

“Art in *transition*: Movements within Modernism as Showcased by the Journal *transition*.”

Cailie Golden

Outlined Content: Copy (including definitions, quotes from leading figures, samples of the literary style, cited sources, and additional reading) and Related Images

Surrealism:

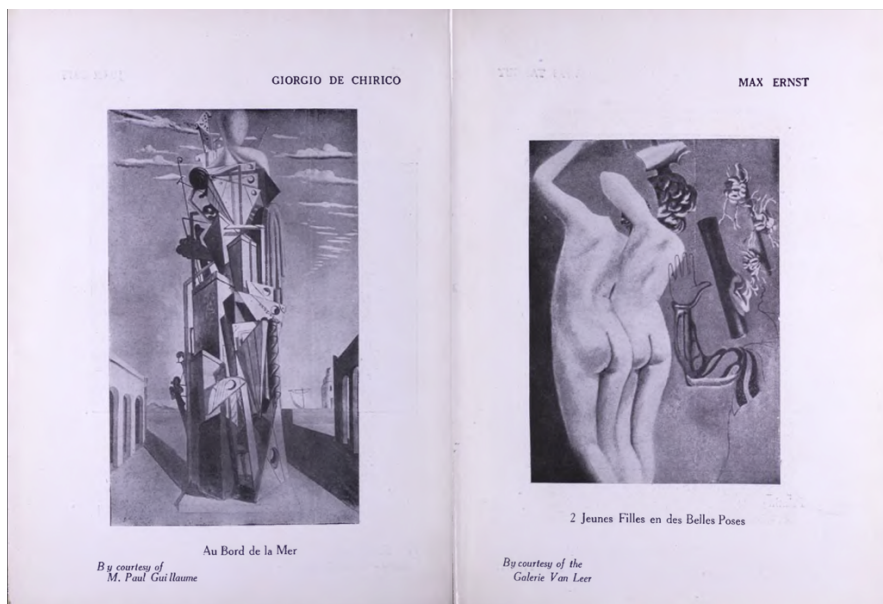
“Although the dream is a very strange phenomenon and an inexplicable mystery, far more inexplicable is the mystery and aspect our minds confer on certain objects and aspects of life.”

—G. de Chirico

Artistic Surrealism:

Surrealism was in many ways a reaction to the conventional world as it failed to make sense in the midst of World War One. This movement saw all things rational as a limit to the imaginative powers of the subconscious mind. With connections to primitivism and Freudian psychology, surrealist artwork distorted the body and often placed it in an erotic context. As seen in Max Ernst's *Jeunes Filles en des Belles Poses*, an arm is extended reaching for figures on the canvas's left; the segmented female bodies and this outline of a hand that never quite makes contact evokes a dream-like quality common to surrealism. The Modernist magazine *transition* featured many of Surrealism's most notable artists, including Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí; as its editor Eugéné Jolas stated in his manifesto, the works published by *transition* are part of an effort “to emancipate the creative element from the present ideology.” Prioritizing imagination over rational thought, the Surrealist movement did just that.

Art Sample:



Literary Surrealism:

The literary side of Surrealism also rejected realism and convention. More often than not, Surrealist prose and poetry presented a dream-like world; mundane objects were described in a way that painted them as strange or grotesque. “The Mad Train” by Henry Poulaille captures Surrealism’s discordance with short, choppy paragraphs; defamiliarizes the setting with the train’s speed and night’s darkness; and sets a nightmarish tone through figures of speech. It functions as a Salvador Dalí painting: houses sit on a checker board horizon, and train stations become “sparks from a tinderbox.”

Literature Sample:

“The Mad Train” by Henry Poulaille

transition, Issue 2. Pages 41-51

Night

A mad train rushing ahead at full speed

A wood, a long wood. Nothing but a row of trees, hurled backward.

Houses scrawled on the vast checkerboard of the horizon.

It’s like a frightful race.

They flee before the mad onrushing beast, itself held prisoner by the double threads of steel upon which it rocks, mounting one upon the other, somersaulting.

— like objects tossed by a juggler, concerning only the performer, they fall silently.

The only noise is that of the machine, hauling its twenty cars where, fretting, fuming, a thousand-odd passengers grumble, hopelessly and helplessly participating in the race to the abyss.

All are panting, sensing the imminent catastrophe from which, perhaps, not one of them will escape.

Not one will escape

Not one will escape

Meanwhile the stations, so brilliantly lighted, are sparks from a tinderbox, the glimmer lost before it shows itself, or the flame of a match flattened by the wind.

Large cities with their electric punctuation of factory windows are only glittering, scattered verses on an immense black cloth, where buildings, streets, monuments form Apocalyptic ruins. The train is crossing a land of nightmares.

Everything has lost its character. Shadows, forms, have contours no longer, passing in broken bundles. All is weakened, dislocated, shrunk in the gust of speed.

Poles come together so quickly they are joined, mere weeds suspended in the storm, chaff which the slight displacement of the air lays flat, breaks, crushes. The crossings, the shanties of the crossing-tenders along the route, are shabby empty boxes.

And everything dances, veers, turns, dances, falls.

Strange, demented, dance.

Manifesto Excerpt:

“Hands Off Love,” Surrealist Manifesto

Transition, Issue 6. Pages 155-165

It is far more significant than any work on the subject, and establishes the true role and the real worth of genius. That mysterious ascendant that an unequalled power of expression suddenly confers, we understand suddenly its meaning. We understand now just exactly what place in the world is that of genius. Genius takes hold of a man and makes of him an intelligible symbol, and the prey of sombre beasts. Genius serves to point out to the world the moral truth that universal stupidity obscures and endeavours to destroy. Our thanks then to the one who, over there on the immense occidental screen, beyond the horizon where the suns one by one decline, causes to pass your shadows, O great realities of mankind, sole realities perhaps, moral truths whose worth is greater than that of the whole universe. The earth sinks beneath your feet. Our thanks to you above and beyond the victim. Our thanks to you, we are your humble servants.

Primary Sources:

transition, Issues 2 & 6

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Surrealism Better:

“The Theoretical Backgrounds of Surrealism,” by Charles E. Gauss in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*: <https://doi.org/10.2307/425943>

Excerpt of André Breton’s Manifesto of Surrealism:

<https://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil330/MANIFESTO%20OF%20SURREALISM.pdf>

List of artists:

<https://www.britannica.com/question/Which-artists-practiced-Surrealism>

For an overview of the movement, see:

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/surrealism/>

Additional surrealist works:

<https://www.artic.edu/highlights/13/surrealism>

Cubism:

“Cubism is not a reality you take in your hand. It’s more like a perfume, in front of you, behind you, to the sides, the scent is everywhere by you don’t quite know where it comes from.”

—Pablo Picasso

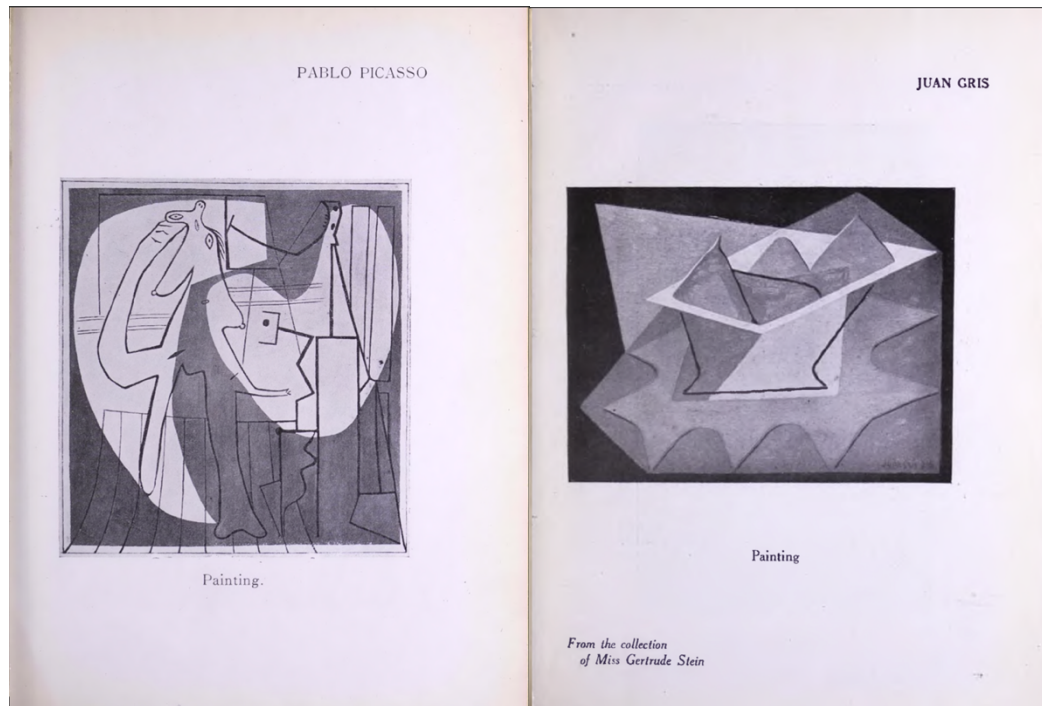
Analytic Cubism:

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque founded this first phase of Cubism in the years leading up to the Great War; this movement rejected artistic convention, focusing on reality as variable instead of definitive. Artists that employed this style captured their subjects from many angles, rejected the limitations of “perspective, foreshortening, modeling...,” and “refut[ed] time-honored theories that art should imitate nature” (Britannica). This concept progressed into a second wave called Synthetic Cubism which differentiated itself from the original movement by experiments in collage and mixed media.

Synthetic Cubism:

Synthetic Cubism was concerned with challenging what materials warrant the term “art.” Collage saw a major resurgence as a medium, called *papier collé*. It deconstructed materials from the modern world and rearranged these fragments in a way that often made a social commentary. Synthetic Cubism signaled a progression from multi-perspectival work into multi-media art, even as it continued in Analytic Cubism’s tradition testing the bounds of fine art and its definitions. Its simplified geometry and more vibrant colors set it apart from earlier works.

Art Sample:



Literary Cubism:

Literary Cubism attempted to imitate what Cubism had brought to visual art. It highlighted the subjective nature of narratives, whether this fluidity applies to formal structure or point of view. The prosaic equivalent to viewing an object from its many angles would be to experience a story through multiple perspectives. Other literary devices employed include fragmentation of the timeline, stream of conscious narration, imagination, subjective reality, and a lack of plot structure (Typesofartstyles.com). “A Continuation of a Work in Progress” by James Joyce demonstrates most if not all of these stylistic features, Synthetic Cubism especially. More reading on Literary Cubism provided in resources.

Literature Sample:

“Continuation of a Work in Progress” by James Joyces
transition, Issue 5. Pages 15-31.

Lead, kindly fowl! They always did: ask the ages. What bird has done yesterday man may do next year, be it fly, be it moult, be it hatch, be it agreement in the nest. For her socioscientific sense is sound as a bell, sir, her volucrine automutativeness right on normalcy: she knows, she just feels she was kind of born to lay and love eggs (trust her to propagate the

species and hoosh her fluffballs safe through din and danger!); lastly but mostly, in her genesic field it is all game and no gammon, she is ladylike in everything she does and plays the gentleman's part every time. Let us auspice it! Yes, before all this has time to end the golden age must return with its vengeance. Man will become dirigible, age will be rejuvenated, woman with her ridiculous white burden will reach by one step sublime incubation, the manewanting human lioness with her dishorned discipular manram will lie down together publicly flank upon fleece. No, assuredly, they are not justified, those gloompourers who grouse that letters have never been quite their old selves again since that weird weekday in bleak Janiveer when, to the shock of both, Biddy Doran looked ad literature.

Primary Sources:

transition, Issues 3 & 5

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Cubism Better:

“Notes on Cubism,” by Carl Einstein and Charles W. Haxthausen for *October*, Vol. 107:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397600>

“James Joyce and the Cubist Esthetic,” by Jo-Anna Isaak for *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 14: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24780356>

Literary Cubism:

<https://typesofartstyles.com/literary-cubism/>

Collection of Cubist artists and paintings:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/6-artists-who-made-cubism-popular/nQJi5Lg9G1yrJg>

For an overview of the movement, see:

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Cubism>

[https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism#:~:text=Cubism%20was%20a%20revolutionary%20new,that%20appear)

[terms/c/cubism#:~:text=Cubism%20was%20a%20revolutionary%20new,that%20appear%20fragmented%20and%20abstracted](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/c/cubism#:~:text=Cubism%20was%20a%20revolutionary%20new,that%20appear%20fragmented%20and%20abstracted)

Analytic Cubism:

<https://www.theartstory.org/definition/analytic-cubism/>

Synthetic Cubism:

Dadaism:

“Dada is like your hopes: nothing. like your paradise: nothing. like your idols: nothing. Like your heroes: nothing. Like your artists: nothing.”

–Francis Picabia

Artistic Dadaism:

The Dada movement built upon “isms” that had preceded it (Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism, to name a few); its founders were reacting directly to the social structures that had caused and prolonged a world war. In the place of hyper-nationalism, artists like Hans Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Hoch, and Man Ray found inspiration in an anarchy of form and meaning. Dadaists sought to shock their audience, satirize norms and boundaries, and create a nonsensical, irrational style. The politics of the First World War prolonged pointless violence, leading many to be disillusioned with society. They rejected convention; their work did not aspire to “high” artistic standards, because these standards no longer mattered to them. Artists within the movement experimented with media, form, and spontaneity. Duchamp’s “fountain” is a well-known example.

When Hugo Ball, the principal founder of the movement, wrote his manifest of Dadaism in 1916, he expressed a desire to “get rid of everything that smacks of journalism, worms, everything nice and right, blinkered, moralistic, europeanised, enervated” (nytimes). Tristan Tzara’s manifesto put it similarly:

Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada; a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action: Dada; know ledge of all the means rejected up until now by the shamefaced sex of comfortable compromise and good manners: Dada; abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: Dada; of every social hierarchy and equation set up for the sake of values by our valets: Dada... (Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918”)

Art Sample:



Literary Dadaism:

Literary Dadaism was similar to its artistic counterpart in many ways. Shock value, absurdity, challenges to the conventions of language, spontaneity... all of these characteristics found their expression in media. Art was no longer being created with the public's approval (or even understanding) in mind. Because a poet founded Dada, it isn't surprising that this movement produced a strong body of work in the literary genre. *transition* magazine features Dadaism in all of its variety: poetry, prose, and drama. For our writing sample, we have "Made a Mile Away" from the sixth issue. Consider its absurdity ("Botticelli mak[ing] uncles"?), its unusual syntax ("if as far as as far as that"), and the overall disregard for reader comprehension. Gertrude Stein received the title "the mama of dada," and it is her work featured below.

Literature Sample:

"Made a Mile Away" by Gertrude Stein

transition, Issue 8. Pages 155-165.

Botticelli makes more uncles for no reason.

So much for sewing. It is as much as that. It is as much as that. And so much. So much so. So much for sewing. It is as much as that so much for sewing.

To remain and happily to do so this is in memory of have it as it as it has it. This is in the memory of only here and there. So much so.

The next was Tintoretto and asleep. Tintoretto and asleep Tintoretto Tintoretto Tintoretto and asleep Tintoretto for if for all if free for all if as far as as far as that. It is not as far as that now. Why. Because there is no use because it is in use, because it is usually, usually how usually, as usually. And so forth.

The next was not more so.

The next was not more so and as much so. Giving it a name all the same. Harry, giving it a name all the same. Not Harry and not giving it a name all the same. Not Harry and not Harry and, and giving, Harry giving it a name, not Harry and not giving it a name all the same. Next. El Greco. Found by itself as if it were as if it was, it was, it was found by itself and not so for so and as so as so much. Longer so much longer and so much.

So much longer and so much and Anthony and so much. So much so and so much. Anthony and as not so much longer. So much longer and seen, feel seen fell seen, fell saw saw it saw him, saw him sell him, see him, seen. As seen a scene. So and seen, seen so, seen as as much longer and seen as so much and as seen and so long. Not good-bye but so long. Longhi. Very nice and quiet I thank you.

Primary Sources:

transition, Issues 6 & 8

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know the Dada Movement Better:

History of Dadaism:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/dada-115169154/>

Manifesto by Tristan Tzara:

https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Tzara_Dada-Manifesto_1918.pdf

Literary Dadaism:

<https://careerauthors.com/principles-of-dadaism/#:~:text=Some%20characteristics%20of%20Dadaism's%20most,reaction%2C%20irrationalism%2C%20and%20spontaneity.>

Dada's 100th Anniversary:

Futurism:

“If we paint the phases of an uprising, the crowd bristling with fists and noisy cavalry assaults will be translated on the canvas into bands of lines corresponding to all the forces in conflict, following the painting’s laws of general violence. These lines of force must envelop the spectator and carry him away; he himself must be in some way obliged to grapple with the figures in the picture. All the objects, according to physical transcendentalism, tend towards the infinite through their force-lines, to bring the work of art back to true painting.”

—Umbro Apollonio

Artistic Futurism:

As explained by the Guggenheim museum, Futurism “glorified the energy and speed of modern life together with the dynamism and violence of the new technological society.”

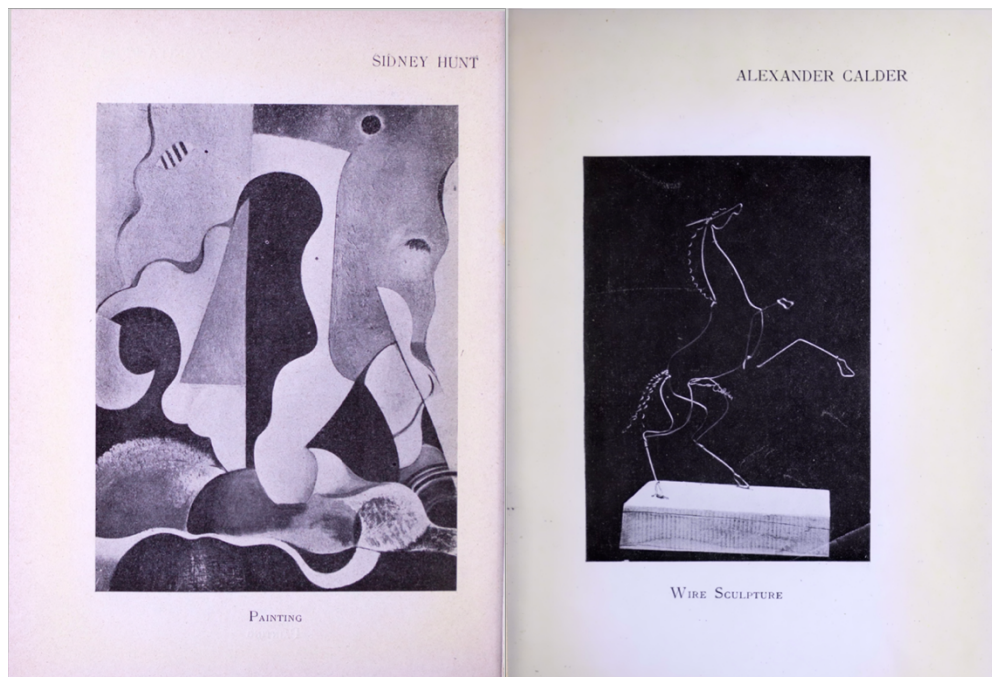
Futurists rejected the past and, like other isms, focused on creating a new, modern culture; however, this movement’s focus on technology and momentum sets it apart from the rest.

Another point of interest: many futurists harbored pro-war sentiments. Tommaso Marinetti wrote in the Futurist Manifesto that war was the “only hygiene in the world” because he felt it would lead to a new social order (artchive.com).

Western European and American artists who incorporated some of these themes were not always aligned with Futurism’s political leaning, so—while there are stylistic moments found in *transition*—war propaganda like this would never be featured in *transition*. That being said...

Sidney Hunt’s painting demonstrates an element within Futurism called dynamism; lines create a sense of motion, as if ocean waves or smoke trails. Take a look at [this piece](#) for another example of dynamic linework and implied movement. The sculpture by Alexander Calder takes a somewhat obsolete form of transportation (a horse) and creates its outline from wire. Not only does this work create a sense of motion through its linearity, but its material also creates a tension between modern transportation and modes from the past.

Art Sample:



Literary Futurism:

The movement arose first in Italy and Russia, but a western component called Vorticism was developed by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound; their magazine *Blast* can be found digitally at the Modernist Journals Project, and physical copies are available for viewing in McFarlin library's special collections. While Vorticism and Futurism are not synonymous (Vorticists being more critical of technological advancement), their styles overlap enough that it makes sense to place them in dialogue with each other. As explained in the MJP's essay "[Italian Futurism and English Vorticism](#)" by Teresa Prudente, Vorticists split from the Futurist movement, taking its "attention to speed and motion [and combining it] with Cubist use of geometry and structure, thereby suggesting the intention to concentrate more on style than on content" (Prudente).

Literature Sample:

"The Futurist Manifesto" by Tommaso Marinetti

June 1909

We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls, because like them they were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts. And trampling underfoot our native sloth on opulent Persian carpets, we have been discussing right up to the limits of logic and scrawling

the paper with demented writing.

Our hearts were filled with an immense pride at feeling ourselves standing quite alone, like lighthouses or like the sentinels in an outpost, facing the army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs. Alone with the engineers in the infernal stoke-holes of great ships, alone with the black spirits which rage in the belly of rogue locomotives, alone with the drunkards beating their wings against the walls. Then we were suddenly distracted by the rumbling of huge double decker trams that went leaping by, streaked with light like the villages celebrating their festivals, which the Po in flood suddenly knocks down and uproots, and, in the rapids and eddies of a deluge, drags down to the sea...

Manifesto of Futurism

1. We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness.
2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity and revolt.
3. Literature has up to now magnified pensive immobility, ecstasy and slumber. We want to exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and blow with the fist.
4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.

Literary Criticism Sample:

“Futurist Standards of Measurement” by F. T. Marinetti

transition, Issue 4. Pages 175-178

Criticism of theatrical productions and of books, such as appears in the magazines and daily newspapers, does not answer the purposes of the modern reader, who demands exactness, speed and simultaneousness. It must be done away with or completely modified. For this reason I have resolved it into a system of precise measurements under separate headings.

The useful results of such a system are as follows :

- (1) A maximum of synthesis is obtained by eliminating all repetitions and ramblings from the subject.

- (2) A maximum of sincerity is obtained. The critic is obliged automatically to declare without subterfuge the value of each feature of a work of art.
- (3) A synthetic impression is presented to the reader, who can quickly grasp the different values, sometimes opposed to one another, of the work in question.
- (4) Separate justice is rendered the author, his intentions, the results of his efforts, the actors, the stage director and the public, by means of the classified headings. The critic may exalt the value, social or literary, past or present, of an author, even when it is necessary thoroughly to condemn his work. He may condemn the actors, at the same time eulogizing the play self, if need be. He may testify to the enthusiasm of the public while deprecating the play which excites such enthusiasm. Present day criticism, lacking such definite dividing lines between the author, conception, subject, findings, interpreters, staging, and the public, often presents a mixture, more or less colored with imperfect judgements, which deceives the intelligence of the reader.
- (5) A modern reader, dynamic and often distracted, may get his information rapidly. He may take account of a play or a book at a glance.
- (6) The importance of originality in art may be emphasized to good advantage, under the heading: Original features or findings. The existence or absence of such features reveal to a certain extent the pulse of a work of art.

Primary Sources:

transition, Issues 3, 4, & 5

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

“The Futurist Manifesto” by Tommaso Marinetti

https://www.societyforasianart.org/sites/default/files/manifesto_futurista.pdf

Get to Know Futurism Better:

Futurism Explained (Video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jERSbNRyx7E>

History of Futurism:

<https://www.artchive.com/art-movements/futurism/>

Collection of Futurist Artwork:

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/movement/futurism>

Sidney Hunt:

<https://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2014/01/24/the-art-of-sidney-hunt-1896-1940/>

Literary Futurism:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/futurism>

Vorticism:

“We stand for the reality of the Present – not for the sentimental future, or the sacripant past”

—Wyndham Lewis

“I have no doubt that Italy needed Mr. Marinetti, but he did not set on the egg that hatched me and as I am wholly opposed to his aesthetic principles I see no reason why I, and various men who agree with me, should be expected to call ourselves Futurists.”

—Ezra Pound

Vorticism:

While patriotism, action, and technological optimism characterized the Futurists, the group that split off to form the Vorticists were wholly disillusioned with these ideals. The founders came to this conclusion: neither war nor any culture/government that allowed it could be romanticized. “[Italian Futurism and English Vorticism](#)” by Teresa Prudente expands on these differences:

Vorticism combined the Futurist attention to speed and movement with the Cubist use of geometry and structure, thereby suggesting the intention to concentrate more on style than on content. In this respect, the theme of technology was interpreted by Vorticism in a more detached way, showing a classical search for control and rationality which contrasted with the Futurist exaltation of modernity and desire for immersion in the flux of life. The Futurists’ involvement with Fascist propaganda also contributed to the Vorticists’ critical approach toward the Italian movement: the Futurist exaltation of war and its call on the masses marked, in Lewis’s view, the movement’s ephemeral and populist character and showed, again, Futurism’s inability to move on from irrational forces towards a more mastered form of art. (modjourn.com)

Vorticism was central in another Modernist magazine called *Blast* created by Wyndham Lewis. Although *transition* associates with the more organic movements of Modernism (surrealism, for example), the dialogue that goes back and forth between these two magazines and their editors means that we get a better sense of debate and mutual criticism as new ideas solidified.

Vorticism is contemporary to the magazine *transition*, but appears mostly through references to Wyndham Lewis or essays by Ezra Pound.

Art Sample:



A Short Flight. Edward Wadsworth.



Edward Wadsworth.
Blast.

Literary Vorticism:

Lewis captures the essence of Vorticism by blessing and blasting, in turns, elements of culture. The vortex is formed in between ideological extremes, and its developing center of gravity generates new inspiration and “the greatest energy” according to Ezra Pound. See [Blast, Issue 1](#) for a literary example.

Literature Sample:

“First Aid to the Enemy” by Eugene Jolas, Elliot Paul, and Robert Sage

Transition, Issue 9. Pages 161-176

...But Mr. Lewis’ soul, it would seem, was still restless — as far as a soul can be restless within the limits staked out by British good form — and he went into retirement, with a few thousand books, magazines and newspapers, to puzzle out the code of the cosmos. The Great Revelation apparently came about a year ago when, entering a new period of his career, Critic-Philosopher- Sociologist Lewis, began mortifying best-selling novelists by issuing a 400-page book every four months. He began also the publication of the deluxe and bulky one-man review, *The Enemy*, designed to inform the impatient public beforehand of Mr. Lewis’ newest

discoveries in the way of bugaboos... (continuing to page 172) Thus, heroically brandishing his lathe sword, he charges Mr. Joyce, Miss Stein, *transition*, Surrealism, Communism and other alleged danger spots in the structure of the Western World.

As far as transition is concerned, he makes no error in assuming that few of his phrases are destined to be dignified by the quotation marks of his opponents, for he is not given to succinct expression and we see little value in devoting a hundred and fifty pages to an analysis of his mistakes. (It is extremely interesting to note in this connection that, despite his boast, Mr. Lewis has quoted not one word, from transition in his criticism.) The challenge of directness, coming from the diffuse editor of *The Enemy*, is not without some humor, but we shall accept it solemnly, with neither the “cries of rage” nor the “wounded vanity” which he anticipates. Indeed, it would be well to start out with the direct statistical statement that out of 309 contributions appearing in the first eight numbers of transition exactly 31 were by men in any way connected with the Surrealist movement. This is rather important since Mr. Lewis, without bothering with embarrassing details, builds up his entire attack from the quite erroneous assumption that for the purposes of argument transition and Surrealism can be taken as meaning the same thing. His data thus arranged to fit his thesis, Mr. Lewis proceeds in this thunderous fashion by means of the convenient syllogism : The Surrealists are Communists — or, as he less directly puts it, “the politics of such a group as the Super-realist are not the dogma, but the aroma, the tempo, of Moscow;” thus transition, being (according to Mr. Lewis) Surrealistic, is “a political paper essentially,” a “convulsive, politico-artistic form of radical propaganda” and, consequently, just one more of those horrid menaces to the safety of the Western World. But Mr. Lewis does not so easily exhaust his capacity for misinterpretation — for he has the newspaper feature writer’s weakness for reckless and inaccurate generalization — and he is soon not only confusing transition with Surrealism, but Mr. Joyce with Miss Stein and Miss Stein with Dada.

Anyone who had intelligently read one or two numbers of transition would have discerned the obvious facts that Mr. Joyce and Miss Stein are at opposite poles of thought and expression, that neither of them has anything in common with the Dada or Surrealist movements.

On one unescapable point Mr. Lewis is correct — the Surrealists are Communists. The editors of transition, on the other hand, are no more Communists than they are Fascists, for all forms of politics are outside the range of our interests. This, however, should not be construed as an attempt to wash our hands of the Surrealists. If we have a warm feeling for both them and the

Communists it is because the movements which they represent are aimed at the destruction of a thoroughly rotten structure, just as were the American and French revolutions. Contemporary society seems to us to be in an abysmally dark state and we are entertained intellectually, if not physically, with the idea of its destruction. But we do not share the illusion that reformation implies improvement. We are content to leave society to the Communists, Methodist missionaries, the Fascists, the Anti-Saloon League, Mr. Lewis and the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Our interests are confined to literature and life; and literature, especially Anglo- Saxon, is on the whole even worse off than contemporary society. It is our purpose, purely and simply, to amuse ourselves in weeding out the rank and sterile growth that has sucked the life out of American letters and in providing a clear patch where fresh plants may grow.

Primary Sources:

transition, Issue 9

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Blast, Issue 1

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Vorticism Better:

Virtual tour of Vorticist Exhibition at Tate Britain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQVjNYPGTs4>

Collection of *Blast* Magazine:

<https://modjourn.org/journal/blast/>

Tate Museum Article:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/v/vorticism>

Understanding the Vortex:

<https://artuk.org/discover/art-terms/vorticism#:~:text=The%20term%20was%20defined%20by,associated%20with%20the%20Victorian%20era.>

Entry to the Encyclopedia of Modernism:

<https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/vorticism>

Primitivism:

“We must be brave and turn our backs upon almost everything that until now good Europeans like ourselves thought precious and indispensable. Our ideas and our ideals must be clad in hair shirts, they must be fed on locusts and a wild honey, not on history, if we are ever to escape from the exhaustion of our European bad taste.”

—Franz Marc

Primitivism:

Primitivism saw its beginning in the late 19th century as artists rejected European standards when it came to art and turned to other cultures for inspiration. Primitivism as a term is problematic; at the time, some within the movement felt they were bringing marginalized works into the modern awareness, but even this rationale takes a Eurocentric view of progress and taste. Artists like Picasso and Gauguin appropriated many of their hallmarks from African and Native American styles that had been established for centuries. Stylized or abstract figures, planes of color, motion and emotion—these elements found in many Modernist movements were drawn from what they called “primitive” art. This shift was seen as a return to an earlier point in human history as well as a rejection of western European standards. *transition* published a wide variety of artwork; its issues included not only artists like Picasso, but also those like Polelonema who created within a tradition begun by their culture.

Sample of Art Criticism:

“The Occident” by Jean George Auriol

transition, Issue 2. Pages 153-159.

The Orient is the admirable museum of an antique and detestable civilization. But the assimilation of Asiatic spirit and culture can bring nothing but disorder, hate of life, an impotence of manifest creative reaction, and a passive inactivity and shrinking which tends toward nothingness. I do not think it is this, exactly, which can restore us to youth,—Europeans already aged and who know little of the joyous and free effort we have allowed to be trampled beneath the feet of our actual miseries...

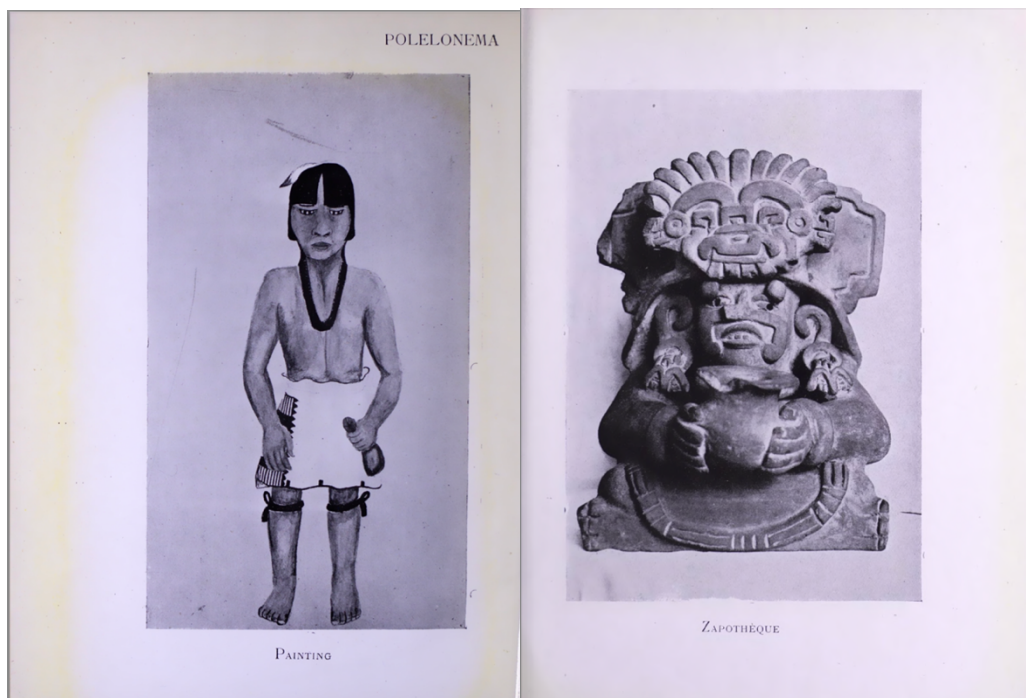
For us a photograph is as good as a poem; an odor is worth a memory; the pressure of a hand, a distaste. The savor of a fruit or the charm of a negro song equals the most subtle literary combinations. We see men and things with the eyes of a child and we have a child’s ingenuous

astonishment and infinite curiosity... We owe this welcome return to a formula perhaps a bit primitive to the brutal influence of America, all America...

Commentary on “The Occident:

In this piece of literary and artistic criticism, Auriol complained that French culture had been influenced too heavily by foreign philosophies, specifically those from Asia. Despite his frustrations about this influence, which he didn’t believe had revitalized their culture at all, Auriol still upheld the “robust” literature coming from America as “perfect” and “full of savage power” (159). He had no issue with Primitivism or its ideals, but pointed to a different source for the same themes. The more genuine, simple, and dynamic—“primitive”—aesthetic was something that many modernists were drawn to once society began crumbling around them in the wake of the first world war.

Art Sample:



Primary Sources:

Transition, Issues 2, 5, & 7

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Primitivism Better:

“Fauve Masks: Rethinking Modern ‘Primitivist’ Uses of African and Oceanic Art, 1905—8.” by Joshua Cohen for *The Art Bulletin*:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44972832>. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.

Khan Academy, “Primitivism and Modern Art”:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/beginners-guide-20th-c-art/xd974a79:key-concepts/a/primitivism-and-modern-art>

The New Nihilism:

“It was evident that old values had become meaning- less. The importance of the individual seemed to have dwindled; the practicability of concerted action appear- ed still more futile. Pity had been exhausted by the unreasonable demands the war years had placed upon it. Cynicism had proven itself inadequate when measured with realities.”

—Elliot Paul

New Nihilism:

The “New Nihilism,” as Elliot Paul called it in *transition*’s second issue, rejected the assumption that life, art, and culture had any broader meaning. Sentimentalism was put aside for consistent, even harsh realism. As Paul examined in several contemporary authors, inhumanity became a theme often connected to the story’s hero. The New Nihilism, however, departed from Nietzsche’s concept of the *ubermensch*. “The new hero,” Paul explained, “neither feels nor shows superiority, only an utter amorality and a clear head which finds futility everywhere and accepts it as a natural law” (166).

Literary Sample:

“Confiteor” by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes
transition, Issue 9. Pages 41-56.

But, I said, You forget, Doctor, there is no more Law.

Precisely so, said Dr. Lavenglette. The task is therefore all the more difficult and subtle. And then, too, without law, women take on a much greater importance, and the Abbé knows women quite as well as he does the art of logic!

What could I say to that. It was part of my system to give free rein to the force of events. And then I had other fish to fry. I said to policeman 3939 — Why does the crowd seem so frightened? We must reassure them. Get your men to do whatever is necessary. What the hell, are they afraid of their liberty ? Only one thing is forbidden them, and that is obligations, and therefore, work. I should think they would leap and laugh and dance. I want them to enjoy themselves!

What I wanted, above all, was to be able to get close to this crowd, to be a part of it, and myself to enjoy the new day as they did. The police officers, directed after that by policeman 3939, went around telling everybody that they were all wrong to be anxious, that it was Sunday, and would always be Sunday. They were to accept it like that, and were to understand that from now on, it would be recognized as being quite natural that man was not put on this earth to work. Then that there was nothing frightening in the fact that all the accustomed ties had been broken. Sons and daughters released from their parents, and vice versa, husbands and lovers let off free, and all the invisible threads uniting people to some point of honor, self-love, respect etc. severed, severed, severed. Now then citizens — no, there aren't any more citizens ; comrades — no, no more comrades either — well, to wind up, I want to say to you: Here's to a good-time for everybody!

... And when one of [the women] grown especially optimistic through alcohol, leaned towards me, her teeth gleaming, to ask what I did in life, I drew her nearer perhaps than she wanted, and looked deep into her eyes in such a way that she did not have the time to turn her glance away and found herself bound to mine. She turned pale, then blushed : it seemed to me that her skin changed color like the skin of a recently captured devil-fish left dying in the sun on the shore. She clenched her teeth on her irregular breathing, and in the depths of her eyes I could read clearly the thought of the last retreat. Beyond the little pleasures, beyond heedlessness, beyond beauty, beyond lust, there was the anguished horror of emptiness and death.

Then, drunk myself, I thrust her aside brutally, crying: Since that's how things are, beautiful chickens of my heart, I want you to know that there now exists only one obligation, the one proceeding from death. Ah, ah, my beauties, now is the time when you'll have to retreat yet a bit more on the flowery border of darkness.

Primary Sources:

Transition, Issue 2

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know “The New Nihilism” Better:

NY Times Article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/1964/02/16/archives/the-new-nihilism-art-versus-feeling.html>

Understanding the *Urbemensch*:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/superman-philosophy>

Read Elliot Paul’s Full Essay:

Visit modjourn.com where *transition* Issue 2 will soon be published digitally. In the meantime, the physical copies of *transition* are available through appointments with McFarlin Library’s Special Collections.

Abstract Expressionism:

“Freeing ourselves of the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend... freeing ourselves from the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, and myth that have been the devices of Western European painting.”

—Barnett Newman

“To us, art is an adventure into an unknown world of the imagination, which is fancy-free and violently opposed to common sense.”

—Adolf Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman

Abstract Expressionism:

As explained by [The Art Story](#), Abstract Expression is indebted to Surrealism’s dedication to accessing the subconscious through artistic spontaneity and disregard for realism; this movement also maps onto a geographical shift: painters like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Helen Frankenthaler founded a new center for modern art in New York, drawing focus away from Paris. Abstract Expressionism gained momentum late in the Modern Era and halfway through WWII. Because this movement was primarily American, its style requires

contextualization within contemporaneous history. The Great Depression, a collective PTSD post-WWI, and the onset of WWII must all be taken into account.

Work by Surrealists, Cubists, and other innovative artist groups were a new legacy and resource for these young American artists to tap into. Stella Paul's essay "Abstract Expressionism" explores this background; Paul points out Abstract Expressionists tapped into the "Surrealist device for breaking free of the conscious mind... psychic automatism—in which automatic gesture and improvisation gain free rein" (metmuseum.org). Like the Picasso and his cubists, Rothko, Gottlieb, and other founders drew heavily from the preoccupation with non-Eurocentric cultures that this guide has defined under the title Primitivism. By exploring connections to other Modernist movements, we understand that—although later in the 20th century—Abstract Expressionism built on the values of its artistic predecessors.

Characteristics that make the movement unique: large canvas sizes; diverse styles of abstraction; spontaneous, immediate, and gestural brushstrokes; and the later development of [color fields](#)—blocks of color that rejected pictorial representation in favor of "a kind of elemental impact" (metmuseum.org). Because the Modernist Journals Project currently extends as far as 1928, Abstract Expression does not exist as a fully developed concept within the archive of magazines.

Primary Sources:

Transition, Issues 3 & 5

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Abstract Expressionism Better:

Video Summary of Movement:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ii4NeXYbzbQ&t=3s>

"Abstract Expressionism," essay by Stella Paul for The Metropolitan Museum of Art:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/abex/hd_abex.htm

List of Artists:

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Abstract-Expressionism>

Highlight—Women of Abstract Expression:

<https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/exhibitions/women-abstract-expressionism>

Fauvism:

“The chief function of color should be to serve expression as well as possible. I put down my tones without a preconceived plan. If at first, and perhaps without my having been conscious of it, one tone has particularly seduced or caught me.”

—Henri Matisse

“One has to guard against a formula that is good for everything, that can interpret reality in addition to the other arts, and that rather than creating can only result in a style, or a stylization. It is the unforeseeable that creates the event.”

—Georges Braque

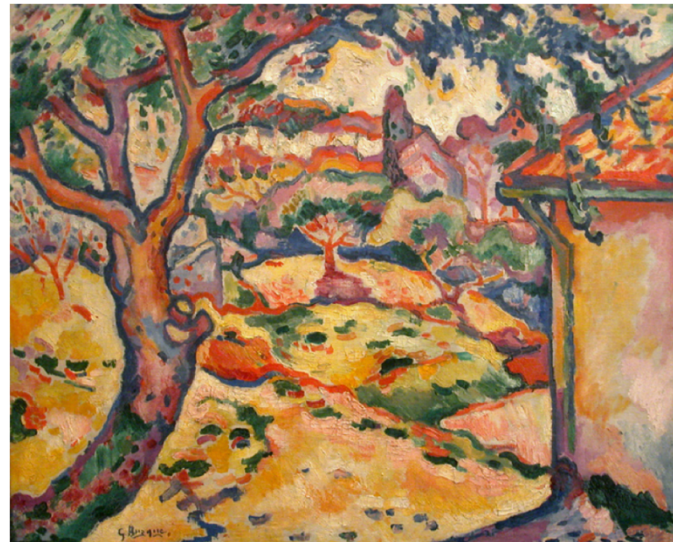
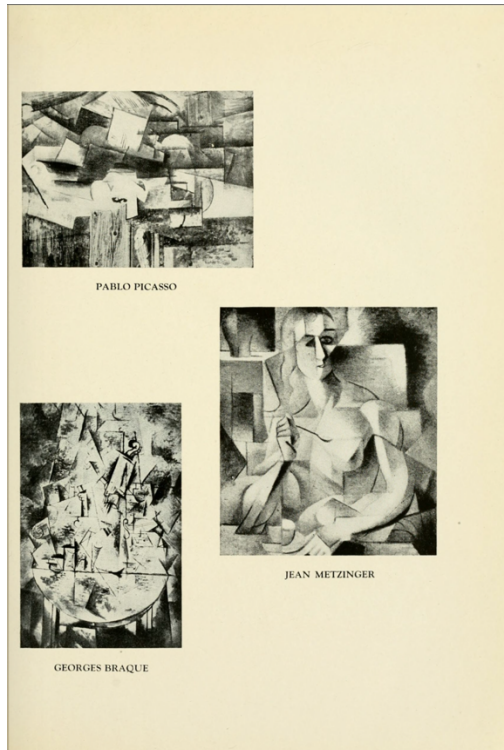
Fauvism:

While this movement was moving out of focus and integrated into other movements by the early 1900's, Fauvism is considered a part of the early Modernist era. In it is the burgeoning sense of the artist as an individual; fauvist art, like that created by the Surrealists, was a response to the painter's subject and not an exact representation of it. This movement found cohesion in the use of vibrant color and prominent brushstrokes.

Names tied to the movement include Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck. Georges Braque and his transition from a Fauvist to a founder of Cubism helps us the rise and fall of artistic movements an organic process. As explained by Sabine Rewald at The Met, “By 1908, a revived interest in Paul Cézanne's vision of the order and structure of nature had led many [Fauvists, Braque included] to reject the turbulent emotionalism of Fauvism in favor of the logic of Cubism.”

Dehistoricizing movements, moving beyond set dates and timelines, we find contact between Fauvism and Cubism, Vorticism and Futurism, Fauvism and Surrealism. This relationship is much like that of Modernist periodicals; although journals began and ended publication at different times, they overlapped and even argued back and forth on how to interpret society. The “isms” interact similarly.

Art Sample—Comparison of Braque's Fauvist and Cubist Styles (*Little Review*, Vol.9, No. 1):



Literary Sample:

“Fauvism and a Fauve” by Michael T.H. Sadler

Rhythm, Vol. 1, No. 1. Pages 14-18.

Fauvism is a frank reaction from the precious. It stands for strength and decision, alike of line, colour and feeling. It remedies the formlessness of Impressionism but keeps the brilliance, it is art and not literature, it is erratically individual and not mechanical. But do not believe those outraged conservatives who raise the cry of anarchy in art. There is a difference between Anarchy and Revolution, the difference between wanton destruction and constructive enthusiasm. This movement is not a mere upheaval, a welter of destructive folly.

And what are the lines of advance ? Their name is legion. That the development is so varied is the best of signs. There is no trace of fettering system or cramping formula?. Almost every artist has his ideas and is working after his own plan, but is at the same time ready to welcome any new method of search, any fresh line of advance towards self-expression.

But has this motley crowd of individual workers any common aim and belief besides that of self-expression? I think so. There is one fundamental desire with which all start—the desire

for rhythm. Be it of line or colour, be it simple or intricate, in every true product of Fauvism it will be present. And this rhythm is of a piece with the use of strong flowing line, of strong massed colour, of continuity. The work must be strong, must be alive, and must be rhythmical. Then there is another goal for which the Fauves are striving—decentralization of design. This aim is an important element in the wonderful decorative value of modern painting, painting which fills a space, which seems prepared to spread over any size of surface with the graceful continuity of its lines.

But I think these ideas can best be explained by reference to some particular artist's work, and no better example could be found than the work of Anne Estelle Rice, some of which has recently been on view at the Baillie Gallery.

Miss Rice, like every other leader of the Fauvist movement, is too individual to allow of her being classed wholly with anyone else. Her outlook is vigorous and personal, her methods definite and unhesitating. The stimulus derived from a visit to the exhibition in Bruton Street was frankly amazing. As one came in, one was faced by the 18 RHYTHM artist's portrait of herself, a large square picture simply alive with the sweeping balance of its line and the brilliant vigour of its colour. The vitality and eagerness of the portrait are the artist's own vitality and eagerness. It is more than a likeness; it is like an intimate conversation.

The same force was apparent in the whole exhibition. Miss Rice has most kindly made a special drawing, which is reproduced at the head of this article, to express as plainly as possible the rhythm for which she strives. There is some similarity between it and one of the pictures shown in London, but here she has gained an added effect by the drooping band of decoration behind the figures. I think the skill with which the curves are related is too plain to need comment. The drawing is indeed typical of Miss Rice's tireless work, with its bold decorative planning and swift decided line, springing ever outwards and upwards.

It is not long since a large painting of Miss Rice's was pilloried in the London and Paris press as the extravagance of a lunatic. I can only hope that these critics of the "Egyptian Dancers" did not know what to look for. If they did, if they came tuned to receive an impression of gliding, continuous motion and did not receive it, there is no more to be said; but if they hoped for the rounded grace and frozen attitudes of Burlington House, these flat triangular forms might well startle. I wonder whether they would condemn for similar reasons—as in consistency they ought—such pictures as "Scheherazade" or "The White Sail." The use of line is the same; the

subtle correlations of outline of the figures in the first case, of the sails and barge-prows in the second, have the same vital stillness, the same rhythmic repose always on the edge of action and always ready for action—to borrow a phrase from Mr Holbrook Jackson—as have the limbs of the dancers and the crouching forms in the background of the large picture which caused such an outcry. There is no need for further analysis of the exhibition. Whether it is sunlight or moonlight she is painting, figures or landscape, still-life or boats on water, there is the same sense of surging design, the same bravery of colour, the same sincerity of vision. This is no blague, no craving for originality. It is very strong, very sane and—I think—very beautiful.

Primary Sources:

Rhythm, Vol. 1, No. 1

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

The Little Review, Vol. 9, No. 1

Physical edition courtesy of McFarlin Special Collections

Digital PDF provided by the Modernist Journals Project

Get to Know Fauvism Better:

Brief Overview:

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Fauvism>

More Works:

<https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/fauvism>

Fauvism in 4 Minutes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcjJEOapNKY>

Essay on the Movement by Sabine Rewald:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/fauv/hd_fauv.htm

“Braque: Homage to a Master,” by Cyril Barrett for *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 52, no. 208: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30088581>

Project Overview:

In 1929, Eugéné Jolas published a manifesto in the experimental journal *transition*, expressing a desire to “emancipate the creative element from the present ideology” (British Library). Because the Modernist era constitutes a time of experimentation, artistic movements arose to challenge society’s standards and established canon. Scholarly practice—when it comes to Modernism—requires a foundation of knowledge about the movements that originated from various centers of counter-culture in the early twentieth century. These centers were scattered across and beyond Western Europe and often distributed their manifestos through publication. The dialogue between periodicals that welcomed these new voices allowed for the collaboration and competition of ideas despite geographical distance. Margaret Anderson’s *Little Review*, Alfred Stieglitz’s *Camera Work*, and Wyndham Lewis’ *The Enemy* were similar to *transition* for a number of reasons: these magazines, and others like them, used a popular medium to circulate novel ideas, experimental artists and writers, and their own theories. Surrealism, expressionism, primitivism, futurism, dadaism: these concepts and more are all featured in *transition*, because they signaled a departure from the mainstream.

“Art in *transition*” is a project that endeavors (first) to create a visual guide including the era’s more prevalent isms, (second) to connect these movements with art and literature found in *transition*... then, more broadly, with work from other magazines, and (third) to highlight the insights these periodicals have to offer when placed in conversation with one another—as they were when originally circulating.

This project would not have been possible without McFarlin Library’s Special Collections or the online database from the Modernist Journals Project. It can be used as a teaching tool, or simply a useful guide. *transition* will be the MJP’s newest addition; if this project has sparked interest, keep an eye out for the first ten issues that we have digitized. Highlighting Modernist studies as a burgeoning field of study at TU and an area in which Digital Humanities already has a foundation, “Art in *transition*” supports and promotes the early stages of a Digital Humanities initiative at the University of Tulsa.