

An abstract cubist painting by María Blanchard. The composition is dominated by dark, angular shapes in black, brown, and grey, set against a background of lighter, textured areas in beige and off-white. The brushwork is visible, giving the painting a tactile quality. There are several clusters of small, light-colored dots scattered across the dark areas, particularly in the upper right and lower right. The overall effect is one of complex, layered geometric forms.

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María Blanchard
Cubist Composition, 1917-1918

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MARÍA BLANCHARD

(Santander 1881 - 1932 Paris)

CUBIST COMPOSITION, 1917-1918

oil on canvas

46 x 27 cm.; 18 1/8 x 10 5/8 in.

Provenance

Jean Grimar, by 1937;
Ladislav Szecsi, probably acquired c. 1937-38;
Galería Biosca, Madrid, 1976;
possibly Galería Laietana, Barcelona, 1976;
Galería Uniarte, Barcelona, by 1978;
private collection, Barcelona.

Literature

María Blanchard, exh. cat., Galería Biosca, Madrid, 1976, no. 13, p. 51.
María José Salazar, *María Blanchard: catálogo razonado, pintura 1889-1932*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Telefónica, 2004 (illustrated in the online edition).

Exhibition History

Paris, Petit Palais, *Les maîtres de l'Art indépendant 1895-1937*, 18 June – 14 November 1937.
Stockholm, Galerie Färg och Form, *Spansk nutidskonst* (Contemporary Spanish Art), 22 May – 30 June 1937.
New York, Julien Levy Gallery, 1938.
Hartford, Connecticut, Wadsworth Atheneum, 1939.
Northampton, Massachusetts, Smith College Museum of Art, date unknown.
Madrid, Galería Biosca, *María Blanchard*, October 1976, no. 13.
Santander, Fundación Botín, *María Blanchard. Cubista*, 23 June – 16 September 2012.

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In *Cubist Composition* María Blanchard reduces the still life - traditionally the privileged arena for demonstrations of painterly skill - to a construction of interlocking planes, blocks of colour and fractured contours. The pictorial space is organised without recourse to a single vanishing point: objects are conceived from shifting viewpoints and translated into a syntax of flat, planar surfaces whose overlaps and interruptions privilege structure over optical description. The result is a deliberately destabilised image where volume is signalled through abrupt tonal juxtapositions and angled passages rather than through modelling, and in which the legibility of the motif is held in tension with the painting's insistence on the canvas as a fundamentally two-dimensional support.

By 1915, shortly after her move from Madrid to Paris, Blanchard had been introduced to Juan Gris through Jacques Lipchitz. Gris, at that moment, was sharing a studio space Pablo Picasso at the Bateau-Lavoir, as the language of Cubism continued to be tested and refined. Blanchard's rapid assimilation of this radical aesthetic is evident here. Yet the present painting also belongs to a notably restricted phase within her career. Only a small number of works can be assigned to her Cubist production: her characteristically slow working method, together with her turn back towards a figurative idiom around 1920, renders such paintings uncommon within her oeuvre (see for example her c. 1919 *Saxophonist*, recently acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts, fig. 1).

The conditions of Blanchard's professional life in these years were shaped in no small part by the dealer Léonce Rosenberg, who acquired almost the entirety of her production. Blanchard herself recalled the arrangement with characteristic frankness:

"He either gave me monthly arrears or bought my paintings in advance, i.e. virtually the totality of my production. Don't forget that I worked slowly. The American buyers, such as Gertrude Stein and her brother, or Germans like Wilhelm Uhde, Russians with Tchoukine, and the often-omitted Zborowski, Modigliani and Soutine's dealer, or again the Swiss Herman Ruff, did not visit my studio, which my painter friends were cautious not to tell him [Rosenburg], i.e. Gris, Rivera, Picasso and even Lhote".¹

The present work is one of two variants of this composition, a practice Blanchard adopted on several occasions. Of the seventy-five Cubist works recorded in the catalogue raisonné, there are six instances in which she produced two versions of a composition and one instance of three. The alternate variant of the present painting is published as no. 48 (pp. 130–131) in Salazar' 2004 catalogue raisonné.

¹ M. Blanchard quoted in L. Caffin Madaule, *Catalogue raisonné des oeuvres de María Blanchard*, London 1992, p. 49.

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Blanchard's kyphoscoliosis, which left her with an abnormally curved spine, has often been cited as a formative element of her personality, perhaps contributing to her more limited social presence within the Parisian avant-garde. The present painting nevertheless confirms the distinctiveness of her contribution to Cubism. In particular, the interplay between earthy tonalities and sharper, more abrupt chromatic accents asserts a highly individual inflection of Cubist theory, grounded in a rigorous painterly intelligence.

The painting appears to have enjoyed a distinguished history from an early date, and may be identified with the *Nature morte cubiste* lent by Jean Grimar, an important supporter of Blanchard, to the Petit Palais exhibition of 1937. It subsequently entered the collection of Ladislav Szecsi, whose activities as a dealer and collector provide a compelling context for its transatlantic history. Established in New York by 1939, Szecsi was offering a collection of some 175 modern French paintings, while correspondence from 1942 confirms his continued collecting activities during the war. Although the precise dates of his ownership remain to be established, these documents offer promising avenues for further research. The painting resurfaced at Galería Biosca, Madrid, in 1976, and was with Galería Uniarte, Barcelona, by 1978, subsequently entering a private collection in the city.

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Fig. 1. María Blanchard, *The Saxophonist*, c. 1919, oil on canvas.
Detroit Institute of Arts.

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