ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Post-Impressionists in England

The Critical Reception

Edited by
J. B. Bullen

Routledge Revivals

Post-impressionists in England

First Published in 1988, *Post-impressionists in England* documents the response of English taste to modern French art from the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1910 to the outbreak of the First World War. The notion of 'Post-Impressionism', unlike its earlier counterpart, Impressionism, was an exclusively English contribution to art history. Originally used to denote the work of Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and the Fauve painters, it rapidly assimilated Futurism, Cubism and recent English work like Vorticism. By focusing on one aspect of an important and complex period in British cultural history, J.B. Bullen illuminates not only aesthetic questions but also the way in which those aesthetic issues were determined and conditioned by social and political concerns.

Changes in English attitudes to art in this period were so rapid and were modified with such speed that the author has taken a strictly chronological approach to the subject. He sets out clearly the month-by-month developments in English attitudes and traces in detail the debates about modernism in England. To make matters clearer the book is divided into three major parts, each complementary to the others. The introduction surveys the period as a whole and places attitudes to art in the general context of the culture of the time. In the second part the extracts provide selected, concrete and particular examples of the huge range of material upon which the findings of the introduction are based; the writers represented include Roger Fry, Bernard Berenson, Desmond McCarthy, John singer Sargent, Walter Sickert, Clive Bell, Virginia Woolf and Wyndham Lewis. In the third part a chronology sets out in tabular form month-by-month events- exhibitions and major publications- as they occurred in Britain and in France. This is a must read for scholars and researchers of British cultural history and art history.

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POST-IMPRESSIONISTS IN ENGLAND

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For my father
who was born in the year
of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition

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Preface

The reception of Post-Impressionism in Britain was a very different affair from the reception of Impressionism. Not only was the impact of Post-Impressionist painting much more sudden and violent than that of Impressionist art which took the form of a gradual assimilation, but from the start the ideas and nuances contained in the term 'Impressionism' were quite distinct from the explosive associations of 'Post-Impressionism'.

The most important and obvious difference between the two terms lies in their respective origins. 'Impressionism', it will be remembered, is a translation from the French. It was invented in France and was readily adopted by the Impressionist painters themselves. The Impressionists looked upon themselves as a group, however loosely knit, and they shared many aesthetic aims and ideals. This was simply not the case with the so-called Post-Impressionist painters. In fact, the whole notion of Post-Impressionism was promulgated in England and none of the painters who were given the name would have recognised or understood it. It was formulated on the spur of the moment to form the title of Roger Fry's 1910 exhibition at the Grafton Galleries – 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' – and it passed instantly into cultural history. It was convenient, potent, deeply misleading, yet in a strange way it admirably reflected the current state of English ignorance about modern French art. Many contemporary writers, artists and critics who were conversant with French painting tried, in vain, to resist it, pointing out that it did not do justice to the variety and complexity of French art. And as recently as 1979 the large exhibition at the Royal Academy entitled 'Post-Impressionism; Cross-currents in European Painting' offered a challenge to the exclusiveness of Post-Impressionism by demonstrating the enormous diversity and the persistent continuity in late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European art. Roger Fry and Clive Bell continued to use it, however, because for them it performed the useful function of separating a whole generation of painters of whom they approved from a generation – the

Impressionists – of whom they approved rather less.

The intrinsic difference between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism as art-historical concepts has led to the radically different organisation of *Post-Impressionists in England* from Kate Flint's volume, *Impressionists in England*. First, the time span of this volume is much shorter. Impressionism was absorbed slowly over a period of twenty years, whereas Post-Impressionism, as it was conceived by Roger Fry and his contemporaries, was assimilated between 1905 and 1914. Essentially this volume gives a cross-section of developments in taste in those years and concentrates especially on the brief, but complex period between 1910 and the First World War. Second, the terms of reference of this volume are substantially different from its companion. 'Impressionism' referred almost exclusively to painting, whereas from the start Post-Impressionism was perceived of as much as an ontology as a style in art. Though on one hand Post-Impressionism was wilfully exclusive, cutting off Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh from their nineteenth-century predecessors, it was at the same time something of a portmanteau term which expanded to contain Fauvisim, Cubism, Futurism and Vorticism – indeed almost any modern style which did not conform to the British view of nineteenth-century art. Furthermore, Post-Impressionism was rapidly extended to the other arts. There were comic accounts of Post-Impressionist gastronomy and dress design, but on more than one occasion Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* was seriously described as a Post-Impressionist work as was the music of Richard Strauss and Schoenberg. Granville Barker's avant-garde production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* in 1912 was called Post-Impressionist and one writer put forward the idea that D.H. Lawrence's first novel *The White Peacock* was an exercise in Post-Impressionist literature.

But the contemporary debate about the virtues or evils of Post-Impressionism was deeply imbedded in the social, political and philosophical climate of the period and though it would have been possible to give a broader account of the reception of painters like Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh – an account which would extend into the 1920s and 1930s – it seemed more valuable to offer an insight into the tumultuous, rapidly changing and complex years of English cultural life between 1905 and 1914 – years which

are still enigmatic and baffling for the historian. Consequently the arrangement of the material in this volume is strictly chronological and the reader can observe, month by month, the speed and violence with which English taste and English attitudes were transformed by successive waves of innovation from the Continent of Europe.

The introduction attempts to offer an overview of the period and provide a context within which the selection of items in the main text can be placed. Necessarily the critical items reproduced in that text represent only a tiny proportion of the published material but they have been chosen to demonstrate the momentum which built up around the subject of modern art in these years. The principle of selection has been two-fold. First, an attempt has been made to print the most intelligent, sensitive and enquiring literature on the subject and, with all his limitations, Roger Fry stands head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries in this respect. Second, an attempt has been made to represent the huge range of opinion on the subject. And though the hysteria of some of the writing has little critical merit, nevertheless, the apocalyptic letters to the press about the work of Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso possess considerable sociological interest. There are also many curiosities which could not be overlooked: few people will know that Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton and Rupert Brooke were moved to write about Post-Impressionism in the popular press. The chronology at the end of the book offers another perspective on the subject. Because Post-Impressionism was essentially an English concept its influence was felt strongly in English painting, which in its turn deeply affected British critics. The chronology enables the reader to see how British painting and Continental art were being exhibited side by side and the way in which exhibitions of modern art in London after 1910 rapidly caught up with those in Paris.

Finally it will come as something of a surprise to many readers that there is so little material in this volume about the Neo-Impressionists – Seurat, Signac and their many followers in France. The fact is, however, that they were almost totally ignored in Britain at this time and their position in art history in English owes most to the efforts of American critics writing in America after the First World War.

The mis-spelling of many of the artists' names by the critics of this period is symptomatic of the unfamiliarity and newness of Post-Impressionism. It has been decided, therefore, to preserve the original orthography.

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf's exaggerated sense of a change having taken place in human character 'in or about December 1910'[1] was related in part to her feeling about living in what she called 'a Post-Impressionist age'.[2] Human character may not have changed with the advent in Britain of Post-Impressionist painting, but the language and discourse of art certainly underwent substantial modification, and the vocabulary and grammar of painting which had been evolving in France seemed, from a British point of view, to overthrow established traditions and stable artistic values.

In 1910 many people in Britain thought they were witnessing a break in the artistic continuity of European art and the arrival of so-called Post-Impressionist painting in England served to polarise attitudes to both the function and status of art in contemporary life. To those writers and painters whose values derived from English realism and English idealism, the primitivism of Gauguin, the expressionism of Van Gogh, the subjectivism of Cézanne and the violent simplification of Matisse and the other Fauve painters posed a threat not just to artistic technique – to matters of 'correct' drawing and 'finish' – but they seemed to undermine the very ontology which had formed the basis of English art for so many years. Post-Impressionism was not just a new way of seeing the world, it offered a new way of understanding the world. It defined a new relationship between man and nature, and developed a new connection between the spectator and the work of art. It was not just that the subjects of Post-Impressionist art were new or different; the principles of mimesis itself – perspective, representationalism, the articulation of the picture surface – all seemed to have been reorganised. To many commentators this shift in the ontology of art looked like regression, degeneracy, even lunacy; to others it was liberating – freeing art from traditions which had become stifling and constraining.[3]

The problem of accounting for Post-Impressionist painting was compounded by the inadequacy of contemporary critical language. The familiar vocabulary, diction and phrasing of art

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criticism was unable to cope with Post-Impressionist painting and the violent and inarticulate journalistic abuse directed at modern art in this period testifies both to the power of new and unfamiliar images and to the paucity of current critical terminology.

The violence of the British response to French Post-Impressionist art was born of unfamiliarity. Unlike Impressionism which, as Kate Flint points out,[4] was slowly absorbed into the British system over a period of twenty years, Post-Impressionism and its associated styles, Cubism, Futurism and Vorticism, burst upon the English public with startling rapidity. Within a period of three years – between 1910 and 1913 – Britain was forced to catch up with developments in Continental art which had taken twenty years to mature. Exactly why the British were so ignorant about French art, however, is not easy to explain, but self-satisfaction with English painting and a legacy of Victorian economic and cultural superiority were partly to blame. But the unstable and explosive state of French taste itself was also responsible. In the period 1890–1905 the French critical response to recent art makes it clear that the French themselves were deeply puzzled by the changes taking place in their own culture.

The history of art in this period focuses strongly on the two Post-Impressionist exhibitions organised by Roger Fry in 1910 and 1912. The significance of these shows remains unquestioned, but some adjustment is neccessary. The enormous prominence given to them in the history of art has tended to overshadow events both before and afterwards and to oversimplify a complex and tangled period of cultural history. Without diminishing the importance of these two shows it is necessary to see them in their context. They were neither unheralded, nor were they the only avenues by which modern art entered English life. After the Grafton Galleries exhibition of 1905 a number of Post-Impressionist works were seen in England before the first Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910 and in any case many contemporary artistis and critics were familiar with what had been happening in Paris in the first years of the century. Furthermore between Roger Fry's two major shows, British taste and understanding underwent significant modification. There was a further exhibition of the painting of Cézanne and Gauguin, there were prints of cubist pictures in the press, there was an exhibition of the drawings of Picasso, and the British were treated to the work of the Italian Futurists. But perhaps most

important, the British were strongly influenced by changes which took place in English art itself.

Most disturbing for the conservative critics in these years was the way in which British painting was infiltrated by Post-Impressionist techniques. The first Post-Impressionist exhibition seemed to encourage experimentation on a huge scale and Roger Fry's second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912 celebrated the British contribution to the modern movement by bringing together native talent and pictures from the Continent.

The acceptability of any new art form is intimately dependent upon the written word and during the period 1910–14 art criticism changed substantially; broadly speaking it evolved in the direction of formalism where concepts such as 'rhythm', 'movement', 'decorative power', or 'expressive colour' were used to translate visual experience into verbal experience. In this context, Clive Bell's book *Art* of 1914 is a considerable landmark. It is easy now to point to the shortcomings of terms like 'significant form' and 'asethetic emotion' but the advance they mark in the use of formalist language is considerable. Such a monograph as *Art* would have been impossible in 1910 and, though Bell's debt to Fry is enormous, their combined work in this field is a triumph of English empiricism.

FEBRUARY 1905–NOVEMBER 1910

The reception of Post-Impressionism in this country must begin with the Durand-Ruel exhibition of French art at the Grafton Galleries in 1905. It was a popular show which contained over three hundred paintings but amongst the brilliant and colourful examples of work by Boudin, Renoir, Monet, Manet, Degas and Pissarro were ten pictures which were largely neglected. They were by Cézanne. Frank Rutter remembered asking himself: 'What are these funny brown-and-olive landscapes doing in an impressionist exhibition?' (see no. 1) and later asked himself the question: 'Where was Mr Roger Fry in 1905?' Fry himself replied by admitting that, like most of his fellow countrymen, he was 'sceptical about Cézanne's genius' in 1905 since Cézanne was regarded by most authorities as a minor and peripheral Impressionist. By 1906, however, when Fry saw two more pictures by

Cézanne at the sixth annual exhibition of the International Society, he modified his view of the painter At this stage, however, Fry still had reservations about the central importance of Cézanne – reservations which he would rapidly abandon. In 1906 he claimed that Cézanne 'touches none of the finer issues of the imaginative life';[5] by 1908 he would be claiming that no other artist could more subtly touch the 'finer issues of life' than Cézanne.

It would be misleading to place too much stress on the weight of Fry's opinion at this early stage in the history of Post-Impressionism in England. Much more influential and widely read were the histories of French painting published in this country by Camille Mauclair, Wynford Dewhurst and George Moore. Mauclair's *French Impressionists* (translated by Paul Konody in 1904) referred to Cézanne's 'robust simplicity of vision' but condemned his figure painting as 'clumsy and brutal'.[6] Dewhurst, also writing in 1904, was more circumspect – realising that the tide was beginning to change in France and opinion was 'curiously divided' over Cézanne.[7] George Moore, however, in his *Reminiscences of the Impressionist Painters* (1906) was frankly dismissive of Cézanne. 'It would be untrue that he had no talent,' said Moore, 'but whereas the intention of Manet and of Monet and of Degas was always to paint, the intention of Cézanne was, I am afraid, never very clear to himself'.[8] Clearly, Moore had never given Cézanne's painting a moment's serious consideration, a fact which emerges amusingly in his confusion of Cézanne with Van Gogh. For George Moore the work of this composite personality represented 'the anarchy of painting . . . art in delirium' and he referred to paintings of 'crazy cornfields peopled with violent reapers, reapers from Bedlam.'

The year 1906 was the year of Cézanne's death, and even if George Moore did not know who Cézanne was, the anonymous writer of his obituary in the *Athenaeum* did. Not only was he conversant with the facts of Cézanne's life but he also pointed out that the ten pictures by Cézanne at the Paris Salon d'Automne of 1906 had gone unnoticed by British journalists.[9] In fact two years were to pass before the work of Cézanne or any other Post-Impressionist was to be seen in England, but an exhibition of the International Society in the early months of 1908 at the New

Gallery materially advanced the story of Post-Impressionism in this country.

The International Society had been founded in 1898 as a reaction against the provincialism of English art. It had never been wildly adventurous but a small section of the 1908 show contained a number of paintings unusual for the time. Along with some English work there were several pictures by Degas, Monet, Denis and Vuillard but there were also two pictures by Cézanne, a Van Gogh, a Gauguin, two Neo-Impressionist paintings by Signac and Henri Edmund Cross and a picture by Matisse (see headnote for no. 2).

The exhibition was largely ignored by the press, but one review was to have important consequences for Roger Fry. In what the anonymous writer in the *Burlington Magazine* called 'The Last Phase of Impressionism' he described the 'infantile' work of Matisse and his contemporaries as the last, fading and effete flickering of the earlier Impressionist movement. He saw a parallel between the developments of this new school out of Impressionism and the 'now forgotten Flemish and Italian eclectics' (no. 2). This review stimulated Fry to reply and in a letter to the *Burlington Magazine* he explained what he felt were the intrinsic strengths of the new movement. In doing so he employed a contrasting historical analogy – one that was to become an abiding principle in the Bloomsbury defence of Post-Impressionism. The change from Impressionism to 'Neo-Impressionism', Fry said, should be likened not to decadence, but to the changes which took place in art between the late Roman Empire and Byzantium. Cézanne and Gauguin, he asserted, 'are not really Impressionists at all. They are proto-Byzantines' (no. 3). In his defence of these artists Fry inverted the historical categories of the original review and transformed the role of modern artists from decadents into revivalists so that they became, in his terms, the initiators of a new, stronger and healthier tradition than that which they superseded.

Between 1906 and 1909 Fry published nothing further on modern art, but when he became editor of the *Burlington Magazine* he contributed a translation of an article by Maurice Denis on the work of Cézanne. The attraction for Fry of Denis's view of Cézanne was that Denis saw Cézanne in the role of both classical and contemporary, simultaneously ancient and modern. 'He is at

once', says Denis in Fry's translation, 'the climax of the classic tradition and the result of the great crisis of liberty and illumination which has rejuvenated modern art' (no. 7).

Roger Fry was of course not the only critic who was aware that important developments were taking place across the Channel and the British public itself was treated to regular accounts of the major shows of modern art in Paris between 1905 and 1910. The *Burlington Magazine*, the *Connoisseur* and the *Studio* all published notices of contemporary activity in the French capital, but curiously it was the better quality journals and newspapers rather than the specialist art journals that directed their readers' attention to the exhibitions of modern art.

From 1900 both the *Athenaeum* and *The Times* devoted space to the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne. The autumn salon – and that of 1905, in particular, which first showed the work of the Fauves – held no terrors for the critic of *The Times*. This exhibition, he said, 'is made up, it is true, of revolutionary painters, but not of anarchists'. 'There is no sensationalism here,' he added, 'but a quiet harmony of effort to record frankly and honestly sensations that neither the tyranny of a "school" nor the direct suggestion of a master have imposed'.[10] In the following year, 1906, the correspondent was equally indulgent to the spring exhibition of the Salon des Indepéndants saying that 'to neglect this association and to pay attention solely to the more official societies of the Grand Palais or the Champs Elysées would be deliberately to warp one's judgement as to the artistic activities of Paris'.[11] Unfortunately this mood of open-minded tolerance did not prevail elsewhere, and Bernard Sickert (the brother of Walter Sickert) who reviewed the same exhibition for the *Burlington Magazine* poured scorn on pointillism. For him, it was 'an ugly heresy from the beginning' and one which by 1906 had become 'such a thing of terror that no man of any pretentions to taste can put up with.'[12]

In 1906, however, the most significant exhibition from the English point of view was a large retrospective collection of the works of Gauguin in the Salon d'Automne. Even *The Times's* critic found this impossible to digest and the strength of his feelings and the terms of his animus anticipate the response to Gauguin's pictures when they first appeared in England. The 'unnatural and obtrusive colour', the 'indifferent drawing' and the 'contorted

attitudes' infuriated him, but what he found most offensive was the fact that in France, Gauguin was treated by an articulate and growing minority as a great painter and part-founder with Cézanne of a new movement in art.[13]

Between 1906 and 1908 it is possible to detect in English criticism the beginnings of a firmer and more entrenched attitude to French modernism. In the Salon d'Automne of 1908 the spectre of primitivism initiated by Gauguin was raised once again in the work of Vlaminck, Derain and Rouault. The vituperation which poured from the pen of the art critic of the *Nation* is characteristic of the English response and is a measure of the extent to which Fauvism was dominating the modern salons. These painters, he wrote, are merely 'fettered by the conventions of rock carving among savage people'.

> In trying to be new, to break loose from dark brown shadows, they now see everything in acid blue and black, fondly believing themselves original, and above all "new." Still lower in the scale are the perpetrators of the strident dissonances, which raise a smile from the indulgent, and despair from the more thoughtful; these apparently naif artists are indeed omniscient, and exasperated at their own inability to be original, seek refuge in the clumsy and would-be archaic.[14]

Even Robert Dell, who was later to be instrumental in bringing modern art to England (see headnote to no. 8), attacked 'the productions of ladies and gentlemen who can neither draw nor paint... and represent violet persons sitting under pink trees'.[15]

The year 1908, however, was the year of Matisse in France. He had thirty pictures on show at the Salon d'Automne; then in December of the same year his 'Notes d'un peintre' were published in *La Grande Revue* and, as we have seen, his first picture appeared abroad in the International Society's exhibition in London. Dell was impressed by Matisse's writing and he praised his pictures for their 'daringly original simplicity of colour and outline'.[16] But it was once again *The Times* which was most generous. If the readers of *The Times* thought that the New English Art Club represented revolutionary painting then, said the anonymous critic, they should go to Paris where they will see 'real revolutionary painting, compared to which the most extreme works of Mr. [Augustus] John are as timid as the opinions of a Fabian socialist compared with those of a bomb-throwing anarchist'. Modern artists in Paris,

he continued, 'are sick of pictures that are the mere dull records of fact' and he sees Matisse as the new David whose 'main concern is to avoid rhetoric, the compromise and the dull imitation of the schools'. Matisse, said the critic, 'wants to create the art of painting anew . . . in his own fierce way' and the review concluded with a highly detailed and sympathetic account of Matisse's *Harmony in Blue* (no. 4).

By 1908 Continental support for Matisse's work was considerable. The French dealer Vollard displayed his work prominently; the Stein family had begun their large collection of works by Picasso and Matisse which was open to inspection by the curious and Bernard Berenson published a forceful letter in the pages of the American journal the *Nation* (no. 5) stressing the virtues of this new painter. Berenson who, like Fry, had created a reputation as a connoisseur of Italian art, may have acted as an influence on Fry at this point. Although relations were strained between them, Fry dined at Berenson's Italian home, I Tatti, in 1907 and the subject of modern art may well have been broached. Fry, however, was slower than Berenson to accept the vividness and vitality of Matisse's art. Even as late as 1909 he wrote to his wife after a visit to Matisse's studio that Matisse is 'one of those neo, neo Impressionists, quite interesting and lots of talent but very queer. He does things very much like Pamela's [Fry's seven year-old daughter]'.[17]

If English curiosity had been aroused by accounts from France of the painting and sculpture of Matisse, another event in England in 1908 served to stimulate that interest and perplexity still further. An English translation of a book appeared which focused for the first time in art history on the work of those painters that were later to be called 'Post-Impressionist'. Meier-Graefe's *Modern Art* (see no. 6) was unlike all other available accounts of nineteenth-century European painting in that it did not accept Impressionism as the height of the modern movement. Instead it stressed the importance of the work of Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh, and went on to examine the part played in the modern tradition by the Nabis and the Neo-Impressionists. Meier-Graefe was a German who, when he lost his job as the editor of *Pan* in 1897, moved to Paris. There he became the editor of *Art decoratif* and published *Art* in German in 1904. The British found the work difficult, exasperating yet exciting. They had seen few or none of the pictures to which

Meier-Graefe referred, yet many writers, including Fry, were deeply impressed by his romantic and 'expressionist' account of Post-Impressionist art – an account which stressed the creative roles of artistic temperament in painting.

Back in England in 1908, the gap between London and Paris narrowed slightly through the efforts of Frank Rutter and what he called his 'Allied Artists' Association' – an exhibiting society modelled on the Salon des Indépendants. 'Independence' was not a quality very prominent amongst English artists at this period who were hard pressed by economic exigencies. Back in 1906 an exhibition entitled 'Some Examples of the Independent Art of Today' at Agnew's was much criticised for its lack of true imaginative independence and its narrow confinement to established British painterly conventions.

So Rutter had the idea of forming a body which was genuinely independent of official juries and where none of the exclusiveness of the academic tradition prevailed. He had long been familiar with the French salons and had taken every opportunity to visit Paris. During his career as art correspondent for the *Sunday Times* and the English correspondent for *L'Art et les artistes* he had witnessed the outstanding success of the Salon des Indépendants and the Salon d'Automne, so like them his 'London Salon', as it became known, threw open its doors to all and sundry.

The response was enormous – so enormous that in 1908 the Royal Albert Hall was hired for the first show and many painters who in the next few years would be labelled as English Post-Impressionists – Alfred Wolmark, Roderic O'Conor, J.D. Fergusson and Harold Gilman – exhibited their work. The Allied Artists' exhibition provided a platform for all kinds of styles and techniques and its catholicism and openness prepared the way for Roger Fry's much more concentrated, explosive and dramatic exhibition of French art in 1910.

It is a fact, however, that many of the successful artists who showed at the Allied Artists' exhibition were familiar with the work of the first generation Post-Impressionists and with more recent French art long before either were seen in London. The Scottish painter J.D. Fergusson, for example, had lived in Paris for many years and had frequently exhibited at the modern salons. In 1909 Frank Rutter invited him to review the Salon d'Automne in the journal of the Allied Artists' Association, *Art News*. Of the

pictures by Manguin, Puy, Friesz, Van Dongen, Anne Estelle Rice and Sickert which Fergusson mentioned, it was, for Fergusson, the work of Matisse that was most impressive.[18]

Like Fergusson, his friend Walter Sickert was no stranger to French art. When in 1905 he returned from his self-imposed exile on the Continent he actually confessed that he wished to 'create a Salon d'Automne milieu in London'[19] and his Fitzroy Street Group of 1907 grew, in part, out of that desire. Like Fergusson, too, Sickert had shown his pictures regularly at the Salon d'Automne and had even put on a one-man show in Paris in 1907. Unlike Fergusson, however, Sickert did not like the work of Matisse, and when he reviewed the English translation of Théodore Duret's *Manet and the French Impressionists* (1910) in *Art News* he poked fun at Berenson's defence of Matisse, making it clear that he felt that Berenson had made a fool of himself about modern art.[20] Nevertheless Sickert, in the same review, bemoaned the insular state of English art, and his own 'Salon d'Automne milieu' did something to change this by bringing together in one group many painters familiar with Continental art.

Spencer Gore, for example, enjoyed the works by Cézanne at the Durand-Ruel exhibition in 1905, and was deeply moved by the Gauguins at the Salon d'Automne of 1906 which he visited in Sickert's company. Unlike Sickert he also liked the work by Matisse in that same exhibition. Charles Ginner, too, joined the Fitzroy Street Group with a good knowledge of French art. He had been born in France and educated at the Académie Vitti. His love of Van Gogh caused the displeasure of his teachers at Vitti's, and when Rutter persuaded him to review the International Society's exhibition for *Art News* in 1910 he expressed his admiration also for Vallotton, Vuillard and Matisse.[21]

Other painters less directly involved with the Fitzroy Street Group had also encountered something of the ferment in French painting. Robert Bevan had met Gauguin as early as 1894 at Pont Aven; in 1905 Clive Bell and Vanessa Stephen visited Roderic O'Conor at his Paris studio and both expressed admiration for his collection of works by Cézanne and Gauguin; Duncan Grant met Matisse and Picasso on his visits to Paris and C.R.W. Nevinson said that he had heard of 'the "mad" painting of Van Gogh some five years before their "discovery" by Roger Fry and the dealers'.[22] The list of artists familiar with the paintings at the

independent salons before 1910 could be extended to include J.B. Manson, Eric Gill, Wyndham Lewis, Phelan Gibb, Augustus John and the Americans Nan Hudson, Ethel Sands and Anne Estelle Rice. Roger Fry was a relative newcomer to the field, and it is a testimony to his energy and intuition that in spite of this disadvantage it was he who was primarily responsible for bringing modern art to England.

The main inspiration for Fry's first Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1910, however, came neither directly from France nor from Frank Rutter's Allied Artists' Association but from an exhibition held earlier in the year on the south coast. The mayor of Brighton felt that one way of employing the resources of the recently opened gallery and at the same time of establishing an *entente cordiale* with the annual influx of Continental visitors would be to put on a show of modern French art. The exhibition was divided into three sections, two of which posed no problems for visitors. The first contained work by late nineteenth-century realists, *plein-airistes* and genre painters; the second was devoted to Impressionist work; but the third comprised a collection of pictures of a kind never before seen in Britain. The earliest work in Room Three was a portrait of Albin Valabrègue by Cézanne; the most recent were two still-life studies by Matisse. There were also three pictures by Gauguin, Neo-Impressionist work by Signac, Cross and Luce and paintings by Vuillard, Bonnard, Vallotton and Denis. There were works by Marquet, Friesz, Sérusier, Puy, Valtat and Laprade together with 'Fauve' paintings by Derain and Vlaminck. This was by no means a complete cross-section of advanced painting in France – there were no pictures by Van Gogh or Seurat, for example – and no one knew this better than Robert Dell, who was responsible for organising the contents of this section. Dell, who lived in Paris, explained in the preface to the catalogue why he had had so much difficulty in obtaining representative examples (no. 8). Dealers in France were simply not interested in expanding into the British market. By 1910 they were fully employed supplying the demands of private individuals and the organisers of exhibitions in Europe and Russia. Their intuitions were correct. Almost nothing was sold from the third section, but it was this section which received the most critical attention.

The principal objections to the new art were poor technique, absence of naturalism and archaism. 'What is one to think of Paul

Gauguin's ideas of oxen – "Les Boeufs"?' asked one critic. 'They are wooden looking beasts akin to those of the nursery Noah's ark variety, and their landscape environment is innocent of any attempt at perspective.'[23] 'Must one', asked another, 'accept a picture, in which oxen are represented as flat things with giraffe-like necks standing before a house, all open in front so that one can see the contorted inhabitants, as real art?'[24] The attention of almost every critic of the exhibition, however, was captured by two views of London (see headnote to no. 8). They were both painted by André Derain on a visit to the capital in 1905 and they fascinated critics because not only was the subject well known, but so, too, was its treatment at the hands of the Impressionists. The problem was mainly one of colour. Valtat could be forgiven for turning his picture of a Provençal garden into a riot of colour, but, as Walter Higgins asked the readers of the *Art Chronicle*, 'can an artist who paints the Thames Embankment with yellow sky, pink trees and pavements, yellow water, blue cabs and green houses, by any means be serious in his art?'[25]

In their attacks on what they saw as the childishness, self-consciousness, affected primitivism and offensive crudeness of modern French art all the hostile critics shared one quality – bewilderment. The puzzlement and confusion was, of course, much greater at the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, but the Sussex local press provided an example in miniature of what was to happen on a much larger scale in November 1910.

Not all the notices of the Brighton exhibition, however, were unfavourable and those that praised the exhibition can be divided into two groups. One group led by Robert Dell stressed the historical continuity of modern French painting. In the introduction to the catalogue he reminded his readers about the controversy over Impressionism and how the Impressionists were once labelled 'anarchists' because they appeared to sever all links with the art of the past. He urged his readers to look closely at what he called 'Neo-Impressionism' and there they would see that many of the painters were operating within a set of values whose origins lay deep in the nineteenth century (no. 8). This theme was taken up by a long and anonymous review in *The Times*. The writing has all the hallmarks of Roger Fry's style as he argues that Maurice Denis 'tries to achieve the grandeur of Piero della Francesca' and how Matisse is 'more primitive than the early Sienese in his reaction

against photographic realism'. He concludes with the hope that out of this art 'a new Giotto will arise and once more unite representation with expression, so that European painting may start again upon a steady course of progress' (no. 9). The other group is best represented by the writing of Frank Rutter. In three substantial reviews he emphasised the revolutionary newness of the paintings in Room Three and praised André Derain in particular for '[taking] his courage in his hands and, throwing overboard the whole cargo of art history, ancient and modern [trying] to forget that a picture was ever painted, and with eyes freed from traditional vision . . . seeks to recreate the barbaric art of infancy.'[26].

The uncertainty amongst critics and the confusion amongst the public about French art of the period was summed up by Lewis Hind, art critic of the *Art Journal* and the *Daily Chronicle*. In 1910 he went to Paris where he saw the large Stein collection of Matisses. He was aware that something important was happening in the French capital and on the eve of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition he rhetorically asked his readers whether they had heard of Matisse: 'Do you know his works?' Hind asked:

> Ninety-five out of a hundred laugh when they see them. Five think. Do you know the 'cube' paintings of Pecasso [sic], the improvisations of Wassily Kandinsky, or the chaotic interpretations of London by André Derain? Pause before you embark on that voyage. You will find yourself without a chart, without a compass. Beauty, say these protagonists, quite rightly, is not final. To understand us you must break through your conventional ideas of beauty.[27]

NOVEMBER 1910–JANUARY 1911

Roger Fry held the private view for his first Post-Impressionist exhibition on Saturday 5 November 1910 and the exhibition opened to the public on the following Monday. The story of the arbitrary way in which it was put together has often been told and perhaps the best account came from the pen of the exhibition Secretary, Desmond MacCarthy, in his book *Memories*.[28] The exhibition itself was an instant *succès de scandale* and Frank Rutter gave an eye-witness account of the audience in those early days. 'Every day people flock to the galleries,' he said,

> and most of them give vent to their feelings in language more audible than polite. Angry old gentlemen shake their fists in their impotence and cry aloud that all this is just done for advertisement.... Scandalised ladies murmur their disgust and wonder how anybody dared to exhibit such disgraceful daubs.... Fashionably dressed young men pry closely into the canvases in the hope of discovering some immorality to explain the uproar, and find nothing there so shocking as their own prurient imagination. What an audience! the painters, if still alive, might well retort to those who cry upon them, 'What an exhibition'.[29]

The press response was overwhelming and in November alone there were more than fifty articles, reviews, letters, cartoons and parodies in the daily papers and the journals. The Saturday edition of the *Sphere* was the first off the mark with a full-page spread of reproductions under the heading 'The Latest Revolt in Art'[30] but by Monday hostile reviews began to appear in large numbers. Above all the 'Post-Impressionists' – and the label was instantly taken up[31] – were interpreted as an anarchist group bound in an unholy alliance and bent upon the destruction of the civilised values of the west. Their work, said the critic in *The Times*, was 'like anarchism in politics' and represented 'the rejection of all that civilization had done, the good with the bad'.[32] But it was Robert Ross's long article in the *Morning Post* which stated most clearly the special fears generated by Post-Impressionism. He wittily pointed out that a more appropriate date than 5 November could not have been chosen on which to reveal 'a widespread plot to destroy the whole fabric of European painting' but what disturbed him most was the apparent subversion of reason, sanity and decorum in the painting. Van Gogh's work was the 'visualised ravings of an adult maniac' and Matisse followed 'the Broadmoor tradition' in his use of discordant colouring. Ross likened the taste for Post-Impressionist work in Europe to a terrible disease or infection and suggested that it should be treated 'like the rat plague in Suffolk'. The source of the infection', he said, referring to the pictures at the Grafton Galleries, 'ought to be destroyed' (no. 11).

The attacks on Post-Impressionist art in the following weeks took three main forms and adopted three main themes. The first was connected with the political and cultural threat posed by the new movement; the second was the subjective 'insanity' and 'egoism' of Post-Impressionism and the third was an attack on the

self-conscious primitivism of modern art. All the adverse comments, however, were based upon a conspiracy theory which quite inaccurately assumed that the Post-Impressionists were a closely linked fraternity with common aims and common ideals.

'Anarchy in High Art' – a headline in the *Tatler* on 23 November – expressed a fear which was widespread amongst the critics of Post-Impressionism. For many writers what they saw in the Grafton Galleries represented an attack on the values of western culture from the ground of art. Though this now seems bizarre, it must be remembered that in 1910 political and social disturbance was a constant topic of public debate. The suffragette movement was strong and gaining strength; rumblings of unrest were developing amongst the miners of South Wales – discontent which culminated in the violent strikes of the following year; Kropotkin was living in London and publishing works on anarchist theory, and *The Times* of 1910 was filled with accounts of the activities of anarchist groups in Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and, above all, France, the home of Post-Impressionism. The worst fears of the British about anarchism were confirmed in December 1910 when policemen were killed in a gun battle with anarchists in Houndsditch. 'Anarchism' was a word which occurs again and again in British reviews of French painting in the earlier years of the century[33] and the fear of anarchism plainly heightened the hysteria of traditional painters like Philip Burne-Jones and William Blake Richmond and conservative critics like P.G. Konody and Robert Ross. The panic was infectious. The critic of the *Spectator* pointed out that 'in France a reform movement always has its section who are for barricades, the guillotine, and the Anarchist's bomb'[34] and in an article entitled 'Pop Goes the Past' Holbrook Jackson explicitly connected what he saw at the Grafton Galleries with a 'deep-rooted revolt against the past' and the 'dark and forbidding names' of Bakounin and Max Stirner (no. 26).

But it was Ebenezer Wake Cook whose letters to the *Morning Post* were the most violent and extreme. Though Cook was primarily a painter (see headnote to no. 17), in 1904 he published *Anarchism in Art and Chaos in Criticism* which was much influenced by Max Nordau's book *Degeneration* (1895) with its prophecies of western decline. Now, in Post-Impressionism, Cook found the confirmation of his worst fears. The Post-Impressionist painters, he

said, 'are the analogue of the anarchical movements in the political world, the aim being to reduce all institutions to chaos; to invert all accepted ideas on all subjects' and they turned the Grafton Galleries 'into a Morgue for "Modernity" art' (no. 17). Cook's views were based on Nordau's theory of psychological decadence and the notion that mental disease had become endemic in the west. This, according to Nordau, was most clearly traceable in the styles of modern art – a view which found echoes in many of the early reviews of the Post-Impressionist exhibition. Matisse's *Femme aux yeux verts*, for example, represented 'the imbecility of an intentionally childish daub' for P.G. Konody and Van Gogh's pictures were 'merely the ravings of a maniac' or 'the expression of an unhinged mind'.[35] His painting was, claimed Robert Ross, 'of no interest except to the student of pathology and the specialist in abnormality' (no. 11). It was, however, the academicians who were the most active opponents of Post-Impressionism. Blake Richmond, Philip Burne-Jones the painter son of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Cook himself and Charles Ricketts (no. 13) were all trained in a nineteenth-century British tradition which seemed totally at odds with the techniques of Post-Impressionist art. Blake Richmond's letter to the *Morning Post* about the 'daubs by living French experimentalists' betrayed a fear itself which tottered on the brink of mania. 'One cannot reason', he wrote, 'where there is no reason to start with. The marvel is that these hysterical daubs should have been perpetrated at all, but various forms of disordered mentality are common to these times' (no. 16). Back in the 1880s Richmond had inveighed against Turner's late pictures; in 1893 he had spoken out against Degas's picture *L'Absinthe*,[36] and now, nearly thirty years later, he was castigating the 'egoism' of the Post-Impressionists for failing to follow the path dictated by nature and for abandoning themselves to self-indulgence. 'Health' and 'virility' are threatened with contamination by Post-Impressionism, and curses are the only recourse of the old painter. 'There is no regeneration for deluded egoists', he wrote; 'They are lost morally in the inferno where Dante places the unfaithful to God and to his enemies' (no. 16).

If the attitude of academicians to Post-Impressionism was unintentionally comic, by the end of the first month many journals had begun to discover the consciously comic aspect of this exhibition. The *Bystander* published the first set of cartoons

showing the uncontrollable laughter on the faces of visitors complete with parodies of pictures by Van Gogh (no. 19). *Punch*, for whom aesthetic controversies had always been a fruitful source of amusement, published comic dialogues set in the Grafton Galleries and the *Tatler* obtained a cheap laugh by printing a reproduction of a work by Herbin in a number of positions claiming that it mattered little which way up it was seen.[37] As for the supporters of the new art, they wisely kept their powder dry and spoke up only in the second month of the show. Lewis Hind, Frank Rutter and Cunninghame Graham all published tempered responses to the barrage of criticism and Roger Fry sent an article to the *Nation* in which he stressed what he saw to be the strengths of French art. 'They are in revolt', he admitted, but against an effete and dead nineteenth-century tradition; they *are* anarchists, he said, though, 'they are not destructive and negative, but intensely constructive' (no. 18). The second month of the show was marked by a substantial change in the tone of the critical response. The large number of items in the press dedicated to the subject was almost as great as in the previous month, but discussion of Post-Impressionism shifted from the review columns to the letters. What is most striking, however, is the way in which legions of protesters in November disappeared and gave way to an almost equally large number of champions of the new movement. It is true that Ebenezer Wake Cook kept up his clumsy attack and was joined by A.J. Finberg in the *Star*[38] while Robert Morley spoke of 'the debasement of the lives of the painters living in the Gay City' and their symptoms of 'disease and pestilence'.[39] But even after a mere thirty days such views were beginning to appear uncritical and absurd and even writers who were out of sympathy with the new 'movement' began to take a more reasoned and conciliatory approach.

Almost immediately a host of letters appeared in print accusing Wake Cook and Henry Holiday of indulging in mere mindless abuse, while Arnold Bennett reminded the readers of the *New Age* of Berenson's support for the painting of Matisse in the American journal *Nation* (no. 22). In fact the readers of the *English Review* of 3 December had already had an opportunity to read Berenson's words in a long article by Lewis Hind – an article which, though slightly naïve in its approach, set the tone for the apologists in the month of December. In it Hind went step by step through the

stages of his own conversion to modernism, quoting liberally from Matisse's 'Notes of a Painter' and Meier-Graefe's *Modern Art*.[40] The case for the defence in this month rested on three main points. The first was that there already existed a large group of witnesses all willing to testify on behalf of Post-Impressionism. To the name of Berenson were added those of Rodin and Degas in France, von Tschudi in Germany, and Claude Philips, Herbert Horne, Lionel Cust and C.J. Holmes in England. The second point rested on the issue of historical continuity. One writer to the *Nation* accurately detected the link between Cézanne's peasant figures, Van Gogh's *La Berceuse* and the depiction of peasant life in the work of Millet and suggested that there were connections between the drawing of Picasso and Matisse and that of Augustus John. Another correspondent went so far as to liken the much-reviled painting by Matisse, *La femme aux yeux verts*, to the *Mona Lisa*. 'There are', he said in Paterian prose, 'strange secrets in her green eyes, deep tragic eyes that will fascinate the dreamers of future centuries, her destined votaries, as the eyes of the Mona Lisa have fascinated men from Leonardo's day to ours.'[41]

The third argument was concerned with the formal and technical achievements of the Post-Impressionists and it was this argument which constituted the substance of Fry's two articles for the *Nation* (nos 18 and 21). His second, published on 3 December, disarmed opposition by the candid admission that in many cases the examples of painting at the Grafton Galleries were highly inadequate or unrepresentative. Similarly candid is his description of his growing realisation of the importance of Cézanne to the movement as a whole. Even though he was a newcomer to the subject, Fry's writing possesses an authority and subtlety which none of his contemporaries could match. Speaking of Cézanne he says:

> As I understand his art, and I admit it is exceedingly subtle and difficult to analyse – what happened was that Cézanne, inheriting from the Impressionists the general notion of accepting the purely visual patchwork of appearance, concentrated his imagination so intensely upon certain oppositions of tone and color that he became able to build up and, as it were, re-create form from within; and at the same time that he re-created form he re-created it clothed with color, light, and atmosphere all at once (no. 21).

JANUARY–OCTOBER 1911

'The exhibition of the so-called "Post-Impressionists" was the most disturbing feature in the history of British Art in 1910', said the critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (no. 31) and the third month of critical reaction to that 'disturbance' was significantly different from the previous two. When the exhibition of Post-Impressionist painting closed in January 1911 the attitude of the public had changed significantly. Derision had given way to admiration and the *Daily Graphic*, in an article entitled 'An Art Victory: Triumphal Exit of the Post-Impressionists', was not the only newspaper to notice how 'public taste in pictures is advancing faster than the critics' (no. 32). The contrast between English painting and Post-Impressionist work was admirably pointed up by the exhibition of the National Portrait Society which replaced 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists'. Many writers were quick to point out that the colour, vibrancy and vitality of French art had instantly given way to English conventionality and dullness when the works of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Matisse were replaced with pictures by Charles Ricketts, William Blake Richmond, Philip Burne-Jones, and Ebenezer Wake Cook.

By the early months of 1911 the supporters of Post-Impressionism had had time to gather their forces and three extended monographs on the new art appeared in quick succession. Frank Rutter's *Revolution in Art* was the first, quickly followed by Charles Holmes's *Notes on the Post-Impressionist Painters* and Lewis Hind's *The Post Impressionists* (nos 33, 34 and 35). Each took a very different view of the subject, but each offered a view which was broadly positive. At the same time substantial and explanatory articles began to appear in the journals. The scholarly *Burlington Magazine*, which in November 1910 had published a long piece by Meier Riefsthal on Van Gogh, now printed a substantial piece by Clutton-Brock who likened the creation of a new language of painting amongst the Post-Impressionists to the efforts of Wordsworth and Blake in creating a new language of poetry (no. 36) and even the popular and conservative *Art Journal* carried a long and well-illustrated article by Frederick Lawton on the life and work of Cézanne who also compared Cézanne with William Blake.[42]

Much of the writing about Post-Impressionism now began to be more discriminating, and it became clear to even the most enthusiastic that all the painters included in this so-called group were far from alike. In a long, witty and penetrating article in the *Fortnightly Review*, Walter Sickert took Roger Fry to task for devising an exhibition which so poorly reflected the state of late nineteenth-century and contemporary French art. Sickert was careful to distinguish his own views from the strident opposition of the academicians in England, and made it clear that he had a long-standing familiarity with the work of Cézanne and Gauguin, as well as a personal knowledge of many of the artists themselves. But he wondered what Cézanne had in common with the Fauves and wondered too, with justification, why Maurice Denis had been overlooked and why Vuillard and Bonnard had been excluded. Sickert's discrimination, however, was coloured by deep personal prejudice: 'my teeth are set on edge' by much of the work of Van Gogh, he said, and he made it quite clear that he had no time for what he called Matisse's 'art-school tricks' (no. 29).

In the early months of 1911 Post-Impressionism continued to supply material for comedy. 'Well if this is Art,' says a painter pointing to an 'infantile' Post-Impressionist work in a cartoon in *Black and White*, then 'I-You-and Michael Angelo are *all* wrong.'[43] In *Punch* a man gets his revenge on a Post-Impressionist portrait painter by paying for it in an illegible Post-Impressionist cheque,[44] and, again in *Punch*, the primitive Post-Impressionist 'Novel of the Future' is projected as an extended nursery rhyme complete with full-scale baby noises.[45] The Chelsea Arts Club staged a Post-Impressionist evening in the form of a fancy dress ball for a group they entitled 'Racinists' where the participants were invited to adopt some of the more extreme manifestations of Post-Impressionist art.

During this period Wake Cook kept up his barrage of letters to the press about the 'decadence' of Post-Impressionism; John Singer Sargent wrote saying that he was 'absolutely skeptical as to their having any claim whatever to being works of art';[46] Sir Alfred East at a dinner of the Authors' Club gave his opinions on 'the morbid art of the Post-Impressionists' and W.B. Richmond continued to fulminate at the Royal Academy, warning the students against the 'intellectual, emotional and technical degeneracy' of the Post-Impressionists with their 'wilful anarchy and

notoriety hunting' which, he said, 'verged on criminality'.[47]

The reception of Post-Impressionism in England is intimately bound up with its influence on British art and from the moment that the first Post-Impressionist exhibition closed it became apparent that British artists had already been experimenting in the new forms. The exhibitions at Vanessa Bell's Friday Club became a platform for Post-Impressionist techniques where, for example, Duncan Grant's *Lemon Gatherers* (1910) was a testimony to the fact that he had already entered the 'Post-Impressionist age'. The work of J.D. Innes, said one critic, early in 1911, was imitative of Maurice Denis[48] and the influence of Picasso was recognised in both Ethel Wright's *The Arbour* and Anne Estelle Rice's *Egyptian Dancers* at the Women's National Art Club exhibition.[49] Phelan Gibb was declared to be 'an English artist who had debauched his by no means inconsiderable talent in the new cult'[50] and at the exhibition of the New English Art Club, Ethel Wright, according to P.G. Konody, proclaimed 'her sympathy with the new movement'.[51] Less surprisingly, Konody also detected the influence of Post-Impressionism at the Allied Artists' exhibition in July 1911. Robert Bevan's *The Courtyard* betrayed 'the unbroken primaries of the Matisse school' while amongst the newly formed Camden Town Group, Charles Ginner, Konody correctly remarked, 'appears to worship at the shrine of Van Gogh'.[52]

Just as the arguments in favour of the new art began to take on a more reasoned and discriminating tone, so the attitudes of the detractors hardened into something more calculated and sinister. The idea of a connection between modern art and insanity mooted in the earliest reviews of the Grafton Galleries exhibition was taken seriously by a number of artists. Consequently Dr T.B. Hyslop, Physician Superintendent to the Royal Hospitals of Bridewell and Bedlam, was invited to give an illustrated talk at the Art Workers' Guild in January. His subject was the art of the insane and his aim was to demonstrate the connection between the diseased minds of the 'lunatics in one of the metropolitan asylums' and the work of the Post-Impressionists. Roger Fry was invited to reply, but his eloquence did nothing to convince many members of the artistic fraternity. The substance of Hyslop's extraordinary lecture, entitled 'Post-Illusionism and Art of the Insane', was published in the *Nineteenth Century* (no. 38) and in it Hyslop accused modern artists and their admirers of being mental 'degenerates'.

'Degenerates', he wrote, 'often turn their unhealthy impulses towards art, and not only do they sometimes attain to an extraordinary degree of prominence but they may also be followed by enthusiastic admirers who herald them as creators of new eras in art'. The paper, which says more about T.B. Hyslop than about either art or madness, attempts to cast a slur on Post-Impressionism by invoking the authority of medical science. It addresses itself to all the prominent features of Post-Impressionist painting as they appeared to the public in 1911 and systematically identifies them with retrogression, cerebral degeneration and '"coprographia" – i.e. pertaining to lust, filth, or obscenity'. Sadly this was not an isolated incident. Hyslop's lecture was followed by a series of articles in *Art Chronicle*, entitled 'Health and Disease in Art', also written by an 'eminent physician' and which repeated Hyslop's arguments at greater length and illustrated them with drawing and painting by the insane.[53]

This initial period of ferment about Post-Impressionism concluded, however, on a saner note with the publication in a May issue of *Fortnightly Review* of a lecture given by Roger Fry at the end of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition. In contrast to so much of what had preceded it, it is urbane and full of lightly worn scholarship characteristic of Fry at his best. He put his audience at their ease by placing modern French art in its historical context and by pointing out that 'distortion' in art works is nothing new and is a common feature of early Italian painting. He also developed his ideas about the relation between the practical life and the imaginative life – ideas which he had first put forward in 1909 – arguing that the Post-Impressionist painters 'speak directly to the imagination through images created, not because of their likeness to external nature, but because of their fitness to appeal to the imaginative and contemplative life' (no. 30).

Yet even in these early months of 1911 it is possible to detect the beginnings of the next wave of disturbance which was to break over Britain from the Continent. This time it was a style of much more recent origin – a style which had been christened in 1908 by Louis Vauxcelles as 'cubism'.

In France examples of cubist painting could be seen in private collections and small galleries, but it was most prominently displayed in the annual modern salons. As we have seen, the Salon d'Automne and the Salon des Indépendants, had long been noticed

by the English press, but one of the effects of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition was to create a much more lively interest in England about what was happening in Paris. Frank Rutter, who was a conscientious watcher of events in the French art world, welcomed what he frankly called the new 'anarchy' in art. 'The innocent abroad', he wrote in *Revolution in Art*, 'wandering through the Grand Palais, views with increasing concern and bewilderment room after room filled with what (to him) appear to be horrible monstrosities'. But this, for Rutter, was a sign of energy and life. He applauded the 'veritable passion for simplicity' in the work of Matisse and the Fauves, and he realised that Picasso was what he called 'the chief of post-Matisseism'. Nevertheless he was deeply puzzled by Picasso's 'new vision of form, building up his paintings with a series of cubes, greyish to yellow green in colour, about three inches square as a rule, cubes some square to the spectator, others at angles, and all ingeniously fitted together to express his feeling for form'.[54]

When Roger Fry visited the Salon des Indépendants in June 1911 he, too, was confused and puzzled by the huge array of different styles. He praised the work of Maurice Denis, Othon Friesz and André Lhote for their 'classic feeling for pure beauty' but Fry, like Rutter, was bafffled by the cubist work. 'There are those', he wrote, 'who, like Herbin, are following Picasso in his search for an artistic philosopher's store [sic], endeavoring to get at the intellectual abstract of form, whereby they can recreate a world of pure significance; and there are those who', he added, making a contrast which was later to have great significance in English criticism, 'following Matisse, search for an intenser unity in the balance of directions and volumes, and the just disposition of intervals' (no. 40). Huntly Carter's review of the same exhibition in *New Age* gives a particularly valuable insight into developments in French art at this period. He, too, realises that 'Picasso is the father of the new extremists' and commented on 'the latest development of Picassoism or Cubism' in the work of Herbin and Braque as being perhaps 'the most remarkable feature of the exhibition' (no. 39). Carter also mentioned the work of a group of Anglo-Saxon Fauves whose influence would very soon be felt in England – J.D. Fergusson, Anne Estelle Rice and Jessie Dismorr. One of Fergusson's paintings exhibited at the 1910 Salon d'Automne entitled *Rhythm* attracted the notice of John

Middleton Murry and Michael Sadleir. According to Fergusson, whom they sought out in Paris in 1911, these two had decided to start a magazine and wanted to call it *Rhythm* and use his 'picture as a cover'.[55] This magazine, which was to contain 'all the latest information about modern painting from Paris', appeared for the first time in the summer of 1911. 'Nobody', said the *Art News*, 'who wishes to keep pace with the movements and ideals of modern artists can afford to ignore *Rhythm*'[56] and even P.G. Konody was forced to admit that 'Post-Impressionism has evidently come to stay. It now has its official organ in the shape of the new shilling quarterly "Rhythm"'.[57]

NOVEMBER 1911–FEBRUARY 1912

By November 1911 the critical confraternity was able to distinguish readily between four main groups within the Post-Impressionist movement. Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin were already beginning to look like established masters; the Fauves, with their intense colouring and their insistence on 'rhythm', were still outlandish in the eyes of many critics, though the modified form of Fauvism in the work of Fergusson, Rice, Peploe and Dismorr was beginning to be acceptable. Cubism, however, was quite another matter and, in spite of the fact that neither Braque nor Picasso exhibited, it was cubism which attracted most critical attention in the French Salon d'Automne of 1911.

Three events late in 1911 demonstrate very clearly how critical responses in England had changed. The first was an exhibition in November at the Stafford Gallery organised by John Neville at the suggestion of Michael Sadleir. Sadleir, who was an energetic collector, had been converted to Post-Impressionism earlier in the year, and had sent Neville to Paris to secure for him work by Gauguin and Cézanne (see headnote to no. 45). Neville's exhibition was well received. Cézanne, according to *The Times*, was the 'Wordsworth of painting'[58] and P.G. Konody said that Gauguin's *L'Esprit Veille* was so 'beautiful in design as well as in colour, and intense in expression, that it well deserves to be called a masterpiece' (see no. 45). 'Post-Impressionism', he wrote, 'has taken firm root among us' and its implantation was celebrated in a painting by Spencer Gore entitled *Gauguins and Connoisseurs at the*

Stafford Gallery (private collection) illustrating the pictures and containing small portraits of Augustus John, Wilson Steer and Neville himself.

The second event was an exhibition at the Goupil Gallery, also in November, which featured the British Post-Impressionism of Alfred Wolmark, S.J. Peploe and Augustus John. The reception was mixed. The critic of the *Outlook* thought that Wolmark's *Decorative Panel* drew attention to itself 'simply by its over-emphasis of crude, noisy colour', while Peploe's *Tulips* 'has certain unrestful decorative qualities which quite fail to charm'.[59] Huntly Carter, on the other hand, who used every opportunity to further the cause of French Post-Impressionism, had plenty of advice for Wolmark to intensify further his Post-Impressionist techniques.[60]

The item which caused the greatest controversy in the latter part of 1911, however, was a picture by Picasso. His *Mandolin, Wine Glass and Table* (now called *La Mandoline et le Pernod*) was reproduced in a poor monochrome illustration in the *New Age* of 23 November. Even in this form, however, it created a storm of protest which was remarkable in its ferocity and its duration. All the old arguments about 'decadence' were resurrected, and many of the earlier antagonists of Post-Impressionism reached once again for their pens. A huge correspondence was generated in the *New Age* and many other journals, and letters, articles and comments continued to pour in well into 1912. Huntly Carter was quick to defend Picasso and published an article in the same issue as the illustration (no. 46). Middleton Murry tried to support him but not before Ebenezer Wake Cook was in print speaking of 'the depths of degradation, inanity . . . [and] sheer lunacy' of 'Picasso-ism'.[61] G.K. Chesterton was also quick to condemn the 'sodden blotting paper' which Picasso had created, and in an article in the *Daily News* he elaborated his argument by condemning what he saw to be the paucity, shallowness and vacuity of modern art criticism which could not 'explain' Picasso to him (no. 48). Lewis Hind, who had championed Matisse so vocally, came out strongly against cubism and Roger Fry was uncharacteristically silent. It was left, then, to Carter and Middleton Murry to wage a war in favour of Picasso and to welcome in the 'new age' of non-mimetic art.

The debate over Picasso had hardly died down when a one-man exhibition of his drawings opened at the Stafford Gallery in April

1912. 'M. Picasso,' said *The Times*, 'the leader of the most advanced school of French painting, has been called an incompetent charlatan.' 'The exhibition of drawings by him,' the reviewer went on, '... proves that he is not that' (no. 64). Much to the dismay of Picasso's critics, all but one of the drawings in this exhibition were figurative studies. One of them, a donkey's head which *The Times* described as 'extraordinarily delicate and precise in chararacter' where, 'the animal is treated ... with the imaginative seriousness of the great Chinese artists' was reproduced in the *Art Chronicle* for all to see. P.G. Konody, however, remained unconvinced by anything that Picasso did. 'Scraps that should never have been rescued from the waste-paper basket' was his verdict for the readers of the *Observer* and 'to exhibit them as works of art is simply *fumisterie*'.[62]

The idea that the whole modern movement was *fumisterie* or a spoof was strongly endorsed by two authorities who, in earlier years, had been staunch supporters of modernism. Walter Sickert adopted the kind of derogatory terms which one had become used to reading from the pen of Wake Cook when he said that:

> The conspiracy of semi-unconscious 'spoof,' which is looked upon by some as an alarming symptom of the artistic health of the present day, is in reality a very small and unimportant manifestation. In the story of the 'Emperor's New Clothes,' it was the whole nation that affected not to see that his Majesty was naked. The modern cult of post-impressionism is localised mainly in the pockets of one or two dealers holding large remainders of incompetent work. They have conceived the genial idea that if the values of criticism could only be reversed – if efficiency could be considered a fault, and incompetence alone sublime – a roaring and easy trade could be driven. Sweating would certainly become easier with a post-impressionist *personnel* than with competent hands, since efficient artists are limited in number; whereas Piccassos and Matisses could be painted by all the coachmen that the rise of the motor traffic has thrown out of employment. It is, after all, an extremely small circle of very unoccupied ladies who find amusement and excitement in going one better than the other in ecstasy at the incomprehensible (no. 49).

Sickert's tone is recognisable as that of the wounded professional at bay – the highly trained professional who feels jealous of those he considers amateurs. Perhaps even more remarkable is the attitude of D.S. MacColl who in the 1880s and 1890s had been an articulate champion of Impressionism. In a long article in the

Nineteenth Century he attacked Fry's interpretation of Cézanne's work and that of the first generation Post-Impressionists. Cézanne, says MacColl, 'was not a great classic: he was an artist, often clumsy, always in difficulties, very limited in his range, [and] absurdly so in his most numerous productions'; Gauguin's 'fine period was short,' he said, and for MacColl it was 'a drop from *L'Esprit Veille* to fantastic rubbish like *Christ in the Garden of Olives*'. Though his response to Van Gogh's work was more tempered, he had no time for Picasso and Matisse. He dismissed Picasso's work as 'geometrical mania' and Matisse's *La Femme aux yeux verts* was merely 'a silly doll' (no. 52).

But by the latter part of 1911 both Sickert and MacColl were beginining to look like two Canutes resisting the tide of modern art. Commenting on the change which had taken place in public opinion, the critic of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in January 1912 pointed out how in little less than a year 'scoffers have turned into admirers' and 'many of those who were most abusive and bitter in their denunciation have come to look with indulgence upon what only twelve months ago appeared to them intolerable!' 'It is no good,' he continued, 'closing one's eyes to the fact that the principles of Post-Impressionism in its milder form have permeated British art and renewed its vitality. Scores of exhibitions have familiarised us with the new rhythm, reconciled us to the synthetic, in place of the imitative, rendering of the facts of nature'.[63] Yet even now a new development was taking place in the language and scope of criticism. Ideas of 'rhythm' imported from France by J.D. Fergusson, enshrined in the title of Middleton Murry's journal, were being developed in different ways by Huntly Carter and Michael Sadleir. Carter's stress on the significance of rhythm as an important element of the new art led him to extend his interpretation of modernism to include music and drama. His championship of Picasso late in 1911 was developed in a full-length study entitled *The New Spirit in Drama and Art* where he explained that his contact with Post-Impressionist painting drew his attention to the fact that

> there was a vital connection between the advanced movement in painting and the movement in the theatre which, once established, would bring about a union of the two, set them mutually acting and reacting upon one another, and tend to remove all difficulties to the proposal to lift the theatre into the region of art. My subsequent

> observations in Paris led me to the conclusion that rhythm is the connecting link between plastic forms of art and the 'scene,' and the continuous and consistent search for this is hourly bringing them closer together (no. 67).

For Carter it was the painting of Fergusson, Peploe and De Segonzac which had such strong links with the work of the directors of the *Ballet Russe* but for Michael Sadleir the synthesis between sight and sound was to be discovered in quite a different area. In an important article for *Rhythm* entitled 'After Gauguin' Sadleir examined Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* where he paraphrased Kandinsky's ideas that 'Music, poetry, painting, architecture are all able in their different way to reach the essential soul, and the coming era will see them brought together, mutually striving to the great attainment' (no. 53). The route would be, of course, through abstraction and the 'psychological effects on the observer of various colours' – a development out of Mallarmé's theories about 'synthetic word painting'.

MARCH–OCTOBER 1912

The feeling that the principles of visual art were being enlarged by reference to the dynamics of physical movement, and that in their turn music, theatre and ballet were adopting the expressive potential derived from painting was enhanced by the appearance of the Futurists at the Sackville Gallery in March 1912. 'What must be rendered is "dynamic sensation – that is to say, the peculiar rhythm of each object, its intention, its movement, its interior force"' – so the *Spectator* quoted from the catalogue, commenting that 'the Futurist idea claims a certain kinship with the modern movement of French music – sensation rather than emotion'.[64] In spite of the declaration in the catalogue that Futurists were 'absolutely opposed' to the art of the Post-Impressionists and the cubists of France, nevertheless in 1912 Futurism seemed to be more closely related to Post-Impressionism than it appears in retrospect. Severini's pictures looked very much like the cubism of Picasso to a writer in *The Times* and many of the critics thought that they were attempting to outdo the Post-Impressionists in experimental terms.

Though P.G. Konody hailed the appearance of Futurism in

London with the headline 'Nightmare Exhibition at the Sackville Gallery' (no. 54), generally speaking most critics treated the incident as an *opéra bouffe*. Roger Fry in the *Nation* and C.H. Collins Baker in the *Saturday Review* gave a cautious welcome to Marinetti, Severini, Boccioni and Russolo, but they both felt that their experiments in the psychology of perception promised more than they achieved (no. 55). Even Sickert had some words of praise for Futurism. He was delighted to be able to report that 'Both Severini and Boccioni ... are competent workmen' (no. 60) and the painting which received most critical acclaim was Severini's picture *Pan Pan Dance at the Monico* (destroyed in the second World War).

OCTOBER–DECEMBER 1912

The central months of 1912 were uneventful when compared with the same period in the previous year, but on 5 October the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition opened at the Grafton Galleries. In spite of Fry's contention that the critical response to this exhibition showed British philistinism 'as strong and self-confident and as unwilling to learn by past experience as ever' (no. 82), the fact is that the tone of most journalists was more guarded and more tolerant than it had been in 1910. There were, of course, the derogatory remarks that had become commonplace in British journalism. The critic of the *Morning Post* called it a 'deplorable and degrading show'; the *Star* warned its readers that the whole thing was 'vapid, empty, stupid and above everything, dull'; Collins Baker called it a 'mysterious, rather boring conspiracy to fool the public' and Anthony Ludovici thought that most pictures were 'pot-boilers', describing Marchand, Derain and Vlaminck as heralds of 'the decay and dissolution of art'.[65] But they were in a minority and most critics found complimentary things to say especially about the small section of works by Cézanne or the work of Duncan Grant, Frederick Etchells, Vanessa Bell or the sculpture of Eric Gill.

There were many reasons for this. One, of course, was familiarity. The period between the two exhibitions had been a highly educative one for the British. The Second Post-Impressionist exhibition was also much better organised and better

thought out in its choice of pictures. Furthermore, with British work in the show, Post-Impressionism could no longer be accused of being a French conspiracy. The exhibition was divided into three parts; Fry chose those for the French section, Clive Bell those for the English group, and Boris Anrep was responsible for the Russian section. Post-Impressionist works from other countries were excluded because Fry felt that they had 'not yet added any positive element to the general stock of ideas' and in the case of the Italian Futurists they had merely developed a system based on 'a misapprehension of some of Picasso's recondite and difficult works' (no. 69). But, as in the case of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, the introduction to the catalogue played an important part in the general response to the exhibition.

Bell's introduction to the French section was historically important because it contains one of the earliest formulations of the notions of 'significant form'. How, Bell asks, does the Post-Impressionist regard a simple household object such as a coal-scuttle? 'He regards it', says Bell, 'as an end in itself, as a significant form related on terms of equality with other significant forms. Thus have all great artists regarded objects' (no. 70). But the great critical problem of the show was presented by the cubist pictures, and both Fry and Bell adopted musical analogies to account for these. In Post-Impressionism, said Bell, 'We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than with a coloured photograph' and Fry suggested that the logical extreme of Post-Impressionist art would 'be the attempt to give up all resemblance to natural form, and to create a purely abstract language of form – a visual music' (nos 70 and 71). In point of fact these analogies would have been better adapted to the work of Kandinsky, yet surprisingly Kandinsky's painting, which had been seen in London on several previous occasions, was not shown.

If Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh had been the *enfants terribles* of the First Post-Impressionist exhibition, then Matisse and Picasso fulfilled a similar role in the Second. Responses to the forty-two works by Matisse ranged from the gushing enthusiasm of Lewis Hind to the condemnation of his 'indescribable outrages' by P.G. Konody (no. 76). His large design, for Prince Shchukin's *La Danse*, received most attention, closely followed by *Le Luxe* – a picture which appears prominently in Vanessa Bell's study *A Room at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* (1912). Picasso, however,

caused universal consternation. His cubist *Tête d'Homme, Tête de Femme* and *Buffalo Bill* were 'unintelligible to the eye and the mind' (*The Times*), as 'unsympathetic as they are unintelligible' (Lewis Hind), an 'utterly unintelligible tangle of... lines' (P.G. Konody) or just 'mad' (*Architect*).[66] The critic of the *Queen*, Martin Hardie, unintentionally but amusingly summed up the general dilemma when he wrote: 'most bewildering and confusing' is the '*cubisine* [sic] of Pisasco [sic].'[67] Even Fry betrayed considerable uncertainty about cubism. 'They may or may not be successful...', he wrote, adding that 'It is too early to be dogmatic on the point, which can only be decided when our sensibilities to such abstract form have been more practised than they are at present' (no. 71).

Some of the most constructive criticism came from Frank Rutter who in his articles for the *Sunday Times* had long been questioning the usefulness of the general term 'Post-Impressionism'. His first-hand familiarity with French art in Paris made it clear to him that the term tended to induce 'utter confusion' in England since it represented 'some half-a-dozen distinct and separate art movements which in France are given separate names' (no. 83). He offered a far more logical, chronological arrangement for the exhibition and when he organised the Post-Impressionist and Futurist exhibitions at the Doré Gallery in the autumn of 1913 he put his ideas into practice.

JANUARY–OCTOBER 1913

The year 1913 was a year of both consolidation and diversification for the Post-Impressionist movement. The British public had become more or less shock-proof to new forms and new movements and at least two events in 1913 which a few years previously would have caused outrage and alarm – the exhibition of Post-Impressionist furniture at the Omega Workshops and the lectures at the Doré gallery by Filippo Marinetti – were greeted with amusement and good nature by the press. The sense of bewilderment about cubism persisted but gone was the talk of 'insanity' and 'decadence'. In fact in August 1913 Sir George Savage (one of the doctors who treated Virginia Woolf) organised an exhibition of art works from lunatic asylums around the country, but now no comparison was made between the art of the

insane and the modern art of France. On the contrary, *The Times* went out of its way to make any such suggestions inadmissable.[68]

But this year was marked by open hostility between those who had previously appeared united in the cause of modernism. Even in 1910 it was possible to detect the seeds of division in the differences between the conciliatory historicism of Roger Fry and the more revolutionary stance of Frank Rutter, and in June 1911 Fry himself noticed a radical distinction between those who followed Matisse and those who painted in the wake of Picasso at the Salon des Indépendants. Until 1913, however, unity had prevailed in the face of the common philistine enemy but the growing tolerance of the British public made internal disagreements less fatal. Consequently in 1913 there was real division about the relative status of the work of Cézanne and Matisse on the one hand and that of Picasso and the Futurists on the other. An article by Clive Bell in the *Burlington Magazine* in January 1913 marked the opening salvo in a war which developed into the secession of Wyndham Lewis and others from Roger Fry's Omega Workshops later the same year. Bell admitted that Cézanne was the 'one giant who moves me supremely,' whereas the 'latest works of Picasso' left him 'cold' (no. 90). For Bell formal beauty had strongly Platonic overtones; it was, he said, 'the boat in which artists ferry us to the shores of another world' – a view which received considerable support from that other Bloomsbury writer, Desmond MacCarthy. MacCarthy claimed that Post-Impressionism was 'the desire for pure form and colour ridden home to the last extreme', while 'Cubism', he said, 'certainly fails in this respect'.[69] MacCarthy's remarks were made in March 1913 in a review of the first exhibition of the Grafton Group at the Alpine Club – an exhibition which represents one of the last moments of unity in the British avant-garde of this period. It was dominated by Bloomsbury and included Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant together with Wyndham Lewis and Frederick Etchells plus Kandinsky and the American Max Weber who were invited to join them. All the pictures were exhibited anonymously.

The idea of anonymity was undoubtedly Fry's, for whom the notion of a *botega* held great appeal. It played a significant part in the formation of the Omega Workshops very soon afterwards and one of the functions of the Grafton Group exhibition was to show how Post-Impressionist ideas were being exploited for decorative