

BMA Presents First Solo U.S. Exhibition of Cubist Juan Gris in Over Three Decades

Forty Paintings and Collages Explore the Artist's Pivotal Role in Cubism and Innovative Approach to Still Life

For media in Baltimore

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BALTIMORE, MD (May 24, 2021)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) presents the first U.S. exhibition in over 35 years dedicated to the Spanish artist Juan Gris. Co-organized with the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) and on view in Baltimore from September 12, 2021 through January 9, 2022, *Color and Illusion: The Still Lives of Juan Gris* highlights the artist's pioneering contributions to the Cubist movement through 40 paintings and collages, spanning from 1911 to 1927—the year of Gris's tragically early death at age 40. The featured works capture all of the major periods of the artist's career and reveal the principal motifs within and evolution of his innovative style. While Gris played a pivotal role in the development of Cubism, his contributions have often been overshadowed by those of his better-known cohorts Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Fernand Léger. *Color and Illusion* provides an opportunity to reconsider the legacy of this important yet underappreciated modernist master, and to explore his incredible ability to create compositions that embrace abstraction and representation, tension and stasis, and color and form.

The exhibition is co-curated by Nicole R. Myers, The Barbara Thomas Lemmon Senior Curator of European Art at the DMA, and Katy Rothkopf, the BMA's The Anne and Ben Cone Memorial Director of the Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies and Senior Curator of European Painting and Sculpture. It premiered in Dallas from March 18 through July 25, 2021. The exhibition includes important loans from The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Telefónica Collection, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, Spain, among others.

“Juan Gris's incredible use of and experimentation with color and form reverberate across modern and contemporary art movements. The upcoming exhibition offers a fresh opportunity to examine a daring and deeply accomplished yet lesser-studied artist, providing new insights into the development of Cubism and the evolving narrative of art more broadly. We are delighted to collaborate with the DMA on the

creation of this exhibition, and we look forward to engaging our many audiences in the brilliance of Gris's practice," said Christopher Bedford, the BMA's Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director.

Born José Victoriano Carmelo Carlos González Pérez in Madrid, Juan Gris (1887–1927) was one of the primary contributors to the development of Cubism in the early 20th century. He was championed by art dealers Daniel Kahnweiler and Léonce Rosenberg and writer and art collector Gertrude Stein, who considered him "a perfect painter." His works are among the movement's most original and inventive, building upon early Cubist precedents with experimental and exquisite still-life compositions distinguished by their vibrant colors, bold patterns, and a constantly shifting approach.

Color and Illusion: The Still Lifes of Juan Gris begins with Gris's early paintings, such as *Still Life with Flowers*, which exemplify Analytic Cubism with greatly simplified, faceted shapes and a monochromatic palette, yet are novel in their systematic geometry and grid-like structure set on diagonals. The exhibition then chronicles a series of subsequent stylistic changes in Gris's practice, starting with his transition to Synthetic Cubism. From about 1913 to early 1916, Gris boldly experimented with *trompe-l'oeil*, collage, and Pointillist techniques in increasingly abstract and dynamic compositions characterized by complex patterns and dazzling colors applied in daring and novel combinations, as seen in *Still Life: The Table; The Siphon; Guitar and Pipe; Still Life before an Open Window, Place Ravignan; Fantômas; and Newspaper and Fruit Dish*.

Gris drastically reinvented his style once more between 1916 and 1920, adopting a more somber palette, simplifying both his motifs and the organizational structure of his compositions, and seeking a greater fusion of subject and ground. This second phase of Cubism, often called Crystal or Classical Cubism, is characterized by its emphasis on the purity and stability of form and composition. Gris was hailed as the leader of this movement, and his work in this period, such as *Still Life with Newspaper; The Sideboard; and Guitar and Fruit Dish on a Table*, contributed to the phenomenon known as the "return to order" that gripped the avant-garde following World War I.

The artist's late production from 1920 to 1927 demonstrates a renewed interest in rich, vibrant hues and the still life set before an open window, an innovative motif he first introduced to Cubism in 1915 and revisited in works such as *Le Canigou; The Painter's Window; and Mandolin and Fruit Dish*. Notable for their harmonious, lyrical quality, these final works embody yet another revolutionary shift in Gris's aesthetic and approach as he increasingly relied on the geometric, abstract structure of his compositions to determine the still-life components integrated seamlessly within them. A perfect union of what Gris called "flat, colored architecture," these works are a lasting testament to his constant reinvention of Cubism and the deceptively simple concept of the still life.

"This exhibition gives us the wonderful opportunity to highlight major works by Gris in both the BMA's and DMA's collections, putting them into a new context for the first time in decades," said Rothkopf. "Seeing how Gris took the same motifs of musical instruments, playing cards, newspapers, bottles, glasses, and tabletops and used them in his still-life compositions in different and innovative ways throughout his brief but productive career is extraordinary."

“Gris was a prodigious talent, achieving an incredible body of work in the short period he was active as an artist. Just two years after he started painting, he emerged as a quintessential member of the Cubist group with a distinct style that is remarkable for its extraordinary refinement and rich color,” said Myers. “His great ability to grasp, adapt, and repeatedly transform the Cubist aesthetic deserves a deeper consideration not only of Gris’s production, but of the role he played in shaping modern art in the first quarter of the 20th century.”

Color and Illusion: The Still Lifes of Juan Gris is accompanied by a fully illustrated scholarly catalogue co-published by the DMA and BMA. The publication will include essays on Gris’s artistic process and legacy by co-curators Nicole R. Myers and Katy Rothkopf; Anna Katherine Brodbeck, the DMA’s Hoffman Family Senior Curator of Contemporary Art; Paloma Esteban Leal, Senior Curator of Painting and Drawing, 1881–1939, at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; and Harry Cooper, Senior Curator and Head of Modern Art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Color and Illusion: The Still Lifes of Juan Gris is co-organized by the Dallas Museum of Art and the Baltimore Museum of Art. This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

[Baltimore Museum of Art](#)

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. artbma.org

[Visitor Information](#)

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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