

MARIE CUTTOLI'S MODERNISM

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In 1949 the art entrepreneur Marie Cuttoli was named an officer of the Legion of Honor, the highest French order of merit, with the following justification: “Mme Cuttoli during her travels abroad especially to the United States . . . organized and presided over numerous exhibitions of French art.”¹ Cuttoli was a woman from the French provinces with no higher education; nothing in her background presaged her ascent into the vanguard circles of art and culture. Her nomination crowned three decades of extraordinary work in which, among other things, she revitalized a French artisan tradition in crisis—tapestry—and propelled modern art into an ambitious experiment with decoration.

Beginning in the 1930s, Cuttoli commissioned a wide range of leading artists—including Georges Braque, André Derain, Raoul Dufy, Le Corbusier, Fernand Léger, Jean Lurçat, Man Ray, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, and Georges Rouault—to create designs for tapestries. She had the textiles woven in Aubusson and Beauvais, historic centers of French tapestry, and arranged for them to be exhibited internationally. With this venture, Cuttoli contributed to one of the central concerns of art production at the time—mural decoration.² At the heart of artists’ fascination with the concept of the mural, in which art overtakes the wall, was its ability to shape environments. Cuttoli’s interest was in many ways logical; she had come of age in Paris in the 1890s when the notion of the bourgeois interior as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, preoccupied many contemporary artists.

That Cuttoli’s achievements have been largely disregarded speaks not only to the precarious place of women in the historical record, but also to art-historical discomforts.³ Tapestry as a medium confuses the distinction between original and reproduction; in addition, interior decoration, which carries associations of bourgeois and corporate taste, usually lies outside the boundaries of fine art. Developed within this arena, one in which marketing and sales played an integral part, Cuttoli’s project affected the discourse and practice of high art.

Fig. 26. Detail of Le Corbusier’s tapestry
Marie Cuttoli (see fig. 66).





Fig. 82. *The Storm (L'orage)*, c. 1933–35. Designed by Jean Lurçat (French, 1892–1966). Woven by Atelier Delarbe, Aubusson. Wool and silk. 91 7/8 × 66 3/4 in. (232 × 170 cm). Musée Jean Lurçat et de la tapisserie contemporaine, Angers

role as broker between artists, workshops, and clients was unprecedented. She transposed her business model from fashion to high art and, in the process, created a template that others would follow, including gallerists Denise Majorel and Denise René.

Cuttoli's shift from the colonial production of rugs to the French tradition of tapestry occurred in the context of the interwar years, when colonialism and regionalism were intertwined with nationalist impulses.²⁴ Promoting the economic benefit of France's territories alongside a return to French artisanal traditions was a two-pronged strategy for rebuilding the country. At the 1925 Paris Exposition, for example, French regional pavilions featuring local pottery and furniture occupied a prominent site along the Seine. And at the massive colonial exposition in 1931, the Gobelins exhibited a new series of Orientalist tapestries depicting the rich resources of France's North African territories. Cuttoli's revival of a historic French medium was similarly built on the exploitation of colonial assets, a familiar narrative in the history of modernism.²⁵

Her turn toward Aubusson was also ultimately a return to her own roots. Her hometown of Tulle was located near Aubusson, and her revitalization of this area can be understood as a form of regionalist reinvestment. Furthermore, as her enterprise grew, she would engage artists who were associated with French regionalism in the 1930s, including André Bauchant and Derain).

The first artists she commissioned, however, were Rouault and Lurçat, the latter of whom is credited with inspiring and encouraging Cuttoli's new project. He had already designed many rugs for Myrbor, and he had concurrently been working on tapestry-like wall hangings that his companion, Marthe Hennebert, executed in needlepoint. Moreover, Lurçat had designed smaller objects such as fire screens that were woven at Beauvais. In 1931 he painted the cartoon for *The Storm (L'orage)*, his first Aubusson tapestry for Cuttoli (fig. 82).

Cuttoli may have chosen Rouault because he had worked in another large-scale decorative medium associated with the Middle Ages: stained glass. She had begun exhibiting Rouault's work in 1929, when she rebranded her gallery

as the Galerie Vignon and started to phase out fashion in order to focus on her tapestry business.²⁶ Rouault, who was very hesitant about Cuttoli's idea, drafted a contract with multiple conditions and stipulations, including the right to destroy the finished work if he found it unsatisfactory. Cuttoli signed the document in July 1931 and set to work.²⁷

Rouault's history with Cuttoli exposes some fault lines in her project. Rouault called his tapestry designs "originals" rather than "cartoons," and he apparently expected the tapestries to be direct reproductions of his painted models, as opposed to translations into a new medium by skilled weavers with their own artistic agency. Moreover, according to his gallerist, Pierre Matisse, he complained about the damage that his works sustained from the weaving process;²⁸ he did not anticipate the cartoons serving as a working tool mounted on the loom.

Rouault's lack of understanding of the tapestry process led to disgruntled feelings. As reported by Pierre Matisse, Rouault remarked that Cuttoli "didn't seem to know what she was doing" and that she was a "difficult" woman.²⁹ These comments hint at a misogyny that likely affected Cuttoli's reception in some modern art circles and her later marginalization in histories of the period. Despite his complaints, Rouault did not destroy the resulting tapestries, and he went on to supply Cuttoli with more than a dozen cartoons.

Commissions from Braque, Dufy, Léger, and Picasso, as well as Henri Matisse, soon followed, and Cuttoli continued to support the artists as a gallerist and collector. Besides her husband, another life partner shared Cuttoli's passion for art and collecting, Henri Laugier, a scientist and professor at the University of Paris. He met Cuttoli in 1923, possibly through their mutual friend Jean Lurçat, and they began a lifelong relationship. Although she remained married to Paul, Laugier became her closest companion. In 1935, Cuttoli moved to a larger home in Paris at 55, rue de Babylone to accommodate the three of them (although Paul spent much more time in Algeria than in Paris) and their growing collection. Most of the artists Cuttoli commissioned therefore had personal relationships with either her or Laugier, or both.³⁰

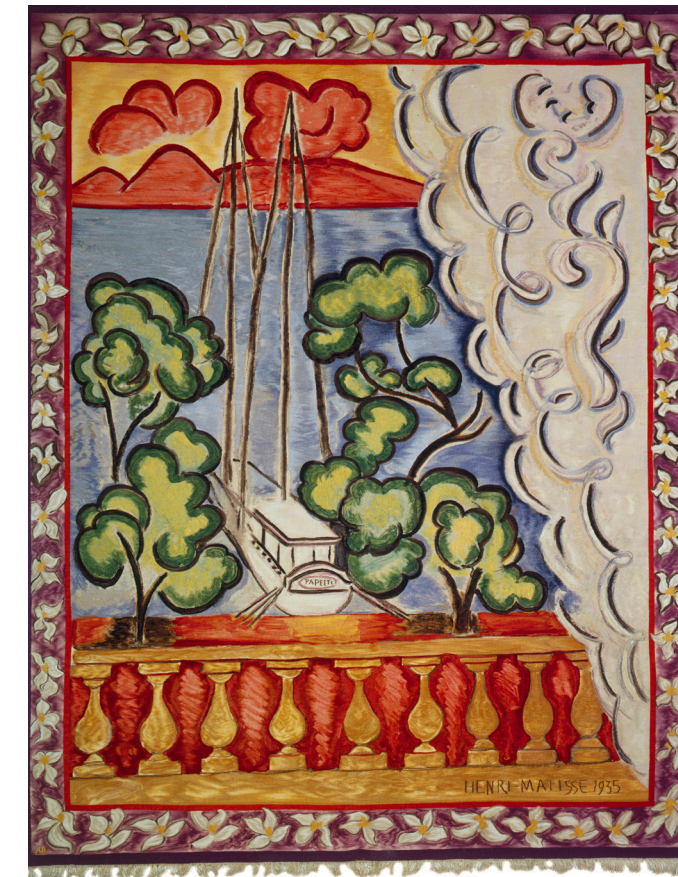


Fig. 83. *Window in Tahiti (Papeete)*, 1936. Designed by Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954). Woven by Atelier Delarbe, Aubusson. Wool and silk, 88 × 68 in. (223.5 × 172.7 cm). Private collection



Fig. 69. Marie Cuttoli, reclining at right, with friends in Arcouest, France, 1927. Cuttoli is wearing a Myrbor coat from 1925, a version of which is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (fig. 46). Collection Professor Julien Bogousslavsky

Fig. 70. Coat. Myrbor (Paris, est. 1922), 1925. Embroidered wool with gold thread and corded silk; silk. Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Fig. 67. A Myrbor dress (right) illustrated in Jeanne Ramon Fernandez, "Summer Modes for Blossoming Gardens," *Vogue*, July 1, 1923. The textile of the dress's bodice resembles an example whose design is attributed to Sarah Lipska (fig. 18).

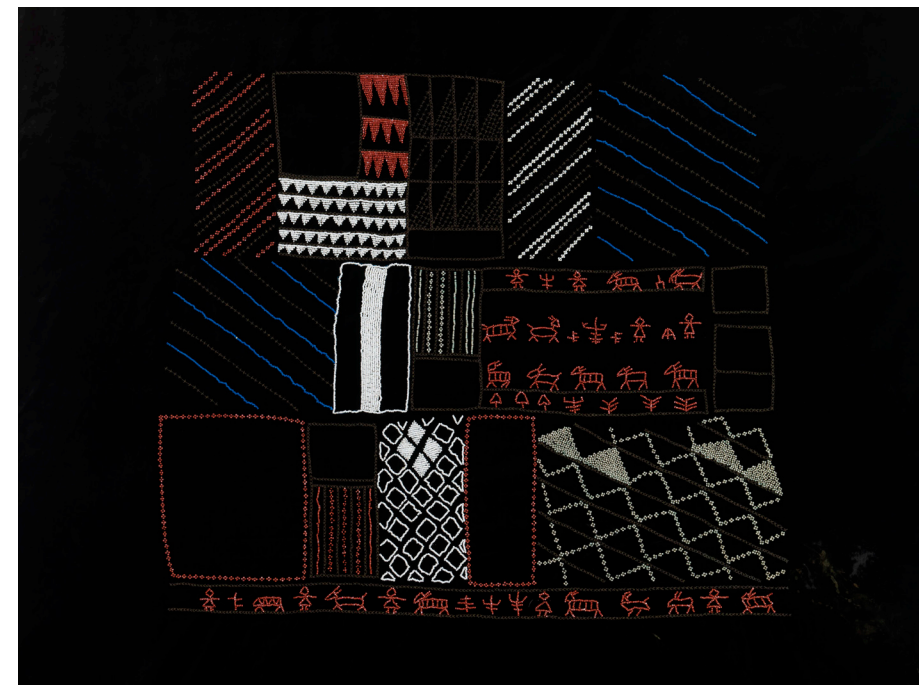


Fig. 68. Textile (detail). Design attributed to Sarah Lipska (Polish, 1882–1973), for Myrbor (Paris, est. 1922), 1923. Silk and metallic thread. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Adelaide Goan, 1955



GEORGES BRAQUE (1882–1963)

Braque was among the first artists whom Marie Cuttoli approached for tapestry designs. At the time, he was enjoying international recognition as a modern master following the major retrospective of his work at the Kunsthalle Basel in April–May 1933. For the tapestry commission, Braque and Cuttoli chose to use two of his large vertical still lifes, *Still Life with Guitar* (*Le guéridon*) (1928–30; fig. <F012>) and *Still Life with Pipe* (*Nature morte à la pipe*) (1928; fig. <F040>), as the basis for cartoons.

Braque, who had been investigating the still-life genre since the early twentieth century with his cubist *papiers collés*, took up the subject with renewed attention in the late 1920s and 1930s. His series of *Guéridons*, so-called after the side table with a circular top that is featured in the paintings (although many works in the series in fact feature a rectangular wooden table), draw from the collage aesthetic. The fragmented and overlapping planes as well as the evocation of textures such as wood recall the artist's earlier compositions of various cut papers, including examples resembling wood grain.¹ These motifs, however, have been transformed in his large-scale paintings of baroque complexity.

In 1933 a photograph of Braque's studio, showing *Still Life with Guitar* and *Still Life with Pipe* flanking two other paintings, was published in a special issue of the leading art magazine *Cahiers d'art* that was devoted to the artist on the occasion of his Basel retrospective (fig. 44).² That the paintings were photographed together, almost as pendants, underscores Braque and Cuttoli's choice to produce tapestries

Fig. 44. *Still Life with Guitar* (*Le guéridon*), 1928–30. Oil and sand on canvas, 80 1/8 x 38 in. (203.5 x 96.5 cm). Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen*

Fig. 45. *Still Life with Pipe* (*Nature morte à la pipe*), 1928. Oil and sand on canvas, 70 x 28 3/8 in. (177.8 x 73.3 cm). Private collection

of them and exhibit them as a pair. Moreover, Cuttoli was likely attracted to their particular surface texture, as Braque had incorporated sand into the ground or paint layer, or both, to create a matte and muted effect.³ The sand serves not only to scatter light but also to emphasize Braque's conception of the "tactile, manual" space of still life.⁴ Braque painted objects in relation to his body—that is, to his ability to reach out and touch them.

Tapestry, as an eminently tactile medium, was well suited to expressing the artist's idea of the palpable space between objects. The translation of oil and sand to wool and silk furthermore speaks to Cuttoli's sensitivity to texture and materiality. Not only does the crumbly consistency of the sand relate to the nubby quality of the wool, but the play between opacity and translucency in Braque's painting finds an analogy in the contrast between light-absorbing wool and light-reflecting silk.

The tapestry of *Still Life with Pipe* (fig. 45) was purchased by the Arts Club of Chicago soon after the *Modern French Tapestries* exhibition closed there in May 1936. The quiet, subtle colors of the work, dominated by soft browns, was widely praised in press reviews.⁵ Mrs. Charles Goodspeed, president of the Arts Club, used the tapestry as the centerpiece of the lounge in the club's newly expanded quarters in the Wrigley Building overlooking the Chicago River (see fig. 24). She designed the room to complement the subdued palette of the work.⁶

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1. Compare, for example, the juxtaposition of black and imitation wood-grain papers in Braque's collage *Aria de Bach* (1913; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) with the composition of *Still Life with Pipe* (see fig. <TK>).

2. *Cahiers d'art* 8, nos. 1–2 (1933): 8. The photograph had been previously published in E. Tériade, "L'épanouissement de l'oeuvre de Braque," *Cahiers d'art* 3, no. 10 (1928): 366.

3. Patricia Favero, Erin Mysak, and Narayan Khandekar, "Material and Process in Georges Braque's Still-Life Paintings, 1928–1944," in *Georges Braque and the Cubist Still Life, 1928–1945*, ed. Karen K. Butler, exh. cat. (Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, Saint Louis; and The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC) (Munich: Prestel, 2013), 90–111.

4. Georges Braque, "Braque, la peinture et nous: Propos de l'artiste recueillis," interview by Dora Vallier, *Cahiers d'art* 29, no. 1 (1954): 16.

5. See, for example, Eleanor Jewett, "Weaver's Loom Captures Art of the Painter," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, June 7, 1936; and Anne Hamilton Sayre, "A World Premiere of Tapestries from Beauvais and Aubusson Designed by Modern Painters of Paris," *ARTnews*, April 4, 1936, 7.

6. India Moffett, "New Quarters of Arts Club Are Charming," *Chicago Tribune*, December 10, 1936, 21.





Fig. 72. *Fence and Rope, Yellow Background* (*Élément de barrière et cordage, fond jaune*), 1934. Oil on canvas., 25 7/8 × 21 1/4 in. (64.5 × 54 cm). Private collection*



Fig. 73. *Composition with Three Figures—Fragment*, 1932. Oil on canvas, 56 3/4 × 45 in. (144.2 × 114.3 cm). Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. Heinz II*