

What is Modern Art?

MOMA

Questions

The Museum of Modern Art collects work made after 1880, when the atmosphere was ripe for avant-garde artists to take their work in new, unexpected, and 'modern' directions.

How did 'modern' artists challenge the notion that art must realistically depict the world?

Many artists explored dreams, symbolism, and personal iconography as ways to depict their experiences.



Paul Cézanne. *The Bather*. c. 1885.

- Cézanne captures a sense of emotional ambiguity or uncertainty in *The Bather* that could be considered typical of the modern experience.
- Look at the figure. What do you notice about his stance and gaze?
- Do you think Cézanne painted from real life or from a photograph? (another modern technique)

Modern artists also experimented with the expressive use of color, non-traditional materials, and new techniques and mediums.



Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*. Paris, June-July 1907

- Picasso invented a new way of painting called Cubism because of its geometric forms.
- What do you notice about the figures and the setting? Do the fractured planes make the setting difficult to identify?
- What else do you think is 'modern' about this picture?

Modern artists also expressed the symbolic, by depicting scenes and places that evoked an inner mood rather than a realistic landscape.

- Take a moment to notice how van Gogh used small brush strokes and color to create *The Starry Night*'s moving sky.
- What might the shimmering stars, moon, and swirling night air symbolize to van Gogh? What mood or feeling do you think van Gogh was trying to convey?



Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. June 1889

The invention of photography in the 1830's introduced a new method for depicting and reinterpreting the world.



- Atget documented Paris for 30 years, capturing the culture and modern architecture of this vibrant and artistic city.
- How do you think this picture captures the concept of a 'modern' city?

Eugène Atget. *Chemiserie, Boulevard de Strasbourg*. c.1900.

Innovations in printing gave artists the ability to replicate an image over and over again, encouraging them to design posters advertising cabarets, art salons, musical concerts, and readings.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. *Divan Japonais (Japanese Settee)*. 1893

- Toulouse-Lautrec's posters were noteworthy for their simplified and abstracted designs. In *Divan Japonais*, he depicts a well-known Parisian cabaret singer, Jane Avril.
- Is this art or is this advertising? What do you think?

Questions

Can you rename all of the ways in which modern artists expressed a new modern sentiment through their works of art?

Painting Modern Life

Questions

How did early modern artists push the boundaries of 'traditional' art?

What kinds of choices did they make to break with tradition and try something new?

Henri Matisse used color to capture the emotion of places in landscapes that were considered 'wild' and 'reckless'.



Henri Matisse. *Landscape at Collioure*. 1905

- Does this landscape look or feel wild to you? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What mood or feeling was the artist trying to evoke?
- How did Matisse achieve this feeling?

A master of perspective and light, Cézanne painted from real life in order to ‘realize his sensations’.



- What do you notice about the objects on the table?
- What do you notice about the background?
- What do you notice about the perspective?

Paul Cézanne. *Still Life with Apples*. 1895–98



Paul Cézanne. *Still Life with Apples*. 1895–98

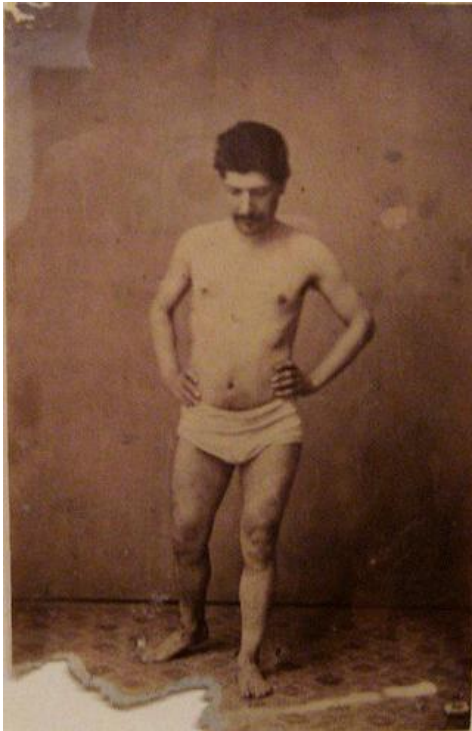
Take a close look at *The Bather*, by Paul Cézanne.



- Look at the figure. What do you notice about his stance and gaze?
- Do you think Cézanne painted from real life or a from a photograph? (another modern technique)
- Why do you think this was considered one of the first 'modern' paintings?

Paul Cézanne. *The Bather*. c. 1885.

Cézanne painted from a photograph rather than something he had seen in real life...a decidedly modern act.



Artist Unknown. *Standing Model*, c. 1860-80.



Paul Cézanne. *The Bather*. c. 1885.

- What do you notice about the photo?
- Can you see how Cézanne captured the model's stance and gaze in the painting?
- Do you think Cézanne painted the background before or after he painted the figure?

Let's compare *The Bather* with this photograph taken at the beach.



Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Archive (c2004, California Historical Society; California Historical Society, CHS-44976)

Shirley V. Bacon ca. 1900, courtesy of California Historical Society Collection, 1860-1960.

- What similarities do you notice?
- What differences?

Questions

Why do you think these artists' choices were considered so modern at the time?

Cubism

Questions

How did Cubists push the boundaries of 'traditional' still lifes and portraits?

What was new and different in their approach to painting?

Now, let's take a close look at *Les Femmes d'Alger* by Picasso.



Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger*.
Paris, June-July 1911

- Describe what makes these figures so unconventional.
- What do you notice about the setting? Do the fractured planes make the setting difficult to identify?
- How did this work break with tradition?
- How might this work of art have been controversial at the time it was painted?

Let's compare these two paintings.

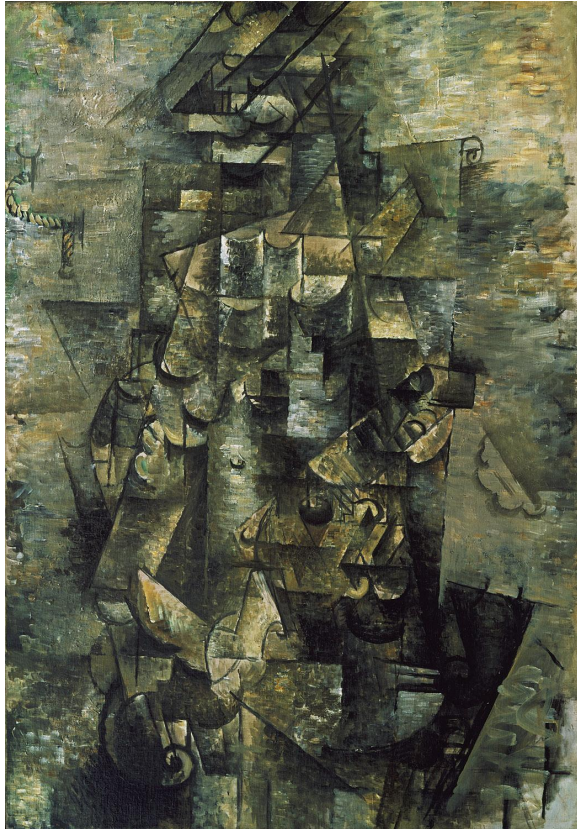


Paul Cézanne. *The Bather*. c. 1885



Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger* (O. J.). Paris, June-July 1911

Compare and contrast two Cubist paintings by friends, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Look at all of the different angles.



Georges Braque. *Man with a Guitar*. 1911



Pablo Picasso. *Ma Jolie*. 1911–12

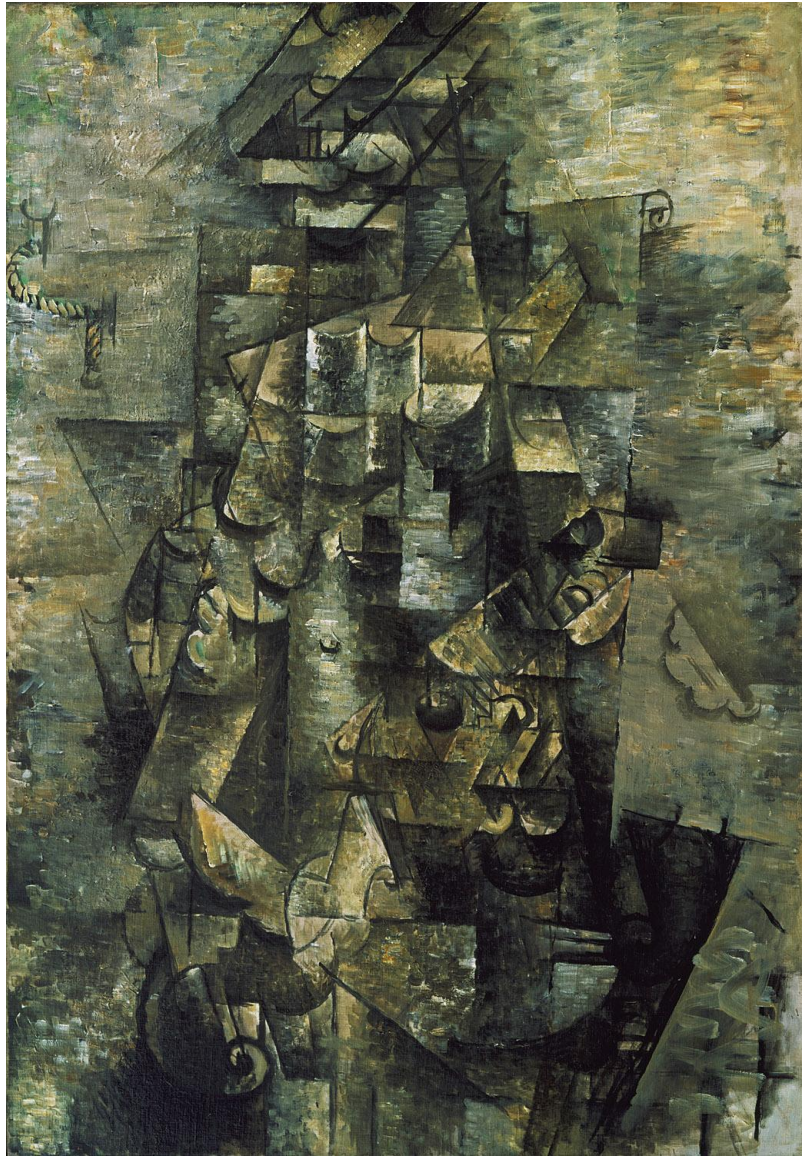
**Braque is on the left, Picasso is on the right.
Can you find the figure in each?**



Georges Braque. *Man with a Guitar*. 1911



Pablo Picasso. *Ma Jolie*. 1911–12



Georges Braque. *Man with a Guitar*. 1911



Pablo Picasso. *Ma Jolie*. 1911–12

Questions

Why were the Cubist artists considered so radical at the time?

How did Cubism lay the groundwork for abstract art?

Rise of the Modern City

Questions

How did art, architecture, and design give rise to the 'modern' city?

How did artists, architects and designers both create modern space, as well as document it?

H. Blancard documented the building of the Eiffel Tower in 1888. At the time, the Tour Eiffel was a controversial ‘modern’ structure.



Hippolyte Blancard. Untitled (construction of the Eiffel Tower). February 1889

- How would you characterize the Eiffel Tower?
- Would you consider it a modern building? Why or why not?
- Why do you think it was so controversial at the time it was constructed?

Hector Guimard produced 141 Métro Gates for the city of Paris to make riding the subway appealing to Parisians.



- What do you notice about the gate's design?
- How do you think Guimard was able to make so many gates?
- How was this design modern?

Hector Guimard. Entrance Gate to Paris Subway (Métropolitain) Station, Paris, France. c. 1900

What can you notice about the few remaining Guimard Métro gates?



Port Dauphine and Abesses Gates
in Paris



Guimard Gate now in Montreal

Eugène Atget documented Paris for nearly 30 years, capturing the rich culture of the modern city.



- What is going on in this photograph?
- How do you think this picture captures the concept of a 'modern' city?
- Do you think Atget meant for it to be a work of art? Why or why not?

Eugène Atget. *Chemiserie, Boulevard de Strasbourg*. c.1900

Modern Landscapes

Questions

How do artists convey a sense of place, atmosphere, or environment in a landscape painting?

How do artists use new painting techniques to express mood and interior feelings in their landscapes?

Take a close look at *Port-en-Bessin, Entrance to the Harbor*, by Seurat.



Georges-Pierre Seurat. *Port-en-Bessin, Entrance to the Harbor*. 1888

- What is going on in the foreground, the middle ground and the background?
- What is the mood of this place?

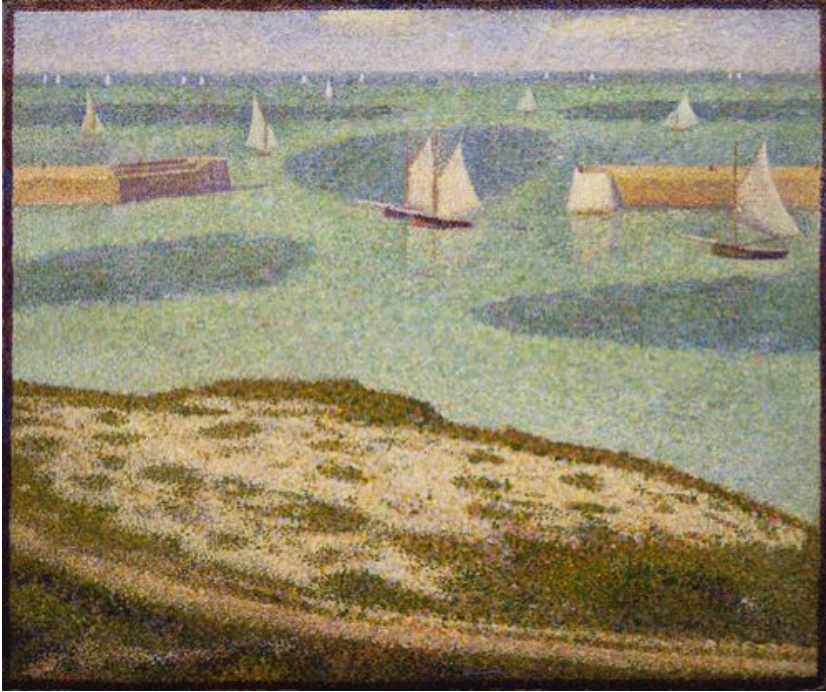
Now, take a close look at *The Starry Night*, by van Gogh.



Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. June 1889

- How is it similar to *Port-en-Bessin*? How is it different? What details do you notice?
- Why might this be considered a 'Symbolist' work of art?

Let's compare Seurat and van Gogh



Georges-Pierre Seurat. *Port-en-Bessin, Entrance to the Harbor*. 1888



Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. June 1889

- How are these paintings similar?
- How are they different?

Now, take a close look at *Melankoli III* (*Melancholy III*), by Munch.



- What is happening with the figure in this landscape? What mood is being conveyed?
- Would the mood be the same without the figure? Why or why not?

Edvard Munch. *Melankoli III* (*Melancholy III*). 1896

Questions

Now that you have generated descriptive words for each image, use them to have a conversation with a partner:

How did these modern painters convey a sense of mood or interior, psychological space in their landscapes?

Portraits

Questions

Why do artists make portraits?

How do artists convey the personality and spirit of a person in a portrait?

What constitutes a 'modern' portrait?

Let's study *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist* by Vuillard.



Édouard Vuillard. *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist*. 1893

- What is going on in this portrait?
- Who or what is the focal point in this picture?
- What is the feeling or mood?
- What do you think makes this a 'modern' portrait?



Édouard Vuillard. *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist*. 1893

Let's take a close look at *Portrait of Joseph Roulin* by van Gogh.



Vincent van Gogh. *Portrait of Joseph Roulin*. 1889

- What details do you notice in this portrait?
- What details do you notice in the background?
- Why might this be considered a symbolist portrait?



Vincent van Gogh. *Portrait of Joseph Roulin*. 1889

Questions

How do artists convey the personality and spirit of a person in a portrait?

Are portraits still important today? Why or why not?

Popular Culture

Questions

How did modern artists employ both artistic talents and inventive techniques (printing) to advance popular culture?

How do artists influence popular culture and vice versa?

Let's study *Divan Japonais* by Toulouse-Lautrec



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. *Divan Japonais* (Japanese Settee). 1893

- What is going on in this image?
- What kinds of lines and shapes do you notice?
- Who or what is the focal point in this image?
- What do you think this poster was used for?

**Compare other posters from the time period.
Do you see a style emerging?**



Jules Chéret. Folies-Bergère, La Loïe Fuller. 1893



Georges De Feure. *Comédie Parisienne, La Loïe Fuller Dans Sa Création Nouvelle, Salomé*. 1900

Compare and contrast Toulouse-Lautrec's poster with *Toy Story 3*.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,
Confetti. 1894



Disney Pixar's *Toy Story 3* Poster.
2010

What is the link between celebrity and advertising? What is the link between art and advertising?



Jules Cheret. Folies-Bergère, La Loïe Fuller. 1893



Got Milk? print advertisement

Questions

Can you see how modern artists influenced a century of advertising?

Do you think the artists were aware of how 'avant-garde' they were at the time?