

# Wassily Kandinsky

(also known as Vasilij Kandinskij, Vasilii Kandinskii, Vasily Kandinski)

He was born on December 4, 1866 in Moscow into a merchant family.

His parents played the piano and the zither and Kandinsky himself learned the piano and cello at an early age. When he was 5 the family moved to Odessa. His parents soon divorced and his aunt looked after the boy. In Odessa, Kandinsky studied in a classical gymnasium and had private lessons in music, drawing and painting.

At the age of 20 (1886), he enrolled at the University of Moscow, chose to study law and economics. During this time he enjoyed the arts as a hobby. After passing his examinations, he lectured at the Moscow Faculty of Law. He enjoyed success not only as a teacher but also wrote extensively on spirituality, a subject that remained of great interest and ultimately exerted substantial influence in his work.

With that we know he was brilliant and loved music. Spirituality was important and very persuasive.

After a visit in 1895 (he was 29) to an exhibition of French impressionist paintings in Moscow, Kandinsky decided to become a painter. Moving to Munich, Germany, he studied life-drawing, sketching and anatomy. It helped that he was older and more mature than his fellow students. He regarded this as basic for an artistic education. In other words, he went to the art school, but was bored with the what they were teaching him.

It was not long before his talent surpassed the constraints of art school and he began exploring his own ideas of painting - **"I applied streaks and blobs of colors onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could..."**

Between 1900 and 1910 Kandinsky traveled widely, including visits to Paris. He met Paul Gauguin, who was a neoimpressionist and a fauvist (a style with aggressive use of brilliant colors). He began developing his ideas concerning the power of pure color and nonrepresentational painting.

In 1911 together with a friend, a German painter Franz Marc, Kandinsky founded the society "Der Blaue Reiter" (Blue Rider), which also published an illustrated almanac. The aim of this society, according to its founders, was "to destroy barriers between the different forms of art", collect and promote new ideas in painting, theater and music. The same year his first theoretical work "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" was published. In the book, he postulated an inner relationship between music and painting.

At the same time Kandinsky took part in numerous exhibitions throughout Russia, Holland, France and Germany. His first one-man show at the "Der Sturm" gallery in Berlin exhibited 64 works of 1902-1912. The painter was in close contact with Russian avant-garde artists, such as the Burliuk brothers, Natalya Goncharova, Michail Larionoff, Kazimir Malevich and others, helping them to promote their art in international shows.

His reputation became firmly established in the United States and the world through numerous exhibitions. In 1909 Kandinsky helped found the New Artists' Association in Munich. Kandinsky painted his first abstract watercolor in 1910 and began formulating his important theoretical study, 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art', which was published originally in German in 1912. In this work he examined the psychological effects of color and made comparisons between painting and music.

With the outbreak of World War I, Kandinsky left Germany to return to Russia, where he taught and organized numerous artistic activities. He went back to Germany in 1921 and became one of the principal teachers at the Bauhaus school in Weimar, remaining with the school until it was closed by the Nazi regime in 1933. The Nazi party destroyed much of his work. The Nazi party named him and his work as “degenerate”.

Kandinsky then moved to a Parisian suburb, where he continued to paint and stayed until his death on Dec. 13, 1944.

From the very beginning Kandinsky's own work showed an interest in fantasy. The influence of music in his paintings cannot be overstated, down to the names of his paintings *Improvisations, Impressions, and Compositions*.

Kandinsky once said

**Color is the keyboard,  
the eyes are the harmonies,  
the soul is the piano with many strings.  
The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.**

The concept that color and musical harmony are linked has a long history, intriguing scientists such as Sir Isaac Newton. Kandinsky used color in a highly theoretical way associating tone with timbre (the sound's character), hue with pitch, and saturation with the volume of sound. He even claimed that when he saw color he heard music.

**Black is like the silence of the body after death, the close of life.**

-- Wassily Kandinsky, 1911

Abstract art lies in the experience of the pictures provides. It demands that you must look and think. Many do not like this because it is demanding and time-consuming. Yet if we do not look long and with an open heart, we shall see nothing but superior wallpaper.

Ranked among the artists whose work changed the history of art in the early years of the 20th century, the Russian abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky is generally regarded as one of the originators of abstract painting, or abstract expressionism. In both his painting and his theoretical writings he influenced modern styles.

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## The White Dot

Show Print

Do you like it? Why or Why not?

Can anyone tell me what this is about?

What does your painting make you think of?

What feeling does the painting give you? Ugly or Beautiful? Harsh or Gentle? Silly or Serious? Lonely or Friendly? Elegant or Crude? Warm or Cold?

This is abstract art. Kandinsky would look at a normal object and turn it into a shape or form. Knowing this, can you look at this painting and identify any images?

How hard would it be to explain this painting without the words shape, line, color or texture?

Cover the picture – when I turn it around tell me where your eye looks first. Turn around the picture – where does your eye go first? Why?

Did a color jump out at you?

### Color to Kandinsky

#### Yellow

Warm

eccentric movement

surface seems to get closer to us

painful and aggressive

Mixed together = Green, eternal

#### Blue

Cold

concentric movement

surface seems to move away

deep calm

#### White

Clarity

deep and absolute silence full of possibilities

#### Black

obscurity

nothingness without possibility

Mixed together = gray, which possesses no active force. The *gray* corresponds to immobility without hope; it tends to despair when it becomes dark and regains little hope when it lightens.

The *red* is a warmth color, very living, lively and agitated, it possesses an immense force, it is a movement in oneself. Mixed with black, it leads to *brown* which is a hard color. Mixed with yellow, it gains in warmth and gives the *orange* which possesses an irradiating movement on the surroundings. Mixed with blue, it moves away from man to give the *purple*, which is cooled red. The red and the green form the 3rd big contrast, the orange and the purple the fourth one.

### **Geometric Elements to Kandinsky**

What kinds of lines did you use?

How were they different?

Can someone show me the forms? --points, bundles of lines, circles, and triangles.

Is there a resting point?

The dominance of circles in this and related works was something Kandinsky acknowledged. According to the artist, circles were to his work of the later 1920s and 30s what horses were to his early paintings, his most important imagery.

The *point* is in the practice a small stain of color put by the artist on the canvas. So the point used by the painter is not a geometric point, it is not a mathematical abstraction, it possesses a certain extension, a form and a color. This form can be a square, a triangle, a circle, like a star or even more complex. The point is the most concise form. It can be alone and isolated or on the opposite put in resonance with other points or with lines.

The *line* is the product of a force, it is a point on which a living force has been applied in a given direction, the force applied on the pencil or on the paint brush by the hand of the artist. It can be *straight, angular or curved*.