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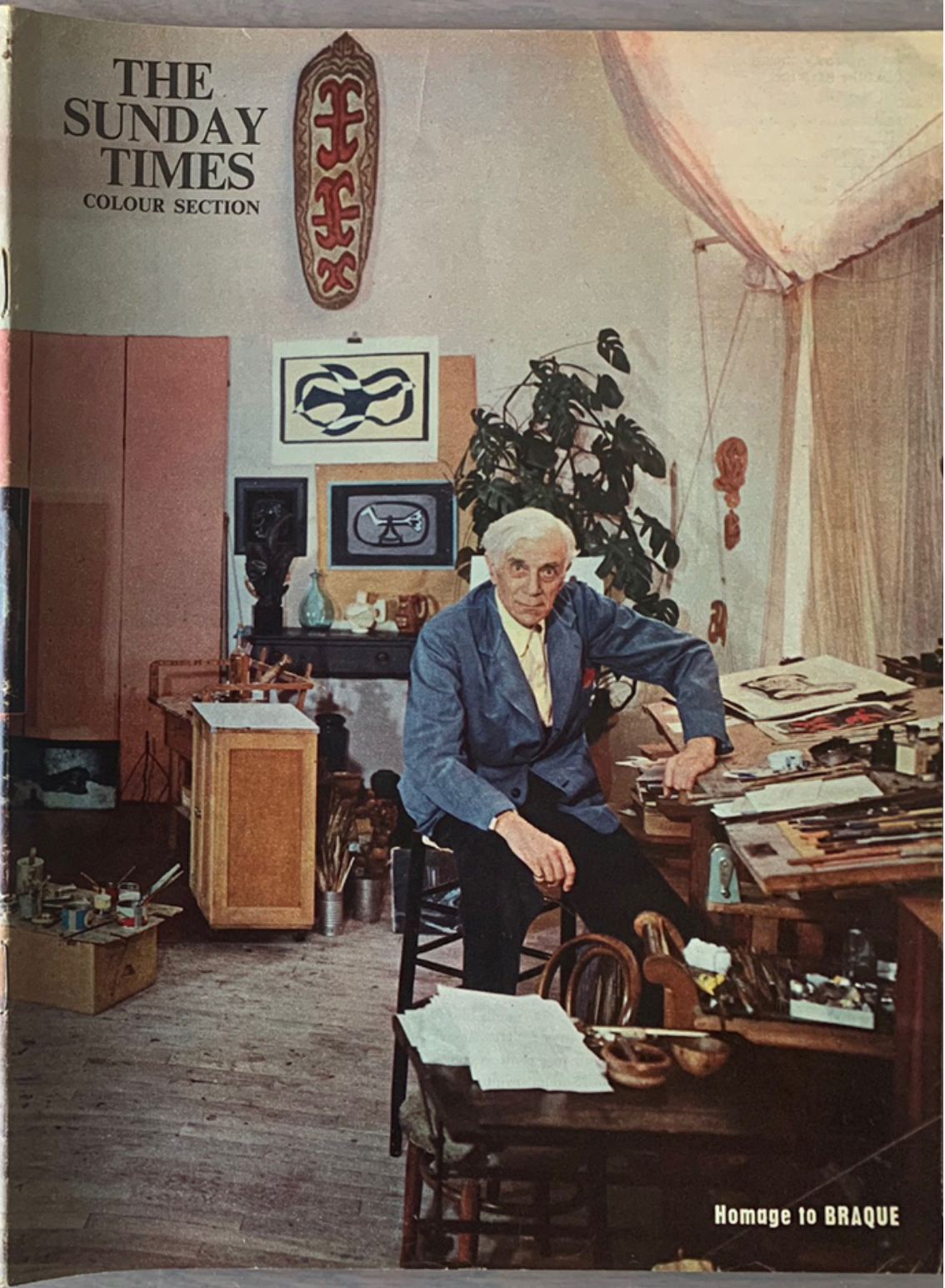

Homage to BRAQUE

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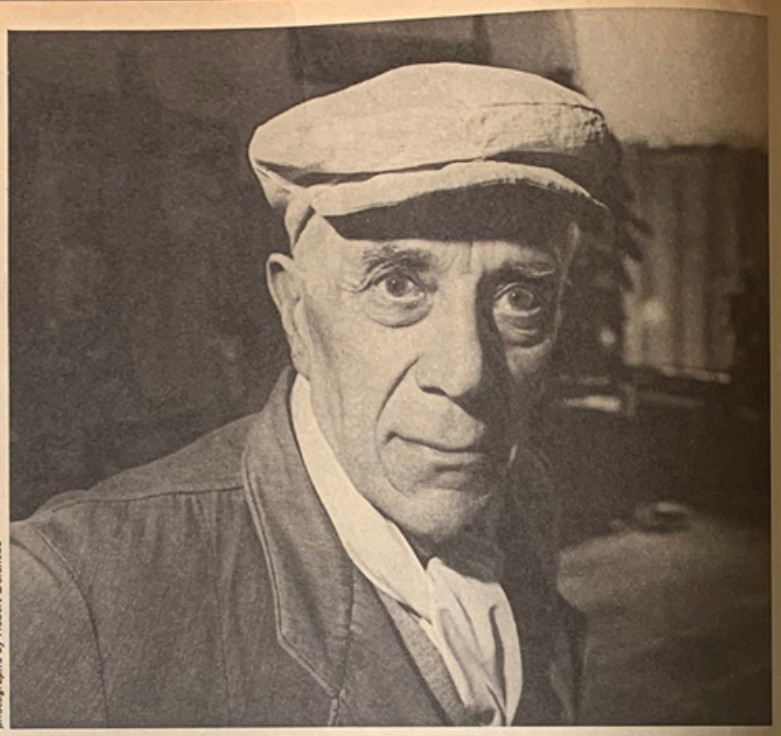
The Cover: Braque in his Paris studio: photograph by Robert Doisneau.



photographs by Robert Doisneau

Today is the 80th birthday of Georges Braque, perhaps the last of the Frenchmen who took European art in hand in the 1860s. Better than anyone now living, he personifies the creative genius of France. One by one, the painters on whom French prestige has depended—Bonnard, Matisse, Léger, Rouault—have been lost to her. Braque is the great survivor: and one who, so far from coasting quietly home, has consistently broken new ground at an age when most dream only of retirement

BRAQUE AT 80:

HIS SPIRIT, HIS GENIUS

by John Russell

From infancy, one might say, Braque was predestined to art. His father and grandfather were house-painters and decorators by profession, Sunday painters by choice. He grew up at Argenteuil, where Manet, Monet and Renoir had summered in the 1870s, and at Le Havre, where he had Boudin and Corot for examples and Raoul Dufy, five years his senior, as a boyhood friend. From his apprenticeship to his father's profession, he learned not only a command of textures subtler and more various than those taught in art schools, but the perseverance and slow development which have proved invaluable to his career.

In outward terms, Braque's life has been one of the least eventful in the whole history of art. A slow-burning, secret, unprecocious boy, he was a conscientious student whom his friends remembered above all for his colossal strength, his skill and energy on the dance-

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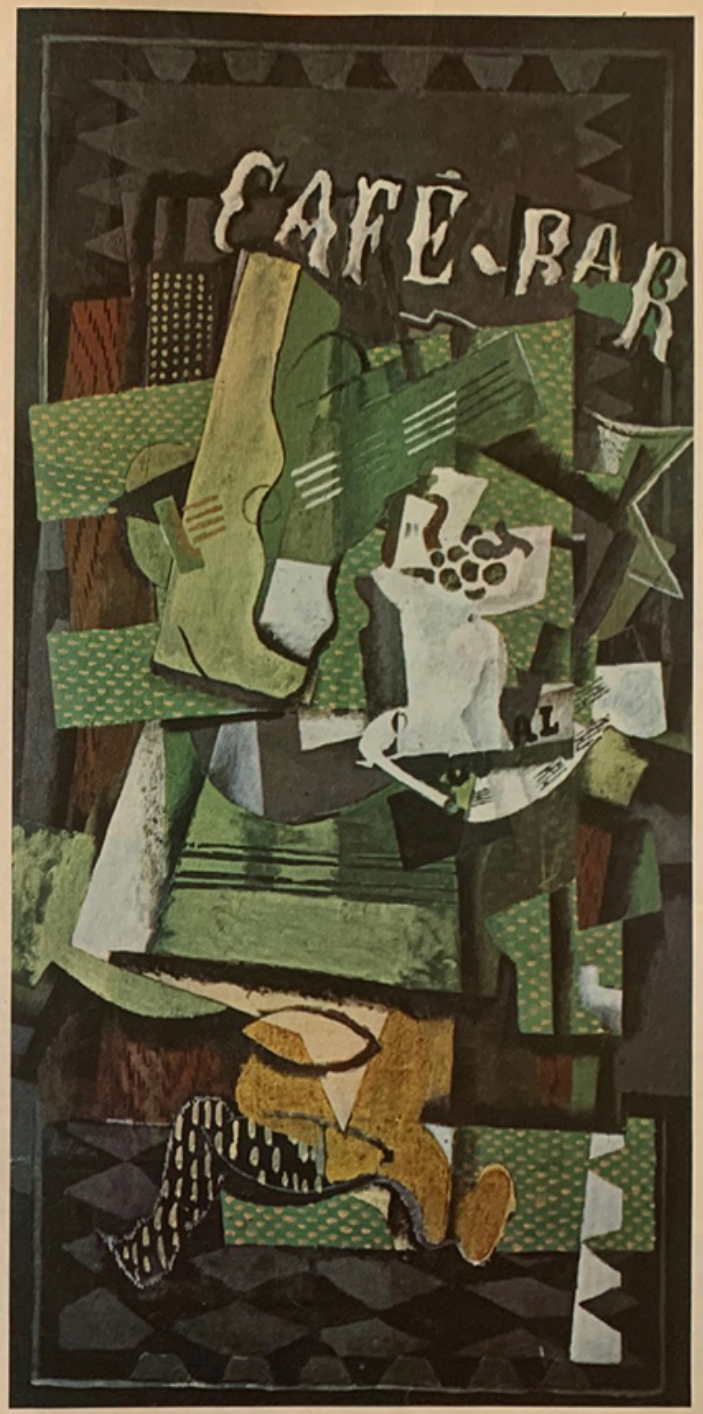

Café-Bar (1919)
now in the Kunstmuseum, Basle

In this seminal painting, Braque applied the methods of 'synthetic' or 'late' cubism to subject-matter derived directly from popular life. The overlapping planes defy conventional perspective and put us within touching distance of the basic elements of French café-life: the guitar, the sheet-music, the pipe, the fruit in its dish, the diamond-patterned floor, the folded newspaper, the window-pane with its sprawly, outmoded lettering, the sharp-toothed decorative surround of doorway and window, the dado, the speckled wallpaper, and the unpainted, rough-grained wood. The lettering suggests that we are looking in on the scene from the street; but in reality we are neither inside nor out, but literally 'in touch' with the scene in all its aspects. In its detail the picture harks back to pre-1914; but in the majesty of its proportions, in the fullness and richness of the colour, and in its ambiguous and equivocal exploration of space, *Café-Bar* also foreshadows the symphonic interiors of 1939-1955. It is one of the key pictures in Braque's career.

'He signs no open letters, sits on no committees, disdains to pester the public with views on current events'

BRAQUE—*continued*

floor, and his unexpected gift for the concertina. At 23, no one would have called him a man of great promise: but then he saw just the pictures, met just the people, and found just the private inspirations which were to lead him to the point at which his pictures can hang beside those of Chardin, Corot, and Cézanne and not collapse at the comparison.

Unlike Monet, van Gogh, Pissarro and other heroes of 'old modern art,' Braque has never lacked for appreciation. He sold from the start. He has always enjoyed the approval of that diminutive élite which makes and unmakes reputations. It is difficult to find a hostile account of his work which is worth reading through to the end. All practical anxieties were taken off his hands when, in 1908, he was put under contract for his entire output by this century's most inspired art dealer, D.-H. Kahnweiler. He has been happily married for 50 years to the same woman. For the time-wasting pomposities of conventional 'success' he cares nothing whatever. No man alive has been more ruthless in cutting the nonsense out of life: and life has rewarded him.

Braque with his Portuguese oysters accomplishes the kind of miracle in paint that is explicit and complete with next to nothing . . . He is occupied with quality, and finds salvation in a delicate and exquisite economy of means. Such learned execution confers a magical interest on whatever he touches.

WALTER SICKERT, 1932

Anyone who thinks that art is a matter of lolling back and waiting for inspiration should investigate the lives of the great masters of modern art. Like them all, Braque is a gigantic worker: when we look at the 'Atelier' series, completed in his seventies in the face of constant ill-health, we remember that Monet could not be dragged from the easel even when he was three-quarters blind, that Cézanne went on working till he as good as dropped dead in the road, and that Matisse in old age tested his hand and eye at the local rifle-range after an operation which would have confined most of us to an armchair for ever. That is the kind of effort which Braque has maintained ever since he received, on the Western Front in 1915, the head wound which temporarily blinded him and destroyed for ever the marvellous physical equilibrium of his earlier years.

Braque is a modern painter in the sense that his pictures of 50 years ago can still exasperate those who demand primarily that art should sanctify their own habits of seeing. But his work has also certain qualities which can be called timelessly French. People who are lucky enough to possess his major works rarely or never wish to get rid of them. They are never in or out of fashion. There are no infectious extremes in Braque's work, no 'impressive' attitudes, no attempts to bludgeon or cajole. Intelligence is their great stabiliser, and we feel instinctively that the man who made them knows what can be done with a given subject, and what can't.

In all this, Braque has kept alive a certain idea of France. It is an idea that reappears wherever French people have brought dignity and a natural sense of style to aspects of life which elsewhere seem repetitive or insipid or pretentious. We see it in the look of the fish- and vegetable-stalls in any large market-town, in the peach-and-lavender brickwork of the Ile de France, in the arrowy statement and counter-statement of French argument, in the microcosmography of Couperin's keyboard-music, in the slate-grey steeples and enamel clock-faces of a thousand country churches, in the unblended local wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux, and in the masterpieces of French provincial cuisine. In Braque's pictures, if we know how to look at them, there is something of all of these, so discreetly and so multifariously do those pictures add to the experience of life.

Braque is, in short, both a revolutionary and a supreme conservative. No one could have a five-minute conversation with him and not realise that a man can be at once a great master of modern art and an inspired preserver of attitudes elsewhere now in decline. Braque rarely comments on the topics of the day but, when he does bring them under review, it is their effect upon the individual that most exercises him. For him, in life as much as in his pictures, man is the measure of all things and no 'advance' is worthwhile that denies that measurement.

To anyone who believes this, no rule need go unquestioned. These were the terms on which Braque got to grips, 55 years ago, with the problem of how he, Braque, was to paint pictures that would be his and no one else's. Till he was well on into his twenties he was primarily a landscape-painter, and it was in terms of landscape that he fought his way through to one of the decisive steps in the history of European painting: the abandonment in 1908 of traditional perspective. This perspective had always been thought of as more 'real'; it was felt that a picture should have a single viewpoint and lead the eye backwards, step by step, by means of a geometrical apparatus, towards a specific horizon. This convention Braque described not long ago as "an appalling mistake, which it has taken four centuries to put right." He amplified this: "Scientific perspective is simply a bad trick which makes it impossible for an artist to convey a full experience of space, since it forces the objects in a picture to recede from the beholder, whereas they should come forward within his reach."

Braque paints like an angel. His sole preoccupation is with the completely new and the completely truthful. He works without ceasing, and each one of his pictures commemorates an effort which no one before him had ever attempted.

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE (preface to Braque's first exhibition, 1908)

The paradox here is that the pictures which are least 'real,' in terms of everyday vision, are precisely those in which Braque got closest to his own notion of reality. From 1908 until he was called to the army in 1914, he chastised the effaced pinks and discreet violets which had been the note of his early landscapes, confining himself at first to greens burnt almost brown by the sun and later to battleship-grey and anonymous browns. Colour as van Gogh and Gauguin had understood it (as the instrument, that is to say, of heightened emotion) was quite excluded: Braque wanted nothing to distract him, or us, from the struggle to bring all the elements in the picture as close as possible to the observer and to suggest that we could, if we liked, put our hands round the trees in the foreground and touch the hills beyond them: all this, however, without losing the sense of trees and hills as distinct and massive happenings in space.

Orthodox tools for the job: yet 50 years ago Braque mixed sand, ashes, sawdust, tobacco with his paints

These first cubist landscapes had identifiable subjects from La Roche-Guyon, near Paris, or L'Estaque, near Marseilles. But after 1909 he began to concentrate on still life, in which he aimed to show more of objects than the eye could see at any one time. This he did in the *Violin and Jug*, for instance, by turning, hingeing, and facetting the violin and jug in such a way that the picture was both a composite portrait of them and in its own right an independent, articulated object.

This was the period of Braque's partnership with Picasso, one of the most famous in the history of art. Like many fruitful partnerships, it was made up of opposites. Picasso's mercurial virtuosity, his natural dynamism, his demonic attack on the spectator's nerves, and his readiness to try anything and see where it led him were the antithesis of the measured and tender procedures of Braque. Yet the alliance worked perfectly. "It was as if," Braque said later, "we were two climbers roped together;" and one witness of the period, the poet Pierre Reverdy, said of the two painters in the year 1911 that "the future was quite empty, the present exceptionally complex and precarious. I remember the heroic and unsparing discussions and the paintings, grey, crowded, ferociously hermetic, in which the two brave, powerful and almost wholly unknown young men slaked their enormous appetite for reality."

This corner of the studio commemorates three of the great enthusiasms in Braque's youth: primitive art, the guitar and van Gogh (the reproduction on the wall). The sculptures of the fishes are by Braque himself

Now that even a minor painting of this period will fetch £32,000 at an auction (Sotheby's, last year) it is difficult to imagine the intense moral solitude in which Braque and Picasso produced these pictures. There was nothing visionary, mystical or symbolical about Braque's activity, then or at any other time: on the contrary, he made a point of using the simplest and humblest of subjects. Cubism was never an art of 'great thoughts' or the traditional sublime: the achievement of Braque and Picasso was to make great art out of the debris of everyday life. In the last year or two, band-wagoning beginners have caught on to the idea that that same debris has its possibilities: hardly one of them remembers that more than 50 years ago Braque was mixing tobacco, sand, ashes, sawdust and iron filings with his paints and producing pictures that now seem to us to have acquired a timeless, classical beauty.

Anyone writing on Braque should bring out how forcefully he uses the tactile space discovered by Cézanne, how skilfully he extracts from the familiar middle-colours of the spectrum their most sumptuous harmonies, and how the physical substance of his paintings seems to be as rich and dense as any fruit known to us.

JEAN GRENIER, 1948

Ironists have noted with relish that whereas Picasso, who never saw a shot fired in anger, has busied himself with tendentious 'peace' propaganda, Braque, who had a hero's war in 1914-18, and might well have died of his wounds, has never referred even indirectly to public events. In private, his views are strongly held and may on occasion be expressed with a vigour disconcerting to those who expect to find him lost in seraphic meditation: but as far as public life is concerned he signs no open letters, sits on no committees,

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has never been the trustee of a museum and would disdain to pester the public with his views on current events. There is no mistaking the physical sympathy with which, in his seventies, he portrayed Ajax in the act of driving his adversaries clean out of the picture; but for many years now the strength that remains to him has been given entirely to his work.

Braque has two studios: one in Paris, in a tall, secluded villa near the southern perimeter of the city, and the other near Dieppe. Suspicious as always of extremes, he prefers a south light, veiled and hooded. A man of lifelong loyalties, he tends to keep things for ever: specimens of primitive art, picked up at a time when this was still a revelation, souvenirs of his admiration for Corot and van Gogh, indestructible studio properties made with his own hands, posters and postcards and books by his friends, and even for a time the case of Scotch whisky that he was sent by the President of the Royal Scottish Academy on the occasion of his great exhibition in Edinburgh in 1956. For a long time he has had the ideal studio assistant in Mademoiselle Mariette Lachaud, some of whose photographs are reproduced on Pages 10 and 11, and today he budges as little as he can from his studios. Such sociabilities as he allows himself begin at five and stop, as often as not, towards seven: for Braque is constant in friendship, even if time has robbed him of many of the companions of the heroic era.

Pascal said, more or less, that all human evils spring from our inability to stay still in one room. Well, Braque has done just that for more than half a century; and when we remember the frailties from which even the major artists of our day have not always been exempt—the bigotry in religion, the egregious political blunders, and the craving for publicity, no matter how inane—there is something peculiarly moving in Braque's adherence, in this as in all else, to the classic virtues of France. So little does he care to leave his studio that even in 1940, when most artists were only too glad to get away, he came back to Paris and stayed there throughout the Occupation. Much that has gone on there can only be guessed at, and even Braque himself cannot describe it. As he said of his collaboration with Picasso from 1909 to 1914: "The things that Picasso and I said to one another during those years will never be said again. Nobody could say them, and even if they were said nobody could understand them . . . All that will end with us."

Real life begins, for Braque, when the talking stops and he turns back to the brush. For it is then that the mysterious indispensable changes begin. "A man's got to live," he said to me a month or two ago, "and living, for me, means changing a little every day." It is for this reason that we owe to him not merely pictures as beautiful as any ever painted by a Frenchman, but, in addition, the lesson that a human life can also be, in its way, a work of art.

'A man of lifelong loyalties, he tends to keep things for ever . . . souvenirs of his admiration for Corot (reproductions on the door) *. . . and even for a time the case of Scotch whisky that he was sent by the President of the Royal Scottish Academy on the occasion of his great exhibition in Edinburgh in 1956'*

BRAQUE: the key dates

1882	Born May 13 at Argenteuil-sur-Seine, the only son of a painter-decorator.
1890	Family moves to Le Havre.
1899-1901	Trains as painter-decorator in Le Havre and Paris.
1901-2	Military service.
1902-4	Decides to become an artist, working eventually on his own in Montmartre. Studies in the Louvre, the Luxembourg Museum, and in the dealers' galleries.
1907	A crucial year: shows (and sells) six pictures at Salon des Indépendants: signs contract with D-H. Kahnweiler: meets Picasso through the poet Apollinaire, and is one of the first to see Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon.*
1908	Influence of Cézanne prompts Braque's first cubist landscapes. One-man show at Kahnweiler's gallery.
1912	Marries Marcelle Lapré. Represented in second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London. Takes a summer house at Sorgues, near Avignon.
1915	May 11: head-wound at Carency, temporarily blinded, trepanned.
1917	Resumes painting in summer at Sorgues.
1923	Diaghilev commissions décor for *Les Fâcheux.*
1924	Auguste Perret builds for him the house in Paris where he has since lived.
1931	Builds summer house at Varengeville, near Dieppe.
1933	First important retrospective exhibition, Basle.
1934	First one-man exhibition in London.
1937	First Prize at Carnegie International, Pittsburg.
1940	Returns to Paris in autumn, after brief stay in unoccupied zone, and remains there for the rest of the war.
1945	Serious illness, stops painting.
1946	Recent work shown at re-opening of the Tate Gallery.
1948	First Prize at Venice Biennale.
1956	Monumental retrospective exhibition in Edinburgh and at the Tate Gallery: honorary doctorate at Oxford.
1961-2	One-man show in the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Braque's different periods

Violin and Jug (1910)

from the Kunstmuseum, Basle

In life, the violin and jug would have stood squarely on the table. But in Braque's picture, space is tipped up and forward and everything in it—violin, jug, table, dado, angled wall, nail on that wall—is brought within touching distance. Front, back and sides are revealed to us simultaneously, and what in life would move sedately away from us comes alive in an elaborate system of hinges and flaps and diamond-edged facets that is nearer to El Greco's *View of Toledo* than to the sobrieties of conventional still-life. Only the nail relates to everyday vision: partly in irony, perhaps, partly to show that old habits of seeing can be combined with the new, partly as a visual pun, to suggest that the picture is itself hung on that nail.

The Musician (1917-18)

from the Kunstmuseum, Basle

This is the last of Braque's major works in pure 'synthetic cubist' style. Instead of analysing the subject in terms of fragmented visual experience, the artist tackles the problem from, as it were, the farther side, and builds up towards a full experience of the subject by the use of long, thin, flat, overlapping planes. This contrasts vividly with the tumultuous faceting of analytical cubism and in this case produces an elongated, hieratic effect. Like most of Braque's seated-figure cubist pictures, this derives ultimately from the seated figures of Corot, two of which Braque has long had pinned up in reproduction in his studio. After the almost anonymous colouring of the analytical pictures, *The Musician* marks the return of Braque's stately and original colour-sense and the use, in the hands, shoes and face, of brief signposts to everyday vision.

The Round Table (1928-29)

from the Duncan Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

The pipe, the fruit, the guitar, the sheet-music, the bottle and the knife are classic Braque subjects; and the motif of music is even carried over into the scroll-device of the dado, which recalls the violins of nearly 20 years earlier. But the note, here, is one of majesty: the pedestal has the dignity of Romanesque arching, there is no fidgeting with ornamentation, and the rectangular panelling has its answer in the multiple viewpoint that turns the ceiling into an agglomeration of dipping and overlapping planes. Braque painted many more ingratiating pictures on this theme in the 1920s: but none quite so memorable for its royal command of subject-matter which has recurred again and again in European art from the 17th century onwards.

Interior: The Grey Table (1942)

from an American private collection

The Billiard-Table (1945)

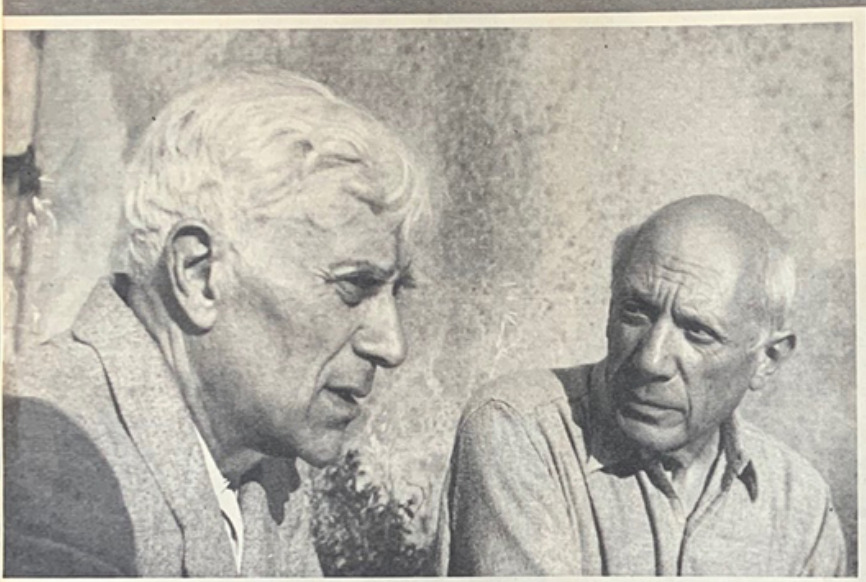
from the Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Paris

Interior: The Grey Table **(top)** is one of the largest of Braque's war-time pictures, and it anticipates certain features of the post-war 'Atelier' series: above all, the notion that the observer can move forward through the canvas, through the easel (here represented by the two strange horn-like shapes in the 'foreground') and into the shallow space of the room itself. It is an early and plain statement of the themes that were later to grow ever more complex and ambiguous.

The Billiard-Table **(above)**: here the table is tipped at a steep angle to the floor and hinged in space, while the whole composition folds around a vertical line to the right of centre. The wraith of the painter's easel recalls the *Interior: The Grey Table*, but the exhaustion of 1945 is evoked by the sad, spiky still-life of flowers, the troubled weather behind the lattice-window, the undecorated walls and the wooden moulding whose natural ugliness Braque would, a generation earlier, have turned to beauty. Braque, in fact, made more than one billiard-subject at this period.

Braque from a private album

Braque has had for many years the ideal secretary-cum-studio assistant, Mademoiselle Mariette Lachaud. The pictures on these two pages are from her private album and have been chosen for THE SUNDAY TIMES with the co-operation and approval of the artist himself



Mariette Lachaud was one of the few people to be present when, not far short of 50 years after the great period of their collaboration, Braque and Picasso (above) met to talk over old times in the South of France. Their meetings have been few in more recent years but, when Braque was convalescing after a serious illness shortly after the war, Picasso made a special journey to Normandy to see him.

Cubist portraits are not 'like' in any conventional sense but this portrait of Braque by Picasso (right), which dates from 1909, reflects better than any more straightforward portrait the extraordinary force of body and mind alike which made it possible for Braque to join Picasso in the great break-through of 20th-century art

Looking like a typical French workman, a cloth-capped Braque (above) relaxes with a quiet cigarette in a café. Despite constant ill-health, Braque still puts in a full day's work in his studio (right). The pictures are sometimes revised for ten years before Braque allows them to leave him

Braque has a great affection for the countryside around Varengeville and, many years after he was photographed (left) on a local farmer's plough, the plough re-appeared (below) as the subject of one of his most sumptuous landscapes

These pieces of furniture in an uncluttered corner of the studio (left) were designed by Braque himself

Braque's latest work

The Bird and Its Nest (1957-58)

from the artist's collection

Braque's delight in birds was further enhanced by a visit he paid to the Camargue in 1955, when (according to a friend, John Richardson) "flamingoes, egrets and other birds" were on the wing under a heavy sky. But such pictures as this derive as much from private obsession as from the pleasures of an occasional ornithologist. The paint, here has a rich, rough, crusty appearance: seeming to be modelled as much as brushed on, it represents a late and subtle refinement of Braque's life-long determination to bring his pictures 'within touch' as well as 'within sight' of the observer.

The Grey Bird (1954)

from the artist's collection

This is one of the many recent pictures which Braque likes to keep by him in his Paris studio, an ever-changing amphitheatre of work completed or still in progress: some may be on the ground, some on easels, some on the wall, and some within reach of a further session with the brush.

Stamp

Many a letter to England has borne, this last winter, the 50-centime stamp in which the French postal authorities have combined the idea of flight with a discreet homage to a great painter and the preferred image of his eighth decade.

Studio VIII (1954-55)

from the collection of Douglas Cooper

Braque has said of this monumental canvas that he tried to put into it the discoveries of a lifetime. Essentially it is a portrait of his own studio, with pictures finished and unfinished, chair, easel, stool, palette, brushes and meaningful odds and ends arranged much as they are in the photograph on the cover of this issue. Only the big white bird, in detaching itself from the red canvas on the right, introduces an element of the extraordinary: but then that bird has been for years, in Braque's imagination, a permanent resident in the studio, welcome both for itself and for its uses as a marker and measurer of space. In this great and mysterious picture, which means (and is meant to mean) different things to different people, Braque has moved on from the interiors of the Twenties, Thirties and Forties to a world of symphonic perception in which not representation but metamorphosis is his aim. In this world, where nothing has necessarily its everyday connotation, life is, in Braque's words, "a perpetual revelation": and the same could be said of the eight marvellous pictures of his studio (this one is the latest, and arguably the greatest) with which Braque has been able to crown his career. Nothing finer has been done since the war.