



Mary Swanzy, *Le Village*, c. 1920s

Analysing Cubism

20 February – 19 May 2013

IMMA, New Galleries, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham

Including artists, Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone, Mary Swanzy, Norah McGuinness, Andre Lhote, Albert Gleizes, Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso

EXHIBITION NOTES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

(Words highlighted in yellow are included in Glossary at end)

General Information

The term '**Analytic Cubism**' has been used to describe work made by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1909 and 1912 and includes iconic paintings such as Picasso's *Ma Jolie* (1911-1912) from the collection of MoMA in New York. The exhibition *Analysing Cubism* takes as its point of origin the principles of early or Analytic Cubism and outlines the various directions taken by different artists, though with a focus on Irish artists Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone. Rather than taking one position on **Cubism**, the exhibition presents several different viewpoints on the subject which are one-sided and even conflicting. *Analysing Cubism* does not propose that the notion of Cubism is contested; rather, it points out that many different scholars and artists have taken the principles of Cubism and translated them in different ways.

The model of the exhibition fits with wider programming ideas at IMMA and the Crawford Art Gallery. It also signals ways in which Cubism and cubist artists remain relevant to many contemporary artists. *Analysing Cubism* will shift the focus away from Picasso and Braque (who quickly abandoned this form of abstraction) to identify the centrality of Albert Gleizes in the development of the movement. Gleizes was the teacher of Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone. Both returned to Ireland, and Jellett particularly maintained a focus on abstraction much more so than other artists at the time.

As part of the talks and lectures programme, IMMA will host a seminar exploring the central principles of the show on Tuesday 19th February.

This project was first proposed by Peter Murray, Director of the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork, and the exhibition is organised by the Crawford Art Gallery in co-operation with IMMA. The exhibition includes major loans from the National Gallery of Ireland. After IMMA, *Analysing Cubism* will travel to the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork for the summer months, and it will end at the F.E. McWilliam Gallery in Banbridge in the autumn.

The exhibition is curated by Seán Kissane, Curator of Exhibitions at IMMA and Riann Coulter, art historian and Curator of the F.E. McWilliam Gallery and Studio. It is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Crawford Art Gallery, edited by Anne Boddaert and Seán Kissane.

Analysing Cubism is part of the programme of visual arts events celebrating Ireland's Presidency of the EU. It has received dedicated financial support from the Department for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and has also been supported by the French Embassy in Ireland (www.ambafrance-ie.org).

The IMMA Primary School Programme will focus on the *Analysing Cubism* exhibition from 20 February until 17 May 2013.

NOTES ON SELECTION OF ARTWORKS

Please note that a number of the following artworks may be visited during a guided tour of the *Analysing Cubism* exhibition. However, the particular artworks visited will vary according to circumstance on the day, and additional artworks which are not covered here may be included. The list below contains both background information for teachers and viewing suggestions for children.

May Guinness, *Two Irish Girls*, ca. 1922 to 1925

Background Information for Teachers

May [Mary Catherine] Guinness (1863-1955) was born near Dublin. She was a pupil of cubist painter André Lhote and a friend and teacher of both Evie Hone and Mainie Jellett. Guinness was an early Irish modernist.

She advocated **plein air painting** and encouraged younger artists in Dublin to experiment with colour and form. Guinness admired the decorative style and use of colour by Matisse and other exponents of the Fauve tradition.

Viewing Suggestions for Children

The colours in this painting are rather pale. What are the names of the shades that you recognise? What kind of a mood do they suggest? Notice the light. What time of day might it be?

The title of the work is *Two Irish Girls*. How would you know that they are Irish? Could this be an outdoor scene, with the two girls outside their cottage? Is there another possibility why the cottage might be in the painting, and how do the two girls fit into their surroundings? Follow the gaze of the two girls. How do you think do they relate to each other?

Look carefully at the lines and shapes, the **composition** and the patterns. Note how the frame nearly cuts off part of the hand of one of the girls. Do you feel the girls have a strong presence in the painting, and if so, why?

Mary Swanzy, *Le Village*, 1920s

Background Information for Teachers

Mary Swanzy (1882-1978) is considered to be the first Irish Cubist. Although not achieving much recognition outside of Ireland, she is one of the most important Irish painters of the twentieth century. Swanzy studied at home and abroad and travelled widely. In 1926, she settled in Blackheath, south London, where she lived for the rest of her life.

Swanzy, along with Mainie Jellett, Evie Hone and May Guinness, is recognised as a pioneer of **modernism** in Ireland. It was only in her last years, though, that she came to be seen as a link between the European **avant-garde** and Irish culture. In the early 1930s in Ireland, her work tended to be seen as original but also unsellable. Nevertheless, she refused to present herself as avant-garde. She was conscious of the ways in which her gender impacted on her career.

Moreover, Swanzy decided not to follow a specific style. Her decision had a negative impact on her reputation in her lifetime as the market place dictated that a distinctive style was essential for a successful artist. Instead, both focussed and pragmatic, she drew on the advantages of her family's distinguished professional background to fund her work.

As none of Swanzy's paintings are dated, it is impossible to establish an exact chronology. In 'Le Village', the Cubist breaking up of the form can be seen in the stylised foliage. The vegetation obscuring the vista at crucial points is a viewpoint that is typical of Swanzy. While some elements suggest the Mediterranean, the plants seem luxuriant and even invasive. There is a sense of unreality about the scene as the walls of the houses appear warped and the vegetation like a pattern.

Viewing Suggestions for Children

Mary Swanzy titled this work 'Le Village'. When you look at the colours and shapes of the village, could you guess where you might find such a landscape? Is the sun shining, and what kind of a climate do the colours suggest? What kind of plants grow in such a climate?

There are five people in the painting, but they don't seem very important, not even the two in the foreground. What would you say is at the centre of this painting? What about the edges? Do you get a sense of depth from this painting or does it seem rather flat?

The pair of trees in the foreground stands tall and straight. It emphasises the vertical dimension. The trees point towards the sky which is not part of the painting as the viewpoint is low. If the eye travels from the top of the tree down, we realise that we don't see the soil out of which the trees grow. Is there anything in the painting that emphasises the horizontal dimension? The two trees are like straight lines. Look for wavy lines in the painting.

Mainie Jellett, *Achill Horses*, 1938

Background Information for Teachers

Mainie Jellett (1897-1944) was born in Dublin. Her early training was at the Metropolitan School in Dublin and with Walter Sickert at the Westminster School of Art in London. She is considered a pioneer of the modern art movement in Ireland.

While studying at Westminster, Jellett met Evie Hone, and the two artists remained lifelong friends. Sickert encouraged both women to visit André Lhote's studio in Paris. Lhote was an advocate of a form of Cubism that was based not on rejecting what had gone before, but on extending the Western European tradition of painting.

Jellett met the artist Albert Gleizes in 1921. He was the author of *Du Cubisme*, an important theoretical book on Cubism. Gleizes' theories about the **symbolic power of colour** were of great interest to Jellett. His argument that pure colour had a magical quality re-enforced her own belief in the ability of abstract colour and form to transcend language and culture. Gleizes used a system of echoed colours and rhythms to create his painted compositions. His two Irish pupils Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone developed an original less rigid and academic interpretation of his principles.

Jellett's studies led her to believe in the power of **abstraction**. She made detailed studies of her subject and then searched for the inner rhythms and ordered movements of the image. She transposed these elements in a systematic manner, producing an abstract image that retained some of the primary study while seeking to create a work of harmony complete in itself. Her belief in the spiritual value of colour was the driving force in her work, and through **colour harmony** and **tonal balance**, she created works of extraordinary force and beauty.

Viewing Suggestions for Children

There are lots of different colours in this painting. What colours can you name? Colours are important for the mood of a work. How does this painting make you feel? If you look at the shapes, many are round or wavy, but there are also plenty of corners. Where is your eye drawn to?

The title of the work is Achill Horses. Achill is an island in Co. Mayo. Can you spot the horses, and how many are there? The painting seems very dynamic. Why would the artist want to convey movement in this painting, and how does she do it?

In 1925, Jellett exhibited in Paris, Versailles and Brussels. The shows were a critical success. Two years earlier, she had exhibited at the Dublin Painters' Exhibition. It was the first time that cubist work was seen in Ireland, and George Russell (the Irish poet and painter known as AE) described her as a victim of the 'artistic malaria' that was abstract art. What do you make of Russell's comment?

Evie Hone, *Abstract Composition (Man with Accordion)*, 1928

Background Information for Teachers

Evie Hone (1894–1955) was born in Dublin. She began her painting career under the guidance of Walter Sickert in London. Hone then moved to Paris to work with André Lhote and, subsequently, Albert Gleizes. Back in Dublin, she became influential in the modern movement in Ireland, and she was one of the founders of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art. She later studied stained glass with Wilhelmina Geddes and discovered it as her true **métier**.

Hone spent time in an Anglican Convent in 1925 and converted to Catholicism in 1937. This may have influenced her decision to begin working in stained glass. Initially she worked as a member of the An Túr Gloine stained glass co-operative which had been established by Sarah Purser (1848-1943). She later set up a studio of her own in Rathfarnham.

Evie Hone, Mainie Jellett, Mary Swanzy, May Guinness, Sarah Purser and other Anglo-Irish women artists came to study in Paris. Art critic Brian Fallon referred to them as 'a very remarkable generation of women, all of whom were authentic personalities in their own right as well as influential and active in many fields. They were, in fact, Ireland's emancipated generation, independent-minded and sometimes vocally feminist – notable organisers and crusaders for various causes.'

Viewing Suggestions for Children

The tones in this painting are **muted**. How do these colours make you feel? There appears to be an outline of a large sitting figure with a square object on his or her lap and an arm or leg reaching down. Can you think of paintings with a sitting figure in the centre holding something in her lap? The yellow colour around the head may give you a clue.

The title of the painting is *Abstract Composition (Man with Accordion)*. Once you know the full title, does it make you look at the painting differently? Considering the tones of the painting, could you suggest what kind of music the accordion might be making?

Juan Gris, *Pierrot*, 1921

Background Information for Teachers

Juan Gris (1887-1927) began by studying landscape painting in Madrid, but after only two years, in 1906, he moved to Paris where he met Matisse, Apollinaire, Jacob, Braque and Picasso. Braque and Picasso were central to his artistic formation, and he collaborated with them to develop Analytical Cubism. In the early 1920s Gris succumbed to the first symptoms of pneumonia, which later developed into pleurisy. He painted *Pierrot* while convalescing in Bandol on the Mediterranean in 1921.

Pierrot is a typical theme of those years, a time when the artist was fascinated by the masks of the traditional commedia dell'arte, popular images from humorous magazines, and noisy carnivals in Paris. However, like Picasso some years earlier, Gris was attracted by the melancholic aspect of the Pierrot character, the pathetic and unfortunate lover in many pantomimes.

Viewing Suggestions for Children

There is a human figure in this painting and a still life. Can you make out the objects that are part of the still life? The human figure overlaps with the object. What is strange about this?

The tones in this painting are muted (soft, subdued). There's black, white and grey. Would you know the names of any other shades in this painting, and how do these colours make you feel?

The title of the work is *Pierrot*. This is the name of a character from pantomime and theatre. Pierrot is the sad clown who longs for love. He is seen as naïve, always the butt of pranks, yet trusting nonetheless. Pierrot performs without a mask but with a whitened face, and he wears a loose white blouse with large buttons and wide white pantaloons.

Does knowing all of this make you look differently at the colours and the way the planes intersect? There are several references to music in the painting. What kind of music would you associate with Pierrot?

Pablo Picasso, *Homme au Chapeau*, 1916

Background Information for Teachers

The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) was revolutionary in the way he challenged the conventions of painting. His **stylistic pluralism**, legendary reconfiguration of pictorial space and his inexhaustible creative force have made him one of the most revered artists of the 20th century. Following his Blue and Rose Period, in 1906 the influence of African sculpture materialised in his works in the shape of geometrical nudes and landscapes that led to the creation of his key work, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907). Viewed by many critics as the 'transitional piece' to Cubism, this painting broke new ground with its multiple viewpoints, fractured figures and exposed canvas. After 1912, Picasso's increasingly abstract work led to his works in collage in which he continued to defy convention. By 1925, he began to move toward Surrealism, extending his cubist deformations by literary association and an increased force of expression.

Viewing Suggestions for Children

This is an artwork by Pablo Picasso. Have you heard of this artist, and what do you know about him, or have you seen another work of his?

It is easy to see the man and his hat in this work entitled *Homme au Chapeau*. What else is the man wearing, and what does he hold in his hands? What else can you see?

The man's body seems to have been taken apart and put together again, but with a difference. What is strange about it? What do you think might the artist have tried to do? Look closely at the forms and patterns. Notice the different kinds of shading in the drawing. If you were to construct a work like this, how would you go about it?

Suggested Preparatory Activities and Practical Uses in the Classroom

Talk to the children about Cubism as a twentieth century avant-garde art movement that revolutionised not only European painting but also sculpture, architecture, literature and music. Listen to and discuss, for example, Igor Stravinsky's Piano-Rag-Music for solo piano or read one of Gertrude Stein's cubist poems.

The founders of the movement were Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Cubist works are full of geometric angles and shapes (eg, cubes, spheres, cylinders and cones). The picture itself is flattened almost to the point of two-dimensionality. The piece will usually have a tangible sense of movement. The artwork is not meant to be realistic. In the early 1900s, some artists became interested in African and Native American art. The styles of those cultures also inspired Cubism.

Encourage the children to look for geometric shapes in a cubist painting and have them copy those shapes using tracing paper. Show them some African or Native American art and discuss some of their characteristics.

Modern urban life was partly characterised by uncertainty and different ways of looking at life. Modernism tended to break down any unified cultural perspective. Viewpoints became multiple. A fluid sense of consciousness developed, and the distinctions between past, present and future became blurred. Cubism was the most striking form of expression of this altered perception.

Talk with the children about such altered perception, for example the influence of multiple viewpoints on literature, music and film.

In cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analysed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form. Instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist observes and depicts the subject from different points in time and space simultaneously. Several successive angles are fused into a single image. Often the surfaces intersect at seemingly random angles, thus presenting no coherent sense of depth. The eye is free to roam from one viewpoint to another.

Possible Responses:

You could look to create your own Cubist inspired collage, this could be with newspapers and printed material, with fabric and everyday objects or it could be a photo-montage.

You could create self-portraits by placing two mirrors angled in towards each other, so to split the image.

Try creating your own translated and rotated images. This was a technique used by Cubist artists, especially by the artist Albert Gleizes, whereby they would translate an object or person into a two-dimensional abstraction (usually using a limited selection of colours), and then rotate that image, rendering it almost unrecognisable. Through simple print methods, you could create your own abstract form and then rotate it when printing onto paper. Using this media, allows you to experiment and layer over the rotated images.

Why not look in your local area to see if there are any stained glass windows, these might be in a church or in someone's doorway. What is the image of? How has the artist split the image into colour, shapes, lines and patterns? You could design your own stained glass windows in class.

Glossary:

Analytic Cubism

This was the first phase of Cubism, which saw artists analyse and reduce forms to their geometric angles and shapes and represent them as flat two-dimensional images. Another form of Cubism is Synthetic Cubism, which used collage as a medium.

Cubism

Founded by artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, Cubism sought to analyse, deconstruct and break up objects, and re-assemble them in an abstracted form. Instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, artists observed and depicted the subject from different points in time and space simultaneously. The title Cubism comes from contemporary art critics who described the artists' use of cubes in their work.

plein air painting

Painting out of doors directly from nature.

Fauvism

Fauvism is an art movement that took place in France in the early 1900s, the word *fauves* means wild beasts in French a title that was given to the group because of their use of wild brushstrokes and unrealistic colours. Leading Fauve artists include Henri Matisse and André Derain.

composition

How an artwork has been divided or arranged into visual elements (colours, lines, objects etc), and how these elements relate to each other.

Modernism

Refers collectively to a range of art movements from the late 1800s to mid-1900s, including Impressionism, Cubism, and Fauvism. Influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the changes in society and politics during this time, Modernism in art rejected realistic representations and sought to depict contemporary society and theories.

avant-garde

Refers to a work of art or an artist whose work is innovative and experimental, and pushes the boundaries of the accepted norms at the time.

symbolic power of colour

Mainie Jellett, among other artists, believed that colour could be used as a symbol to evoke emotions and spiritual responses in the viewer. In society we associate meanings with colours (for example red may symbolise danger), and artists, especially abstract artists, choose colours in order to suggest ideas or sensations.

abstraction

Abstraction is a synonym for abstract art, which is either a reordering or reshaping of the natural world into something unrecognisable or art that is non-representational and is purely interested in formal elements, such as medium, colour, shapes etc.

colour harmony

The art of putting colours together to create an overall image that is pleasing to the eye, this can include the use of complimentary or contrasting colours.

tonal balance

Is the balance between light and dark in a painting or design.

métier

An area or activity in which one excels.

muted

Soft and subdued colours.

stylistic pluralism

In this instance stylistic pluralism refers to Picasso's ability to adapt to, develop and excel in many different artistic styles.