

Taking and Denying

Challenging Canons in Arts and Philosophy

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Comparing the Cologne Sonderbund of 1912 and the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London

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Abstract The article examines the agendas of the *International Art Exhibition of the West German Sonderbund* held in Cologne in 1912 and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* organised in London the same year, by contrasting their historical contexts and comparing their theoretical backgrounds. While the shows varied slightly in approach, both sought to give a systematic overview of the latest trends in art, which was then marketed mainly by private dealers. They addressed similar issues, such as defining the inherited tradition and topical dilemmas about the autonomy of painting and its decorative potential. The paper will discuss the emphasis on the progressive timeline and international outlook on modern art they formulated. It will also revisit the role of these exhibitions in light of the currently expanding discussion of the mechanisms that shaped the canon of European modernism.

Keywords Modernism. Canon. Expressionism. Post-Impressionism. Roger Fry.

Summary 1 Tracing Genealogies within the Turn-of-the Century Art Exhibitions. – 2 The Sonderbund Model. Between the Marketplace and Secessionist Rhetoric. – 3 Transformations of Roger Fry's Project. – 4 Modernist Canons and the Use of History.



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We know, of course, that there are affinities between modern artists and their remotest ancestors [...]. It is just the greatest art of all ages that shows those affinities, nay more, that lives by them.

(Meier-Graefe [1904] 1908, 1: 4)

1 Tracing Genealogies within the Turn-of-the-Century Art Exhibitions

The impact of exhibitions on the spread of modernist movements is now seen as pivotal. Critical examination of art exhibitions began in the 1950s and was concurrent with studies of the World Fairs and the historical reevaluation of early twentieth-century art. Since then, the history of European modernism has often been presented as a process marked by a series of groundbreaking exhibitions, starting with one or another decisive art event. Much literature on the subject has reproduced this progressive scheme by bringing together a sequence of case studies that largely emphasise the global character of the artistic process in Europe at the turn of the century. There are lists of canonical art shows that shaped art history, because they prophetically showed new art to a hostile and unprepared public. Other studies bring to light the ups and downs of single exhibition societies, maintaining, however, primarily the optics of development and emphasising the role of the modernist discourse and its onward march.¹ Only in the last couple of decades have we started to see studies aiming to deconstruct the mechanisms that drove the formation of the modernist canon.² It is vital to look at the exhibitions not only to identify what they presented but, most importantly, to understand what historiographical constructions they employed to justify the legitimacy of the new art they promoted.

Several exhibitions organised at the beginning of the 1910s became widely acknowledged to have determined the reception of modernist art. The shows are noted to have fostered its commercial success and its influence over artists outside France at a time when it was still largely unknown to broader audiences and not yet fully appreciated by institutions and critics. Among them were two exhibitions mounted one after another in 1912: the *Internationale Kunstausstellung des*

¹ For example, some excellent and sourceful works, such as the two volume anthology *Exhibitions that Made Art History* by Bruce Altshuler and his monograph on the avant-garde shows or the study on the Munich Secession by Maria Makela to one extent or another are, however, biased by these models. See Altshuler 1994, 2008, 2013; Makela 1990.

² For example, a profound reconsideration of the art system in Europe in the late 19th early 20th century made by Robert Jensen (1996) or a collection of essays edited by Anna Brzyski (2007) that seeks to approach the subject of canons in art history highlighting their diversity and relativity.

Sonderbunds westdeutscher Kunstfreunde und Künstler (International Art Exhibition of the West German Special League of Art Lovers and Artists) set up in Cologne, and the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* organised in London, mounted at Grafton Galleries by the British critic and art historian Roger Fry. They were closely connected and dealt with similar aesthetic questions. Both expressed the secessionist trends in European art where an increasing number of artists strived to find markets for their work (Jensen 1996, 22). At the turn of the century, new independent art associations were multiplying, often hiving off from older ones and declaring that their missions were more liberal or their stylistic programme more coherent and better grounded, which, however, rarely characterised any of them at the same time. On the one hand, they were challenging the routine and often ossified conventions of local scenes and countering the hostile critique of the latest trends in the arts expressed by established artistic communities (Simon 1976, 51; Joyeux-Prunel 2005, 581). Yet, on the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that, by remaining separate, they largely sought to increase their visibility and improve exhibition infrastructure to reflect their needs (Paret 2001, 63).

Many of these groups employed the tactic of integrating their displays with commemorative monographic sections celebrating the artists considered authoritative among their members. This tool was borrowed from the academic environment, where for years it had served primarily to construct and defend national traditions (Gahtan, Pegazzano 2018, 3). However, it played a major legitimising role for radical expressive languages in the early twentieth century. The organisers of the independent exhibitions often mediated between these two objectives, making way for ambiguities both in contemporary reaction and art historiography.

2 The Sonderbund Model. Between the Marketplace and Secessionist Rhetoric

The German art world in the late 1900s and early 1910s resembled a melting pot, with intense activity among continually dividing groups and numerous debates about norms in the arts and their role in defending national prestige. Among the most remarkable controversies of the day were the Tschudi Affair and the Bremen Art Dispute that followed the acquisition of Vincent van Gogh's *Field with Poppies* (1889) for the Kunsthalle Bremen by Gustav Pauli in 1911. The latter was equally fuelled by the policies of the Secessions and private galleries, such as Galerie Paul Cassirer,³ and by the polemic that arose around

³ Peter Paret, who was the grandson of Cassirer and has just recently passed away, provided a comprehensive discussion of the climate of fear before the foreign influenc-



Figure 1 Announcement of the *International Art Exhibition of the West German Sonderbund*. 1912 (Selz 1957, 242)

the Sonderbund exhibition in 1910. General conservative opinion assumed that there was a conspiracy of Parisian and Berlin art dealers in favour of French art, who had been stringing Germans along and imposing on them overpriced art by foreigners instead of supporting the local schools. Other alleged plotters were progressive museum professionals and critics, who together with the artists blindly following the French were betraying the national traditions (Selz 1957, 238).

The West German Sonderbund was founded in Düsseldorf in 1908 by a group of seven artists who were relatively successful followers of the Impressionist and Neoimpressionist styles (Cestelli Guidi 1992, 20). Right after the first show, the Sonderbund began being seen as the local equivalent to the Munich and Berlin Secessions. The idea to present French artists next to Germans soon emerged and was realised at the second Sonderbund exhibition in 1910. That show featured artists such as Paul Signac, Pierre Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard, Alexej Jawlensky, Wassily Kandinsky, and some pre-Cubist works by Georges Braque. This edition gave particular emphasis on recent theories of colour, its perception, and synthetic approaches in creative practice. The third show maintained this cosmopolitan line by presenting 101 French artists among a total of 147, and further heated things up with a controversial introduction – pointedly entitled *Rhenish and French Art* – written by Richard Reiche, an art historian and one of the organisers.

es on German art at the dawn of the century in his major study on the Berlin Secession. See Paret 1980, 182-99.

The Cologne show was their fourth exhibition, and it emerged in the context of robust debate over the role of public support for progressive art and openly opposed unfavourable political conditions (Schaefer 2012b, 37).⁴ The city of Düsseldorf had withdrawn its authorisation for the venue because the third edition had provoked too much unrest among the local artistic establishment. The town council and the mayor of neighbouring Cologne decided to seize this opportunity and provided the association with a venue, giving it a brand-new Kunsthalle building together with funding of 25,000 marks (Selz 1957, 243). The patriotism of both the administration and local donors, therefore, played an important role in its success in 1912. Cologne, where there was no academy of arts, was an advantageous location, as it was remote enough from Berlin and other centres where the authority of traditional art institutions was strong when it came to undertakings of a similar scale.

The Sonderbund exhibition featured 30 rooms and nearly 600 paintings by 160 artists and was a result of the collective efforts of artists, critics, prominent museum professionals and patrons, private collectors, art dealers, and local politicians [fig. 1]. This stratum had few precedents and guaranteed both the space for experimentation and immunity from attacks from the conservative public. Organisers aimed to present progressive art that endeavoured to develop more intense expression by enhancing pictorial rhythm, colour, and form (Reiche 1912, 3). At the same time, they wanted to show its ties with the innovators of the late nineteenth century, delineating a genealogy of international modern movement in which young German artists decidedly played a part.

The structure of the show and its concept were inventive and straightforward at the same time. New art trends were preceded by a retrospective section laying the groundwork for what visitors were about to see in the following halls. These 'pioneering masters' were celebrated in a wide range of large-scale retrospective displays organised in Europe in the 1900s due to the efforts of independent exhibition societies. For example, sections were dedicated to Paul Cézanne at the Salon d'Automne in 1904 and 1907 and Paul Gauguin in 1906. Other shows organised by dealers included the major exhibitions of Maurice Denis and Henri-Edmond Cross organised one after another by Bernheim-Jeune in 1907 and the van Gogh and Gauguin retrospectives held at the Galerie Miethke in Vienna in 1906 and 1907 respectively (Gordon 1974, 2: 191-207). Naturally, these epi-

⁴ The catalogue of the exhibition that celebrated the centenary of the 1912 Cologne Sonderbund may rightfully be considered the most exhaustive source about the event, its reception and aftermath, including a detailed reconstruction of the list of displayed works. See Schaefer 2012a, 533-617.

sodes followed the stream of the earlier enterprises of Ambroise Vollard and then Paul Cassirer, one the most ardent supporters of progressive painting outside France.⁵

The first five rooms at Sonderbund displayed 125 paintings by van Gogh, making him a messiah of the new art,⁶ as well as the mediator between contemporary French and German painting. Then followed rooms entirely dedicated to Cézanne (26 paintings and works on paper) and Gauguin (about 25 Breton and Tahitian works). Right after them were Neoimpressionists, particularly Signac and Cross, a room reserved for Pablo Picasso (many early works, but also some Cubist ones), and a room dedicated to Edvard Munch. The rest of the exhibition was divided by country (France, Holland, Hungary, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, and finally Germany). Some works were not mentioned in the catalogue. They included paintings by El Greco (whose legacy was being rediscovered in the late 1900s)⁷ in the van Gogh room (*St. John the Baptist*, 1605 ca., Pushkin Museum, Moscow) and presumably another work in the Picasso room, which is, however, impossible to identify (Storm 2008, 129). This matched the general ambition of the organisers who sought to make the visitor “discover to what extent the modern movement looks back to the old masters” expressed in the preface to the catalogue (Reiche 1912, 6-7).

The major part of the retrospective was arranged thanks to the support of private collectors. It allowed them to publicly present their choices and promote a broader recognition of this art. Among the patrons who provided extensive loans to the exhibition were Karl Ernst Osthaus, the founder of the Folkwang Museum in Hagen, and Hans Eberhard von Bodenhausen, a faithful collector of the Neoimpressionists and co-founder of *Pan* magazine. Both Bodenhausen and Osthaus began collecting new French painting in 1900, keeping in mind the example of Henry van de Velde (Stamm 2012, 59).

One of the central halls with lateral windows called the ‘chapel’ was decorated with murals by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Erich Heckel⁸ and stained-glass designs by Jan Thorn-Prikker (Selz 1957, 242). Besides expressing these artists’ fascination with the decorative dimension of painting, this hall, together with four rooms entirely dedicated to applied arts, alluded to the space that the organisers had devoted to the idea of artistic synthesis.

⁵ On the effect of Vollard’s strategies in Germany see, for example, Groom 2006.

⁶ On the exhibitions of van Gogh in German-speaking countries prior to the Sonderbund show, see Feilchenfeldt 1988.

⁷ Several of his canvases appeared at the Salon d’Automne in 1908, which was also noticed by Julius Meier-Graefe in his *Spanish Journey* (Moffett 1973, 103).

⁸ Kirchner’s *Assumption of the Virgin*, the central element of the mural and a sketch of this project were reproduced in Simmons (2004, 261-3).

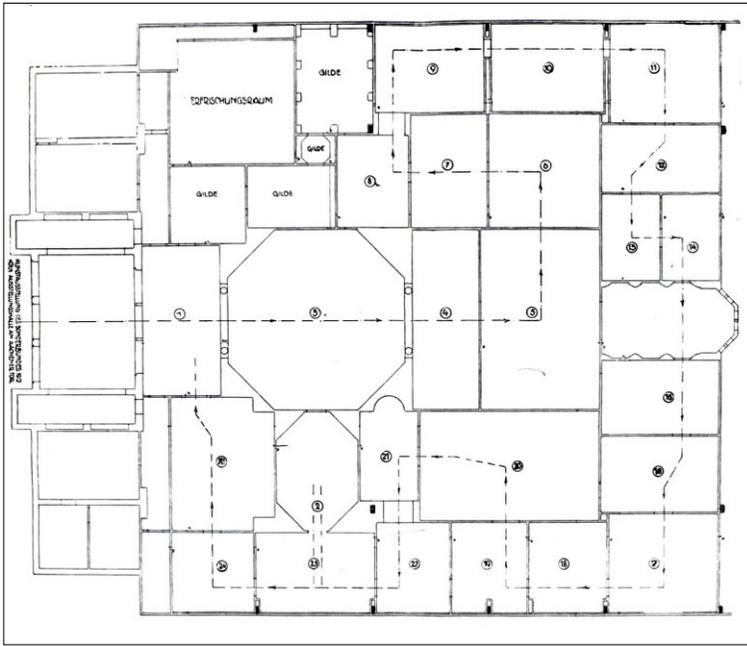


Figure 2 Layout of *International Art Exhibition of the West German Sonderbund*, 1912. Photograph by the Author

The itinerary was arranged in a way that emphasised the progressive flow of the art-historical narrative, from the 'retrospective' section to the most recent trends that showed an affinity with the former and were visible in every country. Those familiar with his work praised the comprehensiveness and dimensions of the section dedicated to van Gogh,⁹ which spread through the central axis of the exhibition venue [fig. 2]. However, others observed that his role was accentuated too strongly in comparison to the role of Cézanne,¹⁰ whose

⁹ It encompassed a large number of landscapes and still lifes, including *Vase with Iris against a Yellow Background* (1890) and the fourth version of the *Sunflowers* (1888, National Gallery, London), which appeared in *Les XX* exhibition in Bruxelles in 1890. It also presented a considerable selection of portraits, among which two versions of *Bertheuse*, *The Postman Joseph Roulin* (1889, not mentioned in the catalogue), *Portrait of Trabuc*, *an Attendant at Saint-Paul Hospital* (1889), and the second version of the *Portrait of Père Tanguy* (1887-8). Finally, it featured three self-portraits and the first version of *Bedroom in Arles* (1888).

¹⁰ The section dedicated to Cézanne included six still lifes with fruits, eight portraits, among them the *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* (1879 ca.), and a pool of landscapes including two views of Sainte-Victoire (now at the Yokohama Museum and the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).

room did not properly reflect his input.¹¹ Even Munch, who together with Picasso was the only living artist who had a whole room, had his work presented more coherently.

The air of primitivism and exotic imagery of Gauguin was approached in a remarkable way. Richard Reiche, one of the main organisers, sought to envision Gauguin's work as if it could be linked to the German tradition, underlining how its decorative qualities influenced young German artists.¹² The glass design by Prikkers was claimed to be an example of how Gauguin's approach could push the artist to rediscover the rich gothic heritage of his country.

The notion that German artists had been adapting Gauguin's style to Nordic lands was one of the conceptual threads that tied the exhibition together¹³ but did not have any significant effect on the way artists from the German section were perceived. The real impact of Gauguin's art consisted of a growing fascination with exotic lands and travel that artists such as Max Pechstein and Emil Nolde expressed in the following phases of their careers (McGavran 2012, 118). It is significant that, despite the ambition to present the 'development' of modern art, no painting of Gauguin could reveal any immediate link to Impressionism. Ultimately, this way of treating Gauguin was more of a symptom of the increasing need to rethink national heritage in Germany than anything else.

Several critics honoured Picasso, whose work covering the years 1903-11 was shown, while artists such as August Macke were astonished to finally see him in such a setting. This glimpse was followed by a large-scale show at Heinrich Thannhause's *Moderne Galerie* in 1913 organised through the efforts of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, which presented over a hundred works (Vernerey-Laplace, Ivanoff 2020, 81). Yet, only six pieces by Matisse were shown in the French room at Sonderbund, possibly because the organisers hoped to diminish his presence by making his impact on German art less visible

¹¹ For instance, Cuno Amiet, whose pieces were featured in the Swiss section and who was, however, mainly influenced by van Gogh, remembered that the master of Aix was decidedly underrepresented in the installation (Stamm 2012, 63).

¹² The ability to evoke 'gothic' motifs was attributed to Gauguin as early as in Octave Mirbeau's account for *Le Figaro* in 1890 (10 August). The overview of his work in Cologne, however, featured the *Painter of Sunflowers* (1888), three canvases depicting Breton peasants and a landscape from the same years and was dominated by the major works of his Tahiti period, including *Nevermore* (1897), *Where Are You Going?* (1892), and *Barbarian Poems* (1896).

¹³ The same applied to the van Gogh display that, in fact, received feedback that fully synchronised with the idea of his art bridging the French and German traditions, which was embodied in the organisers' project (Cestelli Guidi 1992, 26). Moreover, this line was thoroughly accentuated throughout the itinerary and was easier to acknowledge within the German section, where even an unprepared visitor could immediately recognise his influence on the younger generation.

since the idea of the show was to stress its Nordic roots (Cestelli Guidi 1992, 27). That said, it should also be noted that the editions that preceded the Cologne Sonderbund included many Fauvist paintings.

The younger German artists were located right after the tribute section dedicated to Munch in a rather chaotic set-up that undermined the homogeneity of the exhibition. It included representatives of the progressive groups, such as the Expressionist Rhineland painters, Die Brücke, and Der Blaue Reiter, which also advertised its upcoming almanac in the Sonderbund catalogue next to the list of monographic publications by Julius Meier-Graefe. However, while being broad in quantitative terms, this part was naturally overshadowed by the retrospective section. Despite the efforts of the committee, the overall response to the exhibition highlighted the disproportionate dominance of French art instead of the promised “international review” (Reiche 1912, 3) of the joint progressive movement. In terms of commercial success, the preferences were likely distributed in the same manner,¹⁴ although this aspect remains insufficiently researched.

3 Transformations of Roger Fry’s Project

There were several pictures in Sonderbund that had previously appeared in Roger Fry’s *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, organised at the Grafton Galleries in 1910.¹⁵ The concept and some of the choices of the Cologne committee echoed the latter, notably in terms of drawing a family tree of contemporary painting with Cézanne, Gauguin, and especially van Gogh. Together with the one Fry organised in 1912, all three exhibitions accommodated both the fashion for the tribute rooms that had previously spread in Paris salons and progressive European galleries and a general quest for a conceptual framework to apply to new French art.

Back in 1910, Fry’s attempt to formulate his version of it was attacked as speculation and sophism. Examples of innovative modern painting styles were rarely displayed in London on such a scale before the exhibition; generally, visual arts in Edwardian England tend-

¹⁴ As testimonies, for example, we have a purchase certificate issued to a Münster collector, Franz Werner Kluxen, which forms part of a bulk of letters from Walter Klug that appeared on auction in Germany in 2014. Klug was an associate at the Galerie Abels in Cologne and supervised the sales at the Sonderbund exhibition (Aust 1961, 281).

¹⁵ For example, van Gogh’s *La Berceuse* (Augustine Roulin) (1889, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and *Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin* (1889, Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia). The Sonderbund exhibition featured different versions of these paintings: *La Berceuse* (1888, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo), *La Berceuse* (1889, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), and *Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin* (1889, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo).

ed to prefer historical pastiches that transmitted a dignified mood and recalled the art of the masters of previous epochs (Birchenough 2008, 61; Spalding 1980, 153). At the turn of the century, Impressionism had just started entering the critical discourse in Britain, yet was often stigmatised or underestimated (Nicolson 1951, 11). Paul Durand-Ruel had brought an extensive exhibition of French Impressionists to London in 1905, also arranging it at the Grafton. The audience welcomed most of it but ignored Cézanne, who was presented with ten artworks (Bullen 1988a, 48).¹⁶ The first show by Fry had an immense impact on art and collecting, and numerous studies are dedicated to it.¹⁷ However, it influenced in a more straightforward way art criticism in Britain and the very language by which it operated. It had been increasingly moving towards describing the formal qualities of painting, as the number of publications remarking the radicalism of new art in both positive and negative terms has multiplied rapidly.

This first exhibition was structured around the triad of Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin. In the first room, there were eight works by Manet, whose figure was known and appreciated by British art lovers and used by Fry to lure a hesitant public. The rest of the artists were portrayed as the followers of these four masters and were represented by just a few works each. Fry did not want to assume the risk of giving a broader showing of Cubist production, although he regretted that only a modest number of works by Picasso and especially Matisse were shown.

Matisse, owing to the absence of a well-known collector, is quite inadequately represented, and Picasso should have been seen in bigger and more ambitious works. (Fry 1910a, 402)

Even after the show, Fry had not yet determined what theoretical grounding he should attribute to the art he presented, a sentiment which emerged in his impressions on the Cologne exhibition in 1912. He visited the Sonderbund and wrote an exhaustive review on it for

¹⁶ Prior to this, private galleries that featured modern French painting in London were limited to the Chenil Gallery in Chelsea and the Carfax Gallery, which then began to support the Camden Town Group. British artists, even those who travelled to Paris and were exposed to the recent French art, hesitated to produce any articulated feedback on what they saw there, as did their Irish and Scottish colleagues. The artists who were interested in the legacies of van Gogh and Gauguin united at the Allied Artists' Association following the organisational scheme of the Société des Artistes Indépendants in Paris. Some of its members later aligned with the Camden Town Group.

¹⁷ See, for example, Nicolson 1951; Bullen 1988b; Gruetzner Robins 1997, 15-45; 2010, and Bruneau-Rumsey 2009. One of the 2010 issues (vol. 152, no. 1293) of *The Burlington Magazine* was entirely dedicated to the subject.

The Nation, approving the presence of some pictures (including Gauguin's *Barbarian Poems*, which was reproduced on the promotional poster and cover of the catalogue of the 1910 show) that had appeared in London two years before (Fry 1912a, 798). Faced with the fact that the artists were presented under the aegis of Expressionism – which was then an umbrella term for more or less the same phenomenon for which he had earlier coined the term Post-Impressionism – he, interestingly, did not use one term or the other. Instead, he vaguely referred to it as simply 'modern art' or the 'movement'. Besides the passage in which Fry, as one could expect, dwells on the formal qualities of Cézanne's painting, two issues are striking in this article: namely, Fry's hidden patriotism and the way he criticised German art.

It would be almost comic, if it were not rather deeply pathetic, to go from the Sonderbund exhibition, with its hundreds of imitative variation on the art of Van Gogh, Matisse, and Derain [...]. I understand that some of their better painters, such as Erbsloh and Nolde, are not seen at their best at Cologne, but it was with real regret that I had to confirm the opinion which successive exhibitions at the Indépendants and the Autumn Salon had created in my mind, that there is as yet no sign of any definitive creative talent in Germany with the possible exception of one man, Wilhelm Lehmbruch [Lehmbruck], the sculptor, whose work always impressed me by its classic beauty and restraint. (Fry 1912a, 799)

It is therefore not surprising he did not consider including German artists in his forthcoming exhibition.

Fry was surely disappointed by not seeing, although expectedly for him, any British artists. Moreover, he speaks of the exhibition as if the countries were responsible for sending the art there, as happened in World Fairs. However, this was not the case at the Sonderbund, where artworks were provided by gallerists and (mainly) German collectors.

In further writings published in these years, Fry builds an argument in favour of a narrative in which art moves towards a break from the mimetic functions (Fry 1910b, 537).

There is no immediately obvious reason why the artist should represent actual things at all, why he should not have a music of line and colour [...]. Particular rhythms of line and particular harmonies of colour have their spiritual correspondences, and tend to arouse now one set of feelings, now another. (Fry 1911, 862)

The matrix of this interpretative scheme, together with the romanticising rhetoric, is much indebted to the influence of Meier-Graefe (Falkenheim 1980, 19). Fry's formalist approach, which sought to give



Figure 3 Cover for the catalogue of the *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition*, 1912. Photograph by the Author

to art criticism a solid analytic base, was inextricably combined with his idealism concerning the act of aesthetic contemplation (Twitchell 1987, 42). The same rigour was applied in the way he structured the timeline he drew throughout his two exhibitions. In preparation for the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, Fry was much more eager to insist on the linearity of contemporary art development than he was in the previous show. He sought to place one master after another and to structure his narrative as a vital evolution of expressive means.

The adjustments he made at the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, which opened in October 1912 and lasted, with a three-week break, until January 1913,¹⁸ might have been at least partly informed by what he had seen in Cologne. This time he sought not only to present Post-Impressionism as a key artistic phenomenon that was part of a progressive historical perspective but also to introduce its representatives among British artists, demonstrating their works as belonging to global aesthetic progression [fig. 3]. Fry's general tone moved from stressing the value of pictorial expression beyond the norms of the past to claiming that its main power was the ability to translate 'spiritual experiences' into artistic forms, and then towards the idea of art that was "an equivalence, not a likeness of nature" (Fry 1912b, 27)

18 The attendance doubled for the second exhibition. The rearrangement, which was made in January, can be approximately reconstructed from the updated catalogue. See Fry, Bell, Anrep 1913.

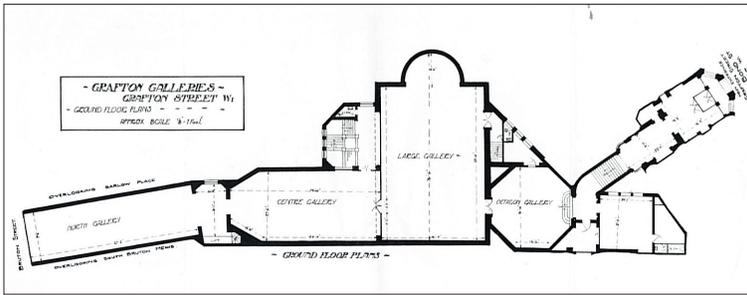


Figure 4 Layout of the Grafton Galleries, London (Altshuler 2008, 86)

and aimed at creating forms rather than imitating them. The show was divided into three sections by a loose geographical criterion, although virtually set aside in the display, that remotely alluded to the traditional structures at World Fairs, as was the case at the Sonderbund exhibition. Fry chose the French artists, delegating the British section to Clive Bell and the Russian one to Boris Anrep.¹⁹ As to the retrospective accents, the masters celebrated in the previous edition as the pioneers of Post-Impressionism were presented in a timeline of photographic reproductions, except for Cézanne. Fry had now concluded that Cézanne exceeded van Gogh in his revolutionising of art forms and was more discreet and diverse (Fry 1912a, 798). The impact of his legacy was underscored by the British section, where most of the works were preoccupied with the formal questions associated with his art. The linkage between contemporary art and Cézanne was essential to Fry. It supported his hypothesis of the ‘classic spirit’ that added order to his discussion of Post-Impressionism, making it more systematic by exalting the genealogies of expressive means.

Fry’s path to modern art lay through the Old Masters, to whom he had previously dedicated his work. Even if Fry borrowed the tone characterising Cézanne as a pillar of tradition from Denis and other French commentators of the mid-1900s, this earlier experience played a crucial role in the way he approached the art of Cézanne (Shiff 1984, 144). The Octagonal Gallery of the Grafton [fig. 4] contained a large set of watercolours of the artist and several paintings, including *Le Château Noir* (1900-4), which previously appeared in 1907 posthumous retrospective at the Salon d’Automne [fig. 5]. After a rehang in January 1913, due to the transfer of a significant part of the show to the New York Armory Show, they were integrated with approximately another 30 pieces.

¹⁹ The ideas expressed by Anrep in the introductory text were then repeated in his article published in the Russian literary magazine *Apollon* (1913).



Figure 5 Paul Cézanne. *Le Château Noir*. 1900-04. National Gallery of Art, Washington (Gift of Eugene and Agnes Ernst Meyer). Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art

There was also a major effort put into evidencing the Fauves (six by André Derain, eight by Maurice de Vlaminck) in comparison to both Fry's first project and Sonderbund (Bruneau-Rumsey 2009, 69). Matisse was presented with about thirty works, and *La Danse* (1909 version) was a real highlight of the show. There is a reason to believe that the artist and his new gallery Bernheim-Jeune could also have a special interest in providing more pieces because of the scarcity of Matisse's recent presence in Cologne and in the face of the growing acclaim that Picasso had been receiving (Gruetzner Robins 1997, 78). Cubism played an important role in the display. The contribution of Kahnweiler, who had hesitated to provide artwork from his stock for Fry's first exhibition, was very substantial this time. Picasso had sixteen pieces shown - for example, from the African period and the early Cubist years - while Braque had four paintings.

The geographical range of Fry's project was considerably narrower and more perplexing than the diverse overview of the Sonderbund. If the reasoning behind the selection of British artists was clear, it is hard to say exactly why he swept new German art aside, if not because he personally thought it had not yet achieved great heights. Moreover, the motivation for the Russian section in the catalogue probably could be slightly confusing to the regular visitor. Most likely the reason lies in the way he theorised over Cézanne's work. He em-

phasised its 'decorative' and synthetic nature, which made Fry seriously consider him and Gauguin as 'proto-Byzantines' in his earlier writings (Verdi 2009, 544). The appeal to the Byzantine and Scythian roots and generally primitivist aesthetic among Russian artists like Natalia Goncharova and Nicholas Roerich surely seemed persuasive to Fry, as they conformed to the expectation of the public for Oriental and archaic imagery from Russian arts (Protopopova 2008, 90) and fit the idea of Byzantine cherished by Fry and his circle.²⁰ Being more of an aesthetic category than a real historical reference, it helped him articulate the cause of the transcendent value that united the great art of the past with the great art of the day and translate it into his exhibitions and criticism.

4 Modernist Canons and the Use of History

Overall, as much as these two exhibitions varied in approach, both tentatively sought to present a systematic overview of the latest artistic phenomena, which were then mainly marketed by private dealers. They emphasised a coherent development of modern art by giving it an international outlook and addressed similar, although often contradictory problems, such as defining the tradition that contemporary art succeeded and the role of decorative potential in the arts. At the time a critically elaborated canon could have an immediate impact on both the work of contemporary artists and the flow of the aesthetic thought. What was truly innovative about both of them was that they were characterised by resourceful use of history, although they had some important precursors, such as the Vienna Secession of 1903 (Jensen 1996, 3), to which Meier-Graefe, incidentally, served as an advisor. It celebrated Impressionism in a retrospective display while it was not yet canonical, tracing its roots to Tintoretto and Velázquez, among other artists, who were shown as the 'great forebears of Impressionism' (Huemer 2018).

Both exhibitions were commercial and rhetorical tools were crucial to positioning the art they promoted in a way that would line up its legitimising ancestry. In the case of Fry's project, it was evident that his version of the modern movement was constituted by a denial of Impressionism. It was instead something that had to be overcome, probably because it was getting increasingly 'institutionalised' by

²⁰ Byzantine art was a shared fascination of the Bloomsbury Group and served as an important element in their theories of aesthetic modernism, a forebear of its sincere, i.e., non-imitative expressive means. See Berkowitz 2018.

juste milieu settings like the New English Art Club.²¹ Meanwhile, at the Sonderbund exhibition, the term ‘expressionist painters’, interestingly, was applied to both German and international artists and virtually emphasised the defiance to the Impressionistic language and a dialogue with the art of remote epochs (Washton Long 1995, 16). In comparison to Sonderbund, the 1912 London exhibition, in a closer look, seems even less credible as envisioning a global picture of progressive art because of its major link to national schools as the main critical category (Jensen 2012). Still, one can surely admit that, despite this, both of them contributed immensely to the diffusion, by museums and the art historical discipline, of the pattern according to which modernism was a straightforward and universal process.

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²¹ The New English Art Club’s merely stylistic appropriation of Impressionism also provoked the discontent of younger generation that gathered in alternative circles such as the Fitzroy Street Group. However, in 1910 letter to Duncan Grant, Fry referred to it as “so far the only one that offers much chance [to exhibit]” (Fry [1910] 1972, 1, 337).

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