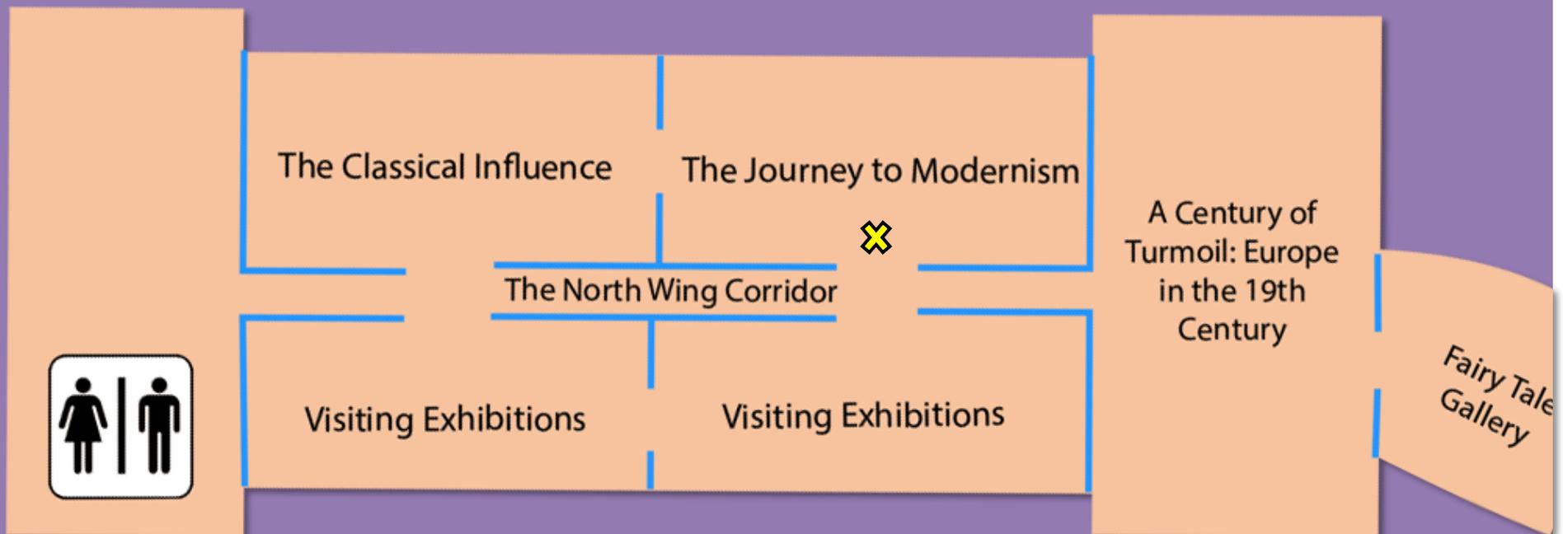


A Journey
to Modernism

Map of The R.W. Norton Art Gallery North Wing

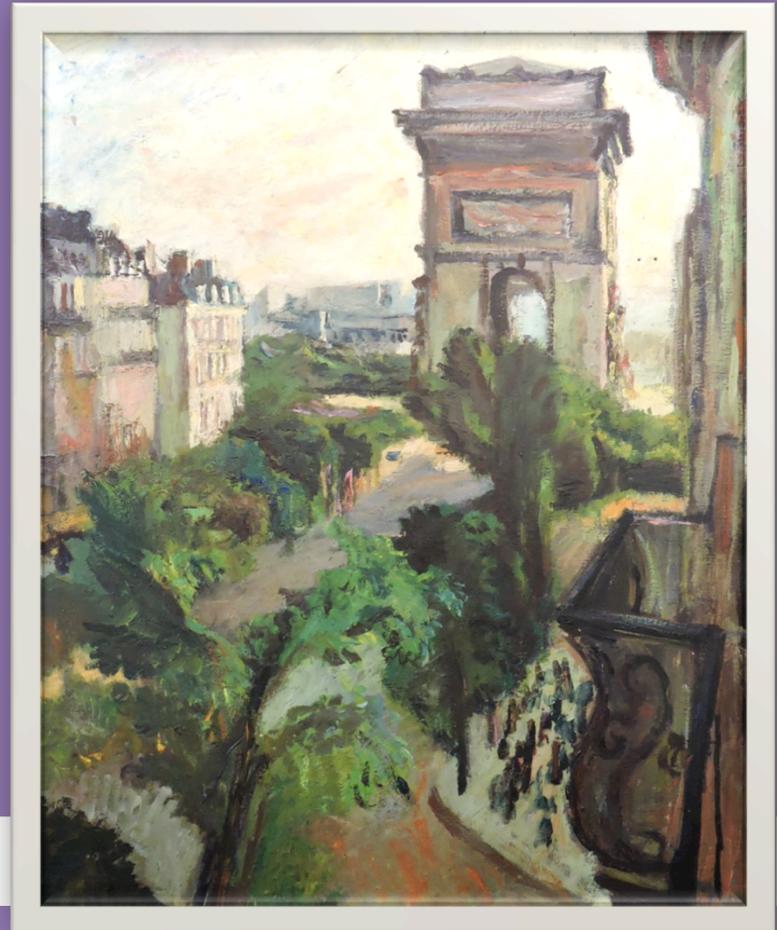


The  tells where the exhibit is located in the museum.

“No artist is ahead of his time. He is his time.”
- Martha Graham

When the 19th century dawned, painters and sculptors had been making works whose main purpose since the Renaissance was to reproduce reality. But by the end of the 19th century, the invention of photography allowed even non-artists to capture the scene before them and both philosophers and scientists had begun to question the very idea of reality.

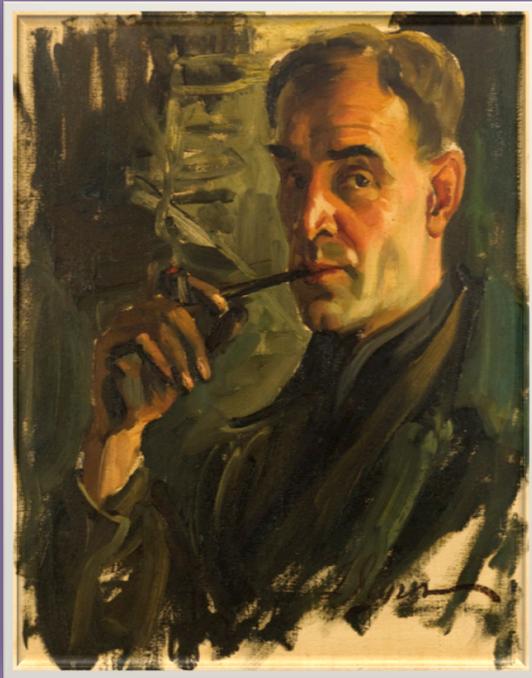
Modernism arose out of artist's attempts to deal with these new issues.



L'Arc de Triomphe
Edy-Legrand, Edouard Leon Louis (1892 – 1970)

“Modern art must strike out from the old. The new is not revealed to those whose eyes are fastened in worship upon the old.” - Albert Pinkham Ryder

At the beginning of the 19th century, Academic art based on Neo-Classicism was the standard, but soon a new movement arose called Romanticism, which was more attuned to the feelings of both the subject and the artist and favored a looser, more painterly approach. But, like Neo-Classical works, it continued to focus on subjects



Portrait of Alexei Iacovleff
Gleb Alexander Ilyin (1889 – 1968)

drawn from history, mythology, or religion and relied on a direct representational style almost photographic in effect. Paul de la Boulaye's *Joan of Arc* is an example of an Academic painting influenced by the Romantic movement.



Joan of Arc
Paul de la Boulaye (1849 – 1926)

What differences do you notice between Boulaye's painting and the *Portrait of Alexei Iacovleff* by Gleb Ilyin?

“There are no lines in nature; only areas of color one against another.”
- Claude Monet

The first Major movement to break with the Academic style was Impressionism, which emerged in France in the 1860s and 70s. The Impressionists rejected the idea of painting as a form of narration or an expression of emotion and focused instead on what we actually see in terms of color and light. They used broken brushwork, swathes of color, and negative space (areas of the painting that lack definition and detail, i.e. “empty space”) to explore what the eye actually takes in.



Portrait of a Young Girl with Dog
Adele Kindt (1804 – 1884)

Compare the Academic style of Adele Kindt's *Portrait of a Young Girl with Dog* with Camille Whitehurst's American Impressionist work *Summer*.

Why did Whitehurst name her painting *Summer* as opposed to the more direct descriptive title given to Kindt's painting?



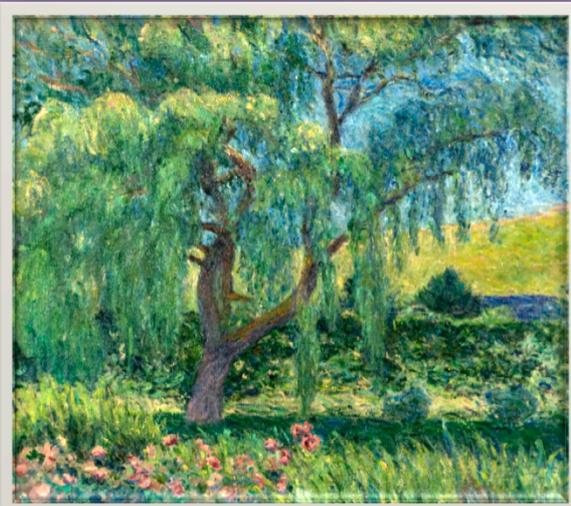
Summer
Camille Whitehurst (1871 – 1936)

Il faut être de son temps. - motto of the Impressionists

One of the first new ideas the Impressionists brought to art which, in turn, passed on to Modernism was their motto: *Il faut être de son temps* – *It is necessary to be of one's own time*. Instead of choosing their subjects from major figures and events from the past, they wanted to focus on the world around them, whether it was the colors exploding in a country garden or a carriage passing down the street.



Le Grands Boulevards, Paris
Childe Hassam (1859 – 1935)



Giverny, le seule et la rosarie
Blanche Hoschedé-Monet (1865 – 1947)

Another way they added immediacy to their work was to borrow from the photograph the sense of capturing a single moment by eschewing traditional composition.

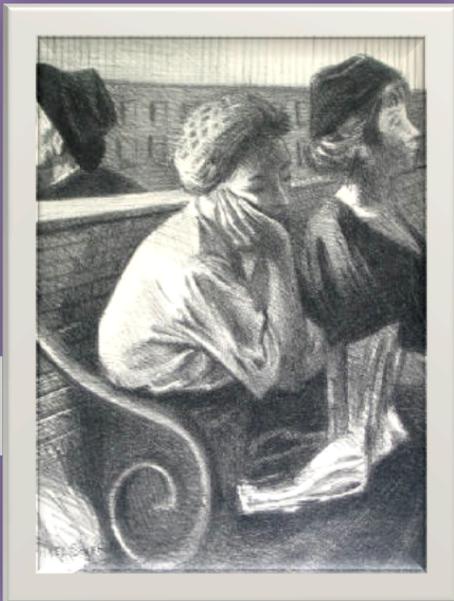
Note how Impressionist Edgar Degas has chosen to depict his friend, fellow Impressionist Mary Cassatt, in his print *Au Louvre, la peinture, Mary Cassatt*.



Au Louvre, la peinture, Mary Cassatt
Edgar Degas (1834 – 1917)

“The music must repeat the thought and aspirations of the people and the time. My people are Americans and my time is today.” - George Gershwin

For many Modernists, as with the Impressionists, the focus on capturing the world around them included depicting the working and lower middle classes rather than the aristocracy. Both Robert Philipp's painting *The Drama* and Raphael Soyer's lithograph *Railroad Waiting Room* feature working class women, their social status revealed by their appearance and their



Railroad Waiting Room
Raphael Soyer (1899 – 1987)



The Drama
Robert Philipp (1895 – 1981)

1. What visual clues are we given to the young women's social status in each work?
2. Why do you think this particular movement reached its height in the 1930s and 40s?

“Sculpture is the art of the hole and the lump.”
- Auguste Rodin

Though there was no direct sculptural equivalent of Impressionism, many scholars feel that the work of Auguste Rodin comes closest to that description, both because he broke with Academic conservatism and because he prefigured Modernist sculpture. Like the French Impressionists, Rodin rejected the narrative tradition that based every sculptural work on history or myth. There is no story implied in his work. He also showed a new interest in respecting the medium as a major element of the art in its own right. In *Head of a Young Girl*, he deliberately leaves some of the marble unfinished, tool marks evident in the stone. This calls attention to the marble itself, rather than allowing it to “disappear” into a portrait where the focus is simply on the likeness. Now the viewer considers not only the image, but also the way in which it relates to the medium, in this case, the marble.

This is also a move toward a greater abstraction of form, as Modernist sculpture Archipenko has done in *Spring Awakening*.



Head of a Young Girl
Auguste Rodin (1840 – 1917)



Spring Awakening
Alexander Archipenko (1887 – 1964)

1. How is Rodin's *Head of a Young Girl* closer to the Academic tradition than Archipenko's work?
2. Why do you think Archipenko's sculpture is titled *Spring Awakening* rather than something like *Female Torso*? Compare this title, for instance, with our earlier question about *Summer* as opposed to *Portrait of a Young Girl with Dog*. What does that suggest about the direction Modernism was taking in thinking about the purpose of art?

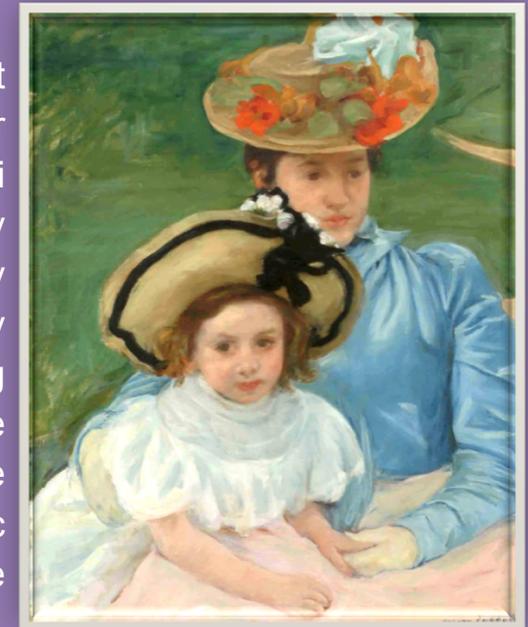
“I dream of painting and then I paint my dream.”
- Vincent van Gogh

French Impressionists wanted to eliminate both narrative and emotion from their paintings and focus on color and light. But, just as they reacted in opposition to the Academic artists who preceded them, a new group of artists rebelled against the strictures of the Impressionists. The first of these artists, including Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, began their careers by exhibiting with the Impressionists, but soon found their own style and became known as the Post-Impressionists.



Joan of Arc
Paul de la Boulaye (1849 – 1926)

Among these was a unique artist who worked primarily in a new, popular genre - the poster. His name was Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Using the newly developed color lithography pioneered by Jules Cheret, he created many masterworks in the poster form, including *Divan Japonais*. As the title suggests, the recent introduction of Japanese art to the West also influenced artistic developments among both the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, particularly in their use of flat planes and negative space.



Mother and Daughter Both Wearing Large Hats
Mary Cassatt (1844 – 1926)

What differences do you notice between *Divan Japonais* and the work of the Impressionists in general?

“Make it new!” - Ezra Pound

Posters were a key genre in another movement that bridged Impressionism and Modernism, Art Nouveau (literally, a “New Art”). Where most of these movements continued to focus more or less exclusively on what were typically called “fine arts”, like oil painting on canvas and sculpting, the proponents of Art Nouveau were reacting against the very idea that the decorative arts were somehow inferior and even inconsequential. They sought to elevate craftsmanship and modernize design in response to the prevalence of mass market factory-made imitations of ornate Victorian design. Art Nouveau favored flowing, organic lines, resembling those found in nature, and pure geometric forms that often imitated styles in early Greek, Egyptian, and Byzantine art.

1. How is the treatment of color different in *Reverie du Soir* than that you have seen in both the Impressionists and Toulouse-Lautrec?
2. What elements do you see in Mucha's work that reflect Greek, Byzantine, or Egyptian elements?
3. Allegory means using images as symbols for ideas about life, or from political or historical situations. What do you think the woman in *Reverie du Soir* is an allegory for? The title may give you a hint.

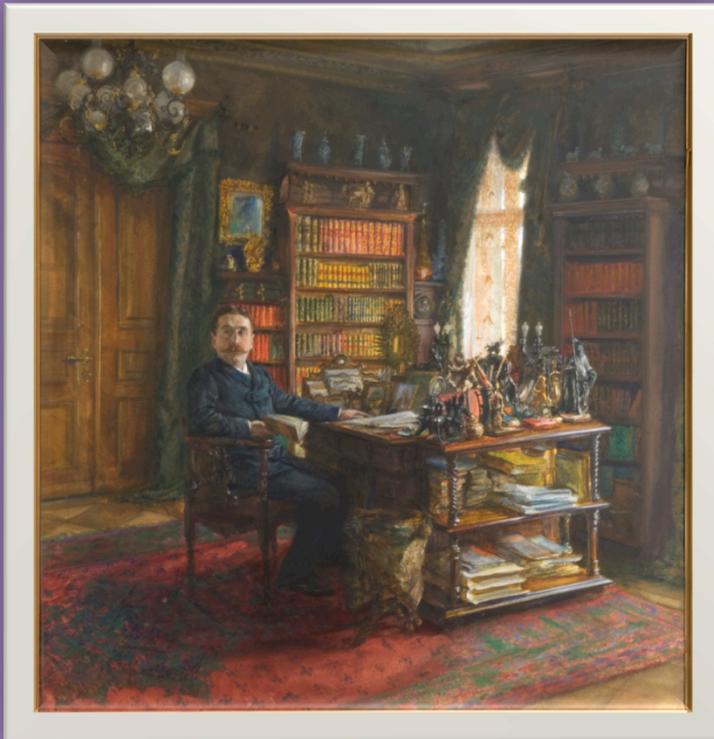
Alphonse Mucha is considered by many to be the father of Art Nouveau. Like Toulouse-Lautrec, Mucha worked primarily in the new, more utilitarian art of the poster. His career began with an advertising project for a new Sarah Bernhardt play. He later became best known for his depictions of allegorical women, like the one in *Reverie du Soir*.



Reverie du Soir
Alphonse Mucha (1860 – 1939)

“Whoever wants to know something about me - as an artist which alone is significant - they should look attentively at my pictures and there seek to recognize what I am and what I want.”

- Gustav Klimt



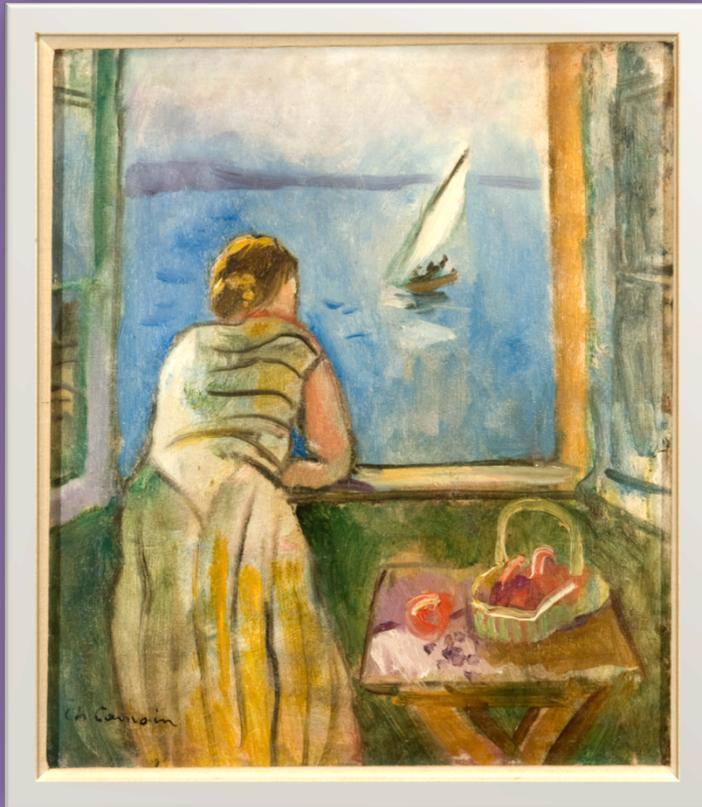
A Connoisseur in His Study
Carl Moll (1861 – 1945)

Two of the most significant Art Nouveau movements developed in Germany, where it was called *Jugendstil*, or “Youth Style”, and Austria, where it was known as “Secession Style” because it involved a secession from Academic standards. Of these two the Vienna Secession undoubtedly did the most to popularize and spread the tenets of Art Nouveau. Led by painter Gustave Klimt, the collective was far more organized than in other nations. While Art Nouveau-inspired architecture, like the appropriately named Vienna Secession Building, emerged on a grand scale, the style was also widely integrated in all aspects of furnishings and decorations. This was a natural outgrowth of the desire to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art”, which unified all the elements of design in a particular site.

One of the Key figures in the Vienna Secession was Carl Moll, who portrays himself in his painting *A Connoisseur in His Study*, an opportunity both to depict and add to his own *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

1. What individual items do you see in Moll's study that appear to be inspired by Art Nouveau?
2. How does the overall composition contribute to the sense of an integrated *Gesamtkunstwerk*?
3. What does the painting suggest about how Moll sees himself?

“One can talk about the Impressionist school because they hold certain principles. For us there was nothing like that; we merely thought their colours were a bit dull.”
- Kees van Dongen



Jeune femme à la fenêtre
Charles Camoin (1879 – 1965)

One of the first true Modernist movements grew out of the innovations of the Post-Impressionists, especially the work of Paul Gauguin. Christened “*les fauves*”, or “wild beasts” by a disgruntled critic, they rejected traditional three-dimensional depictions using perspective and created a new picture space utilizing color planes. To do so, they used bold, broad daubs and smears of high key color squeezed directly from the paint tube. They also employed pattern and contrasting (even clashing colors for personal expression) using flat planes and distorted forms and often using dark lines that created a sort of stained glass effect that further demonstrated this was artifice, not a depiction of “reality”. Henri Matisse, one of the founders of the movement, found his way to it in 1905 with his brilliantly colored painting of the fishing village of Colliourel on the Mediterranean coast. These works were influential on fellow travelers like Kees van Dongen and Charles Camoin. All the Fauves used intense color to describe light and space as well as the emotional state of both subject and artist.

1. What techniques common to Fauvism do you see in *Jeune femme à la fenêtre* ?
2. What emotional effect do you think Camoin intends this work to evoke? What elements in the painting make you think so?

**“You should not paint the chair, but only what someone has felt about it.”
- Edvard Munch**

The Fauves were sometimes associated with another movement who relied on innovative color techniques for their effects – the Expressionists. Unlike the daubs and swaths of the Fauves, the Expressionists typically used swirling, dipping and exaggerated brushstrokes, more in the style of Van Gogh than Gauguin, to depict their subjects. They sought to reveal the inner state of the artist, usually revealing the turmoil of anxiety and yearning rather than sunnier, less complicated emotions. This meant that art began to be evaluated for how well it conveyed the artist’s emotions rather than how well it depicted the physical world around him. Art was steadily moving from the attempt at an objective viewpoint to a deliberately subjective perspective. Often, this included social criticism, which became the defining characteristic of German Expressionism during and after World War I.

Jeune femme à la fenêtre
Charles Camoin (1879 – 1965)

1. What painting techniques do you see in Jaap Wieland’s *Orchard in Autumn* that are typical of Expressionism?
2. How is Wieland depicting a different emotional context than most paintings of an orchard might choose? To what extent might that be drawing on the symbolism of “Autumn”? What about that makes it even more clearly an example of Expressionism?



“Art is meant to disturb; science reassures.”
- Georges Braque

While the Fauves and Expressionists were influenced primarily by the Post-Impressionists' use of color and expressive brushwork to express psychological states, other Modernist artists seized upon the use of line and planes to explore less emotional ideas about time and space. In the attempt to express movement within a two-dimensional plane, Frenchman Georges Braque and Spaniard Pablo Picasso came up with a style eventually known as Cubism. Cubism abandoned perspective to represent bodies moving in space via small, tilted shapes (“cubes”) set in a shallow plane. In doing so, they exploded the substance of their figures, letting space flow through them and integrating background with foreground. To some, this reflected the social and political disintegration associated with World War I, but to most it simply disavowed the artificial constructions of time and space that characterized previous artwork.

A later member of the Cubist movement, Ukrainian born Youla Chapoval found success in Paris after his work was praised by Picasso.

1. Do you see the figure in Chapoval's painting? What elements of the human body are more clearly rendered?
2. Do you think Chapoval had a specific person in mind, or is this sort of a generic portrait?
3. In what way(s) is Chapoval exploring the figure in space? What deliberate displacements has he chosen?

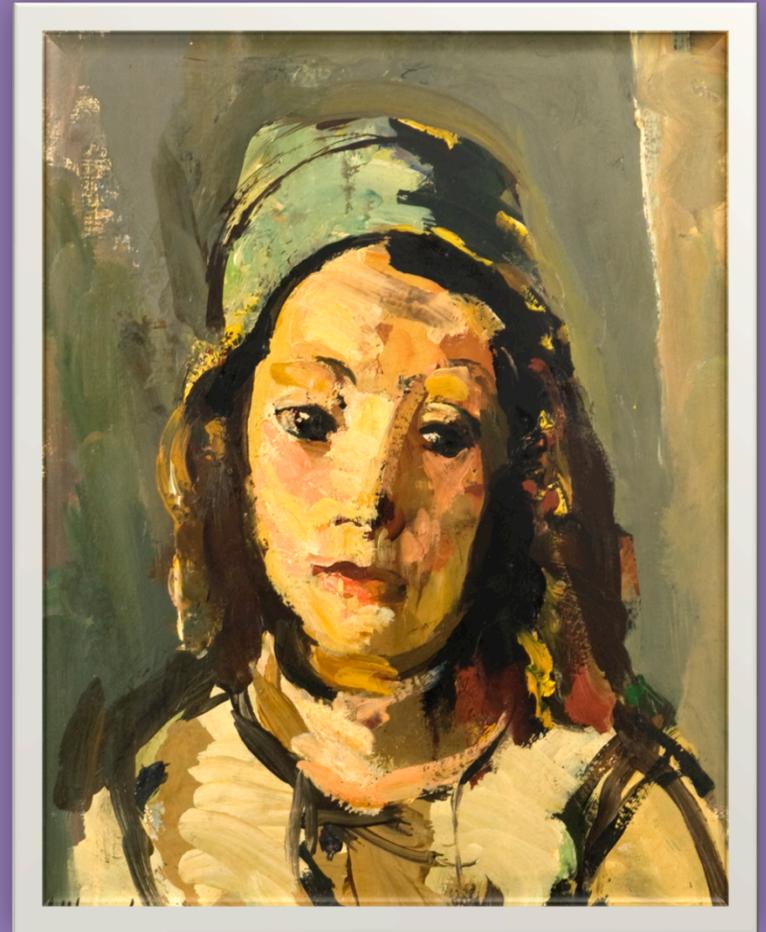
Cubist Figure Composition
Youla Chapoval (1919 – 1951)



**“We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.”
- Pablo Picasso**

Modernism was never one single movement, but instead an umbrella term for styles that were sometimes wildly different in both philosophy and technique, only a few of which have been discussed here. What they all had in common was a turn against the conservatism and conventions of Academic painting, a desire to experiment with artistic conventions in line, color and media, and a focus on art as a personal investigation by the artist rather than an attempt at representing an objective reality.

Modernism emerged just before World War I and dominated the interbellum period. The period after World War II is currently called Post-Modernism, as movements of the 1950s and 60s like Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art both reacted to and built upon various Modernist styles. Like those earlier movements, they have sometimes focused on the psychology of the artist and sometimes simply taken a sharper eye and fresh look to the world around us. But their ultimate goal can be phrased as simply as this – to make us think. Modernist and Post-Modernist art alike is not meant simply to be viewed and doesn't concern itself with what are necessarily subjective ideas about beauty, but demands a greater participation and engagement from their audience. These works are deliberately challenging - and that is part of what makes them special.



Portrait of a Young Girl
Vassyl Khmeluk(1903 – 1986)

Additional ARTy Facts

- smART Works website
- R.W. Norton Art Gallery website information