George Braque is the quieter half of one of the most consequential collaborations in modern art history, the painter whose close partnership with Picasso through the years that produced Cubism made him an indispensable architect of twentieth-century painting, and whose subsequent half-century of work confirmed him as one of the great late masters of European art.

Braque came to art through a working family tradition. His father and grandfather were house painters and decorators in Le Havre, and his early apprenticeship in their trade, mixing pigments, learning the practical handling of surfaces, gilding, and *faux-marbre* , gave him a craftsman's understanding of materials that would underlie everything he subsequently made. He moved to Paris and pursued evening art classes alongside his decorative work before committing fully to painting around 1902.

His first mature style was Fauvist, and he showed alongside Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck at the 1907 Salon d'Automne. But the same year brought two transformative encounters: the major posthumous retrospective of Paul Cézanne, which opened his eyes to a new way of constructing pictorial space, and his meeting with Picasso through Guillaume Apollinaire. The two painters began visiting each other's studios that autumn, and within two years they were working in a sustained, mutual exchange that essentially invented Cubism. Their canvases of 1909–1912, the analytic phase, with its faceted, near-monochrome breakdown of objects, and the subsequent move into collage, *papier collé*, and synthetic Cubism were arrived at jointly. Braque later described the relationship in a 1954 interview with Dora Vallier as one in which the two painters were "like two mountaineers roped together."

The First World War broke the partnership. Braque was mobilized in 1914, fought in northern France, and was severely wounded by a shell in 1915, sustaining a head injury that required trepanation and a long recovery. By the time he returned to painting in 1917, the prewar climate of joint experiment had ended, and he set himself to working out an independent extension of the Cubist project on his own terms.

The body of work he produced over the next four decades has often been described as a slow, deliberate refining of the syntax of Cubism. His mature still lifes, fruit, pitchers, mandolins, fish, the well-furnished studio table, became the primary vehicle for an exploration of pictorial space, color, and the relationship between flat surface and represented depth that few other twentieth-century painters have matched. He also produced major series of figures, landscapes of the Norman coast at Varengeville (where he kept a studio), and in his last decades a remarkable suite of bird paintings, of which the Louvre ceiling is the public culmination.

His position in twentieth-century European art is now settled at the highest level. The body of his work, the early Fauvist canvases, the Cubist years with Picasso, the long postwar still lifes, the late birds, and the public commissions in the museums of Paris, together constitute one of the most coherent careers in modern painting, and his quiet, sustained insistence on the disciplines of his craft has made him, in the long view, one of the indispensable painters of the century.