



this case inaccurate: despite his preoccupation with Cubist formal structure, Gleizes also sought to address symbolic and psychological concerns.²

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1. Daniel Robbins, *Albert Gleizes, 1881-1953* (New York, 1964), no. 32.

2. Ibid.

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Fernand Léger

(French, 1881-1955)

《Man with a Cane (First State)》

1920

Lower right: F. LEGER/20; on reverse: L'Homme=ala Canne/le ETAT/F. LEGER/20.

Oil on burlap

25-5/8×19-9/16 inches (65.1×49.7cm)

The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection
1950-134-A1-126

Does Fernand Léger's *Man with a Cane* depict an individual threatened by a harrowing modern world, or a heroic worker fully integrated into a promising new environment? In light of Léger's experience in World War I, during which the artist suffered gas poisoning, one could easily assume the most pessimistic of interpretations. With its subject's robot-like features dissolving into a fractured urban backdrop, *Man with a Cane* might seem to portray a man literally overwhelmed by industrialized society.

Léger's faith in technology and progress, however, was not shaken by World War I. Rather, the war heightened the artist's aesthetic appreciation of machinery, and further encouraged Léger's great respect for the working man. This coincided with a general waning of interest, at least among avant-garde artists, in the more formal aspects of Cubism. Earlier emphasis on maintaining the two-dimensional integrity of the picture plane, accomplished through the depiction of objects without the use of illusionistic perspective and lighting, was at least temporarily superseded by a desire for art with clearly legible human content. It was at this time, for example, that Picasso began his series of classically-inspired figures. The French poet Blaise Cendrars articulated an emphatically contemporary interpretation of this new spirit in 1919, calling for an art in which the subject was man, "that is you and I, at work and play, with our everyday things, our enterprise..."¹

Léger's longstanding interest in cityscapes, mechanical forms, and labor made him a natural proponent of this newly evolved approach. In *Man with a*

Cane, Léger presents urban man as triumphant machine. Painted in the same textures as the architectonic background, the subject's face is an oval with equally geometric features, his neck has a corrugated texture, and his shoulders form the top of an oblong cylinder. A cane, the least mechanized of supports, is clutched and wielded like a gear. While the subject is at least partially concealed by shifting planes of color containing pieces of girders, transoms, and even elements of stilllife, this figurative ambiguity bespeaks energy and motion more than submission to environment. The arrangement allows Léger to present "city man" as an integral part of his environment, while establishing man's ultimate primacy by placing his oversized presence at the center of the composition.

MFS

1. Quoted in Christopher Green, *Léger and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven and London, 1976), p. 159.

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Fernand Léger

(French, 1881-1955)

《Animated Landscape》

1924

Lower right: F. Leger. 24; on reverse: Paysage Animé-24 F. Leger

Oil on canvas

19-1/2×25-5/8 inches (49.5×65.1cm)

Gift of Bernard Davis

1950-63-1

Animated Landscape was executed in 1924, after Léger's return to France from a trip to Italy with his dealer Léone Rosenberg, proprietor of the Paris gallery *L'effort moderne*. The painting shows Léger (probably the man on the left) and Rosenberg in the foreground on a balcony, overlooking a modern urban landscape. The boat-like form in the middleground on the right suggests that the setting is a harbor or waterfront neighborhood. The human figures, although simplified and schematized, are nevertheless sharply distinguished from the background and are rendered as massive, monumentally solid forms. The background is composed of rigidly geometric elements, but these elements are firmly modelled, and arranged to create a sense of perspectival space.

Animated Landscape represents a departure from Léger's earlier Cubist style. Such works as *La Ville* (1919, Philadelphia Museum of Art) are characterized by flattened architectural forms and a deliberate rejection of perspective. In such earlier works, the



Jean Metzinger

(French, 1883-1956)

«Tea Time (Woman with a Teaspoon)»

1911

Lower right: 1911/J. Metzinger

Oil on canvas-covered wood panel

29-7/8 × 27-5/8 inches (75.9 × 70.2cm)

The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

1950-134-A1-139

Concealed within the playful image of **Teatime** is Jean Metzinger's earnest search for truthful representation. Like other members of Cubism's first generation, Metzinger believed that a painting's surface should be accepted for what it is: a flat plane. As Metzinger stated, "Representing a ball on a flat surface seemed to defy common sense. Only a two-dimensional object can be depicted on a plane, without trickery."¹

Unlike the contemporary work of Picasso and Braque, in which the rigorous development of Cubist systems frequently left a painting's subject unrecognizable, Metzinger sought to present easily read forms while creating an art which went beyond the simple imitation of nature. What results is not a superficial incorporation of cubes and facets into an otherwise traditional composition, but rather an attempt to synthesize reality. Metzinger explained, "I tried to analyze the natural volumes into planes, which by their differences in lighting, dimensions, and placement would allow the viewer to reconstruct the original volumes mentally and to imagine within space the object I had looked at."²

In **Tea Time**, Metzinger presents a purely geometric figure whose volumetric solidity serves to distinguish her from an equally geometric setting. That the subject and background are rendered in the same monochromatic tones, yet are so clearly differentiated, points to Metzinger's skillful handling of painted planes. In his detailed observation of the nude figure, Metzinger draws analogies between what is man and what is man-made. A spoon, for example, echoes the shape of a breast.

Tea Time presents the lessons of Cubism in an accessible form. Employing the new art's mobile perspective, Metzinger shows us a tea cup viewed simultaneously from the side and top. The sitter's welcoming wink is actually the result of pairing two eyes, one viewed from the front, the other in profile. **Tea Time**, which records a flirtatious moment,

teaches us the value of a change in perspective.

MFS

1. Quoted in Joann Moser, **Jean Metzinger in Retrospect** (Iowa City, 1985), p. 43.
2. Ibid.