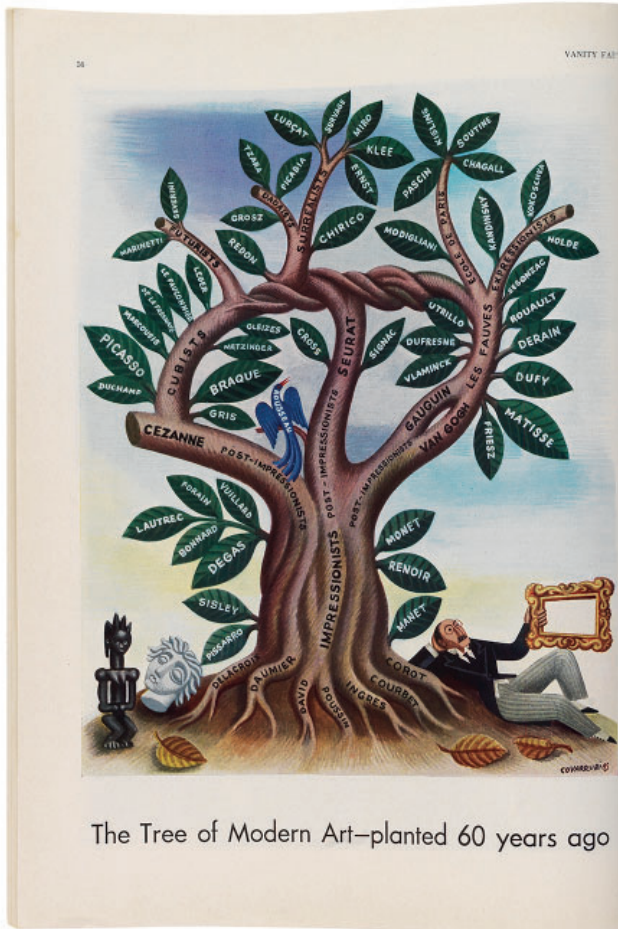




The Tree of Modern Art—planted 60 years ago

The Tree of Modern Art

A SIMPLIFIED GUIDE TO THE MODERN MOVEMENT—FOR THE UNINITIATED • BY R. H. WILENSKI

■ Two preliminary observations

The activity which we call Modern Art is the art of the last 60 years. It was made possible, in Europe, by the so-called Impressionist Movement in France.

But, before tracing the origin of this movement, there are two observations that will, perhaps, make an understanding of modern painting a little easier for us.

First, that a tree of art is a record of the influence upon an artist of the civilization in which he lives—a symbol of the culture of his age—that is to say, of the spiritual attitude of the moment and the social conditions of that age. So that when we call a picture "good" or "bad," the words have merely a personal significance unless we mean by "good," a picture that does represent the culture of the time, and by "bad," a picture which was not intended or has failed to do so. An artist is not, as so many people suppose, a person who has learned, by means of painting and drawing, to compete with the camera; a person who can paint nature, or objects, literally, correctly, agreeably. He is a man who, in his painting, does something

significant with his mind and heart—something which puts in its stimulating context with everything which he truly is and everything that has made him. He is a man who, when he fails, has failed to do just this; and who, when he does not try to do it, is not an artist at all—though he can paint a nose on that we may want to pull it, or an onion that will bring tears to our eyes.

Second, that at every period everywhere, there are very few true artists. But there are always a great many hack painters who imitate the work of the true artists who have preceded them, or of the true artists who are still alive. Sometimes they imitate the work of artists dating 500 years earlier, but their favorite model is the art of 20 to 50 years earlier than their own day. There are thousands of hack painters today who are imitating the artists of 1880 to 1900, or even imitating the work of living painters. In 1880 the hack painters were imitating the artists of 1830–1850. In 1850 they were imitating the artists of 1780 to 1810, and so on. But the work of the hack painters of the past has, luckily, nearly all disappeared from view.

The first stage in art appreciation and understanding is the power to distinguish the work of a hack painter from that of a true artist. The second step is to throw all the works of all the hack painters into the dust bin, actually, if possible, metaphorically, if not. It is always hard to distinguish contemporary artists from contemporary hacks. It is much easier to pick out the true artist of a period that is past. When an artist has been dead for thirty or fifty years we can see him in relation to his period and to other artists who have worked before.

The invention in the Tree of Modern Art, seen on the opposite page, is to show the connection between the different modern schools and movements; their growth from one another; the leaves and fruit which they have borne; and even the seed and that has sown them.

■ Origins of the modern movement

As we have said, Modern Art began 60 years ago, and derived from French Impressionism, in 1874. But Impressionism did not spring into being from the void. It grew from old French tradition in art. It grew from the artistic movement of Delacroix, the romanticism of Courbet and Daubigny, the delicate naturalism of Corot, and the still deeper roots of the classical French tradition—Ingres, David and Poussin.

It grew from these just as they, in turn, had grown from the classical manner before them—following the natural law of evolution in art, which traces back to the ancient Greeks and earlier.

The Impressionists—Manet, Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley and Degas (all of whom are shown on the trunk of the tree), were painters who aimed at two things: (a) at recording

their impressions of reality—choosing landscape and everyday life as their subjects—and (b) at revealing the quality of light by using bright colors, mainly the colors of the spectrum.

The first only of these aims was pursued by Manet, the pioneer of the movement. As early as 1865 Manet was painting scenes in the Tuileries Gardens and, as the years went on, he recorded his impressions of race courses, tennis parties, bathing on the river, shopping at ports, and so forth. At this time he also painted exhibition pictures to rival Volp and Corot—remarkably handsome works, most of which are now in American collections. Later he was converted to the study of the quality of light which was the main pursuit of the other Impressionists, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, etc.

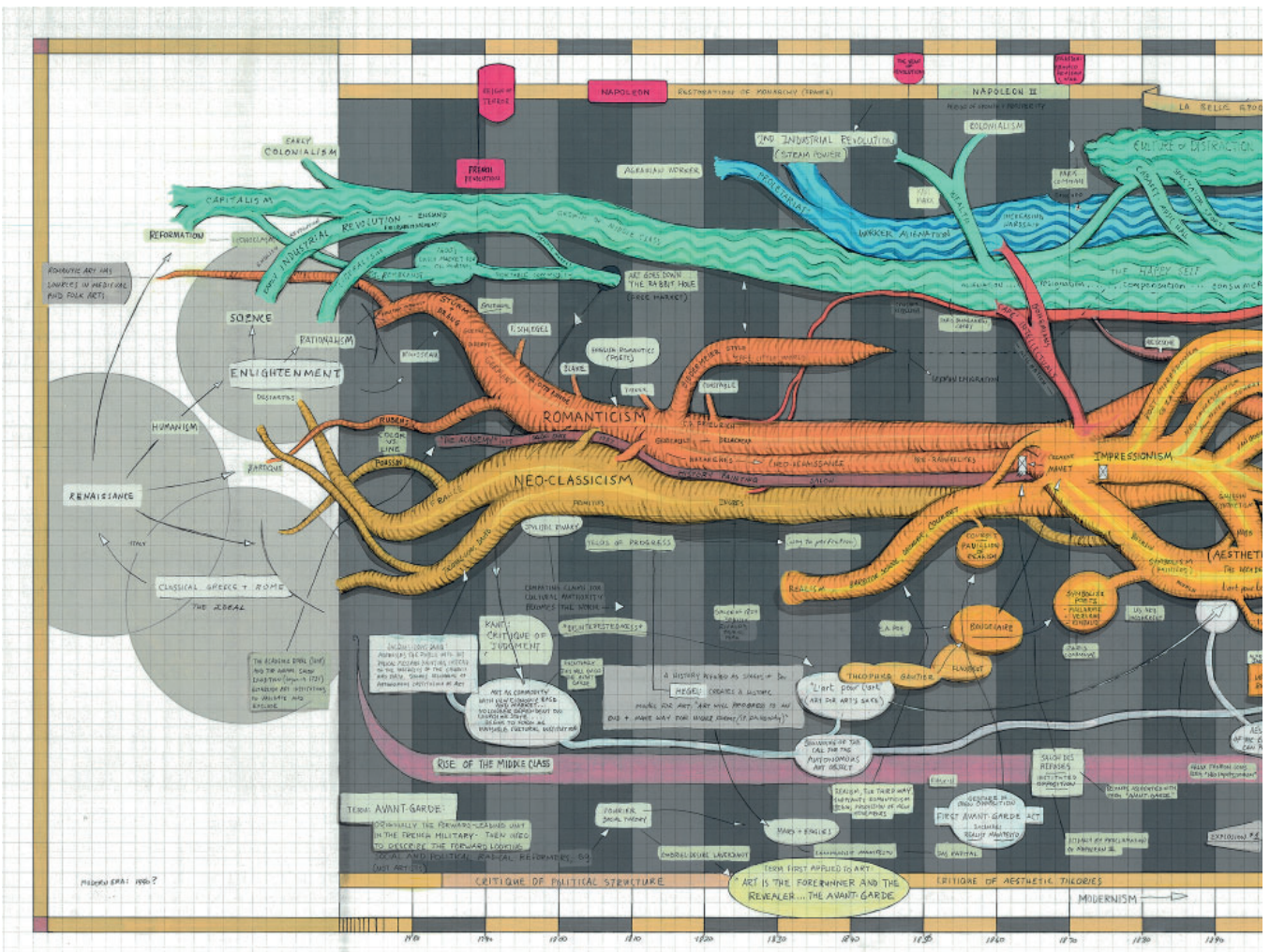
Renoir is one of the most delightful, if not one of the greatest of artists. He lived until 1919 and his work underwent many changes and developments. He was so sensitive to the culture of his time that he was able to absorb into his own personality not only Impressionism but, a little later, the more modern movement of Cézanne.

■ The place of Degas and Lautrec

Another great name associated with the Impressionists was that of Edgar Degas who was trained as a "chance" in the tradition of David and Poussin—and then developed into a brilliant painter, journalist, whose chronicles of ballet dancers, laundry women, café concert singers, etc., were filled with the richness and variety of their color schemes and the Japanese spirit of their designs. In Degas we must add the name of Toulouse-Lautrec, a brilliant, frustrated personality who recorded Parisian night life and the world of vice and pleasure with a moral intensity that places him with the great artists of all time.

Out of the potential trunk of the tree of Modern Art—formed by these Impressionist painters—there sprang, ten to twenty years later, three important branches, representing different reactions to the Post-Impressionist movement. The first, or central branch, was the school originating in and founded by Seurat and began with the founding of the Salon des Indépendants in 1889.

Seurat is so important and typical of the culture of his period as Paul Cézanne. He started painting at the age of twenty-one and died when he was thirty-nine in 1891. He was never able to sell a picture. But in those ten years he painted twenty or thirty pictures of bathers and portraits, and several most delicately mediated compositions which are landmarks in the history of modern art. His central masterpiece, "Grand Jatte," is now in the Chicago Art Institute. Seurat's art grew back, through the spectrum palette of the Impressionists, to (Continued on page 6)



La exposición Genealogías del arte propone la materialización espacial del célebre diagrama que Alfred H. Barr (fundador en 1929 del Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York MOMA y su primer director), compuso para la sobrecubierta del catálogo de una muestra pionera, Cubism and Abstract Art (1936), y en el que explicaba la evolución estilística del arte desde 1890 a 1935.

Este diagrama bidimensional se traslada a las tres dimensiones del espacio expositivo, situando en las paredes de las salas obras de arte y documentos en los lugares ocupados en el gráfico de Barr por las referencias a un estilo o movimiento concretos, poniendo así a prueba la plausibilidad visual del diagrama y, de paso, la credibilidad del que quizá haya sido el intento más ambicioso (y temprano) de dotar al arte de la primera mitad del siglo XX de un canon diagramático en toda regla y de una genealogía que abarca casi tres generaciones. 01

Concebida y organizada por la Fundación Juan March y el Museo Picasso Málaga, la exposición presenta obras de artistas de vanguardia como Picasso, Brancusi, Malévich, Duchamp, Boccioni y Kandinsky, junto con videos de escenografías, arte primitivo, estampas japonesas o diseño industrial de “la era de la máquina”.

Al final se exponen más de un centenar de documentos de doscientos treinta artistas y autores relacionados con la crítica del arte, e incluye las más variadas representaciones visuales de ese pensamiento (árboles genealógicos, tablas, alegorías, mapas, planos, estampas, diagramas y gráficos informativos) elaboradas en un lapso temporal que va desde el siglo XVII hasta hoy.

Alfred H. Barr abrió el camino para el denominado PARADIGMA DIAGRAMÁTICO, que expandió la clásica narración textual (unidireccional) hacia una visión diagramática (panorámica) que permitirá la pedagogía de la historia del arte con recursos visuales y conceptuales mucho más potentes.

El diagrama se ha entendido históricamente de 2 maneras: como un mecanismo explicativo y analítico, y como un mecanismo generativo. Es una máquina abstracta que revela estructuras y relaciones latentes o invisibles. Es un conjunto flexible de relaciones inestables que están en desequilibrio permanente.

Por eso, para Barr era la forma idónea de representar la génesis del arte abstracto del s. XX, en un intento de visibilizar el caldo de cultivo cultural de las que se nutrían las vanguardias.

El desafío es mayúsculo y el diseño del montaje de la exposición se propone una “deriva” psicogeográfica (Guy Debord) en la que los visitantes van intuyendo relaciones e influencias entre las obras expuestas.

Cabría preguntarse para cuando una exposición sobre arquitectura contemporánea que utilice estos mecanismos tan adecuados para la pedagogía. 02

Genealogías del arte, o la historia del arte como arte visual - Fundación Juan March

Texto: Jesús San Vicente // Fotografías: Fundación Juan March

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The exhibition Genealogías del arte (Genealogies of Art) proposes the spatial materialization of the well-known diagram that Alfred H. Barr (founder of the MoMA of New York and its first director) created for the book jacket of a pioneering exhibition, Cubism and Abstract Art (1936) in which he explained the stylistic evolution of art from 1890 to 1935.

This two-dimensional diagram is translated to the three dimensions of the exhibition space, placing on the room's walls the artworks and documents in the places occupied in Barr's graph according to the references to a specific style or movement, proving, this way, the visual plausibility of the diagram and, at the same time, the credibility of the maybe most ambitious (and early) attempt ever to give art from the first half of the 20th century a proper diagrammatic canon and a genealogy that embraces almost three generations. 01

Conceived and curated by the Juan March Foundation and the Málaga Picasso Museum, the exhibition features works by avant-garde artists such as Picasso, Brancusi, Malévich, Duchamp, Boccioni or Kandinsky together with videos showing scenographies, primitive art, Japanese engravings or industrial designs from the “age of the machine”. In the final part, more than one hundred documents by 230 artists and authors related to arts criticism are shown, including the widest ranging visual representations of this discipline (genealogic trees, tables, allegories, maps, plans, prints, diagrams and information graphics) created in a time lapse going from the 17th century until today.

Alfred H. Barr paved the way to the so-called DIGRAMMATIC PARADIGM, which expanded the classic textual narrative (unidirectional) towards a diagrammatic vision (panoramic) that would allow for the pedagogy of art history, using much more powerful visual and conceptual resources.

The diagram has historically spread in two ways: as an explicative and analytic mechanism, and as a generative mechanism. It's an abstract machine that reveals latent or invisible structures and relationships. It is a flexible whole of changeable relationships in a permanent unbalance.

That's why, for Barr, it was the perfect way to represent the genesis of the abstract art from the 20th century, in an attempt to raise awareness of the cultural breeding ground from which the avant-gardes were nurturing.

It is a major challenge, and the design of the exhibition's setup proposes a psycho-geographical “drift” (Guy Debord) in which the viewer senses relationships and influences between the exhibited works.

One might ask when there will be an exhibition about contemporary architecture that uses these mechanisms so proper to pedagogy. 02