
GEORGES BRAQUE

14 November 2008 – 1 March 2009
in the Bank Austria Kunstforum
1010 Vienna, Freyung 8

www.bankaustria-kunstforum.at

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FACTS & FIGURES

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| Curators: | Heike Eipeldauer (Bank Austria Kunstforum) Caroline Messensee (guest curator) | |
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| Admission: | Adults | 9.– EUR |
| | Reduced | 7.50 EUR |
| | Art Start Card (17 to 27 years of age) | 6.– EUR |
| | Family Card | 20.– EUR |
| | Groups (as of 10 persons) | 7.50 EUR |
| | Children up to aged 6 | free |
| | Personal Art Assistant, public guided tour | 3.50 EUR |

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GEORGES BRAQUE

PRESS TEXT

In winter 2008/09, the Bank Austria Kunstforum is putting on a sensational show on Georges Braque, the long-standing companion in art of Pablo Picasso. In comparison with Picasso, the omnipresent “torero of the art arena”, Braque is incomparably calmer, more meditative as a painter, always consistently pursuing his own style of painting. While one Picasso exhibition chases another all over the world, the last Georges Braque retrospective in Central Europe was twenty years ago. Now, 45 years after Braque’s death, the Bank Austria Kunstforum is dedicating the first Braque show ever held in Austria to this superlative, frequently underrated avant-garde artist. A great many international museums are supporting this ambitious exhibition project with generous loans, among them the London Tate Gallery, the Guggenheim Museum, the MoMA New York, and the Kunstmuseum Basel.

The exhibition presents an opportunity of (re-)discovering Braque’s extraordinary oeuvre. Around 80 paintings and the most important printed graphics will highlight the special path Braque took in European modernism and illustrate the unique quality of his adventure in painting: Braque in the circle of the Fauves, Braque the methodical, Braque the inventor of *papier collé*, the influence on Braque of the painting and decorating trade to which he was apprenticed, Braque the master of “modern still life” and, last but not least, Braque the “lyrical constructor”.

A core section of the exhibition is devoted – how could it have been otherwise? – to the groundbreaking invention of cubism. In a unique artistic collaboration starting in 1907, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso propelled the process by which painting won its autonomy, thus heralding in the most important artistic revolution of the twentieth century. For Braque himself, too, cubism remained the path-breaking discovery that enabled him to compose a pictorial fact, “fait pictural”, as he said, rather than an “anecdotal fact”. The First World War interrupted this crucial creative phase – Georges Braque suffered a grave injury to his skull in 1915 and could only resume work at the beginning of 1917.

The exhibition will trace how Braque’s work – based on the repertoire of cubist forms – noticeably manifests a vein of consolidation and a classical impression asserting itself during the 1920s and 1930s. There is a partial reintroduction of naturalist forms, a beauty of line in contours, and an emphasis on the inherent material quality of colour; so we find a measured

form of cubism emerging with the tactile sensuousness so typical of Braque and quite alien to purism. This is evident in variations on the subject of the *fireplace* or the *small table*, in which Braque carries the interplay of transparency and opaqueness, realistic and abstract forms to extremes. During the Second World War Braque produced plain interiors and still life pictures expressing the arduousness and monotony of life in Paris during the war years.

The “total Braque” will be on show in the Kunstforum, and this means including the late work, which has slipped relatively far into the background in the history of critical reception. In the early 1950s – once again in his childhood environment in Varengeville in Normandy – Braque returned to landscape painting, producing small-scale, strongly textured strips of the coastline and farm fields. A key position within the exhibition is taken up by the visionary picture series of the *Ateliers*, in which Braque makes his immediate working environment his subject, thus most closely approaching his objective of achieving the greatest concentration of material and space, a tactile space that can be experienced.

Georges Braque never stopped spurring on the development of his ideas, with a sense of metamorphosis that made conventional pigeon-holing untenable – whether between figuration and abstraction, or between the genres.

BIOGRAPHY

Georges Braque was born in 1882 in Argenteuil-sur-Seine, where his family ran a painting and decorating business. Braque attended grammar school in Le Havre and evening classes at the art school. During this period he produced his first sculptures after antique models; he made friends with Raoul Dufy and Othon Friesz. Braque left school prematurely in 1899 and started an apprenticeship as a painter and decorator.

Braque went to Paris in autumn 1900 and devoted his attention to impressionism, above all the works of Renoir, Monet, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Seurat. He attended a painting class at the Académie Humbert and began to paint in an impressionist style, close to nature. Braque was full of enthusiasm for the pictures of Matisse, Derain, Dufy and Friesz, who exhibited in the 1905 Salon d'Automne – their creators were disparaged as “Fauves”. He produced his first still life compositions in winter 1906 in L'Estaque, a genre that would preoccupy Braque throughout his life. He met the German art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who signed him up in an exclusive contract. Braque went to the major Cézanne retrospective in October 1907 at the Salon d'Automne and in the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, which had an enduring influence on him.

Through Kahnweiler, Braque got to know Guillaume Apollinaire, who took him into the Bateau-Lavoir on Montmartre, where he saw Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R.)*. His rejection of Fauvism was already on the cards, and this was accelerated through his acquaintanceship with Picasso. Braque's first solo exhibition took place in November 1908 in the Galerie Kahnweiler. In a review of the exhibition a critic used the expression “cubes” for the first time. After the summer of 1909, Braque and Picasso compared the works they had just produced and noted parallel approaches. Their friendship and collaboration intensified and determined the next five years of creative life for both of them. The cue was given for the analytical phase of cubism. Braque and Picasso worked with monochrome colouration and extensive fragmentation of form; they distanced themselves markedly from objective representation.

Braque and Picasso spent the summer of 1911 in Céret in the Pyrenees, where they worked on the further development of a common language of cubist forms. Braque integrated stencilled letters into his compositions for the first time; he took inspiration from music instruments, vessels, masks, statuettes and materials. In summer 1912 he began mixing

sand, plaster and sawdust into oil paint – a short time later Picasso did the same. The first *papier collé* appeared in September, heralding the start of synthetic cubism.

Braque was called up for military service in 1914 – the intensive partnership with Picasso came to an abrupt end. A year later Braque's life was endangered by a severe injury; a period of convalescence interrupted his creative work. In 1918 a mingling of cubist allusions and an emphasis on the sensuous qualities of painting led him towards a new style. Braque's painting was influenced by the sculpture of his friend Henri Laurens. In 1928 Braque produced his first lithograph for the frontispiece of an exhibition catalogue for Paul Rosenberg; he created one of his rare scenic designs for Diaghilev's ballet *Zéphyre et Flore*. In the late twenties Braque settled in a summer house with studio on the coast of Varengeville in Normandy. He made friends with Alberto Giacometti.

In 1932 Braque illustrated Hesiod's *Théogonie* with copper engravings for Ambroise Vollard. The Basel Kunstmuseum organised the first major Braque retrospective in 1933; others followed world wide, including New York in 1949 and London in 1956. In 1934 Braque illustrated his first monograph, written by Carl Einstein. From 1933 to 1938, the artist painted opulent still life compositions with strongly decorative elements; these he gradually reduced in Paris during the Second World War.

Braque spent the fifties and sixties mainly in Varengeville, which inspired him once more to paint landscapes; the motif of the bird became dominant. The *Ateliers* series produced between 1949 and 1956 shows him discovering in his late work a synthesis of his entire artistic experience. In 1954 Braque designed stained glass for the windows of the Varengeville village church. His health forced him to soft-pedal the intensity of his work, but he continued to illustrate books for his writer and poet friends, among them *La Liberté des mers* by Pierre Reverdy, *L'ordre des oiseaux* by Saint-John Perse and *Lettera amorosa* by René Char. Two rooms were dedicated to Braque at the 1958 Venice Biennale. The last retrospective of his lifetime was organised in Munich. Braque died in Paris in 1963; a state ceremony in front of the Louvre honoured him and his work.

THE PUBLICATION FOR THE EXHIBITION

Edited by Ingrid Brugger, Heike Eipeldauer and Caroline Messensee.

Contributions by Neil Cox, Heike Eipeldauer, Edith Futscher, Christopher Green, Caroline Messensee, Nicolas Surlapierre and Juliane Vogel.

248 pages, approx. 150 illustrations

Published in November 2008 by Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany, 29 euros, available in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Shop and in good retail booksellers.

The publication accompanying the Georges Braque exhibition fills a gap in the German-language book market. In German-language critical reception and treatment in art history – apart from the monograph published in 1988 by Bernhard Zurcher – Braque's oeuvre was and still is mainly limited to his cubist phase and the felicitous working relationship with Picasso. The Kunstforum is now paying homage to Braque's complete works. For this ambitious book project it was possible to gain the contributions of renowned European art historians and experts, who cast light on Braque's life and work from very different standpoints and discuss him in an historical context.

- Neil Cox: Graduate Director at the University of Essex, expert for twentieth-century French art

Dark Matter – Braque's Black

Cox explores the significance in Braque's late work of the (non-)colour of black – so scorned by the impressionists – and defines it as aura-specific for modernism. As if in opposition to the white ground of the *papier collé* works, black embodies for Braque the trauma of two world wars, yet also a purism focused on the essentials. In the permanent alternation between concealing and revealing, darkness finally had to give way in the last two pictures of the Atelier series to the bright colour palette.

- Heike Eipeldauer: curator of the Bank Austria Kunstforum, numerous exhibitions and publications on modern and contemporary art

- ***Georges Braque and the Still Life as Model of Tactile Proximity***

On account of Braque's training as a painter and decorator he had always placed much significance throughout his life on the material medium and favoured techniques that convey a high degree of tactile characteristics. Heike Eipeldauer shows that within cubism – regarded as a pre-eminently “conceptual” art – Braque strives to make the sensual-haptic element convey actual meaning, so that things can be “grasped” in every sense of the word.

- Edith Futscher: project assistant at the Institute of Art History in the University of Vienna, key research areas art, aesthetics and the theory of modern art, gender studies, film studies

Braque Baroque: Still Life Pictures of the 1920s

Futscher interprets “baroque” in relation to Braque as a conceptual figure of transition: decorative elements, the increased use of folding, marbling and the glitter of gold. Motif variations and format experimentation reflect a gradual rejection of cubist form concepts in Braque's still life compositions of the twenties.

- Christopher Green: Professor at the London Courtauld Institute of Art, specialist for French and British painting and sculpture, 1900 to 1945

A “De-nationalised” Landscape? Braque's Early Cubist Landscapes and “Nationalist” Geography

Braque's early cubist landscapes, as expounded by Green in his essay, may be interpreted as commentary on the self-image of the “Grande Nation”: the de-modernisation and de-historicising of these landscapes consolidate a picture of France that draws its unity from the very diversity of the various landscapes and their populations. Braque's proto-cubist landscapes find their origin in this cultural, “national” identity of the artist.

- Caroline Messensee: curator, numerous international exhibition projects, among them Klimt's erotic drawings in the Musée Maillol, Paris

Georges Braque – Lyricist of Geometry or a French Painter

Messensee pursues three different lines marking the critical reception of Braque in France: besides the great artistic forbears of Braque – Cézanne, Chardin. Poussin and so forth – she addresses the artist's formation of identity within the context of twentieth-century French history, also the national and international significance attributed to Braque as "French artist".

- Nicolas Surlapierre: conservator at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Lille, key interest in the interaction of literature and the visual arts.

"Lyre sans borne des poussières" or a Literary Biography of Georges Braques

Surlapierre compiles several poetic sources addressing the work of Georges Braque: texts by writers who were close to the artist are interwoven into a literary artist-biography and commented upon. The mutual conditioning and interpenetration of the two sister arts of the visual arts and literature become apparent once more.

- Juliane Vogel: professor at the Institute of German Studies in the University of Constance, key research area: cutting and writing in modernist texts

Newspaper Cuttings – Paths of Cubist Facts

The newspaper applied in the cubist collages of Braque and Picasso is far more than mere randomly chosen material. As a symbol of modern life which has engaged human beings in an unprecedented way, it serves Braque on the aesthetic and technical level as one means among others of conveying flatness. Juliane Vogel demonstrates that the newspaper cutting Braque uses in his collages, like the wood-grain paper, takes effect in an (anti-)illusionist dual interplay, keeping the image both closed and open as "window to the world".

QUOTES

Georges Braque, *Pensées sur l'art*, first published in: *Nord-Sud*, Paris, December 1917

1. In art, progress does not consist in extending limits, but in recognising them.
2. The limits set by the medium create the style, generate the new form, and urge towards creation.
3. The limits set by the medium are frequently the source of fascination and power of the primary images. In contrast, extending them results in decadence.
4. New medium and means, new themes.
5. The theme is not the subject; it is a new unity, lyricism, which is generated wholly by the medium.
6. The painter thinks in forms and colours.
7. The aim is not to reproduce an anecdotal fact, but to create a pictorial fact..
8. Painting is a mode of representation.
9. It is not necessary to imitate what you want to create.
10. You don't imitate an aspect, the aspect is the result.
11. In order to be a genuine imitation, the image has to abstract the aspects.
12. Working after nature means improvising.
13. You should beware of a generally applicable formula, one that is equally valid for the interpretation of the other arts and also of reality. Instead of creating something, this only produces a style, or, better said, a stylisation.
14. The senses deform, the intellect forms. Work, in order to perfect the intellect. There is only certainty in what the intellect senses.
15. A painter who wants to paint a circle will only paint a rounded form. He might be satisfied with the appearance of this circle, but I doubt it. The circle will give him the certainty he needs. The *papiers collés* in my pictures have likewise given me certainty.
16. The optical illusion depends on an anecdotal coincidence, which is impressed by the simplicity of the facts.
17. The *papiers collés*, the imitated wood and other idiosyncratic elements that I have used in some of my pictures also impress through the simplicity of the facts; this has confused them with the optical illusion – to which, however, they are diametrically opposed. They are likewise simple facts, but created through the intellect and represent a justification for a new figuration in the space.
18. Noblesse is created out of emotional content.

19. Feeling doesn't have to be expressed through an excited tremble. It isn't added, nor is it imitated. It is the core, the work is the flower. I love the law that corrects feeling.

Quotes on the artistic symbiosis of Braque & Picasso

Braque's view:

Braque on the relationship to Picasso "Roped together up the slope"

Braque: "We saw each other every day and talked a lot. We compared our thoughts, our pictures and our techniques. Whenever we spurred each other on, it very soon bore fruit for both of us. So our friendship always reaped rewards [...].It was a connection based on mutual independence.

Braque: "Picasso and I found ourselves to a certain extent on the quest for an anonymous personality. We were prepared to dissolve our personality in order to find originality."

Braque: "I have to admit that I felt a certain shock after I had made the first papier collé. But the shock was greater for Picasso, when I showed him the work."

Braque, remembering: "But as it became clear later, Picasso is a Spaniard, I'm French; we know all about the differences this involves."

Picasso's view:

Picasso on the artistic symbiosis: "Nearly every evening I went to Braque's studio or he came to me. Each of us simply had to see what the other had done during the day. We each criticised the other's work. A picture wasn't completed before we both had the feeling that there was nothing more to add."

Picasso spoke of Braque as "ma femme"

Picasso to Braque: "I'm using your latest paper and sand techniques. I'm just working on the idea of a guitar and applying a little soil onto our dreadful canvas."