

...ISMs. An Introduction to Modern Art.

Part One. From Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism.

INTRODUCTION.

The striving for novelty.

What makes modern art modern?

What are the main developments which define modern art?

Images 1-8

1. Importance of being misunderstood. **Turner, Snow Storm. Friedrich, Monk by the Sea. Whistler, Nocturne.**

How these works were criticised and misunderstood. Role of Ruskin. Supports Turner but then attacks Whistler.

This is a major theme in modern art. Almost every work we are going to look at (certainly almost every artist) has been criticised for producing incomprehensible work. That is almost one of the defining aspects of modern art: to be misunderstood.

Artists starting to answer the questions posed by Photography. Why paint accurate replicas of reality when photography could do the job better? **Daguerrotype.**

2. How artists rebelled against existing art structures.
Impressionism. Salon des Refusés.

Secessionism. Beginnings of the white cube. Compare Klimt with Makart.

Malevich - "I am happy to have broken out of that inquisition torture chamber, the academy".

3. Art as intellectual, political etc. exercise. Artists starting to write about their art and the ideas behind their art. Modern art is often explained and justified through manifestos, magazines. This can be intimidating and off-putting. We want to look at our art unhindered or unmediated by words. Let the art speak for itself. Art for arts sake. There is a feeling that we need a special education in theory, politics, philosophy, theology and social science to understand modern art. Why is this? Is it because art, no longer having to record reality, has to find alternative purposes and sources of meaning?
4. Modern art as a response to the chaos of the modern world. War, political upheaval, revolution, decline in religious faith, breakdowns in society. It deals with big difficult subjects and so tries to reflect them in the art which itself becomes difficult and challenging.

5. Art as an act of rebellion against polite society. Does this begin with modern art? The artist as a breed apart. Having a special insight into the world. Romantic view of the artist. This has generated the idea of the artist as rebel and seer, prophet and this informs much modern art with its big and complex statements. Also contributes to the feeling that modern art is somehow set apart from the rest of the world and from the viewer. In much of what we will be looking at, there is a sense of a conscious break with existing social and aesthetic structures.

All these elements create a background to modern art which we need to think about and in some ways overcome (they can act as a barrier to understanding the work) before we can fully understand the work itself.

All of these elements contribute to the idea of modern art as something beyond the mere creation of attractive picture and objects. The idea that there is something more serious, radical and rebellious going on. Hence -isms. Not a new idea. Originally from El Lissitzky in 1924. We associate isms with intellectual movements from politics, religion, philosophy - i.e. large, difficult subjects. Modern art deals with big subjects, partly on these subjects but also about aesthetics and how painting captures the world, and our place in it. So it is appropriate that we look at it through studying isms.

Impressionism

Images 9-18

Arose in 1860s. Work was submitted to Academy and Salons and rejected for being too radical. Napoleon III allowed them to exhibit at Salon des Refuses. Eventually in 1874, they had their own exhibition.

Original Impressionist aim to create a truthful visual experience. Purpose was to transfer the actual visual experience of the painter to the viewer.

i.e. What the painter sees is what the painting is about. This sort of painting makes us really look at the world around us. When we do, we realise that colours, shapes, visual experiences aren't always what we think they are and certainly aren't as traditional painting presents it as being.

"Feeling of a new freedom and power. Whenever he discovered a beautiful combination of tones, an interesting configuration of colours and forms, a satisfying patchwork of sunlight and coloured shades, he could set down his easel and try to transfer his impression onto the canvas. All the old bogies of "dignified subject matter", of "balanced compositions", of "correct drawing" were laid to rest. The artist was responsible to no one but his own sensibilities for what he painted and how he painted it". (Gombrich)

About a conversation with the canvas. And then from the canvas to us. We, the viewer, are seeing exactly what the artist sees.

Characteristics of impressionist painting.

Main characteristic is the capturing of the vibrating, fleeting quality of light. Short, quick brushstrokes, broken into separate dabs. Impression, essence, not precise details. Impasto. Looseness of the paint.

Wet on wet technique (don't let it dry). Softer and gives more mixing of colour on the canvas.

White or light-coloured ground. Allows light and brightness into the colours.

How natural light works on objects. Importance of reflection. Water. Paint at different times of the day to get different effects. Paint the same subject in different conditions. **Rouen Cathedral.**

Shadows. Used **snowscapes** to "investigate the problem of shadows". Shadows do not appear grey or black, as many earlier painters thought, but are composed of colours modified by reflections or other conditions. i.e. the shadow depends on the colour of the object or other objects and light conditions around it.

Rapid sketches of quickly changing atmospheric effects. Rough and unfinished.

Paintings of everyday life. Ballet. Races. Bars. Cafés. Bourgeoise life. Street life. City life.

First Impressionist Exhibition. 1874.

Positive review.

Jules-Antoine Castagnary (1830-1888) was a politician and art critic, and like Zola, a proponent of Naturalism - i.e. the idea that the subject matter of a painting should be the world around us. In his review of the first Impressionist show, in 1874, he coined the term 'impressionist'.

"The common view that brings these artists together in a group is their determination not to aim for perfection, but to be satisfied with a certain general aspect. Once the impression is captured, they declare their role finished. They are impressionists in that they do not render a landscape, but the sensation produced by the landscape. The word itself has passed into their language: in the catalogue the *Sunrise* by Monet is called not *landscape*, but *impression*. Thus they take leave of reality and enter the realms of idealism."

Jules Castagnary, *Le Siecle*, April 29 1874

Negative review.

Louis Leroy. Dialogue between two imagined viewers.

Paintings that are "hostile to good artistic manners, devotion to form, and respect for the masters. Oh, form! Oh, the masters! We don't want them any more, my poor fellow! We've changed all that".

Camille Pissarro. Gelée Blanche.

Then, very quietly, with my most naive air, I led him before the *Ploughed Field* of M. Pissarro. At the sight of this astounding landscape, the good man thought that the lenses of his spectacles were dirty. He wiped them carefully and replaced them on his nose.

"By Michalon!" he cried. "What on earth is that?"

"You see ... a hoarfrost on deeply ploughed furrows."

"Those furrows? That frost? But they are palette-scrapings placed uniformly on a dirty canvas. It has neither head nor tail, top nor bottom, front nor back."

"Perhaps ... but the impression is there."

"Well, it's a funny impression!"

Unfortunately, I was imprudent enough to leave him too long in front of the *Boulevard des Capucines*, by the same painter.

"Ah-ha!" he sneered in Mephistophelian manner. "Is that brilliant enough, now! There's impression, or I don't know what it means. Only be so good as to tell me what those innumerable black tongue-lickings in the lower part of the picture represent?"

"Why, those are people walking along," I replied.

"Then do I look like that when I'm walking along the boulevard des Capucines? Blood and thunder! So you're making fun of me at last?"

"I assure you, M. Vincent. ... "

"But those spots were obtained by the same method as that used to imitate marble: a bit here, a bit there, slapdash, any old way. It's unheard of, appalling!

Pissarro. Cabbage Field.

the *Cabbages* of M. Pissarro stopped him as he was passing by and from red he became scarlet.

"Those are cabbages," I told him in a gently persuasive voice.

"Oh, the poor wretches, aren't they caricatured! I swear not to eat any more as long as I live!"

"Yet it's not their fault if the painter ... "

Impressionism criticised at the time for being too radical. Now it is criticised for not being radical enough. A bit too easy and comfortable. But what happens when we look it alongside work that is still regarded as radical and challenging and difficult.

Late waterlilies. And Full Fathom Five. Moma. Monet is shown in the gallery alongside Ab Ex painters and we see him as a precursor to that movement.

Neo-Impressionism

Images 19-24

1886 to 1906. The term coined by the art critic Félix Fénéon in a review, 'Les Impressionistes' of the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition.

Camille Pissarro his son Lucien Pissarro, Paul Signac, and George Seurat shown together in a single room. Idea was that they all shared a common outlook. Wanted a new way of creating interest on the canvas that was related to impressionist interest in light and colour but was distinct from pure impressionism.

Given the name 'new Impressionists'.

What is neo-impressionism? Origins and background.

In the mid-1880s Seurat had become interested in several newly published studies of light and colour. He is the great neo-impressionist painter. 1859-1891

'Optical mixture' instead of 'palette mixture' used by Impressionists.

Optical mixing is how the eye and brain mix colours placed next to each other. The colour we see is not on the canvas but is the colour we think we see by mixing (unconsciously) the two separate colours in our mind.

The aim of optical mixture was luminosity, which was aided by the adoption of separate dots of colour. Placing complementary colours next to each other creates greater intensity of both colours and a greater sense of overall vibrancy. Colours were placed next to each other in small dots or short strokes and dashes. This gave rise to the terms Pointillism, which refers to the application of dots of paint, and Divisionism.

"The separated elements of colour will be reconstituted into brilliantly coloured lights". (Paul Signac).

These small dots also permitted the artists to paint on dry areas of canvas, in contrast to the Impressionists, who painted wet strokes upon wet to capture changing conditions of light and atmosphere.

Borders around the canvases. Seurat added a dotted inner border of complementary colours on the canvas, between the image and the white frame.

Can see all this in **Georges Suerat's La Grande Jatte**. Placing small brushstrokes and dots creates a tapestry like effect.

This is deliberate. Trying to create a sort of timeless grandeur. Something quite classical about the structure. Very formal.

It creates a vivid sense of colour but static and a bit lifeless. It is a still and calm picture. It feels like a scientific experiment (which it is in a way).

Similar calmness and sense of structure and order but also a sense of coldness in Seurat's use of composition.

Seurat's *The Parade* is composed in a balanced, ordered way. None of the freedom of impressionists.

S wished to evoke a mood and to go beyond the mere appearance of nature to an underlying structure and meaning. Seurat's work aims for a timeless monumentality - Ancient Egypt and Greece.

Looking at these three Seurat paintings, we can see how neo-impressionism differs from Impressionism.

Impressionism was about instinct and spontaneity, whereas Neo-Impressionism was based on reflection and permanence. It is a theoretical approach to painting colour and composition.

Impressionists obeyed rules of colour contrast, but they did so pragmatically and by look and feel and not according to the scientific principles that were adopted by the Neo-Impressionists, who believed that painting could be based on rules.

Divisionist technique with longer lines not dots. **Signac - Grand Canal, Venice.** He was influenced by mosaics which create a picture from lots of tiny pieces of stones. Painted mosaic. Is this more artistic and less scientific?

Seurat 'the Messiah of a new art'. Seurat and Signac's work shown in Brussels. Influenced Belgian painters - eg Alfred William Finch. Haystacks. Very simple, classically correct painting - divided in two, simple colour palette.

Italian Divisionism (will see some of this influence in Futurism).

Neo-impressionism declined after Seurat's death. Pissarro thought it was a tedious formula.

Camille Pissarro - View from Bedroom Window. P was not convinced by neo-impressionism. He painted in a divisionist style. Longer brushstrokes. He found it too time consuming and expensive and not realistic. Went back to impressionist style.

Interestingly, a number of neo-impressionist painters became decorative artists. An element of decorative art about the style.

The colour theories of neo-impressionism were taken up by Fauvists and expressionists and futurists - experimented with Pointillism as a means to produce dynamic and vibrant colour.

Eg. Matisse's *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* and Gino Severini - Futurism

Post Impressionism.

Images 25-30

Slightly imprecise term covering all art that reacted against impressionism. Used widely, it incorporates, symbolism, pointillism, cloisonnism, cubism.

Artists who reacted to impressionism. Cezanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Seurat. C1886-1905.

I want to concentrate on two important strands in post impressionism. The strand that leads from Cezanne to cubism and abstract painting. And the strand from van Gogh to expressionism.

Name given after the event. Roger Fry exhibition in 1910.

Rejection of Impressionists' concern for natural depiction of light and colour in favour of an emphasis on abstract qualities.

"... the Post-Impressionists consider the Impressionists too naturalistic". Preface to catalogue of Post impressionist exhibition.

i.e. the Post-impressionists are not concerned with accurate impressions or renderings of the natural world but with the structure of the painting itself. They are translating the natural world into geometric structural forms and arrangements. Behind post impressionism is the idea that all nature has a small number of underlying forms and structures.

Cezanne. The father of us all. Post impressionism leading to Cubism. According to Fry, Cézanne most distinctly marked the transition away from naturalism.

Cézanne's goal was to move away from the 'complexity of the appearance of things to the geometrical simplicity which design demands'

What is Cezanne doing?

Ignored the minutiae of natural scenes in favour of the more intangible areas of aesthetics or symbolic content. Abstract concerns of harmony and the two-dimensional arrangement of forms. Creating greater sense of structure in their work.

Studying the underlying forms of nature itself. His work shows one of the earliest reactions against Impressionism, as in *Zola's House* 1880 where he used carefully brushed, diagonal paint strokes to lend structure to the composition.

Card Players and Woman with a coffee pot. C is trying to create a painted world parallel to the real one. Not reproducing the world as it really is but creating a more structural elemental, intellectual equivalent of the world in paint. His paintings are studies in the elements of painting - studies in line and form.

A process of deconstruction and reconstruction in paint. We can deconstruct these paintings by breaking them down into their line - very structural and their form. Woman - Constructed out of conical shapes. Card players - symmetrical. The subject of these paintings isn't really the people but the nature of painting and building a picture.

Landscape

His painting was a process of deconstructing landscape.

“All objects in nature are shaped like spheres, cylinders and cones”.

C did not simply want to reproduce landscape but to *represent* it - i.e. transform it into an autonomous painterly equivalent – “Art is a harmony parallel to nature”

C. freed painting from its dependency on reality as a model.

C's process of increasing abstraction in the **Mont St Victoire** paintings from 1882-1906.

It seems to me that the Mont St Victoire paintings which show an increasingly abstract view of the landscape say very little about this place as a place. They say little about Cezanne's feelings about or connection to the place.

They are studies in how a painter can show the world about him in pure simple forms and structures. And the painting becomes about how we relate ourselves to the world physically and spiritually and aesthetically. The idea that there is more to the real world than what we see at any particular moment. This is what underpins cubism and much modern art and Cezanne is the first to address it.

Post impression leading to Expressionism. Gauguin and van Gogh used nature and the real world to express emotion in their works.

Shows difficulty of trying to press different artists into the same definition or “ism”.
How connected are Cezanne and Van Gogh?

Van Gogh used brushstrokes and colour to express his fascination with the energy that animates natural forms as well as individual people, as in **Starry Night. 1889**

Starry Night. What he sees is translated into thick paint applied fast and violently. Waves of stars (Hokusai's Great Wave - van Gogh's love of Japanese prints). The waves of the sky matches the waves of the trees. “Circuit of energy throughout all nature”. Robert Hughes.

Van Gogh's Landscapes. Sense of power behind the natural world. How natural forms “rhyme” with each other in van Gogh's paintings. Gives sense of all things being connected. Link with Cezanne - C thought that all nature was based on connected simple geometric forms. Van Gogh thought they were connected by similar forces which generated similar forms. So there is a formal unity and structure in van Gogh's paintings. **Wheatfield with crows.** Sky, crows, wheat - all match.

The Sower. Figure as symbol of death. Silhouette with yellow sun forming a halo. Sun is symbol of life (yellow is colour of life). Colour matches the yellow of the grain. Allegory of life and death. Sowing, religious symbolism. Moral purpose lies behind van Gogh's aesthetics. Nature as reflective of deeper forces. This connects with symbolism and expressionism. Move from 19th century Romanticism to 20th century expressionism.

Cloisonnism

Image 31

Related to and part of post impressionism. A style within it.

What is it? Simplified drawing, and the use of strongly outlined planes of minimally modelled, bright colour.

Stresses the two dimensional quality of the image - flat, no perspective. Undermine the three-dimensionality both of individual objects and of the pictorial space.

The beginning of the end of perspective. Not about making the image on the canvas look 3D but about accepting that the canvas is 2D and making the image truthful to that 2D surface.

Reduce natural forms to their simplest shapes

The term is derived from the cloisonné enamelling technique in which thin bands of metal are used to outline flat areas filled with coloured enamels. Related to stained glass. "The work of the painter will be something like painting by *compartments*".

Part of a general reawakening of interest in all arts of the Gothic period (stained glass). Influence of Japanese prints. Flooding the French art market in the 1880s used bright, occasionally non-naturalistic colours and flat forms delineated by dark outlines.

Cloisonnism allowed the artist freedom to distort or rearrange natural colour patterns. Part of a wider and growing interest in radical use of colour and how colours combine and contrast to create the picture. How colour carries the picture. The beginnings of an art about colour. Has a decorative quality. Colour as the (or an important) subject of the painting is a very 20th century idea (Fauvism) and it starts here.

Important style for other artists of the Parisian avant-garde, including Vincent van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Paul Gauguin.

Bernard's *Breton Women in the Meadow*. Influential painting for Gauguin - limited palette, denial of three-dimensional space and the pronounced Cloisonnist line around most of the forms.

His response was the *Vision after the Sermon* - similar to Breton Women. Gauguin and Bernard explored the ramifications of this new style: their forms became flatter, the brushstrokes more regular, compositions bolder, and colours more saturated.

Synthetism

Image 32

Late 1880s and early 1890s. Related to cloisonnism and symbolism. The term derives from the French verb *synthétiser* (to synthesize) and is based on the idea that **art should be a synthesis of three features:**

the outward appearance of natural forms, (i.e. what a thing looks like).
the artist's feelings about his subject,
and purely aesthetic considerations of line, colour, and form. (i.e. how to create an image of something).

Highlighting attempts to abandon nature as the focal point of art. Although realistic, tangible subjects served as their starting-point, the artists distorted these images in order to express more clearly certain moods or interpretations.

In 1890 Maurice Denis summarized the goals of Synthetism: **'It is well to remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.'**

Characteristics of Synthetist art (Gauguin, Emile Bernard, Paul Sérusier, the Nabis, and other members of the Pont-Aven circle of artists),

- use of a limited range of colours with little or no modulation,
- the repetition of colours across the canvas to establish a harmonious rhythm,
- strong definition of forms, either by outlining (Cloisonnism) or juxtaposition, so as to create an overall, linear rhythm.
- emphasis on the flat arrangement of lines and colours.

Synthetist working method (Gauguin and Bernard): the artist should contemplate his subject in nature, making only sketches, or simply committing the scene to memory. Later, in the studio, his mind would filter out the elements and details unnecessary to the translation of his own feelings about the subject.

Limit the number of lines and colours. Limit concern with space and modelling.
Picture is uncluttered by realistic details.

But we are not quite at non-representational, abstract art. It is still about the subject. But cf Maurice Denis - we are seeing the beginnings of the interest in abstract formal concerns over naturalistic ones.

Post impressionism - about how you create a painting in formal terms (colour, line, shape) rather than about you represent the natural world.
i.e. how you paint, not what you paint.

Look at understanding the world and painting as something connected with the world but separate from it - i.e the painting as an object separate from the thing it is a painting of.

Not just seeing a thing and recreating it on canvas.

Primitivism

Images 33-37

Late 19th/early 20th century.

Attempt to create new art by drawing on influences of old, tribal and primitive art.

Disatisfaction with European culture. Too sophisticated and at the same time too debased. Lost connection with the traditional, the simple, the local and the energy of pre-industrial and pre-modern communities. Art needed to lose its polish and return to roots based in folk traditions and a more primal way of living.

In 1914 in the magazine *Blast*, **Henri Gaudier-Brzeska** surveyed sculpture from every time and place, from the Palaeolithic to the contemporary and across the globe. He dismissed Greek classical sculpture and the tradition that had come from it in Europe. Instead he looked at sculpture of prehistoric Europe, Egypt, India, China, Mexico and sub-Saharan Africa, analysing it **from the point of view of form and energy**: Said that the modern sculptors had to aim for such form and energy in their work.

G-B. Head of Ezra Pound. Influence by the great totemic Easter Island figure that used to stand at the entrance to the British Museum.

Artist who were influenced by primitive/tribal forms of art were seeking “Achieve timelessness and universality in their art, to make things that moved beyond the specificity of period and place, to say something about the human condition”. Connect the past with the present. Link ideas and people across time and culture.

When Giacometti moved to Paris to study he spend hours studying ancient sculpture, Cycladic, Etruscan, and African. Major influence on 20th century is ancient, “primitive” tribal art.

Elongated figures. Etruscan and Standing Woman. These elongated figures were a huge influence on Giacometti throughout his life. First saw them in Italy as a young man, then in Louvre. As with African art, it was an important discovery for European artists in 20th century and there was a major exhibition of these Etruscan figures in Paris in 1955.

Giacometti insisted that he was attempting to convey **his own experience of looking at people**. Giacometti - he often reworked his sculpture over long periods before casting them in bronze, building up the clay model, then stripping it down, rebuilding and stripping again, as he gradually eroded the outline of the body to its essential core. i.e. aiming at the heart of what it is to be human – almost what it is to be human in an abstract way. About the essence of human form.

Cycladic Sculpture. From Greek islands in the pre-archaic period. Very simple, geometric designs, flat forms. Highly abstract and pared down. Sense of mystery about them. Influence on Brancusi. And Giacometti – saw a lot of these in the Louvre. Took basic idea and reduced it to gently shaped, flattened planes that just evoke the shape and sense of a woman's head and body subtly and almost by inference.

“If you didn't know that your skull had a certain depth, I wouldn't guess it. Therefore if I made a sculpture of you absolutely as I perceive you, I would make a rather flat, scarcely modulated sculpture that would be much closer to a Cycladic sculpture, which has a stylised look, than to a sculpture by Rodin which has a realistic look. I think we have such a received idea of what a head is in sculpture that it's completely divorced from the real experience of seeing a head”.

Influence of African heads and masks on painting. Modigliani.

And Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger*. African face. Also, the beginnings of cubism.

Cubism

Images 38-45

Demoiselles d'Avignon - created new canons of aesthetic beauty and destroyed traditional distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly.

Is it a Cubist painting? No - but then look at woman on the right. We see her face on but with her back to us - ie two different (and impossible) perspectives at the same time. That is the essence of what cubism is as we shall see.

Name cubism came from a description applied to 1908 painting by Braque - "a painting made of cubes". Actual word cubism not applied until 1911 - used derogatively.

A formalistic art. - reappraisal and reinvention of what it means to make a picture and what constitutes a painting.

Two most important cubist painters. **Braque and Picasso** - working together - as if they were married.

Picasso - more aggressive and anarchic.

Braque - gentler, more methodical.

But they often paint similar subjects at the same time.

Early cubism. Based on cubes. **Houses at L'Estaque.** 1908. Landscapes and still lifes. Paintings shown in 1908. That exhibition gave rise to the name "cubist".

Forms simplified.

Sense of perspective has been abandoned.

All elements piled up on top of each other to the top of the canvas.

No clear light source - light and dark appear at random.

Cubist painting is about how space was shown and rendered in paint.

Show multitude of views in one picture. Variable viewpoint.

Abandon colour in favour of a monochrome palette.

B+P aware that they had made a break with the past.

Analytical cubism

Disassembled a human figure into a series of flat transparent geometric plates that overlap and intersect at various angles. Cube-like imagery has disappeared. From now on, there are no more cubes in Cubist art. Instead, the basic element of this style becomes the plane or

facet - a small plate-shaped area, bounded by straight or curved lines, typically laid out in overlapping layers.

As though a cube has been taken apart and the parts set out flat. The edges of these planes fade and dissolve so that each one merges with the other.

Imagine these paintings as: a large number of photographs of an object, all from different angles and different times. These photographs are then cut up and rearranged almost at random on a flat surface, so that they overlap with each other.

Metzinger. Tea time.

Rejection of perspective. Show the object from multiple angles in different lights. More truthful than a single viewpoint because our understanding of an object is based on these multiple views as we move around it and see it from different angles.

We see more than one aspect of an object at the same time. The Cubist is not interested in usual representation. It is as if he were walking around the objects but he must represent all these views at once.

Juan Gris. Fantomas. Painting an image of transparency. Layers of papers and objects lying on top of each other but he paints them so we do not know what is on top of what. Opaque materials also appear to be transparent. We are seeing all flat objects in the same place at the same time and as complete objects. Playing with illusions of how we see and what we see and what we are able to see and what we imagine behind what we see.

It was a conceptual image of an object, based upon what was known about it, rather than an image based upon what was seen in a single moment. In short, a type of intellectual experimentation with structure.

The idea, not the object. A major element in modern art.

Eventually, the process of showing so many different angles and aspects means that the object from which you have started is so broken down that we lose any sense of what it is. Is this saying something about our ability really to know and perceive things. Picasso. "I paint forms as I think them, not as I see them".

Synthetic cubism. Picasso saw cubism as sculptural.

1912, abandoned analytic style altogether and turned to what has become known as synthetic cubism - used real-life materials as well as paint and canvas. Using paper to stick on canvas.

Braque using sand and other materials to mix paint to give a denser, more structural look to the paintings.

image was being built up (synthesized) from new elements and shapes. Collage.

Still Life with Chair Caning. Oilcloth printed with design of cane covering for seat of chair, stuck onto a painted still life.

Bringing the real world into cubist painting. Moving away from esoteric, near abstract imagery.

Use of newsprint, packaging material, wallpaper.

Actual sculptures, using wood but in a cubist way. A 3D cubist painting. Built up from scraps of materials and then constructed. i.e. not carved away from a piece of stone or wood or cast in bronze etc. Sculpture being built up from not from solid masses but from flat planes placed together in an open way.

The first time this was done. A completely new form of art and sculpture was being invented. Influences Constructivism and modelling techniques in sculpture that we see today - Anthony Caro etc.

Images 46-47. Brancusi. Bird in Flight.

Brancusi. *Bird in Space*.

Brancusi – b.1876 in Romania. Moved to Paris in 1904. Influenced by Rodin (who died in 1917) but then became more interested in abstract shapes and structures.

He was preoccupied by the theme of the bird, culminating in the sculpture *Bird in Space*, of which he made 15 versions in marble and bronze and a number of plaster casts. Brancusi sought to convey the **essential nature of a bird**, without the need for traditional representational forms.

In 1926, Brancusi sent a version of *Bird in Space* to New York for an exhibition curated by Marcel Duchamp. The law permitted artworks, including sculpture, to enter the U.S. free from import taxes but when *Bird in Space* arrived, officials refused to let it enter as art. To qualify as “sculpture,” works had to be **“reproductions by carving or casting, imitations of natural objects, chiefly the human form”**. Because *Bird in Space* did not look much like a bird at all, officials classified it as a utilitarian object (under “Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies”) and levied against it 40% of the work’s value.

Brancusi took the case to court to have the work declared as art (and so free of import tax).

Court case about whether this was a work of sculptural art. Or a piece of mere craft – a utilitarian object. If it was a work of art, it would have to look like what it said it was. i.e. a “bird in flight”.

The task of the trial became, however, how to define “sculpture”—and, more broadly, “art.”

The art critic Frank Crowninshield was asked by the court what it was about the object which would lead him to believe it was a bird. He responded: “It has the **suggestion** of flight, it **suggests** grace, aspiration, vigour, coupled with speed in the spirit of strength, potency, beauty, just as a bird does. But just the name, the title, of this work, why, really, it does not mean much”.

Court agreed that its definition of what constituted art was out of date. The decision of Judge J. Waite read, “There has been developing a so-called new school of art, whose exponents attempt to portray **abstract ideas rather than imitate natural objects**. Whether or not we are in sympathy with these newer ideas and the schools which represent them, we think the facts of their existence and their influence upon the art worlds as recognized by the courts must be considered”.

De Stijl. Neo Plasticism and Elementarism.

Images 48-58

1917-1931. The main figures. Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg and Gerard Rietveld.

Took its name from the magazine they worked on called De Stijl, initially edited by van Doesburg.

A highly intellectual, spiritual and conceptual form of art.

Mondrian - "one of the supreme artists of the 20th century".

Early Mondrian. Influence of van Gogh. *Windmill in Sunlight* 1908. But see use of primary colours.

Tree studies. Ever more abstract. A series of lines. Curved but these later become vertical and horizontal only in the *Pier and Ocean* series around 1914.

Pier and Ocean. Suggest the movement of the sea. The essential movements of the world. But also about pure abstraction. The straight line and the abandonment of form and using shape as representation.

Influences.

Mathematician M.H.J. Schoenmaekers: two books - *New Image of the World* 1915 and *The Principles of Plastic Mathematics* 1916.

"2 fundamental complete contraries which shape our earth are: the horizontal line of power (which is the course of the earth around the sun) and the vertical spatial movement of rays that originates in the centre of the sun".

"three principal colours are yellow, blue and red. They are the only colours existing".

Theosophy. A "universal religion" based on ideas from all religions and philosophies. Concept of a universal harmony underlying the apparent chaos of the natural world.

What is this universal harmony? A harmony that underlies all physical things at the deepest level. An inner understanding.

About understanding and responding to the world around us not on the basis of the outward appearance and tactile nature of physical objects. But on the basis of a deeper, more spiritual understanding of an inner essence that everything has.

If we focus on this inner essence then we find a unity in all nature linked at this spiritual level. What links and harmonises all things is a set of very simple structures and ideas - straight lines and colours. To find this inner essence we need to get away from everyday forms and material things. These material things (the things we encounter in our every day lives) are the enemy of spiritual enlightenment.

Appealing to artists looking to make a new abstract art. Suggested eternal qualities and meaning in non-representational shapes. Geometrical forms were seen as particularly pure and universal. Many theosophist abstract artists (Mondrian, Kandinsky, Brancusi).

For Mondrian, universal language that underlies all nature is the straight line and the primary colour so the subject matter becomes those things (shape, line, colour). Art as philosophy and theology.

This all makes sense in the context of the chaos of WWI. Materiality causes the problems of the everyday world. So to avoid that and move to greater harmony and unity, we need to jettison the reality of the world and look to deeper idealised abstract currents beneath. (see Ab. Ex. Post WW2).

1917-1918. Mondrian writes *Neo Plasticism in Painting*. Coincides with his first floating rectangular coloured planes.

What is neo-plasticism? Moving away from plastic form (i.e. tangible, figurative form). Moving towards the abstract.

It is a form of destruction/ deconstruction. This means letting go of the recognisable image in order to concentrate on the elements that really make up a painting. i.e. line and colour. Colour and line are no longer used to produce reality to us in a picture but are thought of as constituting reality in itself. See below for where Mondrian goes with this.

Van Doesburg, van der Leek. With Mondrian in early part of de Stijl. Straight lines, floating colours.

But then move away. Doesburg to diagonals and van der Leek to representation (the Drinker)

Doesburg moves to **Elementarism**. In 1924 he painted *Counter-compositions*. Originally with horizontal and vertical axes. Then changed to a square format, and they became diagonal counter-compositions.

Mondrian objected to the diagonal - thought it implied movement and action and so was too closely related to this world rather than the spiritual eternity. Fell out with van Doesburg.

3D de Stijl. Rietveld. Chair and Pavilion. And Utrecht House.

Rietveld as a designer and applied artist. Breaking the boundaries between fine/high art and applied design. Worked on furniture design, architecture, typography and graphic design.

Schroder House. Utrecht. The exterior is built up of grey and white surfaces of varying sizes, which are combined with horizontal and vertical lines in primary colours and black. Blurring the divide between external and internal space. In the interior the first floor can be divided from one area into six by the use of concertina walls. This inside/outside flexibility and open plan design was hugely influential in 20th century architecture. Bauhaus and modernism.

How Mondrian develops and purifies his work.

How opposites work against each other to create a unity and a harmony. The point of intersection of vertical and horizontal is the point of unity and harmony which encloses the colour or the block of white. Energy of the colour is compressed into this space.

Developing into a purist painter. Reducing the means of representation and expression more and more.

Lack of frame. Colours bleed out of the canvas without a border. Idea of universality and freedom. But they are contained within the frame of a black line which creates order and unity.

So a fundamental contradiction - order and freedom. Colour and white. Horizontal and vertical. Bound but boundless. From the restriction of the black line on the canvas the colours become free at the edges and so suggest and offer a new set of possibilities. A further example of "letting go" and destruction.

Last works. Broadway Boogie Woogie. 1942-1943. WWII - To London, then New York.

Replaced the black grid with yellow lines that intersect at points marked by squares of blue and red. Influence of NY. Jazz. Small blocks of colour suggest musical rhythm of jazz (fast and slow) and blinking electric lights. Movement of traffic. Grid pattern of the streets. Energy and order. Chaos and order. Suggestive of reality but still uses the elements of abstract painting from earlier.

Suprematism.

Images 59-64

Russian art movement from 1910s and 20s.

What is suprematism?

Art should be useless. Highly abstract. The first movement to concentrate purely on simple forms, shapes, colours in a single block. Earliest example of what is later called minimalism.

Term coined in 1915 by Kazimir Malevich for a new system of art. Wrote about it at length in a complex and almost religious manifesto. Associated almost exclusively with Malevich.

The term itself implied the supremacy of this new art in relation to the past. Malevich saw it as purely aesthetic and concerned only with form, free from any political or social meaning. And with no practical, social, political element.

Contrast strongly with Constructivism (the other big Russian art movement of the time).

He stressed the purity of shape, particularly of the square, and he regarded Suprematism as primarily an exploration of visual language and the thought that lies behind it. Closely related to De Stijl movement. Theology and philosophy in art. Works of art are manifestations of the subconscious mind. And that mind is more infallible than the conscious.

Early Cubist style. Before he got to that stage (ie. The Yellow Plane) Malevich painted in a cubist style. Many pictures of Cezanne and Picasso were in Moscow. Simple cubist forms but he used ever more reductive style from which identifiable representations of objects disappeared.

Black Square

Gave birth to **Suprematism** – which asserts the supremacy of pure form. – culminated in the Black Square.

The square (which is rarely found in nature) was the basic supremacist element. Square is therefore a repudiation of nature and the repudiation of the world of appearance and past art.

“When in 1913, in my desperate attempts to free art from the useless burden of the object, I sought refuge in the form of the square and exhibited a painting that represented nothing other than a black square on a white background”.

Suprematism – “Before it there were naïve deformities and copies of nature”.

This was the decisive step towards 20th century abstract painting. i.e. a complete break with traditional representational art - pictures of objects, people, landscapes etc.

Pure geometrical abstraction - square, cross, rectangle, straight line. The elemental form which symbolised man’s ascendancy over the chaos of nature.

Art as pure thought.

Black Square is not merely a square. It was full of the absence of any object. It was full of meaning. "Supremacy of mind over matter".

Religious element/influence in Black Square. Is it an icon? See exhibition when it was first shown. Black Square in corner of room where an icon would normally be. Is it also an icon in the semiotic sense of being the thing itself, rather than the index standing for, or as an indication of something else. Also, black square placed on Malevich's coffin when he died. Importance of the cross.

Why are his shapes against a white background? What are the empty white spaces? They represent infinite reaches of outer space. "The free white sea, infinity lies before you". Truly creative works are timeless. Works of art are manifestations of the subconscious mind.

Onto the white background, M places forms which communicate feelings about the universe and space. Idea of movement and dynamism. Floating in space. Forms have visual charge, velocity and direction. *The Non-Objective World*. Out of the 'suprematist square'. Malevich developed a whole range of forms including rectangles, triangles and circles often in intense and beautiful colours. These forms are floated against a white ground, and the feeling of colour in space in suprematist painting is a crucial aspect of it.

White on white.

"I have broken the blue boundary of colour limits (i.e. the sky). I have emerged into white. The free white sea, infinity, lies before you".

No sense of colour, depth, or volume, leaving a simple monochrome geometrical shape, not precisely symmetrical, with imprecisely defined boundaries. Although the artwork is stripped of most detail, brush strokes are evident in this painting and the artist tried to make it look as if the tilted square is coming out of the canvas. Malevich intended the painting to evoke a feeling of floating, with the colour white symbolising infinity, and the slight tilt of the square suggests movement.

Conveying the final emancipation – a state of nirvana. The square sheds its materiality and merges with infinity.

"The climb to the top of non-figurative art is hard and full of torment...but satisfying nonetheless. Real things move further and further back, objects disappear with each step back, until at last the world of ordinary ideas, in which we live, vanishes altogether. Away with pictures of reality, away with ideal representation".

Constructivism.

Images 65-73

Art as anarchy and communism. The art of the practical side of the Russian Revolution.

NYTimes described constructivists.: “insanely bent on rooting out the memory of the great art of the past”.

C is not just an art movement. But expression of a conviction that the artist could help enhance the needs of a whole society (esp. revolutionary proletariat) by engaging with machine production, architectural engineering, and graphic and photographic means of communication, film, theatre. C. is about abstract, political art but also into practical design work. Politicising art - break down barriers between art and society and between high art and craft and everyday engineering. (in a way it has its roots in the arts and craft movement). **Social revolution and technological design were first principles of C.**

If Suprematism was about spiritualism, Constructivism was about Materialism. About physical objects.

El Lissitzky. *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge. 1920.* Street poster. Collision of two forces in revolutionary Russia. Simple symbolism.

Story of Two Squares. 1922. Crash and order imposed by red square.

Art as propaganda. Not subtle.

Engineer replacing the artist at frontiers of new style.

Alexander Rodchenko – designs with compass and rule. Geometric forms with aura of rational order. Symbolises the order they are aiming to impose on society.

Ideal of C was unification of art and society. Break down distinction between fine art and practical art. Tatlin, Rodchenko and Lissitzky worked in many fields.

Rodchenko: typography, poster design, furniture. All for state or political organisations.

Photography - the only way to record the new world.

Lissitzky: architecture and interior design. But also painting and sculpture. These were not ends in themselves (art for art's sake) but were parts of a process by which architecture or industrial products were realised.

Proun – means “new art objects”. Conveys the ideas of creative evolution. Beginning with the flat plane followed by fabrication of three D models, then finished utilitarian objects. Process of construction and forming a new thing. All the elements of form –

mass, flat plane, space, proportion, rhythm, natural properties of the material, plus demands of the ultimate function of the object all come together in the final work. Artist as engineer and architect. Idea of Form following Function.

L's work is about the concern for the material problems of existence, eg in housing. Use of space, being best used for our living. Wolkenbügel. Horizontal and vertical living. Envisaged electronic libraries to save space.

Tatlin's tower. *Monument to the third international.* 1917-20. Tatlin: wood, metal, ceramic. Industrial designs, clothes for workers. Cinema and theatre.

Spiral= dynamism and the future. Inside would be a cylinder, cube and sphere containing meeting halls, offices etc. All revolving – moving architecture. Projection system for showing images on clouds – new bulletins, propaganda, government proclamations projected each hour to the people.

Most major C projects never completed, because of industrial and technical deficiencies in the Soviet Union. But see Lenin's Mausoleum. Ironically, it took the capitalist west to build constructivist buildings.

Was there such a thing as Constructivist painting?

Traditional easel painting declined (suppression of Petrograd Academy and the rejection of Suprematism).

“Constructivism repudiates the concept of “genius”: intuition, inspiration, self-expression. Constructivism is didactic, it is physiologically rather than psychologically orientated, it is intimate with science and technology, it is concrete”.

Liubov Popova. “Genuine construction cannot exist in painting. Construction is ‘the actual making of an object’. So, what looks like a painting is a made object.

Popova described her work as being driven by ‘**energetics**’ - means the direction of planes and lines and colours that formed ‘**construction**’ and ‘**organisation**’.

Space-Force Constructions, painted with thick paint on plywood, the running ‘bars’ can indeed be seen as energy channels that confine and organise the more inchoate swirling patterns that lie between them. The energetic lines bring the image together (**organise** it). Bring order out of chaos. Space force is the chaos and construction is the order/ the organisation. Organisation is a practical element.

Farewell to painting. Constructivists concluded that painting on canvas was not something that could sit with what they were doing - their idea of art as practical construction. Organised an exhibition. $5 \times 5 = 25$, which opened in Moscow in September 1921, was intended as a farewell to painting.

For Rodchenko, the traditional elements of painting could be eliminated as mere decoration.

Rodchenko's triptych *Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour* 1921. As he later described these works, 'I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue and yellow. I affirmed: it's over. Basic colours. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no representation.' A painting about colour or a practical object about colour and paint.

Rayism.

Images 74-78

3 major approaches in Russia to abstract art. Sup, Const. Rayonism.

Term derived from the word for 'ray' (Rus. *luch*), used to refer to an abstract style of painting developed by the Russian artist Mikhail Larionov.

Begins around 1912. *Rayist Sausage and Mackerel* In 1913 Larionov began to expound and elaborate his theory in a series of manifestos.

What is Rayism?

Initially the theory of Rayism was fairly simple. Larionov declared that when light rays are reflected from the surface of an object they intersect each other, creating 'intangible spatial forms' that the artist is able to paint. Early works - objects reflect bold clusters of light rays that shatter and fragment the picture space.

1913 - Larionov abolishes the object from the picture altogether. His manifesto *Luchizm* (1913) argues for a 'non-objective approach' to art, and his paintings and drawings began to depict only the reflected rays and the shifting planes created by their intersection.

Allows Larionov to emphasize the formal aspects of colour, shape and texture.

Dynamism of line and the brilliance of colour have a powerful and expressive force. Rayism **influenced Constructionist artists** - Popova and Rodchenko in the early 1920s. Popova's energetic space force compositions - owe a lot to Rayism.

Scientific and metaphysical themes also played a role in the formation of Rayism. Larionov studied X-rays and radioactive rays and in particular associated his world of intersecting rays with that of the Fourth Dimension which provided a topical and philosophical justification for his non-objective work.

Larionov's colleague, the artist **Natal'ya Goncharova**, also painted in a Rayist style. *Cats: Rayist Perception in Rose, Black and Yellow*. Real objects but rendered in an abstract way.

Rayism and cubism. Fractured perspectives associated with cubism. This combined style was known as cubo-futurism. 'The principle of movement is the same in the machine and in the living being',

Rayism and its relationship with Futurism.

Rayism - inspired by Italian Futurism. Larionov's 'ray-lines' sharing characteristics with Futurist 'lines of force'.

Around 1912–13 Goncharova began to address more urban subjects in her work. She portrayed machines and factories, placing a new emphasis on movement. (Dynamo Machine - Dynamo is about producing light through movement). Like other avant-garde Russian artists, she was responding to futurism - a call for artists to reject the past and celebrate the dynamism of the modern age.

Many Russians were dismissive of Rayism. 'Rayism, with which Larionov tried to outstrip the Italians, fitted into Boccioni's waistcoat pocket.'

Rayism and abstract art.

Rayism suggested a world beyond the visible. Goncharova's depiction of energies such as electricity and rays that intersected solid objects led her towards abstraction. Goncharova was one of the first artists to embrace non-figurative art. Working between representation and abstract (Forest). Larionov, takes abstraction further. (see Nocturne).

Futurism.

Images 79-86

Italian movement founded in 1909. As much about politics, social change, revolution and radical ideas as it is about art. Art is used here purely in support of the social revolution. In addition to the art, the Futurists produced a large number of manifestos and articles promoting artistic and social revolution. Leader was F.T. Marinetti - polemicist, self-publicist.

Futurism put idea before style. Challenge whole idea of modern art and its aesthetic ambitions. About more than visual appearance.

F.T. Marinetti. The beauty of the modern world - whose most important characteristic was speed - set against the classical idea of beauty. **“A speeding motor car is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace”.**

Had thought about calling it Dynamism or Electricity. Shows where his intentions and interests lay. i.e. demolish the past and celebrate the future.

It was about how Italy might be renewed culturally, socially, industrially

Aiming at the overthrow of historical Italy with its grandiose artistic and cultural tradition. Feeling that Italy was too reliant on its past glories but had missed out on the new industry. And on new cultural trends. Italy had not been the centre of the art world for a long time. The idea of Futurism was to cut through this and impose a new cultural spirit based on the modern world. A new art for a new world. Manifesto on Venice.

(Boccioni - Riot in the Gallery).

Boccioni moved to Milan - new technological spirit. Met the Futurists. Joined the movement in 1909, becoming an important interpreter and theorist. Riot in the Gallery. After B had signed the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting 1910. He used the Divisionist technique to study the crowd and create effects of light and movement. Electric light shows interest in modern city. Energy, movement, violent fiery colour. How colour theory and contrasts suggests idea of movement. Colour theory of neo impressionists. (Seurat).

In early 1912, Marinetti organised major exhibition of Futurist work - travelled to Paris, London, Brussels. Ensured that 'Futurist' rapidly became synonymous with 'modern'.

Importance of city life and city street life. **Forces of the Street.** Milan as centre of Futurism.

Vitality of new urban life in Italy. Electric street lighting (Rayism) and industrialisation. Speeding train or cab revealed new ways of seeing the world. 'We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot'.

Severini and motor transport. (Trains) "It has been my endeavour to produce by means of lines and planes the rhythmic sensation of speed, of spasmodic motion and of deafening noise".

Machine aesthetic. Enrico Prampolini. "Is not the machine today the most exuberant of the mystery of human creation?" Saw the machine as having "the significance of an ideal and spiritual inspiration". Machine as religious.

Compare machine worship of Futurism with the calm of neo-plasticism. Mondrian was criticised by Leger for not connecting with the working class. For presenting geometrical order in a pure and static form rather than the geometry of the machine aesthetic.

Influence of Cubism (see this in *Forces of the Street* and the Severini train paintings). Futurists were important in spreading Cubism beyond Paris. Before Futurists went to Paris, cubism was little known. Cubo-Futurism. Combining multiple viewpoints with action and movement. Futurism was more interested in action and politics and ideas.

Importance of movement. Boccioni: *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting*. 1910. "A galloping horse has not got four legs: it has twenty and their motion is triangular". *Dog on a leash*. Influence of Muybridge on Boccioni.

Movement in Futurist sculpture. Open sculpture. Challenging the tradition of classical sculpture and Michelangelo. "Let us get rid of the lot, and let us proclaim the absolute and final discarding of the finite line and of the closed form statue. Let us tear the body open and let us include its surroundings in it". Boccioni. Unique Forms. Open out the form and reveal the energies in it. The figure strides out and we have a sense of the moving muscles.

In *Dynamism of a Speeding Horse + Houses* (1914–15), - wood, cardboard, and metal.

B is saying that how we see things produces the illusion of a fusing of forms. When the distance between a galloping horse and a stationary house is visually imperceptible, horse and house appear to merge into a single changing form. Sculptures such as the present example are concerned with the apparent compression of space as an object traverses it, and with the nature of the object's redefinition by that space.

“We wish to glorify war - the sole cleanser of the world”. Nevinson. Only English Futurist.

WWI Nevinson joined Ambulance Unit - ill health forced his return to Britain. Then Nevinson volunteered for home service with the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Used the machine aesthetic of Futurism and the influence of Cubism in war paintings. Walter Sickert: *La Mitrailleuse*, 'will probably remain the most authoritative and concentrated utterance on the war in the history of painting.' In 1917, Nevinson was appointed an official war artist.

Post war futurism. Marinetti continued his pursuit of and support of the new and the future - led to Fascism. This has coloured our view of Futurism and its importance. Its influence echoed around European art - vorticism, spread the word of cubism, expressionism, Russian constructivism - use of different materials in sculpture and the use of art as a tool of political and social change.

Vorticism

Images 87-94

Founded in 1915 by Wyndham Lewis. BLAST - its publication was one of the most important events of English art at the time. Only two issues.

Born out of a split from the Rebel Art Club - set up in opposition to the Omega workshops of Roger Fry (influenced by Post-Impressionist and Fauvist design). Fry pictures and Helen Marshall.

Similarities between Vorticism, and Suprematism (and Constructivism). Both influenced by/ reacted against Cubism and Futurism.

Vorticism vs Futurism: Ezra Pound - "Futurism is descended from Impressionism. It is, in so far as it is an art movement, a kind of accelerated Impressionism. It is a spreading, or surface art, as opposed or Vorticism, which is intensive". "the vortex is the point of maximum energy".

Lewis on Vorticism: we should think "at once of a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated. And there, at the point of concentration, is the Vorticist".

Edward Wadsworth. Abstract Composition. Vorticism stressed the depth of the image creating an intense, inrushing perspective - a vortex. Acceleration of forms into depth. Embraced the modern and the dynamic. Bold lines, harsh colours and sharp contrasts.

Stillness and solidity of Vorticism. An English reaction against action and movement of Futurism.

Vorticism rejected the Futurists' emphasis on blurred movement and the depiction of speed.

Vorticism wanted clarity of definition, enclosing their forms with strong contours that often gave Vorticist pictures an almost sculptural solidity.

Lewis **Vorticist Construction** and **Workshop**. The containing line was a crucial element in Vorticism; mixture of explosive force and order.

Look like leaning architectural structures. Lewis interested in the theme of the modern city. Strong lines, which epitomise Lewis's Vorticist style. Despite the feeling of instability and agitation there is also a sense of order and strength of definition. The 'vortex' is a still point amid a whorl of energy. A sense of the severe control of Vorticism.

Bomberg. Mud Bath. Local Jewish baths near Bomberg's home in east London. Bomberg reduces the human figure to a series of geometric shapes. Hard diagonal lines angular abstraction. 'Searching for a more intense expression ... where I use Naturalistic Form I have stripped it of all irrelevant matter.'

Alvin Langdon Coburn - form of abstract photography called **Vortography**. How new art uses new forms. A Vorticist, rushing intensity. Vertigo. Slightly frightening.

Epstein, *Rock Drill*. Compare Boccioni with Rock Drill. One open and optimistic, machine striding to the future, the other frightening and dystopic. The machine as enemy. A major difference between F and V is the contrasting views of and attitudes towards machines. British scepticism born of Ind Rev vs Italian pastoralism. Lewis The Crowd.

Epstein on rockdrill. "My ardour for machinery (short-lived) expended itself upon the purchase of an actual drill, second-hand, and upon it I made and mounted a machine-like robot, visored, menacing, and carrying within itself its progeny, protectively ensconced. Here is the armed sinister figure of to-day and to-morrow. No humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into".

"Later I lost my interest in machinery and discarded the drill. I cast only the upper part of the figure."

Vorticist images possess a cool, awareness of the impersonal harshness of the 20th-century world. Brutal energy was characteristic of V: the brutalisation of man by his mechanisation of the environment and our life. Prophecy the destructive machine power of WWI.

Unidealised compared with cubism and futurism.

V finished by 1920.

Symbolism

Images 95-101

The term was coined in 1886 to describe certain types of modern French poetry Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine. Soon applied to all arts including painting and music.

Art as irrational. Away from the ordered and classical. Consider it together with surrealism.

Rejection of the what they saw as the superficiality of Impressionism - i.e. the emphasis on nature and visual effect.

Reaction against realism - eg. Gustav Courbet's notion that "painting is a completely physical language composed of all the visible objects".

Stressed feeling and evocation over definition and fact and emphasized the power of suggestion. Can be very hard to pin down what symbolist paintings are meant to be about. Are they just about the mystery of altered states of mind and feeling?

Böcklin. Isle of the Dead. Mystery, nostalgia, feeling for history and the past and for a metaphysical element. Death and the passing from one world to the next. That world might not be the other world of death but the world of dreams, hallucinations, the subconscious.

Connected with the beginnings of interest in psychology and the deeper irrational recesses of the mind particularly erotic and mystical. Common themes included: love, fear, anguish, death, sexual awakening, and unrequited desire, mysticism and the occult.

Notion that an ideal world lies beyond the world of appearances. Their purpose was to render visible the invisible and to communicate the inexpressible.

Beginnings of Symbolism - conjures up these imaginary dream worlds by referring to mysterious figures from literature, the bible, and mythology.

Rossetti - Beata Beatrix. (In England Symbolism was connected with pre-Raphaelites and their followers).

Portrait of Rossetti's wife Elizabeth Siddal. Draws a parallel in this picture with Dante's grief at the death of his lover Beatrice. Dante wrote a poem about his grief. Rossetti paints a picture. Elizabeth is in the character of Beatrice.

Rossetti intended to represent her, not at the moment of death, but transformed by a 'sudden spiritual transfiguration'. Religious symbols. She is posed in an attitude of ecstasy, with her hands before her and her lips parted, as if she is about to receive Communion.

In the background of the picture Dante looks across at Love, portrayed as an angel and holding in her palm the flickering flame of Beatrice's life.

Ponte Vecchio signifies the city of Florence, the setting for Dante's story.

Beatrice's impending death is evoked by the dove - symbol of the holy spirit. - Opium poppy in its beak. Elizabeth committed suicide with an overdose of laudanum.

Sundial - passing time. Shows nine o'clock - time of Beatrice's death.

Early symbolism - use of traditional symbols (from religious painting) but in a dreamlike setting. But later, traditional symbols fall away and the dreamlike quality takes over and the general everyday objects or ideas (nature) take on a symbolic quality.

Odilon Redon. Important figure for symbolism.

Redon's critique of impressionism.

Impressionists "ignore all that transcends, illuminates or amplifies the subject in the region of mystery. They devote themselves to a purely visual art". They are not interested in what R calls the "light of spirituality. Here I refer to a light which comes from within and which escapes analysis".

Noirs. Definitely a world of imagination not realism. What is about? The all-seeing eye - infinity. Religious/spiritual ideas. They evoke a mysterious world of subjective, often melancholic fantasy. In 1879, he published his first album of lithographs, *Dans le rêve*.

The transformation of nature into dream-like images, suggesting indefinite states of mind.

Redon *Profile of a Woman with a Vase of Flowers*

Nature/flowers as symbol of the woman herself and her connection with nature.

Link between the woman and the vase: Woman takes on characteristics of the vase. Flowers on her scarf. Smooth, rounded contours of her profile are echoed by the curved sides of the vase. The human merges with nature in a dream-like mystical way. Symbolism is also about harmony with nature. B interested in man's loss of contact with natural environment.

Gauguin.

Gauguin said of impressionists, “They seek not in the mysterious centre of thought but in the immediately visible”.

He believed that the emotional response to nature is more important than the intellectual; that lines, colours and even numbers communicate meaning; that intuition is crucial to artistic creation; and that one should communicate ideas and feelings derived from nature by means of the simplest forms, after dreaming in front of the subject.

Vision after the Sermon.

Symbolist belief in art as a form of language,

Gauguin. Mythical, mystical. Vision after the Sermon. Flattened out - cloissonism. This flat space ignores the real and three-dimensional space in which we live. But it reflects the 2D space of the canvas. This unrealistic 2D method is ideal for Symbolism. Absence of pictorial depth and use of arbitrary colour encouraged expression of myth, dream and unconscious.

Faa Iheihe 1898. 'Faa Iheihe' was painted in Tahiti, where Gauguin spent his last years. It seems to represent an earthly paradise of men and women in harmony with nature. 'Tahitian Pastoral'. Colours are as though we are seeing the image through a gauze. Unreal.

He wrote that artists should paint ‘the mysterious centres of thought’

Klimt. Combines music, poetry, art, architecture. Mythology, dream, fantasy, eroticism, mysticism. All the elements of Symbolism are here in the city where the interpretation of dreams was invented.

Influence of symbolism.

Symbolism played an important role in the development of modern art.

Undermining reality by means of simplifications, lack of clarity or exaggeration was utilized by 20th-century artists.

Interest in spiritual and occult - theosophy. Move towards the other worldly in thought and belief is matched by move towards other worldly non-realistic styles in art.

Surrealism

Images 102-112

Will Gompertz says that it is the style of which most of us feel that we have a reasonable amount of knowledge. Is this true?

What is surrealism?

'Surrealist' ('beyond reality') About freedom. Freedom of the unconscious.

The dream is the means of unlocking this. Comes out of the tradition of romanticism and Symbolist emphasis on dreams.

Rejects the rational and logical in favour of irrational and instinctual drives of the unconscious.

Find beauty in the unexpected and the uncanny. Strange juxtapositions of objects. **'as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing-machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table'**.

André Breton. *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), defined surrealism as:

Expression of the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason.

Surrealist artists attempted to tap into the dream-world of the subliminal mind, visualizing its secrets and mysteries.

Aggressive rejection of conventional artistic and moral values - influenced film, photography, literature. A whole cultural movement.

Early surrealist painting.

Giorgio De Chirico. *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*.

Menacing. Unsettling perspective - two vanishing points. Emptiness.

Strange encounters between objects. Chance association - creating the "marvellous" (i.e. the things of strange marvel).

Strangeness of the childlike world. An important aspect of surrealism.

Max Ernst. *Two Children are threatened by a Nightingale*. 1924.

Strange juxtapositions. Mixture of innocence and menace. House looks like a cuckoo clock. Pastoral landscape.

Gate into the unconscious. Why is a nightingale as a threatening bird? Girl with knife?

Miro The Tilled Field. 1923-4. Everything has the power to become something else. Every object contains a living soul - ie, has the means of transformation.

Max Ernst's Pietà or Revolution by Night

Influence of Freud. Dream-like with a reference to Freud's Oedipus theory.

The painting replaces the traditional scene of Mary clasping the body of Christ with an image of the artist himself, held by his father. A staunch Catholic, Ernst's father had denounced his son's work, and the painting is often seen as rising out of their troubled relationship. Father killing the son, son killing the father.

Automatism.

Automatism as a term is borrowed from physiology, where it describes bodily movements that are not consciously controlled like breathing or sleepwalking. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud used free association and automatic drawing or writing to explore the unconscious mind of his patients.

Breton - surrealism as "pure psychic automatism".

Many surrealist artists used automatic drawing or writing to unlock ideas and images from their unconscious minds, and others sought to depict dream worlds or hidden psychological tensions. Drawing produced in a sort of trance or unconscious state. Supposedly allows glimpses of deeper levels of meaning.

Andre Masson. Automatic drawing. They consisted of webs of fine lines. Do we make an image out of them? His fellow Surrealists acclaimed the power of these drawings, whose lines hover between pre-linguistic chaos and order.

Masson combined free line with texture, by pouring sand on to his canvases of 1926–7, for example *Battle of the Fishes*. Masson made *Battle of Fishes* by freely applying gesso to areas of the canvas, throwing sand on it, then brushing away the excess. The resulting contours suggested forms "although almost always irrational ones,"

around which he rapidly sketched and applied paint directly from the tube. The image that emerged suggests a savage underwater battle between sharp-toothed fish. Masson wounded in WWI, joined the Surrealist group in 1924. He believed that, if left to chance, pictorial compositions would reveal the sadism of all living creatures.

Later, automatism played some part Jackson Pollock's work. And in art informel.

Salvador Dali.

One of Dali's most important initiatives was to recognize the disturbing potential of objects.

Surrealist object: symbolically functioning object that became the most popular. In 1936 exhibition in Paris of objects that allowed people to '**touch their dreams**': Dali made the ***Lobster Telephone***.

Face of Mae West (Usable as a Surrealist Apartment)

Mae West-lips sofa.

Female artists. Theodora Fanning, Frieda Kahlo, Leonora Carrington. '**The paintings of Leonora Carrington are not merely painted. They are brewed. They sometimes seem to have materialised in a cauldron at the stroke of midnight.**' Edward James.

Magritte. The treachery of Images. Surrealism connected with Dada and Conceptual art. Links to post war art.

Influence of surrealism on later art based on oversized objects, strange juxtapositions, uncanny art, process art. Look at next time.

Fauvism.

Images 113-119

Short movement of only 3 years. 1905-7

A group exhibited at the Salon D'Automne in Paris in 1905. Matisse, Derain, Kees van Dongen, de Vlaminck, Raoul Dufy. Exhibited with a renaissance statue. Critic Louis Vauxelles described the exhibition as "Donatello among the wild beasts" (parmi les fauves).

Fauvism is not a theory but a method, a way of working and a collection of artists who shared that way of working.

About colour - use of unrealistic, unnatural colour..

General characteristics:

bright dissonant colour;

urgency and quickness of brushstrokes

distortion, exaggeration of perspective and form.

Colour as a sign of vitality and well-being and warmth and feeling. Fauvism was an assault on order in French painting. Optimistic. Van Dongen on Impressionism: "we thought their colours were a bit dull".

Derain's Charing Cross Bridge

They were the first to push the idea of pure colour as a subject, to get us to look at colour in itself rather than as part of the presentation of reality in nature. i.e. if a building is painted green, we look at the colour, not the building. We concentrate on the building as colour rather than as the building itself. The strangeness forces us to shift how we look at the painting. This isn't a painting of the Houses of Parliament. It is a painting of green, yellow, red, blue.

Instinctive, not mental or intellectual. Emotional - link with expressionism.

"The chief aim of colour is to serve expression as well as possible".

Matisse. Woman with the hat. Matisse's wife. Elegant and posed, well dressed. All the elements of a formal, traditional portrait. But the painting was criticised for the wild colours, hair is red and green. What are the green stripes on her face? Brushstrokes suggest that it was painted quickly and carelessly.

At the time, critics and the public expected a portrait to look like the subject. So this was a shock. But M was using this colour and style to give expression to his feeling. You don't express strong emotion by simply copying. You try to make an impact and be original. We look more closely because the colour is so strange and striking. And the portrait is more memorable than many more traditional ones.

Colour acting as words. The job of painting is to express, not describe. Colour as the means of expression.

Influence of cloisonnisme. **Matisse, Woman on a Terrace** (1906) the influence of Gauguin can be seen in the anti-naturalistic and decorative use of colour arranged in flat planes and enclosed by a contour line. Lack of perspective.

Matisse as central figure in Fauvism. 1895. Matisse entered the studio of Moreau. Moreau on Matisse: "He did not set us on the right roads but off the roads. He disturbed our complacency".

The sources of Fauvism are van Gogh and Gauguin as well as neo-impressionism all of which opened the way to a form of painting freed from the pictorial conventions

De Vlaminck. Influence of Van Gogh. Saw van Gogh's work at the Groupil gallery in 1901. "loved Van Gogh that day more than my own father"

Houses at Chatou and **River Seine at Chatou:** explosion of colour—intense, instinctive and arbitrary, the impasto thick and heavily worked (paint squeezed direct from the tube), and the handling violent, with dynamic brushwork.

Matisse's Luxe, Calme et Volupte 1905. A virtual manifesto of what was to become Fauvism. Neo-impressionism (pointillism). Pointillist colour theory and technique.

Title from Baudelaire poem "Everything is only order, beauty, luxury, calm and sensuality". About escapism, Romanticism,

Influence of Gauguin. But simplified drawing - shapes not bodies. "Everything in it plays a decorative rather than a descriptive role". The primarily decorative function of art is important for Matisse.

The colours show a division of tones.

Raoul Dufy: "In front of this picture, I understood all the new principles: Impressionism lost its charm for me as I contemplated this miracle of imagination translated into line and colour".

Matisse. Bonheur de Vivre.

Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feelings.

All that is not useful in the picture is detrimental. A work of art must be harmonious in its entirety.

Scale of figures is inaccurate. Large and small figure close to each other and larger figures behind the smaller one. No perspective within the traditional conventions of Western painting.

M is exploring how we really see things.

Forms look different depending on where we are in relation to them.

Matisse incorporates these shifting perspectives into this painting.

The shifting scale is actually the result of our changing position vis-à-vis the figures. Experimentation with perspective. It is only from the varied perspectives within this landscape that the abrupt ruptures of scale make sense.

Influences of Fauvism.

Influence on Picasso. Saw this in the house of Gertrude Stein (who had bought it) and he decided to compete with it and paint something more shocking and more challenging of traditional perspective and scale - Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.

Is Bonheur de Vivre an early influence on Cubism? Braque thought so.

Braque reacted against the colour and his cubist paintings are quite monochrome.

Matisse used his early Fauvist ideas in his later work - cut-outs. Use of colour and 2-dimensional decorative style. Inspired by his own early style.

How Fauvism links with Expressionism?

Is Expressionism a German version of Fauvism shot through with Gothic angst rather than French warmth and joie de vivre?

Expressionism

Images 120-133

We might define expression in a work of art as an outward manifestation of the artist's inner state.

Start with **Tolstoy. What is Art? 1897**. Purpose of a work of art is to express and communicate emotions to the viewer/audience. The artist must feel that emotion and the work expresses it so that the audience feels it in the same way.

Expressionism can be unsettling and disturbing.

Expressionism is about “imposing the will” of the painter on the canvas.

Origins.

Romanticism of 19th century. The artist as romantic, solitary genius.

Gauguin - rejection of European civilization.

Ensor - rejection of fine art for shocking technique showing shocking subjects.

Munch - private misery.

Van Gogh - passionate yet controlled deformation of nature and colour to communicate feeling.

Fauves - use of colour to carry emotion.

Related to political and social upheavals in Germany in first 20 years of 20th century.

In its origins, it is a German movement. Goethe. “The Germans really are a strange lot. They make life unnecessarily difficult for themselves by looking for deep thoughts and ideas everywhere. Just give yourself up to first impressions...don't think that everything must be pointless if it lacks an abstract thought or idea”.

Expressionism as a term was applied after the event - ie. In 1911 when what we think of expressionism had been in existence for a few years. Unlike many of the other movements, these artists did not necessarily think of themselves as “expressionist”, at least not early on.

Two separate groupings of artists,

Die Brücke (The Bridge) heart on sleeve, open expression through explicit human feelings and emotion.

Die Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider). controlled, expression through more abstract ideas of colour and form. More intellectual and spiritual.

Expressionism was not necessarily concerned with the creation of formally beautiful images. Instead, expressionist painters aimed to capture colour, abstract forms and to get at the inner meaning and feeling not just of the image but of the person who painted it. It also sought to stir up those emotions in their viewers.

Die Brücke, founded in Dresden in 1905 by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Fritz Bleyl.

Most were self taught (had studied architecture). Interested in German philosophy. Image of the bridge leading to new worlds. Expressionism as a way of life, not just a form of art. Communal working. Shared studios - made all their own furniture for studios. Revival of printing and especially the woodcut - medieval tradition.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938). Leader.

K - combines Munch's anxiety and pessimism with the colour of Van Gogh and the Fauves. Takes Fauve ideas of colour as means of expression and reworks it in the spirit of German philosophical art.

Kirchner, Dresden "Completely strange faces pop up as interesting points through the crowd. I am carried along with the current, lacking will. To move becomes an unacceptable effort." Heightened colour. Figures with masklike faces and vacant eyes Capture the excitement and psychological alienation wrought by modernization.

Even landscapes have a psychological charge. Colours seem sharper and forms more angular than Fauvism. Natural colours have been neglected in favour of shrill, aggressive colour. Restless movement to the whole landscape.

Rather than being an accurate description of a village scene, Schmidt-Rottluff represented his inner state - lonely man.

Emil Nolde. Only a member of Die Brücke for one year but linked with it for longer. Perhaps the most important member of the group and the creator of works that we think of as quintessentially expressionist. Most powerful of this group. Violent, disturbing, wild staring eyes, a spiritual/religious charge to the work - a genuine depth of feeling. Combative personality. Nazi sympathies but they didn't like his "degenerate art".

Paradise Lost. "contrite and perplexed, staring into the future, [as] expelled and suffering ancestors of humanity". Similar eyes to his *Self Portrait 1917*.

In 1913, Expressionism was criticised for "endangering German youth" and was described as the "daubs of lunatics".

Georg Grosz. Lovesick Man.

WWI joined up in the first year but was discharged as unfit after six months. He developed a deep hatred of the army and indeed of all life generally. He rejoined the army in 1917 and promptly had a breakdown and was admitted to mental hospital.

Austrian Expressionism. Vienna as a centre of new art, new music, political and social upheaval before WWI. Beginnings of psychoanalysis (Freud). Influence on mental, emotional and artistic environment. How the personal stories of these artists affect their art. Egon Schiele (1890-1918), Richard Gerstl (1883-1908), Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980).

K included in Degenerate Art exhibition. Self portrait of defiance painted after the inclusion of his works. Background shows a deer and a running man. Suggesting flight and being hunted. K had a strong sense of being unique, slightly set apart. Used art to create and communicate this sense of himself.

Blue Rider. Munich 1911-14. Kandinsky, Franz Marc, Gabriele Münter, and August Macke. more lyrical and less socially engaged, form of Expressionism. Broke away from New Artists' Society in 1911.

Significance of the horse. **Franz Marc** used horses or deer as metaphors of spiritual purity and a link to the past. It was linked to traditions in German history - medieval knights and Christian warrior saints. Looking back to the past. Criticism of the modern world of technological 'progress'.

Kandinsky: aimed for a regeneration of spiritual values, attempted to find an art of pure 'inwardness', in which colours and lines could communicate psychological and emotional meanings directly and without the mediation of subject matter. In this way, the first purely abstract paintings came into being.

Clearest explanation of what expressionist artists were trying to do:

Alexei von Jawlensky - "the artist only utters what he has in himself, not what he sees with his eyes". Jawlensky (a Russian who came to live and work in Germany).

"**Solitude**" stripped away all extraneous detail and concentrated on pure line and colour arriving at a near abstract series of blocks colour.

What is black structure in the foreground? A form of cross, a highly abstracted tree.

A human figure? The title of this work is "Solitude" which suggests the sort of alienation in the face of the natural world.

Blue Horses (1911)

simplified and rounded outlines of the horses are echoed in the rhythms of the landscape background, uniting both animals and setting.

"a sense of harmony, peace, and balance" in a spiritually-pure animal world and that by viewing human beings are allowed to join this harmony.

Marc gave an emotional or psychological meaning to colours:

blue -spirituality,

yellow - happiness and joy

red - violence and base earthlike matter.

Evoke a spiritual or transcendental essence

Kandinsky.

One of the first artists to theorise about abstract art. *On the Spiritual in Art*. 1912.

Interest in Theosophy. Saw art as connected with the spiritual world and the inner life.

Abstract art is about moving away from material, realistic art and so reflects the spiritualism and mental and emotional abstraction of theosophy.

“None of us seeks to reproduce nature directly”

We are seeking to give artistic form to our spiritual experience. To the “inner purpose of the particular work”.

The desire to represent inner experience was exemplified by Kandinsky’s gradual advance towards abstraction.

Murnau landscapes 1909. Influence of Fauvism and Cloisonnism. But colour is starting to float free of representation and description. Becoming about pure colour - patches of colour. Beginnings of abstract.

Finally he produced painted compositions without any link to objective reality that consisted of a pure play of colours and forms analogous to music. This was Kandinsky’s highest goal, achieved in such works as *Composition V* and *VII*.

Art Informel. Tachism and Cobra.

Images 134-138

General, inclusive term - refers to many of the styles of abstract painting in the 1940s and 1950s, incorporating a number of abstract tendencies. Look at Tachisme and Cobra.

A European equivalent of Ab Ex. Covers the same period.

Describe types of art based on highly informal procedures. A complete break with tradition.

A sense of otherness - challenge the cool rationalism of geometric abstraction that dominated European abstract painting. i.e. Constructivism, Suprematism and Neo-Plasticism.

First applied to **Wols**. *It's all over the city*. Drips, splashes, scribbles, splodges. Intention or accident?

The popularity of *Art informel* after World War II. Seen as an attempt to shake off tradition and as a break from the political authoritarianism that had led to the war. An expression of artistic freedom as a metaphor for political freedom.

As an aesthetic, however, it represented a form of inward retreat in which reality was allowed only a concealed appearance.

Influence of expressionism and automatism. A lot of overlap between isms here.

e.g. Hartung. T. 1935-1

Executed spontaneously and often at speed so as to give vent to the subconscious of the artist. Brushwork is generally gestural or calligraphic. Long rhythmical brushstrokes or scratches

Georges Mathieu. Calligraphic style. His paintings were executed with controlled force, resulting in a matrix of lines bursting from a single point and thrusting outward in every direction, as seen in *Painting (Peinture, 1952)*. The artist often squeezed paint directly from tubes onto the canvas and emphasized the necessity of rapid application in order to harness an intuitive expression.

These paintings are also given the name Tachism (or at least Tachism is a subset of Art Informel)

Tachism from French *tache* stain, splash. Used previously of impressionism and to Fauvists.

Cobra.

One of the most important groupings of Tachist artists was the group known as Cobra.

Founded in 1948 and active until 1951. The name was from initial letters of the names of the capital cities of the countries of origin of the first members of the group: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.

Used experimental methods to explore new paths of creative expression, and all shared similar expectations of the years following World War II: a new society and a new art.

Inspired by Marxism. They rejected Western culture and its aesthetics. Their working method was based on spontaneity and experiment, and they drew their inspiration in particular from children's drawings, from primitive art forms and folk art. Reaction to WWII, Fascism. Looking back to simpler ideas and forms of art. And a certain wildness, against the control of the preceding years.

Asger Jorn. *Letter to my Son* is one of Jorn's most ambitious paintings of the late 1950s, the period in which his international reputation was established. The title refers to his son, Ole, who was born in 1950. It is one of a number of works by Jorn that refer to families and childhood. The layered composition includes at least a dozen frenetic figures, loosely delineated with great energy. Spontaneous urgency that recalls the children's drawings.

Bram Bogart. Heavy Impasto. Expressive, angry use of material.

Karel Appel.

Appel prepared the surface of *Questioning Children* by nailing discarded pieces of wood to an old window shutter. The vibrant colours and roughly-painted figures recall the spontaneity of children's art.

Cobra artists believed that such unconventional sources could re-invigorate post-war culture. In the same year Appel also used the title *Questioning Children* for a controversial mural at the Town Hall in Amsterdam, which was condemned as incomprehensible, and covered over with wallpaper. There is a note of tragedy in these works as the Dutch title also means 'begging children' and evokes scenes of poverty that Appel had witnessed in post-war Germany. Political work.

The first exhibition of Cobra work held in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in November 1949; the show was received with hostility by both press and public. (**Blotch, blotch and splotch at the Stedelijk Museum**).

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Images 139-151

What do we mean by Abs Ex? A moment in American painting from c1940 to c 1970.

Large scale canvases
violently non-representational,
strong use of colour,
either hyperactive or spaciouly meditative.

Big scale makes it seem very American and so reflecting a particular American self-confidence and success.

And it is usually seen as very urban, connected with New York. They were actually from different parts of America. Certainly not all NY. Still from California. Pollock from mid-West but moved to NY and his best and most famous work came when he moved out the city.

Only statement of their aims and purposes comes from Rothko in a letter to New York Times in 1943. ***“We favour the simple expression of the complex thought”***.

Influences and history

Abstract art of early 20th C (i.e. work of Malevich) and expressionist movement coming from Germany.

Two styles. **Action painting and colour field**. Either a Pollock person or a Rothko person.

Action painting.

“Action painting” - impulsive brushwork, and unstable or energetic composition, which seemed to express the state of consciousness held by the artist in the heat of creation.

Links with automatic drawing.

Pollock as supreme action painter.

Mural 1943. For Peggy Guggenheim. Painted in one day. 20ft x 8ft

Result of a vision of a “stampede of every animal in the American West, cows and horses and antelopes and buffaloes. Everything is charging across that goddamn surface”. But real sense is of freedom from form – abstraction.

‘At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act. ...What was to go on canvas was not a picture but an event’. (Harold Rosenberg).

Pictures of Pollock at work. apparent psychological freedom and physical engagement with materials. Painting **One: Number 31**. Hyperactive intricacies. These are his classic works created by pouring and dripping paint onto the canvas lying on the floor. Pollock calls it “energy and motion made visible”

Lee Krasner. A tighter, more organised style but still with Pollock’s energy. A feeling of intense activity. Generated by filling the whole canvas. Her style became looser and angrier after his death. **Gothic Landscape 1961**.

Blue Poles. make a decision to create straight lines here and to use particular colours but much of the painted canvas emerges from a series of chances. As such it represents how life is lived for most of us. A mixture of intention and chance. Pollock was once accused of painting chaos – he said there was no chaos. He reconciles order and chaos.

Painting is about the process – the energy, tensions and gestures that create the picture.

Willem de Kooning.

Most representational of Ab. ex. Only American artist of his generation to take the human figure as his central theme, continued to explore the subject throughout his career.

Women paintings. Connections with German expressionist paintings of human figure. Brought him to fame. Fragmented images. Figure and abstract background struggle for supremacy, painted with great energy. Shocking images. Artists shocked by their non-abstractness. Public by violence of the images. Images appear frightening (wild stare, wide grin, overbearing and oversized bodies –) and also demeaning and sexist (almost deconstructing the female form).

Colour Field Painting.

Rothko, Newman, Still

use of colours and colour tones close in value and intensity,
its radically simplified compositions,
no obvious focus of attention

very large formats

link with nature – landscape, rock formations, sea, sky. Transcendental.

Newman:

Wrote an essay "The Sublime is Now". Art to be stripped to its essentials but dealing with emotions. Sublime, imposition of monumental on the viewer.

Abstraction conveying awesome meaning and feeling.

Newman's use of narrow line dividing two blocks of the same or closely related colour. He called these lines "zips". i.e. take apart or bring together the whole.

Onement 1. Vertical lines convey sense of humanness – some have seen them as the equivalent of Giacometti's stick thin figures. We relate to these lines in the images which are the human in the divine/sublime.

Vir Heroicus. "It's no different, really, from meeting another person. One has a reaction to the person physically. Also, there's a metaphysical thing, and if a meeting of people is meaningful, it affects both their lives."

Blurred edges of vertical lines give a sense of drama and ambiguity – colours bleeding into each other. i.e. not entirely geometric. But give a sense of life within the void of colour.

Vast fields of colour are also alive. These are not dead images. **Cathedral.** Shimmering blue like the sea but blue shading into green and purple and black. Religious elements – Newman. "Instead of making Cathedrals out of Christ, man or life, we are making them out of our own feelings".

We are meant to stand close to picture. The relationship is to the colour. Intensity and sublimity of colour. We are drawn into it because there is so little going on in terms of representation or narrative. This can either give comfort or a sense of alienation. Balance between awe and isolation in the face of sublime and vast nature.

For Newman art was a spiritual exercise. Art replacing or working alongside religion, spirituality.

Clyfford Still. Again, sense of sublime and awe in face of nature. Like Rothko and Newman, for Still, colour as an ultimate emotional vehicle.

An outsider in Ab Ex. Brought up on West coast and Canada in farming communities. Obsessed with power of huge Canadian landscapes and relationship of individual to it. As his work progresses,

July 1945 R. Line as lightning. Relationship to Newman's vertical line. Can we talk about the line as the subject of the painting? Line as foreground and larger blocks of colour as background.

Becomes more abstract and colour block merge and bleed into each other. 'life and death merging in fearful union'.

light and darkness.

paint surface as a hostile terrain reflecting the hostility of the landscape.

his belief that art must be a moral and aesthetic power in an age of conformity.

Titles - system of numbers, years and letters. He thought that titles manipulated the viewer's experience. "The pictures are to be without titles of any kind. I want nothing to interfere with or assist the spectator. Before them I want the viewers to be on their own and if they find in them an imagery unkind or unpleasant or evil, let them look to the state of their own soul". Ab Ex painting as a very direct experience.

Mark Rothko

Communicating his ideas about the condition of mankind

'The progression of a painter's work...will be toward clarity; toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.'

"I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions — tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on — and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I *communicate* those basic human emotions... The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them".

His painting should fill an entire room. Not shown with other artists or individually. Indirect light.

Early paintings were more representational but went to work with Clyfford Still in California in 1947 who influenced his large scale abstract style. amorphous masses of colour that spread across the entire surface of the canvas, (**Untitled 1948**)

He then starts to simplify the form and structure.

Rectangles against a background colour. He thought of his rectangular forms as actual objects positioned over the field of background colour. Floating in space. As a result of the shimmering and flickering light and the pulsating colours that project and recede, Rothko's large canvases produce an impression of constant motion. The

intense colour and bold form merge into a single unified image whose impact transcends the sum of its individual components.

Brown and grey. Conscious decision to move away from colour. Smaller scale, on paper.

Religious, transcendental, metaphysical. Aesthetic theology. Rothko Chapel.

Tragic and timeless

If there is anything uniting these artists it is a shared experience. All figures were born between 1903 and 1912. Lived through WW1, Great Depression, Spanish Civil War, rise of totalitarianism, WWII and Holocaust. Some were immigrants to the USA: Rothko and de Kooning. Rothko in particular never felt fully comfortable in the US – committed suicide. Pollock suffered from depression and alcoholism and killed himself in a car crash.

Newman also from an immigrant Jewish family. “the feeling I had at the time around 1941 was that the world was coming to an end.”

This is art of its time. It is a response to what TS Eliot called “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”.

Myth and Jung’s idea that myth gives universal form to basic human truths -

a deep level of experience which he called “collective unconscious”.

For Jung myth has a dramatic simplicity expressed through archetypes - primal figures and symbols. Ab Ex art has this quality of reducing art to essentials and simple archetypes, line, colour, form. Gives it a primeval mythic quality. Ab ex seems to express something at a very deep almost unconscious level.

Contents

Introduction.	1-2
Impressionism	3-5
Neo-Impressionism	6-7
Post Impressionism	8-10
Cloisonnism	11
Synthetism	12
Primitivism	13-14
Cubism	15-17
Brancusi, <i>Bird in Space</i>	17
De Stijl, Neo-Plasticism, Elementarism	18-20
Suprematism	21-22
Constructivism	23-25
Rayism	26-27
Futurism	28-30
Vorticism	31-32
Symbolism	33-35
Surrealism	36-38
Fauvism	39-41
Expressionism	42-45
Art Informel. Tachism and CoBrA	46-47
Abstract Expressionism	48-52