

**Large print
exhibition text**



CUBISM

AND THE
TROMPE L'OEIL
TRADITION

**THE
MET**

Access Programs at the Museum are made possible by Mary Jaharis and  MetLife Foundation.

Major support is also provided by the Filomen M. D'Agostino Foundation.

Additional support is provided by the Estate of Doris Alperdt, the Mellon Foundation, an Anonymous Foundation, The Moody Endowment, May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Inc., Renate, Hans & Maria Hofmann Trust, Allene Reuss Memorial Trust, Jane B. Wachslar, The J.M. Foundation, Philip Elenko, William G. & Helen C. Hoffman Foundation, and The Murray G. and Beatrice H. Sherman Charitable Trust.

The exhibition is made possible by the Barrie A. and Deedee Wigmore Foundation.

Additional support is provided by the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund, the Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust, an Anonymous Foundation, the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund, and the Janice H. Levin Fund.

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

We thank the many lenders for their exceptional generosity, with special acknowledgment to the Musée National Picasso-Paris and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

This exhibition is a participant in the international Celebration Picasso 1973–2023, which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the artist's death.

“Parrhasius entered into a competition with Zeuxis, who produced a picture of grapes so successfully that birds flew up to it. Whereupon Parrhasius painted such a realistic representation of a curtain that Zeuxis requested that the curtain should be drawn. When Zeuxis realized his mistake, he yielded up the prize, saying that whereas he had deceived birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist.”

—Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, A.D. 77), on the origins of pictorial illusionism in a contest between two ancient Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius

Cubism and the Trompe l'Oeil Tradition

One of the oldest forms of Western painting, trompe l'oeil (French for “deceive the eye”) would seem to have little in common with the anti-illusionism of the Cubists; this exhibition reveals otherwise. A self-referential art that calls attention to its own artifice, trompe l'oeil, like Cubism, involves the viewer in perceptual and psychological games that complicate definitions of reality and authenticity.

Trompe l'oeil easel painting flourished in mid-seventeenth century Europe, inspired by Pliny the Elder's legendary account of how a painted image could be taken for the real thing—at least momentarily. Typically, artists augmented their “counterfeits” by including painted simulations of handwritten texts and printed matter, blurring the boundaries between the private and the public spheres, and between fine art and popular culture. Frequently disparaged as mere copyists, they showed off their ingenuity with unexpected sleights of hand and elevated the humble genre of still life with commentary on contemporary affairs and morality.

The reputation of trompe l'oeil painting declined precipitously during the nineteenth century, which may explain why its connections to Cubism have been largely overlooked. Yet Georges Braque, Juan Gris, and Pablo Picasso similarly laid bare the conventions of verbal and visual representation, filled their pictures with allusions to art and art making, and upended hierarchies of taste. They parodied and emulated trompe l'oeil strategies in a three-way contest of creative one-upmanship that accelerated with the introduction of collage techniques in 1912. The presence of actual things in the picture—newspaper clippings and illusionistic wallpapers—resulted in previously unimaginable levels of paradox and new ways of confounding the mind. Like the trompe l'oeil artists of earlier centuries, the Cubists raised provocative questions about originality, truth, and falsehood that remain relevant today.

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Antonio Leonelli (Antonio da Crevalcore; Italian, ca. 1443–1525)

Still Life with Grapes and a Bird

ca. 1500–1510

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift of Stanley David Moss

Leonelli's small canvas has outsize importance as one of the first independent still lifes. It is also an early depiction of the Zeuxis narrative—even if a painted bird, unlike inanimate grapes, could never be mistaken for the real thing. The composition was likely inspired by the illusionistic images of open cupboards, made entirely of inlaid wood, that decorated the walls of princely Renaissance studies, such as the one from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio in the Met collection (Gallery 501). The gaze of the greedy gray shrike directs the eye to the cluster of grapes suspended on the threshold.

Adriaen van der Spelt (Dutch, ca. 1630–1673)
Frans van Mieris the Elder (Dutch, 1635–1681)
***Trompe l’Oeil Still Life with Flower Garland
and Curtain***

1658

Oil on panel

The Art Institute of Chicago, Wirt D. Walker Fund (1949.585)

In Pliny the Elder’s story, Parrhasius triumphed over Zeuxis because he strategically painted a curtain on the foreground plane, inventing a classic threshold device—an object that seemingly crosses over into the viewer’s space. In this collaborative still life, where a taffeta curtain on a rod painted by Van Mieris partially obscures a bouquet by Van der Spelt, whose level of simulated reality most astonishes? Seventeenth-century Dutch collectors sometimes placed protective curtains across their paintings, a fact that increases this work’s potential for pictorial duplicity, however fleeting. Other deceits lie hidden in plain sight: flowers that bloom in different seasons and camouflaged insects, such as the Red Admiral butterfly poised at the curtain’s edge.

Juan Fernández (El Labrador; Spanish, active 1629–57)

Still Life with Four Bunches of Grapes

ca. 1636

Oil on canvas

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

Pliny the Elder's origin story of eye-deceiving illusionism and creative competition, recounted on the wall at right, influenced artists in the Renaissance and for centuries after. Still-life painting emerged in the 1600s as a fully independent subject in European art, and grapes and curtains became popular motifs for artists aiming to vaunt their skills. El Labrador, the Zeuxis of his time, specialized in bunches of grapes hanging in a dark chamber for winter storage. The setting served as a pretext for closing off the background plane and allowing raking light to conjure the moist, plump fruit, temptingly near at hand. Tiny dots of highlight on the spherical surfaces round out the illusion of palpable three dimensions.

Origin Stories

The main types of trompe l'oeil painting originated during the Baroque period, notably letter-rack and board pictures. These compositions refuse spatial recession and feature assorted objects projecting from a solid background plane. Artists introduced fake frames, pictures-within-pictures, and other devices to alert the viewer to the clever deceptions at work. Trompe l'oeil enjoyed a resurgence in the United States during the 1890s, with novel conceits inspired by advertising and the con games played in bars and streets during the commerce-driven Gilded Age.

The Cubists reinvigorated hackneyed tropes, redefining artistic skill and ingenuity in an era when photography and cinema had eclipsed painted illusion. Braque, who had trained as a painter-decorator, was the first to experiment with trompe l'oeil motifs and faux wood-grain surfaces, introducing illusionistic details into his nearly abstract compositions. In spring 1912, Picasso made the radical move of pasting an actual fragment of material reality into a still life, transgressing the virtual threshold of painting. Gris trumped both artists

that autumn when he unveiled the new art of Cubist collage to the Parisian public, using a version of the pulled back curtain (reproduced here) from Pliny's the Elder's famous story of artistic competition.

Image caption:

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927). *The Washstand*, 1912. Oil, pasted papers, and pieces of glass on canvas. Private collection. Exhibited in Paris in October 1912

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Still Life with Chair Caning

1912

Oil and printed oilcloth on canvas edged with rope

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979

(MP 36)

Picasso made the first Cubist collage by pasting a piece of oilcloth (a waterproof fabric used for tablecloths) onto an oval canvas depicting café fare and a newspaper.

For this radical act—inserting a fragment of reality into the fictive realm of painting—he ingeniously selected a mass-produced, ready-made visual deception.

Machine-printed to look like the textured rattan weave used in chairs, this piece of trumpery is materially real but patently fake. Picasso then surrounded his still life with rope, a handy substitute for the traditional hand-carved frames that mimic braiding. In so doing, he wittily imitated an imitation.

The Met acknowledges the exceptional generosity of the Musée National Picasso-Paris in lending this work; this is the first time in thirty years that it has been exhibited in the United States.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)
The Scallop Shell: “Notre Avenir est dans l’Air”

1912

Enamel and oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

In spring 1912, Picasso altered the course of Cubism by inserting explicit passages of trompe l’oeil—one hand-painted, the other collaged—into the two oval canvases shown here. In this painting, the image of the French tricolor flag bearing the text “NOT[RE] AVE[NIR] EST DAN[S] L’A[IR]” (Our Future Is in the Air) replicates the cover of a pamphlet issued by the Michelin tire company to promote aviation. The slogan is also an inside joke, as Picasso liked to compare his and Braque’s Cubist breakthroughs to the high-flying inventions of the American Wright brothers. In these works, the letters “jou” appear for the first time, referring to *Le Journal*, the newspaper lying on the still-life tabletops, but also to the French

verb *jouer*, “to play”—signaling this new move in the Cubist game of representation.

Image caption:

Notre avenir est dans l'air (Our Future Is in the Air). Cover of pamphlet published by Michelin, February 1, 1912

Samuel van Hoogstraten (Dutch, 1627–1678)
Trompe l’Oeil Still Life

ca. 1666–78

Oil on canvas

Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe

Van Hoogstraten specialized in the quodlibet (Latin for “whatever you please”), a seemingly random assortment of objects that typically contains verbal and visual witticisms about art, artists, patrons, and politics.

This conceit required marvelous fidelity to the textures and scale of the items depicted; even so, the frame proclaims the entirety to be a painting. Therein lies the ruse, for the frame itself is illusory. Having outwitted the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III with one of his visual deceptions, Van Hoogstraten received the imperial gold medallion and chain, proudly displayed here to symbolize his elevation from artisan to fine artist. The adjacent note from an admirer boasts of this feat and compares him to Zeuxis, the ancient Greek painter skilled at painted illusion.

Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts (Flemish,
1625/29–after 1677)

The Attributes of the Painter

1665

Oil on canvas

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Valenciennes

A studio wall displaying the tools of the artist's trade was the ultimate self-reflexive subject of trompe l'oeil, a means of representing representation. Here, the painter's palette, brushes, maulstick (used to support the hand holding the paintbrush), and bottle of oil cast lively shadows that also indicate the proximity of the background plane. Above, a toppled hourglass and spent candle symbolize the transience of life, but Gijsbrechts undercuts the moralizing by revealing the scene to be mere illusion: the canvas peels off its stretcher, while a disingenuously rough sketch for that composition, nailed to the wall, ironically mimes the curling corner. Such virtuoso illusionism required an artist to hide the mark of his own hand, including signatures; Gijsbrechts coyly embedded his autograph in the note folded over the palette knife.

Wallerant Vaillant (Flemish, 1623–1677)
A Board with Letters, Quill Knife, and Quill Pen behind Red Straps

1658

Oil on canvas

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Gal.-Nr. 1232)

Vaillant pioneered the letter rack, a type of word-and-image counterfeit that prompts reflection on authenticity. The partially revealed letters, all originally secured by red sealing wax, invite the viewer to interpret messages ostensibly written by the hands of others. The inky script is painted not penned, despite the misleading quill, which raises further doubts: are the letters fake or faithful facsimiles? In a novel form of self-promotion, the correspondence bears the names and autographs of Vaillant's princely patrons or those he aimed to impress. The crumpled letter at lower left is a version of the *cartellino*, a trompe l'oeil device invented in the Renaissance that presents the artist's signature on a slip of paper seemingly appended to the painting's surface.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Violin and Palette

1909

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (54.1412)

Braque's *Violin and Palette* contains the Cubists' first explicit allusions to the trompe l'oeil tradition: the artist's palette and the green curtain, pulled back at upper right. Like Gijsbrechts in the painting on the adjacent wall, Braque daubed the palette faithfully with the same colors used on the rest of his canvas. Instead of painting a picture-within-a-picture, however, he took a picture apart. By refusing to employ modeling and perspective consistently, he exposed, through inversion, these two fundamental tricks of the painter's trade. Most tangibly real is the nail that casts a shadow (at the apex of the composition), an emblem of pictorial artifice since the seventeenth century.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Violin and Grapes

1912

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mrs. David M. Levy Bequest, 1960

The fluctuating planes in a shallow space are characteristic of Analytic Cubism and the modernist emphasis on the picture surface. Nevertheless, Picasso's violin on a wall also harkens back to trompe l'oeil board paintings, which reversed the conventions of Renaissance perspective and refused to lead the eye into a fictive middle ground or distance. The artist mixed ham-handed and virtuosic renditions of the violin, having learned from Braque artisanal techniques for faking wood with a brush and a decorator's comb. Not by chance, Picasso included a bunch of grapes (they spill out of a wicker basket)—the symbol of deceptive illusionism since antiquity and the fruit that the Cubists drew and painted more often than any other from 1912 onward.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Violin and Engraving

1913

Oil, sand, and collage on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder
Cubist Collection, Purchase, Leonard A. Lauder Gift, 2022
(2022.150)

A picture-within-a-picture attached to a board or wall was a favorite motif of trompe l'oeil artists. They astonished their patrons by using oil paint to depict work in other mediums and make “honest” forgeries of other artists’ styles. Gris outdid them—and his fellow Cubists—by pasting an actual nineteenth-century engraving into his still life (Robert Wallis’s reproduction, published in 1832, of J. M. W. Turner’s watercolor *View of the Chateau at St. Germain-en-Laye*). Tongue in cheek, the artist told his dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, that the buyer of the painting could remove the print and replace it with another of his choice, which perhaps explains why the bespoke frame swings open at the side.

Jefferson D. Chalfant (American, 1856–1931)
Which Is Which?

ca. 1890

Oil and cut-and-pasted printed paper on wood panel

Brandywine River Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Scaife and the Allegheny Foundation, 1997

Chalfant pasted a U.S. stamp onto canvas and placed next to it a hand-painted double, with identical sawtooth edges and paper-thin relief. The hastily cut-and-pasted newspaper account of the artist's sleight of hand challenges the viewer to discern the real four-cent proxy from the impostor. Though one stamp appears abraded—evidence, perhaps, of attempts to verify “which is which” by touch—the real rub lies with the press clipping, a fictitious piece of paper and reporting. The insertion of actual printed matter, the stamp, was a one-off until the advent of Cubism, but the American proffered two other conceits as well: faux collage and fake news. Though well publicized in the United States, the works of the American trompe l'oeil artists were likely unknown to the Cubists.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Still Life: The Table

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, printed wove paper, newspaper, conté crayon, gouache, wax crayon, and laid papers on newspaper mounted on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952

Like Chalfant in *Which Is Which?*, Gris used a newspaper clipping (in this case, an actual one) to engage the viewer in discerning “[L]E VR[A]I ET LE FAUX” (The true and the false), as the headline reads. Multiple layers of fiction ensue, as Gris draws phantasmal representations of a pipe, a glass, and bottles over solid wood-grain wallpaper that masquerades as a tabletop. A book lies open to a verifiable page, but the hefty volume is pure illusion. The artist pilfered the text from *L’agent secret* (*The Secret Agent*, 1911), one of a series of best-selling whodunits by French authors Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre that feature the criminal Fantômas, a master of disguises. The beguiling key cannot unlock the drawer because the “keyhole” is merely its own cast shadow.

Things on a Wall

Objects, papers, prints, and drawings nailed or strapped to a hard, flat surface were a favorite theme of trompe l'oeil painters. Typically, the surface simulates wood in all its peculiarities of grain, knot, and split, and the things set upon it seem to push beyond the picture plane into the spectator's space with a heightened presence. Stories abound of people reaching out to verify by touch and reacting with astonishment and pleasure on discovering the deception.

A violin or guitar suspended against a wall, sometimes accompanied by sheet music, a drawing, or a print likewise joined the Cubists' artistic repertoire. Not coincidentally, Braque and Picasso displayed their musical instruments in this manner and hung their pipes over a strap nailed to the wall. Beginning in 1912, when the Cubists expanded their range of novel techniques to include collage, papier collé (pasted paper), and mixing sand into oil paint, tactility as such became increasingly important to them. The different weights and types of paper and other materials they used to build their compositions resulted in actual, if

slight, relief. In their hands, tangible reality replaced the pure illusionism of trompe l'oeil painting.

Marcos Correa (Spanish, active ca. 1667–73)
Trompe l'Oeil

ca. 1667–73

Oil on canvas

Hispanic Society of America, New York

Correa was a pioneer of trompe l'oeil easel painting in Spain. This panel, which is one of a pair, is typically self-reflexive in depicting the artist's paint-daubed palette, bottle of oil, and maulstick (used to support the hand holding the paintbrush). The battered prints Correa copied have been identified: a 1611 engraving of a farmyard with peacocks, based on a drawing by the Dutch painter Abraham Bloemaert, is nailed above an etching depicting a beggar, made about 1622 by the French artist Jacques Callot. The skull of a dog is both a studio prop and a reminder of mortality.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Guitar

1913

Oil and cut-and-pasted printed paper on canvas

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris,
Donation of Louise and Michel Leiris, 1984

Twice Gris added a twist to the classic trompe l'oeil theme of a print nailed to a wall (exemplified by Correa's adjacent painting) by incorporating a real reproductive print. In this way, a multiple—the print was from a large edition—acquired uniqueness. Gris may have picked this British engraving (by Charles Heath, based on Henry Howard's *The Swiss Peasant* and published in 1831) because it reeked of passé popular taste and suggested the kind of folksy music played by the absent guitarist. The artist's imitations of wood and marble look willfully crude, in keeping with the painting's general air of feigned naivete.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Guitar and Wineglass

1912

Cut-and-pasted newspaper, printed sheet music, laid and wove papers, oil, and charcoal on printed wallpaper mounted on paperboard

The McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay

The abstracted trellis pattern of this wallpaper, which Picasso also pasted into his first papier collés, recalls the network of straps in letter-rack compositions, one of its joints acting as the hook for the guitar. Like the letter-rack painters, Picasso teases the viewer to make sense of the combination of disparate elements, including a piece of his hand-painted wood-grain, his drawing of a wineglass, and snippets from a song sheet and *Le Journal*. The viewer must become “LE JOU[EUR]” (the player). Many collages by Picasso include news clippings about the Balkan Wars, but here he omitted reference to that specific war from the headline. “LA BATAILLE S’EST ENGAGE[É]” (The battle has begun) has been interpreted as a private allusion to his creative rivalry with Braque.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish 1881–1973)

Composition with Violin

1912

Cut-and-pasted newspaper, graphite, charcoal, and ink on white laid paper; subsequently mounted to paperboard

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2016 (2016.237.22)

In this two-dimensional variant of one of Picasso's paperboard-and-string constructions, the illegible newsprint laid on its side evokes the fine grain of a violin's wood case. The map of lines surrounding the instrument, perhaps indicating where other cutouts might go, recalls the gridlike structure of many trompe l'oeil board paintings (including the nearby Harnett). To judge by the violin's long, narrow form and pointed lower section, Picasso had a "kit" in mind. Small enough to be kept in a pocket, kit violins were used by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dance teachers and street musicians and occasionally appear tucked behind straps in letter-rack paintings.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Still Life with Violin

1912

Charcoal and cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, selectively varnished, on laid paper

Yale University Art Gallery, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Class of 1913 Fund, Susan Vanderpoel Clark Fund, and Edith M. K. Wetmore Fund

Braque produced the first-ever Cubist *papiers collés* in autumn 1912 when he pasted strips of imitation wood-grain wallpaper into his drawings. The resemblance to the flat wood boards beloved of *trompe l'oeil* painters is striking. Here, the faux pine stands for the wood of both the violin and the paneling on which it hangs, effectively fusing foreground and background. Braque's charcoal drawing and shading unite and harmonize the commercial stock with the fine-art paper of the support. The pleated planes forming the violin's body seem to push out and back, as if vibrating like sound, while the parallel lines of its strings double as the lines of music paper. Braque was a keen amateur musician: his theme here is music itself.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)
Violin and Sheet Music: “Petit Oiseau”

1913

Oil and charcoal on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

Here, Braque sported with the mimicry of trompe l’oeil painting by simulating collage, pretending to paste down strips of three different faux wood wallpapers, black paper, and a song sheet. The canvas support, meanwhile, could be mistaken for paper because he drew on it with the draftsman’s medium of charcoal. By allowing the light ground to show through the tracks left by the decorator’s wood-graining comb, he called attention to his deception. There is a similar, witty mismatch between the hand-drawn creases that cast shadows over the faux song sheet and the undisturbed flow of the notes and the title, “Petit Oiseau” (Little Bird). No such song is known, and the music may be Braque’s invention.

William Michael Harnett (American, 1848–1892)
Still Life—Violin and Music

1888

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1963 (63.85)

The combination of immaculate illusionism and structural geometry may suggest a sense of detached impersonality. However, this painting is rife with autobiographical allusions: to Harnett's Irish ancestry, in the sheet music for a ballad from Thomas Moore's collection *Irish Melodies*; to his commitment to trompe l'oeil, in the symbolic eye embossed on the dangling padlock; and to his professional life, in the calling card jammed between two planks of the temptingly ajar cupboard door. The violin and piccolo here appear in other pictures by the artist and surely belonged to him.

Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts (Flemish,
1625/29—after 1677)

***Trompe l'Oeil with Violin, Music Book, and
Recorder***

1672

Oil on canvas

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

With its bow pointing to a recorder, a violin presides over a deceptively casual array of sheet music, a newspaper, a booklet, and implements for writing (uncut feathers, a pen case, an ink bottle, a penknife, and quill pens). Composing and making music—a creative art form akin to painting—was Gijsbrechts's theme in this trompe l'oeil tour de force. A letter draped over the leather strap anchors the rhythmic composition on the right; it not only advertises the artist's position as court painter to Christian V, king of Denmark, but also serves as the artist's signature. The violin turns respectfully toward this precious document.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Violin Hanging on a Wall

1912

Oil and sand on canvas

Kunstmuseum Bern (Ge 063)

Picasso based this composition on classic trompe l'oeil board paintings. In painting the pine wainscot, however, he simulated the stereotypical style of painter-decorators, artisans who created the convincing imitations of wood paneling that were ubiquitous in French interiors. Some planes forming the violin have the flatness of paper cutouts, but the overlaps, passages of tonal modeling, and addition of sand to the paint lend the instrument a physical presence similar to the cardboard-and-string constructions Picasso was making at this time. By depicting only one of its sides and varying the size of the f-holes, he indicated that it is pivoting on its hook, like the violin in Gijsbrechts's nearby painting.

Unidentified artist

Trompe l'Oeil of an Etching by Ferdinand Bol

ca. 1675

Oil on panel

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Fund given in honor of Derald Ruttenberg's Grandchildren (2016.3.1)

The unknown author of this picture-within-a-picture hid his own identity, but not that of the signed and dated print he meticulously copied. The print reveals Dutch artist Ferdinand Bol's debt to his teacher Rembrandt in the characterization of the old man and the etching technique, reproduced perfectly in paint. Fixed to the board by a blob of sealing wax, the print appears to curl toward the viewer, its illusionistic creases implying previous handling. The actual oak support that the painter used is concealed by his convincing imitation of pine.

Lunéville (French, manufactory established 1728)

Tray

ca. 1760

Tin-glazed earthenware

Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres (MNC 2013.0.5)

Niderviller (French, manufactory established 1735)

Dessert plate

1774

Tin-glazed earthenware

Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres (MNC 6141)

Tournai (Belgian, manufactory established ca. 1750)

Coffeepot

ca. 1780

Soft-paste porcelain

Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres (MNC 18147)

The trompe l'oeil motif of a print attached to wood planking by nails or sealing wax became so popular that during the second half of the eighteenth century

many factories imitated it on tableware. Typically, the miniature faux prints depict landscapes with buildings and tiny figures; delicately executed cast shadows make the paper appear to lift. Sometimes the painter signed the print or, as with the plate here, inscribed it with the date and factory name. Whether a different painter would have been employed to execute the pine background remains an open question.

Trompe l'Oeil and the Artisanal Tradition

Despised by academic critics, who claimed it required mere manual skill, trompe l'oeil easel painting declined during the nineteenth century. In France, however, *peintres décorateurs* (painter-decorators) kept the tradition alive. They were responsible for the convincing imitations of wood, marble, stone, and architectural features encountered in every type of building, and for the illusionistic imagery and ornate signage that adorned shops and businesses. In reviving trompe l'oeil techniques, the Cubists intentionally subverted fine-art traditions by imitating the methods of artisans.

Braque's grandfather and father were *peintres en bâtiment* (housepainters). In later life the artist paid tribute to his artisanal training, received in the family firm in Le Havre and from *peintres décorateurs* who taught him how to achieve trompe l'oeil effects. Braque never practiced the trade professionally, but in 1911–12 he began introducing lettering and passages of *faux bois* (imitation wood) into his Cubist paintings. He showed Picasso how to use decorators' graining

combs and taught him tricks of the trade, such as mixing sand into paint to simulate a stony surface. When he incorporated wallpaper into his drawings in autumn 1912, he invented the technique of papier collé (pasted paper). Critics in the Cubists' circle hailed Braque's leadership in this radical move to invigorate art through craft practice.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Homage to J. S. Bach

1911–12

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection, acquired through the gift of Leon D. and Debra Black, the gift of William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. J. Hall (by exchange), the Nelson A. Rockefeller Bequest Fund (by exchange), and the Richard S. Zeisler Bequest (by exchange, 2008)

This is likely the first Cubist painting to include a passage of hand-painted *faux bois*. Here, it represents the oak paneling behind the projecting table. Fine grooves in the oil paint indicate that Braque used a decorator's graining comb. The flat, jet-black lettering of the music paper looks as if it were stamped on the surface of the completed painting, and Braque did use ready-made stencils to execute "BACH" (which also functions as a near homophone of his name). The use of commercial stencils was condemned in decorator's manuals on the grounds that it required no skill; as if to prove his competence, Braque executed the letters "j s" by hand. The artist signed the work at a later date.

The training of a French painter-decorator of Braque's generation involved an apprenticeship with an established master, who introduced the novice to the specialized branches of the trade. Plates published in manuals and portfolios, such as these chromolithographs, supplemented practical experience. Accompanied by instructions, they demonstrate how to imitate varieties of wood, the veining of marble, and the convex and concave profiles of architectural moldings, while simultaneously providing models of finished work.

“Attributes of the Painter-Decorator” (far left) summarizes the entire trade by depicting its essential tools and materials. Emulating seventeenth- and eighteenth-century trompe l’oeil paintings that symbolize the visual arts, the print also claims high status for decorators trained in the art of deception.

Far left

Nicolas Glaise (French, 1825–1888)

“Attributes of the Painter-Decorator”

**Plate XXVI, *Album du peintre en bâtiment:
Travaux élémentaires. Troisième série***

1883

Chromolithograph

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Top row, left

Eugène Berthelon (French, 1829–1916)

“Fir Panel”

Plate 20, *Nouveaux modèles de bois & marbres*

1902

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Bottom row, left

Nicolas Glaise (French, 1825–1888)

Eugène Berthelon (French, 1829–1916)

“Marbles”

Plate XXII, *Album du peintre en bâtiment: Travaux élémentaires. Deuxième partie, Bois, marbres, lettres*

1881

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Top row, center

Pieter van der Burg (Dutch, 1840–1890)

[Wood-graining]

**Plate XXXI, *Handboek voor den schilder:
De hout- en marmer-nabootsing, part 1***

1883

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Bottom row, center

Pieter van der Burg (Dutch, 1840–1890)

[Marbling]

**Plate IV, *Handboek voor den schilder:
De hout- en marmer-nabootsing, part 1***

1883

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Top row, right

Eugène Berthelon (French, 1829–1916)

“Mahogany Panel”

Plate 23, *Nouveaux modèles de bois & marbres*

1902

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Bottom row, right

Nicolas Glaise (French, 1825–1888)

Eugène Berthelon (French, 1829–1916)

“Marbles”

Plate XXX, *Album du peintre en bâtiment: Travaux élémentaires. Deuxième partie, Bois, marbres, lettres*

1881

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Far right

Paul Planat (French, 1839–1911)

“Striping on Wood, Louis XV Style”

**Plate XXXIII, *Le style dans la peinture
décorative: Recueil de documents choisis et
publiés***

1892

Chromolithograph

Collection of Carl Burgess

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Fruit Dish, Ace of Clubs

1913

Oil, gouache, and charcoal on canvas

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris,
Gift of Paul Rosenberg, 1947

This painting riffs on the novel process of Cubist collage while exploiting traditional artisanal methods. Rather than imitate wood-grain directly, Braque used a decorator's comb to imitate the *faux bois* wallpaper he had pasted into his first *papiers collés*, here pretending to patch scraps of it together. The simulated strips of gray wallpaper with an incised trellis pattern recall the rose-and-trellis wallpaper Picasso employed in his first *papiers collés*. The black faux cutouts forming the pitched-up tabletop mimic a commercial paper used in other collages. Further allusions to artisanal practice include evidence of the use of a ruler and compass to draft the composition, and the bunch of grapes rendered in the stereotyped manner of a motif on a decorative frieze.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Fruit Dish and Glass

1912

Charcoal and cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper with gouache on white laid paper; subsequently mounted on paperboard

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2016 (2016.237.33)

According to Braque, this was his first papier collé, created in September 1912 with mass-produced *faux bois* wallpaper purchased in Avignon. To gain a surreptitious advantage over his partner and rival, Braque waited until Picasso had left Avignon for Paris before beginning to incorporate strips from the roll into his charcoal drawings. The machine-printed wallpaper was designed to be a cheap alternative to artisan-painted imitation wood, which was itself a cheaper alternative to real tongue-and-groove oak paneling. By using the three offcuts to frame his hand-drawn still life, Braque merged bargain-basement trompe l'oeil and avant-garde Cubist abstraction.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Glass, Bottle, and Newspaper

1912

Charcoal and cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper on laid paper

Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel (64.1)

Tradesmen would have hung the *faux bois* wallpaper vertically to simulate tongue-and-groove oak paneling, but here Braque pasted the cutouts horizontally. So mysterious is the space conjured in this still life that, in its “incorrect” orientation, the wallpaper could designate a wainscot, a tabletop, floorboards, or all three. The wallpaper is an alien presence, but Braque used the linear grooves and the drifts of wood-grain to reinforce, respectively, his hand-drawn geometric grid and hatched shading. Here and there Braque also extended the pattern by hand or drew over the offcuts: thus, the top edge of the ghostly newspaper (“JOUR[NAL]”) traverses the uppermost cutout.

Things on a Table

For deception to occur, albeit fleetingly, the objects in a painting must be life-size and fully within the picture. A receding table that exceeds the boundaries of the painted surface, as in a traditional still-life composition, does not obey the rules of the trompe l'oeil game.

Careless of such fine distinctions, the Cubists frequently chose to merge two conventions: the tabletop still life and the trompe l'oeil board or letter-rack painting.

They set their objects on a table—recognizable as such from its legs, drawer with knob, and carved edge—but depicted its top tipped up almost vertically, parallel to the picture plane, thus denying spatial recession.

From the moment still life emerged as an independent genre in the 1600s, pure description was seldom the artist's sole concern. Objects were chosen to not only display painterly virtuosity and appeal to the senses but also suggest a way of life. Frequently, they point to a moral about the human condition, such as the *vanitas* (Latin for “vanity”) message that all earthly things are transient and death is inevitable. The Cubists embraced these aspects of the still-life

tradition, often inserting scraps of text to encourage an imaginative response to the imagery.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)
Still Life with a Bottle, Playing Cards, and a Wineglass on a Table

1914

Oil, sand, and graphite on paperboard, mounted on cradled wood panel

Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952

In this painting, Picasso engaged with a traditional Spanish type of realist still life in which the objects are arranged in a zigzagging line along a narrow, projecting ledge. But subversion as well as homage was involved, for although he revived a time-honored form, he chose lowly tavern imagery and adapted artisanal techniques and materials. He used a decorator's comb to grain the wood, gave the bottle literal tangibility by mixing sand into the dark gray paint, and imitated the vulgar trompe l'oeil of a printed wallpaper border when painting the carved molding of the table's edge.

Evaristo Baschenis (Italian, 1617–1677)

Musical Instruments

ca. 1665–77

Oil on canvas

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (3893)

Silence reigns in this somber painting, in which all the instruments strewn over the massive table have broken strings and are unplayable. Decaying apples reinforce the *vanitas* message of the transience of life. Yet Baschenis incites the urge to touch by rendering everything with palpable veracity; the open drawer, crumpled scores, and silky ribbons appear to project outward, as if within one's grasp. Baschenis had been all but forgotten outside his native Bergamo when his signature was deciphered on the table leg of this painting. Published in 1908, the discovery prompted great interest in his work, just as the Cubists embarked on their dialogue with trompe l'oeil painting.

J. S. Bernard (probably French, active 1650s–60s)
Still Life with Violin, Ewer, and Bouquet of Flowers

1657

Oil on canvas

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of the Christian Humann Foundation (2008.55)

With its profusion of costly objects, beautiful flowers, and mouth-watering fruit, Bernard's canvas is typical of the ostentatious tendency in seventeenth-century illusionistic still-life painting that appealed especially to aristocratic collectors. Known in Holland as *pronkstilleven*s, these lavishly decorative pictures held much less appeal for the Cubists than mundane tavern and kitchen still lifes by the likes of Van de Velde and Meléndez. But Picasso had this tradition in mind when he began work on the complex, cascading composition of *Still Life with Fruit Dish on a Table* (shown alongside) in Avignon during the summer of 1914.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Still Life with Compote and Glass

1914–15

Oil on canvas

Columbus Museum of Art, Gift of Ferdinand Howald

Picasso completed this painting during the first winter of World War I. He counteracted the signs of festive eating and drinking—a compote piled with fruit and cakes, with a black, raffia-encased bottle of rum to its left; a peeled apple; a wineglass—by turning *Le Journal* black and the adjoining crumpled napkin an ominous leaden gray. The wallpapers he had used in his papiers collés influenced the work's conception: the faux cutouts with multicolored dots mimic faux-granite wallpapers, and, on the right, the truncated marble panel and wood chair rail can only represent paper imitations of the real thing. The apparent grandeur of the composition is manifestly sham.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Glasses, Teacup, Bottle, and Pipe on a Table

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, newspaper, laid paper, oil, gouache, and crayon on canvas

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

The wood table, crockery, and glassware imply an ordinary kitchen, while the varnished tile-patterned wallpaper stands in for an oilcloth table cover. Two sensational murders are reported on the front page of the newspaper, generating an ominous atmosphere that is reinforced by the stark tonal contrasts. The meticulous hand-drawn reproduction of parallelepiped, a brainteasing pattern that goes back to antiquity, contributes to the visual drama. Gris also highlighted the newspaper's contrasting photos of a Parisian monument, showing it first disguised by the handbills pasted over it, then in a cleaned-up and (as the caption states) "less picturesque" state. A covert allusion to collage was likely intended.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Guitar and Glasses

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, wove papers, printed packaging, gouache, conté crayon, and wax crayon on paper mounted on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Nelson A. Rockefeller Bequest, 1979

Gris seamlessly combined cuttings from a tobacco package and his favorite faux wood-grain wallpapers with his handmade imitations of printed materials: the checked tablecloth that doubles as floor tiles, sheet of music, and label for “BOR[DEAUX] V[IN].” The tabletop tips up vertically, all but negating spatial recession, and the glinting bottle and wineglasses seem to push through the picture plane in classic trompe l’oeil style. The haunting fusion of guitar and table in a shadowy room and the remnants of a past gathering with music recall the theme of Baschenis’s rediscovered masterpiece (shown nearby), which Gris may have known in reproduction.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Glass of Beer

1914

Cut-and-pasted white wove paper, printed wallpapers, newspaper, laid and wove papers, conté crayon, gouache, oil, and wax crayon on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, Bequest of Florene May Schoenborn (1997.544)

Gris evoked a masculine world like that of Van de Velde's nearby still life. The snippet from *Le Journal* offers minimal reading matter, but the eye-catching word "FEMMES" may suggest that the unseen beer drinker had sex on his mind. Ironically, it came from an impassioned "Appel aux Femmes" (Call to Women) to join the embattled French suffrage movement. Gris left the attitude of the beer drinker to the divisive "woman question" provocatively open, just as trompe l'oeil painters left it to their viewers to make what sense they liked of the documents littering their compositions.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Fruit-Dish on a Striped Cloth

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, printed packaging, wax crayon, watercolor, conté crayon, gouache, and graphite on canvas

Frelinghuysen Morris House & Studio, Lenox, Massachusetts

The traditional still-life imagery of this collage is akin to that of Meléndez’s nearby tableau. Gris’s table, however, is tipped up vertically like the backboard of a classic trompe l’oeil letter-rack painting. The grid pattern inscribed on the cloth and echoed in the product labels recalls the straps that secure objects to such backboards. By carefully rendering the molding on the rim of the fruit dish and the crisp folds of the table linen, Gris flaunted his command of conventional illusionism—albeit the illusionism typical of “commercial” rather than “high” art.

Luis Meléndez (Spanish, 1716–1780)

Still Life with Box of Jelly, Bread, Salver with Glass, and Cooler

1770

Oil on canvas

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

This painting is from a renowned set of almost forty still lifes by Meléndez on display at the Prado ever since the museum opened in 1819. In these masterpieces of descriptive realism, which Picasso and Gris certainly saw, the space is shallow, the background featureless, and the crowded table or shelf brought so close to the frontal picture plane that the objects projecting over its edge appear to penetrate the viewer's space. The acute appeal to the senses is offset by the refined geometry of Meléndez's carefully plotted compositions.

Jan Jansz van de Velde III (Dutch, 1620–1662)
Still Life with a Pipe-lighter

1653

Oil on canvas

The Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Bequeathed by Daisy Linda Ward, 1939

The pyramidal structure of this still life is the product of rigorous artistic planning and control, but the imagery implies disorderly behavior. The tall, ringed *pasglas* filled halfway with beer would have passed from hand to hand in a drinking competition; chalk marks on the table beside the deck of cards indicate gambling; and embers spill from the carelessly abandoned clay pipe, while the burning lighter draped over it threatens fiery destruction. Cubist still lifes summoning up the convivial masculine world of the local bar drew on this prevalent type of seventeenth-century Dutch still-life painting but rarely expressed the same *vanitas* warning that death comes to all.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Bottle of Rosé Wine

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, laid and wove papers, printed packaging, conté crayon, gouache, oil, watercolor, newspaper, and wax crayon, selectively varnished, on newspaper mounted on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2021

In place of the virtuoso imitations of materials and textures created by seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish painters, Gris relied on wood-grain wallpaper, a cutting from *Le Matin*, Scaferlati tobacco packaging, and the top of a box of matches. The fancy lettering of the “Vin Rosé” label was his own handiwork, however. Complementing the impression of a dimly lit table at night, the leading report in the newspaper concerns the strikes and power cuts that had formerly plunged Paris into darkness. Scaferlati tobacco was nicknamed “le cube gris” because of the cubic form of its grayish package; incorporated into his collages, it served as a punning substitute for Gris’s missing signature.

Shadow Play

Light and shadow shape our perceptions of the world. Highlights and shading create volume, texture, and depth, and they make tactile the relative thickness and thinness of things. A cast shadow is a potent sign for something real, caused by an object that blocks the light and whose shape it mimics in silhouette when thrown upon an adjacent surface. Trompe l'oeil shadows give visual coherence to painted illusions but also account for the hyperreal presence of objects.

Artists over the centuries enlisted shadows to both deceive the eye and reveal the skillful means of this deception. A prime example is the ubiquitous nail, whose silhouette creates the perception of a fictive third dimension while also pointing to the material reality of the flat canvas. The Cubists elaborated upon these conceits, foregrounding the magic of chiaroscuro, which normally escapes our attention, through exaggerated crosshatching and *sfumatura* (blending), as well as illogical reversals of light and dark. In 1913 they went further: Picasso pasted and pinned some of his paper cutouts so that they lift slightly off the

surface, casting real shadows from within the picture; Gris broke with the Western pictorial tradition by representing objects only in black silhouette, heightening the innately theatrical element of trompe l'oeil with humorous and uncanny twists.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Glass and Checkerboard

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, watercolor, gouache, conté crayon, and wove papers, selectively varnished, on canvas

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Purchase, 1980

The flattened planes and diverse materials of Cubist pictures are anything but illusionistic. Yet look again. For his fragmented checkerboard, Gris fashioned a delicate marquetry with inlaid pieces of *faux bois* wallpaper. As two-dimensional as the depicted scene may be, delicate shading conjures the thickness of the checkerboard along its top edge and the thinness of the stippled white paper plane below, which lifts ever so slightly off the tabletop. A Cubist glass, with its cup, stem, and base schematically rendered, sits at the edge of the table—or do we see two? The excessively large shadow to its right takes on a life of its own, to sinister or comic effect.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Still Life with a Guitar

1913

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 1998

Though sinister cast shadows were no novelty, Gris's ingeniously detached silhouettes stand for the things themselves, as with the wineglass, pipe, and bottle in this garishly colored scene. Unlike full-bodied objects, these apparitions are flat and insubstantial, eluding our grasp. Meanwhile, the shadow dutifully attached to the guitar does not obey the laws of nature but changes in shape and direction, like a rogue twin. Gris's mock deviousness was inspired by the murky criminal underworld of the pulp-fiction series *Fantômas* and its film versions (1913–14), which enthralled the Parisian avant-garde; the titular character often perpetrated his dastardly deeds like a stealth silhouette, clothed all in black.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

The Cup of Coffee

1913

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, laid and wove papers, charcoal, and white chalk on green laid paper

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, 1985 (1985.64.105)

Picasso did not fully adhere the brilliant blue paper (the silhouette of the rectangular instrument), allowing it to rise along the deckled left side. He then blanketed the resulting shadow with hand-drawn *sfumatura* (blending), literally blurring the real and the fake. The differences are almost indiscernible, prompting the urge “to see” by lifting the paper. Picasso’s pronounced shading under the white coffee cup also momentarily casts doubt, stimulating the false perception of high relief. The Cubists often applied such eye-tricking chiaroscuro around the edges of their cutouts. Having introduced a radical material realism into a picture, they undercut it with old-fashioned illusionism. The fragment of wallpaper imitating Islamic tiles signifies the background wall and creates its own optical game of projecting and receding planes.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Guitar, Glass, Bottle of Vieux Marc

1913

Chalk, charcoal, cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, and straight pins on blue laid paper

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979
(MP 376)

Picasso often pinned his cutouts to the support before pasting them flat. He sometimes left the pins in situ (a crafty echo of the trompe l'oeil nail), allowing part of the paper to rise proud of the surface and cast live shadows from within the picture. Here, a subtle shadow emerges from beneath the lower edge of the indented ochre cutout, an inversion of the guitar's B-shaped, white profile. Picasso both concealed and revealed it by adding light strokes of charcoal. The cylindrical bottle projects a contradictory, squared-off double. The outline of a glass adds to the reversals of light and dark, highlight and shadow, and the transparent and opaque.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Pears and Grapes on a Table

1913

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

The deceptive silhouettes that first appeared in Gris's still lifes, here and in the nearby *Still Life with Guitar*, were a novel form of trompe l'oeil. He introduced them at the same time as bunches of grapes, a motif he had never included before. These emblems of Zeuxis (the ancient painter famed for his illusions) received a telltale treatment. Each bunch bursts with incongruous representations, from grapes modeled with highlight or crudely outlined to partial silhouettes that radiate weird auras. The hand-painted rendition of chair caning is a witty riposte to the fraudulent oilcloth in Picasso's first collage. It can be difficult to tell which is which, however, given that machine printing produced the same impersonal style demanded of a supreme painter-illusionist.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Bottle and Fruit Dish

1916

Oil on plywood

Kunstmuseum Basel, Gift of Dr. h.c. Raoul La Roche, 1956
(G 1956.21)

Typically, the Cubists inserted different styles of representation within a single picture. Gris shaded the tablecloth at the left with naturalistic creases and folds, whereas the pedestal of the fruit dish appears two ways, with a convincingly modeled, reddish-brown base and as a flat-footed white silhouette. The shared border between the two renditions possibly triggers an illusion known as Rubin's Vase: if the brown shape dominates, the profile of a downturned head emerges. Together, what one sees of the wine label "BEAU[NE/JOLAIS]" and the newspaper "LE JOUR[NAL]" spells "the beautiful day," an ironic counter to the ominous blacks that fill the backdrop and a wistful sentiment, given Gris's pronounced gloom during World War I.

Paragone

The term *paragone* (Italian for “comparison”) refers to debates conducted during and after the Renaissance about which art form, painting or sculpture, could best imitate nature. In using novel collage and construction techniques, Picasso made the case for hybrid modes of expression and explored the potential for creative exchanges between these supposed rivals. Still life was traditionally considered too lowly a subject for the art of sculpture and suited only to painting. Picasso challenged this assumption, and the sculptures he constructed in 1912–15 are tabletop still lifes that often parody trompe l’oeil devices. Nearly all are reliefs—the type of sculpture closest to painting. The *papiers collés* displayed in this room explore the same subject matter as Picasso’s constructions: always involving a built-up surface, these collages mediate between his two-dimensional paintings and three-dimensional reliefs. He gave color and pattern as vital a role in his sculpture as in his painting, sometimes simulating materials he never used (notably marble) and playfully juxtaposing hand-painted shadows with real ones cast by projecting elements. Deceiving, perplexing, and

thereby stimulating the intellect—moving beyond trompe l’oeil to *trompe l’esprit*, “fool the mind”—was a key Cubist goal.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass and Ace of Clubs

1914

Cut-and-pasted laid and wove papers, charcoal, graphite, and oil on laid paper

Museum Berggruen, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Glass and Ace of Clubs is the papier collé sibling of the reliefs Picasso made during the same period, the almost featureless background standing for the wall on which they were designed to hang. He mitigated the flatness of the cutouts by allowing their edges to lift slightly and gave the wineglass heft by using a textured paper. In a parody of trompe l'oeil painting, the playing card tips over the edge of the oval table— itself made from a sheet of Picasso's hand-painted *faux bois*, complete with a crude faux carved edge. The dark gray-blue cutout may represent a jug and the vertical molding its handle.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass and Card

1914

Gouache, conté crayon, cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, and wove paper on paper mounted on paperboard

Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin

Pipe and Wineglass

1914

Cut-and-pasted wove and laid papers and graphite on paper

Morgan Library & Museum, New York, Thaw Collection

These papiers collés exemplify Picasso's genius for converting offcuts of paper into surprisingly convincing objects. In each case, the artist created a wineglass by cutting out half its silhouette, drawing certain contours and details, and shading part of its body. Alternating between the ready-made and the handmade, Picasso used a scrap of a trompe l'oeil border to represent a carved chair rail in *Glass and Card* but drew the wood beading of *Pipe and Wineglass* by

hand in the standardized style of illusionistic printed borders. Like the quarter apple in *Still Life with a Glass and Ace of Clubs* (hanging nearby), the pipe came from Picasso's existing stock of cutouts. Although adhered to the surface, it has a sculptural presence thanks to the careful modeling and the hand-drawn shadow cast by its stem.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass, Ace of Clubs, Packet of Cigarettes

1914

Cut-and-pasted papers, printed packaging, graphite, gouache, oil, and pastel on paperboard

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979
(MP 379)

In iconography and structure this papier collé is closely related to *Still Life* (in the nearby case), its bare background representing the wall against which Picasso's constructed reliefs were supposed to hang. The overlapping handmade components (the loosely brushed faux wood paneling with molding; the glass and pipe fashioned from cut-and-torn paper; the cutout imitating an ace of clubs) vie with real printed cigarette packaging, which Picasso cut and shaded to simulate creasing. In contrast, the schematic tabletop, drawn in reverse perspective directly on the paperboard, undermines the pretense of three-dimensionality governing the rest of the composition.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Still Life with a Glass and Ace of Clubs

1914

Pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, charcoal, graphite, and gouache on paperboard

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon (2012.89.6)

The construction technique Picasso used when making both three-dimensional reliefs and papiers collés perfectly suited his quickfire imagination, gift for improvisation, and dexterity. To speed up the creative process, he standardized his representation of key tabletop motifs, such as the fluted wineglass, and prepared a corps of cutout fruit, pipes, and playing cards that he could draw from when assembling his papiers collés. The brightly colored quarter apple in this example came from his existing stock. A few meandering black lines and deft snips transformed a scrap of paint-daubed paper into a surprisingly convincing marble shelf, the hand-drawn line beneath it enhancing the impression of physical projection.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

The Absinthe Glass

1914

Painted bronze and perforated tin absinthe spoon

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

The headlike form of the glass, slope of the spoon, precarious position of the sugar lump, and blizzard of spots combine to suggest intoxication. The original wax model for *The Absinthe Glass* was destroyed when Picasso's dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler had six bronze casts made in spring 1914. Converting a multiple into unique originals, Picasso decorated each cast differently. He completed them with shop-bought absinthe spoons, which stand for themselves just as newspaper normally stands for itself in Cubist *papiers collés*. This is the only cast in which black predominates—an allusion perhaps to the fatally addictive character of absinthe, which was banned in France in 1915.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass, Newspaper, and Die

1914

Painted relief with tin, sand, and iron wire, with reconstituted wood background and frame

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979
(MP 251)

Picasso toyed with standard trompe l'oeil themes in this relief sculpture, which he framed as if it were a painting. The glass and newspaper, fashioned entirely from bent and cut tin, project so far beyond the ready-made frame that a viewer drawing too close might suffer a nasty cut—an absurdist parody of seventeenth-century paintings of tables strewn with objects that appear to protrude outward and invite the urge to touch. The grisaille (gray monochrome) palette echoes that adopted by painters who specialized in simulating relief sculpture, but Picasso's super-sketchy technique is flamboyantly anti-illusionistic.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass, Newspaper, and Die

1914

Oil, painted tin, iron wire, and wood

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979
(MP 45)

Picasso constructed this relief inside a shallow wooden box, which approximates the frames that enclose Renaissance reliefs by the likes of Lorenzo Ghiberti. The fluted wineglass, carved from a rough scrap of wood, is seen both straight on and from above, as in a Cubist painting. The top of the die is sliced off in a spoof of steep linear perspective. For the newspaper, Picasso repurposed a powdered-milk tin, cutting and crumpling it as if it were paper. He used its embossed lettering to represent printed text but painted the letters of the masthead, *[LE] JO[UR]NAL*, by hand. Straying beyond the box's threshold, it parodies the curling documents of trompe l'oeil paintings, whereas everything else undermines the very notion of illusionism.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Glass and Die

1914

Painted wood

Private collection

While Picasso never sculpted in the esteemed material of marble, he copied its veining in paintings, *papiers collés*, and this deliberately rough-hewn construction. The carved and marbleized piece of wood fixed to the backboard may represent a curtain or a screen. In any case, it complements the flat, marbleized shadow apparently cast by the white fluted wineglass. Decorative pattern thus supersedes realism in this exercise in *trompe l'esprit* (fool the mind). A jutting nail—a motif represented in countless *trompe l'oeil* paintings—is the sole surviving sign of a fringe cut from newspaper that originally adorned the edge of the circular table and concealed the construction's unpainted base.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Still Life

1914

Painted wood and fabric upholstery fringe

Tate. Purchased 1969 (T01136)

Still Life may appear to be casually concocted from scrap materials but is rife with playful allusions to favorite motifs of trompe l'oeil painters: a table that thrusts forward, a precariously balanced knife, a cut-crystal glass half full of wine, and the leftovers of a meal. The pattern Picasso painted on the beading, which represents a chair rail, is an abbreviated replica of the faux moldings of wallpaper borders, while the real upholstery fringe stands in for the costly textiles featured in illusionistic still lifes. A type of trompe l'oeil known as a *chantourné*, a painting cut to the shape of the thing depicted, may have inspired this eccentric silhouette.

Jean Etienne Liotard (Swiss, 1702–1789)

Trompe l’Oeil

1771

Oil on silk transferred to canvas

The Frick Collection, New York, Bequeathed by Lore Heinemann in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolph J. Heinemann, 1997

In a treatise published in 1781, Liotard firmly stated his belief in the supreme mimetic power of painting. His deceptive imitation of two chipped plaster reliefs “proves” that a painter can convincingly reproduce the appearance of sculpture (whereas a sculptor cannot reproduce the appearance of painting). Significantly, the imagery of the reliefs is derived from paintings, both by François Boucher. Liotard’s simulations of screws made of two different metals, the colored chalks of his two costume sketches, torn and crumpled paper, sealing wax, and pine are equally persuasive. The artist’s professional pride is captured in the seemingly casual signature and date “written” at the top of the faux panel.

The World of Wallpaper

Wallpaper, described by an historian in 1914 as “the supreme art of counterfeit,” was the Cubists’ handy source of ready-made trompe l’oeil effects. Rather than using the luxury hand-printed papers for which France was universally renowned, they chose inexpensive and widely available machine-printed products. Realistic versions of wood, marble, and stone—some replete with panels, grooves, and carved edges—offered consumers cheap alternatives to painted imitations of the real thing executed by skilled artisans. Decorative patterns and styles often came freighted with conventional social and gender associations; the Cubists exploited these to evoke a particular environment or situation.

Braque was the first of the Cubists to incorporate wallpaper into his drawings, in early autumn 1912. Picasso followed suit soon afterward. Gris began using wallpaper in February 1913—tentatively at first, but then constantly between the spring and autumn of 1914. Braque and Gris usually chose papers in current production, but Picasso went out of his way to obtain

obsolete nineteenth-century papers redolent of another era. In attaching their cuttings, all three artists disregarded the correct orientation of the designs whenever it suited them to do so. They also became adept at mimicking wallpaper in their paintings.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)
Bottle, Glass, and Pipe (Violette de Parme)

1914

Cut-and-pasted newspaper, painted paper and wallpaper, charcoal, graphite, and gouache on paperboard

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2016 (2016.237.15)

Braque used a wallpaper simulating limewashed oak to represent the table and another pattern to imitate the paneling typical of dining rooms. The latter is laid on top of the other pasted fragments but, paradoxically, represents the wall behind the table. To integrate it into his composition, Braque extended its molding on the left with a hand-drawn replica. The clay pipe appears to be a pasted-on cutout but was in fact cut from the newspaper on which it seems to lie. *Violette de Parme* (Parma violet), advertised in bold type at the bottom of the other news clipping, was a prized perfume for women. Facing the pipe, it promises a floral antidote to the pungent smell of tobacco.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Playing Card, Fruit Dish, Glass

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, oil, and graphite on paper

Private collection

A streamlined version of the neoclassical, early nineteenth-century French Empire style became fashionable for interior decoration shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Picasso echoed this trend by depicting a console table with a beaded edge and an imperial porphyry top (made with faux granite wallpaper); paneling in an off-white tone (the natural color of the paper plus ruled graphite lines and shading); and a towering fruit dish resembling a classical column (a cutout painted white to distinguish it from the paneling). Beside the cutout of a bunch of grapes are staring, eye-like forms that may represent cross-sections of the fruits. The duo of wineglass and ace of clubs—the lucky card—appears in many of Picasso's collages, likely signifying conviviality.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Fruit-Dish with Grapes

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, gouache, and graphite on laid paper

Private collection

Picasso alluded to Pliny's famous account of the luscious grapes painted by Zeuxis by pairing his cutout of a simplified bunch of the fruit with a snippet of the Leroy factory's trompe l'oeil wallpaper border of scrolling leaves and berries. Cascades of colored dots representing rays of light echo the design of the faux granite wallpapers Picasso used in other collages made in this period. The eccentrically shaped cutout representing the fruit dish is visibly flat, but he gave it volume through his virtuoso modeling and by reinforcing with pencil the real shadows cast by the lifting edges of the paper.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Guitar and Glass

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, laid paper, gouache, and crayon on paperboard

Private collection

Gris's meticulous collage technique resembles marquetry, the practice of inlaying wood to create complex patterns. To cut, match, and place the many paper fragments that compose his still lifes required great finesse. In *Guitar and Glass*, the boudoir pattern of the wallpaper, which imitates Rococo silk, complements the soft, hand-drawn curves of the reclining guitar and contrasts with the geometry of the cutouts and grid lines that anchor the composition. Slender strips of paper representing the instrument's strings, like the wineglass tipping over the table edge, invite exploratory touch and enhance the sensual implications.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Flowers

1914

Conté crayon, gouache, oil, wax crayon, cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, printed wove paper, newspaper, and white laid and wove papers on canvas; subsequently mounted on a honeycomb panel

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2021 (2021.395.3)

Gris's collages often hint at narrative scenarios, the wallpapers and other elements acting as clues for the viewer. In *Flowers*, the combination of the “masculine” pipe and the “feminine” bouquet (formed from different flowery papers, including Leroy's daffodil pattern, displayed below), along with the wine and coffee, imply a lovers' meeting. The hand-painted midnight blue surround and the pink faux marble wallpaper underline the erotic atmosphere. (The Leroy sample shown below retains the wallpaper's original vivid coloring.) American author Gertrude Stein, who befriended Gris in Paris, acquired *Flowers* soon after it was created in spring 1914.

The wallpapers and borders displayed here are similar or identical to those the Cubists used in their collages and pastiched in their paintings. Eight of the albums contain samples from the Isidore Leroy factory, which opened in the 1840s and was the first in France to print wallpaper by machine. Patterns were issued in various colorways; some came in several weights and finishes, including varnished and washable versions. Shops displayed lengths of wallpaper in their windows and kept albums with samples inside. Brochures sometimes included pasted-in snippets. Borders imitating moldings, edgings, and trimmings served to frame architectural features and mark divisions in a decorative scheme. Printed in rows, they were cut out by the paperhanger before application.

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 15292 R

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1908–9

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 14020 F

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1901–2

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 11355

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1894–95

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Back wall

Unidentified English manufacturer

Wallpaper inscribed “Sanitary Washable”

ca. 1875–1925

Machine-printed paper

Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France

Unidentified French manufacturer

Wallpaper: pattern 2729 (“Sévigné”)

Album of machine-printed paper, 1880s

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Back wall

Unidentified French manufacturer

Uncut borders

ca. 1875–1900

Block-printed paper with flocking and gilding

Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France

Back wall

Unidentified French manufacturer

Uncut borders

ca. 1875–1925

Machine-printed paper

Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 14618 B

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1910–11

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Back wall

Unidentified French manufacturer

Wallpaper

ca. 1875–1925

Machine-printed paper

Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France

Back wall

Unidentified French manufacturer

Wallpaper

ca. 1875–1900

Machine-printed paper

Musée du Papier Peint, Rixheim, France

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 15292 S

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1913–14

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 13050 F

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1898–99

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Wallpaper: pattern 1469

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1862–63

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Isidore Leroy (French manufacturer)

Borders: patterns 5058, 5059, 5060, 5061

Album of machine-printed paper, dated 1849–76

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

The Bottle of Vieux Marc

1913

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, newspaper, charcoal, gouache, and pins on laid paper

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris,
Donation of M. Henri Laugier, 1963

Here, Picasso used an old Leroy paper (displayed below) torn from a wall, possibly by the artist himself. The border was stuck to it, but Picasso split the two apart for his composition. Inspired by Islamic tiles, the wallpaper contrasts with the border, which simulates a classic European molding and stands for the table's carved edge. The pinned papers lift slightly, creating real shadows that vie with those both drawn by hand and printed on the border. Books on interior decoration published around the turn of the century recommended "Mauresque" (French for Moorish) patterns for the male domains of smoking room and club, where Vieux Marc brandy and newspapers would be found.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Playing Cards, Glasses, Bottle of Rum: “Vive la France”

1914–15

Oil and sand on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

This painting parodies illusionistic still lifes that depict rare collectors' pieces, highlighting instead the cheap and commonplace “Vive la France” glass and other objects cluttering the table. For the background, Picasso doubled deception by mimicking both a wallpaper that imitates tapestry and a paper border that imitates a carved chair rail. His earliest pastiches of wallpaper preceded his first use of the paper itself, and he became adept at replicating the formulaic trompe l'oeil effects of machine-printed patterns. On this occasion, he simulated “flock” (powdered wool used to give wallpaper a velvety texture) by mixing sand into the paint of his faux tapestry.

Trompe l'Oeil and Typography

Play with word and image was a staple of trompe l'oeil. Book pages, paper currency, pamphlets and flyers, mastheads and headlines, advertising copy and labels—over the centuries the varieties of printed matter and typefaces increased exponentially, but the strategy for co-opting them remained the same. When artists reproduced texts, they often surreptitiously fiddled with the contents, cueing the viewer to read carefully and not take things at face value. Likewise, the Cubists painted or pasted in typographic snippets to pun, allude, opine, or self-advertise. Titles and headlines carry coded messages, brim with innuendo, and exploit the slippages between literal and figurative language.

From the late seventeenth century onward, newspapers appear in trompe l'oeil letter-rack and board paintings, making the press reports as suspect as the pictures themselves. Keeping with the self-reflexive theme, the stories often mention false appearances, deceptive practices, or audience gullibility, while boldface mastheads and choice phrases underscore the act of

communicating here and now with the viewer. As with the clippings in Cubist collage, references to war and human folly generate tension between wit and tragedy. All told, the miscellany of fragmentary texts stimulates the beholder to piece together—even invent—meaning, revivifying faded newsprint and forgotten events.

Edward Collier (Dutch, 1662–1708[?])

A Trompe l'Oeil of Newspapers, Letters, and Writing Implements on a Wooden Board

1699

Oil on canvas

Tate. Purchased 1984

Collier painted his letter racks during a boom in serial publications and in the aftermath of the event known as the Glorious Revolution (1688), when the Catholic king of England was overthrown and replaced by his Protestant offspring. Collier included actual documents related to religious conflict and the status of rulers, subtly tampering with dates and spelling. The masthead of the *London Gazette*, one of England's first newspapers, seems clear enough, but the copy blurs upon close inspection. A parliamentary pamphlet titled "The Humble Address" disingenuously puns on the picture itself and its important messages to the viewer. The artist chose to juxtapose printed matter with handwritten keepsakes, raising questions about how the two differ in feel and truth value. The script of

“Memorye” on the notebook cover is overly embellished, as memories often are.

William Michael Harnett (American, 1848–1892)

The Artist's Letter Rack

1879

Oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1966 (66.13)

The envelopes and cards strapped to Harnett's letter rack document his network of patrons. This painting was likely owned by a family member associated with C. C. Peirson and Sons, a Philadelphia wool merchant and the addressee on the blue stationery. American trompe l'oeil painters exploited slang to pun on hoodwinking and misrepresentation, in business as in art. "Snyde" seemingly scratched into the board means bogus or counterfeit, but also cunning. Below it is a shinplaster, a worthless form of paper currency, which has faded like its value. The newspaper column is pure calligraphic gibberish. A "yarn slinger" was a derogatory term for journalists, and the piece slung over the top of Harnett's board painting serves as an ironic allusion to his own style of art.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Musician's Table

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, blue and white laid papers, transparentized paper, newspaper, conté crayon, wax crayon, gouache, and oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Purchase, Leonard A. Lauder Gift, in celebration of the Museum's 150th Anniversary, 2018 (2018.216)

This collage is one of three by Gris that showcases the word “explorers” and news of an international dispute over who “discovered” an unmapped river in the Amazon Basin. The headline “Explorateurs en désaccord” (Explorers in Discord) and claims of precedence likely allude to the rivalry, or even a rift, between Braque and Picasso. Gris doctored the newspaper to appear as a single page when it really consists of two. The headline from the previous day, “L'enquête atroce” (The Atrocious Affair), while providing a wry gloss on the other story here, reports on war crimes committed during the Second Balkan War. More often than the two “pioneering” Cubists, Gris interrupted the artifice of his still lifes with brutal realities from the real world.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Book, Pipe, and Glasses

1915

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Gris delighted in specious representations—forms that transubstantiate, multiply, or appear and disappear. In this dazzling still life, he focused on an impeccably foreshortened volume illuminated by white light. Amid the hide-and-seek outlines of spectral objects—a coffee pot and grinder, a sugar bowl, cups, and a pipe—the book appears real enough, yet it frustrates the reader with a text composed of strikethrough lines. Gris turned the facing page into a mirror, all glassy sheen, though further scrutiny reveals that it reflects a different page.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Bottle of Banyuls

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, newspaper, wove papers, transparentized paper, printed packaging, oil, crayon, gouache, and graphite on newspaper mounted on canvas

Hermann und Margrit Rupf-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern (Ge 024)

On an outdoor table dappled by colored sunlight, the mouth of a bottle of Banyuls fortified wine appears two ways, sealed by wax and open. Interrupting the pleasurable scene is a newspaper headline with the “terrifying” news of an air balloon whose basket detached and fell into the Tuileries Gardens, threatening death and causing injury. The basketweave pattern of the tabletop underscores that Gris’s choice of papers was never random, but an intricate piece of the narrative design.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

The Guitar: “Statue d’Épouvante”

1913

Cut-and-pasted laid, wove, and printed papers, printed wallpapers, charcoal, and gouache on canvas

Musée National Picasso-Paris, Dation Jacqueline Picasso, 1990.
Personal collection of Pablo Picasso (MP 1990-381)

It is often the case with trompe l’oeil typography that words inside an artwork make inside commentary about art. Here, sculpture, music, film, drawing, and collage are brought together in “concert” to play a recurring theme, or “rondo.” Braque undoubtedly saved the program from the Tivoli Cinema because of the suggestive titles of the three “représentations” (screenings). *Éclair-Journal*, or “illuminated newspaper,” was a weekly cinematic newsreel. “Timbre rare” (rare tone) suggests the sound of the guitar and perhaps also Braque’s silvery strokes. The plot of *Statue d’Épouvante* (Horrific Statue) revolved around a sculptor seeking to avenge his daughter’s death; yet the words can also be read as the artist’s expression of mock horror at traditional forms of sculpture.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Vieux Marc

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, laid and wove papers, newspaper, charcoal, ink, graphite, and gouache on unprimed linen

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 1976

Published in Florence, the journal *Lacerba* was a mouthpiece for the Italian Futurist movement and included articles on Cubism. The boldface title riffed on the adjective *acerbo/a* (acerbic), deliberately chosen because of the journal's aim to be strident. Picasso's handwritten label for Vieux Marc, a prized French brandy that requires aging for its rich flavor, takes aim at the Futurist obsession with youth and speed. As in earlier still lifes, the presence of long-distance dispatches and foreign publications attests to the widespread circulation of information across gaps of time and distance. Unlike the painted papers, however, the Cubist clippings, now yellowed and friable, have changed materially over time, underscoring the venerable *vanitas* theme of transience.

Papyrophilia

A love of papers (papyrophilia)—and the variety of visual conundrums they enable—links the Cubists and trompe l’oeil painters. Flat to begin with, papers can trick the eye more readily than painted objects with depth. Beginning in the eighteenth century, compositions known as “messy tables” and “medley images” mimicked the look and feel of prints, drawings, and ephemera strewn across a surface. Littered with allusions, these compositions demand a dual reading, toggling between horizontal and vertical, the virtual view down upon a table and the actual appraisal of a picture hanging on a wall.

The Cubists likewise conflated the table with the *tableau* (“picture” in French), though they combined represented and real papers. Deft shading around the papery planes creates fictive depth on top of the surface while calling attention to the picture’s inescapable flatness of being. Gris and Picasso typically tilted up their tabletops, playing with the relationship between the edge of the table and that of the picture. In a series of works from 1913–14,

using his signature wood-grain papers and other printed matter, Braque engaged in a more knowing send-up of the “messy table” tradition.

Wilhelm Robart (Dutch, active 18th century)
Trompe l’Oeil

ca. 1770–80

Ink, ink wash, watercolor, and chalk on paper

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

Documents fan out upon a green granite tabletop, transfixing the eye with their material veracity and replicating a collector’s habit of viewing prints strewn across a table. Here, Robart’s medley of images is displayed flat to redouble the *table/tableau* (picture) conceit. A dated sheet from the Dutch East India Company bears a list of cargo on its merchant ships; it partially obscures a musical score for the *Nunc Dimittis* (Song of Simeon). Together with a map of Europe and a booklet with a view of Dordrecht, the imagery traverses time and place, the sacred and the profane. The two landscapes in ink wash are Robart’s “own” handiwork: note the footprints in the snow in the scene at lower left and track the tiny figure who travels across the picture, from winter to spring.

José Pérez Ruano (Spanish, died 1810)

Disorderly Table

ca. 1775–1800

Ink and gouache on laid paper

Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba, Junta de Andalucía Collection

Artistic ambition underlies this “messy” table, as indicated by the *porte-crayon*, a drawing instrument, that points to the word “FAMOSA.” Occupying most of the background plane is a page of artists’ biographies, which Pérez Ruano “took” from one of the most influential treatises on the visual arts, Joachim von Sandrart’s *Academia Nobilissima Artis Pictoriae* (1683). The three landscape engravings are layered just so, in order to reveal the names of the printmakers whose works have been replicated; originally produced in multiples, each is here rendered unique. Attributes of masculinity—a pocketknife, cards, and a cigarette—accompany the copy of Juan Pérez de Montalbán’s 1768 story of attempted seduction and fidelity, but a book of prayers (*Gozos*) tops them all, closest at hand.

Denis Pierre Jean Papillon de la Ferté (French, 1727–1794)

Trompe l’Oeil with Various Prints

ca. 1761–74

Etching with ink wash and watercolor

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris

By copying the works and styles of other artists, image counterfeiters raised the question of “who is who?” as much as “which is which?” In this self-aggrandizing etching, however, all the prints proudly displayed “every which way” are Papillon de la Ferté’s own, and each extols his employer, the French king Louis XV, including an engraved portrait medallion and maps of the kingdom. The hand-colored floral-band pattern of the backdrop resembles wallpaper more than a tablecloth, accentuating the dual-directional reading. The lack of pins or tacks appending them to a vertical surface reinforces the appearance of papers lying on a table, even as we view them as a picture hanging on the wall.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Violin and Pipe

1913–14

Cut-and-pasted newspaper and printed wallpapers, charcoal, graphite, and crayon on paper mounted on cardboard

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Purchase, 1965

This belongs to a series of *papiers collés* in which Braque foregrounded the dual-directional reading of *table* and *tableau* (picture) by drawing the outline of his tabletops inside the picture with soft charcoal lines. The violin inscribed on *faux bois* wallpaper could be lying on the table or hanging on the wall, given that its tuning keys double as nails. The masthead “LE QUO[TIDIEN] DU M[IDI],” from a daily published in the South of France, may surreptitiously refer to the quotidian (everyday) subjects of still lifes; it also brings to mind “le quodlibet,” a term used to describe pictures of assorted objects and ephemera.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Still Life: Playing Card, Bottle, Newspaper, and Tobacco Packet (Le Courrier)

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed newspaper, printed wallpaper, printed packing, charcoal, graphite, black ink, and white opaque watercolor on laid paper

Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952

Whereas Picasso liked to shape his cutouts into silhouetted objects and Gris inlaid his like marquetry, Braque preferred cut rectangles that insist on their identity as flat sheets of paper. His papers are cast about pell-mell across faintly outlined tabletops, even as they take on other meanings. The presence of the masthead from *Le Courrier Colonial: Organe de Madagascar et des Colonies de l'Océan Indien* brings the outside reality of French colonialism into the picture. The newspaper is a “courier” to the reader, a function akin to the informational relay typical of trompe l’oeil medleys. Braque’s altered masthead reads “ORGAN[E] DE MAD[AME],” a bawdy reference deepened by the hole of the adjacent cutout heart.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

Bottle, Glass, and Newspaper

1914

Charcoal and cut-and-pasted newspaper and printed wallpaper on gessoed paperboard (commercial board from mirror backing)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection, Gift of Leonard A. Lauder, 2016 (2016.237.14)

In a witty version of a “mirror image,” Braque took the oval backing board off a looking glass, covered it with white gesso, and turned the vertical format to a horizontal one to emphasize the tabletop effect. The two pieces of differently grained *faux bois* stand for the respective wood planes of wall and table, reinforcing oscillating viewpoints, while the latter displays the daily news: two actual pages and hand-drawn letters that refer to the newspaper *Le Journal*. He placed an ad for Motobloc automobiles (suggesting the male “drive”) next to one publicizing *L’amour obligatoire* (Mandatory love), a handbook on women’s “proper” sexual comportment, and conjoined them with a wineglass amusingly split into positive and negative forms.

The Artist Is Present

A trompe l'oeil image must hide the hand of its maker. A distinctive style, visible brushwork, or free-floating signature would disturb the illusion. Instead, artists asserted their presence through symbolic devices, versions of their own artworks, and autographs “engraved,” “carved,” or otherwise embedded into still-life objects. Painters included references to their inner circle of patrons, artists, and writers, in a form of name-dropping that added luster to their own reputations. The insertion of written testaments or mentions in the press (real or fake) added yet another level of self-promotion. Through this simultaneous concealment and performance of the self, they flaunted their inventiveness.

The Cubists’ ironic play with conventional signs of authorship—especially in collages that seemingly defy the artistry of the hand-rendered image—came out of this long tradition. They invented irreverent versions of the nameplate and other forms of fake signatures that nonetheless function as “authentic” autographs. Braque, Gris, and Picasso delighted in testing

assumptions about art and reality. They transformed humble still lifes made with mass-produced materials into works of singular ingenuity, often tricking the unsuspecting viewer with passages of traditional visual deception. As in trompe l'oeil, it is wit, or *jeu d'esprit*, that prevails.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Marble Console

1914

Oil, collage, and mirrored glass on canvas

Private collection

This still life is one of two by Gris with mirror fragments, which would have offered a Cubist reflection of any person who stood before them. The artist facetiously defended his shortcut by noting how a painted mirror can never really be convincing because the surface of an actual one is always changing: “There is nothing else to do but stick on a real piece.” The book page is taken from the author’s preface to an obscure historical novel, *Le bourreau du roi* (The King’s Executioner) by Roland Bauchery. The heading, “DE L’AUTEUR” (of/by the author), now stands for Gris the artist, who has appropriated Bauchery’s authorship for his own creative ends.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)
Still Life (Glass and Cigarette Pack)

1914

Cut-and-pasted laid and wove papers, newspaper, printed wallpaper, printed packing, charcoal, graphite, oil, and watercolor on paperboard

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift in memory of Charles Barnett Goodspeed by Mrs. Charles B. Goodspeed (1947.879)

This collage contains a rare autobiographical reference by Braque, who was a keen cyclist: the fragment of an ad for the bimonthly magazine *Le Cyclotouriste*. The work likely dates from around June 28, 1914, when the artist embarked on a bicycle trip from Sens to Sorgues (a distance of some 370 miles). He framed his own oval picture with a bespoke mat crafted from trompe l'oeil linen wallpaper so that a piece of it crosses the threshold. The rapidly scripted letters that appear literally out and ahead of the rest of the papers likely express the “[vit]esse,” or speed, with which he aimed to complete his cycling journey.

Georges Braque (French, 1882–1963)

The Violin

1914

Oil, sawdust, and wood particles on canvas

Private collection

Braque meticulously reproduced a type of engraved-metal nameplate, with tiny screws at the edges, that had devolved into a trite vehicle for product branding. A typical example is seen in the lower right of the image reproduced here, featuring a painter-decorator marbling a wall, one of a series of collectible cards advertising Trébucien coffee and chocolate. Braque likely chose this popular signature device over more rarified forms to chafe at the professional hierarchies that separated artisanal painters from “fine” artists. The frankly fake nameplate nonetheless functions as a sign of genuine authorship. That the raised areas of paint, sawdust, and wood particles appear to be cutouts collaged onto the surface is pure trompe l’oeil.

Image caption:

“Le peintre décorateur” (The painter-decorator). Card advertising Trébucien, “Chocolat des Gourmets,” ca. 1900. Chromolithograph. Mucem, Marseilles

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Bottle of Bass and Glass

1914

Enamel and oil on canvas

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift from the Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection

Picasso used stenciled letters to sign his picture, raising questions about the presumed uniqueness and truth value of a handwritten signature. Whether he truly employed a reusable template or deceptively imitated the standardized font only adds to the potential confusion. By adding the dog-eared corner, he turned the identity of an otherwise nondescript rectangle into a calling card, whose class distinction is nevertheless undermined by lettering associated with commercial signage. Although this work may appear to have collaged elements, it is entirely painted, including the wood-grained surface that gives it the impression of having been rendered on hard panel.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Pipe and Sheet Music

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, wove papers, gouache, graphite, and chalk on paper

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice McAshan (69.11)

Glass and Bottle of Bass

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, newspaper, gouache, and charcoal on paperboard

Private collection

These two papier collés poke fun at the same well-worn conventions of art display parodied by Haberle in the trompe l'oeil on the facing wall. Picasso mounted two of his Cubist still lifes on wallpaper supports and surrounded them with a printed leaf-and-berry border that simulates the carved versions used to frame venerated masterpieces. The rectangles of pasted paper, which bear a faux naive version of his autograph, mock the brass nameplates pretentiously affixed to

solid frames by collectors and museums. Yet, by virtue of his collage technique, Picasso has appended to his picture a materially real version of the *cartellino*, the time-honored illusion of a slip of paper bearing the artist's signature—likely a first in the history of art.

Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Bottle of Bass and Calling Card

1914

Cut-and-pasted wove and laid papers, printed packaging, and graphite on paper

Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris,
Donation of Louise and Michel Leiris, 1984

Dice, Packet of Cigarettes, and Visiting-Card

1914

Cut-and-pasted laid and wove papers, charcoal, graphite, printed commercial label, and printed calling card on laid paper

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Transfer from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature

Calling cards displaying the name of the artist or that of a notable peer are featured in many trompe l'oeil still lifes. Following suit, Picasso included the actual engraved cards of his patrons Gertrude Stein and André Level. A bent corner signified that the owner had delivered it personally; though here, the corners are simply not there: Picasso cut them off and drew in

duplicitous doubles. The conjoined dice may allude to Stein's intimate relationship with Alice B. Toklas, one stated openly on their shared card. As to Level, he headed the consortium of investors that sold Picasso's painting *Family of Saltimbanques* (1905) at auction in 1914 for a staggering sum, creating a whole new market for Picasso and modern art.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

The Bottle of Anis

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpapers, newspaper, printed commercial label, gouache, conté crayon, and graphite on newspaper mounted on canvas

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

The word-and-image play in this amusing collage asserts Gris's position as part of an elite Cubist trio, the "DESTILLACION ESPECIAL" (special distillation) as per the claim on the label from a popular alcoholic drink. The enjoyment to be had is as much about *amis* (friends) as *anis*, the licorice-flavored spirit. The logo includes its place of manufacture, Badalona, a suburb of Barcelona, and two prize-winning medallions from Paris and Madrid; these were emblematic cities for Picasso, Braque, and Gris, respectively. The lattice pattern on the "tipsy" bottle mimics the original's pressed glass design, itself a mass-produced imitation of real cut glass.

Juan Gris (Spanish, 1887–1927)

Breakfast

1914

Cut-and-pasted printed wallpaper, newspaper, transparentized paper, white laid paper, gouache, oil, and wax crayon on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (by exchange), 1948

The table in this domestic breakfast scene is laid with printed wallpapers and brims with autobiographical references, mainly the coffee-drinking accessories and the actual Café Eugène Martin label. Gris's dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler remarked that the artist was an excessive consumer of caffeine. A fortuitous newspaper fragment provides the ready-made signature "GRIS" while the letters "OURN," excerpted from the masthead of *Le Journal*, form a homophonic pun on "Juan." The name Juan Gris (or "John Gray") proved to be the finest fiction of all, for it was but a pseudonym for the man born in 1887 as José Victoriano Carmelo Carlos González-Peréz.

John Haberle (American, 1856–1933)

Imitation

1887

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., New Century Fund, Gift of the Amon G. Carter Foundation (1998.96.1)

American trompe l'oeil painters replicated paper bills so exactly that they raised suspicions of actual forgery. Haberle's title, *Imitation*, provokes on multiple levels, as do his painted representations of different forms of representation—stamps, currency, signatures, and a tintype photograph (of himself)—whose relative values depend on established conventions. Nothing is materially “real” here, though much may be “true,” such as the portrait likenesses. He signed the work twice: his name is “carved” into the wood support and appears to have been hastily cut from newsprint and affixed to the frame in a parody of the collection nameplate. The latter draws attention to his artistic “brand,” despite the association with a newspaper's degradable paper and cheap price.

Louis Léopold Boilly (French, 1761–1845)

Trompe l’Oeil

ca. 1799–1804

Oil on marble with wood trim

Private collection, Canada

The French term *trompe l’oeil*, “fool the eye,” was coined in 1800 by none other than Boilly, whose visual deceptions attracted and astonished crowds. This painting on marble functions as an actual tabletop and simulates the look of recently emptied pockets. The piece was likely commissioned by the addressee on the envelope, “Monsieur Pourtalès,” a member of the Neuchâtel banking family, which accounts for the array of Swiss coins. Boilly flattered his patron by including his portrait miniature, with the glass cover coyly removed and set aside for all to “see.” The inclusion also shows off the artist’s own talent—and thriving business—in portraiture. Boilly left behind a few of his business cards, bearing the address of and directions to his studio.



“Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth. The artist must convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.”

—Pablo Picasso, May 1923