

The Third Cubist

Juan Gris first began to paint in a cubist manner in 1912 and, under the influence of his close friends Picasso and Braque, he quickly progressed through analytical cubism, with its faceted forms and shifting perspectives, to synthetic cubism, using overlapping flat planes of colour and texture.

Analytical Cubism

Bottle and Knife 1911

Gris has produced the art work in oil paint on canvas, the image has been carefully drawn out with precision and care, and although the paint is applied thickly it is controlled and with definite equal brush strokes throughout, showing the excellent skill and control the artist has with his materials.



Gris uses muted colour, similar to many of his paintings from 1911-1913, working with a mainly tertiary pallet. The limited choice of colour helps us focus on tone and shape. The centre area of the art work only produced in tone to create separation of areas with the outer edges. The background area has had more colour added and Juan Gris uses a strong warm tone on the top of one ellipse which contrasts with the grey areas of the art work and draws the eye in to the centre of the painting.

The use of grey tones within the centre area gives us a feeling of this section being behind glass or seen as a broken reflection within a mirror.

Gris still follows the basic rules of light and dark, the bottle on the left of the image clearly standing out with his use of dark green shadows behind the object. The direction of the light source apparent from the way he has used his shadows on the ellipses, most of the image follows this with only the knife breaking the rule and the light reversed. Gris plays around with our ideas of reality and creates a puzzle which needs to be solved. Our brain tries to put the pieces back together, and in doing so we struggle to try and see things as Gris sees them.



The painting is divided up by dramatic diagonal parallel lines, which create a feeling of a shattered or refracted image. This strong movement within the painting is exaggerated by the diagonal brushstrokes Gris uses to emphasis the angles within the image.

We are aware we are looking at an image with the rules of perspective twisted and distorted. Gris plays around with our idea of reality and makes us have to work harder to make sense of the image. The table in the background tilts up to meet the objects, which overlap and intersect each other and make us feel we are seeing something in motion, not one moment in time but many all caught together in the one space.

Gris chooses very mundane everyday objects for his subject matter, and the repeating images of the wine glass, bottle and plate appear in many of his works from this period. He appears obsessed by repetitive examination of the same subject, painting them over and over again. In the 'Bottle and Knife' the objects are still clear to see, his use of analytical cubism in this work is apparent but although they are abstracted the clues to the identity of the objects are still there.



