PABLO PICASSO

PRESTEL

SPOTS

In a turbulent time and after two unsuccessful earlier visits, Picasso finally settled in Paris in 1904. The city was flourishing as never before. It was the sophisticated heart of Europe, and people came from every corner of the world to see for themselves the miracles of new technology and the numerous art treasures—and also to enjoy the world of carefree pleasures it offered.

Paris Lit Up

After the dull, foggy world of gas lighting, Paris was provided with electric lights around the turn of the 20th century. This new form of lighting lent Paris a touch of magic and fairytale. Not only the theaters and other public buildings were filled with light: the main streets and boulevards of Paris shone at night with the new brilliance of arc lights beneath which it was even possible to read a newspaper. Electricity became the miracle of modernity, satisfying mankind's dream of readily available power.

Montmartre, Island of Artists

The hill of Montmartre (the Butte) rose out of the hustle and bustle of the city, an island of

At the 1900 World Fair in Paris, the miracle of electricity was celebrated in a specially constructed Palais de l'Électricité.

low-rent houses and cottages hidden in a riot of greenery, narrow alleys, and back streets where lovers, junk dealers, petty crooks and artists rubbed shoulders. At the time, Montmartre attracted artists from all over Europe, and often from the United States, not simply because of the low rents but also because of its idyllic

setting and the romance of its cultural life. People ate, drank and talked endlessly in the famous (or notorious) artists' bar *Au Lapin Agile* (above), which was later renamed the *Cabaret des Assassins* (Assassins' Tavern). This was where Aristide Bruant, the celebrated singer of the day, put on his best performances, and where the "Picasso gang" met to discuss art and plot new tricks to play on the artists of other schools and styles. In the *guinguettes* (cabarets) such as the *Moulin de la Galette* (above right) immortalized by Renoir and Picasso, arty types met to dance and flirt away the evenings far from the cares of

everyday life. In the middle of the steeply rising alleys was the Bateau Lavoir, a run-down building where Picasso had his first studio.

The Eiffel Tower

New structures of iron were changing the face of Paris. The most famous iron building of the 19th century was Gustave Eiffel's Eiffel Tower (1887–89), which along with the Galerie des Machines (1889) was the technical sensation of the 1889 Paris World Fair. The tower was constructed of iron girders of standard commercial sizes. Standing on four broad feet resting on blocks of concrete set deep in the ground, it reached what was then a dizzying height, 312 meters (1,090 feet), making it the tallest building in the world at that time.

Impressionism

When it first appeared in the 1860s, Impressionism aroused hostility and derision. By 1900, however, it was am established, popular style that had even influenced fashion and furnishings. By then, the Impressionists themselves had already withdrawn from the Paris art scene. Monet, for example, had retired to the peace of his gardens in Giverny which provided him with endless subject matter. Cezanne was in his native Aix-en-Provence, tirelessy working on a style that, going beyond Impressionism, would have a profound impact on modern art and on Picasso in particular.

In those days …

… Paris was one of the richest and most alluring cities in the world. With its famous buildings and art treasures, but also its pleasure palaces, such as the *Moulin Rouge*, it became a magnet for tourists from all over the globe.

… studying at the official Académie des Beaux-Arts was strictly regulated. That's why many would-be artists sought teachers in the city's numerous art studios and other art schools.

L'EXPOSITION DE PARIS 1889
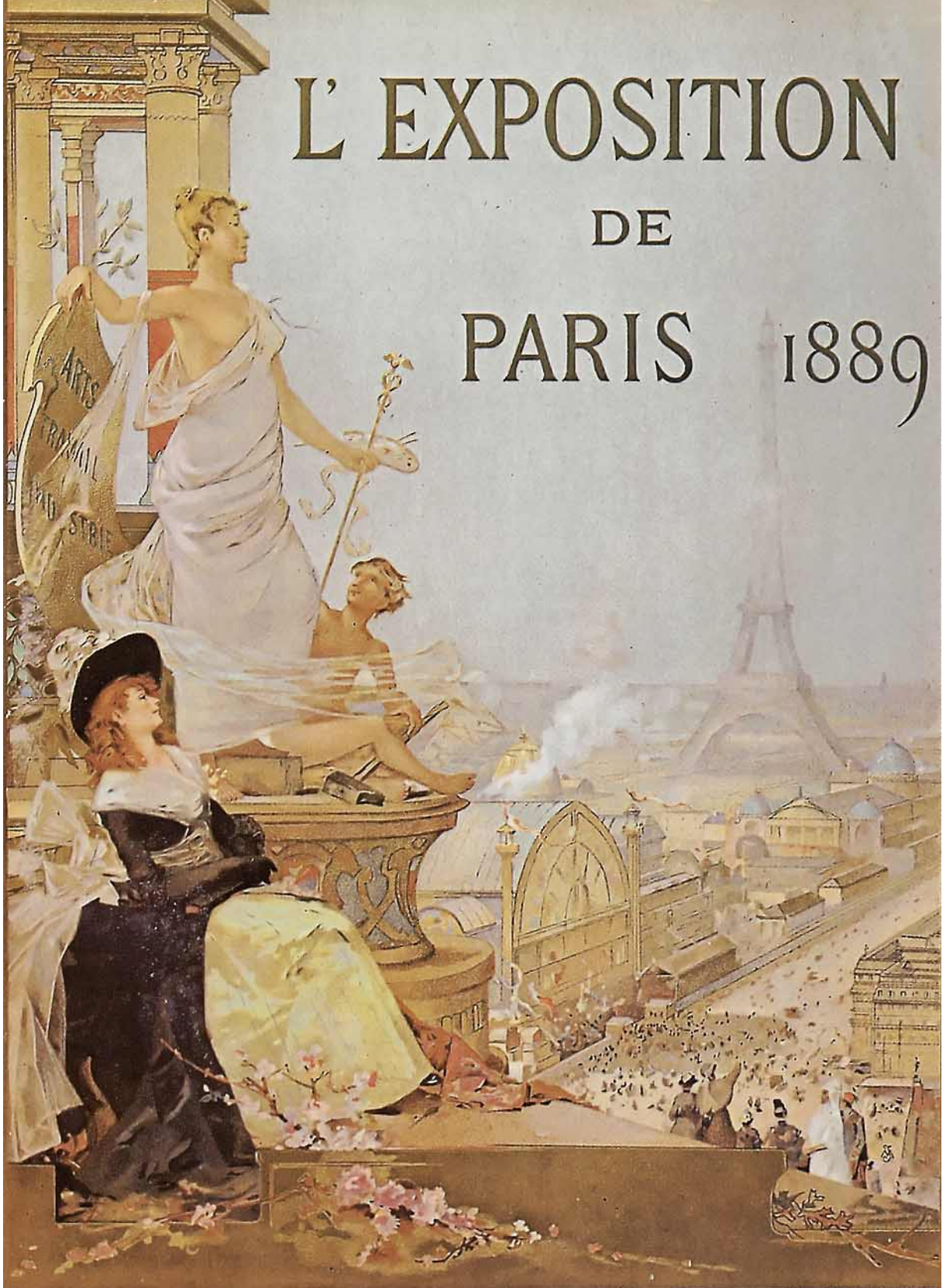
The huge social and intellectual changes at the end of the 19th century lad to profound unease in people's view of the world and themselves. Art served as a guide. In novel forms of expression, it portrayed both the decline of established values and the emergence of a new understanding of the world.

The World Transformed

Between 1880 and 1930, the world underwent a complete transformation. Far-reaching changes affected virtually all aspects of life. And these were not only scientific and technical developments—attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and even moral attitudes all changed profoundly. Art held up a mirror to society, and Picasso was the one who held it longest.

▬ The Cradle of Modernism

It was the utilization of the steam engine in the 19th century that ushered in the modern era. Probably no single invention in the modern period brought about so many changes within such a short space of time. As a result of the construction of large factories and innovations in methods of production, new social classes arose that needed mass housing and the facilities of urban life. The growth of the main cities of Europe was so rapid and so great that new approaches to urban planning were needed. Paris had already seen major change from the 1860s, when Baron Haussmann rebuilt the city into one of the first modern metropolises, cutting broad thoroughfares through the mediaeval labyrinth of often ramshackle alleys and run-down streets. The grandiose boulevards he built were intended not only to improve the quality of life for the people of Paris, but also to provide improved security for the government—keenly aware of the violence that erupted during the Paris Commune (1870/71), the authorities saw broad, straight streets as the best means of bringing any outbreak of civil unrest under control quickly.

Another important project was the development of the rail network and the building of great stations such as the Gare de l'Est, which in turn mean the construction of broad thoroughfares connecting the stations. By 1870, France had around 16,900 kilometers (10,000 miles) of main lines radiating from the capital, linking it with all cities, large towns and important regions of the country, and of course with other European capitals. Among the urban amenities introduced during the Haussmannization of Paris were parks like the Bois de Boulogne, and also such buildings as Les Halles, the famous (now demolished) iron-built wholesale food markets designed by Victor Baltard and immortalized by the writer Zola in his novel *Le Ventre de Paris* (1873).

The famous (and now demolished) Les Halles food market, built to a design by Victor Baltard.

Claude Monet's *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877) documents the artist's enthusiasm for technological progress.
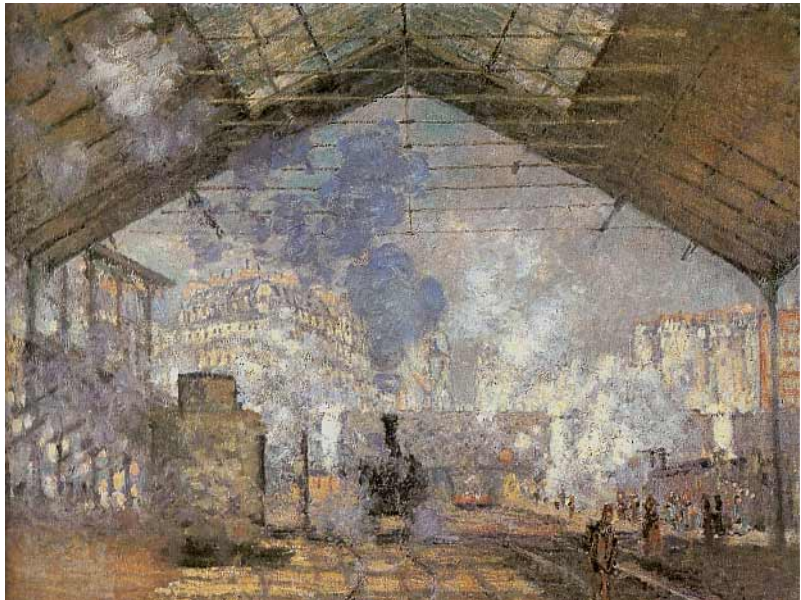
The Impressionists

Today it is almost impossible to imagine the confident sense of optimism and progress that was felt for everything new and forward looking. And it was felt not only by scientists and engineers, but also by artists. Motion, speed, and transience became the new subject matter of painting. The Impressionists sought to capture the various immediate and ephemeral impressions that open-air scenes

made on the eye, as in Claude Monet's *Haystack* series, for example. The Neo-Impressionists who followed broke down a painting into a patchwork of small dots of color that blend in the eye to produce an effect of great purity and tonal brilliance, an approach seen in particular in the laws of optical mixing that Georges Seurat studied.

Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on La Grande Jatte* (1884–1886) shows a Pointillist view of Paris's middle classes enjoying the outdoors.

▬ Modern Paris

It was Seurat who produced the first artistic images of the Eiffel Tower, which was then the quintessence of modernity and a symbol of cosmopolitan Paris. Constructed at the center of attractions at the 1889 Paris World Fair, the Eiffel Tower showed what the modern age could achieve. At 312 meters (1,090 feet), it was the highest building in the world at that date, and represented the victory of the industrial revolution over the past. What was novel about the building was not just its height, towering over the whole of Paris, but its structure, which required a total of 18,038 individual pre-

Camille Lefebre's *Levassor Monument* (1907) is the first-ever monument to an automobile. It celebrates the great race of 1895 from Paris to Bordeaux and back, won by engineer Émile Levassor in an automobile he built himself.

fabricated sections such as had previously been used mainly in the construction of bridges. Which is not surprising, for its designer was not an architect but an engineer and bridge-builder, Gustave Eiffel (1832–1923). He had already made a name for himself with the first department store in Paris, Bon Marché (1876), which was based on the Crystal Palace in London (1851). In its day, the latter, built entirely of glass supported by a thin iron framework, had been considered a miracle of technology and seemed to contemporary visitors a fabulous fairytale palace.

This new openness and transparency of construction was pursued to a dizzying height in the Eiffel Tower. From the second platform, a spiral flight of steps winds its way to the top, from where there is an extraordinary view over the rooftops of Paris. However, not all Parisians were enthusiastic about the Tower. Even before it was built, an article appeared in the Le *Temps* newspaper headlined "Artists Protest," signed by the artist Ernest Meissonier, the composer Charles Gounod, the architect Charles Garnier (who designed the celebrated Paris Opéra), the writer Guy de Maupassant, and others, who protested in strong terms against the new structure, prophesying that Paris would be threatened by a "gigantic black factory chimney." The Eiffel Tower did indeed dominate the view over Paris; and at the same time it could be seen from all sides as the new focal point of the city. This dual dominance and visibility in the cityscape certainly impressed other artists and writers, who celebrated the Tower as the prime symbol of the New Age. Between 1909 and 1937, Robert Delaunay painted several dozen Eiffel Towers in a wide range of styles and views. The writer Blaise Cendrars, who accompanied Delaunay on his daily walks around the Eiffel Tower, described the painter's enthusiasm for the new subject:

"So many ways of treating the Eiffel Tower. Delaunay wanted to interpret it artistically … He took the Tower apart to get it into his frame, he … tipped it up so as to comprehend its dizzying 300-meter height, he took ten viewpoints, fifteen perspectives, this part from below, that one from above, the surrounding houses shown from the right and the left, from a bird's-eye view, at ground level …"

This description captures very graphically the Cubist painter's working technique, fragmenting the subject into different views and then reconstructing it in terms of a new artistic vision.

Dynamism of Modernity

The prospect from the Eiffel Tower literally changed the way people saw things. Its view over Paris, the *vu d'en haut* (view from on high), seeing it like a laid-out map, was enjoyed by millions in the first 20 years of the Tower's existence. It was just as momentous in its time as the famous NASA photo of the Earth was 80 years later, seen from the Moon. Artists' ways of seeing had already begun to change. Instead of using traditional perspective and unambiguous visual spaces, Paul Gauguin and the Nabis group of artists had put together flat, colorfully patterned paintings, a foretaste of the imminent arrival of abstract painting.

The new perception also had to adjust to the new pace of life in the cities—the dense, ceaseless flow of traffic in which the first automobiles competed with countless horse-drawn cabs, the tides of humanity moving up and down the boulevards, the speed of trains, and the conquest of the air with the first flying machines. In 1909, French pilot Louis Blériot flew across the Channel from Calais to Dover. When he returned to France, his aircraft was carried through the streets of Paris in triumph and hung up in a deconsecrated church (now the Musée des Arts et Métiers) like the remains of a fallen angel. The increasing pace of scientific and technical invention transformed the Belle Époque into a crowded laboratory of ideas from which no field of human knowledge seemed excluded.

The scientific and technological foundations of the 20th century were in fact laid during the first 25 years in the life of the man who, born in 1881, would become the best known and most representative artist of the modern age, Pablo Picasso—diesel engines and the first Ford automobiles (1893), film projectors, gramophone records (1894), X-rays (1895), radium, the magnetic storage of sound, the first radio broadcasts, the first motorized flight by the Wright Brothers (1903), Einstein's theory of relativity (1905).

But it was not so much particular inventions that influenced the modern way of life between 1880 and 1914 as the increasing tempo of scientific and technological advances, which seemed to promise to make everything possible. But how was such an age to be captured in art? How could the dynamism appropriate to the machine age be expressed visually? How could one capture a world whose key features were dynamic, always changing, and fractured into pieces—indeed invisible to the naked eye—with the simple, age-old resources of painting, in other words paint and canvas?

This contemporary postcard records the legendary flight of a model of the Wright Brothers' plane around the Eiffel Tower in 1909, piloted by Charles count de Lambert.

Contemporary postcard of the second-level platform on the Eiffel Tower.

Art's Response

It was Cubism that first offered an answer to these questions. Despite using the traditional subject matter of still-lifes, portraits, and landscapes, Cubist paintings by Picasso and Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, and Juan Gris came up with a completely new idiom—an initially incomprehensible mosaic of geometrical fragments that form a recognizable image only at the second or third glance, and that constitute something nameable only by means of inserted symbols, like puzzles combining words and images. Picasso and his fellow artists were not aiming for abstraction, a step taken by a later generation, but were trying primarily to solve basic visual problems such as how to convincingly depict three-dimensional shapes on a two-dimensional surface. A solitary painter who had withdrawn to a remote part of the south of France to work had shown them the way: Paul Cézanne. More than any other artist before him, Cézanne patiently explored the relativity of seeing, the relationships between objects and visual space. The question was how to bring these infinitely subtle and diverse relationships into a painting, and it was only as a result of a process of painstaking analysis that pictorial motifs such as grass, stone, tree, and mountain gradually emerged.

Street traffic in Paris around 1900, when horse-drawn cabs, bicycles, and early automobiles crowded the boulevards.

For the artists who came after Cézanne, this grouchy old painter, who had been ignored or completely underestimated in his lifetime, was a revelation. What they learned from him was that the relationship between art and the world is not as obvious it may seem at first glance: everything is relative, dependent not only on where the artist stands, but also on what questions he poses.

Picasso was probably the one who asked the most questions and found the most answers to them. In doing so, his eye ranged not only over European art but also over that of non-European cultures. What came of this was nothing less than a revolution in art, a "revaluation of all known values" of the kind called for in philosophy by the German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche, and now undertaken by a Spanish artist living in what was little more than a slum in run-down corner of Paris.

PARTS MAKING A WHOLE
The first and perhaps most telling artistic rendering of the Eiffel Tower came from the brush of Georges Seurat, who broke the tower down into a series of color dots, reflecting its serial construction technique.

AN ARTISTIC MOUNTAIN
Paul Cézanne's late paintings of Mont Saint-Victoire manifest a high degree of abstraction. All the elements are transformed into facets of color that give the picture a solid structure and so convey a convincing impression of the inner unity and permanence of nature.