

# Envisioning Cubism in Romanian Avant-Garde Magazines

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## Abstract

How significant was Cubism to Romanian avant-garde artists and how did they incorporate Cubism in their art? I will answer these two questions according to my dissertation research on the 1920s Romanian avant-garde magazines *Contimporanul* (*The Contemporary*) and *Integral* (*Whole*). The two magazines published Cubist art and theoretical texts on Cubism by Romanian artists **Marcel Iancu** and **M.H. Maxy**, alongside reproductions of cubist paintings by internationally known artists **Pablo Picasso**, **Georges Braque**, and **Juan Gris**. Arguably, Cubism, as a modernist movement, contradicted the concept of the avant-garde and most notably what Romanian scholars term the “the militant” Romanian avant-garde. However, Romanian avant-garde artists interpreted Cubism as an avant-garde catalyst that led to the subsequent Constructivist and Dadaist movements. Cubism motivated them to study the problem of plastic construction in their semi-cubist and semi-abstract paintings, drawings, and prints. The Romanian avant-garde magazines, in turn, published their Cubist investigations despite their attempt to adhere to a Constructivist agenda.

## Integral: M.H. Maxy’s Integralist Art

In the article “Cronometraj-pictural” (“Pictorial Timekeeping”), published in *Contimporanul*, **M.H. Maxy** outlines the key characteristics of Cubism, Dadaism, and Constructivism and insinuates that Cubism was the first movement to break from the “individualism” and “romanticism” of sentimentalism and open art to the radical possibilities of Dadaism and Constructivism. Maxy’s “Cronometraj-pictural” exemplifies not only Cubism’s association with Dadaism and Constructivism but also the Romanian avant-garde artists’ continuous reference to and appropriation of Cubism.

*Integral* magazine was the outlet for the integralist style or tendency in Romanian avant-garde art. What is integralism? It is “synthetic order, essential constructive order, classic, integral,” “in rhythm with the times.” Integralist art is a combination of various art styles, such as Cubism and Constructivism. It can be argued that, alongside **Picasso**, **Iancu** and **Maxy**, and their avant-garde magazines, defied the avant-garde call for a break with the past while favoring new art experimentation. **Iancu** and **Maxy** looked back to Cubism in order to create an integralist art that defined the Romanian avant-garde as a distinct, rather than forgotten or redundant, movement among the European avant-garde movements. On the cover of *Integral* no. 11, from February-March 1927, **Maxy** juxtaposed the constructivist black and white design of the magazine’s typeface with his painting *Lopătar* (*Boatman*), which epitomizes one of Maxy’s cubist subjects and his gradual reintroduction of the figurative in his paintings. Within the span of *Integral*’s three-year run, from 1925 to 1928, Maxy’s art switched from the constructivist, abstract composition of *Construcție Integrală* (*Integralist Construction*) in *Integral* no. 1 to figurative portraits with cubist elements, as in *Lopătar*.

## Picasso, Braque, and Gris

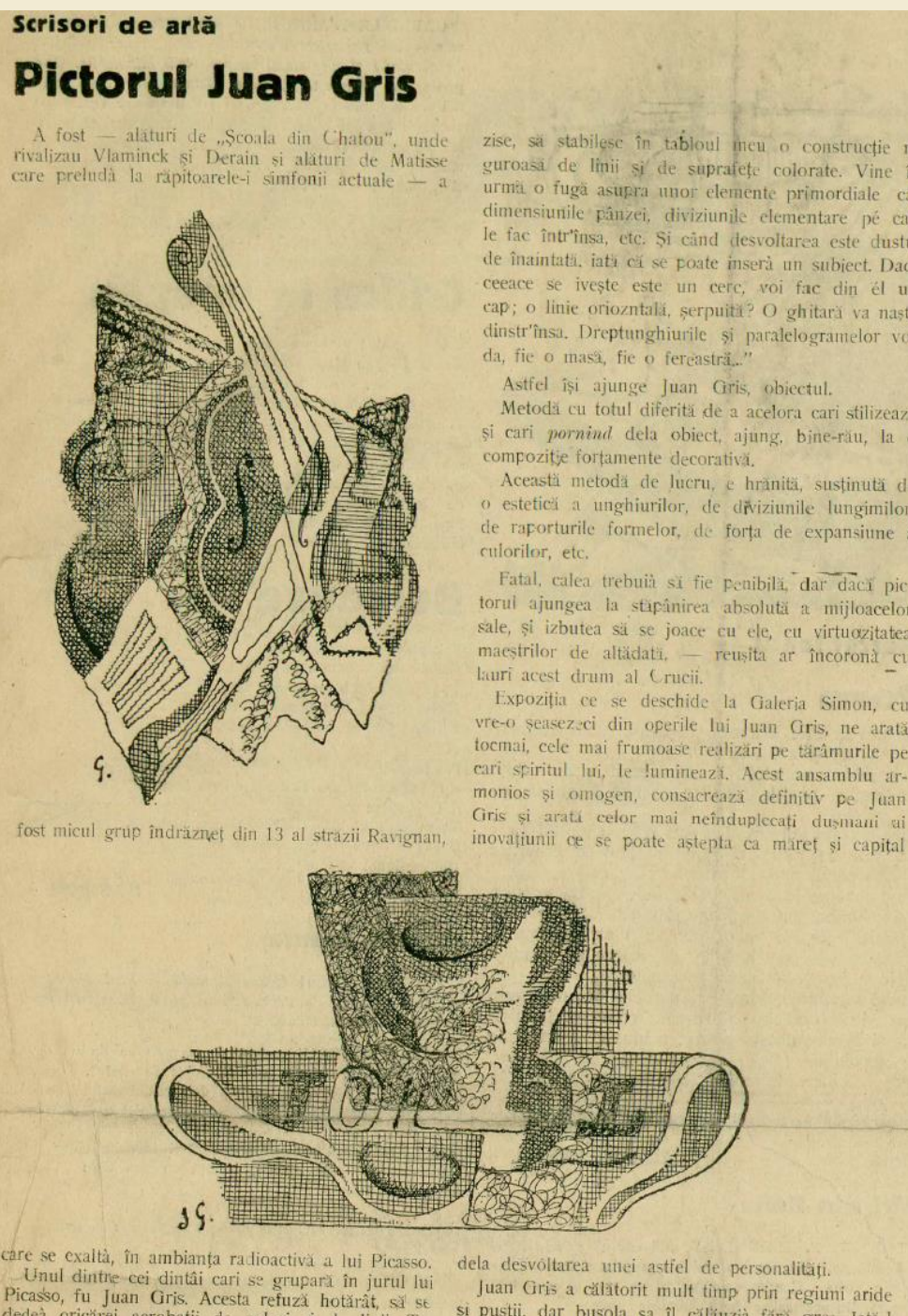


The painting *Compoziție* (*Composition*) by Picasso appears on the front page of *Contimporanul* no. 64. The magazine notes that the painting is from 1925 but it is actually from 1924 and titled *Mandolin and Guitar*. The magazine number was released in January 1926, so the fact that the magazine published Picasso’s painting within a short timespan (even if it was one year earlier than 1925) after its creation testifies to the magazine’s pursuit of new trends in Cubism.

A few issue numbers after Picasso’s cover painting, *Contimporanul* featured the painting *Compoziție* by **Braque**, also from 1925, on the cover of no. 67. Like Picasso’s, the painting is a still life of a guitar with a fruit bowl in a shallow space but without the discernible anthropomorphism. **Maxy** and **Iancu** painted similar still lifes during the 1920s period.



Juan Gris’s art is more pervasive in *Contimporanul* than Picasso’s and Braque’s. In no. 42, two of his prints accompany an article by Paul Dermée, titled “Scrisori de arta: Pictorul Juan Gris” (“Art Letters: The Painter Juan Gris”). In an announcement of his exhibition at Galerie Simon in Paris, **Gris** is described as the artist “who was among the first fighters of modern painting alongside **Picasso** and **Braque**.”



## Contimporanul: Marcel Iancu’s Return to Cubism

**Marcel Iancu** felt strongly about Cubism during his Dada period (1916-1919). In his lecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, he praised Cubism for its ability to “bring order to emotional expression.” Iancu’s cubist painting *Cabaret Voltaire* from his Dada period was featured in *Contimporanul* no.50-51 from 1924. **Iancu** published woodblock prints and painting reproductions in *Contimporanul* that demonstrated his interest in German Expressionism, Constructivism, and Cubism. These paintings include the cubist still lifes *Compoziție lirică* (*Lyrical Composition*) and *Decompoziție* (*Decomposition*).

The paintings signify Cubism’s influence on **Iancu**, particularly Picasso’s and Braque’s synthetic cubist renderings of the guitar form. In *Contimporanul*, the paintings are published next to poems and essays but not as mere illustrations. On the page, the word and image are detached, in the sense that the word and image do not need to rely on each other to complete their meaning; they exist independently of each other. With Iancu’s cubist paintings as independent images, *Contimporanul* established the significance of Cubism in Romania through the cubist practice of one of the most talented and prolific Romanian artists.



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