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# Research into the Development of Collage through Certain Works of Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, and Kurt Schwitters

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RESEARCH INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLAGE THROUGH CERTAIN  
WORKS OF GEORGES BRAQUE, PABLO PICASSO, AND KURT SCHWITTERS  
(TITLE)

BY

NOEL P. CUMMINS

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1912, Pablo Picasso painted a still-life, Still-Life with Chair Caning, into which he incorporated a piece of oil cloth printed to imitate chair-caning. This was the first collage, that is to say the first painting into which materials or other objects than paint were attached to the surface. On top of this small piece of oil cloth Picasso painted the wood of the chairs which acted as the prop for various objects in the still-life(4, p. 103).

It was in September of 1912, when both Picasso and Georges Braque were living near Sorques and while Picasso was spending a few days in Paris, that Braque discovered in a shop in Avignon the piece of wallpaper with simulated wood grain which inspired him to make his first collage drawing. He had made his first (the first?) collage, Fruit Bowl or Compotier, by pasting three strips of imitation woodgrain wallpaper to a sheet of drawing paper on which he then drew a simple Cubist still-life and some letters.

Of course, as soon as Picasso returned he adopted this new method which seemed to lead the way to more

and more experiments. The exchange of ideas and techniques was essential between these two friends. They were fierce rivals but the closest of friends. If Braque possessed an inquiring mind, Picasso had a more vivid imagination and they combined their talents without thinking of copyrights. Once collage had been developed, both artists made use of it.

The invention of collage struck a violent blow at traditional painting, and particularly at the idealized and romantic conception of the "work of art" as sacred. The discovery of collage was a revolt against slickness of brush work and other forms of technically oriented academic painting. It was not an idle game, nor a method of painting in a hurry, but a serious experiment in integrating new materials and techniques within the framework of Cubism and Cubist painting(9, p. 50)

Collage was the logical outcome of the Cubists' conception of their works as self-contained, constructed objects. Collage resulted from the analysis and enlargement of the pictorial elements. It was synthetically constructing new formal realities from fragments of objects.

Collage was, to start with, a development of the



Cubists' concept of the work of art as a real object, part of external reality and not just a representation of it. They were objects built up of various different substances and materials, a protest against the conventional oil painting revered for its likeness to reality. With collage the painting participates in life itself.

Relying chiefly on discarded fragments, the German artist Kurt Schwitters extended the scope and meaning of collage. For him anything torn, unwanted, abandoned, scarred, or marred, whether made of paper, cloth, cardboard, metal or wood, became material from which to create a work of art. One might say, recreated, for that is what Schwitters did. He took the humblest man-made leftovers and recreated them into rich meaningful compositions. He went beyond the Cubist concept of collage, using psychological surprises as well as visual ones. Where the Cubists limited themselves to more formal problems of relationships resulting from contrasting shapes and textures, Schwitters allowed himself greater freedom. With him, collage turned into assemblages of incredible variety. "No one before or since has done more to take the capital 'a' out of art; no one has more conclusively punctured the theory that permanent, valuable or respected materials are prerequisites for esthetic delight(10, p. 54).

Kurt Schwitters continued to make his merz collages during the 'twenties and 'thirties, when no other artist of any reputation worked in this medium.

Schwitters had discovered in the technique of Cubist collage the possibility of introducing commonplace everyday materials. Schwitters played material against material. Match boxes, nails, corks, railway tickets, all sorts of litter that could stimulate a responsive sensibility through surprising chance of association became material for expression. By mounting such materials on his painting surface, by combining them in such a way as to bring out the individuality of the particular tatter of reality, an artist could greatly enhance their poetic quality(6, p. 362). With Arp it was Schwitters who brought poetry to the Cubist papier colle, and it was he alone who elevated the use of rubbish to the function of an artistic material(9, p. 50). The more remote these scraps of reality seemed to our practical perception, the more useless, rejected, forlorn they were, the more evocative they became when held up as objects of contemplation. The individual fragment became something never seen before and as such a stimulus to the imagination(6, p. 359).

With its incredibly rich treasury of images and its apparent attempt to do modern art over again from discarded papers, Schwitters' work leaves one with the feeling of having seen the whole modern movement re-enacted in miniature. Elements of Cubism, Futurism, Purism, Surrealism, Constructivism, and Dadism all enter into these statements, each the size of a notebook page and often affecting the spontaneity of an idea quickly jotted down and laid away for the future. Schwitters looked into the gutter for materials and to the Dada philosophy for his rationale(9, p. 50). To the destructive elements in Dada he opposed his determination to rebuild, from the most despised fragments of the old, an imagery of his own devising(15, p. 43). Schwitters himself may have been at war with his culture as a Dada, at any rate he certainly knew how to ridicule its attitudes.

## CHAPTER I

### Braque and Picasso

The development of collage seems to be almost inevitable. Throughout the nineteenth century, pictorial space had been growing more shallow. It was this shrinking of interior space that partially led to the development of Cubism. Cubism was an attempt to preserve the image rooted in three dimensional space by making better use of what little space was left in two dimensional painting. Cubism counteracted the shrinking of depth of multiplying the number of the planes that compose it. "A Cubist painting reads like a deck of cards. To give maximum thickness, the top card had to be made to coincide with the picture plane or even, if possible, to protrude from it"(16, p. 17).

It was here that Georges Braque made his discovery. Pictorial elements tend to sink to the bottom of a picture, extraneous materials float. In 1911 Braque introduced capital letters and numbers stenciled in paintings whose motifs offered no realistic excuse for their presence. These extraneous stencils

by their flatness stopped the eye at the physical surface of the painting in the same way that the artists signature did. It was toward this same end that Picasso and Braque in 1912 mixed sand and other foreign materials with their paint. The granular surface achieved called direct attention to tactile reality of the picture. Soon afterwards he made his first collage, Fruit Bowl, by pasting strips of imitation woodgrain wallpaper to a sheet of drawing paper. Cubist space had by this time become even more shallow. The presence of the wallpaper in the drawing pushed the lettering Braque had drawn into illusioned depth by force of contrast. The lettering, because it can not be imagined on any but a flat surface, continued to suggest and return to the flat plane of the surface. This was encouraged by the placement of the letters and the fact that Braque pushed back the edge of the paper strips themselves by drawing on them and shading them into illusionary depth. The strips, the lettering, and the charcoaled lines along with the white paper begin to change places with one another. A process is set up in which every part of the picture takes its turn at occupying every plane. The planes of the picture are all parallel to one another. They

are connected by their common relation to the surface. Wherever a form from one plane slants or extends into another it immediately pushes forward. The surface still, however, states and restates its flatness(5, p. 48).

Picasso and Braque began to use pasted paper and cloth of different textures and patterns, with realistically painted elements in the same work. Shallow planes shown partly in depth and partly out were pushed together and as a whole brought closer to the surface of the painting. Pictured surfaces were shown as parallel with the picture plane and at the same time cutting through it, establishing an illusion of depth greater than that actually shown. Pictorial illusion begins to give way to optical illusion(16, p. 17).

For the first time also, non-art had been brought within the bounds of art. It was to save the illusion of space that Braque introduced these alien substances but he softened the blow by working them into his composition. He blurred hard edges with smudges of gray paint and shadings with pencil. Braque "domesticated" nonpictorial elements by depriving it of one of its liberties: color(7, p. 28). Cubism seems to be as reserved in its attitude towards space. Later, however, as Cubism developed and grew



into Synthetic Cubism, Braque and Picasso came to grips with color. Picasso chose to solve the terms of Synthetic Cubism by contrasts of bright color and bright color patterns. A great deal of this was accomplished with collage. On a more technical plane the Cubists' used collage "as an experiment designed to solve the problem of reintroducing colour in Cubist painting" (13, p. 37). From 1910, in Braque's case, and from 1911 in Picasso's, stenciled numerals and letters had already appeared in their oils, in the form of legible, definable shapes, contrasting with abstract forms. Braque later explained why he made use of these typographical elements at the precise moment when he had to place objects into space by decomposing them into spaced planes.

They were shapes where there was nothing to deform, because being flat, letters were not contained in space and so in contrast their presence in a picture allowed one to distinguish the objects which were situated in space, from those not contained within it(20, p. 40).

But as well as this he says that in this experiment he was guided "by the desire to get as close as possible to a reality"(20, p. 5). This reality was to become important in another way, when printed papers made their appearance, and became one of the constituent elements of painting.

It could be expected that the Cubists frequent use of painted letters might have led to the use of cut paper letters in the first collages. In Braque's first collage, however, the pasted elements consist of wallpaper that represented woodgrain, and in Picasso's, a piece of oil cloth that simulated chair caning was incorporated. Which picture came first is not known for certain as both Picasso and Braque can not accurately relate the correct date. There is no agreement as to what constitutes the first collage. Was it the first collage drawing or the first painting to include a scrap of foreign material or was it the conception of the idea in the beginning, that which brought the whole thing about?

They were mixing painting with unheard of materials, expanding into three dimensional construction. Which perhaps is another way of saying that the two Cubists were intent on creating some kind of synthesis between two kinds of reality and two kinds of space: the pictorial and the real(8, p. 17).

It is obvious that it was a joint discovery if it was a discovery. These two painters were then working so closely together that it is not at all certain that the one who did the first "papier collé" had really had the idea first. They might have talked about it before...It is generally admitted that the first one was "Compotier" done by Braque in the summer of 1912 at Sorgues(8, p. 15).



That summer Braque saw in a shop window some wallpaper of the sort very popular at the time in middle class homes.

The first composition he made with this papier collé or glued on paper, was on a sheet of drawing paper...upon which he pasted the strips of woodgrain paper....He then drew a simple composition in charcoal...sketched a bunch of grapes, a goblet, and beneath the grapes a suggestion of a compote dish upon a table. One of the strips was placed at the bottom where it suggests the table drawer. Another was neatly cut out to fit the curve of the fruit bowl. The drawing was extended across some of the pasted strips and the letters ALE and BAR were added...But who knows what discussions preceded it, what mutual ideas and inspiration, what forgotten remarks or sketches led to the discovery(8, p. 13).

The Compotier or Fruit Bowl is clearly Braque's first collage. Picasso's first is a matter of definition. By one definition it could be the 1908 drawing, Baigneuses. By a different definition the Still-Life with Chair Caning, dated 1911-12 would be the first. It is believed by some that Picasso did not consider the first drawing to be a collage. It must be counted however as a first step towards collage. Several questions have been raised about the Baigneuses which could dispute even Picasso's memory of the drawing. Why, for example, is the paper separated from the main drawing by lines added to indicate its shadow. This seems to rule out that the paper is merely

a revision as it would generally have been blended into the composition rather than emphasized. In addition, why are the letters AU LOUVE used upside down when surely the artist must have had a clean scrap or at least one of the same color of paper(8, p. 14).

Picasso has shed no light on this mystery.

It can be said that the difference between the two lies in intent. Picasso may have added the scrap of paper to the drawing for various reasons but it is difficult to believe that the reason was a conscious effort to introduce foreign materials as the basis of a new art form. The first man to do anything was the man who intended to accomplish a difference.

If the first for Picasso was not Baigneuses then it was surely with intent that Still-Life with Chair Caning was. This painting includes oilcloth representing chair caning which is integrated into the structure of the painting. The letters JOU from the name of a newspaper often used by the artist are painted, the chair caning is in itself only a copy, a facsimile of reality. Only the rope framing the painting is real. This is significant for this is still not a step to use the object as itself. This was to come later, the oil cloth only substitutes machine made illusion for the man-made illusion of the painter.

For all its convincing appearance, the fake caning was unreal reality, while the images of lemon, pipe, and glass made no pretense of being anything but images or representations of objects or, in other words, real unreality. The real rope, on the other hand, was actually the closest to the purpose of collage in that it represented itself with a special reality because it resembled an ordinary oval carved "rope-molding" frame. Cubism thrives on precisely these exchanges between art and nature and the ambiguous places where it is not certain which is which between the Real Real, the Unreal, and the Real Unreal(14, p. 62).

Of all the paper used in collage, newspaper in that day was the most shocking. It defied art history and convention. The Cubist wit is involved in the shock first in the use of dissimilar materials in painting for the first time and second for the newspaper clippings as puns, both visually and verbally. Cubist theory of course placed the newspaper scraps as abstract elements in a composition but like graffitti and post cards, they were irresistible reading for the viewing public. This is not to say that the puns read into the paintings were not placed there by the artists. Some of the works, unlike the confusion as to the "first" collage, are dated by and even, in the case of a collage



## Plate I



Still-Life with Chair Caning

by Gris signed by the use of newspaper clippings(8, p. 16).

Corresponding to the style of the whole, the newspaper collages were often simple, more or less regular geometrical forms. Picasso, however, cut out silhouettes of bottles which were part of the still-lives of the Cubists. While remaining figurative, the still-life allows the presentation of objects in their most basic relationships.

After this, Picasso was to use a large variety of materials, he was very good at discovering old wallpapers with designs of flowers, or designs of brocade, or old lace which faded by age brought to collage a rich melancholy.

These bits of flotsam were chastened and purified, lifted out of the commonplace and lowborn roles they played as part of the clutter of an artist's studio, were made elegant counter-point for paint and charcoal. To paste onto canvas some of the real materials as the subject matter of cubist still-life was a form of revolt against nineteenth century realism. To paint a cheap wine bottle rather than a cut-glass decanter, a newspaper rather than a leather bound volume, a label from a package of cigarettes rather than a pipe, a bare table top rather than the complex folds of cloth, was in itself a protest against the overstuffed, pompous subject matter of Victorian still-life. To use a bottle label

rather than spend one's time painting realistic facsimiles, was another intellectual step forward in freeing painting from the tyranny of academic formulas. It was a serious experiment in integrating new materials and techniques within the formal, severe framework of Cubist painting(11, pp. 25-26).

The sand, pieces of wood, hair and newspaper that have been pasted on give it the same kind of reality as a statue or religious symbol worshipped as an object in itself.

He (Picasso) wanted to paint no more men, women, donkeys, and high school students, since they partook of the whole system of deception... he felt that painting with oil was a very definite culture and morality. He invented the new medium. He began to stick sand, hair, post-office forms and pieces of newspaper onto his pictures, to give them the value of a direct reality; removed from everything traditional (13, p. 36).

In another still-life of the period, Picasso introduced a postage stamp and by the early part of 1913 was working with strips of cloth, bits of paper and even occasionally small pieces of foil.

In certain compositions, the collage covered practically the entire space. The drawing was then reduced to a few faint strokes lighting up the dark background and a few black lines shading the light surfaces. At times the drawing disappeared entirely leaving its place to collage. At the beginning the

papers were frequently pinned on to each other, which proves these works were very spontaneously created. In this, Picasso took over the methods of his father, a teacher at the School of Arts and Crafts at Malaga, who liked to prepare his compositions by re-grouping bits of paper with the help of pins before starting to paint(20, p. 7). In the works of his son, the pins remained and have rusted, just as the newsprint has yellowed, worn by age.

In the course of his work, Picasso made use of everything he found, packets of tobacco, calling cards, bottle labels, boxes of matches, scraps of material, and others. For him there was no such thing as a worthy or an unworthy means of expression. The artist may make use of any material on condition that he is capable of infusing it with creative feeling. He was the first to bring out the virtues of trivial and worn out objects.

At the beginning, a limited number of pieces of collage were combined with lines which crossed and spread over them without much regard for the shapes of the collage pieces. Sometimes light hatchings modeled the shapes without the spatial relationship being defined. In other words, the pieces were used not as representational objects as much as background



color or texture for overpainting. Then the paper collage enabled the painters to reintroduce color directly into their work, as an independent pictorial element.

Braque, as it seems, was the actual instigator in most of the new directions for Cubism. The introduction of elements of reality, such as the stencil letters and numerals in Le Portugais, restates clearly the material existence of the painting as an object in its own right. In addition to applying to the canvas or sheet of paper letters, other pieces of paper or fragments of glass, foil, elements considered to be foreign to the technique of painting or drawing, the artist makes the spectator conscious of the canvas, panel or paper as a material object capable of receiving and supporting other objects. The letters and numbers on a Cubist painting serve, as do the collage pieces, to individualize it, to isolate it from all other paintings.

Braque and Picasso were also makers of constructions. Their constructions must have helped them to achieve the kind of spatial definition that exists in their paper collage, and painting of 1913. Some of these may even have been a prelude to the discovery of collage that autumn. In Picasso's case, there are definite



ties between these early constructions and his later paintings(4, p. 125).

Following a spontaneous creative system, Picasso used freely all the elements at his disposal. He opposed the smooth surface of some papers with other surfaces painted with mixtures of sand and sawdust. He put ready made objects side by side with drawn or painted copies. More frequently in his still-lives, black and white drawing gives tone, to which collage of newspaper, tobacco packages, imitation textures were added to provide contrasts of color. Because of the ambiguous nature of the elements they were illusions and allusions of reality(20, p. 7).

Although 1913 was the year of discoveries in collage both on materials and the use of them, later the collage developed along with the "synthetic" Cubism. Formal discipline took over where chance had played a part, interest was concentrated on the relationship of textures and colors. The great initial period of Cubist collages may practically be considered to have ended with the war in 1914 which scattered the painters in every direction. Picasso never completely gave up the principle of collage. In 1926 new Guitars appeared, which was the continuation of the constructions of the 1912-1914 period. Since that

time Picasso has returned to collage for cover designs, such as the cover for the first number of the Minotaure, and for a series of tapestry cartoons, specifically for the Sitting Woman and Women at their Toilet in 1937-1938(20, pp. 9-10).

Of all the papier collé and collage of Picasso and Braque the fragments can be said to exist on three levels. First, they are flat, colored, pictorial shapes. Second, they represent or suggest certain objects in the picture by analogies of color and texture or by the addition of keys or clues. Thirdly, and this is the part of collage that relates most to the other forms of Cubist collage, the pieces of paper exist as themselves. That is to say, one is always aware of them as solid, tactile pieces of extraneous matter incorporated into the picture and emphasizing its material existence in a very concrete way with weight and solidity as material objects(4, pp. 105-106).

Picasso used collage in one form or another at one time or another, in both drawings and paintings. Braque used collage or papier collé only as an added facet to his drawing, for much the same reasons and in much the same way as Picasso.

When in 1935, more than twenty years after they

were executed, Picasso's "Collages" were shown in the Pierre Gallery in Paris, few painters showed much enthusiasm. Few collectors dared to take advantage of the prices, which were very low considering the quality of his past work. They were suspicious of the value of works such as these, made up of scraps salvaged from the litter of an artist's studio. Just as there are still people who react to collage as if it were some outrageous form of intellectual delinquency; a spoof on the public.

It seems odd however, that the painting styles contemporary with the development of collage seem to be outdated or even old fashioned; collage is still as fresh and exciting as the day it was discovered.

## CHAPTER II

### Schwitters

It can not be said where or when Kurt Schwitters first viewed the Cubist collages but it is evident that he must have. Schwitters grasped its plastic meaning enough to make collages whose value is over and above montage, tricks of illustration, and decoration as some other of the viewers were to develop collage as a medium.

The split lies here. Collage was to come into its own, not just an aid to painting. Schwitters was a Dada and for him this new means of expression was the perfect vehicle with which he could express his own version of the movement. A first step was made in the early collages when he established Merz, a word derived from a torn scrap in one of his collages, as the name of his brand of Dada which was true Dada he felt. The other prime movers in Dada chose to differ with Schwitters. They felt that he was too abstract. A cornerstone of the Dada foundation was its opposition to social content. On the contrary Schwitters thought

what could have more social content than the litter from society itself(19, p. 55). Poet and painter, Schwitters occupies a particular place in the history of Dada. He was avoided by the Berlin group, which was interested only in political action and which distrusted his concerns and mere poetic attitude. He found himself isolated in Hanover. He was not invited to contribute to the great Berlin exhibition of 1920, which included almost all the other German Dadaists. As a matter of fact, Housmann and Huelsenbeck, two of the grand Dadas of the movement, openly declared their opposition to him(7, p. 28). Schwitters' obvious interest in the end product of his effort as the creation of an object, further severed him from the mainstream Dada movement. Color in some ways symbolizes what some hard core Dadas found objectionable in Schwitters. Color is with Schwitters, however, a complex issue. Schwitters use of printed paper, usually, was not for the message written on it but for its color. The color made its "note of harmony" within the large field of collage. His pictures are best, according to Whittet, in their first unfocused encounter from across the room.

They (the colors) sing individually in a shrewdly engineered composition that is not necessarily improved by close analysis(21, p. 248).

However, the very idea of color opposes the representational tendencies of Dada. For the Dada color was a traditional concern and besides that only a detail, and, theoretically, they had no patience with either traditional concerns or mere details. Color in Dada as a whole applies almost entirely to the work of Schwitters. Color, for Schwitters, was the bridge between German Expressionism and Analytical Cubism and Synthetic Cubism, which permitted the Cubists to use color in a way structurally comparable to their former style but causing a conflict between the real and the abstract. Where the Cubists had formerly used patterns, Schwitters in using discarded litter like stamps, labels, packaging, stubs, transfers, printed images and text, made the literary and pictorial content seem both incidental and accidental. He focused our attention, instead on, abstract elements of form, space, and color, particularly color(19, p. 55).

The collages of the few years after 1920 when Schwitters reached his mature style of work, have a very spontaneous improvised look. The material looks to be scattered at random and pasted down where it fell. The object, scrap of paper, bus ticket, or what ever, becomes a formal element of the collage. Even though the shape,



color, and texture of a piece could conceivably be made equally well in paint, it is the identity of the object that makes the difference. That difference is a real thing from the real world and remains clearly recognizable. Because of its presence the world of the picture, of the collage itself, and the world of the spectator are overlapped.

The essence of Schwitters' art is in the relationship between art and life. It is about the environment and Schwitters living in it. It is made out of the environment, it is a picture of the environment and it is the environment(16, pp. 248-249).

Schwitters' art was linked to his material environment, and his artistic outlook of the twenties was conditioned by that first great age of mass production. Schwitters' art of the 'twenties is essentially urban in character. Like the other abstractionists of that period, his art was that of the metropolis(2, p. 59).

The typical Schwitters collage is a mixture of formality of means and informality of appearance, waste bits of paper junk interrupting and overlapping the verticals and horizontals of more or less geometric designs(19, p. 56). It is essentially a treatment which involves a literal ground plane, the relationship of forward and backward planes. These are methods of picture making he had developed from his Cubist,

Futurist, and Expressionist sources. This method demanded a "describable pictorial space related to the physical dimensions of the work of art and to the integrity of the picture plane itself"(3, p. 57).

The pictorial structure is of distinctly conventional nature (within the Cubist-Expressionist format) even though formed from unconventional materials.

The collages of the German period had of course gone through many changes and developments. The elements of Cubism and Futurism contributed the strong diagonals leading out of the picture edges and provided some of the variety of Schwitters' form and structure. After a visit to Holland in 1923 with the Dadaist van Doesburg, his collages changed structurally again and incorporated some of the De Stijl geometrics. In some paintings these are evident as the horizontal-vertical right angles of Mondrian and in some works the structure is rotated into a diamond grid.

The German collages vary from "massive stable compositions" to the more dynamic futurist diagonals. The collages of this time are, according to Janis, surprisingly warm and optimistic, "remarkably so in view of the innate sadness of the castoff, rejected, lost materials"(8, p. 75).



There is a basic organization of interlocking, angular, transparent planes formed for the most part of two-dimensional collage elements. Schwitters established a system in which the material itself became the essential formative element. The fragments of paper are worked into compositions the structure of which is lines, the edges of planes, but not of the planes or the actual collage elements themselves. In these works however, there is a complicated structure of interlacing planes that so fill and overlap the pictorial surface that the ground plane is almost lost. It was Schwitters innovation, the replacement of a conventionally Cubist base or ground plane for a more personal impressionistic one; that goes far to destroy the sense of delineated space itself. It was something for which Schwitters has been criticized and upon which the "decline" of his work after 1931 has been blamed(3, p. 60).

This was actually, according to Elderfield, not a decline but a reassessment. For the first time, he had freed himself from the tradition of the planular scheme which had dominated his work. This change in his work accounts for the "decline". Schwitters refused to be bound by any system, even though that system would have and did guarantee a more coherent end

product(3, p. 60). Tillim said, in a review of Schwitters, about the post-1931 work: "Growing obscurity now extends to color and organization, which in some examples is simply chaotic"(3, p. 57). He goes on to remark about the structural unity giving way into overlapping shapes which destroyed the base plane, as has been noted was perhaps the original intention, with "holes" that were sometimes filled with illusionistic detail. With this, Tillim feels that Schwitters became too "painterly".

Robert Melville feels, however, that the "English" collages are among Schwitters most notable achievements. They "lack the bite of those earlier examples which, so to speak, confront us with the litter from which they are made. The complex overlappings of bus tickets, labels, old envelopes and magazine cuttings turn them into an anonymous paste; but these pastes considered as contributions to the art of abstract collages are unrivaled in the subtlety of their chromatic effects"(12, p. 50).

Many of the English collages of Schwitters have a shredded look. Long thin strips of various materials were pasted down in the same direction vertically or diagonally. In his new surroundings a wavering unsettled, drifting appearance, became the

most apparent form in his collage. The English collages, in this way, relate and almost confirm what Schwitters told Huelsenbeck about Hanover.

It is doubtful that Schwitters could have come to feel about England and Ambleside as he did about his birthplace Hanover, but his work belies his statement made in Germany that "If I ever move from Hanover where I love and hate everything I will lose the feeling that makes my world point of view"(3, p. 59). His world view was not lost, however, but grew to encompass more than the mechanical civilization.

In the collages of this period, the background sadness of castoffs seems to surface to become a dominant characteristic. The unsettled composition adds to this feeling of lament and memories(8, pp. 76-78).

The later works, those created after 1931, especially the "English" collages, are rarely composed as such. They are what they appear, simple selections of found material. They are images of nature, random heaps of objects which look to have fallen of their own accord into compositions which the artist simply made more permanent. But in so doing, Schwitters gave these collage constructions a touch of himself. This should remind us that for Schwitters, art was an extension of living, an expression of the patterns of personal

behavior(3, p. 60). Herbert Read, who admired Schwitters' work, is quoted by John Elderfield in a statement about picking and choosing as a technique:

Selection is also creation. Nothing is so expressive of a man as the fetishes he gathers around him....Art in its widest sense is an extension of the personality: a host of artificial limbs(3, p. 61).

Where as Schwitters said: "Nature or chance often carries together things which correspond to that which we call Rhythm. The only task of the artist is to recognize and limit, to limit and recognize" (2, p. 57). Perhaps even better explained by what Aragon called "the personality of choice"(18, p. 82). It becomes more important than manual dexterity or painterliness. A painter's job was not to build up an individual art but to relocate and manipulate an existing reality until a new art or artifact was born spontaneously.

Schwitters' system made the material itself the essential element and the carrier of meaning in forming the collage. The material itself took the active part in the forming and could not be used compositionally, but must suggest for itself its own correct place in the collage. Schwitters got away from conventional ideas of unity and harmony. His was a more open ended, a formal, and essentially psychological approach to

making collage. Essentially, he allowed the materials to establish their own rightness of character(3, p. 61). The litter of cities and society used in his work is always stout enough to be "literary" in collage and while not the whole importance of the work it is in a sense the real "content". The images of text, picture, ticket, or token still serve to call up memories and reinforce the relationship between spectator and painting. This involvement with the material, is described by Charlotte Weidler: "He spread flour and water over the paper, then moved and shuffled and manipulated his scraps of paper around in the past while the paper was wet. With his fingertips he worked little pieces of crumpled paper into the wet surface...In this way he used flour both as paste and as paint"(3, p. 63).

There is an obvious change in the "English" collages but for obvious reasons. It is a simple matter of palette. When a painter changes the colors of his customary scheme his work changes also. It is the same with a collagist and was with Schwitters in particular. When Schwitters made his final move from German occupation he ended in England. Here he found his new palette. From the litter of both urban and rural English countryside. Schwitters was an incurable browser and



collector, as his work indicates and necessitates. While he lived in Ambleside, he constantly roamed the countryside and brought parts of it back to take their place in the collages and constructions of that time. His new palette was enriched now by pieces of bone, twigs, pebbles and shells, as well as the to be expected papers, advertisements, and labels. But now the text was in English. A lot has been written about the Dada point of Schwitters work as an attitude toward a culture based on waste. As much can be said, however, about the humor involved in his work. As Schuyler points out in one collage that says, among other things, "Delivered message" and "Not fantastic"(17, p. 10). These statements of the wry humor of Schwitters were now available to the English speaking public who had before, perhaps, only been able to appreciate the color of Schwitters' collages.

Through the sources that have been sighted, it is possible to gain some insight into the methods and objectives of Kurt Schwitters as well as the structure of the collages themselves. Founded in Cubism and Dada, they elevated rubbish to the level of fine art. The collages show us the everyday taken for granted objects around us in a different light. Now the discarded

ticket is an irregular red shape that plays off against the browns of the papers and paint around it. The collages survived Cubism and Dada and, through the influences of Expressionism in its early foundations, Schwitters' work influenced many later artists in the development of abstract art to date. It is found possible to trace most contemporary collage back to the work of Schwitters, Braque and Picasso. Without reference to date, Schwitters' collages are as contemporary, as timeless, as important today as they were when they were created.

At this time, it is even more evident that Schwitters saw the true gauge of society--its waste. Society produces enough waste to smother itself and is apparently attempting to do so as rapidly as possible. Perhaps Schwitters from his vantage point in the beginnings of the mechanized mass production age could foresee the mess of things to come. His art was of his time, but is of our time also. As Fred Brookes said of Schwitters' Merzbau: "It is made out of the place where it stood"(1, p. 227). This statement is true of Schwitters work as a whole. It is Schwitters' statement about the world that affected Schwitters. Through Schwitters collage became a glorification of the object, an appreciation of the ready-made, an

involvement with the found object. The spectator, for the first time, was confronted with an art with which he had personal experience. Here was the bus ticket he had used this morning, the newspaper of yesterday, an advertisement for his own brand of tobacco. To the principle of the object, Schwitters added a feeling of respect for everyday life. The common, the soiled, and deteriorated became important. The rejected once more assumed a character. New life was given to what had been dead. The new "personalities" so created seemed to be endowed with the Dada unreasonableness of dreams, with the spontaneity of expressionism. These objects were taken unaltered for the most part, from their normal context and recreated and transposed from its superficial reality; a higher plane of contemplation.



## CHAPTER III

### Conclusion

The author's own work can best be associated with that of his illustrious predecessors within the context that collage is not an end in itself but merely a means to an end. Both Picasso and Braque sought to use collage in cubist paintings as a technique to reintroduce what they considered to be a lost element in their art. The first step was taken not as a detour from the path of cubist painting, but rather as a side path, a short cut, which would eventually lead them to their goal. The author first became involved with collage as an experiment in painting which would achieve the desired effect of freeing himself from a restricting method of painting which he had assumed first. Adopting collage as a means to break away from small brushwork and a striving for detail which was false in both context, and in result. Collage allowed him to work with larger areas, work towards an intuitive approach to composition and design, and above all else realize a more pleasing result.

Schwitters, a pseudo-dada, also had a profound influence on the author. Taking his dada associations as a base, Schwitters started out on a side path of his own which developed into a fantastic journey. Rescuing his media from oblivion he did an about face on the popular dada practice of creating nothing out of art and created art out of "nothing". Perhaps it could be said that Schwitters was more true to the purpose of collage than the cubists, for his creations did represent themselves as still-life and not as representations of still-life, but only as collage. Here the means, collage, was used to achieve a more noble end, which is both an aesthetically pleasing art form and a valid comment on his contemporary society. The author has tried to carry on this influence with his own commentary of recycled art in both large cubist-futurist collage and smaller merz-dada collage-photomontage.

The authors work can be divided into two types. The first and larger of the collages are abstract landscapes on the whole, with a few that proceed on into nonobjective. Technique varies somewhat with the collages in this category depending, for the most part, on the date which they were completed. The earlier collages relied heavily on varnish glazes and painted

papers. The textures were manufactured in the sense that the papers were folded or at least crumpled. Natural color of the various papers was extremely subdued by the dark wood stain varnishes used as both a glaze and as the adhesive.

Later works are more honest to material. Two of the earliest paintings of this type would be Heaven is a Helluva Place, in which papers are both crumpled and folded for textural effect before being applied to the canvas, and Big Rock Candy Mountain where the natural color of the paper, is for the most part lost, due to heavy varnish and an early experiment with Rhoplex as an adhesive. The various papers used are allowed to state their colors unchanged. The usual glaze, in this case, being a clear varnish which imparts a yellow tint to the brown papers used. Some areas still show the darker glazes of the earliest collage. However, technique has by this time improved to the point that polymer is used as both adhesive and as a textured, clear glaze. The gel glazes were used to unify the similar textures of the tape and papers used, while at the same time, they gave the entire surface an independent texture of its own. It might be well to point out that in the collages, prior to this time, brown packaging tape is used in virtually all of

## Plate II



And the Big Rock Candy Mountain

the larger and many of the smaller collages. Indeed, in many of both sizes the tape is used exclusively and without benefit of other papers. The surface at this time becomes a little less glossy and more pigment is allowed to show in its directly applied state as the topmost plane of the collage.

Under the direct influence of the cubist collage, which will be discussed at more length later, pigment is used to deny the edges of shapes by heavier over-painting. For the first time also, pigment and glaze is used to enhance the edges of some shapes to bring these edges into sharper focus, while at the same time subduing others.

The author's work, while increasing in size, still deals with essentially the same three things, as it has in the past; shape, plane, and color. Color plays a less important part, due to the fact that papers chosen for collage are picked with a monotone color scheme in mind. The author has intentionally chosen to underplay the color variety in his collage, choosing rather to present a limited palette of values and shades of brown paper in most cases and with only occasional use of dull blues, greys, and greens. Until recently, the paper has gone untouched after once being applied to the panel surface. Acknowledging an influence of the cubists,



the later works are showing a great deal more over-painting. The polymer pigment applied over the paper has a dual purpose in that it is used both to enhance the surface of sometimes smooth paper while, at the same time, pushing the surface into a different arrangement of planes than that which the order of application of the paper shapes would imply.

Planular arrangement of the paper shapes dictates the final appearance of the panel. This can be changed somewhat by a visual rearrangement of the planes. This done by painting over the edges of some of the paper shapes, those on top, and, in effect, pushing the topmost shape deeper into the layers of the picture. At the same time outside edges, often of the same piece of paper, are painted "behind" or around by painting up to the edge in order to lift the edge from the surface. This has given the visual appearance to the paper of bending inside the picture plane. The cubists used this technique to further exploit the fragmenting of their paintings surface caused by their three dimensional view of their subjects. The shallow depth of the cubists is a visual "trick", an optical illusion which the author has tried to incorporate and capitalize on in his own work.

One such painting is Things Which Went Unsaid and



## Plate III



Things Which Went Unsaid and Remain Forever Lost

Remain Forever Lost, which shows this rearrangement of planes. In this particular painting, many of the planes formed by individual pieces of paper are tilted into the picture by pushing one edge of the paper plane back into simulated depth by painting on top of it with white polymer. The darker paper "behind" it seems to come to the surface of the illusion while the painted edges seem to sink into the background. Another edge of the same piece has been lifted by the same technique. The bottom shape has been painted white, in order to further increase what illusionistic depth already exists between it and the top shape; thus, in effect, again lifting it out of the picture. The result is a tilting of the plane of that particular paper shape. There is also another innovation to the author's work which is indirectly associated with the cubists. A false edge is used to break up large areas of a single piece of paper or to deny the existence of an already established edge by crossing it in such a way as to put the edges "under" a simulated piece of collage. This is done by incorporating the use of a stencil made from a torn scrap of paper and painting over its edge to create a false or simulated edge. The author began using these techniques after discovering their effectiveness in the cubist collages. It is believed that

these illusions add a great deal of depth to his collages that possibly would not have existed before. Depth is inherent in collage, that is to say, that when any collage materials are, in effect, stacked on top of one another the resulting layering can not help but to give both a real depth and a subtle simulated depth. Overpainting has been used to further take advantage of the "accidental" depth and add a painterly influenced intentional depth.

Shape in the collage of the author is represented by the torn edges of papers used to cover the supporting panels. Shape is to the author an intuitive thing. Papers chosen for the collages usually are picked for the shape as well as the color that they already have. It is believed that if an artist is to become successful in creating art, then design must become intuitive, second nature. This frees the artist to concentrate on technique and manipulation of media. This not to say that design must rate second to brush work or other fine points of picture making. If an artist can rely on his intuitive abilities to arrange a successful composition, while he is working toward a color relation or the enhancement of a surface, he is free to create.

The author relies on an intuitive method of arrangement of the paper shapes involved in his collage.

The shapes of the various papers used are rarely changed by removing any part of the paper in any way. If this must be done, it is usually handled by covering that particular area with paint or more paper. Old envelopes, worn drawing paper, wrappings, and grocery sacks are all used in the original state in which they were discovered. Folds and torn edges or holes are not created but are played up by paint or minor manipulation in order to best show their textures or shapes.

It is the author's belief that these "finds" are art enough in their own right and need only the proper setting in which to realize their potential. This restates an earlier remark about truth to material, by letting these pieces of litter speak for themselves through their own textures and colors, by accepting their shapes and torn edges as having enough natural interest and appeal to stand on their own, a successful collage can be created with a minimum of intervention on the part of the painter.

The second of the two types of collage that the author creates is much more representational and even literal. Just as the collages of Kurt Schwitters were very small, these work, almost without exception, are small. They are created from pictures, words, and

letters gleaned from numerous sources. Often, the mail of an artist adds a great deal to his art. Such is the case here for, many of the pictures in these small collages or photomontages are taken from advertisements of various sorts. Magazines also contribute a substantial portion of the illustrations used.

The best of these small paintings are those in which all of the various pictures, taken from the context in which they were intended, contribute to the general over all interpretation. One of these photomantages and typical of the kind is A Systematic Method of Choosing Sets of Random Numbers. Again, as in most of these small works, this one started with a purpose, perhaps similar to Schwitters' "Idea of Message Delivered". The collage is based on a letter from the author's bank which informed him of the assignment of a numbered account. Resenting the impersonalness of continually being assigned a number, the author started the collage as a personal protest. Grouped around the top of the letter are various numbers and number groups, most of which were taken from advertisements for contests in which each entry is assigned an individual number. "This is your lucky number. No one else has it" they inform you. The greeting in the



letter is replaced by a similar number and the letter is signed as well by a number and a cut out smile. The letter surrounded by computer punch cards and numbers conveys some of the author's indignation at becoming a method for gathering sets of random numbers.

A similar painting would be "The Universe is a Silly Place at Best", which involves much the same approach to the inconsequential timewasters of the System. The collage is based on a campus traffic ticket and its accompanying threatening letter, and various punch cards which require one to answer questions without relevancy, in order to be admitted to a course of study at an university during which one is fined for stumbling. The author's comment is inserted in the form of a Micky Mouse superimposed on top of the collage.

Technique in both of these paintings is much the same. A heavy layer of polymer gel is used as both adhesive and as the first glaze. The primary purpose here is to negate some of the cut and placed layering of the various pieces, a process which gives the finished product a much more united appearance than it would have had. In conjunction with this, a final glaze of varnish is applied to tone down any color differences and generally blend together the dissimilarities of the



many pieces involved. The final varnish also is used to highlight certain areas, as in for instance ...silly place..., by darkening into the background those things which are around the highlight. Just as the collage of Schwitters can and indeed should be read, so are these to be. However, where Schwitters was primarily interested in the colors and the intercolor relations of his collages, the author is more involved that his own message be interpreted by the viewer. It would be hoped that the collages could stand on their own right, without the use of a message. None the less, the reading of the collage is as important to its existence as is its' across the room appearance. Perhaps the relation of the authors works to that of Schwitters is not so strong as the relation to others of the Dada movement such as Ernst. Outward appearance, discounting any literary content, of both the authors and that of Schwitters is very similar at first glance in that they seem to have a haphazard arrangement of the collage pieces. Both Schwitters and the author rely on strong but dissimilar composition.

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