

FACING MODERNITY:

DEGAS *to* PICASSO

FROM THE AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI

23 MAY – 20 SEP 2026



Education Kit

VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
VCE Art Creative Practice

sam
Shepparton Art Museum

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This education kit supports VCE Art Making and Exhibiting and Art Creative Practice students as they engage with the exhibition *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

Through the exhibition and accompanying activities, students will develop an understanding of exhibition design and preventative conservation practices. They will also learn about Cubism by closely examining Cubist artwork.

The Shepparton Art Museum (SAM) stands on the traditional lands of the Yorta Yorta people. The SAM building, and art museum within it, is located close to the Goulburn River, which is known as Kaiela to the Yorta Yorta.

SAM recognises the Yorta Yorta as the traditional owners and ongoing custodians of the lands and water of the country upon which SAM is built, and that sovereignty of this land has never been ceded

FACING MODERNITY: DEGAS *to* PICASSO

FROM THE AUCKLAND ART GALLERY TOI O TĀMAKI

Shepparton Art Museum 23 May - 20 September 2026

Spanning nearly a century of artistic innovation, *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* brings together 37 exceptional paintings and sculptures from the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki never before shown in Australia that capture the radical shifts in art from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

The body of this touring exhibition is drawn from a generous bequest made to the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 2023 by New York philanthropists and art lovers Julian (1932–2022) and Josie Robertson (1943–2010), who wished for their personal collection of modernist masterpieces to inspire new audiences and generations—children in particular. Now, this monumental grouping of works by Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and many others enriches the cultural landscape of the broader Pacific region, offering new insights into the cascade of artistic breakthroughs that characterise the modern era.

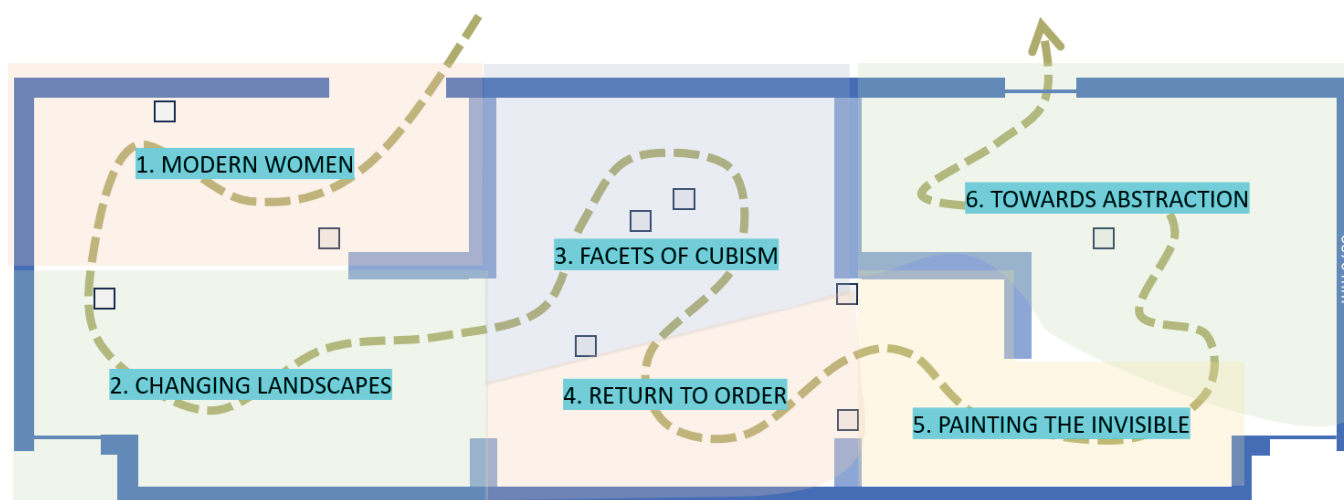
Unfolding chronologically, the artworks in this gallery guide you through the major artistic movements of the period and the visionaries who refracted the turn of the century's upheaval and transformation in their artistic innovations, eschewing tradition and convention to embrace the changing pace of life and society. From Impressionism and Post-Impressionism to Surrealism and postwar abstraction, *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* extends to you an invitation to discover a trove of rarely-seen works by artists whose pioneering techniques indelibly influenced the direction of art history, and who continue to enthrall audiences over a century later.

Curators:
Kenneth Brummel and Sophie Matthiesson

Exhibiting Artists

Alexander Archipenko	Albert Dubois-Pillet	Henri Hayden	Louis Marcoussis
Georges Braque	Jacob Epstein	Barbara Hepworth	Henri Matisse
Pierre Bonnard	Helen Frankenthaler	Ivon Hitchens	Eileen Mayo
Paul Cézanne	Henri Gaudier-Brzeska	Frances Hodgkins	Henry Moore
Philip Connard	Paul Gauguin	Hans Hofmann	Paul Nash
Salvador Dalí	Mark Gertler	Fernand Léger	Ben Nicholson
Edgar Degas	Harold Gilman	Wilhelm Lehmbruck	Pablo Picasso
Maurice Denis	Charles F Goldie	Len Lye	Auguste Rodin
André Derain	Duncan Grant	Aristide Maillol	

Exhibition Design



Floorplan tracing the thematic journey of the exhibition

CURATORIAL INTENTION

Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso is a touring exhibition from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, curated as a chronological journey through the major art movements of the modern era. Spanning from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, it opens with reimagined nude figures and concludes with post-war abstraction. The exhibition brings together 37 paintings and sculptures by artists such as Paul Cezanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí and Barbara Hepworth. By presenting works from Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism and beyond, the curators trace the sequence of artistic breakthroughs that shaped modern art over time.

Temporary walls divide the gallery space into smaller zones and help audiences transition between the six themes. Accompanying each themed section are didactics, explanatory texts written by the curators which introduce the key concepts of the section. Three pairs of colours emphasise the transition between each curatorial theme.

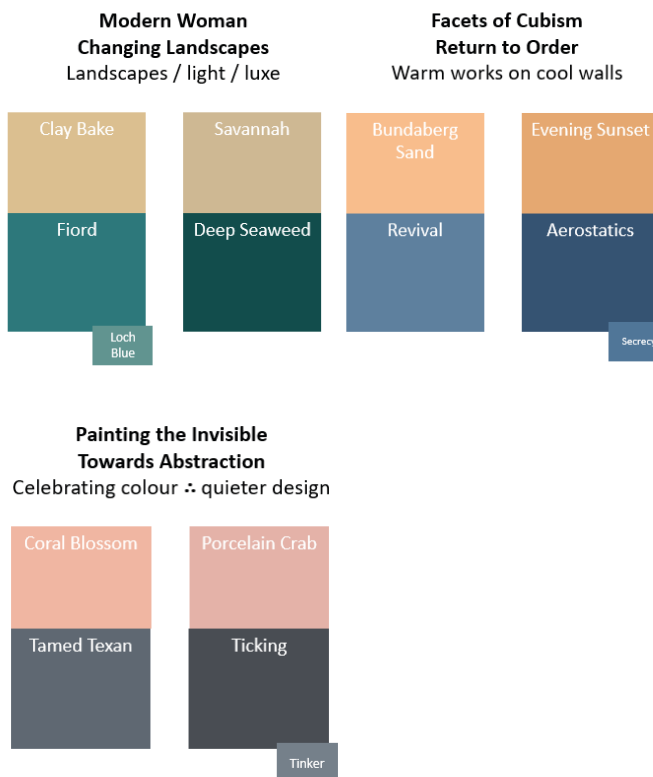
EXHIBITION DESIGN

Exhibition Design and Curatorial Intention

As a touring exhibition curated by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and presented at Shepparton Art Museum (SAM), *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* is adapted to suit SAM's gallery spaces. Staff from both institutions work closely together to ensure the original curatorial intentions are communicated while responding to the physical layout of the building.

The exhibition traces the development of modern art by structuring the narrative across six curatorial themes.

- Modern Women
- Changing Landscapes
- Facets of Cubism
- Return to Order
- Painting the Invisible
- Towards Abstraction



Exhibition design wall colour choices and delegations to curatorial themes.

Exhibition Design

Exhibition Design and the Visitor's Experience

The introduction of colour to the gallery walls represents a departure from the exhibition's original display at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. In addition to indicating a different theme, the incorporation of colour makes the space feel more inviting and intimate for visitors. Jewel-toned colours were chosen instead of pastel palettes that have commonly been used in exhibitions about modern art in Australia.

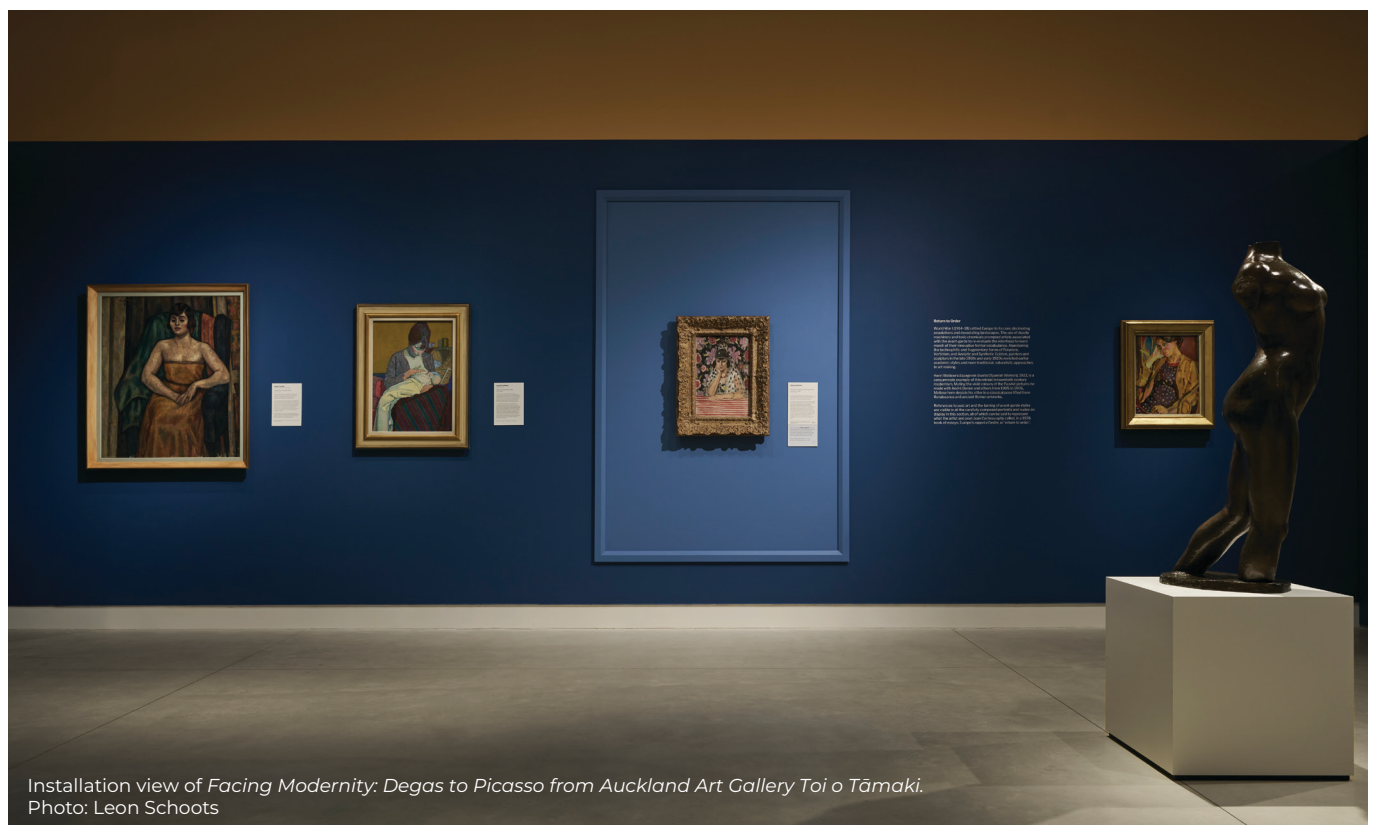
Many artworks in the exhibition are small in scale and can feel stark when displayed against the gallery's four metre high walls. To address this, a horizontal band of colour, known as a datum line, is added across the top of the walls to visually reduce their height. This one metre high band is lighter in colour than the rest of the wall and creates a more balanced and comfortable viewing space. The lighter tone also references Impressionism's focus on capturing the fleeting qualities of light.

To emphasise the significance of certain artists, more space is given around their work. This is further highlighted by framing the works with a block of colour in a softer tone than the surrounding wall colour.

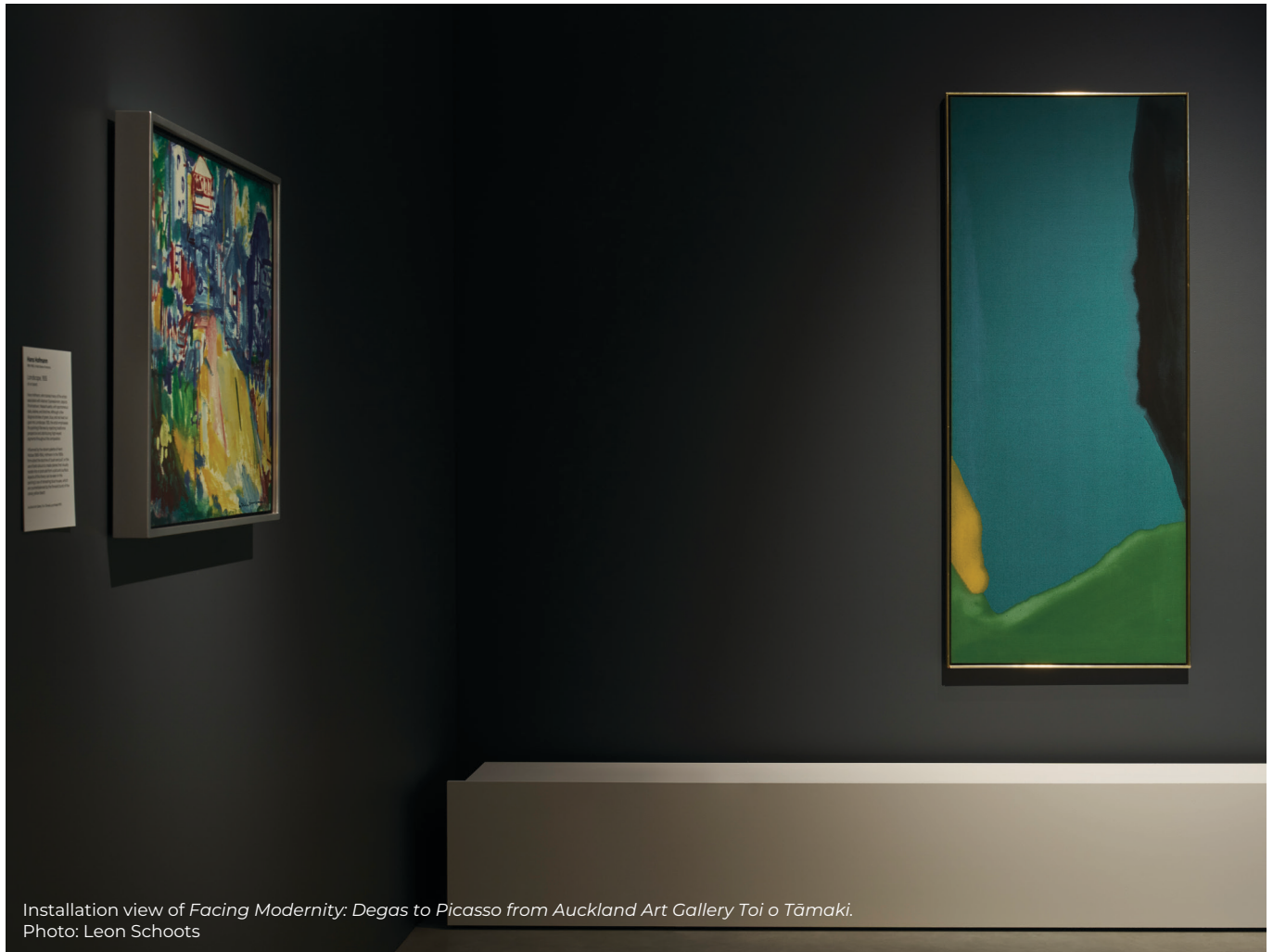
Exhibition Design and Care

In anticipation of high visitor numbers, the introductory exhibition text was not placed at the entrance. Instead, visitors are welcomed with a high resolution vinyl reproduction of Albert Dubois-Pillet's *The Lock* (1886-87). This approach helps prevent congestion that could occur if visitors had to stop and read text immediately upon entry, allowing for a more open and fluid movement into the exhibition space.

Several exhibition design choices were made to help protect the artworks while on display. Perspex hoods cover sculptures sitting on plinths to reduce the risk of visitors touching them. A trough has also been installed in front of *Black Came In* (1965–66), creating a safe distance between visitors and the artwork. This helps protect the painting while still allowing viewers to closely experience Helen Frankenthaler's visually rich colour field painting.



Preventative Conservation



Conservation and Collaboration

Exhibition Design choices for the exhibition were made in consultation with conservation staff, from both SAM and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. SAM conservation staff have a strong understanding of the building and its gallery spaces, while conservation staff from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki have detailed knowledge of the artworks included in the exhibition. Working together helps ensure the artworks are cared for correctly throughout the install and exhibition process.

Each artwork is accompanied by a condition report, which is completed at multiple stages, including before and after transport, and before and after display. For touring exhibitions, it is common for curatorial and conservation staff to travel and be present during unpacking, condition reporting, installing and deinstalling, to closely monitor the condition and safety of the artworks.

Conservation and Display

Throughout the exhibition, artworks are inspected daily to check for any changes in their condition. Any changes are carefully recorded in each artwork's condition report so issues can be identified early.

Paintings are protected with museum glass, which helps shield them from dust and damage. Museum glass is specially designed to be non reflective, meaning it does not bounce light back at the viewer or interfere with seeing the artwork clearly. In addition, display surfaces are cleaned regularly to help maintain a safe and well presented exhibition environment.

For further insight into museum preventative conservation practices read our Preventative Conservation Education Kit:
[Students and Teachers - SAM+](#)

Exhibition design and Preventative Conservation at a Glance

- *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* is a touring exhibition from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, adapted for SAM's gallery space while maintaining the original curatorial vision.
- The exhibition traces the development of modern art through six key themes. Temporary walls and colour schemes help define each theme.
- Artworks are cared for through collaboration between SAM and Auckland Art Gallery.
- Artworks are protected through display strategies such as museum glass, troughs and Perspex covers.
- Daily condition checks and detailed reporting ensure ongoing care and preservation.



Installation view of *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
Photo: Leon Schoots

Facets of Cubism – An introduction to Analytic Cubism and Synthetic Cubism



Installation view of *Facing Modernity: Degas to Picasso* from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
Photo: Leon Schoots

Cubism developed in the early 20th century, strongly influenced by the later work of Paul Cézanne. Following a posthumous exhibition of his work in 1907, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso began rethinking how objects and space could be represented in art.

As seen in Cézanne's *The Road (The Old Wall)*, 1875–76, also in this exhibition, artists were already challenging traditional representation. In a 1904 letter, Cézanne wrote, “treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, the cone,” likely offering practical advice for simplifying forms into basic shapes for painting.¹ Braque and Picasso extended these approaches by breaking three-dimensional objects into flat geometric shapes (planes).

Cézanne also challenged Renaissance linear perspective through his paint application, presenting multiple viewpoints within a single image, as though seen from different angles at once. His use of flat, directional brushstrokes further flattens space and reduces atmospheric perspective, as seen in *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, c. 1902–1904.

African objects were another source of inspiration, particularly for Picasso. Their “...sophisticated use of flat planes and bold contouring was unlike anything the artist had encountered before”.²

Cubist thinking was also shaped by science and modern philosophy, such as the idea that perception depends on perspective—when, where, and how we experience something. Scientific developments such as x-rays, modes of travel and innovations in photography were also changing how people saw and understood the world around them. Cubist artists questioned whether art should depict appearance or express deeper understanding.

Rather than moving towards abstraction for its own sake, Cubists believed they were representing reality more truthfully.³ By fragmenting objects into their basic shapes and showing them from multiple perspectives simultaneously, they aimed to represent the way objects are experienced rather than how they appear from a single fixed viewpoint.

Early Cubism, known as Analytical Cubism, used muted colours and fragmented forms to depict multiple viewpoints. Synthetic Cubism followed, introducing brighter colours, recognisable imagery and collage materials such as newspaper and sheet music. This phase also emphasised the flatness of the canvas (picture plane).

1. “Cézanne on Solids and Spaces,” Artforum, accessed 3 March 2026 <https://www.artforum.com/features/cezanne-on-solids-and-spaces-209329/>

2. Lisa Modiano, “How Much Does Picasso Owe to African Art?” April 30, 2022, <https://www.thecollector.com/picasso-and-african-art/>

3. “How Cubism Changed the World,” Barnebys, May 18, 2020. <https://www.barnebys.com/blog/how-cubism-changed-the-world>

Artwork Deep Dives



Georges Braque (1882–1963) France

La Tasse [The Cup], 1912,
oil on canvas, 24cm x 33cm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki gift of
Julian and Josie Robertson through the
Auckland Art Gallery Foundation, 2023

This still life by Georges Braque shows how Cubist ideas are applied in practice. Objects are broken into overlapping planes and arranged across the surface, creating the sense that we are viewing them from multiple angles at once.

Braque uses a limited palette of browns, greys and ochres, which flattens the image and makes forms harder to distinguish. Some objects remain partly recognisable—the cup and saucer, shown in profile, act as an anchor within the composition.

Other forms are more fragmented. For example, the die is shown from several sides simultaneously. This overlapping of viewpoints reflects a shift away from showing what an object looks like from a single position, towards representing how it can be understood from multiple perspectives.

Guided Prompts

- How do colour and line work together in this painting, and why might the artist have made these choices?
- Where are you as the viewer positioned in relation to the scene and how does your eye move across the composition?

Extended Responses

Use the information provided and your responses to the guided prompts to answer the following.

Structural Lens

Discuss the artist's intentions as expressed through the visual language of the artwork.

Cultural Lens

Discuss how early 20th-century cultural and technological changes, including the influence of Paul Cezanne, shaped the development of Cubism and are reflected in *La Tasse (The Cup)*.

Artwork Deep Dives

Georges Braque (1882–1963) France

Le Gueridon (Vase gris et palette) [Pedestal Table (Grey Vase and Palette)], 1938, oil and sand with fine gravel, 107.6cm x 89.5cm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki gift of Julian and Josie Robertson through the Auckland Art Gallery Foundation, 2023



Georges Braque continued to develop his Cubist practice throughout his career. *Pedestal Table (Grey Vase and Palette)* demonstrates key characteristics of Synthetic Cubism, including a brighter palette and more legible forms than earlier works like *The Cup*, 1912. Painted textures such as woodgrain and marble help distinguish objects within the composition. Braque's experience as a house painter and decorator comes through in these simulated textures.

In this painting Braque emphasises the flatness of the picture plane by combining different viewpoints, and making spatial relationships between foreground, middle-ground, and background ambiguous. The two dimensionality of the work is further emphasised by added sand in the paint and a vertical ripple that runs down the right side, encouraging the viewer to consider the painting as an arrangement of shapes, surfaces and textures rather than a window onto the world.

Guided Prompts

- How has space been treated in this painting? Consider linear perspective, depth and the picture plane in your response.
- Compare both artworks by Georges Braque and list all the similarities and differences.
- From this comparison, what is the difference between Analytical and Synthetic Cubism.
- Reflect on your artwork, identify and discuss any elements that connect to Cubism. Consider whether these aspects were influenced by Cubist ideas intentionally or emerged unintentionally during your creative process.

Glossary

Analytical Cubism

An early phase of Cubism (1908-1912) where images are broken into fragmented shapes and shown from multiple viewpoints at the same time, using mostly muted colours.

Atmospheric perspective

A technique used in art to show depth by making distant objects appear lighter, blurrier, and less detailed.

Collage

Both a technique and an artwork, created by arranging and attaching different media onto a surface.

Cubism (c. 1907–1914)

An art movement associated with Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. It depicts subjects using fragmented geometric shapes and multiple viewpoints. See also Analytical and Synthetic Cubism.

Curator

A specialist responsible for selecting, researching, caring for, and interpreting artworks or objects within a museum, gallery, or other cultural institution.

Curatorial intention/rationale

The reasoning and conceptual framework guiding the selection and arrangement of an exhibition.

Datum line

An exhibition design feature creating the perception of a lower wall and a more intimate space through a painted band along the top of the wall(s).

Didactic

Informative wall labels providing context to help visitors understand the artworks and

Exhibition design

The practice of planning and arranging the layout, display, and visitor experience of an exhibition, including the presentation of artworks, objects, text, lighting, and spatial flow.

Exhibition theme

The central concept or subject unifying and guiding the selection and presentation of artworks or objects in an exhibition.

Floorplan

A scaled aerial view showing the layout of artworks, display structures and furnishings within an exhibition space.

Linear perspective

A way of creating the illusion of depth on a flat surface by making parallel lines appear to meet at a single point in the distance (called a vanishing point).

Plane

A flat surface within a painting or sculpture.

Picture plane

The two-dimensional surface of a painting.

Synthetic Cubism

The later phase of Cubism (1912-1914) characterised by brighter colours and simpler shapes.

Trough

In this context, a trough is a raised platform in front of an artwork that creates distance and discourages audience interference.

Window onto the world

A concept which arose during the Renaissance, whereby artists began to think of paintings as windows. By using linear perspective on a flat surface, they created realistic scenes that appear three-dimensional, as though we are looking through a window.

Bibliography

Artforum. "Cézanne on Solids and Spaces." Accessed 3 March 2026. <https://www.artforum.com/features/cezanne-on-solids-and-spaces-209329/>

Barnebys. "How Cubism Changed the World." May 18, 2020. <https://www.barnebys.com/blog/how-cubism-changed-the-world>

Modiano, Lisa. "How Much Does Picasso Owe to African Art?" April 30, 2022. <https://www.thecollector.com/picasso-and-african-art/>

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