

*PAINTERLY PASTED PICTURES*

Curated by E.A. Carmean, Jr.

Opening February 21, 2013



FreedmanArt

“THE ROAD TO PAINTERLY PASTED PICTURES:  
BRAQUE AND ARP TO STELLA AND KELLY”

by E. A. Carmean, Jr.

The exhibition entitled Painterly Pasted Pictures at the Freedman Art Gallery brings together a group of collages that share the formal trait of "painterliness," either in part or whole. This stylistic characteristic, the opposite of crisp (cut) profiles and simple, balanced compositional layouts, is one not usually associated with the standard idea of the modern collage. But, "painterliness" is nonetheless an essential feature of many collages made by the Abstract Expressionists, including their works featured in this show.<sup>[1]</sup>

But this "Painterliness" was also a stylistic feature present in collage pictures created by some of the Abstract Expressionists' contemporaries. And later, even artists we might regularly identify with precise forms and geometric compositions, such as Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly (included here), made collages one can term as "painterly."

This formal characteristic is so common in the art made in America and Europe in the third quarter of the Twentieth Century that it might seem to be almost a "given;" but its particular form of "painterly" collage was the result of a significant history of both formal inventions and personal connections, some of which are sketched below in six brief sections pointing to inventive moments in the history of collage in the Twentieth Century.

**LINEAR VS. PAINTERLY, MUNICH 1915.**

*"Vision itself has its history [...]" Heinrich Wölfflin*

Two generations ago, most college students majoring in art history were soon initiated into the various methods of doing a formal analysis of art objects. Broad descriptions would locate the work of art into its culture, while greater knowledge of historic styles could be added to more detailed descriptions to provide a

more accurate sense of where the work of art belonged, in cultures or within a single artist's overall body of work.

Acquiring these essential skills was often accompanied by the study of Heinrich Wölfflin's distinctions between linear vs. painterly outlined in his *Principles of Art History* written in 1915. The general approach taken by Wölfflin was at once particular in describing individual works, and broad in seeking to define personal to even nationalistic stylistic traits. Perhaps his most succinct contributions were his categories of formal analysis, setting stylistic traits, or artistic creation, into two general poles, with art shifting from one to the other and around again. Important for our discussion here is his contrast of art shifting from linear (drawing, profiles) to painterly (greater physicality, and elements in patches extending over fixed boundaries).

[2]

Taken into art history's broad perspective, these stylistic traits seemed to alternate, from High Renaissance to Baroque and Rococo, from Neo-Classicism to Romanticism, from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism. As we will sketch here, a similar flow took place within the brief history of collage, leading to the rich variety of painterly collages in this show.

### **THE VERY FIRST PAPER COLLAGE, SORGUES (FRANCE), 1912** <sup>[3]</sup>

*"I am working a lot [...] sculpture out of paper," Georges Braque, writing to D.H. Kahnweiler, Summer 1912*

*"Braque- I am using your latest paperistic [pasted] procedures," Pablo Picasso writing to Georges Braque on October 9, 1912*

[3]

In studying the emergence of modernist art, 1911 is a watershed moment. Then the cubism of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso had grown increasingly complex: Indeed, their overall multipart compositions, with an ever-greater number of short segments of linear definitions, had generated a rapid shift toward a more painterly composition, albeit one now virtually abstract.

One day in the summer of 1912, while working in Sorgues, Braque happened to look into the window of a decorator's supply shop. This was understandable as Braque had actually begun his adulthood being trained to paint interior decorations, including how to imitate wood grain patterns using special tools.

Braque's attention was caught by a roll of wallpaper printed to look like grained wood. In that instant, the idea of the paper collage was born, along with Braque's creating small cubist sculptures out of cut paper. Soon, Braque shared his extraordinary formal discovery with his cubist colleague Picasso, as Picasso later wrote to Braque (Picasso had been away when Braque made the very first paper collages).

Opposite of the painterly cubist pictures they'd just completed, the first collages were quite simple compositions. This was especially so in terms of their elements; compositions were first nothing but line drawing atop and adjacent to rectangular cut pieces of paper; later the pasted sheet of paper—and with wood grain patterns—could be cut to suggest the profile of an object, say of a guitar or violin. In a Wolfflin sense, with the cubist collage the linear and clear displaced the painterly complexity of Braque's and Picasso's immediately previous cubist painting. Collage was invented as a "linear" form of artistic expression.

### **BRAQUES' "GUERIDON" COLLAGE, PARIS 1918 <sup>[4]</sup>**

*"I have seen some new things by Braque which I find soft and lacking in precision. It's a turn toward Impressionism." Juan Gris, 1920.*

In 1914, Braque was drafted into World War I. As Spaniards, Picasso and the new cubist painter Juan Gris were both exempt from service. In many ways, during the War Gris took over Braque's role of being Picasso's creative colleague.

Braque returned from the War severely wounded, and his recovery was slow and distracting. Nevertheless, his work was soon informed by the changes in cubism undertaken by Gris and Picasso in his absence: still a

more linear style of flat planes, but more recently a greater number of shapes often rendered in more spatially complex settings.

Braque's first—and only completed—post-War paper collage represented at once an extraordinary change, one that would characterize the whole of the later style of cubism (1918-1928). First, this still life composition contains many more cut profile shapes. Secondly, these pieces now featured varying surface patterns; this later surface variety effecting one's "take" of the picture akin to the manner in which impasto paint "reads" in High Baroque paintings. Further, some pieces were cut out and shaped so to fit together in an overlapping, almost three dimensional jig-saw construction.

This collage might be said to return to a new variation of the original High early cubism's painterliness, actually called "Impressionism" by Gris.

#### **INVENTIONS, 1920s-30s. <sup>[5]</sup>**

*"I began to tear my paper instead of cutting them neatly with scissors, I tore up drawings [...] These torn pictures, these "papier déchirés [...]" Jean Arp, 1935.*

The formal impact of Braque's invention of paper collage was rapid and widespread, adopted by many other emerging movements. Within the emergence of abstract art, many new ideas are found in the inter-War collages of Kurt Schwitters and Jean Arp. These collages would prove influential to the emergence of the painterly pasted pictures of the Abstract Expressionists and others in the post-1950s periods.

In the 1920s, Kurt Schwitters began making collage using pieces of scrap paper he'd found on the streets. Combined in an overall semi-grid-like structure derived from early cubism, Schwitters' gatherings of numerous smaller pieces of very different surfaces and type-faces—some elements might even have torn or ragged edges—created a richly counterpointed composition one can label as tending toward the "painterly" rather than the linear (Beyond his paper collages, Schwitters' constructions employing attached objects

would influence the later movement known as *Assemblage*, and its principal genius, Robert Rauschenberg, in his *Combines*).

In Berlin in the Summer of 1918, Schwitters first met the visiting Arp. They must have esteemed each other's art, for when Schwitters returned to Hanover and Arp had returned to Zurich, they would continue as colleagues.

Jean Arp—who was in Paris at the time of the first paper collages—made his first works in this new medium in its linear form, using shapes cut from paper using scissors, resulting in firm strong profiles often suggesting organic forms. In the 1930s Arp began making collages by tearing the paper into irregular pieces, and then rearranging - scattering like "fallen leaves" in Robert Motherwell's apt description - the feathered-edged shapes.<sup>[6]</sup> Sometimes Arp might later connect these forms by adding drawing between the paper shapes (Arp's tearing and rearranging and generating new pictorial ideas would be used by Willem deKooning in his rare collages made in the later 1950s).

In the 1950s, both Schwitters and Arp's collages would have been known in New York; and Arp's more so, in a direct way.

In 1949, as a part of the Friday Evenings programs held by a school known as *The Subjects of the Artist*, both the students and public were invited to attend a public presentation by an invited speaker. Almost surely around for these events were the organizers of the school—including Robert Motherwell, William Baziotis and Mark Rothko—and likely as well, other then-emerging modernist artists in New York.

Jean Arp, who was on a visit to New York, spoke about his work to this public audience. In another of those links in art history, Arp was introduced by Robert Motherwell, the artist who was already becoming the most important collage maker of the next generation.

## **ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST COLLAGES, NEW YORK 1943 AND 1948.**

*"Even the torn papers in his collages "arranged according to the laws of chance"[...] are serene, an effort to find a natural order, like that of leaves fallen on the ground [...]" Robert Motherwell, 1948.*

*"The violent tearing of paper became to [Motherwell in the mid-1950s] the equivalent to the immediate automatic brush gesture in painting." H.H. Arnason, 1966 <sup>[7]</sup>*

In the Winter of 1942-43, Peggy Guggenheim decided to present an exhibition of collages at her New York art gallery, the Art of This Century. It is measure of both America's naïveté and art history's fashions that, while Guggenheim's European artists had often worked in the medium of pasted pictures and connected assemblage, her trio of American painters had never before made a collage.

There is said to be strength in numbers. So, in early 1943 William Baziotés, Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock met together in Pollock's studio to make their first collages. We can gather some idea of that gathering from the early collages by each from that time, some of which appeared in the exhibition. They share curious affinities with Braque's and Picasso's first collages, namely pieces of cut paper to which drawing—albeit here sweeping and in colors—sets atop the pasted elements.

Of the trio, Motherwell took to collage, frequently making works that combine cut pieces of a German wrapping paper printed to look like it's scattered with painterly elements into a more geometric structure.

In the later 1940s and early 1950s, Pollock returned to making paper collages, and, although made independently of each other as far as is known, Pollock's works share remarkable affinities with nearly simultaneous, if not slightly earlier, new directions in Motherwell's collages. This is seen in Pollock's *Untitled* of around 1951, now in the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC, and two comparative collages by Motherwell, *The Elegy* of 1948 in the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University, and the *In Grey and Tan*, also of 1948, now in the Krannert Art Museum, of the University of Illinois.

The pieces share formal characteristics of torn paper distributed across the picture's surface, with painterly strokes of paint added in. In a curious manner, these collages are not only "painterly," but even (and ironically) parse the contrapuntal compositions of 1911 cubism, the pulverized surfaces leading to abstraction which caused paper collage's invention that Summer in 1912. <sup>[8]</sup>

How much these two Abstract Expressionists' collages and Motherwell's later 1950s-and-on works owe to Schwitters and Arp is open to speculation. As above, we do know Motherwell was editing Arp's writings and looking at his earlier "torn paper" collages during 1948, and that he would meet with Arp the following year.

### **PAINTERLY PASTED PICTURES.**

*"Often World War II-generation artists working in collage [created] constructions and deconstructions, as is the case with Willem de Kooning. [...] In the mid-1950s, de Kooning developed a process of cutting or ripping and then reassembling one or more drawings by pasting them down [...]" Elisabeth Hodermarsky, 2002. <sup>[9]</sup>*

It is curious that Motherwell's art, in his paintings and collages, returned to a more measured fabrication, of cut papers—"Poussinist" we might say—until the mid-1950s when the act of tearing paper, with its sweeping, irregular edges corresponded with the painterly direction of his other pictures. By then, torn paper or not, the painterly collage had become a staple of Abstract Expressionist art, including Motherwell, de Kooning and Franz Kline, as well as many other collage-makers of this period.

Introduced here in this focus, one might posit that just as the formal steps of early and middle cubism have now been traced and articulated, so art history has before it the task of unraveling the development of the Painterly Pasted Pictures gathered here.

These collages might be placed into one of several formal groups. Borrowing a page from Wolfflin, we might set out general categories broadly characterizing the works included in this exhibition: Visitors are

encouraged to use these descriptions to define for themselves the varieties of collages in Painterly Pasted Pictures.

1. crisply cut in painterly setting made of other material.
  2. torn (painterly) in painterly setting made of paper or other material.
  3. torn (painterly) in "smooth" setting.
  4. crisply cut forms placed in over-all multi-part composition of such variation among elements as to effect a sense of the painterly and
- 4b. being the same with painterly addition

The entire continent of Painterly Pasted Pictures waits to be mapped.

## **TWO COLLAGES.**

*"Clearly Stella was trying [...] to build a bridge through the daunting and reductive Black paintings back to a larger, more inclusive tradition -- to abstract expressionism [...]" Harry Cooper, 2006. <sup>[10]</sup>*

*"[Kelly] went to see Matthais Grunewald's Isenheim Altarpiece [but the] construction of polyptych altarpieces fascinated Kelly far more than their subjects [...]" Diane Upright, 1987. <sup>[11]</sup>*

The impact of what has been called here the "painterly collage" was more widespread than its prevalent role in collages of the Abstract Expressionists and related stylistic groupings (i.e. the so-called painters identified under the rubric "10th Street Touch").

By contrast, two key figures, Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella, arguably the two most important abstract artists of the last half-century, are often popularly linked with a kind of geometric structure and formal "reductiveness." But in their making paper collages, they may also be seen in certain works as strong representatives of the (Wolfflin) tendency toward the "painterly."

Kelly's *White Panels on Green*, 1950, dates from the artist's years in Paris. Like other collages of this extremely fecund period, it uses an underlying geometric structure, here fifteen rectangles of pasted white paper on an extraordinarily long green ground; its overall ratio is nearly twelve to one. Within this arrangement, Kelly has used three differing widths for the pasted rectangles; they are composed so that the outer three on each side are the same, with the inner nine - or three units of three each - are unmatched. The effect is not unlike the structure (underscore, in its formal organization) of a triptych, or a five-panel polyptych. <sup>[12]</sup>

This establishes a sense of visual "flicker" as the eye reads the varying sized elements, resulting in a "painterly" or, to use Gris' term, an Impressionistic character. <sup>[13]</sup>

So too, Stella's collage, *Maquette for Lo sciocco senza paura [Fearless Simpleton]*, 1983, from his *Cones and Pillars* series, composed as it is of such essential shapes, reading from their illusionistic "shadings," as a stable round column and a pointing conical shape.

Stella's inventions in *Lo sciocco* can be compared with similar and particular elements of the formal vocabulary created by Gris and Braque in their 1915-1928 collages and paintings. Chief among them are the ways in which Stella's clear shapes serve both as firmly defined planar statements and at the same time openly act—and occasionally, in both Gris and Stella, as literally as arrows and pointed cones—to direct the energy and the coherence of their composition.

Here in *Lo sciocco*, within this surface organization - one reading of the actions from the top "notch" moves down and to the (viewer's) right, checked by a leftward push. All this is then combined with their different spatial placements - both actual and descriptive.

In a broader understanding, Stella here creates a collage that at once shares affinities not only to the compositions of later cubism, but is also directly akin to the piece-to-piece placements, interweavings and

staccato "strokes" of the Abstract Expressionist vocabulary, stylistic characteristics found in their paintings and -as here-in their painterly pasted pictures.

January 2013

## The Road to Painterly Pasted Pictures

### NOTES.

1. In addition to the works from private collections forming the center of this exhibition, the author would like to thank Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella and their associates Eva Walters and Paula Pelosi for making possible two key collages. So too Jock Reynolds and Elisabeth Hodermarsky at the Yale University Gallery of Art lent that institution's rare and very important collage by Willem deKooning. All of these generous lenders offered not only their assistance with realizing this show but have shared their important works which have made possible this project.
2. Summary. See Henrich Gombrich, *The Principles of Art History*, 1915
3. See Isabelle Monod-Fontaine and E. A. Carmean, Jr., *Braque: The Papiers Colles* (Washington, National Gallery), 1982. To be sure, Picasso had earlier painted on a piece of oil cloth printed to depict chair canning, and "framed" with a piece of rope looking like carved molding. But this object was an isolated "thing;" Braque's paper collage lead to a continuing tradition.
4. This discussion is based on the present author's "Braque, Collage, and Later Cubism," in *Papiers Colles*, above.
5. For a more complete discussion of this stage of Arp's collage, see Pierre Bruguere, *Jean Arp: les tems des papiers déchires*, Paris, Pompidou, 1983.
6. Robert Motherwell, Preface to Jean (Hans) Arp, *On My Way*, (New York, Wittenborn) 1948.
7. Motherwell, as above, and H. H. Arnason quoted in E. A. Carmean, Jr., *The Collages of Robert Motherwell*, p. 63.
8. These connections among Analytical cubist works and Motherwell's collages - and paintings of this time by Jackson Pollock and Willem deKooning were first advanced in 1972 in the present author's *Motherwell Collages* above, pp. 18-25.
9. Elisabeth Hodermarsky, *The Synthetic Century: Collage from Cubism to PostModernism: Selections from the Collection*. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 2002. p.26
10. Harry Cooper, "What You See and What He Said," in Cooper and Megan R. Luke, *Frank Stella* 1958. Cambridge, Harvard Art Museums, p. 85.
11. Diane Upright, "The Measure of Mystery," in Upright and E. A. Carmean, Jr., *Ellsworth Kelly: Works on Paper: Drawings, Watercolors, Collages, Photographs*. Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum 1987. p. 11.
12. *White Panels on Green* is composed of 15 white paper rectangles of three different widths (same height), which Kelly has composed to form a triptych in the following manner (of N as thin, R as regular and W as wider), as if organized in three panels as :

NWR--RRW:RRW:RWW---RWN

This asymmetrical composition is a feature of Baroque altarpieces, such as Ruben's Antwerp Descent from the Cross.

13. In a unique way, the young Kelly in Paris joined his clear, linear and at times geometric vocabulary to shapes derived - one might say, almost in an Impressionist-like response - from seeing things, including his grid based but Monet-echoing "Seine pictures" of the Paris river, or even his multi-panels compositions derived from looking at windows of Paris facades. So too, Kelly spent time sketching in Notre Dame; his later triptychs or polyptychs (even those joining differing colors), with their varying interiors within rigid geometric forms may reflect the "shimmer" given off by gold-ground altarpiece paintings, or the mannerist irregularities of Grunewald's masterpiece.

In one sense, one might say that Stella's Cones and Pillars realize the more complex spatial depositions suggested by Gris and Braque in their collages and later paintings. At the same time - and as importantly - they belong - at distance, to be sure - to the rich pictorial language created by 18th Century still-life Masters, from Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin to Grinling Gibbons, as well as to the bold and forceful vocabulary commanded by P. P. Rubens.

### SUGGESTED READINGS.

- \*Clement Greenberg, *Collage*, 1961 (originally appeared in Art News, September 1958).
- \* Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh, *Collage*. New York, Chilton, 1962.
- \* E. A. Carmean, Jr., *The Collages of Robert Motherwell*. Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1972
- \* E. A. Carmean, Jr. and Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *Braque: The Papiers Colles*. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1982.
- \* E. A. Carmean, Jr., Arp: *The Dada Reliefs*, Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1983 (Petite Journal).
- \* Pierre Bruguere with Dominique Bozo, *Hans/Jean Arp: le temps des papiers déchires*. Paris, Pompidou, 1983.
- \* Dianne Upright with E. A. Carmean, Jr., *Ellsworth Kelly: Works on Paper: Drawings, Watercolors, Collages, Photographs*. Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum, 1987.
- \* Elisabeth Hodermarsky with Jock Reynolds, *The Synthetic Century: Collage from Cubism to PostModernism: selections from the Collection*. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, 2002.

This essay accompanies the exhibition:

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