From Bohemian artists to modern graphic design

Between 1910 and 1939 a number of modernist art styles were integrated into graphic design. A variety of progressive graphic designers in Britain, France and the United States began absorbing stylistic elements from modern art movements, especially **Cubism** and **Futurism,** by seeking to integrate advertising design with the **sophisticated abstract painting styles** of the pre-war years. However, the bohemian artists who lived in Montmartre and Montparnasse were hostile to the creation of commercial art. Part of their self-identification came from the stance that they had rejected mainstream society. Furthermore, there was no established figure, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, who could bridge the world of fine art and graphic design: the golden age in which posters attained a special cachet had gone. Nonetheless, the fundamental stylistic elements derived from abstract painting by Cubists and others, would have a substantial impact on graphic design for decades to come.

The work of the community of artists mentioned above, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, was centred in the Parisian neighbourhood of Montmartre, whereas in the 1900s, a second, parallel art scene emerged: **Montparnasse**, which gradually superseded Montmartre as the favoured living and working location for **avant-garde artists**. In 1912, **Pablo Picasso** moved to Montparnasse in search of lower rent and remained there until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. In Montparnasse, Picasso lived near a friend, **Georges Braque** (1882-1963), who would later join him in developing the most influential painting style of the twentieth century, **Cubism**. The term "Cubism" was used by a critic who saw an exhibition of Braque's abstract paintings and disparaged the forms in the paintings as merely "little cubes". From 1908 until 1912, Braque and Picasso developed the style into its first mature form, now called **"Analytic Cubism"**. In this style, three-dimensional objects are represented on the canvas as two-dimensional abstractions.

to attain: *conseguire*	**mainstream:** *(qui) conformista*
blandly: *in modo monotono*	**merely:** *solamente*
to break down: *(qui) scomporre*	**neighbourhood:** *quartiere*
to bridge: *collegare*	**nonetheless:** *nonostante ciò*
canvas: *tela*	**to overlap:** *sovrapporsi*
charcoal: *carboncino*	**pasted papers:** *ritagli di*
to develop: *sviluppare*	*quotidiani incollati*
to devise: *ideare*	**scraps:** *ritagli*
to disparage: *denigrare,*	**rent:** *affitto*
sminuire	**to seek (sought-sought):** *cercare*
to epitomize: *incarnare,*	**stance:** *posizione*
rappresentare al meglio	**still life:** *natura morta*
facet: *superficie*	**to supersede:** *soppiantare*
furthermore: *inoltre*	**via:** *per mezzo di*
however: *tuttavia*	**wallpaper:** *tappezzeria*
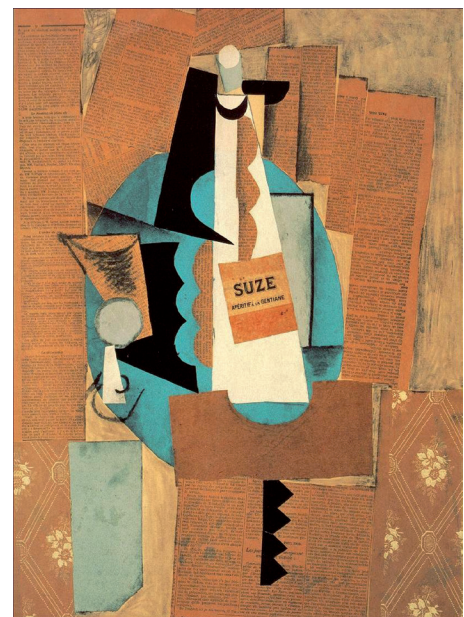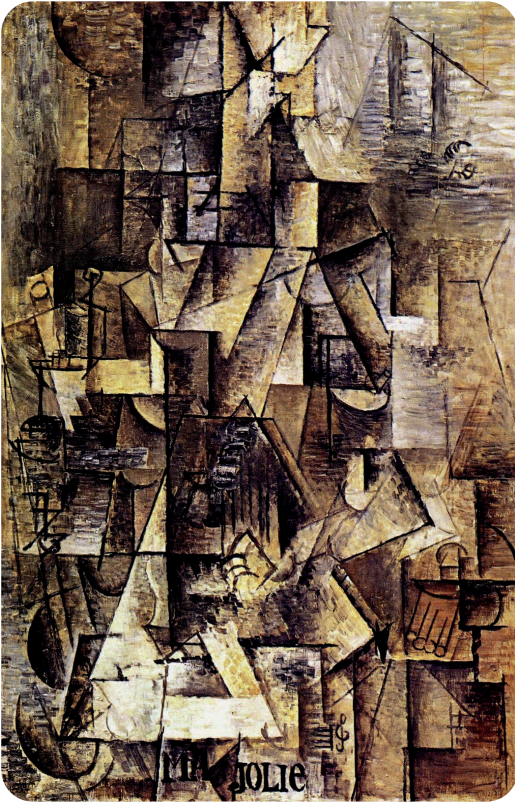
The term "analytic" refers to the fact that the Cubist painter analyses solid forms and then transfers them into canvas via flat facets that represent the subject from a **multiplicity of views**. Picasso's painting *Ma Jolie* (1911-1912, oil on canvas), which means "My pretty one", is an example of fully-developed Analytic Cubism. The subject, a woman, has been reconfigured as an abstract assortment of overlapping geometric facets, which are blandly coloured with a near monochrome effect. *Ma Jolie* could refer either to the model or to a popular song at the time. Of course, when analytic Cubism was later used by graphic designers, they had to make adjustments in order to make people understand the commercial message easily. The Cubists favoured neutral subject matter, such as still life and portraits.

Around 1912, Picasso and Braque devised a second Cubist technique called "**Synthetic Cubism**". In contrast to the Analytic Cubist who likes breaking down forms, artists who create Synthetic Cubist pictures conceive the image-making progress as flowing in the opposite direction, as the artist "synthesizes" an object out of a mix of abstract parts. Picasso's *La Bouteille de Suze* (pasted papers, **gouache** and charcoal) epitomizes an example of Synthetic Cubism. Here Picasso has built up a picture of a café table and its associated objects by making a collage of scraps of blue and black paper, wallpaper and newspaper. These abstract, fragmented elements all appear to rest on a blue table in front of a wall. Serving as a formal element, the newsprint also suggests the popular Parisian café activity of reading the paper while smoking and drinking. In this manner Cubism was a pioneering force in establishing the significance of the new medium of collage. Synthetic cubism created an alternative for artists and **designers** for an **abstract language** with which they could experiment.

1 👥 PAIR WORK Student A: using the prompts below, ask questions about the reading passage. Student B: answer Student A's questions. Then give an oral report of what you have learnt about Cubism.

a. did/move/why/to/Montparnasse/Picasso?

b. Cubism/and/Braque/first/Picasso/did/when/ style/develop/into/its /mature/?

c. for/used/the/term/time/"Cubism"/who/the/first?

d. neighborhood/long/remain/Montparnasse/how/Picasso/did/in/Parisian/of/the?

e. Picasso's/are/the/like/facets/what/painting/*Ma Jolie*/in?

f. does/what/represent/*La Bouteille* de Suze?

g. Did/how/designers/graphic/cubism/analytic/use?

h. Cubists/kind/what/matter/subject/did/favour/of?

2 📄 **Complete the following summary of the passage on the previous pages using the words listed below.**

canvas • that • fine • commercial • became • most • by • designers • up • examples • materials • angles

Between 1919 and 1939, Montparnasse **1.** .... a magnet for artists but in a different way from Montmartre. Here artists, such as Toulouse-Lautrec, developed professional careers **2.** .... connected poster design and **3.** .... arts as well as personal relationships. The Montmartre community, on the other hand, was devoted to progressive innovation and rejected **4.** .... art. Picasso and Braque embarked on some of their greatest experimental styles while living in Montparnasse. Cubism, the **5.** .... influential style of painting of the twentieth century, was created there. Graphic **6.** .... were influenced **7.** .... Cubism, which they used for commercial purposes by adapting technical innovations to their target. The first stage of the Cubism movement was called Analytical Cubism. In this style, the subject was **8.** .... into different blocks and looked at from different **9.** .... It was then reconstructed. The second stage of Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, introduced the idea of adding other **10.** ...., such as newspapers and scraps of paper, in a collage, to represent the different blocks of the subject. Picasso's quintessential **11.** .... of the two stages are respectively: *Ma Jolie* (1911), oil on **12.** .... and *La Bouteille de Suze* (1912, pasted papers, gouache and charcoal).

Toulouse Lautrec, Divan Japonais

3 🎲 **Match the adjectives from the passage in the first column to their antonyms in the second column.**

a.	bohemian	☐	1.	representational
b.	abstract	☐	2.	old
c.	new	☐	3.	conformist
d.	early	☐	4.	far
e.	mature	☐	5.	upper
f.	pretty	☐	6.	late
g.	near	☐	7.	synthetic
h.	monochrome	☐	8.	immature
i.	analytic	☐	9.	ugly
j.	lower	☐	10.	polychrome

4 Read the passage again and decide which part of speech the words in italics belong to. Remember that recognizing grammatical classes is very important when you need to look up a word in a dictionary under the correct entry.

a.	*nonetheless*	adjective	adverb
b.	*bohemian*	adjective	noun
c.	*furthermore*	adverb	preposition
d.	*which*	relative pronoun	noun
e.	*canvas*	noun	adverb
f.	*that*	verb	relative pronoun
g.	*still*	adjective	verb

DE STIJL

Britain, France, Italy and the Unites States were not the only countries in which avant-garde movements had a major influence on graphic design in the period of the First World War. Dutch De Stijl and Russian Constructivism had a long-lasting impact on graphic design. De Stijl in particular had one of the most immediate impacts. It was founded by a group of artists and architects that included Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian. They felt that individualism and a nationalist egotism was responsible for the savagery of the conflict that began in 1914 and viewed art as a sort of spiritual redemption. Van Doesburg wrote: "The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal". Therefore, they offered a universal language of geometric abstraction to cure Europe's wounds. De Stijl proposed simplicity and abstraction, both in architecture and painting, by using only straight horizontal and vertical lines and rectangular forms. Moreover, their formal vocabulary was limited to the primary colours – red, yellow, and blue. In 1919, Doesburg completed an experimental alphabet in which the letters were determined by an underlying geometric scheme resulting in a constructed rectilinear sans-serif typeface.
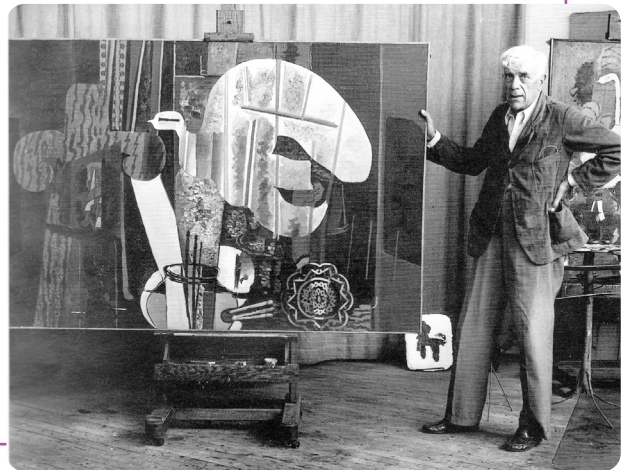
G. Braque in his Paris studio in 1950.