

# **AMATEUR MEANS IN CUBISM? THE USE OF RIPOLIN® BY PABLO PICASSO**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The introduction of non-artistic materials and techniques in Cubism is not a complete invention, contrary to what the traditional historiography of this artistic movement would want to make us think. Contemporary do-it-yourself practices – amateur handicraft – with which Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso had been in contact while living in the working-class neighborhood of Montmartre, have encouraged paper collage and constructions. Among those amateur means transformed by Cubist artists, Ripolin® holds a prime position. Indeed, Ripolin® house paints are often mentioned in handbooks used by amateurs to guide them in creating their artifacts. Cheap and solid, it was recommended in repainting amateur creations because of its strong ability to both mask and “produce a nice surface.” As for Picasso, he used this brand for its smooth and homogeneous texture, one of the precise characteristics described in amateur guidebooks, but he invested it with new meanings, both formal and ideological. This paper then analyzes the place of Ripolin® in the process of diversion and in the re-appropriation of techniques and materials used by amateurs that supported the technical and material innovations of Cubism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of Cubism is punctuated by a series of material and technical innovations. Not only did Georges Braque (1882–1963) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) renovate the manner of drawing figures in space, but they also introduced unusual means of creation such as sand painting, stenciled letters, hand-painted wood graining, pasted paper, and assemblage. These atypical materials and techniques were not part of traditional artistic formation. As a consequence, they did not meet fine art standards and were seen as an outrage to the painting trade's principles. In other words, they were inartistic. Indeed, Braque and Picasso's introduction of heteroclitic materials and techniques during and after 1911 ran counter to traditional art and artistic conception. They did not bring into play the *savoir-faire*, the tools, the materials or the manufacturing process which were normally associated with artistic production.

Among those scandalous means, there was Ripolin®. Picasso started using this decorative paint not long after Braque experimented with hand-painted *faux bois* between the fall of 1911 and the beginning of 1912. The same pictures where he assimilated the fake wood method introduced by Braque – *Souvenir du Havre* (1912, private collection) and *Violin, Glasses, Pipe and Anchor* (1912, Národní Galeri, Prague) – contain Picasso's first samples of Ripolin®. As both Ripolin and handmade wood refer to the craft world, maybe Picasso thought that employing this brand of paint would echo Braque's *faux bois*, which came from his former training as a house painter, but questions still rise about the origin of these inartistic materials.

Even if it is possible to trace the origins of some of these unusual techniques, such as stenciled letters, hand-painted *faux bois*, and Ripolin® that derive from the decorative painter trade, they still have no precedent in fine art – as the term inartistic implies – and appear to be a complete innovation. Braque and Picasso were the first to go that far in mixing high and

low practices or using commonplace material such as Ripolin®, sand or pieces of newspaper. Pasted paper and construction, in particular, which proved to be the successful fruits of their labor to find new means of making works of art, correspond to a brutal rupture in the artistic method of creation. They use such unprecedented techniques and materials that their emergence at the beginning of the 20th century is quite an enigma for the art historian. How did these artists have the idea to exploit such non-traditional elements and make such unconventional works of art? What gave birth to those new means of creation? Which conditions made such novelties thinkable and possible and, to an extent, led to the invention of *papier collé* and construction? Were there any plastic manifestations that could have been favorable to the use of heteroclite operating procedures and materials?

It therefore seems that, in order to fully understand the origin and use of Ripolin® by Picasso, it is necessary to consider the environment in which the Cubists' material and technical innovations appeared. Cubist innovations were born in Montmartre, where Braque and Picasso lived and came into contact with humble social classes that had a peculiar relation to everyday things.

## **2. LIVING IN MONTMARTRE**

At the beginning of the 20th century, the 18th *arrondissement* was a marginal space in the capital, both geographically and sociologically. This neighborhood, where most of the artistic avant-garde was located, had a far different atmosphere to that of the rest of the city. Untouched by the Second Empire's urban transformation, the hill of Montmartre mixed the particularity of the city with rural characteristics and an unfortunate population.

With its narrow, unpaved streets, its modest buildings and unpretentious houses, its small squares and its itinerant dealers, Montmartre looked like a rural or a country town. Farming even remained a significant activity; the north of the hill was partly occupied by

fields, windmills, and kitchen gardens. Thus, people who lived there still worked for themselves in traditional rural occupations such as raising livestock or farming, exploiting natural resources – lumber, game or fish, for example – or domestic production, such as needlework, weaving or fabrication of everyday goods. This way of life was in sharp contrast with the rest of Paris that had already experienced the Industrial Revolution. Montmartre was also near the northern industrial suburbs of Paris and was directly touched by the working class<sup>1</sup> migration and the poverty that they experienced. To the northwest, there was a shantytown named *Le Maquis*. With its prostitutes, alcoholics, beggars, and guttersnipes, the 18th *arrondissement* even had an evil reputation. At night, with the new urban entertainment scene (music-halls, taverns, and night-clubs such as *The Moulin Rouge*), life in this district was busy and regularly disturbed by dramatic events. The gunshots, knife fights, and quarrels in cabarets like *Zut* and the *Lapin Agile* that artists visited frequently, dominated the locals' daily conversations (Olivier [1933] 2001, Sabartés [1946] 1996).

Thus, inside Paris, Montmartre and the 18th *arrondissement* were a diverse neighborhood that brought together Paris' dying peasant community, the industrial working class, artisans, and craftsmen, as well as those suffering from the most abject poverty and criminal elements. Because of this, it was considered a deprived district. This fringe area of Paris provided refuge for the dispossessed; with the urbanization of the town, the boundaries between the poor and the rich increased, and the former were pushed out to the periphery. It was also a place where middle class men would come to find cheap entertainments of all kinds.

The young artists that lived there were part of this unconventional population. The avant-garde, unable to make a living, understood the precarious life of the poor from the inside. Each earned a living through another trade: Juan Gris (1887–1927) and Kees Van Dongen (1877–1968) sold humoristic drawings; Max Jacob (1876–1944) was a salesman in a

department store; Henri Laurens (1885–1954) was a cutter of stone on site; Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958) was a gypsy musician. Despite these multiples jobs, they had financial difficulty and were compelled to buy on credit, to pawn goods, and to barter. They were also sometimes short of food, clothing and heating. For example, Fernande Olivier, Picasso’s companion, remembers days of fasting, staying in bed in winter because neither could afford charcoal for the stove and not being able to go out for a two-month period for want of shoes (Olivier [1933] 2001). They often lived in humble or unhealthy dwellings, living in poorly-furnished rooms or in hotels without basic comforts. When described, the lack of furniture and decoration is striking. The majority of their furnishings were for practical use only: a few tools, a stove, a straw mattress for a bed, one table and a few chairs. Just as those from the poorest social classes, they lived day to day, always in need of basic necessities. The Bateau-Lavoir apartments were among the most pitiful: the building was described as a “filthy place<sup>2</sup>” (Kahnweiler 1963, 240) with badly joined wood board walls from which hung shreds of wall paper and dripped unidentifiable liquids. The doors were decaying and full of graffiti, the wood floors were half-rotted and there were holes in the roof. It had a musty smell and was so cold in winter that water froze in jugs.

Living in this poor district, not only were the Montmartre avant-garde in close proximity to the modest population that carried on traditional habits of making and repairing their own small belongings and items for everyday life, but they also shared do-it-yourself and recycling practices of fabrication. Pursuing the same saving goal, they handmade some of their daily essential items or used alternative products in their art practice. Gris, for example, manufactured his own slippers from old shoes (Kahnweiler 1946); Picasso created a doll for Van Dongen’s daughter (Warnod 1975), as was the custom in humble circles; André Derain (1880–1954) and de Vlaminck constructed their frames for the 1905 *Salon des Indépendants* with a few wood boards bought on credit (Dagen 1994). In his artistic work, Picasso painted

with lamp oil while Jacob made watercolors with whatever was close at hand: smoke stains from his light, leftover coffee grinds, dust he found on his furniture (Olivier [1933] 2001). A common habit was to repaint an old canvas; the “*père Soulié*” even made a business out of the practice, selling badly painted pictures as fresh canvases, which is how Picasso bought some of his Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) paintings (Olivier [1933] 2001).

Although they shared the precarious life of the unfortunate, at the same time the artists of Montmartre enhanced their marginality by adopting transgressive patterns of behavior. It is necessary to read their memoirs critically since the artists may have over exaggerated the poverty in which they lived. By being part of the avant-garde, the young artists expressed their rebellion against traditional models of society. Living in poverty, in the margins, was a manner to draw a counter-model to the bourgeois way of life. For example, they sought an original and eccentric clothing style to distinguish themselves from the uniformity of the male urban costume. Derain and de Vlaminck were dressed with large, square-patterned suits and bright colored ties (Kahnweiler [1961] 1998), whereas Max Jacob preferred a London cabman’s style. Beyond peculiar dress, they also adopted shocking habits such as living at night or taking drugs (Olivier [1933] 2001). To increase what polite society would have seen as a reprehensible reputation, Braque and Picasso liked to espouse rough manners, crude and brutal gestures or coarse language associated with the working classes (Olivier [1933] 2001). This kind of behavior was certainly not new amongst artistic groups, but none had gone as far as the Montmartre avant-garde. They built an atypical identity entirely in opposition to middle-class morality and its dominant model for behavior. Since everything they rejected was associated with the bourgeoisie, all their actions were intended to offend that social class. Everything that was in conflict with the rules of etiquette was used to construct a distinct group identity. Rural people, the working class, as well as those designated by the middle class as being of ill-repute, were brought into play to show their differences. For the avant-

garde, embracing the lifestyle of these humble circles and adopting vulgar or scandalous behavior was a game, a way to get into bad company while denying the bourgeois' condemnation of it.

But what is most remarkable about this constructed identity is that belonging to the 18th district in turn affected the very nature of the rebellious identity the artists developed. For the first time, the poor and working class people with whom they lived became a model to follow for the artistic bohemia. Indeed, this new reference left its mark from the clothing to the political opinions that Picasso and his friends embraced. Their singularity was due, in large part, to their imitation of working class habits. However, the regular return to points of reference from these communities seems to offer evidence that for some of them, this was an expression of deep identification, not a superficial association exclusively meant to shock the middle class. They enjoyed humble ways of living and tasted the same pleasures as their neighbors: the circus, movie theaters, taverns or night-clubs, all regarded as inferior by the wealthy classes. They also followed the trend for sports that affected the masses at the same time – biking for Braque and de Vlaminck, boxing for Derain, Braque and Picasso..., (Olivier [1933] 2001). For some of them, belonging to the working class was meaningful. Laurens considered himself as a craftsman sculptor. Both he and Braque came from modest families and received atypical art training – the former as a stone-cutter and the latter as a decorative painter. Picasso and Braque's overalls and manual worker's clothes showed their desire to embrace and emulate the work ethic of manual laborers. They also called – along with Gris and Laurens – their art dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, “boss” as a nod to their solidarity with the working class. Braque and Picasso even pretended to be workers one time, approaching the dealer with their hats in hand, saying: “Boss, we've come for our wages” (Kahnweiler [1961] 1998, 60).

This attraction for modest living and working-class values was particular to the

Montmartre avant-garde. The 19th-century bohemians had experienced a hard life and tried to establish a marginal identity, but they never leaned on working class standards as a place from which to build and exhibit their difference. This shift comes from the socio-political context of the *Belle Époque*; the Montmartre artists were not indifferent to the working class' use of riots and strikes to make their demands heard. Some of them expressed left-wing political opinions: Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) and André Salmon (1881–1969) wrote in political newspapers; Salmon and Kahnweiler went to political meetings (Kahnweiler [1961] 1998); de Vlaminck and Laurens were anarchists; Picasso, when in Barcelona, drew for anarchist newspapers and, during his blue period, chose subjects related to contemporary social matters. It seems clear as well that the geographical and social proximity with the marginal populations of Montmartre played a major part in the artists' decisions to adopt working-class and modest-living values. Their choices stand in sharp contrast to many post-impressionists and symbolists, who were anarchist militants but would have never dreamed of being associated with manual workers.

If the particularities of the Montmartre avant-garde and their distinctive identity reflected their marginal geographical localization, the cubist's works of art can also be related to the neighborhood in which they lived. Their iconography depicts their everyday environment and its distractions. In opposition to traditional still-life paintings, they showed common things such as jugs, glasses, tables, chairs, alcohol, tobacco, newspaper, fruit, cards, checkerboard tablecloths and so on. Some of these items, like the novel *Fantômas*, the accordion, or the movie theater program, were directly associated with mass entertainment. They also used everyday materials and manual skills in their *papiers collés* and constructions; wood, metal, paper, newspaper, wallpaper or even food tins were cut, pasted, and nailed with the help of ordinary tools like scissors, glue, hammers, nails, and saws. Wallpaper, along with fake wood or fake marble, were typical of modest interiors that imitated – albeit with cheaper

material, such as paint or paper – the wall tissues, wainscoting, and marble paneling of bourgeois decoration. At last, some techniques they used were house-painter practices, like stenciled typography or hand-painted wood graining made by passing a comb in fresh paint.

These characteristics reveal an artistic conception that differs significantly from those embraced in academic settings. Using poor materials, heteroclite techniques and depicting common subjects annihilated the traditional hierarchy in fine arts. It expresses their will to make an art closer to daily life, in its iconography and its fabrication. *Papiers collés* and cubist constructions in particular seem to be within everyone's range since they do not require any artistic training to be made. Thus the artist appears like a manual worker and his position in the society changes as a consequence. He and the product of his art are no longer considered as exceptional beings. This unusual perception of art and artist is very similar to the craftsmen model and was partly made possible because Braque and Picasso lived in a modest neighborhood and embraced working class values. Hence, the same can be said about their use of inartistic techniques and material; surrounded by practices of self-made decorative objects that used inexpensive materials (sometimes found in the garbage), as well as heteroclite techniques, they discovered another creative material culture that encouraged and inspired new means of Cubist creation.

### **3. A CREATIVE MATERIAL CULTURE**

Manual creation from common and recycled materials was, as a matter of fact, an ordinary use in the old autarkic and rural economic system; living without abundance and being completely self-reliant meant fabricating most things for everyday use inside domestic circles with secondhand elements or items close at hand. Native natural resources supplied raw material to build houses and fences, as well as to heat or to produce tools and other objects such as baskets, ladders, brooms, small furniture or toys. Waste was not an option as

everything was reused, converted, and worked over again in a permanent recycling chain. Used water and cooking refuse went to the backyard or the farmyard; children's clothes were made out of the parents' old wardrobe; leftover grease served for lighting and the art of using up scraps was widespread. With the urban immigration, these traditional *savoir-faire* habits penetrated the city and found new forms and applications in order to adjust to city life. Domestic manual activities exceeded mere necessity and became simple leisure following the development of spare time. Amateur activities were born. The aim of such occupations was to improve, embellish and maintain one's living quarters by making decorative artifacts (vases, flowerpot, paintings, frames, tapestries, artificial flowers) or typical household items (baskets, boxes, coverlets, fireguards). Thus, these amateur practices mixed old traditions, such as gardening, making everyday things by hand, sewing clothing or concocting simple therapeutic cures, with more traditional artistic, artisanal, and leisurely activities of wealthier classes, like painting, carving, drawing on different materials or working on leather and wood.

The growth of these household and pastime occupations during the 19th century leaned on a special kind of literature published to help the beginner create his or her own artifacts. Guidebooks for amateurs are very didactical writings that describe in detail do-it-yourself activities in order to teach specialized competence and initiate the reader to manual practices. As a consequence, they simplify artistic and artisanal techniques to put them within everyone's range in a vulgarizing enterprise. Following the model of professional instruction manuals, each procedure, ordered by type, is explained in a technical and unliterary language. The author enlightens the reader with definitions for professional vocabulary, recalls fundamental knowledge of the craft, lists the tools needed, describes handling and finally splits the procedure into steps. Images complement the text. Diagrams clarify the author descriptions and drawings provide models to copy. Indeed, the aim is not only to train in an

art but also to give a concrete purpose to this instruction by giving directions that create a peculiar artifact. Skills and knowledge are almost always communicated via the description of a method to fabricate a precise object, such vase, leather box or plate painting reproduced in illustration. Just as professional writings for craftsmen prepare for a trade and pattern books diffuse decorative and ornamental repertoires, so do amateur handbooks offer a shortened training squeezed onto a few pages. Through these publications that legitimize domestic activities by convoking learned culture, amateurs could be part of a tradition and felt as though they were embracing an artistic existence; they were their own creator and show artistic capacities.

Even if these instruction books tend to systematize, standardize and regulate a very diverse range of activities, they are an essential resource that give historians a picture of the material culture that encouraged Cubist innovations. The authors drew from the practices they were surrounded by to write their guides; they were inspired by techniques they observed and comments they heard. Since there is not really any other source from this time<sup>3</sup> on the domestic methods of creation from poor and recycled material, this literature allows one to grasp the plastic manifestations with which Braque and Picasso came in contact in Montmartre. Indeed, amateur guidebooks do not only explain traditional artistic and artisanal activities, but also original techniques with unconventional material for two reasons. First, amateurs being self-taught, they do not possess the skills and dexterity of the professional. Second, a large part of these leisurely occupations were adopted by modest circles in order to imitate the bourgeois decoration with low-cost means. As a result, instruction books for amateurs contain do-it-yourself manual practices that use poor and recycled material.

One of the principal reasons amateurs embraced manual occupations was to embellish their home by their own means. During the 19th century, while ornamental objects and practices exploded onto the domestic scene, decoration became an important matter and it

enhanced the image of the household member due to handmade decorative artifacts he was surrounded with. It was a way of personalizing one's home setting, appropriating the living quarters and showing one's own character. Not only could the individual compose a personal taste and décor, but also differentiate from all others by exhibiting through his handiwork his creative skills and mind.

However, there was an economic purpose to decorating with handmade items: households saved money by repairing or producing the common tools and items of daily life without paying a professional for it. For instance, amateurs learned how to make glue out of flour, to prepare alcohol, beer, vinegar, and ointments, to waterproof clothes or fabric, to remove difficult dirt stains or to construct rabbit hutches, flowerpots, fences and lampshades. To extend the objects' lives, guidebooks described tricks to hide cracks or stains with paint, glued or embroidered patterns, or how to repair distended paintings and straw-bottomed chairs. Manual occupations were, in addition, a way to obtain expensive artifacts that amateurs could not purchase. Thus, the *Album des arts utiles et amusants* (literally, "the album of useful and amusing art pieces") proposed to imitate things which are "high-priced and at range few people can afford" (Album 1840, 125), such as Etruscan containers or Japanese porcelain jugs, the latter made by cutting patterns in fabric, gluing them on a vase and finally varnishing it. As for Felix Moser (Moser 1906), he suggested fabricating Christmas tree ornaments because it represents a considerable amount of wealth and cannot always be bought at a reasonable price. For example, the family can gild pine cones, craft candleholders out of iron wire and make candy boxes with nuts shell or match boxes to create a nice and inexpensive Christmas decoration. Both also explained how to make artificial flowers with fabric, paper or shells. These examples are evidence for the economic principle that inspired a large part of manual activities; they led to a modest embellishment of the domestic setting that imitated, albeit with cheaper means, the luxury and conveniences found

in the homes of the wealthier classes.

To respond to the double objective of self-creating and saving money, material that was used was poor, within reach, and sometimes picked from the garbage. The basic principle was to make something out of nothing, to create a mosaic from broken pieces of glass and dish, to craft jewels in filigree, or to decorate old boxes by gluing a mix of papers or leftover fabric. Jean Emile-Bayard (1904) explained how to take advantage of natural elements in order to conceive low-priced decorative artifacts like rustic or seaside frames made by gathering pine cones, acorns, and leaves for the former, or shells, sand, seaweed, and crab claws for the latter. Sometimes materials and methods were very original, like the miniature vases composed of eggshell and cardboard, or the process of burying a copper or tin pot and watering it to obtain a patina. Hence, to hide those spare methods, a real esthetic of camouflage and inauthenticity was engendered. Methods for imitating wood or marble graining were meant to give the authenticity those creations lacked, whereas fake patinas aged newly-bought objects. Amateurs covered their creations with paint to resemble silver, bronze or enamel in order to hide the unconventional materials beneath from sight. For example, Emile-Bayard (1904) recommended spreading a layer of metallic powder over rustic and seaside frames to unify their disparate look.

If amateur occupations adapted themselves to meet those of humbler circles' needs and participated in the spread of bourgeois decoration and ways of living, they adjusted as well to the inexperience of the beginner. The *savoir-faire* techniques that were taught were simplified, and the tools reduced to a minimum, but it was not always enough to bring everyone to the same level of skill as a craftsman especially when it comes to drawing, a fundamental knowledge that requires long training. To resolve this inability, machines like the pantograph (that could copy, reduce or enlarge a model) and transfer process were of major help for amateurs. Guidebooks explained in particular the latest technology, describing

the different methods (such as using carbon, transfer paper, or special mixtures, or by drawing on a glass, printing, embossing, casting, and so on) in detail. Often, they recommended using ready-made patterns or objects to create compositions more easily: amateurs just had to cut figures from different magazines, prints or newspapers, and glue them together to get a nice picture. They could collect leaves, shells, nuts, pine cones, flowers, and other natural elements to create by assemblage a personal composition. For Emile-Bayard (1904), flowers and embroideries could also make nice negative stencils for spray painting. In addition merchants sold ready-made items to simplify amateurs' task: stencil plates, ornaments in paste-board, moulds, and complete artifacts such as vases and plates were available in stores. Amateurs just needed to glue, paint or decorate them the way they wanted.

Therefore, manual domestic occupations brought in new means of creation. Often, the making of an artifact was limited to the assemblage of ready-made elements from natural, printed or industrial origin, and material was poor, recycled or diverted from its primary use. Because amateurs would use working parts that were not made by their own hand, they appear to not entirely engender their own handiwork, as opposed to the artist or artisan. They also invented an operating process that did not need drawing. Moreover, they employed unconventional techniques and materials without any unity or hierarchy; every item and every practice was valid for creation as long it fit in the creation and suited amateurs' desire. As a consequence, amateur objects contravened artistic standards; they did not respect traditional values which dictate that a painting must only be executed with paint, or a sculpture must be carved out of one single material to achieve a homogenous creation in its form and style. No academic hierarchy was followed; neither stylistic, material, nor technical harmony was observed. Amateurs possessed the liberty to create however and with whatever they liked.

Ordinary practices of creation thus represented a favorable environment for Cubists' technical and material innovations since those activities were at the heart of a redefinition of artistic activity from the fringe social groups. This was made all the more true because they did not fall within the context of daily life, contrary to traditional rural domestic occupation. They exceed mere necessity and obtained the status of a leisure devoted to increasing one's well-being, comfort, and esthetic pleasure at home. Consequently, embracing such a pastime was enhancing and distinguishing: beyond the possibility of producing a unique item of décor lay the aspiration of obtaining the position of “artist” in society. Amateurs created decorative artifacts where they expressed their personality; therefore, they adopted an artistic attitude and fabricated objects related to minor arts. But what they accomplished was totally foreign to the traditional art world. Thus, manual decoration occupations displayed the different uses of unconventional materials and techniques in a new light. Related to a creative gesture and employed to achieve aesthetic purpose, such heteroclitic procedures suddenly did not seem so illicit anymore and opened a path for Braque and Picasso. With their extremely innovative creative methods, ordinary manual practices represented at the same time a stimulating example, just as non-Occidental art did, and an encouragement in their enterprise of artistic renovation. Braque and Picasso discovered in these artifacts the techniques, materials, and aesthetic effects capable of inspiring their own work. Hence, they transposed the amateur material and technical repertory on to their creation and used it with entirely different intentions, just as Picasso high-jacked Ripolin®, to answer particular cubist questioning.

#### **4. AMATEUR USES OF RIPOLIN, A “RIPOLINAGE” TECHNIQUE**

Indeed, Ripolin® house paint is cited in amateur guidebooks. In addition to technical instructions, they contain information on prices and shops for buying tools or materials. They often recommend, directly or indirectly, specific brands to the reader. Besides the

advertisements put at the beginning or the end of instruction manuals, illustrations do not only display generic products, but watercolor boxes from Lefranc et Cie., pyrographs from Tiersot, the company's trademark appearing on the drawing itself. It is likely that certain industries had a deal with editors to better sell their products, but amateur handbooks nonetheless also gave advice to help the reader choose the most appropriate product. Authors were supposed to have tried out the techniques they described and counseled readers on their easy application, their quality or their inexpensive cost. For example, Marcel Bourdais (1908, 7) specified that “all the methods put in this small volume [...] have been tested in my laboratory, all are simple to execute and guaranteed success if employing first quality products.” Thus, authors referred to certain brands, explaining their superiority or their good price/quality ratio. For instance, Moser (1906) thought Lefranc et Cie. colors surpassed English paints which were previously known as the most excellent. He continually pointed out this trade name, quoting more than twenty different Lefranc et Cie. products in his guidebook. As for Henri-L. Alphonse Blanchon (1908), he dissuaded readers from buying low-priced brushes in bazaars because they would not be made of silk.

Ripolin® house paint citations are answerable to the same selection made by the author to facilitate amateur tasks and advise them in what materials and tools would match their budget, their technical skills and, above all, the particular ways amateurs were going to use them. In the *Livre des travaux artistiques d'amateur* (Moser 1906), “Ripolin® liquid enamel paint” is even the subject of a chapter which details its benefits and utilization:

These colors have been invented and spread during those last years and serve masses of uses, due to the ease with which one can smear them, the large extent of their shade, their relatively cheap price, their durability, and the nice effect they produce. [...]

Let us also mention that enamel colors have a great practical value and that

one can employ them to cover kitchen, bathroom walls, etc.; to enamel objects of domestic application in metal, these colors are of excellent use (Moser 1907, 71–73).

Contrary to Lefranc et Cie., more specialized in fine and minor art material, Ripolin® brand is generally advised for decorative painting. Blanchon (1908) proposed to cover handmade creations such as wooden-cased bookshelves, racks or armoires, flowerpots made from wine bell or umbrella stands composed from terracotta drainage pipe, with Ripolin®. Georges Franche (1913), on the other hand, wrote that it can be put on all surfaces (toilets, stairs, halls, doorframes, stone-walls) and on metallic devices. This use of house paint is proof of the artisanal and working class links associated to this trademark. Produced by modern industry, it was an everyday material for the construction profession but it was, in addition, related to manual domestic occupation and daily life.

A 1913 advertisement booklet identifies the decorative qualities of Ripolin® (Ripolin® 1913). Not only does this information sheet recall the multiple uses of Ripolin® paint – in all rooms of the house, hostels, hospitals, schools, and factories, metal items such as ironwork, machines, engine, train, cars, and wooden furniture – but it also asserts that beginners in the art of painting can obtain very satisfying results within no time. Other examples offer confirmation for the domestic use of this brand: a varnish for leather was intended to renew all things made in this material, and a paint for metal was said to be very helpful for bicycle alterations and touch ups. At last, Ripolin® had such a success and wide diffusion that the brochure advised against forgery and explained how to recognize the authentic trademark. Unsurprisingly, the precise qualities underlined by the brochure were also what amateur guidebooks pointed out; the product is robust and durable, it has a strong coating capacity with a nice glossy and smooth effect for a very cheap price, compared to fine art colors. Authors noticed as well its polyvalence and simple handling, since it is ready-

to-use and does not necessitate blending, along with its wide availability. For them, it represented a product within everyone's reach on either a technical, practical, or economical level.

Ripolin® decorative paint hence possessed the exact property to adapt to amateur requirements. Cheaper, stronger, and more common than oil paint, it first satisfied the need for a durable, thick, and multipurpose coating easily available and suitable for all supports. Indeed, amateurs committed "*ripolinage*" while painting as it operated as a unifying agent and hid heteroclitic techniques and materials. It helps amateur creations to look like professional artwork and is part of the "fake" esthetic displayed in domestic creative practices. It is therefore appropriate for an amateur's lack of skill and training. As a matter of fact, painting was a professional practice before the introduction of good quality ready-mixed paints. One needed knowledge and experience to blend the correct ingredients in the right assortment so that the painting had the required properties. Ripolin®, on the contrary, was ready-to-use and its material characteristics made it easy to apply. Its body was not too heavy, which would otherwise make the paint difficult to spread, but sufficient enough to get a good coating without too many layers, and had a finish free from brush marks which meant less manual work and dexterity. Subsequently, it is probable that Ripolin® was a frequent art product in Braque and Picasso's environment.

Nevertheless, Ripolin® was used as well in more artistic manners. As an undercoating, it allowed, according to Moser (1906), a very hard background without cracks, ready for paint, while in *Les petites occupations manuelles et artistiques d'amateur* (Ris Paquot 1893) it is said that, for pottery, enamel paint has such a luster that varnishing is unnecessary. But above all Ripolin® is associated with the simulation of traditional artistic and artisanal practice. Taking advantage of its glossy and smooth finish, it was proposed as a substitute means in works that were technically inaccessible for an amateur. To replicate

stained glass, for instance, Emile-Bayard (1904) suggested applying a grey Ripolin® line after painting the glass with colored varnish; the relief produced by its thickness and the shiny effect of its flat surface imitate lead perfectly. He also indicated that it gave a sufficient impression of barbotine or majolica. For Blanchon (1908), one could also achieve an effortless lacquered result while employing this brand. Finally, Ripolin® liquid enamel paint was a complete technique to reproduce enamel with simple means:

The process we describe here is an imitation of authentic enamel obtained by cooking pigments at a high heat. [...] The use of Ripolin enamel colors is of the easiest and within everyone's reach. They do not demand any preparation, except for cleaning the background on which one wants to use them, and do not require any artistic capacity. [...]

The color's laying will immediately be covering for small figures; while for bigger ones, one would better put a first bright tint, still transparent, even if it means to pass back again a second time, when the underneath coat will have dried [...]. This way, the drying is faster, the color does not soak in, fissure, and presents a fine unified surface. [...]

Once all the colors are put down, the work is entirely finished since, as we already said, the enamel needs neither varnishing nor cooking (Moser 1906, 71–77).

## 5. A PLASTIC SOLUTION

It is precisely for its enamel appearance that Picasso used Ripolin® decorative paint on his canvases. In *Souvenir du Havre* (1912, private collection) or *Violin, Glasses, Pipe and Anchor* (1912, Národní Galeri, Prague), the bright color areas are done with this lacquered house paint trademark that offers a smooth, uniform, and shiny texture contrasting with the

rest of the picture. This way, the colored surfaces stand out against the figure and come into sight like planar elements autonomous from the space generated in the image. Thus, if Picasso took advantage of the exact characteristics explained in amateur guidebooks – the glossy, flat, and covering effect of Ripolin® - he radically transformed its meaning and function.

Ripolin®, in Pablo Picasso's paintings, acts in response to the problem from which Cubism originated: how to integrate three-dimensional figures to the planar surface of the canvas. Indeed, Ripolin's areas of color function as a spatial element, in the same way as stenciled letters and numbers, or handmade wood graining, by revealing the flat plane on which the picture is painted. Because Ripolin colors, typographies, and fake wood are two-dimensional forms laid in a tinted manner on the background, they display the flat nature of the level surface supporting the drawing. Therefore, they create an inverted perspective by pushing the other objects depicted into the foreground, instead of pushing them into the background. The painting space comes out, contrary to Leon Battista Alberti's (1401–1472) open window principle where it deepens and recedes. The use of Ripolin decorative paint thus has its place among the solutions set up by Braque and Picasso to find a pictorial equivalent to reality and represent volume without digging into the picture; it is part of the desire to bring to light the material reality of works of art and its freedom from the traditional goal of imitating nature.

Ripolin®, following typographies and handmade woods, is also an element with a descriptive function which provokes a stylistic breaking. Not deformed by the Cubist grid, these parts of the painting are exterior to the Cubist manner. They are used for alleviating the difficult reading of the picture through the introduction of signs that allow recognition of the objects depicted. In *Souvenir du Havre* (1912, private collection) for instance, the typographies indicate the representation of a newspaper. The *faux bois* refers to the table on

which the objects lie, or again to the paneling on the wall. The flag is featured by means of blue, white, and red areas of color placed side by side. Endowing their paintings with real, material and descriptive details outside of analytic Cubist style, Braque and Picasso produced formal rupture and caused a conflict between contradictory plastic forms that encounter the heterogeneity of amateur creation. The latter, with their heteroclite material, techniques, and models must have had a disparate look; they could juxtapose a figure cut in a print, with a Flemish landscape and real plants or broken pieces of very different dishes. Despite the desire to copy the bourgeois decorative items, a peculiar esthetic, by default, sprung from those artifacts. They had an involuntary contrasting effect for an informed eye such as one of an artist. Not only were the layers of paint not always enough to hide the replacement materials and practices, but some domestic productions, such as patchwork or broken pottery mosaics, played deliberately with the combination of divergent styles, patterns, and colors. Therefore, they showed Braque and Picasso the potentiality of the stylistic, material and technical diversity that characterized synthetic Cubism.

The way Picasso operated with Ripolin® thus takes a totally different meaning: it is used to answer questions inherent to Cubism – avoiding abstraction and finding plastic means to represent reality in a non-naturalistic way – but it especially contributes to the deconsecration of art undertaken by Braque and Picasso. Since it is a decorative paint, Ripolin® does not belong to traditional fine art materials and techniques, just like sand painting or later, the scraps of newspaper and other ready-made elements included in *papiers collés* and construction. For that reason, it found its place among the Cubist's search for new methods of creation and materials worthy of modernity. Along with advertisements or wall papers, Ripolin® was an item borrowed from the real world, more precisely from industry, that showed the technological and social mutations of the time. It was a recent product due to the improvements of the modern manufacturing process and growing knowledge and was,

consequently, a sign of the contemporary period. Ripolin® is as well a common trademark responding to the daily and poor iconography of Cubism. It was just as frequent in their everyday surrounding as the bottles, the cups, the packs of cigarettes or the newspapers, the advertisements or the wall papers which appeared in their works of art. It played an important role in the desire to create an art closer to everyday life and to the general public by representing common things and using ordinary materials that everyone can recognize and link to his daily environment. Moreover, by employing decorative paint – Ripolin® – or house painter techniques – stenciled letters, hand made *faux bois* – Picasso and Braque ignore the separation between fine and applied art. They connected art with craft, and the artist with manual workers, making no distinction between creative practices and kinds of creators behind them, and renewing their empathy and identification with workers. Therefore, they stripped art and the artist from their exceptional status and broke the barrier separating them from the rest of humanity and its many productions, bringing art closer to ordinary life.

Such a search for modernity and openness in art then implied a will to disparage traditional artistic hierarchy; using techniques and materials exterior to fine-art standards, resorting to Ripolin® and assemblage to make a work of art, was a way to undermine the material, technical and esthetic rules establishing fine art superiority. They demonstrated that there was no noble material and procedure and that there was no reason to place fine art above other creative activities, to differentiate and create watertight boundaries between them. All means were legitimate to make art; methods and materials scoffed at by the fine arts possessed a sort of plastic charge. There was, in particular, in the use of Ripolin® a desire to test the spectator and the limits he or she could tolerate in the ever-expanding artistic field, as Picasso would go on to state in a letter dated June 17, 1912, and addressed to Kahnweiler: “You tell me that Uhde does not like the latest painting of me where there is some Ripolin and flags, maybe we will succeed in disgusting everyone and we have not said

everything yet” (Monod Fontaine 1984, 168). In other words, Ripolin® and all the inartistic means employed by Picasso have an explicit transgressive connotation; they represent, in a way, a systematic enterprise of challenging the public expectation to “disgust everyone,” including a supporter like Wilhem Uhde. A total inversion of amateur motivation for using Ripolin® thus came to be; while it has the ability to cover up the unconventional appearance of an amateurish creation and to improve its disparate look, allowing the object to be more acceptably esthetic, Ripolin®, on the contrary, was for Picasso a way to both question and reject the traditional visual and technical norms. On one hand, Ripolin® was employed to fit in artistic or artisanal categories; on the other hand, it was to open the creative field.

This backwards use of Ripolin® was emblematic of the way Braque and Picasso diverted and transformed the use and significance of amateur means and adapted them to their own work. Self-taught, amateurs did not gain control of qualified techniques; they were a separate entity from the professional groups from which originate the practices they were learning, and thus they possessed the liberty to use whatever they wanted or thought is good for their creation. Therefore, their products went against the traditional artistic rules; because all materials or techniques were suitable to achieve the completion of the object undertaken, they did not follow any fine-art hierarchy or esthetic. Yet, they did not emancipate intentionally from traditional artistic and artisanal categories; on the contrary, they made an effort to adhere to the bourgeois taste and used by default heteroclitic procedures that they tried somehow to hide. Braque and Picasso, contrarily, detected in domestic creative occupations a technical, material and formal revolution that was not yet conscious of its own existence and anticipated their own artistic reform. They extracted from ordinary manual practices what could lead them beyond tradition and generated, from the particularities of amateur operating processes, new means of creation capable of resolving their plastic interrogations and breaking as well with traditional models. They have made artistic practice

out of an ordinary practice of creation and Ripolin® was one of the amateurish means integrated in Cubism and transformed into art.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Therefore, the encounter of the avant-garde's search for new artistic means of expression and creation occurred because of their intimate relationship with the people and places of Paris' 18th *arrondissement*. Remaining outside bourgeois city life and the academic world of art allowed them to be in contact with a working class culture that nourished their own work. They found in this milieu and its plastic manifestations a support on which to lean in their quest of modernity, a confirmation of the necessity to break tradition and an encouragement to their transgressive artistic choices. Braque and Picasso's immersion in Montmartre served as a sort of prerequisite condition for their renewal of artistic creation and their questioning of art, as well as the artist's place and function in society. Without living in such a lower-class district, without feeling the gap between the restricted artistic world they knew and the one in which they lived, would they have so passionately desired changing traditional art? To make the artist a normal being, even a manual worker, and the product of his work a less prestigious object are conceptions directly originated from their experience outside the traditional artistic circles. In a surrounding where manual fabrication was not an exceptional activity, where the creator was a craftsman, a worker, or anyone getting by with his own objects of daily life, the meaning given to creation could not be restrained to the strict limits of fine art. Thus, Cubists were brought to discover another material culture which inspired them to new artistic means such as Ripolin® decorative paint.

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## NOTES

1. The term “working class” is to be understood in the large acceptance that prevailed at that time. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it did not only refer to industrial workers but included all types of manual workers: peasants, artisans, craftsmen and of course industrial workers.
2. All French translations are mine.
3. Because these activities refer to the domestic sphere, they were not documented at that time and artifacts were not preserved.

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Claire Le Thomas has a Ph.D in contemporary art history. Her dissertation, which was rewarded by the 2010 Orsay Museum prize, analyzes, with an anthropological viewpoint, the links between ordinary creative activities and Cubist innovations. She taught art history, as a lecturer, at the University of Paris Ouest (2003-2006) and, as temporary assistant professor, at the University of Strasbourg (2009-2011). She also collaborates with the website *l'Histoire par l'image* (<http://www.histoire-image.org/>) and is a member of different research centers. She is currently working on the publication of her Ph.D in association with the Orsay Museum and is a post-doctoral student at the LAHIC (Laboratoire d'anthropologie et d'histoire de l'institution de la culture, CNRS).