

G Braque



Braque:

The Great Years

Douglas Cooper

The Art Institute of Chicago

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For W.A.M.

The great encourager with love and gratitude.

D. C.

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Published in the United States by
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.
In conjunction with a Braque exhibition
At the Institute, October 7 through December 3, 1972.

Designed and produced by Chanticleer Press Inc., New York, and printed by Amilcare Pizzi, S.p.A., Milan, Italy
Designer: Ellen Hsiao

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 72-82731

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Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Trustees of The Art Institute of Chicago, I should like to say it is with the greatest of pleasure that we present to our members and visiting public from far and wide a major exhibition of one of the twentieth century's greatest painters — Georges Braque. The exhibition consists only of the major and monumental works of the later period of this great artist and will be shown only here at the Art Institute, as owners today are becoming more reluctant to lend their great paintings for long periods. The exhibition will open October 7 and run through December 3, 1972. This is a very expensive show because of the high cost of insurance, transportation, installation, and the many other expenses that occur in assembling a great exhibition, but due to a generous contribution from the National Endowment for the Arts, we have been able to assemble these superb pictures from museums and private collections in Europe and the United States, many of which have never been seen before publicly.

I am delighted that we were able to secure the outstanding services of Douglas Cooper, who not only selected the paintings, but along with the help of our Associate Director, John Maxon, Anne Rorimer, and other members of the staff, prepared this catalogue. Mr. Cooper wrote the text, based on his personal acquaintance with Braque and his great knowledge of his works.

At the last moment, after this catalogue was in print, no. 30 was unavailable. Through the extreme kindness and great generosity of M. Jean Leymarie, *The Billiard Table*, 1944, is being lent by the Musées Nationaux, Paris, in addition to the other loans from that museum.

I wish to thank all the lenders for making the sacrifice of giving up, even temporarily, possession of these noble works in order that the public of Chicago may share them. I also wish to express Mr. Cooper's thanks to the following people who have eased his way and helped to make the exhibition possible:

M. and Mme. Aimé Maeght and Mme. Nicole Mangin, of the Galerie Maeght, for assistance of various kinds;

M. Claude Laurens, for his friendly co-operation and the loan of photographs;

Mr. David Lowe, of Chanticleer Press, for his sustained interest, patience, and skill during the production of this book-catalogue;

M. Pierre Georgel of the C.N.R.S., Paris, for assistance in procuring photographs;

Mr. Jeffrey Loria, for assistance with the loan of a painting;

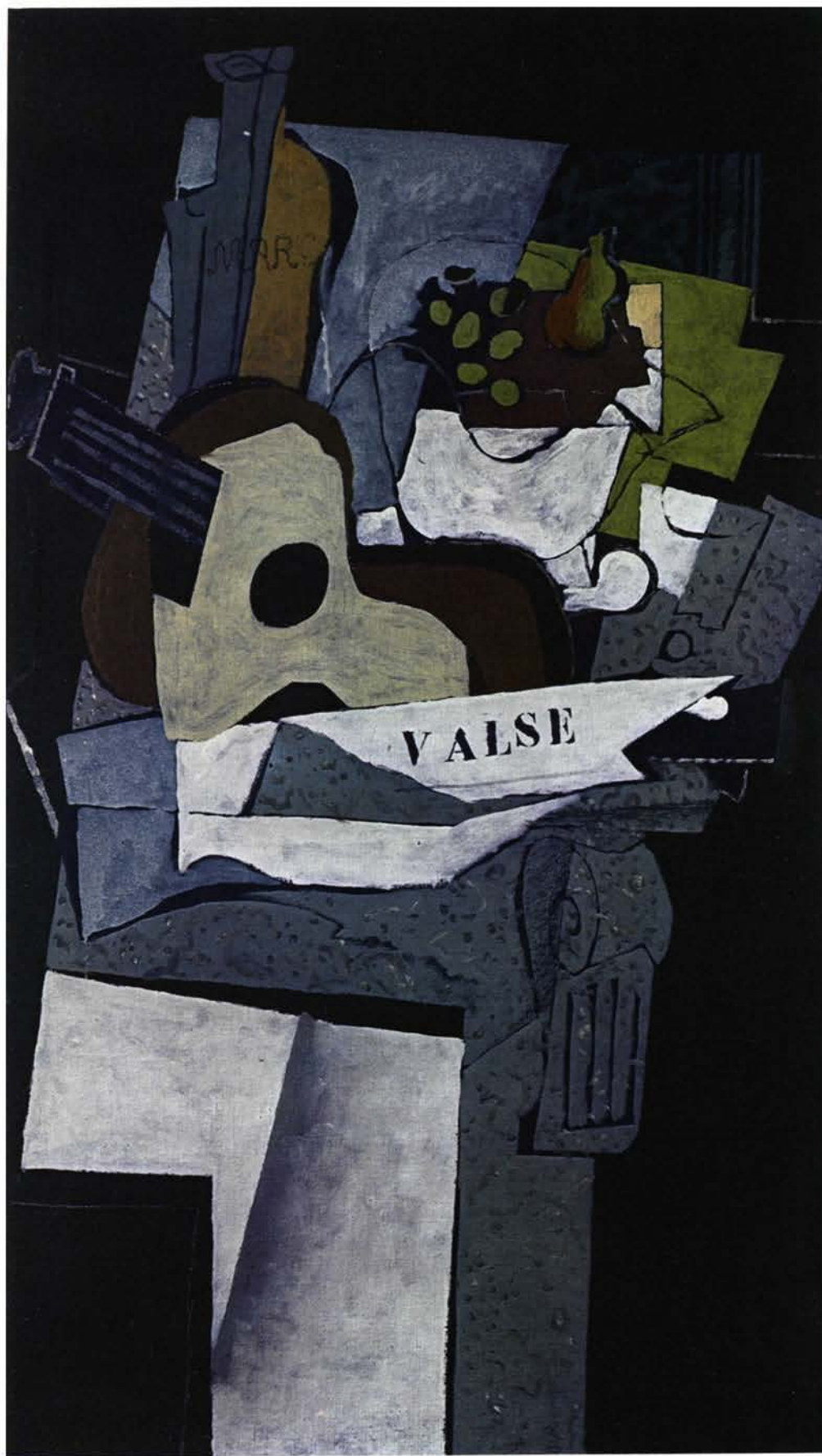
Mr. Alexander Liberman, for his gracious co-operation in providing copies of some of his own photographs of Braque and his studio;

And many others too numerous to list.

Leigh B. Block, President
The Art Institute of Chicago



*Plate 1. The Guéridon, 1918,
oil on canvas,
51x29 inches (129.5 x 73.6 cm.),
Philadelphia Museum of Art,
Arensberg Collection.*



*Plate 2. The Mantelpiece, 1921-22
(No. 2*)*

*Indicates number in Check List.



Plate 3. The Mantelpiece, 1922 (No. 3)



Plate 4. The Mantelpiece, 1927
(No. 10)



Plate 5. *The Guéridon*, 1925.
oil on canvas, 57½ x 30 inches
(146 x 76.2 cm.), Mrs. Walter A. Haas,
San Francisco.



Plate 6. Guéridon with a
Bottle of Rum, 1928-30 (No. 14)



Plate 7. Still Life with Mandolin I, 1936 (No. 20)



Plate 8. The Pink Tablecloth, 1938 (No. 22)

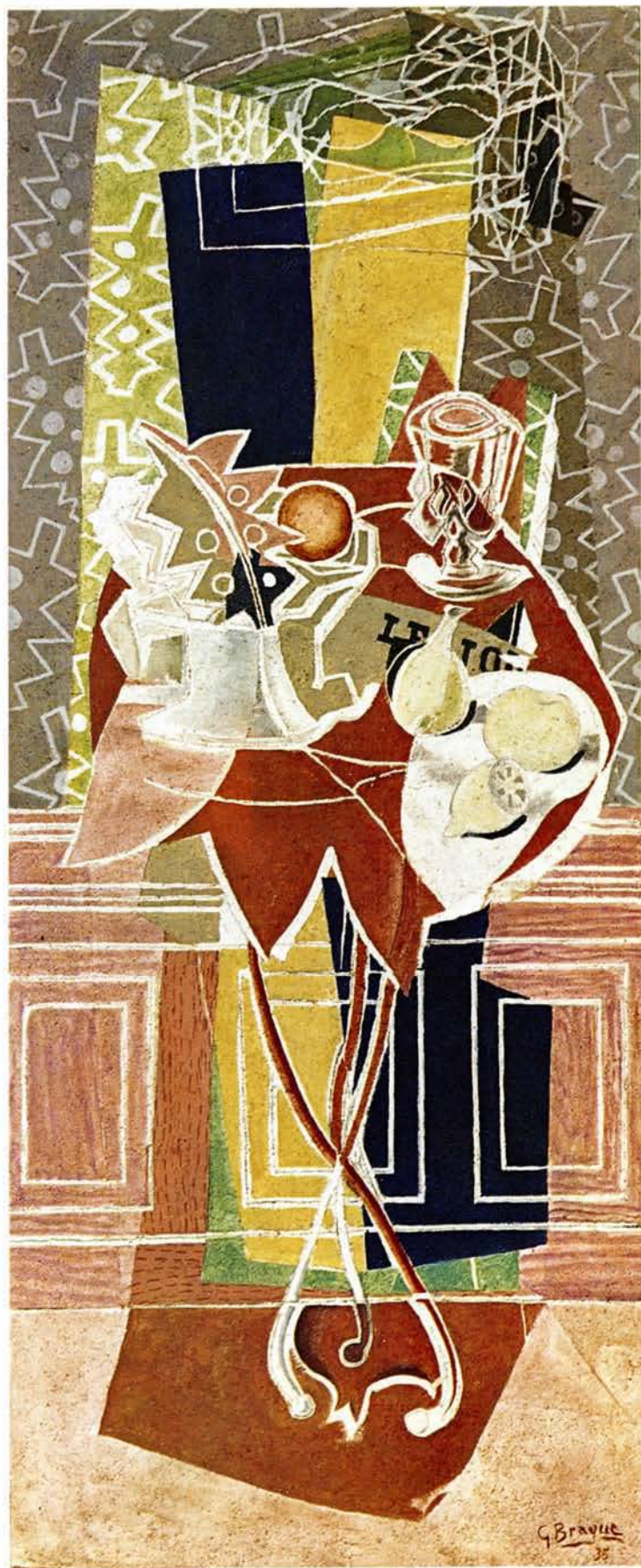


Plate 9. The Guéridon, 1935 (No. 19)



*Plate 10. Still Life with a Mandolin,
Fruit, and a Roll of Paper on a Table,
1936–38 (No. 21)*

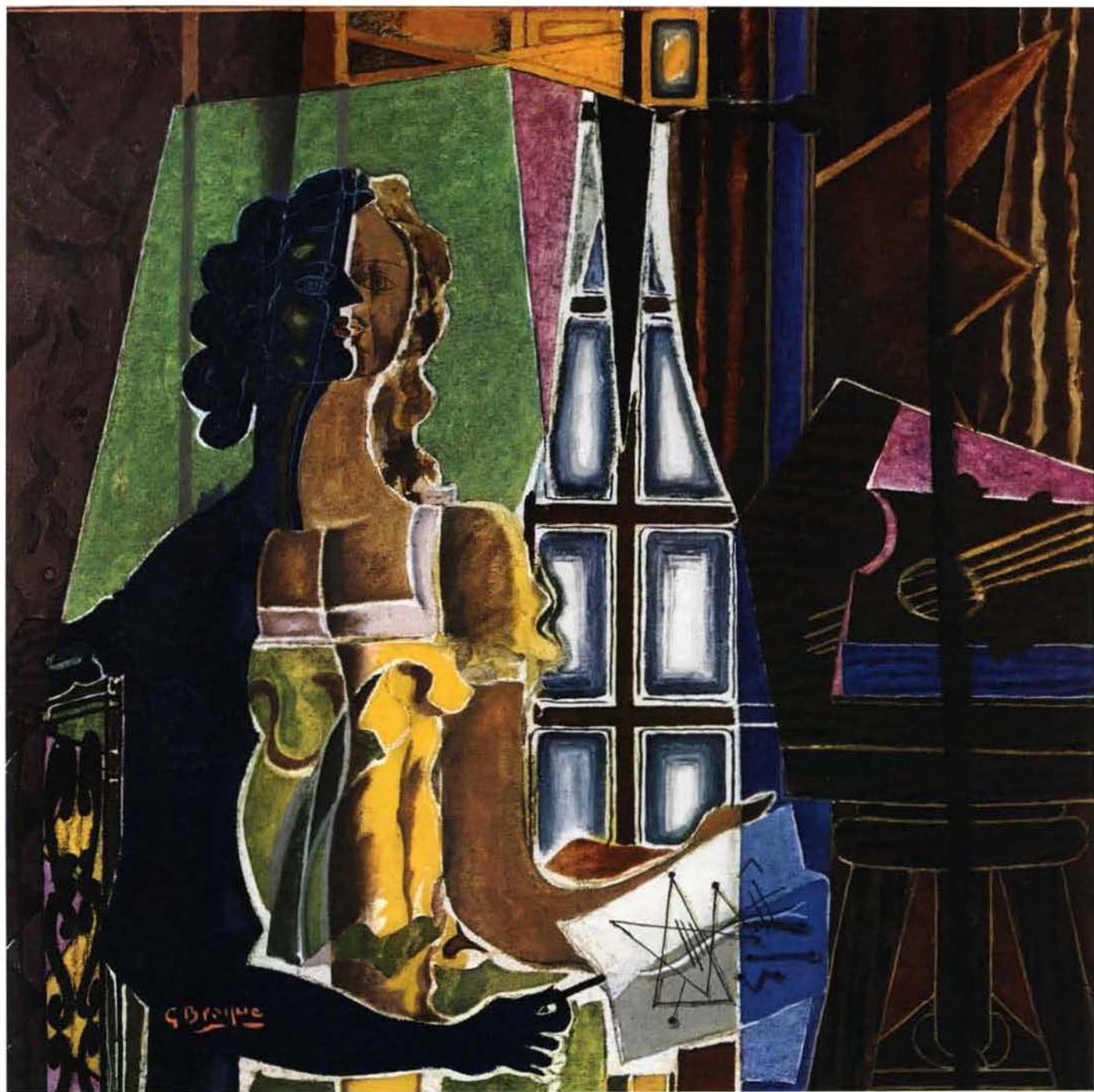


Plate 11. The Model, 1939 (No. 24)



Plate 12.
The Blue Washstand,
1942 (No. 26)

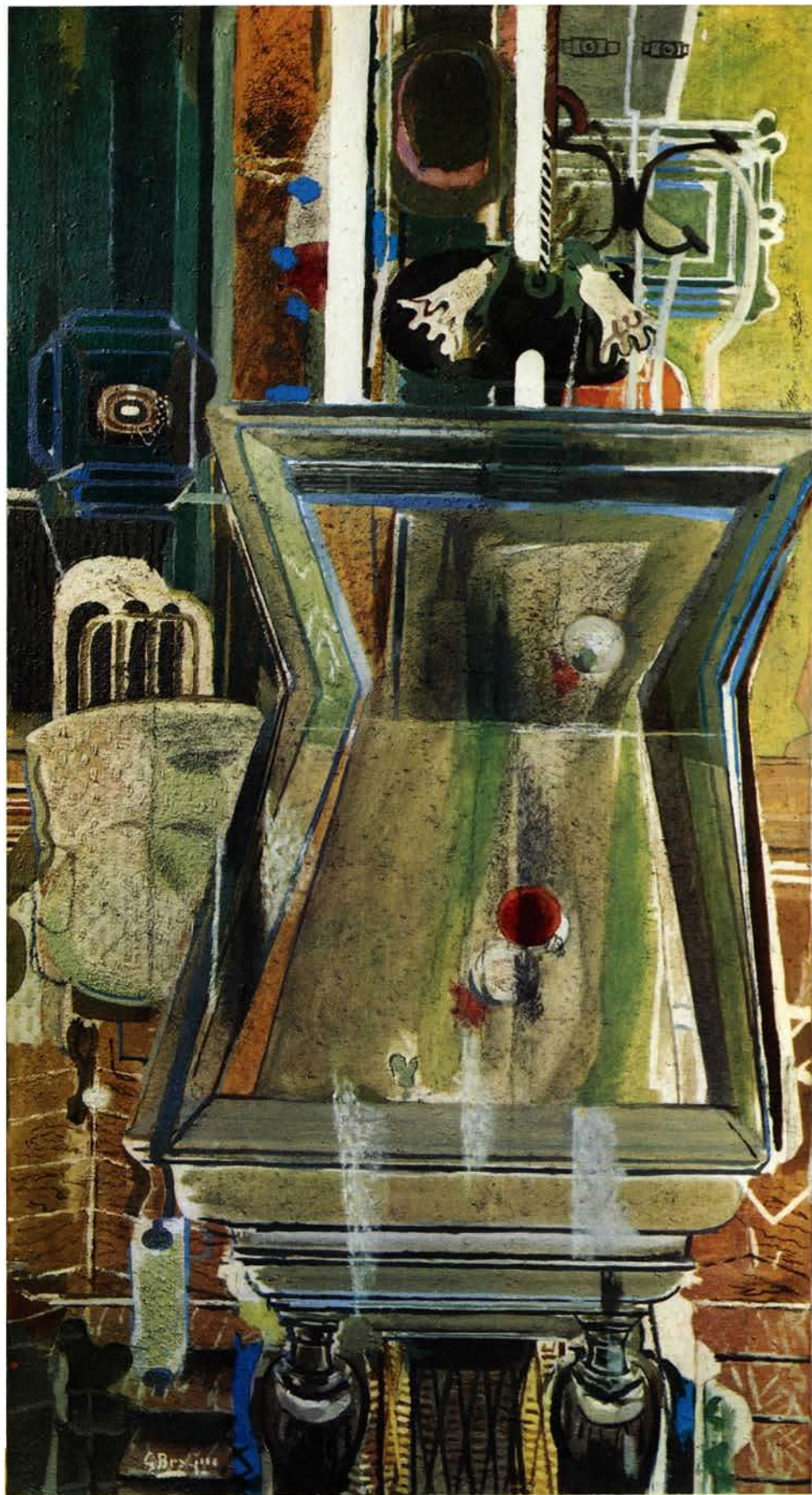


Plate 13. The Billiard Table,
1944-52 (No. 30)

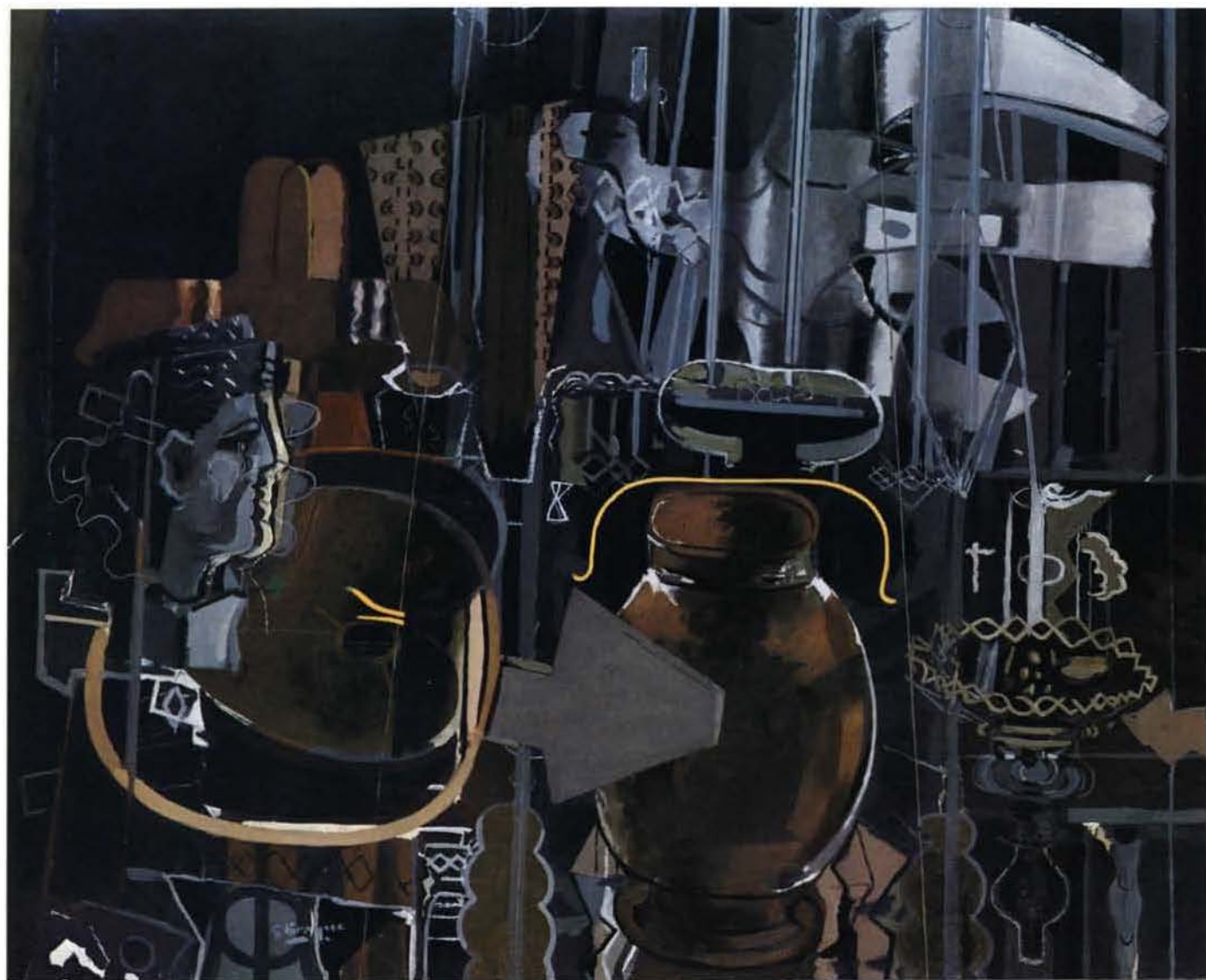


Plate 14. The Studio II, 1949-50 (No. 32)





Plate 17. Reclining Woman,
1930-52 (No. 34)



Plate 16. The Trellis, 1953-54 (No. 36)

Check List

1. *Guitar, Pipe and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon*, 1918
Fig. 9
Oil on canvas,
51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (130 x 74.5 cm.)
Unsigned
Lent by the Stedelijk van Abbe Museum,
Eindhoven, Holland.
2. *The Mantelpiece*, 1921–22
Plate 2, Fig. 20
Oil on canvas,
51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 inches (130 x 74 cm.)
Signed on back, not dated
Lent by the Národní Galerie, Prague.
3. *The Mantelpiece*, 1922
Plate 3, Fig. 21
Oil on canvas,
52 x 29 inches (132 x 74 cm.)
Signed on back, not dated
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil,
St. Louis.
4. *Woman with a Basket of Fruit*, circa 1923
Fig. 31
Oil on canvas,
57 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (146 x 77.7 cm.)
Signed, not dated
Lent by the Dial Collection, through the
Worcester Art Museum, Worcester,
Massachusetts.
5. *Woman Seated Against a Background of Foliage*, 1922–23
Fig. 33
Charcoal heightened with white chalk
on paper, 36 x 30 inches (91.5 x 76 cm.)
Signed, not dated
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Louis N. Cohen,
Glencoe, Illinois.
6. *The Mantelpiece*, 1923
Fig. 23
Oil on canvas,
51 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 29 inches (130 x 73.5 cm.)
Signed and dated 1923
Lent by the Kunsthaus, Zurich.
7. *Guitar and Fruit on a Table*, 1924,
Fig. 36
Oil on canvas,
45 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (116 x 60 cm.)
Signed and dated 1924
Lent from a Private Collection.
8. *The Marble-Topped Table*, 1925,
Fig. 38
Oil on canvas,
- 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 inches (130 x 73.5 cm.)
Signed and dated 1925
Lent by the Musées Nationaux, Paris.
9. *Seated Woman*, 1927
Fig. 34
Red chalk on paper,
36 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (93 x 74.7 cm.)
Signed and dated 1927
Lent from a Private Collection.
10. *The Mantelpiece*, 1927
Plate 4, Fig. 24
Oil on canvas,
51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 inches (130 x 73.5 cm.)
Signed and dated 1927
Lent by The Norton Gallery and School
of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida.
11. *The Guéridon*, 1928
Fig. 39
Oil and sand on canvas,
70 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (180 x 73 cm.)
Signed and dated 1928
Lent by The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.
12. *Still Life on a Table*, 1928–29
Fig. 42
Oil and sand on canvas,
70 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (180 x 73 cm.)
Signed, not dated
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Saidenberg,
New York.
13. *The Guéridon*, 1928–29
Fig. 41
Oil on canvas,
58 x 45 inches (145 x 114 cm.)
Signed and dated 1929
Lent by The Phillips Collection,
Washington, D.C.
14. *Guéridon with a Bottle of Rum*,
1928–30
Plate 6, Fig. 44
Oil on canvas,
71 x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (180 x 73 cm.)
Signed and dated 1930
Lent by Galerie Maeght, Paris.
15. *The Grey Table*, 1928–30
Fig. 45
Oil and sand on canvas,
57 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (145 x 76 cm.)
Signed and dated 1930
Lent from a Private Collection.
16. *The Blue Mandolin*, 1928–30
Fig. 46
Oil on canvas,
45 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 34 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (115 x 89 cm.)
Signed and dated 1930
Lent by the St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.
17. *Guitar and Bottle of Marc on a Table*,
1928–30
Fig. 47
Oil and sand on canvas,
51 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 inches (130 x 73.5 cm.)
Signed and dated 1930
Lent from a Private Collection.
18. *Two Fruit Dishes and a Mandolin on a Marble Console*, 1930
Fig. 48
Oil on canvas,
45 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 35 inches (116 x 90 cm.)
Signed and dated 1930
Lent by Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-
Westfalen, Düsseldorf.
19. *The Guéridon*, 1935
Plate 9, Fig. 51
Oil and sand on canvas,
70 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (180 x 73 cm.)
Signed and dated 1935
Lent by The San Francisco Museum of Art,
Gift of W. W. Crocker.
20. *Still Life with Mandolin I*, 1936
Plate 7, Fig. 49
Oil on canvas,
38 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (97 x 130 cm.)
Signed and dated 1936
Lent by The Norton Gallery and School
of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida.
21. *Still Life with a Mandolin, Fruit
and a Roll of Paper on a Table*, 1936–38
Plate 10, Fig. 53
Oil on canvas,
44 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (114 x 146 cm.)
Signed and dated 1938
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block,
Chicago.
22. *The Pink Tablecloth*, 1938
Plate 8, Fig. 50
Oil and sand on canvas,
35 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (89 x 107 cm.)
Signed and dated 1938
Lent from a Private Collection.
23. *Vase, Palette and Skull*, 1939
Fig. 55
Oil on canvas,

Check List

36 3/4 x 36 3/4 inches (92 x 92 cm.)

Signed and dated 1939

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. David Lloyd Kreeger,
Washington, D. C.

24. *The Model*, 1939

Plate 11, Fig. 59

Oil on canvas,

39 1/4 x 39 1/4 inches (100 x 100 cm.)

Signed and dated 1939

Lent by Mrs. Charles Vidor, New York.

25. *The Artist and His Model*, 1939

Fig. 60

Oil on canvas,

51 1/4 x 69 1/2 inches (130 x 176 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Mr. Walter P. Chrysler, New York.

26. *The Blue Washstand*, 1942

Plate 12, Fig. 62

Oil on canvas,

58 x 37 3/4 inches (147 x 96 cm.)

Signed and dated 1942

Lent by Mr. Sam Spiegel, New York.

27. *Interior: Table with Palette and Plant*,
1942

Fig. 63

Oil on canvas,

57 x 77 inches (144.5 x 196 cm.)

Signed and dated 1942

Lent by The De Menil Family Collection,
Houston.

28. *The Stove*, 1942

Figs. 64, 65

Oil on canvas,

57 3/8 x 34 3/4 inches (146 x 89 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by the Yale University Art Gallery,
Gift of Paul Rosenberg and Company
In Memory of Paul Rosenberg.

29. *The Kitchen Table with a Griddle*,

1942-43

Figs. 66, 67

Oil on canvas,

51 x 29 inches (130 x 73.5 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Herr Gustav Zumsteg, Zurich.

30. *The Billiard Table*, 1944-52

Plate 13, Figs. 68, 69

Oil on canvas,

76 3/4 x 38 1/4 inches (194.9 x 97.2 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Mr. Jacques Gelman, Mexico City.

31. *The Billiard Table*, 1947-49

Figs. 70, 72

Oil on canvas,

57 x 76 3/4 inches (145 x 195 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block,
Chicago.

32. *The Studio II*, 1949-50

Plate 14, Fig. 74

Oil on canvas,

51 1/4 x 63 3/4 inches (131 x 162.5 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-
Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

33. *The Studio VI*, 1949-52

Fig. 76

Oil on canvas,

51 x 63 3/4 inches (130 x 162.5 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Galerie Maeght, Paris.

34. *Reclining Woman*, 1930-52

Plate 17, Fig. 82

Oil on canvas,

28 3/4 x 70 3/4 inches (73 x 180 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Galerie Maeght, Paris.

35. *The Guéridon*, 1939-52

Fig. 52

Oil on canvas,

70 3/4 x 28 3/4 inches (180 x 73 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by the Musées Nationaux, Paris.

36. *The Trellis*, 1953-54

Plate 16, Fig. 81

Oil on canvas,

51 x 51 inches (130 x 130 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Brody,
Los Angeles.

37. *The Studio VIII*, 1952-55

Plate 15, Fig. 78

Oil on canvas,

52 x 77 1/2 inches (132 x 196.5 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent from a Private Collection.

38. *Bird Returning to Its Nest*, 1955-56

Figs. 84, 85

Oil on canvas,

51 1/4 x 68 1/4 inches (130 x 173.5 cm.)

Signed, not dated

Lent by the Musées Nationaux, Paris.

Biographical Chronology



Braque, 1958.
Photo Alex Liberman.

- 1882 *May 13*: Georges Braque born at Argenteuil-sur-Seine.
- circa 1890 Braque family moves to Le Havre.
- circa 1897 Braque begins attending evening classes at Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Le Havre.
- 1899 Leaves school and becomes apprentice to a *peintre-décorateur* (M. Roney) in Le Havre.
- 1900 *Winter*: Goes to Paris to continue his craftsman's training (with M. Laberthe). Lives in Montmartre and also attends evening classes in painting and drawing at the Cours Municipal of Batignolles.
- 1901 Begins one year's military service.
- 1902–04 Lives in Montmartre. Studies painting at the Académie Humbert, where he meets Marie Laurencin and Francis Picabia. First portraits of members of his family. Frequent visits to the Louvre; is impressed by Egyptian and archaic Greek sculpture, Poussin and Corot. Visits the galleries of Durand-Ruel and Vollard; sees Impressionist paintings at the Musée du Luxembourg.
- 1903 Works for two months in the *atelier* of Léon Bonnat at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, but then leaves.
- 1904 Summer in Brittany. On returning to Paris, rents a studio in Montmartre, gives up art schools and begins to work on his own.
- 1905 Impressed by the room of Fauve paintings at the Salon d'Automne. Through his friendship with Raoul Dufy and Othon Friesz (both natives of Le Havre), Braque is drawn into the Fauve orbit.
- 1906 *March*: Exhibits seven pictures at the Salon des Indépendants.
Summer: Painting with Friesz at Antwerp. Braque's first Fauve works.
October: Goes to L'Estaque to paint.
- 1907 *February*: Returns to Paris.
March: Exhibits six pictures (all of which are sold) at the Salon des Indépendants. Meets Matisse, Derain and Vlaminck.
May: Goes to La Ciotat to paint. Is joined later by Friesz. Both painters go to L'Estaque in September.
October: Returns to Paris. Exhibits one painting at the Salon d'Automne, which includes a Cézanne Memorial Exhibition. Kahnweiler buys several pictures from Braque and signs a contract for his whole production. Braque meets Guillaume Apollinaire, who takes him to Picasso's studio, where he sees *Les Femmes d'Alger*.
December: Begins work on the *Standing Nude*.
- 1908 Summer at L'Estaque. Influence of Cézanne leads to first cubist paintings. Dufy joins Braque for a while.
October: Braque's pictures are rejected by the jury of the Salon d'Automne.
November: One-man show at Galerie Kahnweiler, Paris.
- 1909 *March*: Exhibits two pictures at the Salon des Indépendants. Louis Vauxcelles writes of his "*bizareries cubiques*."
Fall: Close friendship with Picasso begins.
- 1911 Begins to use lettering in his pictures.
Summer: At Céret with Picasso.

Biographical Chronology

- 1912 *July*: Joins Picasso in Sorgues and rents a house there.
September: Makes the first *papier collé*.
- 1914 Summer vacation at Sorgues interrupted by mobilization.
- 1915 *May 11*: Wounded in the head at Carency (Artois). Trepanning operation, followed by a long convalescence.
- 1916 *April*: To Sorgues for convalescence.
Summer: Demobilization.
- 1917 *January 15*: A banquet is organized in Paris by Braque's friends to celebrate his recovery. Sees much of Henri Laurens and Juan Gris.
Summer: At Sorgues, begins to paint again. Léonce Rosenberg becomes Braque's dealer.
- 1918 The *Guéridons* begun.
- 1919 *March*: Exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's gallery, *L'Effort Moderne*, in Paris.
- 1920 *January*: Exhibits four pictures at the Salon des Indépendants. Kahnweiler opens the Galerie Simon and again becomes Braque's dealer.
October: Exhibits three pictures at the Salon d'Automne, which includes a Renoir Memorial Exhibition with many late works.
- 1921 Begins the *Mantelpieces* and *Kanephoroi*.
- 1922 By invitation, exhibits eighteen works at the Salon d'Automne. All are sold.
Fall: Moves from Montmartre to Montparnasse (Avenue Reille) to live.
- 1924 Paul Rosenberg becomes Braque's dealer. Braque moves into a new house built for him by Auguste Perret at rue du Douanier, near the Parc Montsouris, in Paris.
- 1928 Summer in Dieppe. Paints his first small seascapes. New series of *Guéridons*.
- 1931 First summer in a new house built for him at Varengeville (near Dieppe).
- 1936 First paintings of artists and models.
- 1938 Still lifes with a skull begun.
- 1939 The first *Studio Interior* completed.
- 1940 *May*: To Varengeville.
June: After the German invasion of France, Braque moves south, first to the Limousin, then to the Pyrenees.
Autumn: Returns to Paris.
- 1941 Painting again. Wartime interiors and still lifes.
- 1944 *October*: To Varengeville for a short period. Series of *Billiard Tables* begun. Paints *The Salon*.
- 1945 Serious illness in the summer followed by long convalescence. Stops painting for several months.
- 1946 *Spring*: Starts painting again. *Sunflowers* completed.
- 1947 Aimé Maeght becomes Braque's dealer.
Spring: Has pneumonia. Publication of *Thoughts and Reflections*. More work on *Billiard Tables*.
- 1948 Series of *Studios* begun. The "bird" theme begins to play an important role in Braque's work. Begins *Terrace* paintings.

Biographical Chronology

- 1950 *January*: Exhibition of first five *Studios* at Galerie Maeght.
- 1952–53 Works on three ceiling paintings of *Birds* for the Etruscan Gallery in the Louvre. *Studio VI* completed; *Studios VII* and *VIII* begun.
- 1953 *Feuilles, Couleur, Lumière*, Braque's most important color lithograph, published.
Winter: Serious illness, stops painting. Has just completed designs for three stained-glass windows for a chapel at Varengeville.
- 1955 *July*: *Studio VIII* completed.
- 1956 *Studio VII/IX* completed. *Bird Returning to Its Nest* and *On the Wing* completed. Publication of additional *Thoughts*. Braque's health begins seriously to decline.
- 1963 *August 31*: Death of Georges Braque at his home in Paris.

1

The Formative Years: 1905–1917

Now that the pictorial revolution effected by a few very great artists of the School of Paris between 1900 and 1920 is more than fifty years behind us it is possible – not least because our eyes have become sufficiently familiar with the new idiom they created to be able to “read” what they see – to look back at the paintings, find visual and physical pleasure and stimulation, distinguish the separate personality of each artist and appreciate the degree of his individual achievement. We can therefore afford, nowadays, to forget about schools and theories, to dismiss from our minds virtually all the conflicting and often misguided critical writings we have read, and set out to rediscover for ourselves the truth as revealed by the works and in the utterances – rare and sibylline though they are – of the creators.

This is the line which I intend to pursue here in re-examining a series of masterpieces by Georges Braque.

Braque was not only consistently creative and original as an artist but also, in my opinion, the most consummate pure painter of the School of Paris, a great French artist who modernized and enormously enriched the French tradition of painting. He was an artist of monumental stature, a fact which has never, I think, been properly recognized. One can adduce many reasons for Braque’s work still being undervalued: that Braque’s was not a showy personality; that his painting was never provocative or sensational and always deeply serious; that his smaller pictures present no problems and are superficially charming; that he pursued to the end his own vision of the world and his own conceptions of picturemaking, unswayed by the methods of others; that his work defies classification by any ism; even that its visual complexity and spiritual nobility are not sufficiently challenging qualities in an age when eyes and palates are bedeviled by a tumultuous display of self-renewing genius. But there is more to it than this. For even early in his career Braque was regarded as a follower, and this wrong-headed notion lingers on still.



Braque in his studio, 1911.

To see how this error of judgment originated, we have only to look back at what happened in Paris before 1914. Growing up in Le Havre, Braque made friends there with Raoul Dufy and Othon Friesz, two bright young art students who encouraged him to move to Montmartre in 1902 and complete his training by working in a free academy, the Académie Humbert. Then, in 1905, when Braque was twenty-three but still undecided as to his future artistic development, they exposed him to the shock of modern art at its most colorful by leading him to the Fauve paintings at the Salon d'Automne. Braque was overwhelmed and convinced – "Matisse and Derain opened the road for me," he was to say five decades later – and during the next two years attached himself to Matisse and the Fauve group, under whose tutelage he produced what he called his "first creative works" (Fig.1). Talking to Dora Vallier in 1954 about these days, Braque explained: "What impressed me about *fauve* painting was its novelty. It was painting full of fervor, and that suited me at my age. Romanticism was alien to me, but I liked this physical painting." However, it did not take Braque long to realize that the paroxysm of Fauve painting, resulting from northerners being exposed (as Van Gogh had been) to the sunlight and heat of the Midi, could not be sustained forever. Moreover, he found in the fall of 1907 that the hitherto dominating influence of Matisse was declining, because young painters were succumbing more and more to the revelation of Cézanne and because they had become aware that a then relatively unknown young painter from Spain was producing aggressively modern pictures which opened up more fruitful possibilities for the future.

It was at this moment that Braque was exposed to a second, and more violent, aesthetic shock, when he was taken by Guillaume Apollinaire, in October 1907, to the studio of this young Spaniard, Pablo Picasso. There he was shown a large, recently executed figure composition, known today as *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which was the first outburst of a wholly new way of pictorial representation. The effect on Braque, who had recently started to come to terms with Cézanne's handling of pictorial forms and spatial relationships in his later paintings, was overwhelming. And he began forthwith under these joint influences to rethink and transform his own methods and ideas. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Braque returned for the third time to paint in Cézanne's countryside around L'Estaque in the summer of 1908 (Fig. 2), he no longer succumbed to the "exaltation" which he had felt previously, because he could see "something else." This, of course, was a tangible reality, the en-



Fig. 1

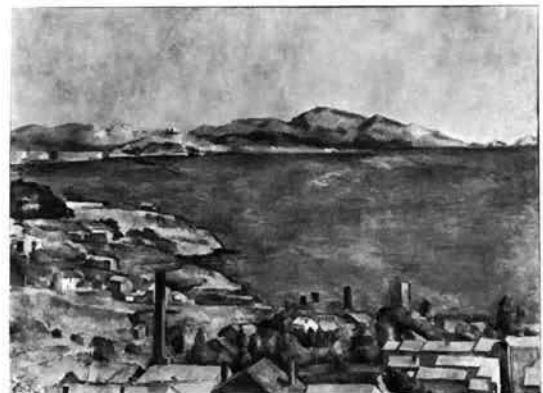


Fig. 2

Fig. 1. Georges Braque, *L'Estaque*, 1906-7, Private Collection.

Fig. 2. Paul Cézanne, *The Gulf of Marseilles Seen from L'Estaque*, circa 1883, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, The H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

during element in nature, and Braque then set about representing it, following his own intuition and methods he had observed in works by Cézanne and Picasso, without eye-fooling illusionism and in terms of basic geometric forms.

Thus Braque makes his appearance on the Parisian scene, historically speaking, first as a follower of Matisse in the Fauve group, then as a disciple of Picasso and the new art form which he had begun to elaborate. That is to say, Braque appears to be pulled first in one direction, then in another by the two most forceful, creative avant-garde forces of the time. Yet, in actuality, the painting experiences to which Braque was subject between 1905 and 1908, and as a result of which he worked his way through from a colorist style, concerned with light, pleasurable sensations, mural decoration and emotional release, to a constructive style, concerned with formal and spatial experiences, everyday reality and the creation of a new pictorial language, had an immediately vitalizing effect and continued to pervade every stage of his artistic evolution thereafter. For they liberated Braque's creative persona and put him on the path, for which he was looking, to true self-discovery.

It was above all through looking intelligently at the work of Cézanne – as both Matisse and Picasso had before him – that Braque found his personal solution. And it is not sufficiently emphasized that, in consequence, Braque's stylistic advance toward Cubism in 1908 and 1909, unlike that of Picasso, was consistent and progressive. When, therefore, he and Picasso discovered, in the fall of 1909, that although they had followed different routes they had arrived at similar results and were advancing pictorially in the same direction, it was as two artists of equal accomplishment that they decided to co-operate for the future in a common venture. Neither Braque nor Picasso thought of himself as leader or disciple, and their great achievement was undoubtedly to have been able, for three years (1909–12), to merge and hold in check their competing personalities while they concentrated wholeheartedly on working out together a new pictorial language. The effect was of a "marriage," to use Picasso's own expression, between a French and a Spanish temperament, out of which came a succession of unforeseeable inventions which kept the development of Cubist painting on the move. Nevertheless, each of the two artists had distinctive gifts of a personal kind, which inevitably found expression. But because they took creative advantage of the interplay and divergences of these, their respective paintings have

an individual character which an observant eye will detect. Braque was already Braque in 1909, and his individual personality grew stronger and more evident from that moment on.

Cubism was, of course, created jointly by Braque and Picasso, working as equals. Therefore it is unfitting either to differentiate too clearly between their respective contributions during the period of its elaboration, or to weigh the relative importance of the one in relation to the other. However, there is no need to conceal that among the important inventions which can be attributed to Braque are the facts that he was the first to introduce lettering, to make use of a paintcomb, to introduce passages of imitation wood graining and marbling, to vary the texture of his paint by mixing it with sand and other ingredients, and finally to discover the technique of *papier collé*. To which we may justifiably add that alongside Cubist paintings by Picasso, Braque's appear more painterly, more serene, more lyrical and more exquisite. Thus there should be no confusing the works of the two artists, although at the time – and indeed until 1919 – not only the interested public, but especially the critics, paid little heed to the work of Braque, whom they considered to be an imitator and follower of Picasso.

With all the evidence at our disposal today we can see how mistaken their judgment was. In fact, when both artists were working with *papiers collés* in 1913 and had just evolved the synthetic Cubist style, Braque's sober, elegant, and attractive use of the pictorial means was so different from that of Picasso as to give his pictures an unmistakably personal character. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the divorce between Braque and Picasso occurred in 1913, at which time each was able to withdraw from the *communauté des biens* greatly enriched by the experiences and discoveries they had shared, but aware that innate differences of temperament and growing mastery made it necessary, from then on, for each to pursue the development of his artistic personality alone.

At this point, however, the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 intervened to break, temporarily, the continuity of Braque's evolution. Picasso and Gris, who as Spaniards were not mobilized, thus found themselves left to carry on separately the humanization and enrichment of the Cubist idiom which had been the preoccupation of all three in 1913–14.

When Braque left for the front, he was at work on still lifes with objects which were already more integrated and recognizable

than before, in compositions which were subtly colored, loosely disposed and enlivened with elegant ornamental passages. More importantly, he was conscious of having been a leading protagonist in the stylistic revolution which, to quote George Heard Hamilton, established that "artistic activity is not essentially concerned with representation but instead with the invention of objects variously expressive of human experience, objects whose structures as independent artistic entities cannot be evaluated in terms of their likeness, nor devalued because of their lack of likeness, to natural things.... With Cubism, no such relationship is necessary or inevitable. In relation to the actual world the work of art is no longer a description or an illusion of that actuality, but rather is in and of itself its own reality, a real thing, subject to the laws of art rather than of nature, imposing its own system of relations upon nature."¹

Braque's life as a soldier was of comparatively short duration, for he was seriously wounded in the head on May 11, 1915, at Carençy in the Artois sector of the front. He underwent a trepanning operation, was hospitalized in Paris for almost a year, and was only released in April 1916. Then Braque left for convalescence at Sorgues, near Avignon, where he and Picasso had worked before the war and where he had acquired the lease on a house. But it was the spring of 1917 before Braque had thrown off the aftereffects of his operation, and he only started to paint again during the summer. By this time he had, inevitably, lost the thread of his own development, was out of touch with everything that had happened in Cubist painting during the past three years, and needed to refresh his vision and renew his technique of painting before attempting a fresh creative start. This was not easy for Braque, who could neither revive his partnership with Picasso nor resume the intimate, constructive discussions that they had had together in the past, not least because Picasso was absent from Paris throughout most of 1917. Braque did, on the other hand, see something for a while of Juan Gris, whose work of this date he not only admired but was able to learn from. He also resumed his old and very close friendship with Henri Laurens, who in the meanwhile had developed a significant extension of Cubism in sculpture.

For a year, at least, Braque, finding his way alone, hesitated and made different experiments before he fully recovered his sense of direction. He tried using *papier collé* on a much bolder scale than before (*Guitar and Clarinet*, 1918, Philadelphia Museum of Art), he painted two derivative and somewhat stiff figures

1. George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880 to 1940* (London, 1967), p. 1.



Fig. 3. Georges Braque, *Guitar and Fruit Dish*, 1917, Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., St. Louis.

(*Woman with a Mandolin*, 1917, Private Collection, France; *The Musician*, 1917–18, Kunstmuseum, Basel) in a synthetic Cubist idiom influenced by Gris, and he also painted some angular, ornamental still lifes which seem self-consciously artistic because the composition is enclosed in diamond shapes, lemon shapes, regular and irregular ovals, or an octagon (*Glass and Pipe*, 1917, Nathan Collection, Zurich; *The Guitar*, 1917, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo; *Guitar and Fruit Dish*, 1917 (Fig. 3); *Still Life with Grapes*, 1918 (Hendrie Collection, Cincinnati).

During this tentative period of self-renewal and discovery, which did not last long, it is obvious that Braque was considerably influenced by Gris and Laurens. Indeed, many of his paintings are really *tableaux-objets*, that is to say they are conceived as the equivalents of bas-reliefs. His largest ($86\frac{3}{4}'' \times 44\frac{3}{8}''$) and by far his most ambitious composition of the time was the figure painting *The Musician*. And this is of special significance, first because it marks the end of that ten-year period in Braque's work during which he absorbed the lesson of Cézanne and evolved the language of Cubism, but secondly because it is the last painting in which Braque used a *pure* synthetic Cubist idiom.

Braque finished *The Musician*, after some nine months' work, in the early summer of 1918, by which time he was thirty-six years old and back in his own stride. From this moment, Braque's old mastery fully reasserted itself, his painting became once more thoroughly personal, and his art blossomed anew. It is at this point that the present exhibition begins. And it has been confined to some forty of his most monumental canvases, because the larger the scale on which Braque worked, the more completely, more brilliantly and more convincingly did he realize his personal vision.

2

Self-Reorientation: 1917–1918



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 4. Pierre Subleyras, *Attributes of the Arts*, circa 1735, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, France.

Fig. 5. Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Attributes of Music*, 1765, Louvre, Paris.

In 1917–18 Braque reached a stage when he had to sort out, intellectually, his own attitude to purely painterly problems. His period of convalescence was therefore a convenient occasion to reflect on the nature of spatial experience, on how to give substantiality and immediacy to a group of still-life objects, on

the sensuous side of painting and on the pictorial relationship between one object and another. Braque had always been, first and foremost, a still-life painter. We can discover this at once if we consider certain basic facts. For example, Braque executed about 175 paintings between the beginning of 1908 and the end of 1914. Less than 12 of these were figures, and although the number of landscapes is about 25, the fact is that Braque virtually stopped painting landscapes in the fall of 1909 because, as he said: "In order to achieve pure representation, the painter must disregard appearances. To work from nature is to improvise."¹ So it is not unfair to relate Braque, subject-wise, to the great French tradition of still-life painting and to see him in the 1920's and 1930's as the heir of, for example, Subleyras (Fig. 4) and Chardin (Fig. 5). Yet there are two great differences in his approach to still lifes which set Braque apart from these earlier artists. First, Subleyras and Chardin established what Braque was later to call a "visual" space between the foreground plane of their composition and the eye or hand of the spectator. Secondly, Braque did not attribute to the natural and man-made objects which appear in his still lifes any symbolic meaning, nor did he treat them as an excuse for a decorative arrangement. Braque wanted us to see and feel, with himself, that they were real because they could be touched, handled and thereby given life. That was yet another lesson he had learned from Cézanne.

The most immediate way to discover how Braque's mind was working in 1916-17 is to consult the *Thoughts and Reflections* which he began to write at that time and continued for many years to add to and revise. Some of these illuminate so clearly the new style of painting that Braque was to evolve in 1918-19 that they must be quoted here.

"The limitation of means gives style, engenders the new form and incites to creation."

"The limited means are often the source of charm and strength in unsophisticated painting. On the other hand, any straining of the means leads to an art of decadence."

"The subject is not the object, it is the new unity, the lyricism which emanates entirely from the means."

"The objective is not to care about reconstituting an anecdotal fact but about constituting a pictorial fact."

"Don't imitate what you want to create."

"There is no imitating an appearance: appearances are results. The senses deform, the mind forms."

1. *Nord-Sud*, No. 10, December, 1917.
All translations from the original French are by the present author.

"Work to perfect the mind. There is no certainty except in what is conceived by the mind."

"What fools the eye is due to an anecdotal accident which convinces us because the facts are simple. The pasted papers, imitation wood graining – and other similar elements – which I have employed in certain drawings also convince because the facts are simple, which accounts for their being mistaken for eye-fooling devices, although they are absolutely the opposite. They are incidentally simple facts, but created by the mind, and hence one of the vindications of a new portrayal in space."

"Emotion should not be communicated by a tremor of feeling. It can neither be added nor imitated. It is the seed, the work is the flowering."²

These economically reasoned, but penetrating and pithy maxims, which were formulated by Braque for his own guidance and should not in any sense be read as the outline of a manifesto or a theory, show how deeply Braque's view of what constitutes a true pictorial language was conditioned by his prewar experiences of Cézanne and Cubism. He was convinced in 1917 that the problems of pictorial representation in the twentieth century could only be solved by a conceptual approach; he had cast off the impressionist legacy of Fauvism, and was preparing himself to realize a greatly enhanced sensory vision.

Unlike Picasso, Braque did not feel the need to check on the "realism" of Cubist representation by testing himself coincidentally in a naturalistic idiom, nor did he attempt to pick up the half-elaborated synthetic Cubist style where he had been obliged to abandon it. Braque simply took what he found available in later synthetic Cubism and transformed it to suit himself, so that it became suaver and more relaxed. Thus Braque's painting from 1917 onward is characterized by a use of freer, more pliable, bolder and more tactile (though still flattened) forms, of deeper and more resonant color harmonies achieved with rich paint, and of a closer correspondence with recognizable appearances. Braque himself gave an excellent description of how his pictures look – not only those of 1918–19, but later works too – when he said to the poet-critic Jean Paulhan: "There is a certain temperature at which iron becomes malleable and loses its connotation as iron. It's that sort of temperature that I look for. A picture consists of objects which have changed their function."³

2. *Nord-Sud*, No. 10, December, 1917.

3. Jean Paulhan, *Braque le Patron* (Geneva, 1946), p. 38.



Fig. 6

What is the meaning of this seductive but, at first sight, disquieting transformation? First, it seems to me, Braque had been above all absorbed up to 1914 in inventing means to represent pictorially the purely formal and structural properties of still-life objects and the spatial relationships between them. By 1918, however, he had fully mastered this aspect of Cubist picture-making and felt he should give expression to some more personal sentiments by considering the "personality" of objects. Secondly, whereas Braque had been concerned before the war with re-creating for the spectator a predominantly visual and intellectual experience of form, reality and space, he now began to be concerned with making pictures which would arouse in the spectator a predominantly tactile experience of space, objects and their relationship to each other.

Again, three of Braque's *Thoughts and Reflections* will serve to illuminate his attitude:⁴

"The painter thinks in terms of forms and colors; objects are his poetics."

"A still-life ceases to be 'still life' when it is out of reach."⁵

"Verisimilitude is visual deception."

Braque's new concern with making the space and objects in his paintings tactile owed a great deal to the example of Cézanne. For Cézanne's major innovatory achievement was to find a way

Fig. 6. Paul Cézanne, *The Kitchen Table*, circa 1894, Louvre, Paris, *Jeu de Paume*.

4. *Cahier de Georges Braque*, 1917-47 (Paris, 1948).

5. A play of words on the French expression "nature morte," i. e., natural objects are "dead" and incapable of animation when they are "out of reach of the hand."

of representing volume and giving apparent spatial continuity to a world of appearances and unconnected objects without recourse to eye-fooling methods. *The Kitchen Table* of circa 1894 (Fig. 6) with its combination of different viewpoints – head-on, looking up from below the table top on the right, looking steeply down from the top left, looking straight in across the table from the left – the break and alteration in level of the edge of the table in the foreground, the flattening effect of the upward-sloping floor which virtually becomes the background plane of the wall, the distortion of some vertical axes and the arbitrary differences in scale of the objects, reveals several characteristics of Cézanne's inventive practice. Cézanne has neither imitated what he saw, nor tried to fool the eye with scientific one-point perspective. Yet he convinces us visually within the limits of his canvas that the tables, fruit and other objects exist in the full space of a room, he evokes a sense of rounded volumes and solid reality, and still preserves an awareness of the flat surface of the canvas on which his still life is painted. There is no conjuring here but only painting in its finest and noblest form. "Magic," Braque was to write, "is the sum of the means which kindle credulity." It was in this spirit that Braque began to give new meaning to Cézanne's innovations in the paintings he executed after 1918.

Where Braque outdid Cézanne was in laying more emphasis on the tactile aspects. And this he was able to do by drawing more fully than in the past on his youthful experiences in the handling of paint. For Braque was the son of a painter-decorator and was initially taught the traditional craftsmanly skills in order that he should succeed his father. Roger Bissière, a painter who was also a close friend, wrote of him in 1919: "Braque in fact inherited methods and tricks of the trade which are perhaps the fundamental essence of painting, or at any rate its most solid basis. He spent his youth watching others patiently laboring to create imitation wood or marble, he was taught the complicated art of applying paint in thin and thick coats, he learnt from his father's workmen not only the science of mixing colors so as to produce a particular tone, but also how best to apply it, and finally he mastered lettering and line-work."⁶

In 1918 Braque, conscious of his individuality as an artist, set out to humanize his synthetic Cubist idiom. He wished to endow it with those "sensitive and sensuous" values, which Juan Gris regretted not being able to incorporate into his painting,⁷ by bringing into play all of the craftsmanly knowledge and experi-

6. Bissière, *Georges Braque* (Paris, 1920).
Roger Bissière (1888–1964).

7. *Letters of Juan Gris*, translated and edited by Douglas Cooper (London, 1956), letter to D. H. Kahnweiler of December 14, 1915.

ence to which he was heir. In his prewar Cubist days, Braque had only employed a few tricks of the trade. From 1918 on, he widened his range and continued exploring until he found in them sources of inspiration which progressively led to new discoveries. Among these we may count the sandy, fresco-like textures which pleased Braque around 1930, and also his use of black or dark grey for priming his canvases in order to give more resonance to his colors.

Talking to Dora Vallier in 1954 about the inexhaustible importance of craftsmanly considerations, Braque said: "I take the greatest care over the preparation of my canvases, because the priming has to support all that follows: it is like the foundations of a house. I have always been greatly concerned with the materials of painting because sensibility enters as much into one's technique as into all the rest of the picture. I grind and prepare my own colors. I am convinced that to get the maximum result the artist himself must play a part. I remember the horrified look on the face of a certain color merchant, who had been telling me how finely ground his colors were, when I replied that I was thinking of adding sand to them. Even I don't know how this sensibility about grinding colors works, it's something indefinable. I fiddle around and work with the paint, not with any ideas.... The contrast between one consistency of paint and another is just as important as the contrast of colors. I take advantage of every difference in consistency, and then color takes on a much deeper meaning. I play on these differences and that gives me more variety."⁸

The most eloquent insight into the deep impression made on his friends by the new paintings which Braque showed at his one-man exhibition at the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne (Léonce Rosenberg) in March 1919 comes once again from the pen of Bissière: "Braque is perhaps the first of the moderns to sense the poetry inherent in fine craftsmanship, in a work elaborated with love and patience and owing nothing to any preconceived sensibility. He realizes that a human handiwork, long and lovingly caressed by its maker, will in the end bear traces of the care which attended its creation and reveal some indefinable but touching sign of humanity."⁹ Of the same group of paintings, Juan Gris wrote in a letter: "Braque's experience begins to be considerable and now enables him to bring off some magnificent pictures."¹⁰

The exhibition which elicited this high praise contained such pictures as *The Bottle of Rum* (Galerie Beyeler, Basel) and

8. Dora Vallier, *Braque, La Peinture et Nous*, in *Cahiers d'Art*, No. 1, 1954, pp. 13-24.

9. *Op. cit.*

10. *Op. cit.*, letter to Kahnweiler of September 3, 1919.



Fig. 7. Georges Braque, *Café Bar*, 1919, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Clarinet, Guitar and Fruit Dish (Kunstmuseum, Basel), both of 1918; *Guitar, Clarinet and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon* (Musées Nationaux, Paris), *The Sideboard* (Private Collection, Basel), and *Newspaper, Guitar and Grapes* (Musée de la Ville de Paris), all of 1919.¹¹ There were also two earlier works, *Violin, Glass and Pipe* of 1914 (Phillips Collection, Washington) and *The Musician* of 1917. But the greatest surprise of the exhibition was provided by two enormous canvases, still-life compositions arranged atop a table, which was shown in its full length. These were *Guitar, Pipe and Fruit Dish* of 1918 (Fig. 9) and a similar, though later and even larger work, which is known today from its inscription as *Café Bar* of 1919 (Fig. 7). These two canvases heralded a long series of similar still-life-on-table works, collectively known as the *Guéridons*,¹² which continued to fascinate and occupy Braque until 1940.

The Parisian public, which was wholly unprepared for such an impressive group of recent works by an artist whom it hardly knew, was astounded.¹³ Suddenly, Braque had to be recognized as a great master of the French School who, in the seclusion of his studio, had evolved a delectable, painterly and monumental idiom of his own. Late though it was, there was no denying that pictorially Cubism had matured.

11. Bissière, *op. cit.*, Plates 6, 8, 13, 15 and 18.

12. *Guéridon*: generally, a round table with a marble top, supported on a columnar wooden base ending in a tripod foot.

13. None of the paintings had been exhibited previously. Braque's last one-man exhibition had been in November 1908.

3

The Guéridons of 1918–1919



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Braque completed two *Guéridons* in 1918:¹ *Guitar, Pipe and Fruit Dish* (Fig. 9), already mentioned, and another in which the still life consists of the ace of clubs, a pipe, a pear, a newspaper and a fruit dish containing a bunch of grapes (Fig. 8). In both paintings the still life, which occupies roughly the central area of the canvas, is supported on a wooden table top, rectangular in the Philadelphia painting, round in the Eindhoven one. Compositionally three spatial areas are involved: downward from the

Plate 1, Fig. 8. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1918, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 9. Georges Braque, *Guitar, Pipe and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon*, 1918, Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, Holland (No. 1*).

* Indicates number in Check List.

1. Both are dated.

table top to the floor; the spaced out but basically horizontal, weighty still life; and finally the vertical area above and behind this. The two lower parts of the canvas are situated in the foreground to make them immediate; the upper third is structured with flat planes of varying color growing out of the lower part of the composition and lying, as it were, in and on each other. Yet they are detached from each other, because several cast shadows. There is thus a visual and sensory continuity from bottom to top. We can assume – it is not certain, because Braque worked on several canvases simultaneously – that the Philadelphia painting is the earlier of the two. And this for three reasons. On the verso of the canvas is an unfinished still-life composition in oil paint and *papier collé* which dates from 1917. In this, the table is cut off just below the level of the top so that no base is shown. Secondly, the structure of the finished painting on the recto is more complex and confused, and its forms more arbitrary. Thirdly, the Eindhoven painting is bolder and more simplified in handling so that, tentative though it is in several respects, it is more assertive and looks forward stylistically to paintings Braque was to execute in 1921–23.

Immediately following these two canvases, combining features from both yet showing a much greater clarity of spatial structure and form, as well as a more expressive variety of tactile handling than either, is *Café Bar* (Fig. 7), which must have been finished only a few weeks later. Here the table top is again rectangular, and on it is a still-life arrangement with a pipe, a sheet of music, a newspaper, a fruit dish containing a pear and a bunch of grapes, and lastly a guitar. As in the Philadelphia painting, the inscription is intentionally evocative, but pictorially it serves above all, as did the lettering in Braque's paintings of 1911–12, to establish a flat plane which "made it possible to distinguish between objects situated in space and those which were not."

Before analyzing the formal and planar build-up of these three impressive canvases, we must look back to Braque's prewar Cubist painting and pick up the threads of his development and transformation from there. For it was Braque who was first led, through his Cézannian obsession with the representation of space, to paint in 1911 a still life arranged on a *guéridon* which was shown full-length (Fig. 10). At that time he was, above all, concerned with problems of volume, forms and how to represent space around them, so that in this first picture Braque followed Cézanne in establishing a "visual" space between the

spectator and the nearest plane of the table, which he then spatially flattened by folding it upward across the middle. This *Guéridon* is spatially coherent and legible, the faceted objects being piled upward against a faceted background plane. However, nothing is within reach because we are looking at the table from a certain distance. "Visual space separates objects from us and from each other," Braque was to write. "Tactile space separates us from objects. The tourist *looks* at a landscape. The gunner 'hits' the target (the trajectory is an extension of the arm)." It is the passage from one spatial treatment to the other that is demonstrated in Braque's subsequent *Guéridons*.

By 1913, when Braque had evolved through *papier collé* to synthetic Cubism, he painted a second still-life composition, *Playing Cards and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon* (Fig. 11), in which he tilted the table top so sharply upward that its surface fills more than half of the canvas and thus inevitably brings all the objects on it within reach of the hand. Everything happens here on the surface of the canvas. The curving sides of the *guéridon* evoke, without illusion, a spatial change from a foreground to a back-

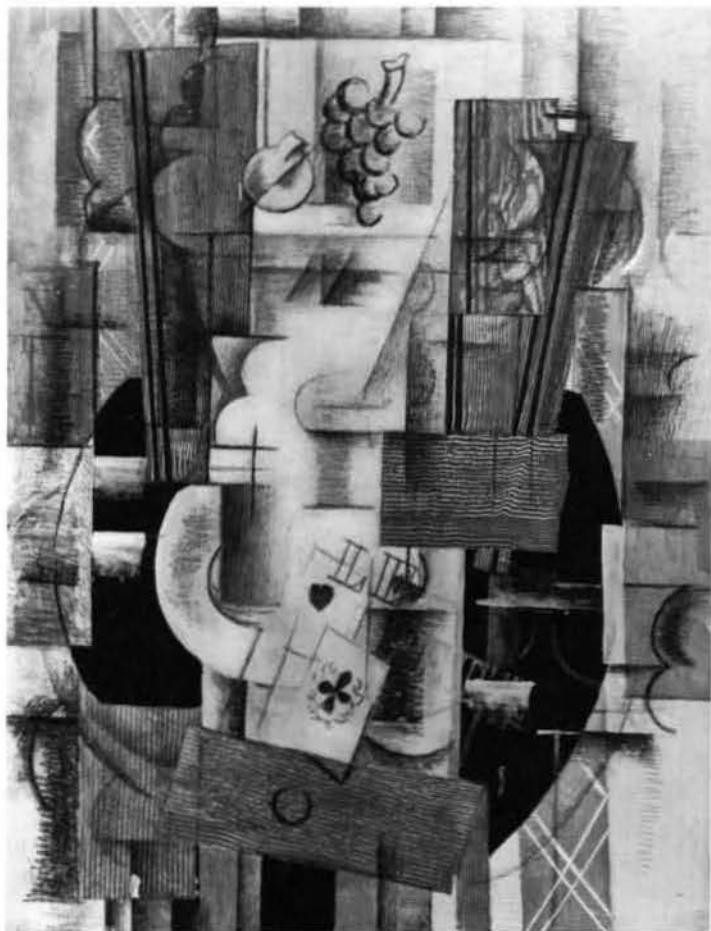
Fig. 10. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1910–11, *Musées Nationaux, Paris*.

Fig. 11. Georges Braque, *Playing Cards and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon*, 1913, *Musées Nationaux, Paris*.

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



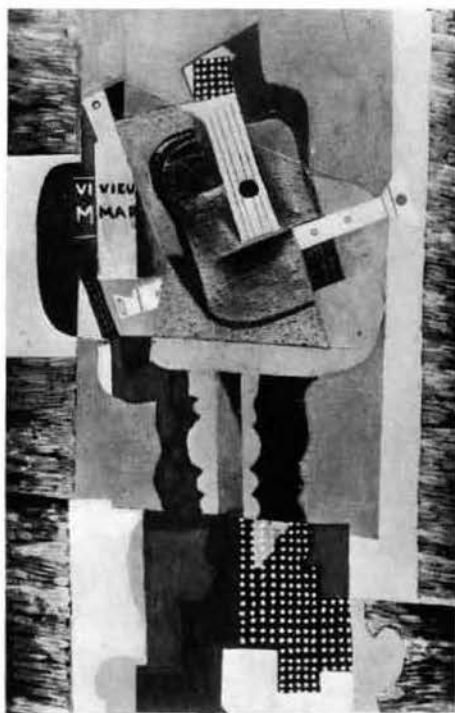


Fig. 12. Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Bottle and Flute on a Table*, 1915. Mr. Wright Ludington, Santa Barbara, California.

ground plane. Yet if one reads the picture vertically from bottom to top, everything from the wooden drawer with its knob to the fruit in the dish exists on a single vertical plane. However, Braque has countered this flatness with subtle modeling and much use of the paintcomb to simulate wood and vary the texture, in order to induce belief in rounded volumes and tangibility.

Thus Braque's new series of *Guéridons* in 1918–19 was a return to a subject which he had not only been the first to handle, but which he had transformed stylistically between 1911 and 1913 and could now take up and elaborate. In the meanwhile, however, this subject had been appropriated and given a personal treatment by Picasso, Matisse and Gris. A painting by Picasso begun in 1913 and finished in 1917, *Fruit Dish and Bottle on a Guéridon*,² is related in conception to Braque's 1913 painting, which he probably saw. But since it was worked on much later it is more elaborate and colorful. Its forms are bolder and its spatial structure simpler than those of Braque in 1913, but it shows a *Guéridon* in full length standing on the floor. And the same can be said of three other large *Guéridons* (Fig. 12) painted by Picasso in 1915–16,³ which have a simplified, bold and colorful planar structure. Only one painting by Matisse is comparable, *The Pink Marble Table* of 1916,⁴ which is naturalistically handled. This table is shown full length in an outdoor setting; however, the table and its background with foliage are rigidly flattened into a single plane and the effect is above all decorative, no textural or tactile values being involved.

With Juan Gris we are in yet another world of pictorial thinking. Gris was, of course, influenced to some extent by his friends Picasso and Braque between 1912 and 1914, and it is probable that he saw Braque's *Playing Cards and Fruit Dish on a Guéridon* in 1913. At all events, Gris' *Breakfast* (Fig. 13), executed in spring, 1914, was the only Cubist still life showing a table in full length to be carried out in *papier collé*. It is more severe than any of Braque's paintings, but it is interesting in relation to his 1918–19 *Guéridons*, because Gris used a varying viewpoint and piled up the objects against three flat background planes, one of which is a patterned wallpaper. Gris' *Violin* of July 1916 (Fig. 14) represents a later stylistic conception of a comparable subject. Here the square-topped wooden table is shown full length in front of a paneled background wall. On the table are a violin, a bow and a sheet of music. This is a stark, clear and monumental painting carried out in a sober color harmony of black, white, grey and brown. There is no play of tactile values

2. Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. III, No. 101.

3. Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. II, Nos. 533, 536, 538.

4. G. Diehl, *Matisse* (Paris, 1954), Plate 78 (color).



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

and no illusionism, but by placing things diagonally, by breaking down aspects of the violin and reassembling them, and by the use of heavy shadows and intersecting lines, Gris has succeeded in conveying both the fullness of volume and the existence of his still-life composition in a confined space.

We do not know which, if any, of these paintings Braque saw at the time, and it does not matter. For their creation is evidence that in 1918–19 a continuity of thinking existed between the three great Cubist artists. Or shall we say that even though the style and content of their pictures were changing and evolving in different directions, the solution of certain pictorial problems along accepted lines remained for all three a common preoccupation? And the most crucial of these problems was to make ironed-out planes of space and false volumes palpably acceptable and visually convincing without calling on *trompe-l'œil* perspective and chiaroscuro. However, it is on this level that we find the most significant difference between Braque's new paintings and those of his friends Picasso and Gris, because

Fig. 13. Juan Gris, Breakfast, 1914, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.

Fig. 14. Juan Gris, Violin on a Table, 1916, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Braque's paintings after 1918 were less factual and more painterly than those of his two Spanish friends. One may even say that they were more arbitrary, more rhythmic and more ornamented. These are personal characteristics which signify Braque's concern with another set of values and interests – more limited perhaps, but none the less pictorial – which led him on a path progressively diverging from that taken by his erstwhile friends.

Braque made his *Guéridons* as flat as he could. He evokes space by the movement of a diamond pattern on the floor and by the build-up of successive planes in the background, which push the objects toward us. He looks down at the feet of the table and slightly upward at the objects. Pointillism, wood grain-ing and rhythmic lines animate the surface, provide visual information and establish a series of "rhymes" which link different parts of the composition. Color-wise Braque's *Guéridons* are executed in a distinctive, muted palette of greys, white, greens and browns. However, unlike Picasso who, having seen Braque's exhibition, painted a new series of *Guéridons*⁵ in the summer of 1919 in which the table is set in front of a window open onto outdoor space (Figs. 15, 16), Braque confined himself to a claustrophobic interior space until 1939. Gris, on the other hand, had first painted a still life in front of an open window in June 1915 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) and was to continue exploring this extension of his spatial range throughout the period 1917–26.

It is at this point, when both Picasso and Gris were extending the spatial references in their paintings and trying to make objects more legible and real-looking, that we must consider why Braque was doing the opposite. The key lies in Braque's anti-materialist outlook on the world, in his contemplative attitude, in his obsessive concern with the fullest and purest use of the means of painting. Unlike Picasso, Braque did not seek through painting a means of communicating violent emotions or a philosophy for today, nor did he want to expose his reactions to events in his private life. Unlike Gris, Braque did not believe that logical reasoning and scientific procedures could play any useful role in the creation of great art. "Art soars, science provides crutches" was one of his *Thoughts*, meaning of course that only weak-kneed art calls for support from mathematical calculations. Or again: "When you bring science into play, things end up in their appointed places and there is no revelation." But the full signification of these two sibylline utterances becomes even



Fig. 15. Pablo Picasso, *Open Window at St. Raphael, 1919*, gouache, Private Collection.

5. Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. III, Nos. 282, 365, 367, 385, 386, 389, 396–403.

more clear when they are read in conjunction with what Braque said to Dora Vallier: "Traditional perspective gave me no satisfaction. It is scientifically ordered and never allows one to take full possession of things. It operates from a single viewpoint, which is never abandoned. Now the viewpoint is a minor consideration. Imagine a man who would spend his life drawing profiles, as though he would have one believe that man has only one eye. Once we reached this stage in our thinking – Picasso and I – everything changed. You have no idea of how much! I was above all attracted to making real the new sense of space that I felt – and this was a major force in Cubism. So I began to paint, above all, still lifes, because there is in nature a tactile, I almost mean 'manual' space."

The fact is, also, that Braque had no special attachment to the objects which appear in his still lifes beyond the degree to which they could assist him in giving meaning to some picture which he envisaged in his mind's eye. For Braque, the requirements inherent in painting as a visual language had to take precedence over all other considerations, whether it be the artist's preconceived idea, his "anticipated results," or the known shape of a guitar or fruit dish. "Writing is not describing, painting is not depicting" is another of Braque's *Thoughts*. And he underscored this point in an interview with Georges Charbonnier on the French radio in 1950:

*"One begins to paint under the impulsion of an idea. Something happens first in one's head before it begins to happen before one's eyes. An idea takes shape, do you see. But, as one goes on working, the picture itself takes over. That is to say, there is a tussle between the idea – the picture as it is conceived in advance – and the picture which fights for its own life. It is this conflict which creates that vital tension which gives life to a picture."*⁶

In other words, as Braque said on another occasion: "No question of taking an object as a point of departure: one advances towards it." And this attitude of attributing more importance to purely pictorial values than to objective truth led Braque to concentrate on exploring and giving a free rein to the means of art rather than to thinking about painting a particular subject. "Sensation, revelation," as he was to write in his notebook.⁷ This too was an aspect of his pictorial credo which Braque discussed in detail with Georges Charbonnier:

"Every picture has a subject, but it is not inevitably anecdotal.



Fig. 16. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life on a Table in Front of an Open Window*, 1919, Norton Simon, Inc., Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

6. G. Charbonnier, *Monologue du Peintre* (Paris, 1959).

7. Cf. Diderot, *Salons*, ed. J. Seznec et J. Adhémar (Oxford, 1957), Vol. I, pp. 222–23, *Salon de 1763*. The following passage describing a still life by Chardin might almost have been written of a painting by Braque: "This is a real painter, a real colorist. . . . His is a magic one cannot account for. Here, for example, are opaque layers of color applied one over another and creating an effect by seeping to the top from underneath. At other times a vaporous haze seems to have been blown on to the canvas, and then again it seems to have been lightly sprinkled with dew. . . . But move closer in, everything becomes confused and flattened and disappears. Move away again and everything takes shape and re-becomes itself."

The starting point of a picture for any painter is a matter of colors and forms. I don't believe you can get away from that, although it is not an absolute rule. . . . I believe that, first of all, there is a play of colors and forms. I believe that the poetry of art – if that is what one may call it – is a matter of animating these forms and colors. That is to say, turning the patch of white on the canvas into a napkin. But I believe that the patch of white is conceived in advance, without knowing what it will become. So there is a process of transformation, one might call it a poetic transformation."

Thus in the end Braque's statement to Dora Vallier that "objects can only appear in so far as painting permits them to do so," becomes perfectly comprehensible.

In this connection it is important to note that it was in 1918 that Braque first took to using a notebook to make a rough drawing of "anything, whatever happens to go through my head." Drawing was never a major activity for Braque, because it was not his habit to work out a composition in advance through a sequence of preparatory studies. But Braque did find it useful to have around him some record of the pictorial ideas which occurred to him from time to time. Braque used these albums⁸ like dictionaries to retrace the workings of his own imagination and to rediscover past visual experiences. "There are times when one wants to paint yet does not know what to paint," he told Dora Vallier. "I cannot account for this, but at certain moments one feels drained. One has a tremendous urge to work, and at such times my notebooks of drawings become like a cookbook in the hands of a hungry man. I open them, and the least sketch is likely to offer me something to work on."

Claude Laurens, the son of the sculptor Henri Laurens, one of Braque's oldest and closest friends, and the heir to the contents of his studio, has graciously made available to me certain drawings which relate to pictures under discussion. As will be evident, they are usually hasty notations and often antedate by a few years the paintings to which they relate. At the same time, they have a special value in that they reveal how many color notations Braque made at the start, because this confirms his claim that the point of departure of any picture is really "a matter of colors and forms."

Now since we are here concerned with Braque's working methods and profound absorption in the expressive range of painting techniques, it seems appropriate to summarize at once the

8. He began a new one every year.

pictorial phases through which he was to work his way, in a series of monumental paintings, during the two decades between 1920 and 1940, as he tried to fulfill the exigencies of his unique, majestic and highly sensitized vision.

During the decade 1918–28, Braque maintained his mastery of the late synthetic Cubist idiom by unremitting efforts to make it suppler, less strict and, humanly speaking, more meaningful. He constantly varied the size and shape of his canvases: horizontals alternate with verticals, large with small, square with elongated. His paint is sometimes luscious, sometimes dry. Likewise, Braque's color harmonies and his handling of form varied constantly, even within groups of works of the same date: somber changes to light, compressed to flabby and extended, angular to rounded and free-flowing.

There is no denying the subtlety, elegance and seemingly effortless refinement of Braque's smaller and more intimate paintings throughout all these years. They are acutely realized and visually delectable. But from 1918 onward the true story of Braque's development is recorded in a small number of large-scale canvases into which he poured the inventions and discoveries arising out of his constantly growing experience as a painter, and in which he was able to realize most fully, on account of their size, his special and complex sensations of space. It is through these that I want to follow his evolution.

First of all, we find Braque establishing – in 1920–22 – a new set of relationships between color, form, *matière* and “in-between” space in a series of *Mantelpieces* which followed the first *Guéridons*. Then, in a series of *Kanephoroi* and nudes (1922–1926), we find him experimenting with the tactile possibilities of flesh and a free use of line, while at the same time investigating in still life what he referred to as “the amplitude of color.” After that comes a period (1926–28) during which Braque was more concerned with representing volume and with discovering “how far one could go in allying volume with color.” Then, between 1928 and 1938, Braque reacted against his own sensuousness: during these years his paint becomes drier and less succulent, he deliberately cultivates a fresco-like effect, and seeks animation through line and ornamentation. Thus Braque gradually explored the range of the various pictorial elements in a series of magisterial works before feeling, in 1936–37, that he possessed the accumulated knowledge to attempt an orchestrated synthesis.

Now, as things turned out, this planned consummation – which we see at its richest and most vigorous in paintings of 1938 – also marked a new point of departure. For it coincided with the moment at which Braque was ready to extend his grasp on space. Ever since 1920, Braque had been slowly and subtly varying and increasing the spatial element in his pictures. At the start, in a painting like *The Mantelpiece* of 1920–21 (Fig. 17), we see Braque treating still life virtually with the semiflatness of a bas-relief. But by 1936, in a painting like *Still Life with Mandolin* (Plate 7), Braque could still preserve a sense of the flatness of his canvas and yet treat the space behind and around the table as though it were articulated like a folding screen. In other paintings, for example *The Guéridon* of 1928–29 (Fig. 41), he tried enlarging the spatial sensation by setting the still life and table in the shallow corner angle of a room. All the time, however, Braque wanted to encompass the fuller space of a room – even to open a window onto the world outside – provided it did not mean losing contact with the objects close at hand or becoming involved in atmospheric painting. This was the step that Braque, fortified by the success of his synthesis of the technical means, was finally able to realize in *The Studio* of 1939 (Fig. 61).

Fig. 17. Georges Braque, *The Mantelpiece*, 1920–21, Národní Galerie, Prague.



4

The *Mantelpieces* and *Kanephoroi*: 1920–1927

After the first *Guéridons* Braque painted a series of still lifes on a mantelpiece, which derive from them compositionally in the way the canvas is divided and the spatial element handled. Once again Braque was returning to a subject which he had been the first to treat a decade earlier, but this time he handled it on a more monumental scale. Braque painted his first still-life group atop a mantelpiece (Fig. 18) during the summer of 1911, which he spent in company with Picasso at Céret in the Pyrenees. In this picture the objects – a sheet of music, a glass, a bottle of rum and a clarinet – are piled up pyramidally against a background wall, to which is pinned a sheet of paper. Braque adopted viewpoints here which are deliberately contradictory in order to achieve an overall flatness, so that one looks up at the still life but down onto the narrow mantel, supported by a scroll, and on down into the upper part of a recessed hearth, indicated by the scallop-shaped handle of the fire screen.

In 1915–16, Picasso took up the *Mantelpiece* as a subject as he had also the *Guéridon*, and painted three rather severe and simplified synthetic Cubist compositions,¹ of which the version in the Pulitzer Collection, probably the latest since it dates from the winter of 1916 (Fig. 19), is the most interesting and elaborate. For in that canvas Picasso used blocklike forms and heavy black lines, and created a spatial double play by placing the flattened still life with its mirror image on the mantel in the upper half of the canvas and below it a deceptively cavernous hearth. In this respect, Picasso's canvas is comparable to those which Braque was to paint between 1921 and 1923, although Braque's achievement was to be subtler and more monumental.

In subject and format, Braque's *Mantelpieces* echo his *Guéridons*. Compositionally and spatially, however, they are more inventive, ambitious and self-assured. These are the works of a master who knew what he wanted and achieved it without hesitation. The series was heralded in 1920–21 by a long, horizontal still-life composition, consisting of musical instruments and a fruit dish lying atop a mantelpiece, which is cut off immediately

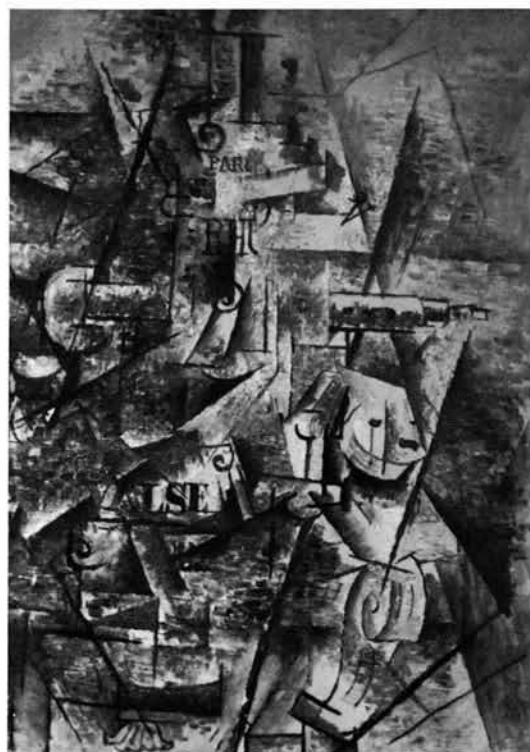


Fig. 18. Georges Braque, *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece*, 1911, Galerie Beyeler, Basel.

1. Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. II, Nos. 540, 565, 945.



Fig. 19. Pablo Picasso, *Guitar on a Mantelpiece*, 1916, Mr. Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., St. Louis.

2. The first step toward this series seems to have been taken by Braque in a small (10 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches) gouache on wood panel executed in 1919–20 (Private Collection, New York City; reproduced in S. Fumet, *Georges Braque*, Paris, 1965, p. 75), which corresponds somewhat with the Prague version.

below the ornamental plaque in front (Fig. 17). Here the pictorial space is severely flattened and the treatment is similar to that of a carved and painted bas-relief. The presentation of the objects is immediate, there is an elaborate structure of differentiated vertical planes, there are many textural variations, and Braque has succeeded in suggesting volumes and the "in-between" spaces with a subtle use of cast shadows.

Then in 1921–22 Braque worked simultaneously on three large vertical *Mantelpieces*, of which the Prague version (Plate 2, Fig. 20) was probably begun first² and the Marx-Schoenborn version (Fig. 22) finished last, the Weil version (Plate 3, Fig. 21) coming between them. These three canvases are compositionally more daring than anything that Braque had hitherto attempted. The center of interest, the still life, is concentrated in the upper part of the canvas, its full weight resting on the narrow mantel, suspended over an empty black and white space and cunningly held in balance by an emphatic structure of verticals. Braque here established two visual movements which go counter to each other: in the lower half of the canvas the eye looks down and inward, whereas in the upper half it is arrested on the surface by the still life which comes toward it. At the same time, the eye is carried up and down the canvas by the vertical elements. Thus without any need for illusionism, Braque makes us aware of a comprehensive visual and spatial experience by the subtlety and invention of his compositional methods.

Braque progressively increased the area of the hearth through these three paintings, using it as a visual focus yet giving it a spatial significance by cunningly twisting it obliquely out of a straight frontality. He also progressed from the simple mantel in the Prague picture to the elaborate green and black *faux-marbre* chimney piece in the Marx-Schoenborn version. One should also note how Braque suppresses the edge of the mantel in order not to establish a visual interval but to present the still-life objects as though they were easily within reach. What is more, Braque now represents these objects in a less two-dimensional, more sensuous manner than before, so that they seem to have a greater density and fluidity. Also here one finds Braque, for the first time, bisecting a bottle or a carafe into a light and a dark half, a device which became very characteristic of his painting and which he used not only to suggest two separate simultaneous aspects of an object but also to evoke light and shade without resorting to chiaroscuro.

At the same time, Braque, continuing to learn from Cézanne, had begun to make tactile the space around objects, to separate



Fig. 22

them and yet to allow them to flow into each other. "Don't forget," Braque said to Georges Charbonnier, "that you also have to paint what there is between the apple and the plate, and this it seems to me is every bit as difficult as painting the two objects themselves. Indeed this 'in-between' is a no less important element than what they call the 'object.' In fact, it is the relationship between objects themselves, and with the 'in-between,' which constitutes the subject matter."

Here we have touched on a fundamental point of distinction between the later painting of Braque and that of Picasso. For where Picasso has always been literal-minded, that is to say concerned with "the thingness of things," with "naming" objects, Braque yielded more and more to the ambiguities and adventures of spatial experience, to what he called "indefinition," and to the correspondences, rhymes and poetics which imposed themselves on him while he sought pictorial equivalents for the world of objective forms. "I am more concerned with being



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

Plate 2, Fig. 20. Georges Braque, The Mantelpiece, 1921-22, Národní Galerie, Prague (No. 2).

Plate 3, Fig. 21. Georges Braque, The Mantelpiece, 1922, Mr. and Mrs. Richard K. Weil, St. Louis (No. 3).

Fig. 22. Georges Braque, The Mantelpiece, 1922-23, Mrs. Florene Marx Schoenborn, New York.



Fig. 24

Fig. 23. Georges Braque, *The Mantelpiece*, 1923, Kunsthhaus, Zurich (No. 6).

Plate 4, Fig. 24. Georges Braque, *The Mantelpiece*, 1927, *The Norton Gallery and School of Art*, West Palm Beach, Florida (No. 10).



Fig. 23

in unison with nature than with copying her" is another of his *Thoughts*.

The importance which this sense of the "in-between" space was to assume for Braque in his painting becomes more apparent when we turn to two other *Mantelpieces* which he painted slightly later. One of these (Fig. 23) is dated 1923,³ not 1928 as it has often been read, the other (Plate 4, Fig. 24), possibly started at the same time although finished later, looks at first sight like a replica. But in fact on close examination it reveals certain minor yet meaningful differences and is dated 1927. These two *Mantelpieces* cannot be considered as being in any sense afterthoughts to the first three, nor are they extensions of them. Stylistically they are wholly different. Here objects have assumed more recognizable, corporeal shapes, the planar structure is less intricate and more smoothly resolved, while the "in-between" spaces have been made more sensorial. These two pictures also have in common a curious stylistic feature which

3. The color harmony alone makes a later date improbable.

does not occur in such an assertive form in any other painting by Braque, namely the vertical rectangular panel of whitish-grey paint on the extreme left. This has no literal significance, nor is it intended as a decorative passage. It is essentially structural, serving as a "tactile" spatial device to give the composition a visual surface immediacy,⁴ to strengthen the vertical element, and to set up a foreground-to-background relationship with the vertical green panel behind. No explanation has ever been given to account for these two apparently similar pictures having been executed at an interval of four years. But it was Braque's habit to work on several canvases simultaneously, over a prolonged period, and any that did not please him would be put aside temporarily while he worked on something else, so that he could come back to them with a fresh vision later. Perhaps that is what happened in this case. For Braque believed that when he ran into difficulties during the execution of a painting it was because he was pursuing some preconceived idea of what it should look like, whereas if he put it away the painting itself would later reveal to him how to complete it.

While he was working on the *Mantelpieces*, Braque also began in 1922 a series of monumental figure paintings. These were the first he had undertaken since *The Musician* of 1917, and for them too he now found a wholly surprising, new pictorial technique. Stylistically, in fact, this series of figures is quite unlike anything else in the whole of Braque's work. The first two were classical in inspiration and conceived as "*Decorations*."⁵ They represent *Kanephoroi* (Musées Nationaux, Paris), young women who carried on their head ceremonial baskets of fruit and flowers in the Panathenaic procession. As forerunners for Braque's conception of these women, one may cite the caryatids (5th cent. B.C.) supporting the entablature of the Erechtheum on the Acropolis (Fig. 25), or a so-called *Dancer* in bronze (circa 30 B.C.) from Herculaneum (Fig. 26), or various decorative figures used architecturally in Italian Renaissance villas. There is also a basket-carrying maiden by Poussin (Fig. 27) among the figures on the extreme right of *The Triumph of Flora* (circa 1628). Braque was surely aware of this past history, for its influence shows in his own *Kanephoroi*. Yet it is reasonable to guess that the idea for these first two figures – which were quickly followed by others – was nurtured in Braque's mind by more contemporary sources. For one thing, when Braque exhibited three paintings at the Salon d'Automne in October 1920, he saw there a commemorative exhibition of works by Renoir (d. 1919), which included many large, fleshy nudes of his last



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

Fig. 25. Caryatid from the Erechtheum, Athens, 5th century B.C., white marble, British Museum, London.

Fig. 26. Dancer from Herculaneum, circa 30 B.C., bronze, Museo Nazionale, Naples.

Fig. 27. Nicolas Poussin, *The Triumph of Flora* (detail), circa 1628, Louvre, Paris.

4. A comparable use of this device will be found in a more modest form on the lower left edge of *The Guéridon*, 1925 (Haas Collection). And the plaque of green faux-marbre filling the lower left corner of *The Marble-Topped Table*, 1925 (Musées Nationaux, Paris), serves the same purpose.

5. Exhibited under this title at the Salon d'Automne, November, 1922. Reproduced in J. Richardson, *Georges Braque* (London, 1959), Plate 19 (color).



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

Fig. 28. Auguste Renoir, *Seated Bather*, 1914, Durand-Ruel, Paris.

Fig. 29. Pablo Picasso, *Three Women at a Spring*, 1921, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Allan D. Emil.

years (Fig. 28). Secondly, by 1920 a neoclassical reaction against revolution and fragmentation in the arts was taking hold in Paris. And thirdly, it is not unjustified to regard Braque's *Kanephoroi* as being to some extent his rejoinder to the series of monumental female figures – for example, *Three Women at a Spring* of 1921 (Fig. 29) – directly inspired by classical originals, which dominate Picasso's work between 1919 and 1922.

Nevertheless, Braque created for the representation of the human figure an idiom which was wholly personal and keyed to the rest of his painting. The forms which Braque gave to human bodies are ample, his modeling is broad and loose. And these two factors, aided by a delectable palette of brown, creamy yellow and lime green, endow these figures with a tactile value which stops short of sensuality. These half-exposed female figures exist on a detached plane of semireality. They appear to be presented with the opulent fullness of a Rubens nude, yet they do not exist in the round. They seem to stand out in bold relief, yet they are soft, flattened and inseparable from their mural background. On the other hand, they communicate a sense of movement, flux and palpitation, which is absent from Braque's contemporary still lifes, because he makes great play with free linear rhythms, which he was subsequently to develop into a graphically decorative idiom.

A later, though less hieratic, sequel to the original *Kanephoroi*, painted about 1923, appears first as a drawing in Braque's album for 1923 (Figs. 30, 31). However, Braque modified his original idea considerably while he was transforming it into a painting. This figure is more human than its predecessors, but also more mannered. Here particularly one is reminded of certain late Renoir nudes who are holding up garlands. And this correspondence is equally evident if one compares Braque's *Nude Woman with a Basket of Fruit* of 1926 (Fig. 32) with Renoir's *Seated Bather* of 1914 (Durand-Ruel Collection, Paris).

Alongside these few monumental figures, Braque also painted during these same years (1922–26) several smaller, less memorable and more easygoing nudes – some seated, others recumbent – which appear to owe their inspiration in part to post-1855 Corot. Yet there is a significant difference between the nudes painted by Corot or Renoir and those by Braque. For Corot's nudes were sensuous, idealized and slightly distant nymphs, while Renoir's were hot-blooded, fleshy, luscious, sensual women. Braque's, on the other hand, are monumentally female and attainable, although lukewarm, impassive and dumb.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

Fig. 30. Georges Braque, *Woman with a Basket of Fruit*, 1923, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

Fig. 31. Georges Braque, *Woman with a Basket of Fruit*, circa 1923, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts, Dial Collection (No. 4).

Fig. 32. Georges Braque, *Nude Woman with a Basket of Fruit*, 1926, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Chester Dale Collection.

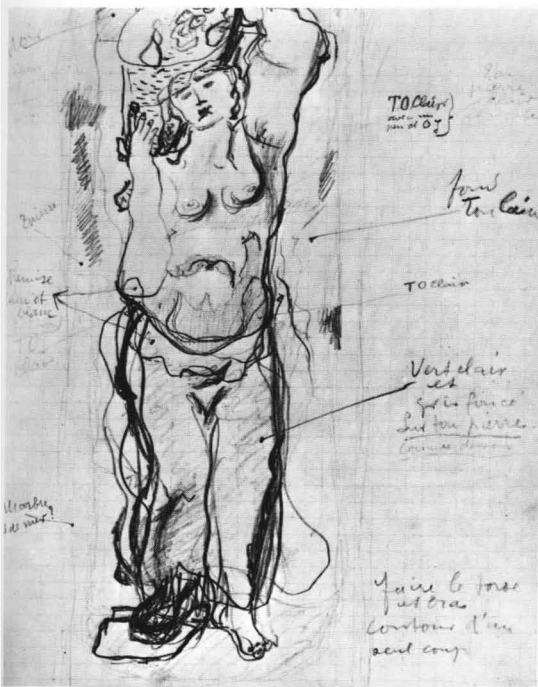


Fig. 30



Fig. 33

Fig. 33. Georges Braque, Woman Seated Against a Background of Foliage, 1922-23, charcoal, Mr. and Mrs. Louis N. Cohen, Glencoe, Illinois (No. 5).



Fig. 34

Fig. 34. Georges Braque, Seated Woman, 1927, red chalk, Private Collection (No. 9).

However – and this is paradoxical – contemporaneously with these sexless paintings, Braque executed a series of large-scale drawings of nudes which are without question his most impressive achievement in this technique. Some are in charcoal, others in sanguine or chalk (Figs. 33, 34). They give the impression – false no doubt – which the paintings never do, of having been drawn from living models, because they are solidly elaborated and humanly inspired. They are important, therefore, not only because they are unique in showing how Braque could master natural forms when working solely with the graphic means, but also because they provide a forward-looking link to the classically inspired figures that Braque was to draw and engrave in the 1930's.

5

More *Guéridons*: 1922–1930

Braque's second sequence of rather more than fifteen *Guéridons* – this classification is misleading, but no other generic noun is as convenient – were painted at intervals between 1921 and the end of 1930, and he was to paint others still later. Having said that this classification is “misleading,” I shall now try to explain. First, though in every case a still life on a table provides the subject of the picture, Braque did not always represent a *guéridon*, but changed to a rectangular wooden table with four legs, which are sometimes straight and at other times undulating, used on one occasion a console table, and in the late 1930's chose a *guéridon* with brass legs. The second point to make is that there is no “sequence” in these paintings beyond the fact that they were begun and finished at certain dates. That is to say, they were not conceived as a continuous series: some were painted singly, others worked on contemporaneously in groups. There is no progression from one to another, but only modifications or changes in style, composition and choice of objects.¹

It is thus the critic and historian looking back, seeking to interpret a mentality and to put order into the products of a great artist's studio, who selects this group of lapidary and related works in order to study the evolution of Braque's pictorial creativity.

The process is long and mysterious, but what these paintings reveal are Braque's constant efforts to find alternative solutions, through continually varying his use of the pictorial means, for giving pictorial form to the visual and spatial sensations which he felt so acutely. That is the source of the kinship between all of these paintings. But there is no monotony, because no two of them look alike, even though they often stood side by side while Braque was working on them.²

The earliest painting in this sequence of *Guéridons* must have been painted in 1921–22, for it was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in November 1922 and acquired by Comte Etienne de Beaumont (Fig. 35). This painting was therefore executed con-



Fig. 35. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1921–22, Mrs. Bertram Smith, New York.

1. Two curious and interesting canvases in the group are the decorative panels (76 1/4 x 16 1/4 inches) executed by Braque in 1927–28 for the dining room of his new house on the rue du Douanier in Paris. In these Braque has compressed a small *guéridon* into a spherical form that he has then reversed to contain the background wall in the upper part of each panel. The effect is thus of an elongated figure 8, with a few objects standing on a small round table-top in the waisted middle (vide Maeght, 1924–27, p. 118).

2. Vide photographs of Braque's studio in 1928 in *Cahiers d'Art*, 1928, pp. 411–16; also in 1930 in S. Fumet, *Georges Braque* (Paris, 1965), p. 95.

temporarily with two big *Mantelpieces* (Plates 2, 3) and the first two *Kanephoroi* (Paris), none of which it resembles in any way. Nor indeed does it resemble – except in the use of a diamond floor pattern – any of the *Guéridons* of 1918–19 (Figs. 7–9). This one is lighter and more varied in color but has none of those ornamented passages which make the *Café Bar* attractive and vital. The still-life objects are smaller, more deliquescent and out of reach. The rounded edge of the table top, which projects and is nearest to the eye, is not “tactile,” and therefore a visual space is established between it and the spectator. Also, the still-life group is the least important element in the composition. In this painting Braque was essentially concerned with the space occupied by, and the volume of, the table. His handling of the rounded pedestal and tripod base of the table in relation to the flat paneled wall behind involves Braque in creating an elaborately shaded planar structure which gives the pedestal an almost tactile reality. The still life, by contrast, is flat and remote. But the two black planes at the top, opening out diagonally as though they were folded down the middle, again represent an in-between space and animate the upper part of the composition. This simple device will be found in many of the paintings that follow.

Braque’s second table still-life of the first half of the 1920’s, *Guitar and Fruit on a Table* of 1924 (Fig. 36), stands out as a classically conceived masterpiece. It is calm, static and perfectly balanced, simple yet monumental, free of either decorative or experimental devices, and in its luscious fullness essentially tactile. Spatially, Braque has brought everything onto one vertical plane, which begins with the undulating drapery at the top and carries through to the columnar drapery which hangs over the edge of the rectangular wooden table in the immediate foreground. The plane of the table top is thus lost. Here Braque allowed objects to assume their full volume and recognizable form, and placed all the weight in the center of the canvas. The viewpoint is frontal, but the inverted Λ shape in the bottom right corner leads the viewer’s eye inwards beneath the table and thus evokes space. The composition is held together by a system of strong verticals and horizontals, traversed by gently inclined diagonals. In this canvas, Braque has for once discarded synthetic Cubist principles of representation, gives a masterly display of his knowledge of *belle peinture*, exploits subtle variations of texture to give every part of the picture a tactile existence and succeeds completely in reuniting volume with color. As an example of “pure” painting allied to a twentieth-



Fig. 36. Georges Braque, *Guitar and Fruit on a Table*, 1924, Private Collection (No. 7).

century style of representation, this canvas by Braque is one of those that most effectively challenge the greatest works in the same genre by Chardin, Renoir or Cézanne. And the creative sensibility is just as quintessentially French.

The *Guérison* dated 1925 (Plate 5, Fig. 37) is in total contrast to this and shows Braque working in a twofold stylistic idiom. The aggressive flattening of the lower part of the canvas and the arbitrarily shaped planes of the upper background are reminiscent of works of 1919–20, whereas the still-life group, with its free, angular and malleable forms, looks forward to pictures Braque was to paint during the next five years. Much about this picture is abstruse and impossible to account for literally. Its composition is also somewhat confused, while the base of the table seems inadequate to support the weight of the objects and draperies above it. In short, despite several beautiful passages of paint and a rich harmony of colors, the visual effect produced by the contrast of formalized and free shapes and the inertness of the spatial structure make this picture less successful than the others.

The other "classical" masterpiece of this time is, undoubtedly, the so-called *Marble-Topped Table*, also finished in 1925 (Fig. 38), a firmly but elaborately built-up composition, which is luscious and colorful. Unfortunately, the content of this painting has always been misread, with the result that it has acquired a meaningless title. This error in interpretation results from the ambiguous signification of the panel of green *faux-marbre*, which advances upward from the bottom left corner of the canvas as though it belonged to the table. But this panel does not represent the top of the table, which is shown as being round and made of wood. Actually this *faux-marbre* panel has no literal meaning, but refers to the marble, or marbleized, covering of the walls surrounding the table, whose spatial setting is represented by linear intersections in the bottom right corner of the composition. In other words, the pictorial justification of this panel of green *faux-marbre*, like that of the grey *faux-marbre* to its right, is that it gives the painting immediacy in the same way that Braque created it with the whitish-grey panel in the two *Mantelpieces* of 1923 and 1927 (Fig. 23, Plate 4). This green *faux-marbre* panel functions therefore as a tactile element to bring the palpable still life closer to the spectator, to emphasize by its flatness the volumes of the fruit on the cloth in the foreground, and to give spatial credibility to the overhanging cloth which casts a heavy shadow. The spatial existence of the table



Fig. 37



Fig. 38

Plate 5, Fig. 37. Georges Braque, *The Guérison*, 1925, Mrs. Walter A. Haas, San Francisco.

Fig. 38. Georges Braque, *The Marble-Topped Table*, 1925, Musées Nationaux, Paris (No. 8).



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

Fig. 39. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1928, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (No. 11).

Fig. 40. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1928-30, Statens Museum vor Kunst, Copenhagen.

3. Mme. Cuttoli, with Braque's consent, ordered this and the Copenhagen *Guéridon* to be woven in silk and wool tapestry at Beauvais in 1935. The composition appears in reverse, greatly reduced in size, and surrounded by an imitation moiré border. Braque did not make special cartoons for these tapestries, which were done from the actual paintings in an edition of three examples of each.

is further represented by the clever way in which Braque has constructed his composition as a system of verticals, with diagonals which traverse the ovoid table top placed in the center. Both the vertical and diagonal planes run from the foreground to the background, objects cast shadows to detach them from one another and create in-between spaces, while the abstract beige form on the background plane "rhymes" with both the green *faux-marbre* panel and the cithara and acts as a point of reference. This luscious and richly ornamented canvas is one of Braque's most solid and impressive achievements of the mid-1920's.

We now pass on to a group of four table still-lives painted by Braque in 1928-29, which form a homogeneous group and should be considered together. Three of these (Figs. 39, 40, 41) are arranged on *guéridons*, the fourth (Fig. 42)³ on a rectangular wooden table with undulating legs. This group of pictures marks an important change of style in Braque's painting, which involved his choice of colors, his use of paint and his handling of



Fig. 41

space. Indeed, it is a change which amounts to a rejection both of the tonal resonance and of the seductive and delectable beauty of his works of the previous ten years, in favor of a drier more economical and yet fuller experience of reality. All of a sudden, Braque gave up his previous palette of dark brown, tan, olive green, pale ochre, dark grey, black and white and changed to a scale of more luminous colors – lemon yellow, viridian green, cobalt blue, beige, light grey – used in counterpoint with black and white. At the same time, Braque exchanged his former loose brushwork and rich oily paint for thin washes of color evenly applied over a layer of gesso mixed with sand. This gives his paintings a granular, matt, fresco-like appearance, with a dry, rough surface which arouses tactile sensations of a different order.⁴

Three of these table still-lives are set, as in the past, against a flat background plane – a wall whose lower part is paneled – whereas the *Guéridon* in the Phillips Collection (Fig. 41) offers the innovation of being set in the spatial embrace of two walls meeting at right angles to form the corner of a room. In all these paintings Braque has used a divided background plane in two colors – light and dark – running from the floor almost to the top of the canvas, which seems to articulate the space and thus enhance the volumes of the base of the table and the objects.



Fig. 42

Fig. 41. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1928-29, Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C. (No. 13).

Fig. 42. Georges Braque, *Still Life on a Table*, 1928-29, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Saidenberg, New York (No. 12).

4. Braque's deliberate intentions have often been defeated subsequently by the incomprehension of owners who have allowed some of these paintings to be varnished.



Fig. 43

For while these objects tend to be larger in scale than before, they are also once again very flat. The background structure of the Copenhagen picture (Fig. 40), with its arbitrarily shaped planes that cast shadows and are rhythmically arranged, recalls that of the 1918 *Guéridon* (Fig. 9). But the most surprising developments are to be seen in the *Guéridon* of the Phillips Collection, which is the most complex, the most colorful, the most ornamentally enlivened and the most triumphantly successful of the four. Here, as never before, Braque has emphasized the solidity of the base of the table, which he has set in the more ample space of a corner of a room. This placing is stated both in the lines of the floor and in the angle formed where the walls meet at the top. And Braque has given further articulation to the space by making this angle correspond with the fold in the red, blue, yellow and green planes immediately between it and the still life. Yet Braque has kept this picture flat, and made the table and still life seem to be more within reach, by showing the brown areas of dado, to left and right of the *guéridon*, in a false perspective which counters any suggestion of recession and establishes them on a continuous plane. Also in this picture, Braque makes more use of a changing viewpoint than in the others: looking up toward the ceiling, frontally at the still life, and down at the table top and the floor. This enables Braque to represent the wider spatial experience more fully and to make the spaces in between objects more tactile.

We can test Braque's extraordinary spatial achievement in this painting by comparing it with the big horizontal *Still Life on a*

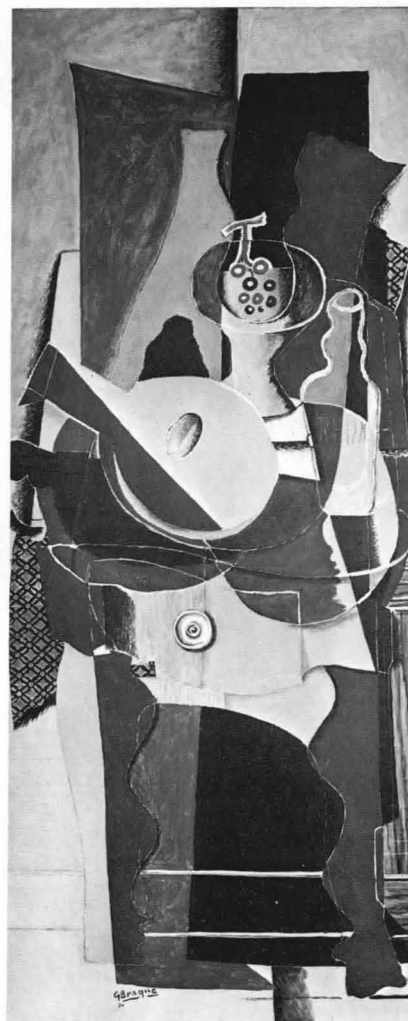


Fig. 44

Fig. 43. Georges Braque, *Still Life on a Table*, 1929, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Chester Dale Collection.

Plate 6, Fig. 44. Georges Braque, *Guéridon with a Bottle of Rum*, 1928-30, Galerie Maeght, Paris (No. 14).

Table dated 1929 (Fig. 43). Here a similar group of objects stand on the rectangular top of a wooden table, in front of a flat wall, and are seen from a single frontal viewpoint. Braque was therefore unable to “fold” the two-colored background plane and had to represent the distance from the foreground plane of the open drawer to the wall by showing the right side and back leg of the table as a ghostlike white form. The space in this picture is thus severely flattened and the composition gives the effect of a bas-relief.

Contemporaneously with the four *Guéridons* I have just discussed, but continuing from 1928 until late in 1930, Braque was working on six others. Each of these is different in style and handling, yet they all derive out of, while adding new dimensions to, the major works which Braque had painted during the preceding ten years. The *Guéridon* of 1928–30,⁵ with a clay pipe and a packet of tobacco in the foreground (whereabouts unknown), is both flatter and more mathematically structured than any other, the canvas being regularly divided vertically and horizontally. In style and conception this picture relates backwards to the *Guéridon* in the Haas Collection (Plate 5, Fig. 37) and to *The Marble-Topped Table* (Fig. 38), both of 1925, but it is rhythmically and organically more unified than either. The *Guéridon with a Bottle of Rum* of the same date (Plate 6, Fig. 44) has fewer ornamental passages, depends less on textural contrasts, consists of only three still-life objects and is even more rhythmically organized. The shapes of the objects are simplified and they exist as thin, partially transparent, almost weightless planes standing on a table whose top and base are severely compressed. The only substantial feature is the *trompe-l'œil* drawer knob, which provides a visual focus to which all the rest is spatially related. This sparseness and flatness are, on the other hand, offset by a more animated spatial structure at the top and by a subtly orchestrated harmony of browns, dark blue and emerald green.

The Grey Table, dated 1930 (Fig. 45), is still more simplified, both in formal structure and in choice of objects. It is also more like a mural in conception. Here the spatial experience is reduced to a minimum: the objects are immediately tactile and the eye is kept moving up and down on the surface. This movement is encouraged by the way in which, exceptionally, the objects are ranged successively one above the other, from the napkin in its ring to the fruit dish with its grapes, the sheet of music passing subtly between them. The free pink and grey forms, on



Fig. 45. Georges Braque, *The Grey Table*, 1928–30, Private Collection (No. 15).

which the elements representing the table – including a passage of *faux-bois* – and the still-life objects are inscribed, provide the whole visual experience. And the flatness of the composition is further emphasized by the two dark grey forms like a pickaxe on either side. Yet this picture is not as static as it seems, for Braque has given it an internal life by linking its various parts organically through “rhymes” and correspondences. For example, the lines on the front edge of the table are picked up in the sheet of music, the strings of the mandolin and the shading at the top, while the pale grey ovoid form in the background between the front legs of the table “rhymes” with the sounding hole and handle of the mandolin, as well as with the fruit dish. This contrived and economical painting is rhythmically the most ingenious.

By contrast *The Blue Mandolin*, also dated 1930 (Fig. 46), is highly ornamented and full of textural variations. Several arbitrary forms have also found their way into the composition. Here the table and still life are presented in a flattened form which gives them tactile immediacy. In the background at the top,



Fig. 46

Fig. 46. Georges Braque, *The Blue Mandolin*, 1928–30, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis (No. 16).

Fig. 47. Georges Braque, *Guitar and Bottle of Marc on a Table*, 1928–30, Private Collection (No. 17).



Fig. 47

behind the mandolin and the fruit dish, the planes are, on the contrary, articulated like the panels of a screen, thus evoking a slightly rounded space. And this round form is echoed in the *faux-bois* at the bottom. Braque then sets the eye moving in all directions with a lively play of accentuated curves and diagonals: So the calm structure of horizontals and verticals in the lower part of the canvas, that is to say the foreground, is offset by a movement expanding into space above.

The *Guitar and Bottle of Marc on a Table* (Fig. 47), another table still-life completed in 1930, contains compositional elements common to several of the others, yet is more strict and monumental in its build-up and provides a spatial experience of another kind. It can be compared with the *Guéridon* in the Phillips Collection (Fig. 41), although it is spatially less venturesome. In the lower part of the canvas, space is compressed, the four legs of the table, the carpet and the pale ochre background being on one plane. The overhanging white cloth creates an immediate foreground plane, while the progression from foreground to background is represented on the right by the side of the table which disappears in a short diagonal. Braque has here set the guitar back from the foreground plane, so that he could represent its volume in the lower grey half, while keeping the upper red half as flat as the red planes above and below it. The emphatically vertical and transparent bottle of marc is then spatially related to the guitar through the sheet of music and the semitransparent apples. Behind the bottle is an elaborate structure of overlapping vertical planes of color, which are paper-thin, flat and cast no shadows. These enable Braque to represent the space between the front and back of the table. But because they have colors and ornamental or descriptive motifs, which also occur in the lower part of the composition, they serve to keep the picture flat and near the surface of the canvas.

The last picture in this group which we have to consider, *Two Fruit Dishes and a Mandolin on a Marble Console*, also finished in 1930 (Fig. 48), is different again from the others. For it is looser in execution, carried out in a more somber tonality, more complex as a composition, and spatially more venturesome. The black marble table top here has a smaller surface and is supported against the background wall on only two legs, showing that it is a console. With his love of ambiguity, Braque nevertheless represents the top as semicircular – thus establishing a “rhyme” with the fruit dishes and the mandolin – yet for compositional and spatial reasons also shows it as rectangular. The



Fig. 48. Georges Braque, *Two Fruit Dishes and a Mandolin on a Marble Console*, 1930. Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (No. 18).

table is in the corner of a room, represented by the intersection of walls on the left. The still life has a tactile immediacy, and the eye is carried both upward across it by the diagonal which rises sharply on the left, and around it by the lines representing the table top. Distance is again measured by the diagonal on the right linking the front of the table to the far edge of the mandolin and the carafe, a point from which another diagonal descends to the left through the blue fruit dish to the left side of the table. This picture does not have a fresco-like surface and Braque has reverted to using more fluid paint. In fact, we see here the beginning of a style which Braque was to use again in a group of small still lifes in 1935.

If we now look back over the succession of major works which Braque had painted since the end of World War I, we shall see how he had gradually acquired full mastery of each of the pictorial means and had thus been able to extend his expressive range. Braque had in fact progressed from a late synthetic Cubist idiom, which tended at first to be stiff and complicated, to a privately elaborated style which was free, simplified and lyrical. Braque's debt to Cézanne remains a constant force throughout these years, urging him on to feel space and the volumes of objects within it as the essential experience of reality which the artist must represent by strictly pictorial methods: that is to say, in terms of "pure" painting without recourse to illusionism. But, unlike Cézanne, who was tied to color modulations as a structural and representational principle, Braque had discovered, through his experiences with *papier collé*, that color and form can function independently in the make-up of a picture. "Form and color do not merge: they are simultaneous," Braque noted. Already, therefore, he had the advantage over Cézanne of being able to draw the forms of objects and arrange colors on his canvas in such a way that they might, or might not, be descriptive but would certainly be functionally placed and harmoniously keyed to an overall tonal pattern. Cubism had also provided Braque with the elements of a new way of representing space in painting. What is more, he had acquired a unique understanding of what can be achieved with paint during his early craftsmanly training. And in the space of a few years the conjunction of these vital elements enabled Braque to forge a truly pictorial language of his own.

To say that, by 1930, Braque was transforming everyday domestic subjects into noble and enjoyable pictorial experiences is not enough. What is far more important is that he makes the

spectator feel, as well as see, certain discoveries he has made about the nature of reality. One cannot therefore make any valid comparison between the postwar works of Braque and Picasso, because after 1919 they moved away from each other in opposing directions. For Picasso's reality was the product of living, looking and feeling. His primary concern was with man, with inventing new (or improving on old) pictorial forms to communicate what he himself, as a sentient human being, had seen and experienced. Picasso thought far less, therefore, about sensations of space and the coexistence of inanimate objects⁶ than he did about expressing tenderness, love, desire, pity or rage in an imaginative but formally lucid pictorial idiom. He resorted at this time to a language of symbols, myths, and metaphors. And when Picasso painted a still life it was for purposes of formal discovery or emotional release and not in order to evoke delectable sensations. Picasso used forms and colors demonstratively, Braque evocatively and, so to speak, musically. Sometimes the two artists painted the same subjects, but they were neither in harmony nor in competition. Yet both remained subject to the essential pictorial conceptions of Cubism, their joint creation, and the best proof of its pictorial viability is that it enabled Braque and Picasso to follow divergent paths and reach equally significant creative results.

6. This is impressively illustrated by Picasso's *Still Life on a Guéridon*, dated March 11, 1931, reproduced in Zervos, Vol. VII, No. 317.

6

Braque in the 1930's

During the first half of the 1930's, Braque experimented in his painting and seems, for a while, to have lost his sense of direction. Braque's figures and bathers of this date are lame paraphrases of works by Picasso, his beaches with cliffs and boats are insipid, his still lifes are suave and prosaic. In short, the paintings Braque produced between 1930 and 1936 are among the least alive, the least interesting and the least substantial of his entire *œuvre*.

Braque engaged during these five years on a new course of simplification in his still lifes in order once again to test and separate the pictorial functions of color, form and line. As a result we find him establishing on his canvas a basic arrangement of areas of color painted in thin washes. Over this base, Braque drew with incised lines – a technique he had never used before – to evoke the presence of objects. The effect of these paintings is flat, rhythmic, sparse and, above all, decorative, for Braque was no longer using color in fixed forms but leaving it free to make its own patterns. Simultaneously, he developed a cursive linear idiom for figural representation, which he used in engravings, in some decorative plaster plaques painted black so that the incised lines are white and many years later in the series of *Helios* lithographs¹ (1946) and the painting *Ajax* of 1949–54 (Fig. 85), where the linear tangle is reinforced with a free use of color.

Between 1930 and 1936, Braque's basic concern was with the decorative aspects of painting, for which he had an astonishing and subtle gift. His repertory of still-life objects remained the same, but temporarily Braque relinquished his interest in space, volume and tactile values in favor of a seductive surface play of "rhymes" and rhythms created with ambiguous flabby forms and meandering lines. Natural objects virtually lost not only their value as such for Braque, but even their right to a material existence. And the colors he used alternated between a heavy range of black, dark brown, yellow and red, to a much lighter and livelier palette of pink, pale blue and yellow, white, orange and

1. Vide W. Hofmann, *L'Œuvre Graphique de Georges Braque* (Lausanne, 1961), Nos. 14–22, 26–31.

purple. This was an easygoing interval in Braque's career, a period of transition which ended in a break with the past and the start of a wholly different creative phase.

In 1936 Braque – then aged fifty-four – recovered his pictorial control and embarked once again on a succession of masterly works. These are eminently personal in conception, inventive, marvelously organized, confident in execution, subtly if not always strongly colored, richly ornamented and once again spatially involved. Certain characteristics recur throughout: a granular fresco-like surface, a decorative pattern which is a stylization of either a bunch of grapes, a flower or a bird, a paneled wooden dado, emphatic linear rhythms, zigzag, diamond and serpentine motifs, and an overall surface animation. Yet, busy though they are, these are no longer flat, decorative compositions. On the contrary, objects once again have volume and are set in space. Braque claimed that by this time he had made the discovery “that ornament liberates color from form” and the workings of this dissociation are self-evident. In these pictures Braque created a richly orchestrated synthesis of free form, controlled color and organized rhythm, which he embellished with arbitrarily disposed ornamental motifs and “rhymes.” “So far as I am concerned,” Braque said in his interview (1950) with Georges Charbonnier, “it is the rhyme which intervenes accidentally that gives life and spontaneity to a picture.” Each of the pictorial elements functions in these pictures independently and simultaneously. But to contain so much activity Braque had to expand the pictorial space; he also introduced a more active play of light and shade.

In *Still Life with Mandolin I* of 1936 (Plate 7, Fig. 49), Braque has bent the wall on the left so as to situate the console table in a shallow alcove, while the curves which are arbitrarily drawn across the background wall evoke a larger surface than the table top would have. These also have the effect of tilting the still life toward the spectator and making it more tangible. In *The Pink Tablecloth* of 1938 (Plate 8, Fig. 50), a more severe composition, this spatial expansion is again evoked by the extension of the table top onto the background wall. But it is more particularly created by the undulating movement from side to side set up by the projecting flaps of the tablecloth.

In the *Guéridon* of 1935 (Plate 9, Fig. 51) Braque has taken as a point of departure the sort of table-stop still life he was painting around 1930 but has used another type of brass-legged *guéridon*. This time, however, Braque has set out to enrich the



Fig. 49



Fig. 50



Fig. 51

Plate 7, Fig. 49. Georges Braque, Still Life with Mandolin I, 1936, The Norton Gallery and School of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida (No. 20).

Plate 8, Fig. 50. Georges Braque, The Pink Tablecloth, 1938, Private Collection (No. 22).

Plate 9, Fig. 51. Georges Braque, The Guèridon, 1935, San Francisco Museum of Art, Gift of W. W. Crocker (No. 19).

general effect and expand the pictorial space with his most recent pictorial discoveries. Thus he has articulated the space behind the still life, as he had in the past, with two differently colored intersecting planes of blue and pale ochre running from bottom to top. But Braque has also expanded the table top to the right by a broad, curving white line surrounding its edge, and to the left by a pronounced arc which runs from the bunch of grapes to the flap of the tablecloth. Braque has then made great play between the voluminous, tactile fruit in the immediate right foreground, the stylized and insubstantial bunch of grapes, which acts as a formal link between the flaps of the

cloth and the patterned wallpaper, and the massive but transparent glass in the background, which is again palpable. And as an ironical comment on the artificiality of the world conjured up by the painter, Braque has made the framed painting of fruit in a dish, hanging on the wall above the still life, wholly insubstantial by representing it with a web of lines drawn over the patterned wallpaper, so that even its situation in space is ambivalent. Thus, in this picture Braque combined the massive, the insubstantial, the palpable, the stylized and the arbitrary in an image which is both convincing and decorative.

One cannot however discuss this *Guéridon* of 1935 without immediately comparing it with the very similar composition of the same size (Fig. 52), executed by Braque as a decoration for the salon of his home, which was begun in 1939 although not completed until 1952. In this second and far more colorful version, the differences are more eloquent than the similarities, because the result is less decorative and more monumental. To begin with, Braque abolished the "visual" space which he had created in the 1935 canvas by bringing the tripod base of this second *Guéridon* into the immediate foreground. The eye is thus immediately drawn downward, as in the *Mantelpieces* (Figs. 20–24), where a spatial complex is represented through the interweaving lines of the three brass legs and the open areas between them. These three legs also start a rhythmic movement which carries the eye upward to the still life, where the curved shape of the mandolin and the ample oval of the dish with fruit create a new expansion. Then comes the articulation of the background space through the meeting of the green and brown planes. So the table and still life are given a considerably enlarged pictorial space in which to exist. Here Braque has put more emphasis on structure than on ornamentation, on stability than on rhythm, on form than on ambiguity. So he achieved a painting which is lucidly constructed, colorful, visually satisfying and splendidly conceived. In other words, he brilliantly realized aims which he had been pursuing since 1918.

Let us then look back first at *Café Bar* (Fig. 7), which is rich in textural contrasts and ornamental motifs but spatially flattened. Next let us consider again the *Guéridon* of 1928–29 in the Phillips Collection (Fig. 41), where Braque has represented a fuller and more articulated spatial experience and given objects more volume and recognizable forms. In this perspective, the *Guéridon* of 1939–52 rightly appears as the sumptuous culmination of a long-developed theme, but it is also a monument to



Fig. 52. Georges Braque, *The Guéridon*, 1939–52, *Musées Nationaux*, Paris (No. 35).

Braque's increased mastery over the technique and possibilities of "pure" painting.

The other monumental composition of these years, *Still Life with a Mandolin, Fruit and a Roll of Paper* (Plate 10, Fig. 53), occupied Braque between 1936 and 1938 and is a brilliant, elaborate, wholly successful synthesis of discoveries made since the days of Cubism. Here Braque reduced the pictorial space to a minimum, yet he succeeded in accommodating on the rectangular table top a larger number of objects than usual, as well as in giving them volume and mass. To achieve this he had recourse to changes in viewpoint, perspectival distortions and a firm structure of verticals and horizontals. Braque employed various devices to animate, and hence expand, the pictorial space: he introduced circular and undulating lines, whose signification is ambivalent, to establish a rhythm; he accepted abstruse forms in order to establish "rhyming" correspondences; and he increased the rhythmic content with the contrasting ornamental motifs on the wallpaper and the cloth, as well as with the swinging arbitrary forms in red and grey. Much in this picture cannot be rationally analyzed, a fact which must have delighted Braque. For among his *Thoughts* we can read: "In art only one thing counts: that which cannot be explained." But Braque was to make a still more significant declaration on this subject in a conversation with Christian Zervos, the editor of *Cahiers d'Art*, published in 1935, that is to say shortly before he began work on this great still life: "Recourse to logic presupposes a weakness of the instinctive faculties, an incapability to act. Reason being rational has never led to creation. Writing a poem, painting a picture or carving a stone are all irrational acts. Once one has to start propping up any of these acts with applied science they become like that science which leaves an empty space, the psychic space. The artist needs to call on this at the moment of creation; he must not add it subsequently. A conclusion, which results from a debate, is tantamount to a death sentence. To conclude is to exclude the imponderable."²

In the Block *Still Life*, Braque indulged his love of the arbitrary in a conjunction of forms, some of which represent objects, others of which measure distance, still others of which have none but a purely pictorial justification, and one of which – the pyramidal form on the right – seems to be an embodiment of a ray of light. At all events, every element in this picture – not least the striking combination of colors – combines to produce a vivid spatial and tactile sensation and an exceptional éclat.

2. Vide *Cahiers d'Art*, No. 1, 1935, p. 21.



Fig. 53



Fig. 54

These were the last gay pictures Braque was to paint for several years. Immediately afterwards, in 1938-39, a skull appeared in several of his still lifes such as *Studio Interior with a Black Vase* (Fig. 54) and *Vase, Palette and Skull* (Fig. 55), which contain fewer rhythmic devices, less ornamentation and are executed in a heavy, melancholic harmony of colors. In these paintings everything is still and tactile, but for the first time in Braque's work the spatial structure of the scene is really ambiguous. Braque always claimed that there was no symbolism in his work and that he had painted a skull because he found it beautiful and fascinating as an object. Be that as it may, one must at least



Fig. 55

Plate 10, Fig. 53. Georges Braque, *Still Life with a Mandolin, Fruit and a Roll of Paper on a Table*, 1936-38, Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block, Chicago (No. 21).

Fig. 54. Georges Braque, *Studio Interior with a Black Vase*, 1938, Mr. and Mrs. David Lloyd Kreeger, Washington, D. C.

Fig. 55. Georges Braque, *Vase, Palette and Skull*, 1939, Mr. and Mrs. David Lloyd Kreeger, Washington, D. C. (No. 23).



Fig. 56

Fig. 56. Pablo Picasso, Painter and Model, 1926, ink drawing, Private Collection.

Fig. 57. Pablo Picasso, Painter and Model, 1928, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection.



Fig. 57

note that Braque made these paintings in the oppressive atmosphere of the twelve months preceding the outbreak of World War II, that the skull was present in his own studio, and that he placed it in immediate proximity to his own palette and brushes. And it is also worth recalling that in his reply to a questionnaire published in *Cahiers d'Art* in the summer of 1939 Braque wrote: "There is nothing which distinguishes the artist from other men. He lives on the same plane as everyone else. . . . Anything viable in what he creates takes form independently of his will. Not enough credit is given to the obscure forces by which we are actuated, forces which many people in their optimistic appraisal of the universe think they can ignore, but which on the contrary should be examined, so that moving slowly forward we are constantly faced with a mystery retreating beyond our grasp. Inevitably, every change of regime affects the life of a painter because, like everyone else, he belongs to his time. . . . But a picture is not a snapshot. That does not mean, however, that the painter is not influenced, perturbed or maybe worse, by the march of history. He can suffer without being a militant. But we must insist on a categorical distinction between art and actuality."³

The other innovation which Braque made in his paintings of the immediately prewar period was also thematic. That is to say, he made the artist, his model and the contents of his studio the subject of several canvases. Braque thus took up a theme which, throughout the nineteenth century, had played a consid-

3. *Cahiers d'Art*, Nos. 1-4, 1939, p. 65.

erable role in the work of such painters as Corot, Courbet, Bazille, Seurat, Van Gogh and Gauguin, but which had already been treated also by a number of major artists of the twentieth century. Generally speaking, this theme had been used to symbolize the cultural worth, the unaccountable power of inspiration and the solitude of the independently creative artist. In the twentieth century, however, it had been given an autobiographical term of reference, and was used to show the independent artist as a man of superior gifts, who, like anyone else, is an honest worker. From 1900 on, Matisse had repeatedly painted the interior of his own studio, with his models, his canvases, and his sculptures standing around.⁴ After 1918, in paintings done at Nice, Matisse had sometimes included himself in the composition – an artist in the act of drawing or painting a specific subject – while during the 1930's *The Artist and His Model* had become one of Matisse's favorite subjects. In the work of Picasso, too, this same theme had played an important role. We find it couched in antique terms in a group of drawings of 1926 (Fig. 56); in a highly schematized form in two paintings of 1928 (Fig. 57)⁵; in a picturesque form in the series of engravings which Picasso made in 1927 to illustrate Balzac's *Le Chef d'Œuvre Inconnu*,⁶ a novel about the mysteries of artistic inspiration; and again in neoclassic form in the much longer series of engravings made by Picasso in 1933–34, which are concerned with the life of a sculptor and his models in the studio.⁷

Braque's treatment of the theme of the artist and his studio owes something perhaps to the work of an artist he greatly admired, Corot, but shows no sign of having been influenced by any of the more recent precedents. For example, nothing could be further removed from Braque's conception than the studio scenes with girls drawing which Picasso had painted in 1935.⁸ Braque was to find in the *Studio* theme a powerful vein of inspiration which lasted for fifteen years, and he made of it something peculiarly his own. Even to the extent that, on the principle of "Take and Transform," which has always been one of his methods, Picasso was undoubtedly prompted to embark on his own extensive series of *Studio* paintings in 1955–56 (Fig. 58) after seeing what Braque had recently achieved.

To start with, in 1936, Braque seems to have felt that it was time to open up and animate his heavily ornamented interiors with the presence of human beings. His first efforts were tentative, involving a Matisse-like boudoir scene, a woman playing a mandolin, and a lady painter in a hat seated, palette and brushes in



Fig. 58. Pablo Picasso, *The Studio*, 1955, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Saidenberg, New York.

4. Vide A. H. Barr, Jr., *Matisse: His Art and his Public* (New York, 1951), reproductions on the following pages: 162, 250, 306, 375, 410, 413, 424. Also G. Diehl, *Henri Matisse* (Paris, 1954), Plate 110.

5. Vide Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. VII, Nos. 44–47, 142, 143.

6. Vide B. Geiser, *Picasso Peintre-Graveur*, Vol. I (Bern, 1933), Nos. 123–134.

7. *Ibid.*, Vol. II (Bern, 1968), Nos. 297–328.

8. Vide Zervos, *Catalogue*, Vol. VIII, Nos. 248–264.



Fig. 59

Plate 11, Fig. 59. Georges Braque, *The Model*, 1939, Mrs. Charles Vidor, New York (No. 24).

hand, in front of a canvas on an easel. Both of the latter subjects recall Corot.⁹ By 1937, in *The Duo* (Musées Nationaux, Paris), Braque was representing two figures in a room playing a piano and singing. Then in 1939, with far greater assurance and invention, he produced *The Model* (Plate 11, Fig. 59) and *The Artist and His Model* (Fig. 60). Braque's figures, apart from that of the artist with his long hair, cigarette in the mouth and sharply pointed beard, are impersonal rather than characterized. One might even say that the conception of the scene is intended to symbolize Braque's own obsessive fascination with the art of painting rather than to carry any other meaning. In none of his studio scenes is there ever any drama, frustration, erotic gamboling or comedy, such as one finds in Picasso's studio scenes of the 1960's. Braque's studio scenes are static and solemn: this is the place and the hour of creation.

These studio paintings are of special interest in the evolution of Braque's work, however, because in them he used for the first time new devices to represent his heightened sensations of space and volume. For example, the obliquely placed chair and easel; the juxtaposition of profile and full-face views, one being painted in black and the other in clear colors; and lastly, the introduction of a window and a play of light.

9. Compare the following works by Corot: *The Studio*, 1865–66, *The Studio*, 1865–70 (both Musée du Louvre, Paris), *Woman in a Red Dress Holding a Mandolin*, 1868–70 (Weeks Collection, Des Moines), all reproduced in *Figures de Corot*, Musée du Louvre, Paris, June, 1962, Nos. 60, 61, 73. Also *Gypsy Woman With a Mandolin*, 1874, Museum of São Paulo.

Throughout this short series of immediately prewar works, Braque turned away from the delectable aspects of the natural world, ceased to look outward and gradually retired within himself, and into the peace of his studio, in order to come to terms with a more subjective vision of reality. This trend was to become more pronounced from then on. The turning point in his work is marked by this first series of studio still-lives and scenes, but especially by one of his most significant canvases, *The Studio* of 1939 (Fig. 61). Here so much seems familiar at first sight – the passages of *faux-bois*, the ornamentation, the flattening of the pictorial space, the color harmony – that one does not immediately perceive how much is new. Braque's great innovation is in his imaginative spatial exploration. The still-life elements are no longer contained within the surface of a table top but are variously disposed across the width of the room: on the left are two small tables, on the right a rush-seated stool in front of an easel. Braque has also induced a fictitious experience of space by other means: the vertical panels in the center advance or recede by tonal contrasts, the window opens frontally onto the sky, lines of direction fly off into outer space. Important too is the way Braque has created arbitrary differences of scale to bring objects up to the surface of the canvas, and

Fig. 60. Georges Braque, *The Artist and His Model*, 1939, Mr. Walter P. Chrysler, New York (No. 25).



Fig. 60



Fig. 61. Georges Braque, *The Studio*, 1939, Private Collection.

hence nearer to the hand. And it is surely not without significance that the most tactile elements are the palette and brushes and the stool which the artist has just vacated. Lastly, attention must be drawn to the easel on which is a canvas with a somewhat schematic representation of a bird in flight, which seems to be detaching itself to float in the studio of its creator. Here we have the paradox of a painted copy of a painted image breaking out of its own doubly artificial state to seek a freer existence in the no less artificial space of the artist's new painting.

The importance of this *Studio* in Braque's work is that it marks an end and a beginning: it is the summation of all that Braque had discovered and sought after since 1918, and it is the point of departure from which Braque's spatially more mysterious late works were to develop.

7

The War Years: From the *Kitchen Table* to the *Billiard Tables*, 1940–1949

Braque was fortunate in getting through the war years without any disagreeable experiences. When the Germans invaded France in May 1940 he was at his house at Varengueville in Normandy, from where he moved south in June to seek temporary refuge first in the Limousin, then in the Pyrenees. By October, Braque was back in his house in Paris, where he remained quietly working throughout the rest of the war.

Inevitably, the number of paintings which Braque made each year was less than before. Also his style of painting changed, as did the subject matter of his pictures. No less than the rest of his compatriots, Braque suffered spiritual turmoil during the occupation of France by the Nazis. For the most part, Braque's paintings of these years are small in scale, simplified, unenterprising and uneasy. And on most occasions when he attempted a large canvas, the result was not impressive. For example, the *Guéridon* which Braque executed in 1941 as a decorative panel for the Parisian salon of Mme Encherrena is lackluster, awkward and is painted in a drab palette of olive greens and dark brown. Similarly, *Mandolin and Sheet of Music on a Table*, also of 1941 (Private Collection, Paris), bids fair to display a semblance of Braque's former skill and energy and is carried out in brilliant red and purple, but it is in fact hesitant and unresolved, while the tonality seems forced and discordant.

Between 1941 and the fall of 1944, when he was able to return to Varengueville after more than four years' absence, Braque's subject matter was related almost exclusively to food and the daily routine of housekeeping. There is no symbolism here, but simply a reflection through Braque's eyes of the preoccupations of a wartime existence in a large city. One after another, Braque's still lifes are of kitchen tables with a sparse arrangement of objects such as a pair of scales, a frying pan, a chopping knife, a coffee grinder or a teapot, side by side with three cherries and a pear, two leeks, a piece of bread, some fried eggs, a bit of sausage, two mackerel, a sole or a slice of cheese. None of these had appeared in Braque's paintings in prewar days, and they



Plate 12, Fig. 62. Georges Braque,
The Blue Washstand, 1942,
Mr. Sam Spiegel, New York
(No. 26).

evoke no festive or luscious sensations. True, Braque occasionally painted a small bunch of flowers, but these have no real glow or life in them. Then too Braque embarked on another wholly uncharacteristic subject: bleak rooms with a washbasin, a bidet, a pitcher, a sponge, some soap, and perhaps a hairbrush or even a woman at her toilet. Of these, *The Blue Washstand* of 1942 (Plate 12, Fig. 62) is the finest and most important. In none of these works do the ornamented cloths and wallpapers which had been so prominent in his paintings of the 1930's appear, nor does one find the elaborate spatial devices which had previously concerned Braque so deeply. Now the setting is of the simplest: a flat paneled wall maybe, or in 1943–44 an aggressively roughcast background divided into large diamond shapes, which repel rather than encourage the desire to touch. Everything about these paintings is austere, leaden and sad; even the fish lying on their dishes fix the spectator with a frightened stare. In a few paintings the skull reappeared in a heightened tactile form. But what grates most in these paintings is that Braque's brushwork and handling of form are, generally speaking, slick, unrefined, loose and often aggressive.

So much for a generalized appraisal of Braque's paintings during the war years. Inevitably, there were a few great exceptions, works of an austere grandeur like *Interior: Table with Palette and Plant* of 1942 (Fig. 63) or *The Blue Washstand*. Curiously enough, Braque, who must have spent a great deal of time during the war in his studio, abandoned it as a subject between 1939 and 1949. Nevertheless, its existence is referred to in the *Interior*, for the two outline shapes which cut across and embrace the still life represent the artist's easel. By this means Braque induces the belief that the spectator, like the artist, is seeing through and around the easel, and therefore he has been able to make the still life more immediate and the palette easily tactile. And the spatial experience is complemented by the way the chair on the left is detached from the background wall with a shadow. This picture is severe, devoid of ornamentation and, somewhat exceptionally for Braque, carried out in a neutral palette dominated by large areas of black. Yet despite the general effect of restraint, Braque has created a memorable pictorial image.

Braque's next important paintings, two of which, *The Kitchen Table* (Paulhan Collection, Paris) and *The Stove* (Figs. 64, 65), are of 1942, and the third, *Kitchen Table with a Griddle* (Figs. 66, 67), was probably painted in 1942–43, all have a domestic sub-



ject. Braque drew his first ideas for *The Stove* and *Kitchen Table with a Griddle* in his album for 1940, though there is no telling where or when they were made.

Fig. 63. Georges Braque, *Interior: Table with Palette and Plant, 1942*. De Menil Family Collection, Houston (No. 27).

Braque made some interesting compositional changes when he came to paint *The Stove*. For example, what appears to have been in the drawing a window on the left has become a blank wall, the map (?) hanging crooked on the wall has become an ornately framed painting, the vase of flowers has become a plant in a pot, the smallish table has become a larger compositional element which both creates and flattens the pictorial space in its upward sweep, and lastly the palette – which has almost assumed the form of a skull – is shown without brushes. What is more, the most tactile elements in the picture are the wastepaper basket, the coal bucket and the stove. Thus we have four objects which suggest life-giving warmth, the death of painting, and wasted effort.

The first version of *The Kitchen Table* is airless, savorless, spaceless and dry. The whole composition is aggressively flattened and only the falling black drapery is allowed to be to some extent tactile. On the other hand, the later variant with a griddle is one of the two or three most original, most successful and

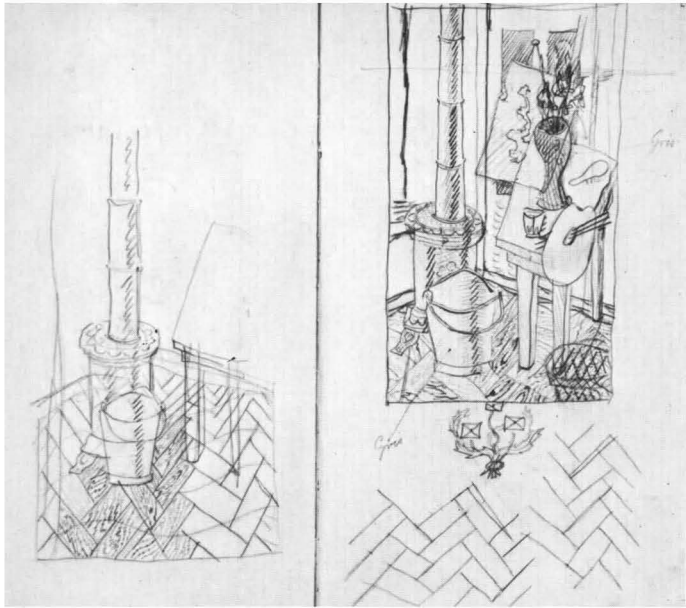


Fig. 64

Fig. 64. Georges Braque, *The Stove*, 1940, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

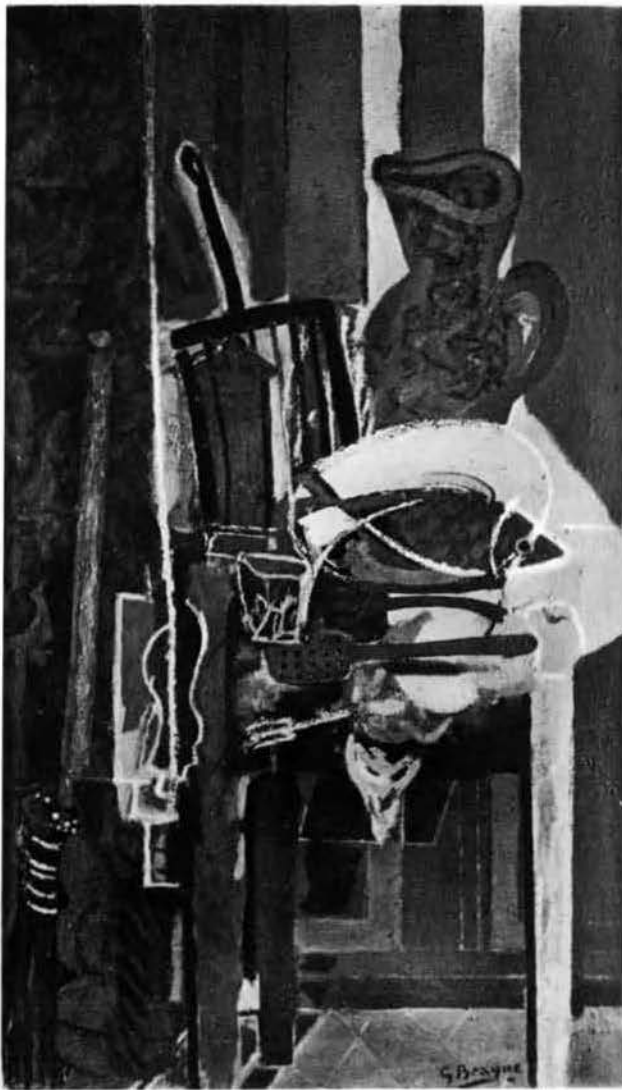
Fig. 65. Georges Braque, *The Stove*, 1942, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Paul Rosenberg and Company in Memory of Paul Rosenberg (No. 28).



Fig. 65

most memorable pictures which Braque painted during the war years. It is a sparse and melancholy picture: the presence of the half-concealed broom, introduced later than the drawing, must have had some emotional significance for Braque because it is obviously an afterthought. It is interesting too to see how Braque has put the edible objects out of reach and made the cooking utensils tactile.

With the approaching end of the war in France, followed by the liberation of Paris in August 1944, when Braque was at last able to return to Varengeville and see what had happened to his studio there, his mood began to lighten, his inspiration was renewed and things began to happen. The year 1944 saw Braque embark once more on a group of major compositions in which both internal and external space were again involved: *The Billiard Table I* and *The Salon* (Musées Nationaux, Paris) and *The*



Washstand (Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.). Each of these represents a new or unexpected subject for Braque, and is treated not only on a large scale but in a different way. They are not ornamented, are light and sober rather than bright in color, while Braque's brushwork is more sure and fluent than it had been since 1940.

The composition of *The Washstand* is firm and clear, but the other two pictures are already affected by that ambiguity and arbitrariness which, from now on, was to become a characteristic of Braque's late works. This is evident in the unformed, deliquescent still life in the right foreground of *The Salon*. But it is equally present in *Billiard Table I* in the handling of the table and chair on the other side of the green baize table. Another innovation in this painting is also connected with the representation of space. As in *Interior: Table with Palette and Plant* of 1942



Fig. 66

Fig. 66. Georges Braque, *The Kitchen Table with a Griddle*, 1940, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

Fig. 67. Georges Braque, *The Kitchen Table with a Griddle*, 1942-43, Herr Gustav Zumsteg, Zurich (No. 29).

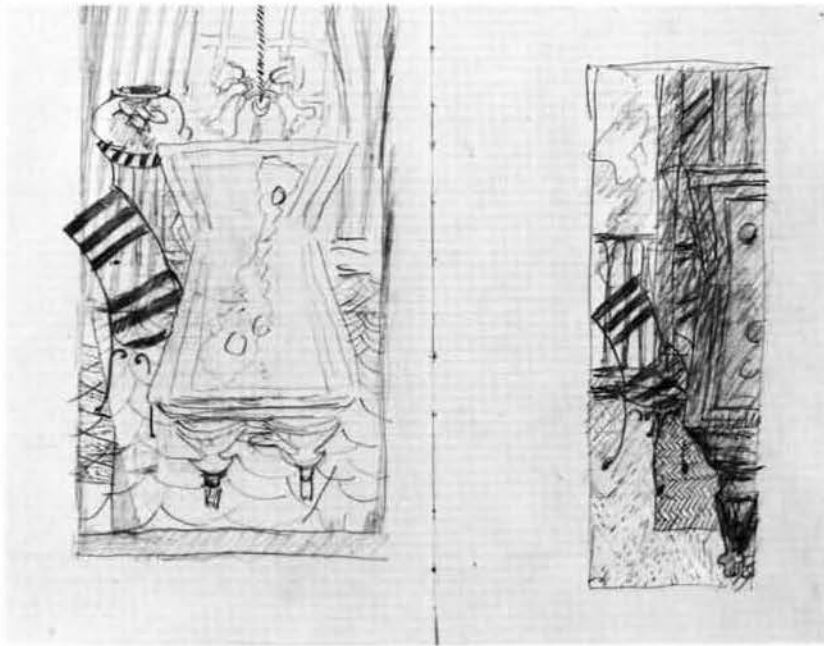


Fig. 68

(Fig. 63), Braque presents the room as seen through his easel, one arm of which embraces the vase of flowers and *guéridon* in the background and draws them forward, while the other disappears over the edge of the billiard table. At the same time, two cues traverse the dematerialized easel, the larger one being used to measure the distance from it to the window sill, the shorter one opposing it to lead the eye on to the table. Braque has thus created a minimum of pictorial space in the foreground, all of which is tactile. He has then articulated the space in the corner behind the table. However, by "folding" the billiard table on the same axis as the corner of the room and tilting its longer part up toward the spectator, Braque has again flattened the picture.

This was the first of three major *Billiard Table* compositions, all of which seem to have originated in Braque's mind at more or less the same moment. At all events, the first idea for the big vertical version which followed (Plate 13, Figs. 68, 69) occurs as a drawing in Braque's album for 1944, while the drawing for the more complex and later horizontal version (Fig. 70) is in the album for 1945. But the actual paintings were not to be finished until a few years later. Meanwhile, in the summer of 1945, Braque had his first serious illness and operations followed by a long convalescence. So it was the spring of 1946 before he began to work again.

Braque executed only ten paintings in 1946; they all have flowers as a subject – poppies, daisies or sunflowers – and are

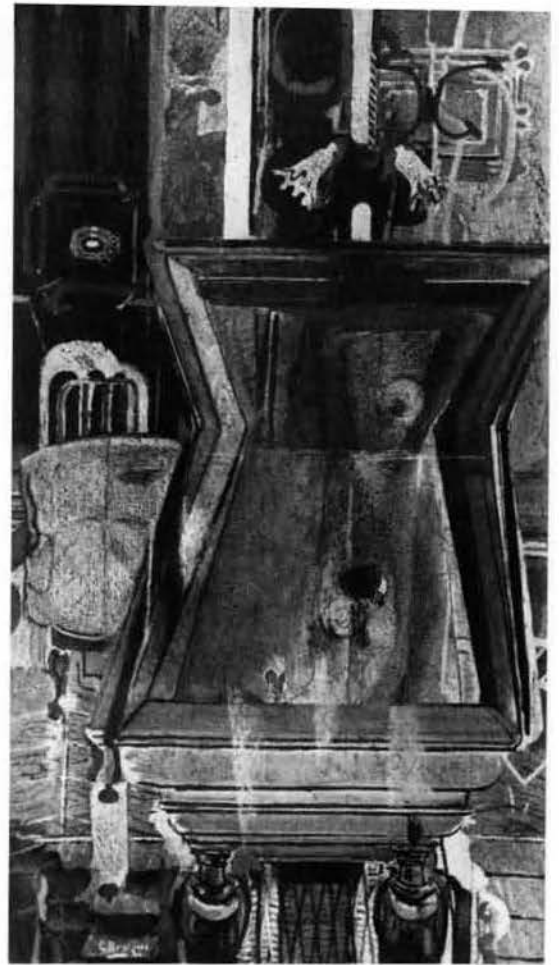


Fig. 69

Fig. 68. Georges Braque, *The Billiard Table*, 1944, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

Plate 13, Fig. 69. Georges Braque, *The Billiard Table*, 1944-52, Mr. Jacques Gelman, Mexico City (No. 30).

carried out in a bright but acid contrast of colors based on yellow and lime green. Among these the big *Sunflowers* (Fig. 71), a glowing, joyous, overflowing work, is not merely an exception but also of special interest and significance. For ambiguity lies at the heart of this almost visionary painting. What are we looking at? The still life on the table has a heavy frame around it. But is it emerging from or being absorbed by this frame? Is it a reflection in a mirror, or a painting of a painting? There is no secure sense of space here. Is there even any space at all? Yet Braque has been at infinite pains to make some parts of the picture tactile and to create an expansive rhythm – as he had in *The Pink Tablecloth* of 1938 (Fig. 50) – with the pointed and undulating flaps of the cloth. This marvelous but puzzling *Sunflowers*, with all its visionary ambiguities, forms an important link in Braque's evolution between his works of the late 1930's and those which were to follow between 1947 and 1955.

It was only after completing this *Sunflowers* that, in 1947,¹ a year which Braque devoted to working by turns on a group of new large compositions, he took up again the other two *Billiard Tables*. The Block version was conceived and begun last but

1. Braque was again seriously ill (pneumonia) in the spring of this year.

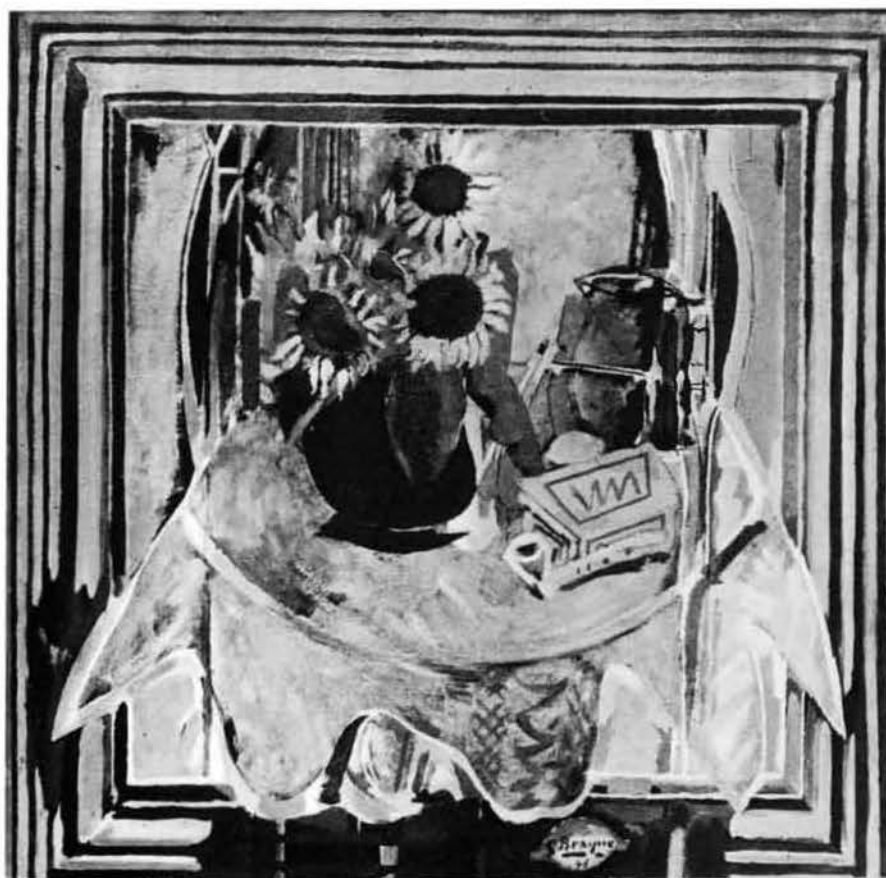


Fig. 71. Georges Braque, *The Sunflowers*, 1946. Collection of the Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, New York.

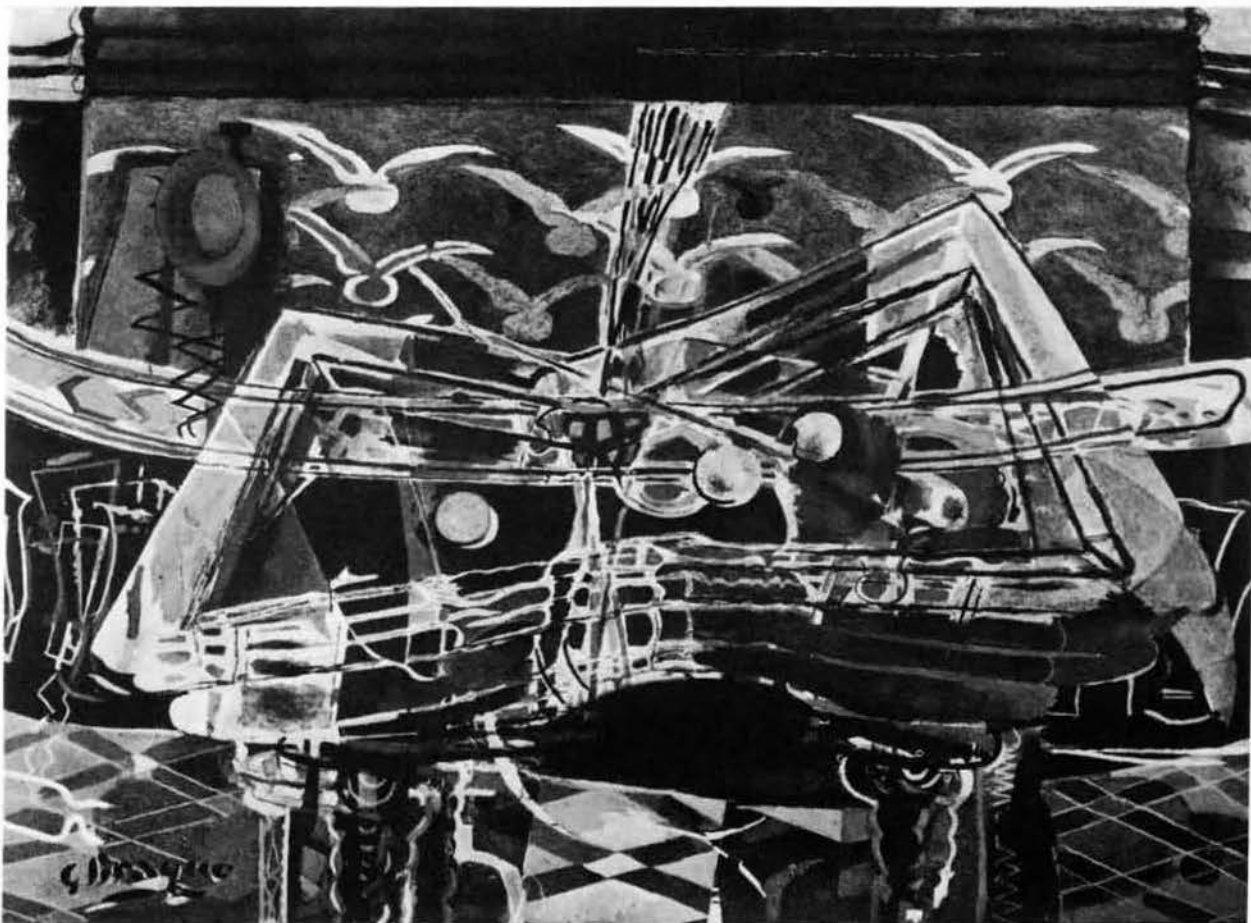


Fig. 72

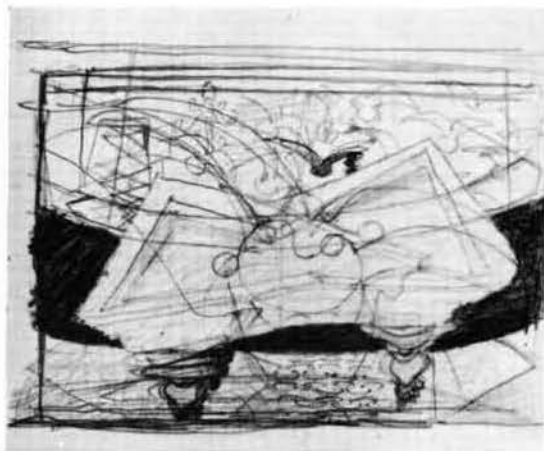


Fig. 70

Fig. 70. Georges Braque, *The Billiard Table*, 1945, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

Fig. 72. Georges Braque, *The Billiard Table*, 1947-49, Mr. and Mrs. Leigh B. Block, Chicago (No. 31).

finished first, in 1949 (Fig. 72). And it was, at that moment, the strangest and most baffling painting Braque had ever executed. Once again, where are we? The turmoil and ambiguities which our eyes encounter wherever they look are disconcerting. Space has been bent this way and that, rhythmic or angular lines carry our eyes from side to side, up and down, from foreground to background, where the wall breaks off abruptly at each end, leaving an area of doubt. Nothing is either solid or quite what it seems to be. However, we are in front of the long side of a billiard table in a room: the tiled (?) floor is visible, and in the background is a hatrack with a hat hanging on it. There are three balls on the table, and the drawing tells us how to identify also the cue lying diagonally across it. Braque has omitted the chandelier which appears in the drawing. But in place of the single bird, which in the drawing is shown hovering over the table, Braque has released a flock of winged things which detach themselves from the wall and fly toward the spectator, thus countering the disappearing diagonals of the table's edges and bringing the composition back onto the plane of the canvas. Braque has used all his accumulated knowledge and experience to make

this picture spatially viable and pictorially adventurous. And he has succeeded triumphantly. This is a picture which carries us stylistically forward into the 1950's, for it is more closely related to the *Studios* than to the vertical *Billiard Table*, which was begun before it in 1944 and only finished much later in 1952. But time did not count for Braque, and he was not in the least disturbed by the overlapping of wholly different styles.

The Gelman *Billiard Table* (Fig. 69) has roots in the past, although it is a far more venturesome, subtle and convincingly structured composition than *Billiard Table I*. This latter was a pioneer work, whereas the Gelman version displays the sureness, unique vision and pictorial know-how of a great master making a lapidary statement. In all three of his big *Billiard Tables*, Braque used the same devices in similar ways to represent a spatial experience, but his idea of bending the further end of the billiard table upward and back in the Gelman version was particularly inventive.

As Braque's painting became increasingly charged with ambiguities and less susceptible of analysis, so it became more esoteric, mysterious and lyrical. This, however, was not a consideration which troubled Braque at all. He always firmly maintained that he painted for himself alone (as Cézanne had done), not for the public – another factor which distinguishes him from Picasso – and though he might regret that other people could not “read” what he had represented on his canvas, or see and feel as he did, he was not prepared to attempt any clarification.

“I am opposed to art for the masses,” Braque had said to Christian Zervos in 1935. “An art which sets out to win the approval of the multitude is a passive art, instigated by some prompting outside of itself. It is official art! In the interests of mankind, one must fight against it with an active art, born of intuition. Only an active art can furnish new elements, that is to say elements which are advantageous to all. . . . However, it is not possible to create these new elements unless one is immersed in the surrounding world, because that is where we belong. . . . I absolutely refuse to believe that an artist can do without it. On the contrary, he must never stop building up and deepening his experience of the world in which he lives.”²

Such was the creative course on which Braque set out from 1947 onward and which found its most glorious expression in his monumental group of *Studios* executed between 1949 and 1956.

2. Vide *Cahiers d'Art*, No. 1, 1935, p. 21.

8

The Studios: 1949–1956

The group of eight *Studios* which Braque executed between 1949 and 1956 were not only his crowning achievement but the most significant and innovatory works of his entire *œuvre*. We have already seen how Braque had advanced toward them in 1938–39 in his paintings of artists and models, and in a large colorful studio interior with a painting of a bird in flight standing on an easel. But these earlier pictures were spirited and easily legible by comparison with what Braque was to paint ten years later. For this new group of *Studios* followed on the heels of the *Sunflowers* of 1946 and the *Block Billiard Table* of 1947–49 (Figs. 71, 72), pictures in which the great stylistic change which was to characterize Braque's late works had already begun to operate. In the *Studios* Braque was to accept to a much greater degree the ambiguities and equivocations of form and spatial structure which appeared in the preceding works because that was how he saw things at moments of speculative contemplation.

In 1947, following a serious illness, Braque had been preparing an elegantly ornamented edition of his diverse thoughts about painting and art in general, which he had been writing down from time to time since 1917. This occupation had started his mind working again, had refreshed his view of his own painting, had stimulated new thoughts which he then began to record, and had led him to employ his idle moments by, as he said, composing pictures in his head. In fact, Braque seems at this time to have looked back over his past work, to have pondered on his own visual and sensory insights into the nature of reality, and to have asked himself whether they had been fully revealed in his paintings. Yet we must beware of concluding that as a result Braque decided what he was going to do next or how he would achieve it. For Braque himself said in an interview: "I'm utterly incapable of forcing my art along specific lines. I have no idea what I'm going to do tomorrow, let alone in a year's time. Preconceived ideas don't exist for me. Every new picture is a gamble, an adventure into the unknown. It seems to me that I 'read' my way gradually into a canvas rather like a fortuneteller



Fig. 73. Braque working in his studio. Photo Alex Liberman.

'reading' tea-leaves. It is the act of painting, not the finished product, which counts. I never know how a painting is going to develop. . . . I have never made a voluntary decision in my life."¹

What Braque did after he had recovered – and it is essential to explain that from this time on, although he was then only sixty-five, Braque was progressively ailing and noticeably aging – was to make a heroic effort to achieve once again "an active art, born of intuition." But now, of necessity, his creativity depended increasingly on his being "immersed" in the small, tranquil but inspiring domain of his own studio, where everything that counted for Braque happened.

The *Studios* are examples of painting at its purest, most intuitive and most lyrical. That is, they happened on the canvas itself, virtually without preparation, and can only be comprehended if we look upon them as records of Braque being his own interlocutor. They are, therefore, to a great degree subjective and esoteric. And the key to appreciating the mood in which they were painted is provided by three *Thoughts* which Braque wrote down at about this time:

"Everything around us is asleep. Reality only reveals itself when it is illuminated by a ray of poetry."

"Poetry endows things with a circumstantial life."

"I am no longer concerned with metaphors but with metamorphoses."

Carrying these thoughts even further, Braque subsequently described his new attitude to painting in an interview with Dora Vallier in these words:

"If I had to try and describe the way one of my pictures evolves, I would say that first of all there is an impregnation, followed by a hallucination – I don't like the word, but it is fairly true – which in turn becomes an obsession. And in order to escape from this obsession one has either to paint the picture or to give up living."

Now let us look at each of the *Studios* in turn and see how much we can discover about what is represented and how the composition has been put together. But before we do so, there are five important considerations to bear in mind. First, all the *Studios* with the exception of *Studio I* are very large canvases. Second, the first five *Studios* were painted contemporaneously in a little more than twelve months, between the end of 1948 and January 1950, when they were exhibited. *Studio VI*, on the

1. *Vide The Observer* (London), December 1, 1957.

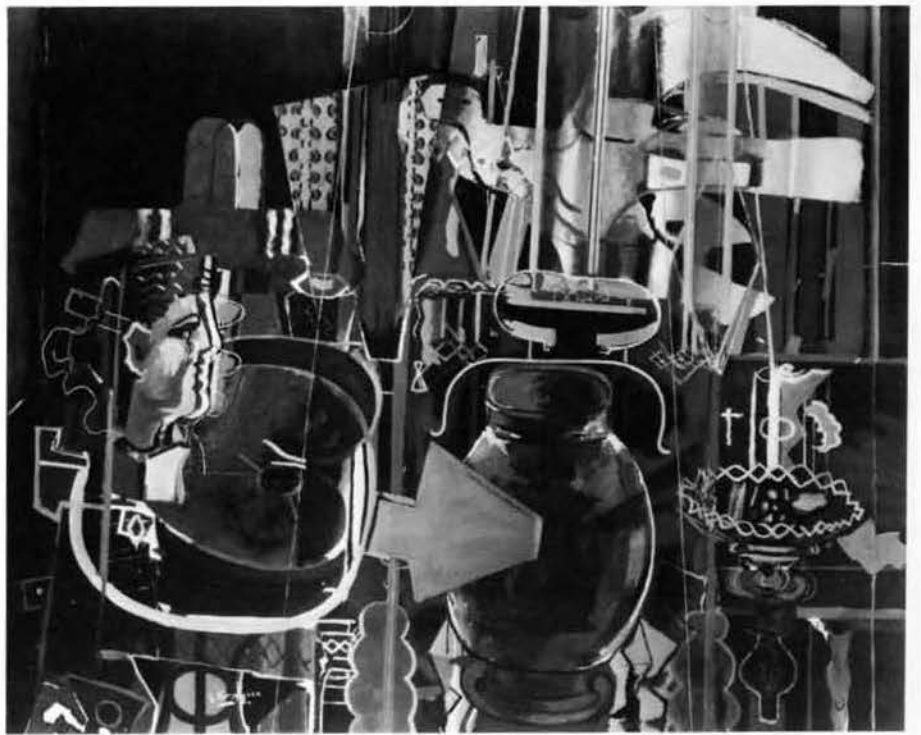


Plate 14, Fig. 74. Georges Braque,
The Studio II, 1949–50.
Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein–Westfalen, Düsseldorf
(No. 32).

other hand, was only begun toward the end of 1949 and not completed until the spring of 1952. *Studio VII* was begun in the fall of 1952–53, and *Studio VIII* some time in 1953. But Braque had to abandon both temporarily in the winter of 1953–54 on account of a serious illness. When Braque came to work on them again in the spring of 1954, he already had behind him the experience gained painting the three big panels of birds in flight for a ceiling in the Louvre (1952–53), as well as the luminous designs for stained-glass windows for a chapel in Varengeville (1953). Both commissions appear to have influenced in a limited degree Braque's conception of these last two *Studios*. As a result, Braque completed *Studio VIII* in the summer of 1955, whereas he largely reworked *Studio VII*, which was not completed until almost a year later in the spring of 1956. Then it lost its original number and became known as *Studio IX*.² The third consideration is that all of these *Studios* are evocations of the private microcosm into which Braque retired during his later years, and that his palette and brushes feature prominently in all but *Studio I*. Fourthly, Braque has adopted – in all but *Studio III* – a consistently frontal viewpoint, and has succeeded by his own inventive pictorial methods in representing a more expansive spatial experience than in the past without having recourse to perspectival logic. And lastly, it was never a question for Braque of evoking in these pictures the containment of a room. He was concerned with celebrating the art and attributes of paint-

2. I. e., there is no *Studio VII* today.

ing, as well as the deeply mysterious sources of his own inspired pictorial vision.

*Studio I*³ (Guerlain Collection, Paris) is formally and structurally the simplest and most direct of the group. Virtually no pictorial space is involved here. Everything is flat, static and frontally presented. The left side is occupied by part of an ornate gilt frame. To the right of that are two of Braque's own paintings, unframed, one standing above the other on a chair in front of a pinkish, grained wall. The lower one is *Pitcher and Lemons* (Private Collection, Paris), painted in 1949, the one behind and above shows an enormous white pitcher silhouetted on a black ground, its base seeming to rest on the upper edge of the lower canvas. Here there is neither mystery nor ambiguity. But Braque seems to be pointing up a contrast between the loose forms, modeling and *matière* of the lower painting, and the tautness of the wholly flat white pitcher in the upper one, where the eye feels volume, although there is no modeling, simply because of the confrontation of white and black.

In *Studio II* (Plate 14, Fig. 74), Braque has allowed his eye and imagination to range freely among the objects of his private world. Here – as in *V*, *VI* and *IX* – everything is in a state of flux, nothing appears either static or quite real, the spatial complexities are considerable and the formal ambiguities no less so. Moreover, this painting is somber in color – dark brown, black and dark grey predominating – although Braque has lightened certain parts to articulate the space. The composition is divided horizontally into two roughly equal halves by a largely invisible line, which runs from the knot of hair on the left through the nose of the sculpted head, above the yellow line of the handle, and on to join the line which comes inward from the right edge. Everything below this line constitutes the foreground and is tactile. The ambiguously situated fruit dish with a bunch of grapes suggests a middle ground, although it, too, really belongs to the foreground. Everything above the line is on a visually more remote background plane. The two planes are, however, interrelated through a series of arbitrary and often equivocal formal devices, such as the indented flowerpot shape outlined in white near the center, or the half-observed diamond shape on the right, or the mysterious grey line emerging from between the ornamental dish and the coffeepot (?) which, higher up, entwines itself in the tail and wings of the bird. Simultaneously, a visual measure of the pictorial space in a vertical sense is provided by two thin, slightly converging, diagonal lines, which also

3. Reproduced in color in R. Cogniat, *Braque* (Paris, 1970), p. 65.



Fig. 75. Georges Braque, *The Studio III*, 1949–50, Mrs. Florene Marx Schoenborn, New York.

effect the transition from foreground to background. It would seem that these lines indicate a line of sight from a point low down outside the canvas. Space is not aggressively flattened here but is articulated, in various parts of the composition, by arbitrarily bent or errant lines, lines of direction, and a complex of vertical planes allied with changes of tone.

In the left foreground of *Studio II* are a sculpted head and a palette on a metal *guéridon*. In the center is another table on which are a large pot and a fruit dish, while on the right is a third table on which are an ornamental metal dish (?) and a coffeepot (?). On the background plane are, on the left, an easel and some patterned wallpaper, whereas the right half is filled by a large, somewhat fragmented, hovering bird, which is freeing itself from a canvas. The right to left movement implied by the bird is countered, in the left foreground, by a large directional arrow pointing to the right. This materialized, as Braque was the first to recognize, through one of those “accidents” which he delighted in turning to a positive pictorial account.

Studio III (Fig. 75)⁴ is a more restricted, more intimate and spatially more equivocal view than we are given in *Studio II*. Apparently it represents objects in a corner of a room. On the side wall is a large electric gadget, then some curtains, and in the background a framed, elongated painting hanging above a larger oval painting or plaque, showing a female head in profile, which presumably stands on an easel. In the foreground is a still-life group consisting of a jug, a palette (on which are patches of red and green), two brushes, a sheet of music and a glass, all of which apparently are disposed on a table covered with a checked cloth. In this painting, Braque has achieved an articulation of space by again resorting to a varying viewpoint, so that we look frontally at the two paintings, but down onto the still life.

Studio IV (Frau Sacher Collection, Basel)⁵ is composed of fewer and larger forms than *II* or *III*, represents a more limited pictorial space, and contains as many ambiguities. It is, however, rather more colorful. The principal compositional elements here are all in the foreground and tactile. On the left is an easel with a painted canvas on it, in the center a jar with brushes, and immediately behind this a palette with three more brushes, then the faint suggestion of a pot, and on the right an ornamental, colored object, which reminds one of the dish on the right in *Studio II*. And over all of this hovers a paper-thin but enormous bird, whose form “rhymes” with that of a palette. Behind these

4. This painting is generally numbered *Studio IV* owing to a misunderstanding. In fact, *Studio IV* is a horizontal canvas (vide *Le Point*, No. 46, October, 1953, pp. 7 and 18), and the painting in the collection of Mme. Sacher, Basel, has this number written on its *châssis* (stretcher). *Studio III* is reproduced in Maeght, 1948–57, p. 11.

5. Vide M. Gieure, *Braque* (Paris, 1956), Plate 129 (color).

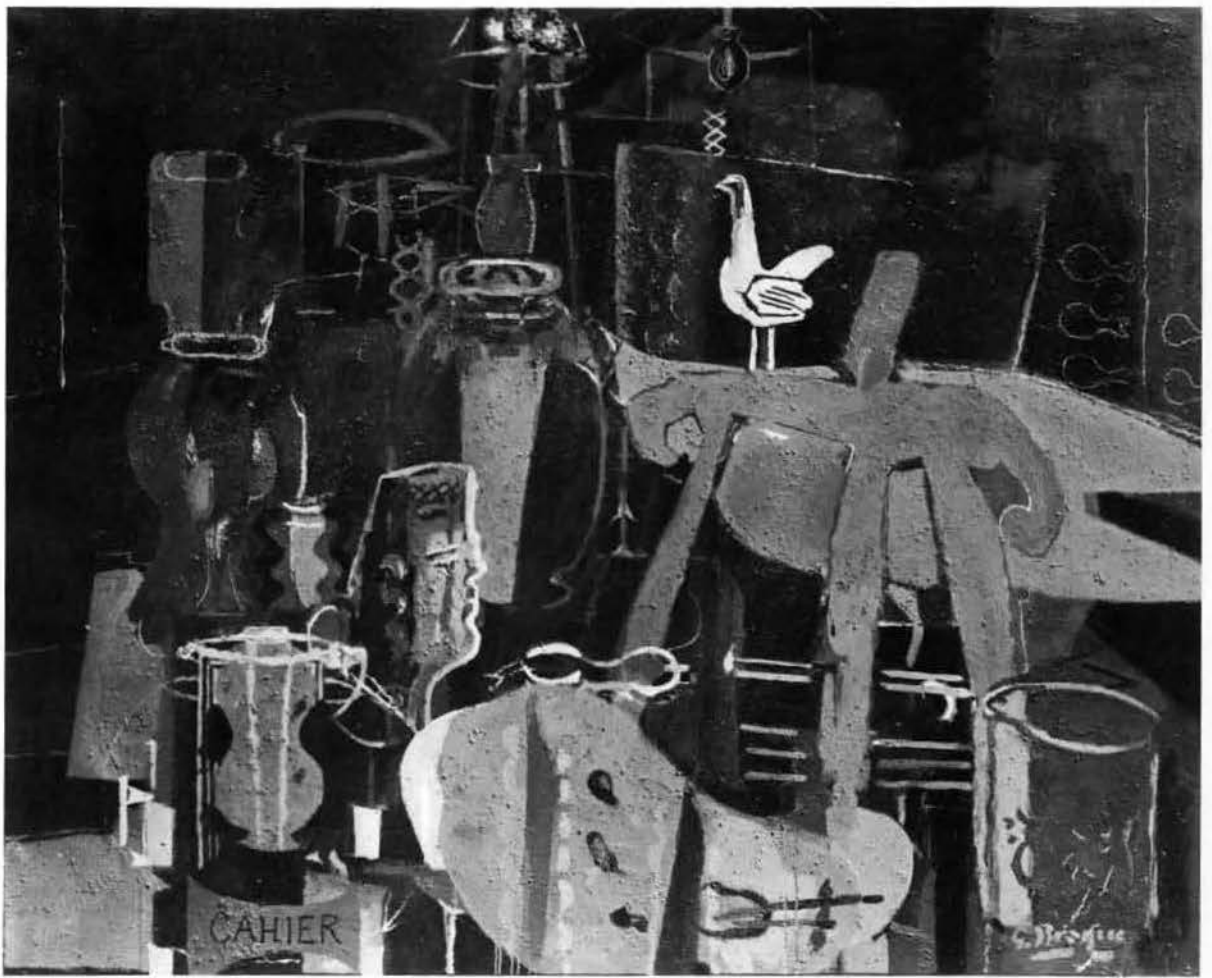


Fig. 76. Georges Braque, *The Studio VI*, 1949–52, *Galerie Maeght, Paris* (No. 33).

objects is a dark background plane traversed by vertical lines. And the two planes are related by a broad but arbitrary grey stripe which originates in the jar in the foreground and disappears behind the easel. Furthermore, Braque has made an effort to give tactile reality to the space in between the palette, the bird and the background by animating it with the sort of broken brushwork and silvery tonalities which he used in his Cubist paintings of 1910–12.

Studio V (Hänggi Collection, Vaduz) and *Studio VI* (Fig. 76) are related to *II* and to each other by the extent of their visual field. But in both *V* and *VI* Braque's handling of the spatial structure is more supple and arbitrary, while he has treated objects with more equivocation than in *II*. The composition of the later paintings also involves a fuller spatial experience in that the objects are on more than two planes between foreground and background. In *Studio V* the immediate and tactile foreground is occupied by a palette with brushes, a jar with other brushes, a bowl with fish swimming in it and a ruler. On a plane behind

these are, from left to right, a small *guéridon* with a cloth, on which is a large pot, then behind the palette the top of a low easel, and another vase. Behind these again are what appears to be a canvas with a carafe painted on it, and a large bird which hovers and occupies more than half the width of the composition. And behind these, in the background, are several undefined forms which may represent easels and canvases, as well as an area of the same wallpaper which appears in *Studio II*. In-between spaces play a great role in the build-up of this picture, whose spatial structure depends on an elaborate play of verticals and diagonals, helped by lines of direction, changes of scale, and abstruse forms like the grey rectangle on the left which links the carafe in the middle ground to the foreground easel.

Studio VI (Fig. 76) is more mysterious, less articulated and more arbitrary. Here the tactile foreground consists of a *cahier* lying on a *guéridon*, a deliquescent palette with brushes and a decorated vase. Behind these are a second *guéridon* with a light colored vase and a sculpted head⁶ on it, then an easel, on top of which a small white bird has perched. Immediately behind the easel is a large, headless, beige-colored bird, which is disappearing among a group of large pots arranged on another table on the left. Higher up, in the right background, are some canvases, a lamp with a bulb hanging from the ceiling, and to the left again what appears to be both a vase with flowers and another hanging lamp. The incised bulblike forms on the right have no literal meaning, and there are also several ambiguous forms on the left. The background in this picture is flat and featureless. The spatial structure depends partially on changes of scale and formal correspondences between foreground and background. But above all Braque has here filled out the pictorial space by a progressive build up of objects, whose in-between spaces he has represented so subtly with changes of color that they articulate the whole.

Braque's mood and vision began to change when he started *Studio VII/IX* (Aimé Maeght Collection, Paris), a square canvas which was already more colorful in its first state than its forerunners and closer in conception to *Studio I*. That is to say, it began⁷ as a composition in the center foreground of which was a large pot, painted on an unframed canvas, which stood in front of (and partially overlapped) a second framed canvas on which was painted a bird in flight. In the left foreground was an arrow emerging diagonally from a vase of foliage, a palette with



Fig. 77. Georges Braque, *Sketch for The Studio VIII*, 1952, pencil and watercolor, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

6. This resembles Braque's plaster head *Hesperis*, made in 1939.

7. Two photographs showing the state of this painting in the spring of 1953 will be found in *Le Point*, No. 46, October, 1953, pp. 7 and 17. Vide also J. Richardson, *Georges Braque* (Milan and London, 1961), Plate 61.



Plate 15, Fig. 78. Georges Braque,
The Studio VIII, 1952–55, Private
Collection (No. 37).

brushes and what appears to be an easel. But when Braque decided to rework this picture in 1955–56, after completing *Studio VIII*, he radically transformed its appearance. The reality of the large pot became equivocal – is it still a painting of a painting or a hallucination? – the still-life forms in the bottom right corner became ambiguous, the upper canvas more or less disappeared, while the bird itself, now fragmented and multi-dimensional, was used to articulate the whole background. Even the former vertical and horizontal structure of this picture was made less evident, so that the most active spatial notation became the arrow aimed at the bird. Basically, this painting has only one plane, but the conjuncture of the substantial pink palette, the ambivalent vase, the multidimensional flapping bird and several arbitrary spatial notations, evokes an experience of an unstable and impenetrable artistic world.

Studio VIII is in another key, at once more stable in composition, more colorful, more consistently elaborated and more expansive. It is, in fact, the most fully furnished and most adventurous of all the *Studios*, and thus forms a brilliant culmination to a succession of masterworks. Braque noted a first idea for *Studio VIII* in his album for 1952 (Fig. 77). This drawing in pencil and watercolor shows two small tables with objects on them in the foreground, a large table behind with a large and a small vase of flowers on it, on the right a canvas and a bird, and on the left an indeterminate vertical form which might be a door. When Braque came to paint the picture, two years later (Plate

15, Fig. 78), he both changed and elaborated this first idea. For instance, the immediate foreground plane, which is tactile, is now filled with at least two small tables with objects on them: reading from the left, a fruit dish with cherries, a dish with two apples in it and a knife, a bunch of grapes, a palette with brushes, a bottle and a ruler. Some of these are easily identifiable, but there are many other forms in the foreground – the cogwheel, for example – which are abstruse and have no literal meaning. The central event in this composition, which determines the area and structure of the pictorial space, consists of three overlapping planes of color: the red canvas on the right from which the large, hovering white bird has detached itself, the irregular greenish-yellow table top on which stand two pale grey pots, and further back the vertical red plane, which now looks more like a canvas than a door. Between the two red forms, in the center of the composition, Braque has established a strong vertical accent with the folds of a curtain, and this verticality is echoed by other forms and lines in different parts of the picture. The horizontal element is emphasized by the bird, by the grey diamond form on the left and by three or four arrowhead shapes pointing from left to right. The pictorial space is also articulated here by an elaborate linear structure down the left side, by the echoing diamond and arrowhead shapes which carry the eye from plane to plane and yet help to keep the picture flat, and by the formal “rhyme” which Braque has established between the outlines of the palette and table in the foreground and the mysterious black form above the red canvas (?) on the left. This last device enables the eye to measure the distance from foreground to background. Everywhere in this picture Braque has animated the in-between spaces and made them palpable: around the bottle he has achieved this by using broken brushwork in pink and green. Lastly, there is a sight line which retreats along the right edge of the canvas, where the black rectangle surely signifies the top of the desk at which Braque wrote and worked on graphics. The forms nearer the foreground seem to represent the folders in which he stored paper, prints and large drawings.

Studio VIII is Braque's most all-embracing composition in the series. It is the most alive and complex, the most dependent on color as an active factor and spatially the most intricate. Yet its formal structure subsumes a greater number of abstruse, ambiguous forms and errant lines, which have no literal meaning but are there to animate the surface or assist the articulation of space, than Braque introduced into any of the other *Studios*.

I have felt obliged to analyze Braque's eight late *Studios* at such length because in them he extended the range of his own hard-won understanding of the possibilities of painting, achieved the fullest and most imaginative expression of his personal vision of space, and showed not only his mastery of, but especially his ability to take liberties with, the stabilizing principles of composition. These pictures are largely esoteric, rhapsodic and disturbingly equivocal. Yet far from taking flight into the empyrean, Braque brings us in his *Studios* closer to the heart of reality. And in them he shows himself, once again, to have been a true successor to Cézanne.⁸ For the pictorial structure in Braque's *Studios*, as in the paintings of Cézanne, is a matter of visual and tactile invention. It does not derive from applying preconceived theories, mathematical formulas, calculated color harmonies or contrasts, or any other kind of scientific notion. Thus every ambiguity, equivocation or apparent distortion in these *Studios* is justified purely and simply by pictorial necessity.

It may be true, as John Richardson has written, that "sometimes shadows have substance, while things of substance turn out to be shadows; forms are flattened and flatness is given form; what is hard is painted as if it were soft; what should be opaque appears transparent, and vice versa; objects are only half indicated, or they merge with one another, become something else and disappear."

But let us for preference listen to Braque talking to Christian Zervos in 1935: "My trend is toward nothingness, that is to say toward nullifying the concept of something in order to get at the thing itself." And let us ponder on the personal relevance of these few *Thoughts* which Braque wrote down:

"To define a thing is to substitute the definition for the thing itself."

"I am not in search of definitions. My trend is toward indefinitions."

"Conformism begins with definition."

"A vase gives form to emptiness, music to silence."

"I do not need to distort. I start from formlessness and create form."

For those who ever sat with Braque in the privacy of his studio, either in Paris or in Varengeville, these eight pictures contain enough recognizable indications to reveal that they are the fruit of long periods of contemplative looking. For Braque sat in a

8. Two paintings by Cézanne, chosen at random in the Metropolitan Museum, New York - *Montagne Ste.-Victoire* of circa 1885-87 (Venturi No. 452) and *Still Life with a Ginger Jar and Eggplants* of circa 1890 (Venturi No. 597) - will suffice to reveal that Cézanne used many of the same linear and structural devices as Braque did in his *Studios*, and that his sense of spatial organization was analogous. Cézanne's use of color, however, differed fundamentally from Braque's in that he accepted local color and relied on tonal modulations.

corner of his studio, on a low settee, from which he could take in the whole extent of his studio and from which, at his leisure, he could look at and react to those of his works which stood around. Some were finished, others half-finished, others still hardly begun; some were framed, others not. They were displayed at different levels, either on small wire supports standing low on the floor, or on proper easels at a higher level. All were



Fig. 79. Braque's couch in his studio. Photo Alex Liberman.

easily accessible, so that whenever Braque felt like working on any of them he could do so at once. In the background, a section of the studio was curtained off, screening canvases which Braque did not wish to be seen; elsewhere along the background wall Braque stacked other canvases more openly. Here and there, in the central space of the studio, were small tables and stools on which stood pots, vases, jars, plants and flowers,



Fig. 80. Braque painting in his studio. Photo Alex Liberman.

as well as Braque's palette, brushes and supply of colors and varnishes. Drawings and prints were apt to be spread out on the floor or on a long table, while Braque's sculptures, plaques and decorated potsherds were in a corner. Pens, pencils, brushes and the like were carefully arranged on top of the desk, while in the corner behind the desk stood a lectern with a drawing album open on it. Hanging on the wall were some musical instruments and Negro sculptures. Nor must one forget the veiled and changing quality of the light in Braque's studio, for he preferred it to come from the south and to be filtered through fine fabric shades. The total effect made by this studio interior, in which everything was carefully and practically placed, was not however of something contrived but of an arrangement which was well judged and consciously aesthetic.

Such was the basis of Braque's everyday visual experience in his own workshop. And it was this familiar material which inspired the *Studios*. Yet as he continued to look, obsession turned into hallucination and the painted bird became a free, mobile element amid it all. Now this winged creature was never intended to be a real bird, and even less a symbol. It originated as a painted bird on a canvas, which Braque later destroyed.⁹ But the bird fought for its life and freedom in one of those tussles, which delighted Braque so much, between a pre-established conception and a painting in progress. And Braque accepted the new situation with equanimity because, by its presence, the bird increased the element of mystery, flux and instability in his *Studios*. In the next phase, as we shall see, the bird became the main element in Braque's pictorial repertory and provided him with a range of volatile subjects.

At this point, having gained some insight into the origins, meaning, spatial organization and poetics of Braque's *Studios*, it is time to face the mysteries they enshrine. And here, once again, it is Braque who shall have the final word in a quote from an interview which he gave in 1957: "To explain away the mystery of a great painting – if such a feat were possible – would do irreparable harm, for whenever you explain or define something you substitute the explanation or the definition for the real thing. The same is true of science. Each time a new problem is solved I feel that something of value has been lost. Instead of having matters made clearer, I should like to have them made even more obscure. . . . There are certain mysteries, certain secrets in my own work which even I don't understand, nor do I try to do so. Why bother? The more one probes, the more one deepens the mystery: it's always out of reach. Mysteries have to be respected if they are to retain their power. Art disturbs; science reassures. If there is no mystery then there is no 'poetry,' the quality I value above all else in art. What do I mean by 'poetry'? It is to a painting what life is to man. But don't ask me to define it; it is something that each artist has to struggle to discover for himself through his own intuition. For me it is a matter of harmony, of *rappports*, of rhythm and – most important for my own work – of 'metamorphosis.' I will try to explain what I mean by 'metamorphosis.' For me no object can be tied down to any one sort of reality. A stone may be part of a wall, a piece of sculpture, a lethal weapon, a pebble on a beach or anything else you like, just as this file in my hand can be metamorphosed into a shoe-horn or a spoon, according to the way in which I use it. . . . Everything changes according to circumstances: that's

9. *Vide Le Point*, No. 46, p. 18.

what I mean by 'metamorphosis.' When you ask me whether a particular form in one of my paintings depicts a woman's head, a fish, a vase, a bird, or all four at once, I can't give you a categorical answer, for this 'metamorphic' confusion is fundamental to the poetry. It's all the same to me whether a form represents a different thing to different people, or many things at the same time, or even nothing at all; it might be no more than an accident or a 'rhyme' such as I like to incorporate in my compositions.

"You see, I have made a great discovery: I no longer believe in anything. Objects don't exist for me except in so far as a *rapport* exists between them, and between them and myself. When one attains this harmony, one reaches a sort of intellectual non-existence – what I can only describe as a state of peace – which makes everything possible and right. Life then becomes a perpetual revelation."¹⁰

10. *Vide The Observer* (London), December 1, 1957.

9

Other Late Works

Though the *Studios* were Braque's greatest achievement during his last years, he also executed other major paintings representing pictorial interests of a different kind. These must now be briefly discussed because some of them are relevant in various ways to the *Studios*, with which they were often being worked on contemporaneously.

First of all there is a group of large canvases having outdoorsubjects. In *The Terrace with an Iron Guéridon* of 1948 (Dr. David Levy Collection, New York), Braque placed a metal garden chair and a *guéridon* with a still life on it, consisting of a lemon, a glass, a carafe and a pitcher, under an awning against a background of foliage. This picture is unusual in that it represents a sun-dappled scene, so that the objects do not appear solid. Here Braque obviously enjoyed painting effects of transparency. The still bigger *Terrace* (Hänggi Collection, Vaduz), which Braque finished late in 1949 after more than a year's work, is spatially more carefully structured and has rhythmic and patterned elements such as one finds in Braque's interiors of 1938–39. Begun while Braque was still working on the last two *Billiard Tables*, and finished after he had begun the first of the *Studios*, this *Terrace* shows him using, though in a more explicit form, some of the same devices for evoking space: diagonals converging toward the background, a vertical and horizontal structure, and the two assertive V shapes which articulate but reduce the pictorial space and bring the table and chairs within reach. There are also many equivocations and ambiguities in this picture: for example, the *guéridon* is melting into the form of a palette, the chairs have no real seats, the ivy trails in space.

In 1952, when Braque was at last completing *Studio VI*, he painted a large vertical composition, *The Philodendron* (Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.). The foreground plane is filled with a garden chair and a metal *guéridon*, on which stand a carafe and an enormous apple; and they are set against a flattened background plane of foliage and curtains. The objects here are insubstantial and the effect decorative. The fragmented *Bicycle*

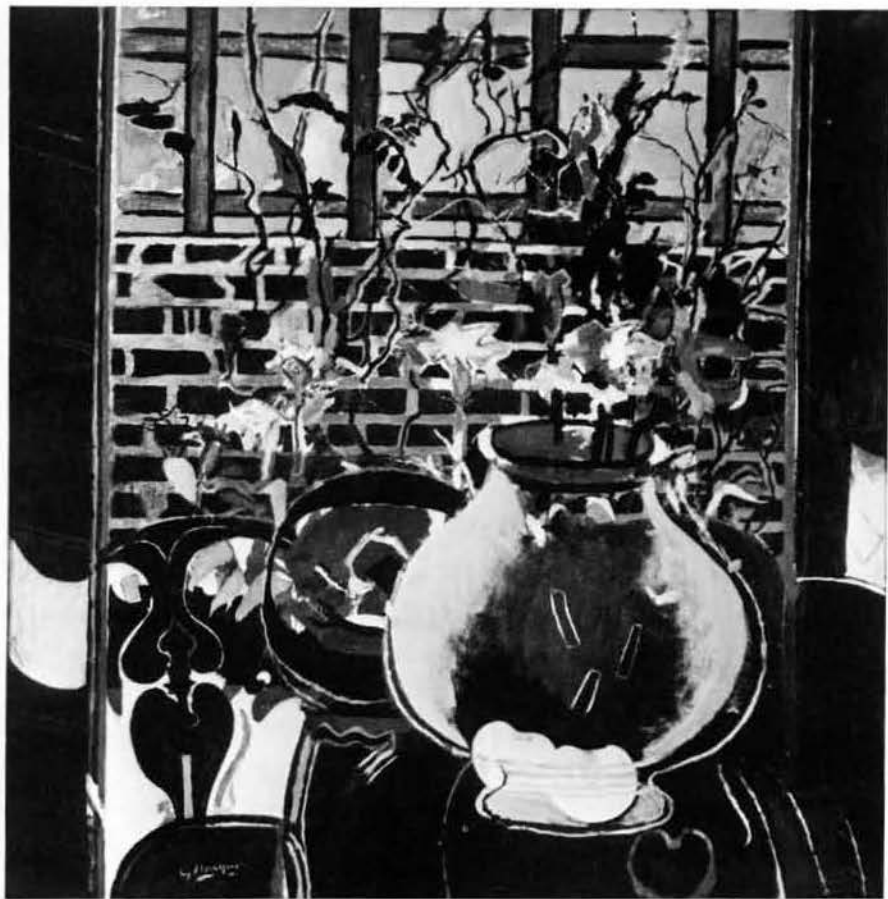


Plate 16, Fig. 81. Georges Braque,
The Trellis, 1953–54, Mr. and Mrs.
 Sidney Brody, Los Angeles (No. 36).

of 1951–52 (Rosensaft Collection, Montreux), which stands against the trunks of two trees in a more or less abstract, shimmering landscape, is even less substantial, though spatially the picture is more articulated.

In 1953–54 Braque painted *The Trellis* (Plate 16, Fig. 81), that is to say after he had completed *Studio VI* (Fig. 76) and before he finished *Studio VIII* (Plate 15). It is a radiant and colorful picture. The spatial structure is established with verticals and horizontals in the background, through which one sees the sky. The errant branches of foliage set up an ornamental counterrhythm to this strict design. However, the “poetry” of the picture resides in the forms of the objects in the foreground, where there are ambiguities and equivocations comparable with those in the *Studios*. The closest and most tactile apple on the table, for instance, exists only in outline, while the dish on which the two apples behind it are sitting has been absorbed with them into the base of the large flower vase. Inside the vase, the foliage has lost all but three fragments of its stalks. The chair is only half present. The curving white shapes on both sides have no literal meaning.

Around 1950, and for the next few years, Braque started to look at and reconsider the finished and unfinished paintings of a lifetime which had accumulated in his two homes. He thus became involved in an extensive program of destruction or completion. We have already seen that in 1952 Braque put the finishing touches to a *Guéridon* that he had begun in 1939 (Fig. 52), and that he completed a large *Billiard Table* begun in 1944 (Fig. 69). He also destroyed a great many works which no longer met with his approval. He did, however, take a renewed interest at this time in some large figure paintings which he had made in 1931–32 and then abandoned. The first two of these to which he decided to give new life are now known as *Night*, completed in 1951 (Galerie Maeght, Paris), and *Reclining Woman*, completed in 1952 (Plate 17, Fig. 82). Originally, both of these figures must have been executed in the simplified rhythmic idiom, based on bold colored shapes and sinuous contours, which Braque used in several paintings of incorporeal bathers in 1931. Now, in the 1950's, Braque transformed them into creatures of uncertain anatomy, while making them at least more palpable through an elaborate, though arbitrary, fragmentation of their forms and volumes and the use of a broken brushwork such as one finds in his Cubist paintings of 1910–12.¹ In particular, the nude *Reclining Woman*, which is the most complex and impressive of the group, has lost her original flatness. She lies on her cushions with a still life around her and fills the space of the room, seeming almost to touch the framed still life hanging on the background wall. These two latter-day cubistic figure paintings thus oblige us to look back across four decades to find their forerunners in works like *Woman with a*

Plate 17, Fig. 82. Georges Braque,
Reclining Woman, 1930–52,
Galerie Maeght, Paris (No. 34).



Mandolin of 1910 (Neue Pinakothek, Munich) and *The Portuguese* of 1911 (Kunstmuseum, Basel). Then we cannot fail to see how in these early Cubist works, Braque had managed to represent volume, space and factual reality in basic terms by relying on a combination of reason and intuition, whereas in his paintings of the 1950's, by contrast, he was representing a less material vision of reality in pictorial terms which were more involved, more equivocal and more freely invented.

By comparison with these two figure paintings, *Ajax*, begun in 1949 and completed in 1954 (Fig. 83), has great dash but is a less adventurous achievement, because its conception is essentially decorative. Braque's first idea for this composition exists as a wash drawing in his album for 1932 and shows Ajax wrestling with another male figure. In the painting, Braque retained only the right leg of the second man, so that Ajax advances alone to the attack. No space is involved in this picture, where Ajax is presented in profile and silhouette. He is delineated in the flat linear idiom which Braque invented in 1931–32 for classical subjects. However, in the 1950's Braque enhanced and enlivened the rhythmic tangle of lines with a rich spattering of colors – fiery red, blue, mauve, with some additions of yellow and green.

Before he had completed either *Ajax* or *The Trellis*, Braque had to stop working for several months in the winter of 1953–54, owing to a serious illness. But shortly before he fell ill Braque had designed three stained-glass windows for a chapel in Varengeville. In these we find the bright translucent colors – red, blue, greenish-yellow, pink – which appear modestly in *Ajax*, but more confidently in *Studios VIII* and *IX*. Braque had also completed in the fall of 1953, after a year's work, three large compositions of black birds, outlined in white against a dark cobalt-blue sky, for the ceiling in the Etruscan Gallery in the Louvre. All of these works affected, in some measure, what he was to do next.

Once Braque had allowed the bird to take leave of the canvas in his studio, he found its mobility so fascinating that he soon accepted it as a major theme for his late works. Everything began with the Louvre ceiling. After that, we find Braque executing two decorative panels of birds in flight for his own dining room, and two more panels for the salon of M. Maeght's villa at St. Paul de Vence, all painted in 1954. These were, however, suave and elegantly shaped but not tactile birds. In 1955–56 Braque reached out toward his birds and tried to discover them

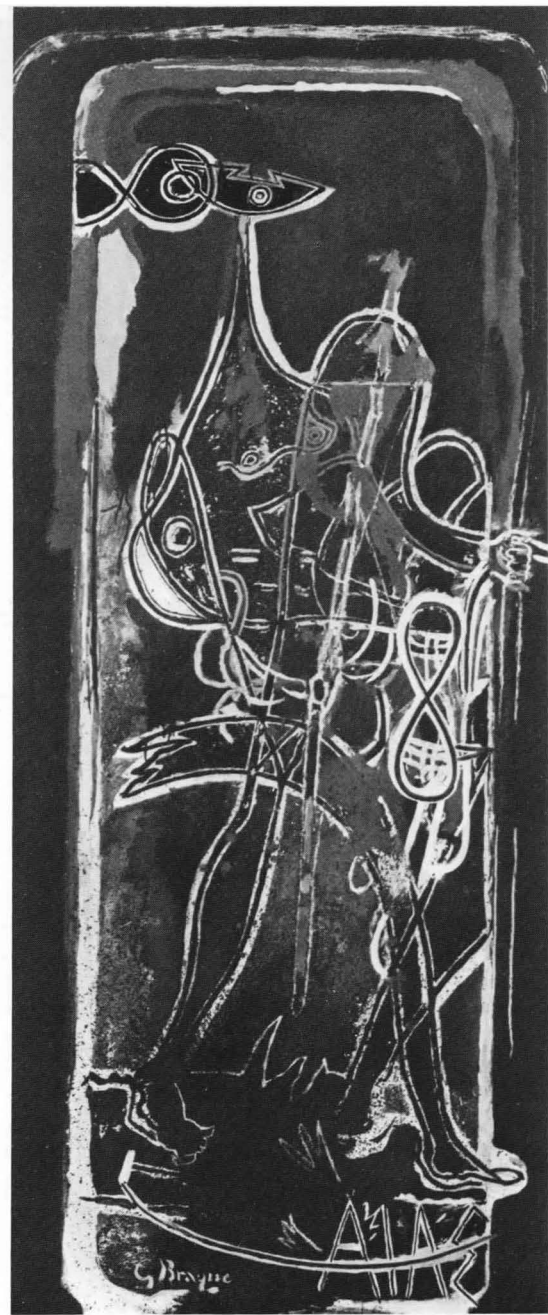


Fig. 83. Georges Braque, *Ajax*, 1949–54, oil on paper, Mrs. Florene Marx Schoenborn, New York.

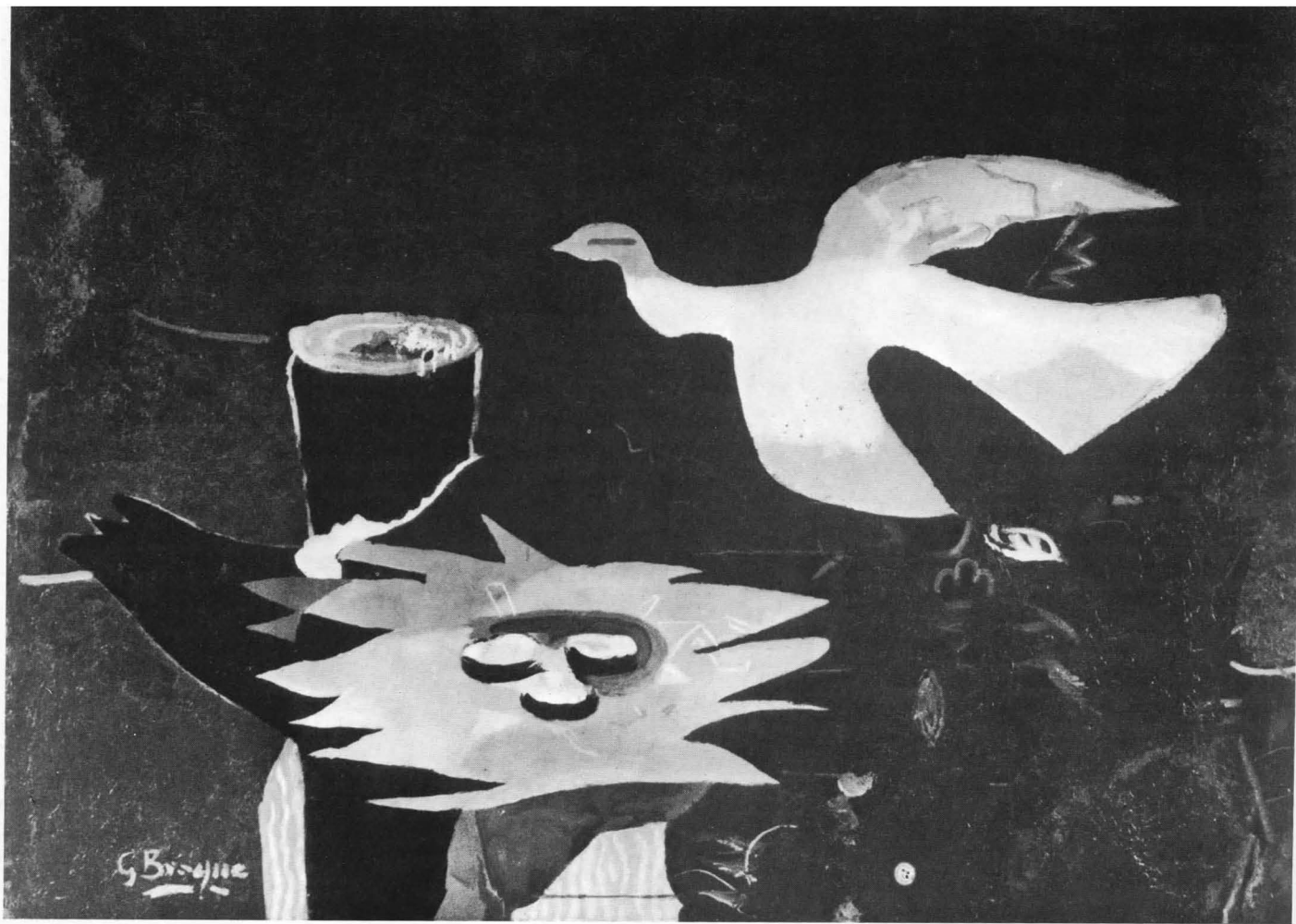


Fig. 85

Fig. 84. Georges Braque, Bird Returning to Its Nest, 1952, pencil drawing, M. and Mme. Claude Laurens, Paris.

Fig. 85. Georges Braque, Bird Returning to Its Nest, 1955-56, Musées Nationaux, Paris (No. 38).

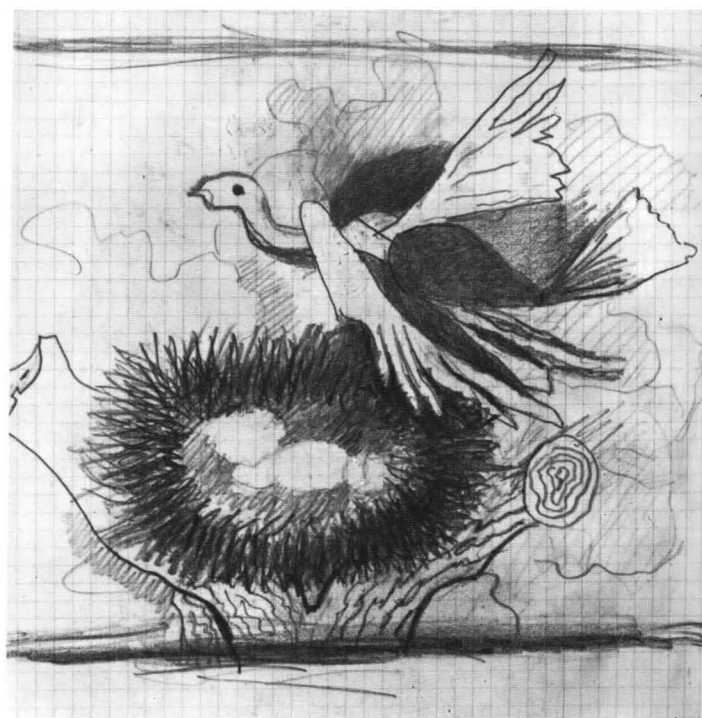


Fig. 84

in their true element – air or space. He set about building up a very thick impasto to make not only of the plumage, but even of the clouds and the remote blue of the sky, a new tactile reality. For in Braque's view it was above all *matière* that aroused the spectator's tactile sense.

Braque's first great achievement in this line of painting was the *Bird Returning to its Nest* (Figs. 84, 85), finished in 1956, a mysterious, nocturnal episode in which even the whites of the bird and its eggs are muted to a cool beige, while all around it is carried out in browns so dark that they verge on black. Braque's next major canvas with a bird theme was *On the Wing*, also completed in 1956. Here a cloud materialized as a voluminous, dark, round shape in the middle of a coarsely granular, texturally opaque blue sky, through which an elongated bird pursues its slow, heavy flight.

At the end, Braque's imagination was haunted by the possibility of re-creating in paint a meaningful expression of the sky with its clouds, sun, moon and winged inhabitants. He even carried this preoccupation over into his small but heavily charged landscapes and beach scenes, painted during summer vacations at Varengeville, where he made the lowering sky, the roughly tilled earth or the ripening wheat fields into harsh tactile experiences.

But from 1956 on, Braque's health and strength were constantly on the decline. He therefore made no paintings of importance after this date, although he labored away and brought to completion a few beautiful works which he had begun in the early 1950's. Braque worked primarily during his declining years in the graphic media, illustrating books for friends or making lithographs in color as well as in black and white. Over forty of these were concerned with birds, and Braque did not seem to have exhausted the imaginative appeal of this subject when he died, at the age of eighty-one, on August 31, 1963.

10

In Conclusion

"This painter is angelic," Guillaume Apollinaire wrote in his foreword to the catalog of Braque's first one-man exhibition at the Kahnweiler Gallery in Paris in November 1908. "Purer than other men, he ignores everything foreign to his art which might suddenly distract him from the paradise in which he lives."

It is hard to believe that, at the time, Apollinaire can have been aware of the full import of what he had written. But now, over sixty years later, and at the end of this long study of Braque's pictorial conceptions and his struggle to realize them in his paintings of the post-Cubist years, Apollinaire's words have, I hope, taken on a more forceful significance. For Braque's uniqueness among contemporary artists does, in fact, lie in his spiritual "purity," and in the "purity" with which he handled the pictorial means. Admittedly, the scope of Braque's personal vision, his outlook on reality, was limited, as was his range of pictorial expressiveness. But against this we must set the fact that there is, in his pictures, a distillation of formal, spatial and tactile values which endows them with the force of veracity. Therein lies their strength and fascination, as well as the essence of Braque's artistic greatness.

Georges Braque, *artiste-peintre* – for he referred to himself constantly by that evocative craftsmanly designation – was a humble and dedicated craftsman for whom painting was not merely a way of life but more importantly his whole life. He allowed no sort of political, sentimental, tragic or historical events in the world outside of his studio or, more surprisingly, in his private life to "distract him" from the regular pursuit of his profession or to insinuate themselves, by way of troubling his conscience, into the matter of his painting. And the only exceptions to this absolute statement are what I believe to have been a partially conscious symbolism, born of sinister memories and a peaceable nature, which is discoverable in Braque's pictures of 1938–39, and again the self-evident drabness and change of subject matter which occurred in Braque's wartime pictures painted between 1940 and 1945. These two moments of yield-

ing are, however, the most eloquent proof, in my opinion, that Braque did not live entirely on a plane outside of the world of actuality, as several writers have tried to maintain. Nor should we forget that, for all their "poetry," delectable paint qualities and bypassing of time, Braque's pictures require from us an awareness of worldly values and sensations. True, we will find no indications of love, fury, gloom or current events. But then, even in Braque's paintings of the Cubist period one can look in vain for those topical allusions which occur in the works of Picasso and Gris. Nor did Braque allow a sense of fun, a joke, a pun or an element of caricature to enter into his work. Yet Braque the man was certainly neither devoid of a sense of humor nor humanly insensitive.

Not every artist has to be demonstrative, extroverted or temperamentally expressionist in his work to achieve greatness, though nowadays this fallacy is widely disseminated. There exists a psychological process known as sublimation. Van Gogh, a northerner, saw and felt the effects of the meridional sun in such an acute way that he tortured his paintings and drawings in order to achieve a visual equivalent to "the high yellow note" which seemed to assail him. Cézanne, on the other hand, who was meridional by birth, contained the force of his visual and physical experiences as he observed the canicular and sun-baked Provençal landscape, so that he could concentrate on making a formally satisfying and visually true picture, in which the tonal factors would evoke the rest through the plenitude of their sensorial expressiveness. We would be wrong to assume, however, that less passion went into the creation of one of Cézanne's paintings than into one of Van Gogh's. So it was with Braque.

It is on this reticent plane of creative genius that we must come to terms with the paintings of Georges Braque, the most purposeful, reserved, intuitive and yet sensitively attuned artist of the twentieth century.

Braque, I believe, changed his personality twice over the years. The original Braque who, in 1906-7, openly confessed to his love of the "physical painting" of Fauvism was himself at that time a physically conscious human being. For the youthful Braque was a sporting type who went in for boxing, bicycling and swimming, although none of these occupations are reflected in his pictures of the time. And Braque's painting remained robust throughout the Cubist period, although his delicate sensibility often showed through. Then Braque was very seriously wound-



Fig. 86. A corner in Braque's engraving studio.
Photo Alex Liberman.

ed, and from 1917 we have to reckon with the emergence of a new personality in Braque, an artist absorbed in painting as an art and in the elements of a private microcosm. Almost thirty years later, a third personality developed in Braque, the withdrawn artist pursuing a unique vision of space and the pictorial possibilities of representing a reality which had come to exist for him sensorially rather than materially.

Yet throughout Braque's life as a painter, one factor remained constant: his innate feeling for and love of painting as an art. To say that Braque was as much a craftsman as an artist is not to do him an injustice. For part of his inventive brilliance lay in the fact that he was the first craftsman-painter to harness the everyday methods of an artisan's stock-in-trade to the needs of a more sophisticated type of painting and produce thereby some of the subtlest and most innovative painting of the twentieth century. Now Braque did not search around for ways and means of displaying his craftsmanly tricks. Being one of the most intuitive painters who have ever lived, Braque's inventive solutions came to him spontaneously. Faced with a problem – as happened so often in the Cubist years – Braque found the solution by drawing on acquired knowledge. That is how it happened with the introduction of *faux-bois*, *faux-marbre* and the paintcomb, with the creation of *papier collé* and with his use of ornamentally shaped canvases. Indeed, the mysteries, surprises and sudden changes in Braque's painting were all the result of intuitive promptings, never of intellectual reasoning. He might, and did, compose pictures in his head, and make a note in an album of the idea as it had occurred to him. But when it came to painting the picture, everything passed through a melting pot and had to happen again on the actual canvas. Braque made no intermediary or preparatory sketches or studies, was never concerned with whether or not he had fulfilled some original intention, and until the final moment was ready to accept, absorb or give fuller pictorial meaning to some formal "accident," happy "rhyme" or fortuitous technical effect which had found its way into his picture. Therein lies the key to what looks like effortless in the carrying out of his pictures.

Yet Braque was also a thoughtful and reflective artist. He was, therefore, a slow and deliberate worker. Braque was not, like Picasso, an artist whose inspiration flowed so freely that he could produce a required design in a matter of minutes. A long process of trial and error preceded the completion of his lithographs, book illustrations and posters. In the same way, he had a basic design in his head when he began working on canvas. But

being concerned above all that, when it was finished, the picture he was painting should contain its own truth and reality and should not be mistaken for an imitation or illusion of some other (perhaps better-known) reality outside of itself, Braque always allowed pictorial needs and necessities to prevail over his original intentions.

Once again we can turn to Braque's own writings for an account of how his methods worked:

"Without having striven for it, I do in fact end by changing the meaning of objects and giving them a pictorial significance which is adequate to their new life. When I paint a vase, it is not with the intention of making an utensil capable of holding water. It is for quite other reasons. Objects are re-created for a new purpose: in this case, that of playing a part in a picture.... Objects always adapt themselves easily to any demands one may make of them. Is it not the poet's role in life to provoke continual transformations of this sort on everything around us? Once an object has been integrated into a picture, it accepts a new destiny and at the same time becomes universal. If it remains an individual object this must be due to lack of improvisation or imagination. And as they give up their habitual function, so objects acquire a human harmony. Then they become united by the relationships which spring up between them, and more important between them and the picture and ultimately myself. Once involved in this universality, they all draw closer together, because we have human eyes, and then they refer uniquely to ourselves."

Where had Braque learned that pictorial needs had to come first? The answer is, of course, from Cézanne. Cézanne was not merely the painter Braque admired and respected above all others, but the painter whose work had first opened his eyes to the fact that it was possible to represent and evoke a full spatial experience by strictly pictorial means without having recourse to eye-fooling devices and geometric theorems. And the example of Cézanne is implicit in every stage of Braque's evolution. The two painters had a similar conception of how to represent volume and spatial relationships; they even used similar methods of composition. They both believed that within the area of his canvas the painter could treat the facts of reality according to his own requirements, so that what he made pictorially true became visually acceptable as a re-creation of reality. Cézanne and Braque differed in only one major respect: their handling of color. And this can be explained by the differ-



Fig. 87. Braque's palette and brushes. Photo Alex Liberman.



Fig. 88. Braque's pencils and engraving tools on his drawing table. Photo Alex Liberman.

Overleaf:
Fig. 89. Braque in his studio. 1958.
Photo Alex Liberman.





ence between their generations. For where Cézanne, with his background of Impressionism, always took account of the transient effects of light and used tonal modulations to create volume and recessive space, Braque, having discovered that color could be separated both from form and from line was able to use it as an independently functioning element with no atmospheric connotation. What also draws Cézanne and Braque close together in the end is the fact that they both relied on paint alone to achieve their pictorial purpose. They used no tricks, and no formulas, nor did they take refuge in illusions.

What painter of the twentieth or any other century has been able, as Braque was, to transform the sight of ordinary household things – a table, a cloth, a newspaper, a fruit dish, a pack of cigarettes, a clay pipe, some bread, a glass, some grapes, a lemon, an apple or a knife – into a pictorial vision at once so harmonious, subtle, monumental, colorful and yet intimate? What other painter has conveyed so vividly and immediately the telling differences of surface texture which distinguish one object from another? What painter has made us visually more aware of the complexity of our modes of sight and touch, and above all of the complex relationships existing between ourselves and the objects in our daily life?

I believe that the twentieth century has been unjust to Braque in its critical evaluation of his work. Was he perhaps too independent and unassuming as an artist? In this age of schools and labels, there is none which can be applied to Braque after the Cubist years. Was his painting perhaps too concentrated and subtle to attract the admiration it deserves in this century which has made a cult of elegant abstraction, slob-drip expressionism, erotic fantasy and garish "pop"? Ten years after his death, it is time to look afresh at a small but representative group of major works executed by Braque between 1918 and 1956. In these, where he realized his pictorial vision most completely, we can discover the workings of his great inventive powers and his superb handling of paint. And then, I think, we cannot fail to conclude that Georges Braque was one of the greatest and most original artists of our time.

March 1972
Argilliers

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D. C.

