

Between such as,
pablo picasso. this
style revolutionized

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Between the wars, during the prime of De Stijl and Bauhaus aesthetics, Cubism came to be considered one of the most influential movements of the early twentieth century. The movement in formal terms was considered art based solely on its abstract elements, "the means of constructing a picture by taking the object as a pictorial element only, quite apart from the anecdotal standpoint" (Leighton, 270). It was given the name Cubism by French art critic Louis Vauxcelles due to seeing geometric shapes he thought of as "cubes" in the work of artists; such as, Pablo Picasso. This style revolutionized the art world. No longer did artists use traditional illusionism in paintings, but instead reduced objects into geometric forms. While artists; such as, Picasso were credited with creating this new visual style, it was further adopted by many other painters.

One example being Juan Gris. These two artists ended up being partners in the development of Cubism in the four or five years leading up to the first world war. Despite their similar content, they approached their work differently in their painting styles. The focus of this paper will be that difference, and for a better understanding of their styles, this essay will examine Gris' work Checkerboard and Playing Cards Picasso's Still Life with a Bottle of Rum (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2.). Gris was born José Victoriano Carmelo Carlos González Pérez, in 1887 in Madrid.

He took the pseudonym Juan Gris shortly before his relocation to France in 1906, and by fortuitous circumstances became Picasso's neighbor in Le Bateau-Lavoir. Gris was at that point a graphic artist, but his fellow-Spaniard introduced him to the world of writers and painters. He seriously began to

paint in 1910, and by 1912 emerged as one of the Cubists, alongside Picasso and Braque (Soby, 12). By the time Gris created *Checkerboard and Playing Cards* in 1915, “he began to simplify his compositions, aiming for structural clarity and monumentality in the still-lives he painted with almost monastic devotion” (Desmond, 15). *Checkerboard and Playing Cards* is a typical Cubist still life with objects that include a green and black checkerboard, and playing cards as the title suggests. There is also a pipe, a wine glass or two, and a newspaper, *Le Journal*. They all appear to be on a round table (Fig. 1).

These are familiar enough things, but are described in an uncommon way. Space is compressed and planes overlap, pressing the objects against the picture plane. Mark Rosenthal said that Gris specialized in airless space, and pointed to his “use of geometry to elevate lowly objects” and his considerable earnestness (46). Gris had set up the painting to have certain contrasts: from the brilliant whites and the velvet blacks to the lemon yellows and deep maroons.

Curved shapes are played against each other. To top off the balance of elements is the connection between the indistinct forms and unequivocal detail, such as the markings on the cards (Desmond, 15). Symmetry transformation is also to be considered when considering this piece of art. Before 1915, Gris had done what the other cubists had done. He had disassembled still life objects into disconnected planes and reassembled new and unusual objects by coming from different vantage points.

With this method, though, he added a new way for disassembling not just individual objects but groups (Kahnweiler 30). Gris wasn't enormously gifted, but he was committed to Cubism. He preferred the visual excitement and the judgement of his eye over Cubist formula and logic. In 1919, Gris himself said: "If I am sometimes able to push a picture to a successful conclusion, it is due more to my understanding of the language of art than to my experience of actual painting" (Kahnweiler 30). This lack of experience means that even though he has these feelings and thoughts in order, the same isn't true of his brush.

Picasso was born on 1881 in Malaga, Spain. His father who was an art professor introduced to the arts rather young. Picasso was seen as a prodigy, and finished his classical training early. Before the age of 20, Picasso had already begun to shift his style away from traditional realism (O'Brian, 1976). When Picasso moved to Paris, he didn't immediately begin painting in that fragmented, Cubist style. He had two distinct periods from 1901 to 1906: his Blue Period and Rose Period. Picasso took his best friend, Casagemus, with him to Paris for companionship and support, but Casagemus became involved with a Parisian prostitute who shot both of him and her in a quarrel. The prostitute survived, but Casagemus died of his wounds (Kavanaugh, 1995; O'Brian, 1976).

Overcome with grief, Picasso began to paint the despairing characters of what became known as his "Blue Period". During this period, Picasso painted primarily with blues tinged with green, mainly depicting prostitutes or beggars. It wasn't until 1906 that he had a better state of mind, and

introduced warmer colors into his paintings, starting the "Rose Period" which mainly had clowns and circus performers (Crespelle, 1967). His rose period was shorter than his blue period, and soon Picasso began experimenting with other painting styles.

By 1910, he had come up with something very new: Cubism. It started in 1909, when Picasso was in Spain. He had brought back with which Gertrude Stein had said, "were extraordinarily realistic and all the same the beginnings of Cubism" (7). It is suggested that he took photos of the landscapes during this time, and the photos had interested him in trying to recreate the cubic features that were shown in the landscapes (Tucker, 1982).

By the time Picasso discovered this new art style, it was World War I. Picasso had retired his complex and allusive prewar project, and instead reduced it to "a game of line, color, and form devoid of social critique and programmatic animus towards the past or any other engagement with the iconography of contemporary life" (Leighton 270). Upon using Cubism, Picasso sabotaged the traditional properties of painting. He introduced materials considered "unworthy" to be considered art and demonstrated a total indifference to technique (Desmond 15). While a majority of Picasso's works were paintings, Cubism led him to create stunning created prints, etchings, lithographs, and linocuts in the style of Cubism. Picasso also "incorporated pochoir, or hand-applied watercolor, to the majority of his Cubist prints further contributing a sense of texture and color" (Rewald 2000). These

prints were considered rare and are often created after Still Life with a Bottle of Rum (Fig.

2). Picasso's Still Life with a Bottle of Rum (Fig. 2) was painted in Céret, a small town in the foothills of the French Pyrenees as he worked alongside Georges Braque (Castre 56). It was made during the abstract stage of Cubism, known as Analytic Cubism.

With Analytical Cubism, Picasso used a muted color palette which had browns, grays, and blacks and chose to convey unemotional subject matters such as still lifes and landscapes. "He placed an emphasis on open figuration and abstraction, but did not yet incorporate elements of texture and collage" (Fry 296). In this painting, there is a round tabletop with a stemmed glass painted on the left side of the painting. Upon a closer look there is a bottle of rum at the center and a pipe towards the right. It is considered the first of Picasso's work that includes letters. To understand these contrasting works we must consider the attitudes of these colleagues who had opposing views on almost everything. For instance, in 1921 Gris had said he works with a combination of elements: intellect and imagination. "I proceed from the general to the particular, by which I mean that I start with an abstraction in order to arrive at a true fact.

Mine is an art of synthesis, of deduction" (Kahnweiler 193). In contrast, Picasso had said that researching for a painting often makes the artist lose himself in his thoughts. He felt that a picture is not meant to be thought out and settled beforehand.

Form can change as easily as one changes their thoughts (Green 52).

Again Gris, trying to be logical, said, "I try to make concrete that which is abstract...Cézanne turns a bottle into a cylinder, but I...make a bottle - a particular bottle - out of a cylinder" (Kahnweiler 193). Picasso having heard of Gris' remark about the bottle of cylinder had a romantic response. He said he could start off with a head, but end up with an egg. He doesn't know what to expect but is interested in all the possible ways "between the things I want to speak about...Reality must be torn apart in every sense of the word" (Gilot & Lake 51-52).

Another example of their opposing thoughts is Gris' words in 1921. He said, "I consider that the architectural element in painting is mathematics, the abstract side" (Kahnweiler 193). Picasso upon hearing these words said that math, psychoanalysis, music, and what not, has been related to Cubism to make it easier to understand. "All this has been pure literature, not to say nonsense, which brought bad results, blinding people with theories" (Chipp 265). It seems the start of their disagreement started after Gris had won Picasso's friendship. Gris wanted to show his talent as an artist was capable of true painting, and painted a portrait of Picasso.

The portrait helped solidify his own place within the Paris art world, but did not promote their friendship, though. The black and white outlines shown in the portrait made Picasso look rather gray which gave him a cold expression to his face. Gris had wanted the painting to be a way to confirm his commitment to cubism, but Picasso was far from flattered. He was actually extremely irritated and Gris was mortified (Richardson 178). What

solidified it was Picasso finding out Kahnweiler had signed both him and Gris for his gallery.

Picasso was furious, became merciless towards Gris. For the rest of Gris' life, he would pay the price of this rivalry (Richardson 269). Despite this, though, it still didn't stop them from learning from each other. It is unfortunate for Gris to be compared to someone as great as Picasso.

Picasso was someone you would never know where his ideas were going to lead. A collage could most likely end up as a sculpture. By comparison Gris was very conservative. Gris' work confronted the unpredictable with the logical.

He was stuck in a comfortable space while Picasso took risks, using whatever was at hand, and the result would look anything but easy to understand (Green 20). People normally have disagreements as how to characterize Gris' work. If they chose to say cool it is usually in derogatory terms. Clearly, all those who mention commenting on both artists, people have expressed a strong personal preference for Picasso's work over Gris.

For example, Gertrude Stein, after the First World War, continued to collect works by Gris, but never bought another painting done by Picasso. Or how Roger Dutilleul, the Parisian collector, never bought anything by Gris, "regarding him as too cerebral compared with the raw, instinctive and intense works of Picasso" (Richardson 302). There was never the same answer twice towards Gris and Picasso's art. Each person had their own thoughts and opinions.

Maurice Raynal, for example, had good things to say about both artists. In 1922, he described Picasso as “unceasingly re-juvenated,” and Gris as having “engaging austerity” (Green 21). Then there is John Olsen who approached both of their work with much distaste. He found that Cubism was pointless. There was no moral meaning for any of it (Green 21).

Despite the feedback, whether positive or negative upon seeing the different styles towards the movement, Cubism still survived.

It was born in France, emigrated across Europe, and integrated within the artistic world. Not only revolutionizing traditional styles towards art, but several major design and architectural styles. Thus, impacting the twentieth century, and prevailing to this day as a mode of expression in art.