, subject. Delaunays, Leger, Duchamp; Delaunays interested in colour, conveying a dynamism which accords with dynamism of life. Leger's forms tubular, mechanical, contrasts of colour, light and form. Dynamism of tensions of modern, urban life. (pp 789-90)

FUTURISM

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Ideology as much as art movement. Futurist Manifesto (Marinetti). Reaction to earlier art: Focus on dynamism and speed, modernity. Art borrowed from both Cubism and Expressionism but works featured only sections of whole image, 'close-ups'; action passes through painting (*Abstract Speed the Car has Passed, Balla*). Futurist architecture halted by death of key proponent, Sant'Elia. Drawings indicate scale and futuristic style that would have resulted. Boccioni (*Unique form of Continuity in Space*); 'not pure form, but pure plastic rhythm; not the construction of the body, but the construction of the action of the body'. Sculpture appears like fluid, molten metal, constantly in flux. Short-lived movement due to links with Fascism but influential. Raymond Duchamp-Villon (*The Horse*) mechanistic realisation of horse 'horse power'. (pp 790-793)

ABSTRACT OR NON-OBJECTIVE ART

Idea of abstract art, for its own purpose, not new. Cubists differed from Kandinsky through interpretation with geometric form. Laws of art as corresponding with maths/geometry. Others believed universal laws only achievable through abstraction, leading to art as model for harmony of humans and their environment. (p 793)

Suprematism and the Founding of *De Stijl*

Russia recognised abstraction, created Rayonism, characterized by rays emerging from subjects in paintings. After Russian Revolution, deeply Christian, spiritual Malevich founds Constructivist movement (Popova among painters), later Suprematism; 'supremacy of feeling in creative art'. Simple forms, idea over matter, chaos over nature.

1917 Dutch De Stijl Group; Mondrian, Doesburg, Oud. Focus was absolute purity, harmony, sobriety. Strongly Calvinist. Inspired by Cubism but taken further into abstract. Mondrian barely representational but took form from nature not in studio as Cubists. Rendered to primary colours, geometric shapes. (pp 793-95)

ARCHITECTURE

Frank Lloyd Wright inspired by Sullivan (see above) but took functionalism further. Buildings were designed to 'grow out of their environment organically'; low, spreading structures, well-built (prairie houses). Asymmetry, unconventional-shaped interiors. Organic constructions, integration of furnishings alongside interior and exteriors simile for social integration. Influence not great due to rise to prominence of German architecture (Gropius and Meyer). (pp 795-97)