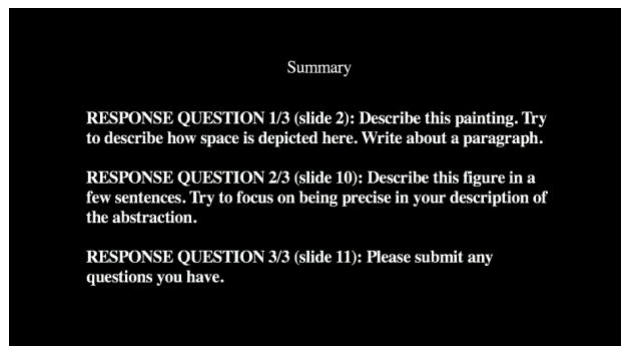


## 5.4.20 Cubism

Responses due 5/5/20 at 9:30 AM by email ([anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu))

### Slide 1: Summary

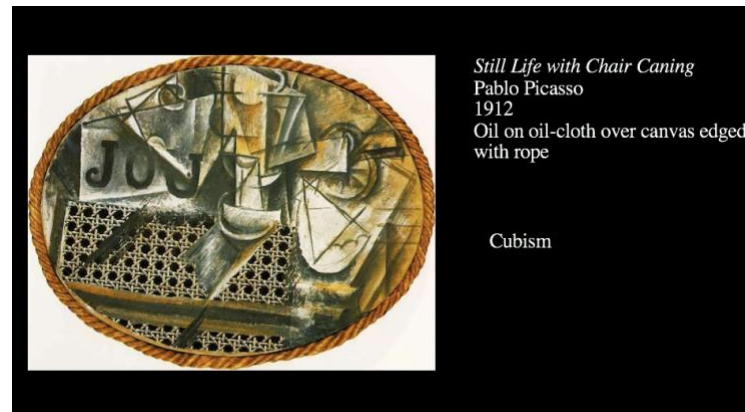


RESPONSE QUESTION 1/3 (slide 2): Describe this painting. Try to describe how space is depicted here. Write about a paragraph.

RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3 (slide 10): Describe this figure in a few sentences. Try to focus on being precise in your description of the abstraction.

RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3 (slide 11): Please submit any questions you have.

### Slide 2



Let's start today by talking about Cubism. We looked at Cézanne's proto-Cubist *The Basket of Apples* last class, which we said was an early step in fragmenting space. Cézanne was beginning to paint objects from multiple perspectives, imagining what an object would look like from every perspective and combining those different views in one canvas. Pablo Picasso, probably the most famous Cubist artist, took this idea and used it more dramatically than Cézanne did.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 1/3 (slide 2): Describe this painting. Try to describe how space is depicted here. Write about a paragraph.**

## 5.4.20 Cubism

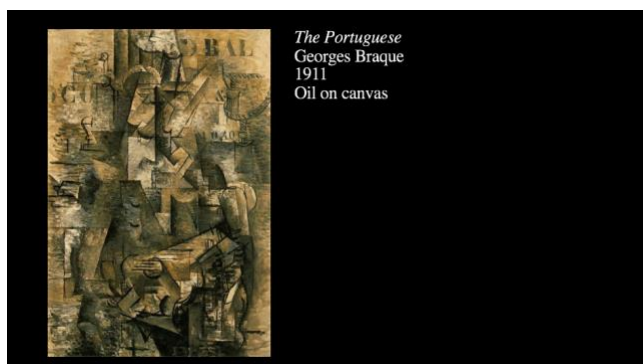
### Slide 3



We've seen still life paintings, but Picasso's looks very different. It's not at all naturalistic. We can imagine that the objects Picasso paints are on top of the chair (the gridded surface towards the bottom left of the canvas), but there is very little sense of space with objects one on top of another, or one behind another. All the objects are pressed together and flattened- this is Picasso taking all the different viewpoints from which to view the scene and combining them in one image, which would be impossible to render in traditional perspectival modes. Are we looking down at the chair, which seems flat, or frontally at the scene, as implied by the rendering of the objects? The views are combined.

This abandoning of perspectival depth and the emphasis on the canvas as a flat surface is a major shift in thinking about art; think back over the semester so far. So much of what we have discussed is artists developing perspectival techniques to render 3D space in illusionistic ways, but this is not what Picasso and the other Cubists were interested in. This was incredibly radical. Another radical thing here is the use of commercial objects. The edge of the oval canvas is wrapped in rope. Picasso was one of the early artists to non-traditional objects in his compositions, opening up the "high" art world. He also used a lot of collage elements. There was a distinction between fine art and craft, which Picasso rejects. He actively combines the two with new materials and new techniques.

### Slide 4



The combination of points of view is also seen in Georges Braque's *The Portuguese*. Braque goes a bit further than Picasso did in *Still Life with Chair Caning*. Again, the perspective is not from a fixed point that the artist is observing from. He captures the scene from changing perspectives. It's almost like he has painted the person from all sides and overlapped those images so that we see them all at once on the canvas. This is in fact an image of a person, but it certainly doesn't look like one.

## 5.4.20 Cubism

### Slide 5



Cubism wasn't only the movement happening at this time. Matisse, a friend and rival of Pablo Picasso, but was also interested in depicting space. Matisse did this with color, while the Cubist did this with linear forms.

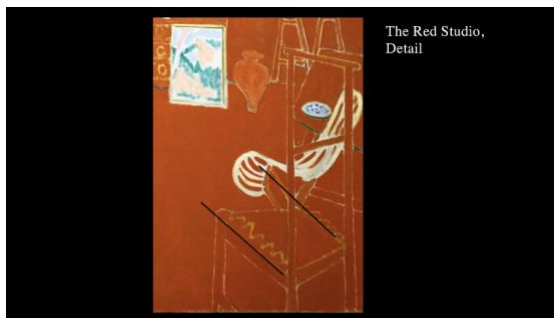
What perspective is used here? There is some depth. Look for the white line that extends back at the left side of the painting; we can recognize this as the floor of the studio. But, Matisse isn't using linear or atmospheric perspective to create space and forms. He's using colors. Nothing is modelled; there are no highlights or contours. The overwhelming use of red makes the space feel flat, despite the subtle allusions to depth.

### Slide 6



The black line here points out where there should be a line to show division between the falls which would give a better sense of three-dimensional space, but Matisse did not include this.

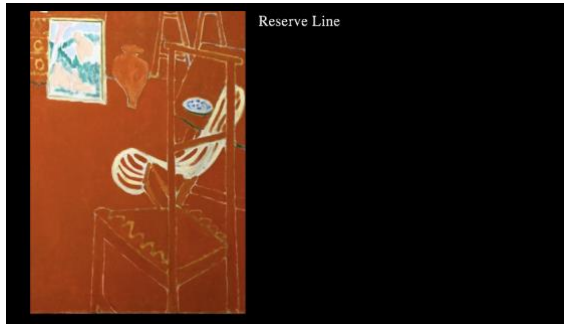
### Slide 7



He also creates some depth with the objects, like the seat of the chair. These lines don't follow standard perspectival rules though, because if they did they would converge at a vanishing point. If we extend these lines, they will not converge.

## 5.4.20 Cubism

### Slide 8



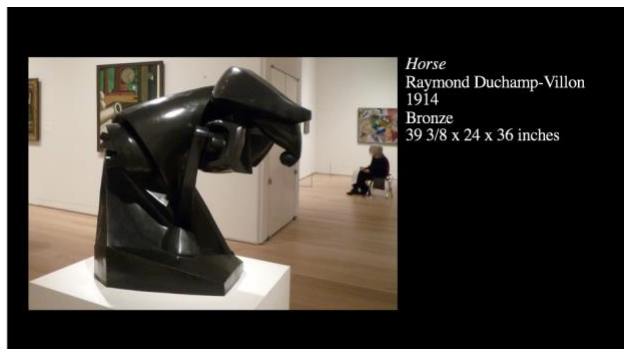
Matisse is using an interesting technique here. All of the white lines that we can see are not painted, but are blank, unpainted canvas. We call this a **reserve line**. Matisse didn't paint the lines that convey space, but painted the area AROUND them, leaving a blank reserve line. This is what we mean when we say Matisse uses color, not line to create forms, he's not actually outlining the forms but painting around the form to create shape.

### Slide 9



This is actually Matisse's studio, and he has filled it with works of art that he made. This adds a very personal touch to the composition.

### Slide 10



An interest in space is a common thread through many movements and styles in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of these movements was Futurism, which developed around the time of World War I (1914-1918). World War I totally disrupted life; the death toll was unheard of at the time due to the use of new types of warfare and technological advances that changed weapons. The War totally changed art, as people responded to this new way of living.

## 5.4.20 Cubism

Futurists living in this period focused on the figure in its environment. We have here *Horse*, and the title tells us that this is a horse. But does it look like one? In some ways yes, the vertical base of the statue seems a bit like legs, and perhaps there is a hoof at the bottom. There is a sense that these are the legs of the horse coming together as it gallops. Instead of rendering an abstract still horse, Duchamp-Villon shows the horse in motion by compressing the body parts of the horse together.

The horizontal top of the statue is perhaps the head, neck, and mane. But this certainly does not look like any horse you would see in life; it is abstracted. It feels too mechanical, too geometric to be a natural, living creature. This statue was begun just before the artist was drafted into the war and finished only when he was on leave from the army. In World War I, there was a shift from armed cavalry (men on horses) to armored weapons and vehicles, like tanks, against which horses could not fight. There is a sense that the natural form of the horse is being converted to a machine. The swirl of bronze that may be interpreted as part of the horse's head may also look like a cog in a machine. In Futurism, there is an interest in movement, but also in the transition from the natural world to a more machine-focused industrialized one. This interest was catalyzed by the destruction of World War I.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 2/3: Describe this figure in a few sentences. Try to focus on being precise in your description of the abstraction.**

Slide 11



Here is another Futurist work, a painting. Balla captures movement much differently than Duchamp-Villon; Balla uses repetition to show movement, like in the wagging tail of the small dog. Duchamp-Villon synthesized the form, compressing the shapes of the running horse.

Why is there this obsession with movement at this period? This was the time when cars were invented, when trains were getting faster. With new modes of transportation, the speed at which people experienced the world changed. Imaging you are looking out the window of a fast-moving car; the outside world would seem blurred together. Futurists are trying to depict this type of phenomenon.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 3/3: Please submit any questions you have.**