NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

Museum of Modern Art: Masterpieces

Twenty works from the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art, from Van Gogh and Picasso to Pollock, Warhol and Rauschenberg



The Museum of Modern Art, usually called MoMA, opened in New York in 1929, and its collection has done much to shape how modern art is shown and studied. The twenty works chosen here include Monet's Agapanthus, Van Gogh's The Starry Night and Rauschenberg's Bed, which is made from real bedding.

The selection also includes Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, Dalí's soft watches and Warhol's soup cans, which borrow the look of commercial printing. Rousseau, Matisse and Klee appear twice each, so you can compare an artist with himself. Mondrian, Pollock and Reinhardt each take abstraction in a different direction, and Boccioni and Sheeler arrive at very different pictures of building and industry.

Artline made this selection independently of the museum, drawing on documented holdings in MoMA's collection. A work being in the collection does not mean it is on view. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the linked records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/museum-modern-art-new-york

The selection · 20

1. The Starry Night
   Vincent van Gogh · Saint Rémy, June 1889
2. Les Demoiselles d'Avignon
   Pablo Picasso · Paris, June-July 1907
3. The Persistence of Memory
   Salvador Dalí · 1931
4. Broadway Boogie Woogie
   Piet Mondrian · 1942–43
5. The Sleeping Gypsy
   Henri Rousseau · 1897
6. The Dream
   Henri Rousseau · 1910
7. Campbell's Soup Cans
   Andy Warhol · 1962
8. One: Number 31, 1950
   Jackson Pollock · 1950
9. I and the Village
   Marc Chagall · 1911
10. The Song of Love
    Giorgio de Chirico · 1914
11. The City Rises
    Umberto Boccioni · 1910
12. Twittering Machine
    Paul Klee · 1922
13. Abstract Painting, Blue
    Ad Reinhardt · 1952
14. Dance (I)
    Henri Matisse · Paris, Boulevard des Invalides, early 1909
15. Actor's Mask
    Paul Klee · 1924
16. Agapanthus
    Claude Monet · 1914-26
17. Agony
    Arshile Gorky · 1947
18. American Landscape
    Charles Sheeler · 1930
19. Bather
    Henri Matisse · Cavalière, summer 1909
20. Bed
    Robert Rauschenberg · 1955

01 / 20

The Starry Night

Vincent van Gogh

Saint Rémy, June 1889 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Vincent van Gogh. The Starry Night. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Van Gogh painted this while staying at Saint-Rémy, and it is not a straightforward view: the scene combines what he observed with what he remembered and imagined. The village sits small beneath a sky of sweeping curves, bright stars and a glowing moon. In the foreground a cypress rises like a dark flame, a form on the ground that seems to share the sky's movement.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 472.1941

02 / 20

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon

Pablo Picasso

Paris, June-July 1907 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Pablo Picasso. The girls of Avignon. WikiArt source label: Public domain US. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/the-girls-of-avignon-1907 · Public domain US (WikiArt source label)

Five figures face outwards, but angular planes break across their bodies and the space around them, and they never settle into one continuous room. The faces show this most clearly. They are treated in markedly different ways, so no single method of representation holds for the whole group.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 333.1939

03 / 20

The Persistence of Memory

Salvador Dalí

1931 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Salvador Dalí. The Persistence of Memory. Image: WikiArt. Copyright protected (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Copyright protected (WikiArt label)

Dalí gives the soft watches precise edges and solid-looking surfaces. They are instantly recognisable as timepieces, though no clock that bends like this could keep time, and the exact handling is what makes the impossibility so hard to dismiss. The cliffs in the distance keep a firmer appearance.

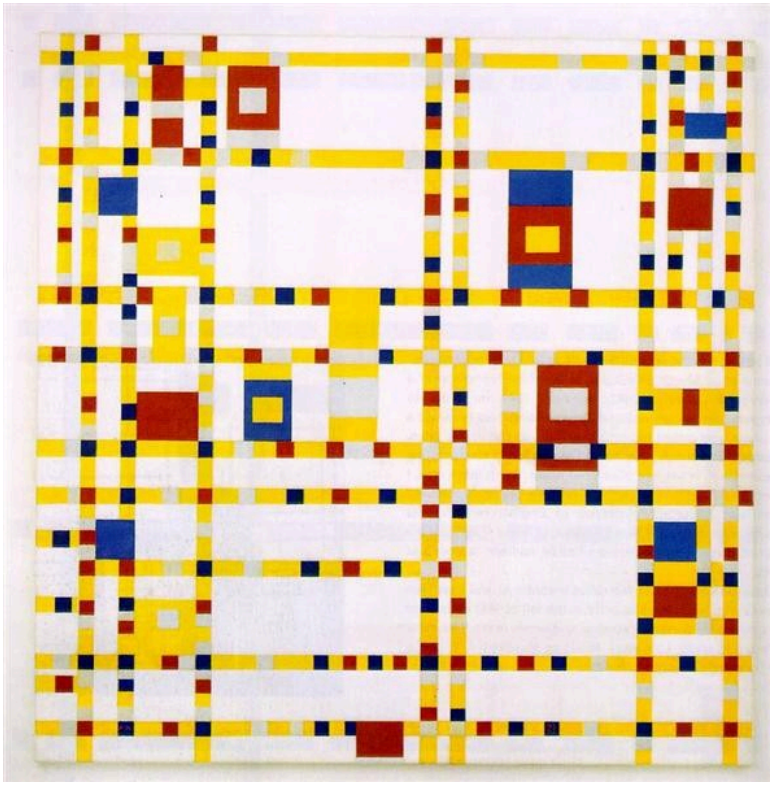
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 162.1934

04 / 20

Broadway Boogie Woogie

Piet Mondrian

1942–43 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Piet Mondrian. Broadway Boogie Woogie. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Small squares of colour break up the yellow lines of the grid, so the lines no longer act as continuous boundaries. Mondrian keeps to right angles, but the spacing of these interruptions gives the still surface a restless pulse. The title refers to a city and a musical rhythm. There is no street scene, and that stop-start pulse is perhaps as close as the painting comes to either.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 73.1943

05 / 20

The Sleeping Gypsy

Henri Rousseau

1897 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Henri Rousseau. The Sleeping Gypsy. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

In an open landscape, a lion leans towards a sleeping woman but does not attack. Her instrument and vessel lie beside her, sharply drawn. Rousseau stops at a moment when the animal's closeness could mean danger, curiosity or something the picture leaves unexplained.

The title is Rousseau's own historical wording for the sleeper. It does not make the painting an ethnographic record.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 646.1939

06 / 20

The Dream

Henri Rousseau

1910 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Henri Rousseau. The Dream. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A sofa stands among oversized leaves, animals and a musician. That single piece of indoor furniture is enough to show the jungle as an arranged, invented place, where nothing needs to work as real geography. As in The Sleeping Gypsy, each part is painted clearly, but the scene as a whole has no ordinary explanation.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 252.1954

07 / 20

Campbell's Soup Cans

Andy Warhol

1962 · Acrylic with metallic enamel paint on canvas, 32 panels · Museum of Modern Art



Andy Warhol. Campbell's Soup Cans. WikiArt source label: Andy Warhol Fair Use. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/andy-warhol/campbells-soup-cans-1962 · Andy Warhol Fair Use (WikiArt source label)

The canvases look as though they came off a press, but Warhol painted all thirty-two by hand. When they were first exhibited, they stood on shelves like groceries. Because the design repeats, what changes from one canvas to the next stands out: the variety of soup.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 476.1996.1-32

08 / 20

One: Number 31, 1950

Jackson Pollock

1950 · Enamel and oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



One: Number 31. WikiArt; Jackson Pollock. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Jackson Pollock

Pollock's loops and threads of enamel and oil paint spread across the broad canvas without gathering round a main figure, and every crossing, break and successive layer is left visible. There is no depicted object to look through to. The structure lies in how the marks relate to one another: where one line crosses or slips under another, and how the density shifts from one area to the next.

Object source · Open artwork

09 / 20

I and the Village

Marc Chagall

1911 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Marc Chagall. I and the Village. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A green-faced man and an animal look each other in the eye above small houses and figures. Chagall mixes scales freely, and circles and diagonals link areas that could not belong to one measured space. The exchange between the two large faces gives the picture an intimate centre. The village of the title is suggested around it, never laid out as a street plan or a panorama.

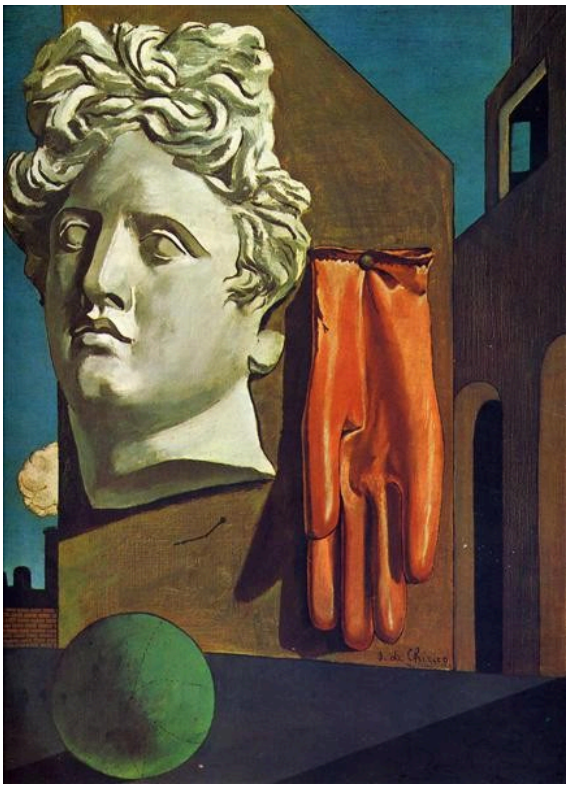
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 146.1945

10 / 20

The Song of Love

Giorgio de Chirico

1914 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Giorgio de Chirico; WikiArt; Public domain (WikiArt label). Source frame preserved; proportionally resized and JPEG compressed. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A classical head, a rubber glove and a green ball, each distinct and clearly painted, share a space whose perspective is easier to follow than its contents. Why these three things? De Chirico gives no practical reason for bringing them together. In the distance a train adds a more everyday kind of movement, but it throws no light on the foreground.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 950.1979

11 / 20

The City Rises

Umberto Boccioni

1910 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Umberto Boccioni. The City Rises. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The red horse strains, and its effort seems to spill into the brushstrokes around the workers and the building site. Boccioni blurs edges, so it is hard to separate a body in motion from the activity of the city around it, and no individual task is picked out. For a picture called The City Rises, there is no finished skyline. The rising is labour still under way.

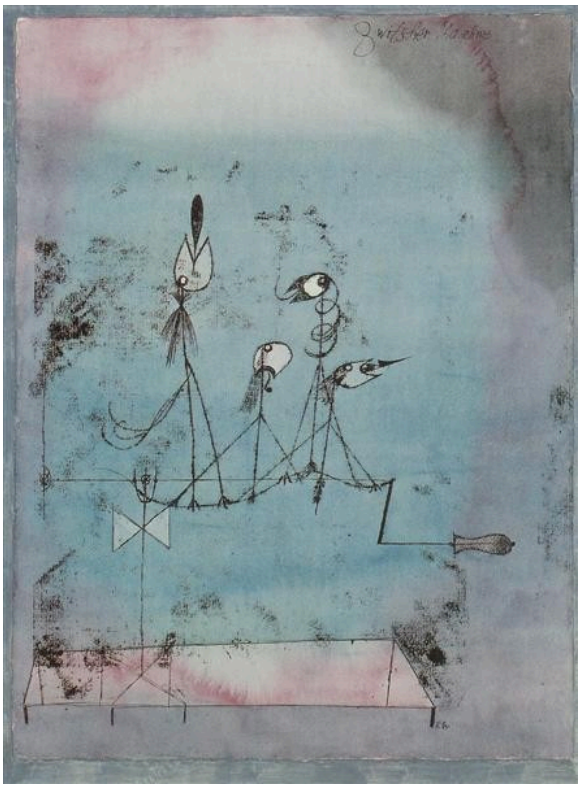
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 507.1951

12 / 20

Twittering Machine

Paul Klee

1922 · Museum of Modern Art



Paul Klee. Twittering Machine. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Klee's birdlike figures have thin, separate bodies, comic and fragile, yet all of them are attached to a single crank. That shared mechanism is the troubling part, since it suggests their sound or movement, the twittering of the title, could be operated from outside. A few connecting lines bring living creatures and mechanical control into one small structure that is half toy and half something more coercive.

Object source · Open artwork

13 / 20

Abstract Painting, Blue

Ad Reinhardt

1952 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Ad Reinhardt. Abstract Painting (Blue). Image: WikiArt. Copyright protected (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Copyright protected (WikiArt label)

At first the blue can look continuous. Gradually, subdued rectangles divide it into darker and greenish passages, none of them strongly outlined, and the search for a subject gives way to telling neighbouring colours apart. The values are so close that a reproduction may alter them considerably, so one that looks flat or simple is no reliable guide to the painting.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 427.1981

14 / 20

Dance (I)

Henri Matisse

Paris, Boulevard des Invalides, early 1909 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Henri Matisse. Dance (I). Image credit: Henri Matisse; Source credit: MoMA. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

At one point the reaching hands nearly fail to close the ring. Matisse keeps the setting spare, so the movement comes from that small gap and from the uneven spaces between the five bodies. The figures do not form a mechanically repeated pattern. Their hold on one another takes effort, and the circle looks as though it is being kept going.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 201.1963

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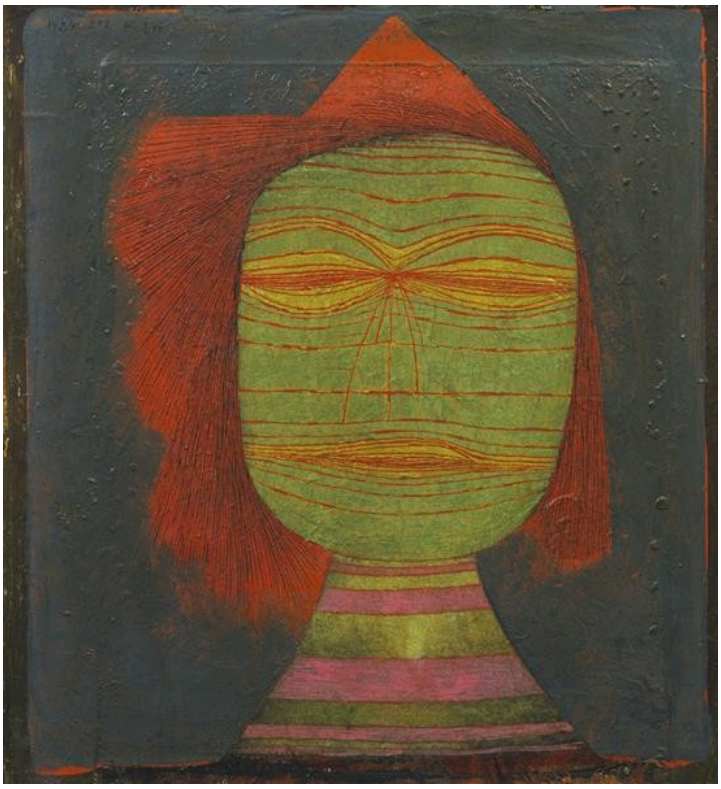
Actor's Mask

Paul Klee

1924 · Oil on canvas mounted on board · Museum of Modern Art



Paul Klee. Actor's Mask. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Thin divisions turn the green face into a constructed surface, more grid than flesh. The eyes and mouth are enough to make it read as a face, though they never settle into an easy expression. Chagall's green-faced man, elsewhere in this selection, is caught up in an exchange of looks. Klee's image sits between a face to be read and a mask to be worn. The title refers to performance but supplies no character or story.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 616.1967

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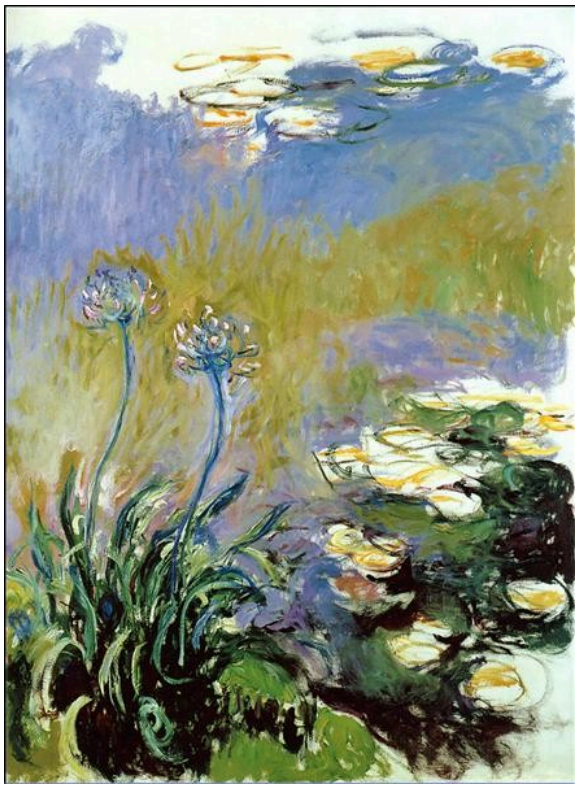
Agapanthus

Claude Monet

1914-26 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Claude Monet. Agapanthus. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Monet paints the nearby flowers and the reflected growth with the same long, overlapping marks. Clear outlines do not consistently separate plant, water and distance, so you have to make out the scene from changes in the brushwork, not leaf by leaf. The garden reads less as a place laid out in depth than as a dense field of colour close to the surface.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 527.1992

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Agony

Arshile Gorky

1947 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Arshile Gorky. Agony. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Red and black shapes gather unevenly against a brownish ground. Gorky's thin contours come close to describing bodies and fragments without quite fixing them, and the forms stay open to other readings. The title suggests pain, though the painting illustrates no particular event.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 88.1950

18 / 20

American Landscape

Charles Sheeler

1930 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Charles Sheeler. American Landscape. Image: WikiArt. Copyright protected (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Copyright protected (WikiArt label)

Still water and sharply placed buildings give Sheeler's factory complex an unusual composure, and a small boat gives a sense of scale against the industrial forms. Set against Boccioni's The City Rises, this picture shows a place of work without showing the work. Boccioni's construction scene is full of physical strain. Sheeler keeps the effort of running the plant out of view, and the machinery sits settled in a carefully spaced landscape.

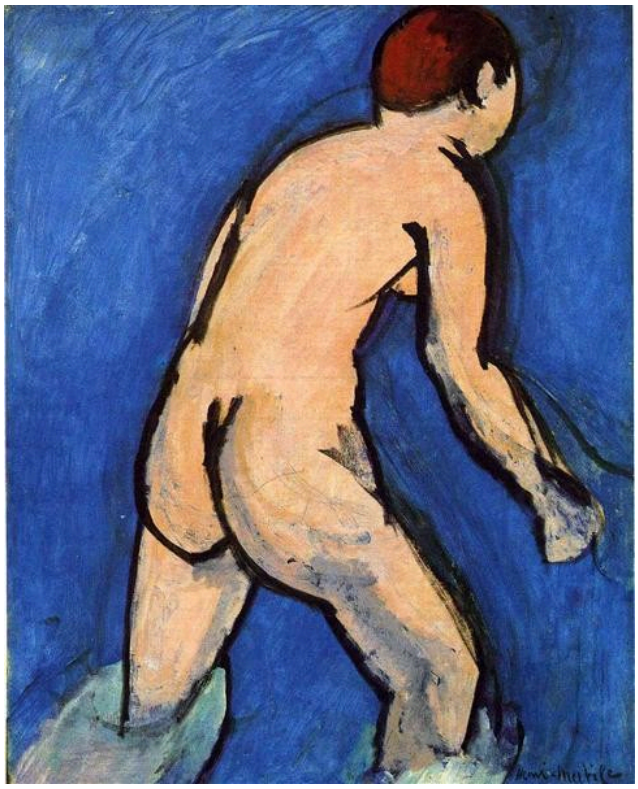
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 166.1934

19 / 20

Bather

Henri Matisse

Cavalière, summer 1909 · Oil on canvas · Museum of Modern Art



Henri Matisse. Bather. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Painted at Cavalière a few months after Dance (I), the Bather cuts descriptive detail just as sharply, yet the body stays physically present. The turned back and large limbs carry real weight with little anatomical shading. Firm contours and broad areas of blue and green do most of that work.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 17.1936

20 / 20

Bed

Robert Rauschenberg

1955 · Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports · Museum of Modern Art



Robert Rauschenberg. Bed. Image: WikiArt. Copyright protected (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Copyright protected (WikiArt label)

The pillow, sheet and quilt are real bedding. Rauschenberg marked them with oil paint and pencil and set them upright on wooden supports. They remain recognisably household things, but stood on end they can no longer be used, and they take on the upright format of a painting. The work sits uneasily between furnishing and painting.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 79.1989

Telling the methods apart

Several of these works do something odd to ordinary things, and the differences between them are worth keeping straight. Warhol repeats an image of an object, while Rauschenberg uses the object itself. Dalí changes how things behave physically, bending watches that ought to be rigid. De Chirico leaves his head, glove and ball intact and changes only the company they keep, much as Rousseau does when he puts a sofa in a jungle.

Further reading

Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective

Edited by William Rubin · Digitized catalogue under Publications · English

This digitised catalogue of MoMA's Picasso retrospective, edited by William Rubin, places Les Demoiselles d'Avignon among studies and later works. Seen alongside them, the painting's departures from conventional figure drawing are easier to follow. It records a single-artist exhibition, so here it helps only with Picasso.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
