

Written Research Task

Cubism – Pablo Picasso

On October 25th of 1881, one of the most influential artists of all time was born. The city of Malaga in Spain was blessed with the presence of Pablo Picasso. He was a world-renowned sculptor, printmaker, and painter, and after working alongside Georges Braque, Picasso is credited with creating the art movement of cubism. This art style was revolutionary, allowing people to combine different ideas and opinions using geometric shapes to create a fragmented image. Cubism had two primary phases, analytical and synthetic cubism. Picasso started developing analytical cubism in 1908, experimenting with overlapping monochromatic geometric shapes, allowing the artwork to showcase multiple perspectives. In 1912, he switched to synthetic cubism, which, unlike analytical cubism, was abstract and polychromatic.

Girl with a Mandolin (1910) was one of Picasso's most famous works from his analytical era. It was painted in a studio using oil paints, inspired by a model who posed in front of him. This painting was fragmented and abstract, reflecting Picasso's previous painting style. However, *Girl with a Mandolin* marked the start of an imaginative art movement, and with that, it became increasingly difficult to decipher his work because of the indistinct forms.

In this monochromatic painting, there are various shades of brown which have been blended to create a dull and muted artwork, associated with the depression and melancholy aesthetic. The geometric shapes create the appearance of a distorted figure, emphasising how abstract and blurred the painting is as its composition moulds together. The subtle hints of blue combine with beige to create tonal work that outlines the woman and her mandolin. Additionally, the linework is systematic and refined, exaggerating every geometric shape and defining the model. The model seen in the painting appears both two-dimensional and three-dimensional at the same time due to the multiple perspectives in which it was painted.

The mandolin is clearly the focal point of this painting. It is centred in the middle of the canvas, and the surrounding lines and tonal work is darker in comparison to the rest of the painting. Additionally, it is the most easily identifiable object because it is less distorted than the model. Despite how abstract the artwork is, the proportions of the model and the mandolin are realistic, and closely resemble the features of a person. The negative space in the top left corner is reflective of the negative space in the bottom right corner creating balance. When flipped on a diagonal axis, the painting almost seems symmetrical, particularly in the background. This artwork demonstrates the ideas associated with analytical cubism because it showcases the overlapping geometrical shapes while integrating realism and emotive symbolism.

Picasso had many studios around the world, but painted primarily in *Le Bateau Lavoir* in Paris, France. Here he perfected the art of oil painting, using this technique to create many artworks during the Cubism art movement. Picasso often prepared his own canvases, using rabbit skin glue and oil ground. He then proceeded to sketch out his painting ideas, focusing on the defining features, tones, and minor details. Picasso mixed his own oil paints, using linseed oil as a thinner, and then worked on the tonal work and details before finally adding varnish.

With *Girl with a Mandolin*, Picasso utilised his pre-existing knowledge of different techniques to add detail and create form using layering. He used a dry brush to create a streaking texture which is emphasised in the edges of the artwork. Additionally, he often used thick brushes to fill in the grey and blue tones in the geometric shapes. He switched to using flat brush strokes to define the sharp edges of the layered shapes. These brush strokes can be seen across the entirety of the artwork, adding texture.

During the Cubism movement, Picasso created many artworks that had great historical influence, one of his most famous was *Guernica*. This artwork is known as Picasso's most powerful political statement because of its direct connection with the Spanish Civil War. Guernica is a city in the Basque Country of Northern Spain and in April of 1937, it was bombed for several hours by Nazi Germany. Although Picasso had not visited Spain for many years, he was significantly affected by this event because in May of 1937, Picasso began painting *Guernica*, a monochromatic painting that highlighted the tragedies of war and its devastating effects on the innocent civilians of the town.

Several people can be seen crying in pain, in particular, one woman can be seen screaming as she holds her child. The bodies are distorted and mutilated, adding to the chaos. A lady can be seen holding a lamp out of the window, potentially representing having some light and hope in a dark and sad situation. This painting had a major impact on Cubism because it had a darker meaning than some of Picasso's other works, however, it still had abstract elements and showcased many different perspectives.

Nowadays, Picasso is regarded as one of the most inspirational and talented artists of the 20th Century. His contribution to art during the Cubism movement was revolutionary, especially because he was the main artist to define this art era. *Girl with a Mandolin* and *Guernica* are both highly praised and remarkable artworks from this art period, representing ingenuity and originality.

Personally, I am quite fond of Cubism. Picasso's work is incredibly thought-provoking and imaginative, most likely because of how abstract it is. I like how he has managed to combine many perspectives into a single painting and his

ability to create meaning and depth using dark tones is remarkable. I do not particularly like how distorted some of the figures are, however, I have learnt this is how Picasso communicates his ideas.

Girl with a Mandolin (1910)



Guernica (1937)



Bibliography

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