

MAX WEBER: SHAPE AND SPACE

How does art help us experience the world differently?

AGE RANGE: Key Stage 3 (Upper Primary/Lower Secondary)

Suggestions to compliment Arts Award: Explore.

Suggestions for Sensory Learning for SEND Students.

THEMES AND TOPICS:

- ◇ Drawing from different perspectives
- ◇ Understanding different art styles
- ◇ Analysing/interpreting art
- ◇ Max Weber & 1900s New York

OBJECTIVES:

- ◇ Learn about Max Weber and other artists from the same period, such as Pablo Picasso.
- ◇ Add to sketchbooks with drawings and paintings in different styles and techniques.
- ◇ Develop ability to interpret and understand art for meaning, form, and feeling.
- ◇ Explore and reflect on the process of creating.



Max Weber, *Landscape I*, 1912.
Oil (possibly with crayon) on canvas. 27 x 21.3 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10423.

Please note:

Although Max Weber's paintings are not currently on display, arrangements could be made for group visits to the University of Reading Art Collection to see the art in person.

MAX WEBER: SHAPE AND SPACE

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1. CUBISM

Max Weber was in Paris from 1905 to 1908. During this time, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque created the new modern style of Cubism.

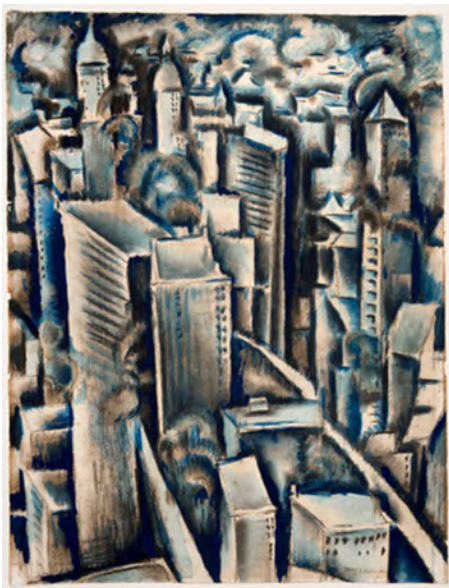
Since the start of the Renaissance period in the 1400s, art had traditionally used linear perspective.

Linear perspective involves making a flat image appear deeper and three dimensional. Objects in the distance are shown as smaller so when we look at the artwork, they seem further away.

Cubism broke away from this. Picasso and Braque started to highlight the flat, two dimensional nature of artwork. Their artwork was broken up and abstract. It showed lots of viewpoints of the same object or person in the same image.

These uneven, sharp edges often resembled cubes—giving the name of the movement, Cubism.

During his time in Paris, Max Weber was influenced by these new movements. He met Picasso in 1908 and read about Picasso and Braque's works while back in New York. His work reflects these modern styles with strong edges and distorted perspectives.



(left) Max Weber,
New York, 1912.
Water colour, pastel and
charcoal on paper.
61.5 x 47 cm.
University of Reading Art
Collection UAC/10412.

(right) Max Weber,
Dancing Figures, 1912.
Pastel on paper.
61.8 x 46.8 cm.
University of Reading Art
Collection UAC/10418.

Read more about Picasso's Cubist work here: <https://www.pablocpicasso.org/cubism.jsp>

ACTIVITY 1: Ask students to research the Cubist art of Pablo Picasso and consider the following questions:

- ◇ What similarities and differences can you see between Weber and Picasso's art?
- ◇ How does each artist use colour, shape, and style?
- ◇ Why do you think people at the time were so shocked by Cubist art?

Arts Award: Part B Explore

Explore the life and work of Max Weber using these questions and other information in the pack.

Suggestions for Sensory Learning:

Try using different mediums like paints, crayons, or pencils to create similar textures, shapes and colours.

2. VAUDEVILLE

Weber often painted or drew scenes full of movement. For example, the bustle of New York rush hour to the energy of dancing figures.

He depicted figures from 'Vaudeville.' This was a type of American entertainment that included several kinds of acts. These could be dancing, magic, juggling, singing, and even trained animals. It was popular from the mid-1890s until the early 1930s.

In 1913, Martin Beck built the Palace Theatre in Weber's home city of New York. This became the most popular theatre to perform and watch Vaudeville shows.

Weber painted multiple **moments** and **perspectives** in the same picture. This was to show the **energy** and **speed**. The figures are seen from different directions and different poses to show how quickly they switch and move. The experience and emotion of the scene is more important than a really accurate reproduction.

Max Weber, *Dancing Figures*, 1912.

Pastel on paper. 61.8 x 46.8 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10418.



QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- ◇ **What shapes can you see?**
- ◇ **How does Weber use ideas from Cubism to paint Vaudeville dancers?**
- ◇ **What techniques are used to indicate movement?**
- ◇ **In what ways are Weber's paintings of people different to his other paintings (in this resource)?**

This painting could show Ruth St Denis. She was a Vaudeville dancer known for her short black hair and dancing with bare feet.

St Denis was inspired by cultures across the world. For example, she created dances based on Ancient Egyptian and Hindu mythology.

Through her dance, multiple places could be joined into one series of movements.

Weber also took inspiration from art and culture all around the world.

Arts Award: Part B Explore

Explore the life and work of Max Weber using these questions and other information in the pack.

3. NEW YORK (FROM ABOVE)

Max Weber often painted and drew New York City. He was fascinated by the **height**, the **speed** and the **energy**. He was interested in the views from the new skyscrapers being built across the city. Some of these scenes are shown on the next page.

Weber's friend, Alvin Langdon Coburn was also interested in showing New York from above. He took photographs from skyscrapers which seemed to make city come alive.

Watch this video for more information about Coburn's elevated photography:

<https://benuri.org/video/48-alvin-langdon-s-the-octopus-1909-at-the-max-artist-focus/>

NEW YORK IN THE 1910s

New York at the beginning of the 1900s was fast, modern, and growing. When Max Weber returned to the city in 1908, it was breaking records. The longest subway system in the world opened in 1904, the Brooklyn Bridge (pictured on the next page) was longest suspension bridge in the world, and the tallest buildings in the world were almost all in New York.

The city was not only modern and booming, but also diverse. Between 1900 and 1915, over 15 million people moved to the USA as immigrants. By 1910, three quarters of the population of New York were either immigrants or first generation Americans (the children of immigrants).

ACTIVITY 2:

(a) Students should study the three paintings on the following page. They are all portrayed from a height. Consider the following questions:

What new shapes can you see from height that aren't visible at ground level?

Why is it important to look at places from new angles?

(b) Ask students to choose a local building, park, or bridge. In a sketchbook, ask them to try drawing it how they imagine it looks from above. Think about the following questions:

What new shapes can you see from height that aren't visible at ground level?

How will you look at this building/park/bridge differently now?

Arts Award: Part C Create

Draw or paint structures from a height. Record the process and any challenges encountered.

Suggestions for Sensory Learning

Use mirrors from ground level to look up at buildings and identify new shapes and patterns.

4. NEW YORK (FROM ABOVE)



Brooklyn Suspension Bridge (1912)

Weber often tried to depict the fast pace of New York. He was impressed by the structural strength of Brooklyn Bridge and saw it as an urban monument.

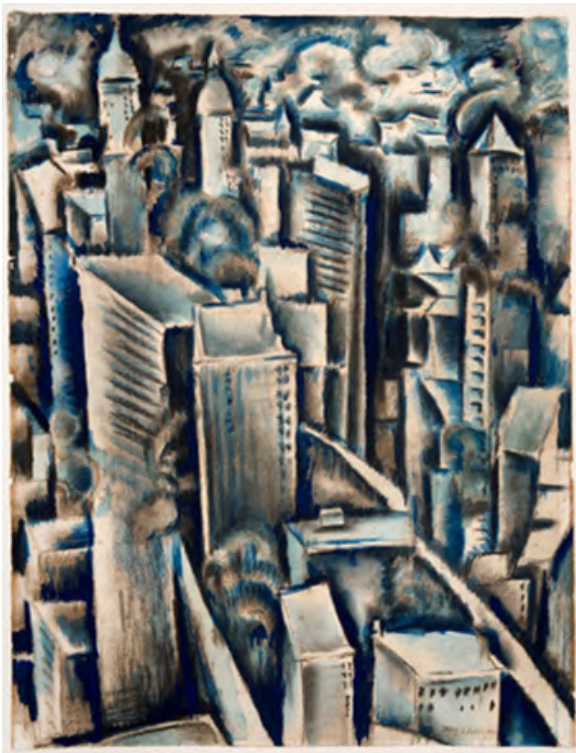
This was not the only time Weber included the bridge in his artwork. In a separate painting of New York (1913), the bridge acts as a canopy over the whole city. It is often seen as an icon of the USA.



Octopus (1911)

Weber was inspired by Alvin Langdon Coburn's photograph of New York's Central Park. (See video on previous page).

In Coburn's image, the snaking paths make up the octopus's arms. In Weber's painting, the scene is much smaller, and the trees themselves appear as the octopus.



New York (1912)

In this painting, Weber uses the familiar sharp shapes of Cubism as well as softer shapes for trees and clouds.

During this period, Weber made several watercolour and charcoal sketches of New York. He and Coburn were fascinated by the views from the new skyscrapers. They especially focused on the empty windows and impressive shadows.

*(top) Max Weber, Brooklyn Suspension Bridge, 1912.
Paint, pastel and crayon on board. 47.5 x 61.5 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10414*

*(middle) Max Weber, Octopus, 1911.
Water colour on paper. 14 x 21.8 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10428.*

*(bottom) Max Weber, New York, 1912.
Water colour, pastel and charcoal on paper. 61.5 x 47 cm.*

5. EXPERIENCE OVER ACCURACY

Max Weber, *Landscape I*, 1912.
Oil (possibly with crayon) on canvas. 27 x 21.3 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10423.

Arthur Wesley Dow was Max Weber's teacher while he was studying in Brooklyn. Dow believed that Americans were not interested in art because it was too accurate to real life. Dow believed that **"the artist does not teach us to see facts: he teaches us to feel harmonies."**

Weber was influenced by this. He argued that art should be a record of people's **experiences** rather than a record of factual images (Essays on Art, 1916).

There were other methods to create perfectly accurate images, such as the newly popular photography. Painting was becoming more personal and emotional instead.

The three paintings on the next page are semi-abstract. The scene is clearly a forest but the trees and landscape are distorted. This could reflect how Weber **felt** in the space as well as how he saw it.



"Art has a higher purpose than mere imitation of nature. It transcends the earthly and measurable [...] A work may be ever so anatomically incorrect or 'distorted' and still be endowed with the miraculous and indescribable elements of beauty that thrill the discerning spectator."

Max Weber

ACTIVITY 3: Ask students to think about what feelings they get from the paintings on the next page? Ask them to write down the emotions that each one makes them feel and why.

Think about colours, textures and shapes. Would you feel comfortable in the space? What differences and similarities are there in the feel of these paintings?

Then, compare notes with others in the class, in small groups or pairs. What different feelings did other students get and why?

Suggestions for Sensory Learning

Explore the sights, smells, textures, and feelings of a local landscape. Create a sensory journey using fans, water, and sounds (e.g. crunching leaves). Try bark rubbing or leaf and flower pressing. Try using the natural dyes in petals and leaves to recreate landscapes.

6. EXPERIENCE OVER ACCURACY

ACTIVITY 2: Think about what feelings these paintings create. Write down the emotions that each one makes you feel and why. Then, compare notes with others in the class, in small groups or pairs.

Think about colours, textures and shapes. Would you feel comfortable in the space? What differences and similarities are there in the feel of these paintings?

Understanding the feeling and meaning of art is very personal. There are no right or wrong answers. Were you surprised about the different feelings paintings could cause?



Max Weber, *Landscape I*, 1912.
Oil on canvas. 27 x 21.3 cm. University of
Reading Art Collection UAC/10423.

How does Landscape I make you feel?

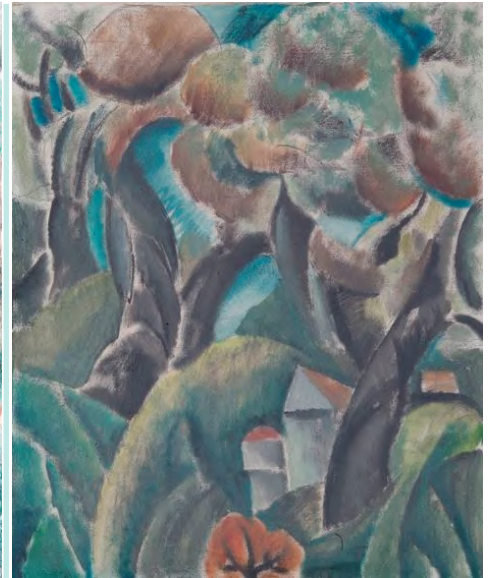
How does Landscape I make other
people feel?



Max Weber, *Landscape II*, 1912.
Oil on board. 26.9 x 21.4 cm. University of
Reading Art Collection UAC/10425.

How does Landscape II make you feel?

How does Landscape II make other
people feel?



Max Weber, *Landscape III*, 1912.
Oil on canvas. 45.7 x 37.8 cm. University of
Reading Art Collection UAC/10420.

How does Landscape III make you feel?

How does Landscape III make other
people feel?

7. STILL-LIFE PAINTINGS

Max Weber was a big fan of the art and design from non-Western countries. Objects from around the world can be seen in some of his **still-life** paintings.

For example, in Still Life II, the white and black bird is an example of Native American **Cochiti pottery**. The three-legged bowl with a painted llama may have come from Mexico, or South America more widely.

Weber was inspired by museum objects as well as his own small collection. While he was studying in Paris, he visited the **Musée Guimet** which is famous for its collection of Asian objects.

While he was in New York, he often visited the Chinese collection at the **Metropolitan Museum**. He also enjoyed visiting the **American Museum of Natural History** to see its South American art collection. This included objects from the Incas and Aztecs.

Weber mixes a traditionally Western art style (still-life) with non-Western objects to create interesting and vivid paintings. His work is similar to the **Fauvist style** with bright, block colours.

Max Weber, *Still Life II*, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm..

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10416.



ACTIVITY 4: Divide the students into pairs. Give one student image A and the other image B (images on next page). They must not show their image to their partner.

Students take it in turns to describe their image while their partner attempts to draw and recreate it. Focus on the placement and space between objects.

Once both partners have described and drawn, ask them to compare their drawings to Weber's original paintings. What are the main differences? Was it easy or difficult? Why?

EXTENSION TASK: Research traditional still-life paintings. Compare them with Weber's paintings. Do you think they belong in the same artistic category?

School or group visits to the Art Collection or The Museum of English Rural Life could be arranged.

Why not come for a workshop in handling objects?

Ask students to use objects from the collections to construct and draw their own still life compositions.

Arts Award: Part A Inspire

Visit the Art Collection or The Museum of English Rural Life. This can be done in person or virtually using the online exhibitions and resources. Pick out 3-5 objects to arrange and draw a new still life. Think about the inspiration behind why you chose certain objects and reflect on the overall activity.

A



Max Weber, *Still Life III*, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10415.

B



Max Weber, *Still Life with a Lemon and Blue Vase*, 1914.

Oil on board. 26 x 21 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10424.

9. ART AWARD

The activities and information in this resource can be complimentary to all stages of the Explore Art Award.

Part A (Inspire)

See Pages 7-8.

Still Life Paintings

Part B (Explore)

See Pages 1 and 2.

Research Max Weber.

Part C (Create)

See Pages 3-4.

Drawing from new perspectives.

Part D (Present)

See below.



Max Weber, *Still Life II*, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm..

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10416.

Questions for Art Award Part D: Present

Reflection:

What have you enjoyed the most during your Explore Arts Award?

What are you most proud of, and what is your biggest achievement?

What skills have you learnt and what activities would you like to try again?

Presentation:

Who would you like to share your experience of the Explore Arts Award with?

Teachers? Parents or Guardians? Someone else?

How would you like to present your ideas and experiences?

Can you make an online exhibition of your work and what you have researched?

Can you make a physical display or video to share your ideas?

Make sure to record of what you presented and how you shared it in your Art Log.

10. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Arthur D. Chapman, Photograph of Max Weber, 1914.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Accessed Wikimedia Commons.

Max Weber was born in 1881 in the Polish city of Białystok. When he was 10, he moved to Brooklyn in the USA with his family. He studied art at the Pratt Institute under Arthur Wesley Dow.

Weber worked as a teacher while saving money to travel to Europe and study at the Académie Julian in Paris.

In Paris he met many influential artists, including Henri Rousseau, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso.

Weber was in Europe from 1905 to 1908 and this was an important time for modern art. Movements such as Fauvism and Cubism emerged and influenced Weber's style. He was also inspired by the work of Paul Cézanne.



In 1908, Weber's money started to run out so he returned to New York. He was surprised that almost nobody in America had heard of the artists he admired, such as Cezanne, Picasso or Rousseau.

He is known as the first person to introduce Cubism to America. However, because the style was so unknown, people did not like it to begin with and he was widely criticised.

For the next few years, Weber was very poor. He sometimes had to camp on the floor of his friend Alfred Stieglitz's gallery 291.

In 1913, modern art was properly introduced to the USA in the Armory Show. Weber was offered the chance to display two of his paintings in the exhibition. He dropped out in protest because some other artists were given more space.

After the First World War, Weber began to move away from Cubist and modernist styles to focus more on landscapes and still-lives. At a 1929 exhibition, he was praised as a "pioneer of modern art in America" - a long way from the harsh criticism of twenty years before.

During the 1930s, he started exploring his Jewish faith through paintings of Jewish families and Rabbis.

By 1950, other modern artists had begun to take over from Weber, although he continued exhibiting work during this time. The newcomers included Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko.

11. KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE

291 was a gallery created and led by photographer Alfred Stieglitz. The gallery gave a new platform for photography as art, and introduced many modern European artists to the USA. These included Henri Matisse, Henri Rousseau, and Paul Cézanne as well as Max Weber.

Académie Julian was an art school in Paris founded by Rodolphe Julian in 1867. While women were not allowed to enrol at the prestigious École des Beaux Arts, they were allowed to attend Académie Julian. And while the École des Beaux Arts had a very harsh French language exam, foreign students were welcomed at Académie Julian. Students came from all over the world.

The **Armory Show**, or International Exhibition of Modern Art (1913), was the first major exhibition of modern art in the USA. American audiences were used to realistic styles and were shocked by the experimental art on display, including Fauvism and Cubism.

Paul Cézanne has inspired many artists of the 1900s, particularly Cubists and Fauvists. While he was informed by Impressionism, he did not follow the conventions of nineteenth-century painting, preferring to focus on personal expression and the feeling of a painting, rather than subject matter.

Alvin Langdon Coburn (pictured) was an American photographer who was the first major artist to use elevated viewpoints and abstract photographs. Coburn is responsible for leaving the collection of Max Weber paintings to the University of Reading in 1966.

Cubism involved showing multiple different views of the same subject within the same picture. This gives the impression of being fragmented or abstracted. It was invented in 1907-08 by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. It was the first major move away from linear perspective since the Renaissance.

Arthur Wesley Dow studied art at Académie Julian before working as a commercial artist designing posters. He then worked as a teacher, instructing Max Weber while at the Pratt Institute. His ideas on teaching art were very new; he thought people should include personal experience in art, focusing on line and colour rather than simply imitating the real world.

Fauvism is characterised by an expressive and rough style, bright colours, and simple forms. It was the first modern art movement of the 1900s and was inspired by artists such as Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh.



Max Weber, Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1911.
Gouache on board. 62.9 x 47 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10413.

12. KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE



Max Weber, *Still Life III*, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10415.

Henri Matisse started painting in 1889 after originally studying law. During 1904-1905 he and other artists were inspired by the brightness of Southern France to create a new style of artwork focusing on wild, clashing colours: fauvism. Matisse also invented a new form of art, the cut-out, which were collages of cut-out painted paper.

Linear perspective involves creating an illusion of depth on a flat piece of paper or canvas. Objects in the distance are depicted as smaller and thus when we look at the artwork, they seem further away.

Pablo Picasso was supported in art from a young age as his father was also an artist. Picasso developed Cubism after being influenced by African sculpture and the work of Paul Cézanne. He also worked with collage, sculpture, and ceramics.

Jackson Pollock was an abstract expressionist artist. This group came from New York and created paintings that didn't depict real subjects, but instead tried to show emotions such as happiness or

anger. He was also influenced by a movement called automatism which involved a lack of planning in art, using chance and the moment to create.

Mark Rothko was taught by Max Weber. Rothko is best known for his paintings of coloured squares. He wanted his paintings to express human emotions, including tragedy and doom.

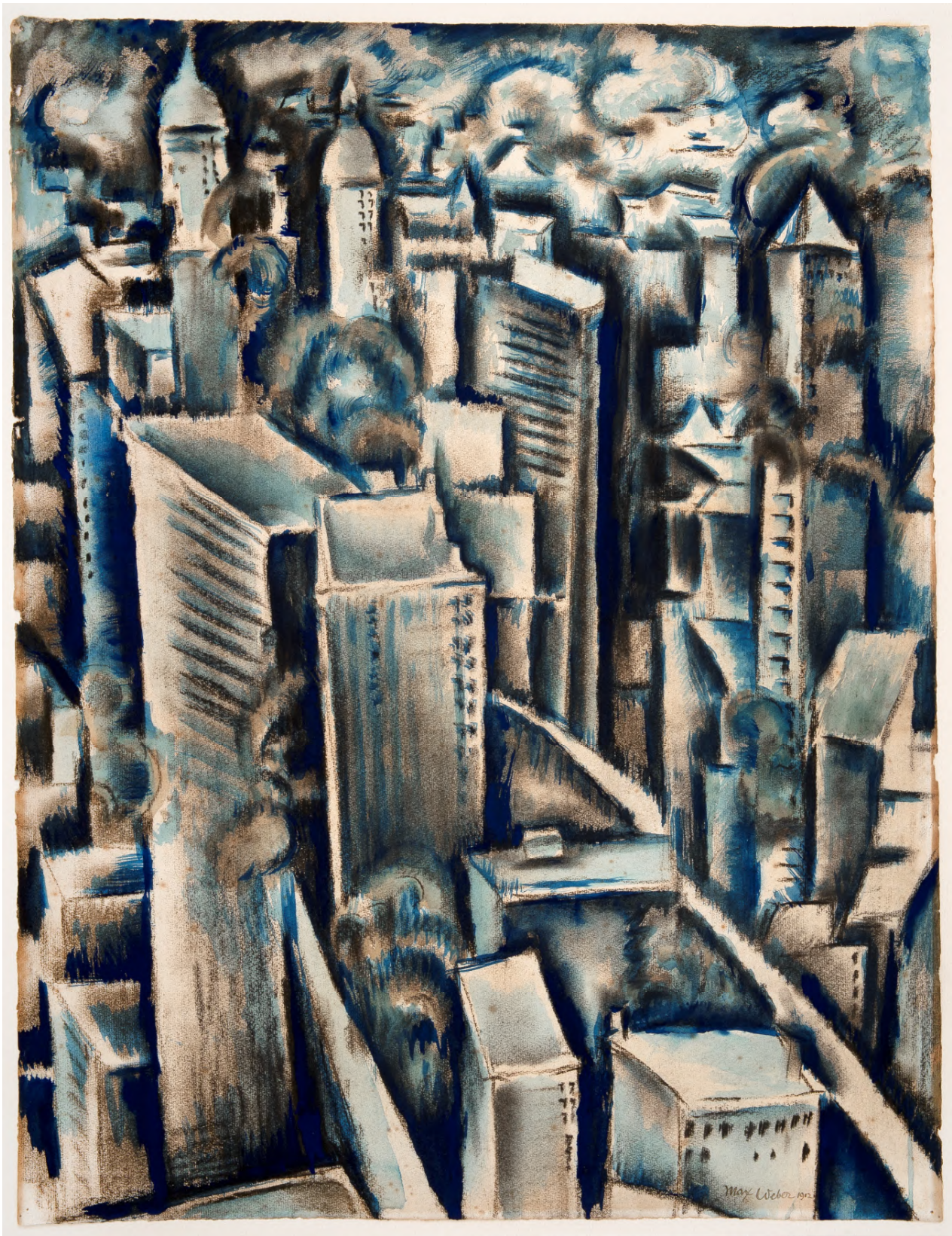
Henri Rousseau didn't start painting seriously until he was in his forties, having worked as a tax collector previously. He was self-taught and is best known for his paintings of jungle scenes. Although he never left France, he was inspired by stories from soldiers who had visited Mexico as well as the exotic plants in Paris' botanical gardens.

Still-life paintings usually show a collection of objects arranged on a surface. Fruit, flowers, and dishes are common subjects.

Vaudeville was a type of American entertainment that included several kinds of acts. It was popular from the mid-1890s until the early 1930s.



*Max Weber, Landscape I, 1912.
Oil (possibly with crayon) on canvas. 27 x 21.3 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10423.*



(left) Max Weber, *New York*, 1912.
Water colour, pastel and charcoal on paper. 61.5 x 47 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10412.



Max Weber, *Dancing Figures*, 1912.
Pastel on paper. 61.8 x 46.8 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10418.



(above) Max Weber, *Brooklyn Suspension Bridge*, 1912.

Paint, pastel and crayon on board. 47.5 x 61.5 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10414

(below) Max Weber, *Octopus*, 1911.

Water colour on paper. 14 x 21.8 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10428.





*Max Weber, Landscape II, 1912.
Oil on board. 26.9 x 21.4 cm.
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10425.*



Max Weber, Landscape III, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 45.7 x 37.8 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10420.



Max Weber, *Still Life II*, 1912.
Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm..
University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10416.



Max Weber, Still Life III, 1912.

Oil on canvas. 54 x 45 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10415.



Max Weber, Still Life with a Lemon and Blue Vase, 1914.

Oil on board. 26 x 21 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10424.



*Arthur D. Chapman, Photograph of Max Weber, 1914.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Accessed Wikimedia Commons.*



Max Weber, Alvin Langdon Coburn, 1911.

Gouache on board. 62.9 x 47 cm.

University of Reading Art Collection UAC/10413.