



1. *The Tower and The Castle: Remarkable Modern Art*
2. *Our Unsteady Gait in Pursuit of Truth*

The Tower and The Castle: Remarkable Modern Art

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GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Western societies saw accelerated industrial advancement coupled with marked intellectual and social change. How was this revolution embodied in art? Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were the ‘reverberators,’ so to speak -- sent to explore what the upheaval meant through their paintings and collages.

Both artists, influenced by Cézanne, can be said to have invented a new movement. Picasso and Braque defied the laws of traditional painting with its apparent timelessness,

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stability, and classical perspective. They began painting abstract art – the non-figurative representation of an observed world in flux. The Cubism movement was their response to a world changed by shifting philosophical and scientific realities.

Cubists translated the ideas of philosophers like Henri Bergson on memory, perception, duration of time, and space and altered their canvases to reflect this new platform or aesthetic. Perception and knowledge were believed to be ever-changing, altered by experience and accumulated memories. It was the artist’s task to capture this fluidity and this new way of looking at information. While Picasso and Braque were credited with inventing this unique visual language, such artists as Juan Gris, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Fernand Léger, and Marcel Duchamp stretched it. They were major examples of the Cubist movement in its Analytic and Synthetic varieties.

Analytical Cubism’s imperatives were defined as: a diversity of perspectives, deconstruction of forms

and fragmentation, the emphasis on two-dimensional construction, the blurring of lines between the object and the environment, and subdued coloration. Synthetic Cubism was a synthesis of invented forms using paper collages (*papier collé*) with bold coloration, patterns, and textures.

Two lights of the Analytical Cubism movement were Robert Delaunay and one of Cubism’s founders, Georges Braque. Their proficiency in the fundamental aspects of this offshoot of Cubism was on display in their respective pieces, *Red Eiffel Tower* (1910-1911) and *The Castle of La Roche-Guyon* (1909).

Delaunay and Braque attempted to glean the ethereal and changeable quality of human perspective and knowledge. They rejected the copying of nature by conventional methods, and sought to express diversity and complexity through fragmentation of objects and blurring boundaries between an object and the environment. Shapes were perceived as being in transition. Pictorial configuration was advanced, and a shallow, relief-like space was created to provide limited distance between objects and what appeared in the foreground and background. The gaze of the viewer was directed, but there was no imaginary distance to lead the eye toward an interior object. The whole canvas demanded study.

In *Castle of La Roche-Guyon*, Braque began to experiment in earnest with Analytical Cubism. He deconstructed a known piece of architecture, reconfiguring the castle into something entirely distinctive. He did not copy it as a static object, but gave it a fragmented appearance. Braque vertically arranged the space with geometric forms and faceted planes that appeared to sit precariously on the surface of a high elevation. The lines between the fractured vision of the castle and the surrounding foliage and trees were blurred, almost unrecognizable,

Our Unsteady Gait in Pursuit of Truth

By TAICHENG JIN
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

The false dichotomy between nurture and nature makes us presumptuously deny their synergistic, and inextricable, influences on our worldviews. I believe my musing interaction with religion resembles a process of scientific inquiry. Perhaps it is sacrilegious of me to believe that religion should be a means to an end instead of the end, a one-stop shop for truth. Leaving the irrational and self-defeating premise of altruism aside, I am an opportunistic scholar and what some may term “an effective altruist” spellbound by utilitarianism. The philosophical and social movement that emphasizes the efficiency which results from benefiting others has lulled me in with its enthusiasm for cold, hard rationality. I defer to human reasoning so much that it would be difficult to convince me to practice a single religion exclusively and use the prescribed truth as the sole source of my altruism. I can benefit from critically questioning all religions.

It may seem surprising that I have come to identify as an agnostic, considering that I was doused in a mix of religious traditions and felt the visceral pull of each. I grew up with a delightful blend of Buddhist dharma and Confucius’s virtues. After I moved to the United States, I was introduced to Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and many more. The plethora of monotheistic and pluralistic theologies intrigued me profoundly. Whether it was celebrating a bar mitzvah, tasting wine at Sunday mass, attending a Bible study group, feasting at Diwali, talking with my Syrian friend, or reading Roman and Greek philosophers in Latin, I actively strove to broaden my worldview and sought reconciliation between the various faiths’ disparate lessons on ethics, the ontology of the soul, and metaphysics.

My burning curiosity for knowledge was appropriately channeled toward

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continued on back

as broad strokes of greens, browns, and grays. Two- and three-dimensional perspectives were made interchangeable, and the colors were hushed and hazy – gray, white, brown, and green. The green was iridescent.

In *Red Eiffel Tower* by Delaunay, one can see that he embraced most of the rubrics of Analytical Cubism through his study of the iconic symbol of the Paris cityscape, the Eiffel Tower. In this painting, he captured the zip, mobility, and vibrancy of the new industrial age, the new century. The picture was far from static or homogeneous; it churned with fragmented shapes, planes, and facets of the tower and the surrounding buildings and sky. Two- and three-dimensional perspectives were made interchangeable. The space around the tower was shaded in blues, whites, and

grays. The vertical tower was red, with its brilliant latticework ready to twist and soar. The picture was energetic and off-kilter, embracing modernity. Unlike those in the Braque work and other Analytical Cubist renderings, the colors were not understated; whites and blues infused the canvas with light, and red was a bold counterpoint.

Political, social, technological, and intellectual shifts in the modern age laid the groundwork for Cubism's seismic shift in the art world. The experimentation created a new movement with talented adherents. Cubism as a general movement both introduced and influenced Analytical Cubism. Braque created the prototype and Delaunay adopted these guiding principles. The fragmentation, interchangeable dimensions, blurring

of perspective, and coloration reflected their grasp of the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Both artists produced models of this movement in their paintings, *The Castle of La Roche-Guyon* and *Red Eiffel Tower*.

Cubist artists such as Braque and Delaunay opened the doors for future abstract artists, such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, to explore new methods, new forms, and new ideas. Analytical Cubism showed artists a groundbreaking way forward.

This essay is based on a paper written for an Art History class on Modernism here in 2017. Claire Kitz (Hamilton '19) was Editor-in-Chief for Enquiry in her senior year. She currently works at a consulting firm in Chicago.

academia by my mentors, who taught me the fundamental value of critical thinking. As clichéd as the famous quote from Socrates may be, his valid criticism of the “unexamined life” prompts me to read abundantly,

Economics, on the other hand, clarified the driving incentives and patterns of human behavior. Equally and perhaps more importantly, I started to slowly observe the economic arguments couched beneath ethnic, religious,

philosophy has beaten into me the need for rigorous use of words and for vigilance in avoiding broad claims without qualifications. I should not assert that I have sufficient evidence, or impeccable reasoning, in rejecting

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think deeply, and evaluate with a critical eye, all in the daring pursuit of truth and virtue. My initial conception of an all-encompassing, objective truth slowly eroded away as I familiarized myself with the immense intellectual difficulty in teasing out the unabridged, undoctored truth from the mere perception of truth, the difficulty in learning a pure truth free from nationalistic furies, impulsive biases, and corrosive rumors.

I learned how inadequate our knowledge of certain civilizations is and how we can reconstruct only a silhouette of truth from the meager supply of their records. I learned how power has been used to suppress narratives, and in doing so has committed the injustice of silencing voices essential to the holistic truth. Studying political science in college has reinforced my reservations about adopting a single worldview.

and culturally relativistic terms. Critical thinking serves as our guardian against our biological heuristics, especially in a world of clamor and uncertainty, of falsehood and hostility. My diverse exposure to historiography, biology, economics, computer science, anthropology, linguistics, and political science has taught me to value reasoning and logic instead of authority or tradition. To be clear, I do not aim to say that having a religious belief is misguided or useless. In fact, religious teaching is extremely useful for many, and it has been for me in times of darkness. Ancient wisdom can be a safe harbor that lends shelter to the wandering traveler. But it should be and remain *pro tempore* on the journey, lest the traveler immersed in comfort forget about his adventure ahead. In order to persuade me to adopt a single religion, one has to appeal to more than faith, piety, and duty. Studying

the existence of an omnipotent being. I am always learning, and therefore I am agnostic, not an atheist.

I needed, and still try, to figure out why one adopts one religion over another. In a Socratic manner, I often interrogate my religious friends, not with the intent to judge, but to learn. I listen to their adoption of, conversion to, and relationship with a religion, question them on their rationales and experiences. When I am at a loss for answers to questions about my own beliefs, I often study to inform myself and to formulate a system with which to defend them. I never try to dissuade people from religion. That is not my intention, nor will it ever be. I only attempt to put their beliefs through intellectual trials, because only after that experience can it be said that they truly “own” those beliefs, instead of borrowing words from a stranger’s mouth.

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