Chapter 20
From 1900 to the Present

Learning Objectives

20.1 Distinguish between Cubism, Fauvism, German Expressionism, and Futurism.

20.2 Explain the rise of Dada and the emergence of Surrealism.

20.3 Discuss how politics impinged on the art of Diego Rivera and Pablo Picasso in the 1930s.

20.4 Describe the reaction of both American modernist and Abstract Expressionist painters to European modernism.

20.5 Explain how Pop Art and Minimalism both responded to the example of Abstract Expressionism.

20.6 Outline some of the major trends in contemporary art.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the world was in motion. As early as 1880, one French advertising company boasted that it could post a billboard ad in 35,937 municipalities in the space of just five days—a billboard of the kind advertising Astra Construction in *L'Équipe de Cardiff* (*The Cardiff Team*) (**Fig. 20-1**), a painting by Robert Delaunay. The painting depicts the men of the Cardiff (Wales) rugby team leaping up at a rugby ball in the center of the painting. They represent the internationalization of sport; the first modern Olympic Games had taken place in 1896 in Athens, followed by the 1900 Games in Paris, staged in conjunction with the Universal Exposition, and rugby was a medal sport in each. The rugby ball is framed by the famous Grande Roue de Paris. Built for the 1900 Universal Exposition, at 100 meters (328 feet) in height, it was the tallest Ferris wheel in the world. On July 1, 1913, the year that Robert Delaunay painted *The Cardiff Team*, a signal was broadcast from the top of the Eiffel Tower, seen dominating Delaunay's work, establishing worldwide Standard Time. By 1903, Orville Wright had been airborne for 59 seconds, and by 1908, he would fly for 91 minutes. A year later, Louis Blériot crossed the English Channel by plane (though it would be another 18 years until Charles Lindbergh would cross the Atlantic by air). The airplane in Delaunay's painting is a "box kite" design, built in a Paris suburb beginning in 1907 by the Voisin brothers, Gabriel and Charles, the first commercial airplane manufacturers in Europe. Finally, the signboard "MAGIC" refers to Magic City, an enormous dance hall near the Eiffel Tower. Delaunay called his work Simultanism, a term that refers to the immediacy of vision, suggesting that in any given instant an infinite number of states of being simultaneously exist. This is the thrust of the painting and it is equally the thrust of twentieth-century art—speed, motion, change, culminating in the twenty-first century in the almost instantaneous global reach of the Information Age.

Fig. 20-1 Robert Delaunay, *L'Équipe de Cardiff* (*The Cardiff Team*), 1913. Oil on canvas, 10 ft. 8⅜ in. × 6 ft. 10 in. Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Holland.
Inv. 84. De Agostini/Bridgeman Images.

The New "Isms"

What are Cubism, Fauvism, German Expressionism, and Futurism?

At the center of the new spirit of change and innovation that is the subject of this chapter stood the Spanish-born Pablo Picasso. Picasso's studio in Paris was quickly recognized by other artists and intellectuals as the center of artistic innovation in the new century. From around Europe and America, artists flocked to see *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see Fig. 1-13), which by 1910 had come to symbolize the modernist break from tradition, and they carried his spirit—and the spirit of French painting generally—back with them to Italy, Germany, and America, where it influenced the arts there. "Make it new!" was something of the mantra of the day, and new art movements—new "isms," including Delaunay's Simultanism—rapidly succeeded one another.

Fig. 20-2 Georges Braque, *Houses at l'Estaque*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 28¾ × 23¾ in. Hermann and Margit Rupf Foundation.

Cubism

Soon after Georges Braque first saw *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, he began to paint a series of landscapes based on its formal innovations. His *Houses at l'Estaque* (**Fig. 20-2**) takes Paul Cézanne's manipulation of space even further than the master did (see Fig. 19-36). The tree that rises from the foreground seems to meld into the roofs of the distant houses near the top of the painting. At the right, a large, leafy branch projects out across the houses, but its leaves appear identical to the greenery that is growing between the houses behind it. It becomes impossible to tell what is foreground and what is not. The houses descending down the hill before us are themselves spatially confusing. Walls bleed almost seamlessly into other walls, walls bleed into roofs, roofs bleed into walls. Braque presents us with a design of triangles and cubes as much as he does a landscape.

Together, over the course of the next decade, Picasso and Braque created the movement known as **Cubism**, of which Braque's *Houses at l'Estaque* is an early example. The name derived from a comment made by the critic Louis Vauxcelles in a short review that appeared directly above a headline announcing the "conquest of the air" by the Wright brothers: "Braque . . . reduces everything, places and figures and houses, to geometrical schemes, little cubes." It was, as the accidental juxtaposition of Cubism and the Wright brothers suggested, a new world, and when Picasso returned to Paris from Spain in the fall of 1909, he brought with him landscapes that showed just how much he had learned from Braque (**Fig. 20-3**).

Fig. 20-3 Pablo Picasso, *Houses on the Hill, Horta de Ebro*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 25⅝ × 31⅞ in. Nationalgalerie, Museum Berggruen, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

Fig. 20-4 Georges Braque, *Violin and Palette*, September 1, 1909. Oil on canvas, 36⅛ × 16⅞ in. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

54.1412. Photo © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Photo by David Heald. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Fig. 20-5 Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Wine Glass*, 1912. Charcoal, gouache, and papiers-collés, 18⅞ × 14¾ in. The McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas. Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay, 1950.112. © 2015. McNay Art Museum/Art Resource, New York/Scala, Florence. © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Other artists soon followed the lead of Picasso and Braque, and the impact of their art could be felt everywhere. For the Cubist, art was primarily about form. Analyzing the object from all sides and acknowledging the flatness of the picture plane, the Cubist painting represented the three-dimensional world in increasingly two-dimensional terms, emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane and the design realized upon it rather than any illusion of depth. The curves of the violin in Braque's *Violin and Palette* (**Fig. 20-4**) are flattened and cubed, so much so that in places the instrument seems as flat as the sheets of music above it. The highly realistic, almost trompe-l'oeil nail at the painting's top—obviously three-dimensional, but thereby underscoring the flatness of the rest of the painting—introduces another characteristic of Cubist work. Casting its own shadow, it can be seen either as part of the painting, holding up the palette, or as real, holding the painting to the wall. Such play between the reality of painting and the reality of the world soon led both Picasso and Braque to experiment with collage (see Chapter 9). In *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Wine Glass* (**Fig. 20-5**), Picasso includes a newspaper fragment in the painting. At the bottom of the image, the headline of *Le Journal* reads, "*La bataille s'est engagée*"—"Battle is joined." Literally, it refers to a battle in the Balkans, where Bulgaria attacked the Turks, November 17 through 19. But the "battle" is also metaphorical, the battle between art and reality. Similarly, the background's trellis-and-rose wallpaper is no more or less real than the fragment of the actual musical score, the *faux-bois* ("false wood") guitar, and the Cubist drawing of a goblet, cut out of some preexisting source like the other elements in the work. By admitting these things into the space of art, Picasso and Braque redefined painting as

Fig. 20-6 Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905.
Oil on canvas, 31¼ × 23½ in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Bequest of Elise S. Haas.© 2015 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Fig. 20-7 Wassily Kandinsky, *Sketch I for "Composition VII,"* 1913.
Indian ink, 30¾ × 39⅜ in. Felix Klee Collection, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
1979.222. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the setting in which the forces of the high and low, art and the real world, must engage one another.

Fauvism

Though the Cubists tended to deemphasize color in order to emphasize form, Henri Matisse favored the expressive possibilities of color. Matisse, in a sense, synthesized the art of Cézanne and Georges Seurat, taking the former's broad, flat zones of color and the latter's interest in setting complementary hues beside one another. Under the influence of van Gogh, whose work had not been seen as a whole until an exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in 1901, Matisse felt free to use color arbitrarily. A number of other young painters joined him, and at the Autumn Salon of 1905 they exhibited together—and were promptly labeled **Fauves** ("Wild Beasts"). It was Matisse's *Woman with a Hat* (**Fig. 20-6**) that caused the greatest uproar. The public could not fathom how he could so willfully transform an otherwise traditional portrait with such a violent and nonrepresentational use of color. The broad brushstrokes of green paint that define his model's forehead and nose were the particular object of ridicule. But some critics saw in this work the promise of great things to come. The painter Maurice Denis wrote of them: "One feels completely in the realm of abstraction. Of course, as in the most extreme departures of van Gogh, something still remains of the original feeling of nature. But here one finds, above all in the work of Matisse, the sense of . . . painting in itself, the act of pure painting." Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo agreed, and they soon bought the painting.

German Expressionism

It was in Germany that Denis's idea of "pure painting" fully took hold. In Dresden, a group of artists known as *Die Brücke* ("The Bridge"), among them Ernst Kirchner, Emil Nolde, and Erich Heckel (see Fig. 10-6), advocated a raw and direct style, epitomized by the slashing gouges of the woodblock print. A group of artists known as *Der Blaue Reiter* ("The Blue Rider") formed in Munich around the Russian Wassily Kandinsky. They believed that through color and line alone works of art could express the feelings and emotions of the artist directly to the viewer—hence the name **Expressionism**.

In the 1890s, Kandinsky had seen an exhibition of Claude Monet's *Grainstacks* (see Fig. 5-36). Noting how the grainstacks themselves seemed to disintegrate in the diffuse light, Kandinsky was convinced that "the importance of an 'object' as the necessary element in painting" was suspect. Nothing of the geometry of Cubism can be detected in Kandinsky's early paintings such as *Sketch I for "Composition VII"* (**Fig. 20-7**). Kandinsky considered his painting to be equivalent to music, and his works are alive in nonfigurative movement and color. Each color and each line carried, for Kandinsky, explicit expressive meaning (see Fig. 5-39). He believed that paintings like his had "the power to create [a] spiritual atmosphere" that would "lead us away from the outer to the inner basis."

The paintings of the Fauves convinced Kandinsky that through color he could eliminate the object altogether. "Color," Kandinsky wrote in his 1911 treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, "is a power which directly influences the soul."

Kandinsky's ideas find remarkable expression in the work of another member of the Blue Rider group, Franz Marc, who adopted Kandinsky's color symbolism in his depiction of animals. "I try to heighten my feeling for the organic rhythm of all things," Marc wrote, "to feel myself pantheistically into the trembling and flow of the blood of nature." More than any other German painter, Marc understood the sensuality of Matisse's line and employed it in his work. His use of color, which echoes, of course, the name of the movement to which he belonged, is liberated from the world of appearance, but it is highly emotional. He painted horses over and over again (**Fig. 20-8**). Sometimes they were blue—Marc associated blue with masculinity, strength, and purity—sometimes red, sometimes yellow, depending on his emotions as he was painting. Marc never fulfilled his promise as a painter. He was killed fighting in World War I in 1916.

Fig. 20-8 Franz Marc, *Die grossen blauen Pferde* (*The Large Blue Horses*), 1911.
Oil on canvas, 41⅝ in. × 5 ft. 11¼ in. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Gift of the T. B. Walker Foundation, Gilbert M. Walker Fund, 1942. De Agostini/Bridgeman Images.

Futurism

If abstraction was the hallmark of the new century, certain thematic concerns defined it as well. The world had become, quite literally, a new place. In the summer of 1900, with the opening of the Universal Exposition, Paris found itself electrified, its nights almost transformed to day. The automobile, a rarity before the new century, dominated the city's streets by 1906. People were flying airplanes. Albert Einstein proposed a new theory of relativity and Niels Bohr a new model for the atom. Many people felt that there could be no tradition, at least not one worth imitating, in the face of so much change.

When, in February 1909, Filippo Marinetti published his manifesto announcing the advent of Futurism (see Chapter 4), there were, in fact, no Futurist painters. Marinetti had to leave Paris, go back to Italy, and recruit them. But when they subsequently exhibited their show of Futurist painting around Europe from 1912 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, outraging as many as they pleased, these painters—Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini—embodied the spirit of the machine and of rapid change that seemed to define the century itself. Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (**Fig. 20-9**) captures the Futurist fascination with movement. It demonstrates, as well, its debt to new technological media—in particular, photography and the new art of film (see Figs. 11-2 and 11-3).

Fig. 20-9 Giacomo Balla, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 35⅜ × 43½ in. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

Bequest of A. Conger Goodyear and Gift of George F. Goodyear, 1964. © 2015. Albright Knox Art Gallery/Art Resource, New York/Scala, Florence. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

Fig. 20-10 Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913. Bronze, 43⅞ × 34⅞ × 15¾ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest, 231.1948. © 2015 Digital image, Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (**Fig. 20-10**) gives the sense of a figure striding forward, clothing flapping in the wind, a sort of new *Nike of Samothrace* (see Fig. 16-25). Boccioni probably means to represent a nude, its musculature stretched and swollen to reveal its dynamic movement through space and time in the same way that he stretched the form of a bottle, exposing its volumetric dimensions in his *Development of a Bottle in Space* (see Fig. 4-7). "What we want to do," he explained, "is show the living object in its dynamic growth."

Dada and Surrealism

How do you explain the rise of Dada and the emergence of Surrealism?

World War I more than dampened this exuberance. The war was catastrophic. As many as 10 million people were killed and 20 million wounded, most in grueling trench warfare on the western front, a battle line that remained

virtually stationary for three years and ran from Oostende on the Dutch coast, past Reims and Verdun, to Lunéville in France. World War I represented to many the bankruptcy of Western thought, and it served notice that all that had come before needed to be swept away.

Founded simultaneously in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, and New York during the war, **Dada** took up Futurism's call for the annihilation of tradition but, as a result of the war, without its sense of hope for the future. Its name referred, some said, to a child's first words; others claimed it was a reference to a child's hobbyhorse; and still others celebrated it as a simple nonsense sound. As a movement, it championed senselessness, noise, and illogic. Dada was, above all, against art, or at least art in the traditional sense of the word. Its chief strategy was insult and outrage. Perhaps Dada's chief exponent, Marcel Duchamp always challenged tradition in a spirit of fun. His *L.H.O.O.Q.* (**Fig. 20-11**) is an image of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (see Fig. 18-8) with a mustache drawn on her upper lip. Saying the letters of the title with French pronunciation reveals it to be a pun, *elle a chaud au cul*, roughly translated as "she's hot in the pants." Such is the irreverence of Dada.

In New York, in 1917, Duchamp submitted a common urinal to the annual Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, titled it *Fountain*, signed it R. Mutt, and claimed for it the status of sculpture (**Fig. 20-12**). At first it was rejected, but when Duchamp let it be known that he and R. Mutt were one and the same, it was accepted. Thus, whether something was art depended on who made it—or found it, in this case. It also depended on where it was seen—in the museum, it was one thing, in the plumbing store, quite another. Furthermore, on its pedestal, in the context of the museum, Duchamp's "fountain" looked to some as if it were indeed sculpture.

Fig. 20-11 Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919. Rectified Readymade (reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* altered with pencil), 7¾ × 4⅛ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 20-12 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917. Glazed sanitary china with black print. Photo by Alfred Stieglitz in *The Blind Man*, No. 2 (May 1917); original lost. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Duchamp did not so much invalidate art as authorize the art world to consider all manner of things in aesthetic terms. His logic was not without precedent. Cubist collage had brought "real things" like newspaper clippings into the space of painting, and photography, especially, often revealed aesthetic beauty in common experience. But Duchamp's move, like Dada generally, was particularly challenging and provocative. "I was interested," he explained, "in ideas—not merely in visual products."

The art of **Surrealism** was born of Dada's preoccupation with the irrational and the illogical, as well as its interest in ideas. When the French writer André Breton issued the First Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, the nihilist spirit of Dada was clearly about to be replaced by something more positive. Breton explained the direction his movement would take: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality." To these ends, the new art would rely on chance operations, automatism (or random, thoughtless, and unmotivated notation of any kind), and dream images—the expressions of the unconscious mind. Two different sorts of imagery resulted. The first contained recognizable, if fantastic, subject matter. It was typified by the work of René Magritte (see Fig. 2-2), Giorgio de Chirico, who was acknowledged as an important precursor to the Surrealist movement by the Surrealists themselves, and Salvador Dalí. De Chirico claimed not to understand his own paintings. They were simply images that obsessed him, and they conveyed, Breton felt, the "irremediable anxiety" of the day. Thus, in *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street* (**Fig. 20-13**), the little girl rolls her hoop toward the ominous black shadow of a figure lurking behind the wall. Dalí called paintings such as *The Persistence of Memory* (**Fig. 20-14**) "hand-painted dream photographs." The limbless figure lying on the ground like a giant slug is actually a self-portrait of the artist, who seems to have moved into a landscape removed from time and mind.

The other type of Surrealist painting was virtually abstract, presenting us with a world of indecipherable visual riddles. The painting of the Spanish artist Joan Miró and many of the early mobiles of Alexander Calder (see Fig. 6-7) fall into this category. In Miró's

Fig. 20-13 Giorgio de Chirico, *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 24¼ × 28½ in. Private collection.

Fig. 20-14 Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 9½ × 13 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Given anonymously, 162.1934.

Fig. 20-15 Joan Miró, *Painting*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 4 ft. 3⅜ in. × 5 ft. 4⅛ in. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford.
Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund. Photo Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. © 2015 Successió Miró/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Painting (**Fig. 20-15**), biomorphic, amoebalike forms float in a space that suggests a darkened landscape. If we look closely, however, faces, hair, and hands begin to appear. Everything in this composition seems fluid, susceptible to continuing and ongoing mutation, moving back and forth between representation and abstraction.

Although never officially a member of the movement, in the late 1920s and early 1930s Picasso worked in a distinctly Surrealist mode and contributed regularly to Surrealist publications. Breton, in fact, argued that Picasso led the way to Surrealist art with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Picasso's Surrealism would assert itself most fully in a series of monstrous bonelike figures (see Fig. 1-10) that alternated with sensuous portraits of his mistress Marie-Thérèse Walter, whom he had met when she was only 17, in January 1927. For eight years, until 1935, he led a double life, married to Olga Koklova while conducting a secret affair with Marie-Thérèse. Since Marie-Thérèse is so readily identifiable in her portraits, it is tempting to see the more monstrous figures as portraits of Olga. Picasso was indeed obsessed in these years with the duality of experience. His 1932 double portrait of Marie-Thérèse, *Girl before a Mirror* (**Fig. 20-16**), expresses this—she is the moon, or night, at the right, and the sun, or light, on

Fig. 20-16 Pablo Picasso, *Girl before a Mirror*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 5 ft. 4 in. × 4 ft. 3¼ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, 2.1938. © 2015. Digital image, Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the left, where her own face appears in both profile and three-quarter view. Her protruding belly on the left suggests her fertility (indeed, she gave birth to their child, Maya, in 1935, soon after Picasso finally separated from Olga), though in the mirror, in typical Picasso fashion, we see not her stomach but her buttocks. She is the conscious self on the left, her subconscious self revealing itself in the mirror. Picasso's work addresses Surrealism's most basic theme—the self in all its complexity.

Politics and Painting

How did the art of the 1930s reflect the politics of the era?

The era between World War I and World War II marks the period in Western history when, in Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Soviet Union, totalitarian and nationalistic regimes—fascist dictatorships—rose to power. It was also a time of political upheaval in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, where guerilla groups led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa demanded "land, liberty, and justice" for Mexico's peasant population. Their primary purpose was to give back to the people land that the government had deeded to foreign investors in the hope that they might modernize the country. In light of such events, politics impinged mightily on the arts. The Mexican Revolution, which started in 1910, fueled a wave of intense nationalism to which artists responded by creating art that from their point of view was true to the aspirations of the people of Mexico. When the government initiated a massive building campaign, a new school of muralists arose to decorate these buildings. It was led by Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco.

From 1930 to 1934, Rivera received a series of commissions in the United States. They included one from Edsel B. Ford and the Detroit Institute of Arts to create a series of frescoes for the museum's Garden Court on the subject of *Detroit Industry*, and another from the Rockefellers to create a lobby fresco entitled *Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to a New and Better Future* for the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center in New York. When Rivera included a portrait of Communist leader Lenin in the lobby painting, Nelson A. Rockefeller insisted that he remove it. Rivera refused, and Rockefeller, after paying Rivera his commission, had the painting destroyed.

Rivera reproduced the fresco soon after in Mexico City and called it *Man, Controller of the Universe* (**Fig. 20-17**). At the center, Man stands below a telescope with a microscope in his hand. Two ellipses of light

Fig. 20-17 Diego Rivera, *Man, Controller of the Universe*, 1934. Fresco, main panel 15 ft. 11 in. × 37 ft. 6 in. Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, D.F. Mexico.