

# Loss of the Whole Reflected in Western Art and Design

By Pastor Douglas Shearer

Almost 80 years ago, Robert Frost intoned, “The family’s where you go when no one else wants you.” What prompted Frost’s observation - as much a plaintive cry as an observation - were the changes then taking place in Western culture. Family alone was a sanctuary; a haven; a refuge. All other social institutions were fast becoming impersonal bureaucracies staffed by “experts” - and pointed toward well defined, rationally calculated goals. Management technique was based upon “cost effectiveness.” Organizational linkages were intentionally stripped of affection and reduced instead to a mere “cash nexus.” Neither management nor labor stressed personal loyalty based upon a sense of mutual respect and organic attachment. The bottom line for both was the “almighty dollar.” Employees were mere ciphers, moveable parts, *modular units* - to be shifted around or discarded at will.

## *New Way of Thinking Produces a New Art Form*

Modular units, moved about at will - perhaps the best single concrete reflection of alienation. It has been carried over onto every level of human consciousness - even onto the level of artistic consciousness. Picasso’s art reflects it. His human figures are composed of “modular units” moved about at random - not bound by any thought of the whole. A nose is haphazardly attached here, an ear there, etc. The parts are all present, but not fit together according to any holistic principle. The integrating significance of the whole has been intentionally discarded - leaving many of his paintings looking like shards of broken glass.

Picasso perfectly reflected the alienation that was tightening its grip on western culture at the be-



Modular Home



Picasso’s Art - loss of the whole

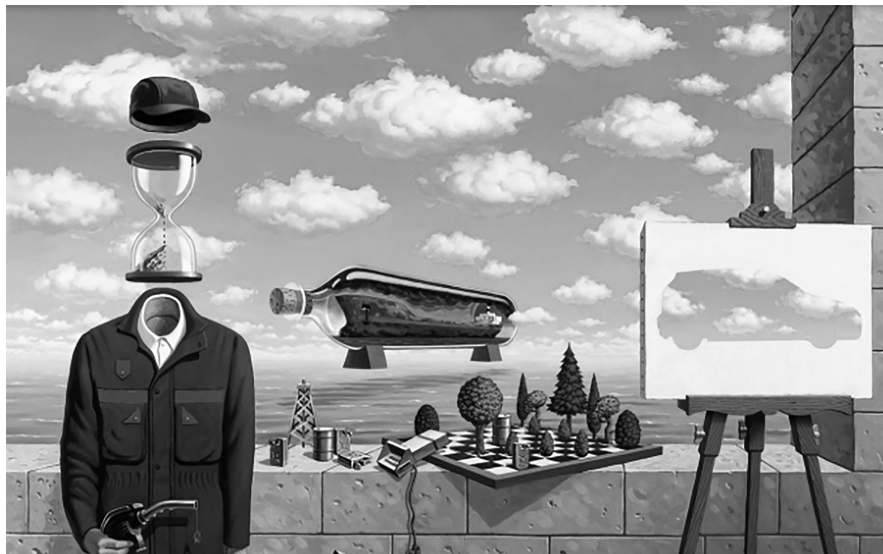
gining of the Twentieth Century. That was his genius. Picasso, though, never quite captured the horror of that alienation. That was left to Edward Munch.

His painting “The Scream” sends shudders through the soul of every man, woman, and child born since 1900. Each of us resonates to the dread it portrays. And what it so dramatically portrays is the insanity that alienation leads to - the horrifying solipsism it produces. Likewise, the absurdity produced by alienation is the subject of the surrealists - who transformed even space and time into “modular units.” The whole flow of “modern” art is easily discerned when set against the backdrop of the individualism which is now fully predominant in the West - most especially here in America.



Edvard Munch – *The Scream*

Renee Magritte - a Belgian surrealist who painted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century



Surrealism is art that depicts the unexpected - with images that don't fit together - images that don't belong together. It's art of the non sequitur. Once again, the integrating significance of the whole is intentionally jettisoned.