

Wassily Kandinsky 1866-1944

Russian painter

Germany then Paris

Later in life, he would recall being fascinated and stimulated by colour as a child. His fascination with color symbolism and psychology continued as he grew

he relates that the houses and churches were decorated with such shimmering colors that upon entering them, he felt that he was moving into a painting

This experience, and his study of the region's folk art (particularly the use of bright colors on a dark background), was reflected in much of his early work. A few years later he first likened painting to composing music in the manner for which he would become noted, writing, "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul".^[8]

1896 before leaving Moscow, he saw an exhibit of paintings by [Monet](#). He was particularly taken with the impressionistic style of [Haystacks](#); this, to him, had a powerful sense of colour almost independent of the objects themselves. Later, he would write about this experience:

That it was a haystack the catalogue informed me. I could not recognize it. This non-recognition was painful to me. I considered that the painter had no right to paint indistinctly. I dully felt that the object of the painting was missing. And I noticed with surprise and confusion that the picture not only gripped me, but impressed itself ineradicably on my memory. Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendor.

He rarely used human figures in his work *Couple on Horseback* (1907) depicts a man on horseback, holding a woman with tenderness and care as they ride past a Russian town with luminous walls across a blue river. The horse is muted while the leaves in the trees, the town, and the reflections in the river glisten with spots of color and brightness. This work demonstrates the influence of [pointillism](#) in the way the depth of field is collapsed into a flat, luminescent surface. [Fauvism](#) is also apparent in these early works. Colors are used to express Kandinsky's experience of subject matter, not to describe objective nature. Use of Shadows allowing viewers to participate in the creation of the artwork, became an increasingly conscious technique used by Kandinsky in subsequent years; it culminated in the abstract works of the 1911–1914 period. In *The Blue Rider*, Kandinsky shows the rider more as a series of colours than in specific detail. This painting is not exceptional in that regard when compared with contemporary painters, but it shows the direction Kandinsky would take only a few years later.

1914

Kandinsky's paintings from this period are large, expressive colored masses evaluated independently from forms and lines; these serve no longer to delimit them, but overlap freely to form paintings of extraordinary force. Music was important to the birth of abstract art, since music is abstract by nature—it does not try to represent the exterior world, but expresses in an immediate way the inner feelings of the soul.

His writing in *The Blue Rider Almanac* and the treatise "On the Spiritual in Art" (which was released in 1910) were both a defense and promotion of abstract art and an affirmation that all forms of art were equally capable of reaching a level of spirituality. He believed that color could be used in a painting as something autonomous, apart from the visual description of an object or other form.

These ideas had an almost-immediate international impact, particularly in the English-speaking world.^[13] As early as 1912, *On the Spiritual in Art* was reviewed by [Michael Sadleir](#) in the London-based *Art News*.^[14] Interest in Kandinsky grew apace when Sadleir published an English translation of *On the Spiritual in Art* in 1914.

In 1916, he met Nina Andreevskaya (1899–1980), whom he married on 11 February 1917.

1922 Germany

Bauhaus

Geometrical elements took on increasing importance in both his teaching and painting—particularly the circle, half-circle, the angle, straight lines and curves. This period was intensely productive. This freedom is characterized in his works by the treatment of planes rich in colours and gradations—as in *Yellow – red – blue* (1925), where Kandinsky illustrates his distance from the [constructivism](#) and [suprematism](#) movements influential at the time.

Great Synthesis (1934–1944)[\[edit\]](#)

Living in an apartment in Paris, Kandinsky created his work in a living-room studio. [Biomorphic](#) forms with supple, non-geometric outlines appear in his paintings—forms which suggest microscopic organisms but express the artist's inner life. Kandinsky used original color compositions, evoking Slavic popular art. He also occasionally mixed sand with paint to give a granular, rustic texture to his paintings.

As he stated in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (see below), Kandinsky felt that an authentic artist creating art from "an internal necessity" inhabits the tip of an upward-moving pyramid. This progressing pyramid is penetrating and proceeding into the future. What was odd or inconceivable yesterday is commonplace today; what is *avant-garde* today (and understood only by the few) is common knowledge tomorrow. The modern artist–prophet stands alone at the apex of the pyramid, making new discoveries and ushering in tomorrow's reality. Kandinsky was aware of recent scientific developments and the advances of modern artists who had contributed to radically new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.

Kandinsky also developed a theory of geometric figures and their relationships—claiming, for example, that the circle is the most peaceful shape and represents the human soul. These theories are explained in *Point and Line to Plane* (see below).

Theoretical writings on art[\[edit\]](#)

Kandinsky's analyses on forms and colors result not from simple, arbitrary idea-associations but from the painter's inner experience. He spent years creating [abstract](#), sensorially rich paintings, working with form and color, tirelessly observing his own paintings and those of other artists, noting their effects on his sense of color.^[27] This subjective experience is something that anyone can do—not scientific, objective observations but inner, subjective ones, what French philosopher [Michel Henry](#) calls "absolute subjectivity" or the "absolute [phenomenological life](#)

Published in Munich in 1911, Kandinsky's text, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, defines three types of painting; *impressions*, *improvisations* and *compositions*. While impressions are based on an external reality that serves as a starting point, improvisations and compositions depict images emergent from the unconscious, though *composition* is developed from a more formal point of view.^[29] Kandinsky compares the [spiritual](#) life of humanity to a [pyramid](#)—the artist has a mission to lead others to the pinnacle with his work. The point of the pyramid is those few, great artists. It is a spiritual pyramid, advancing and ascending slowly even if it sometimes appears immobile. During decadent periods, the [soul](#) sinks to the bottom of the pyramid; humanity searches only for external success, ignoring spiritual forces.^[30]

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The obvious properties we can see when we look at an isolated color and let it act alone, on one side is the warmth or coldness of the color tone, and on the other side is the clarity or obscurity of that tone.^[36] Warmth is a tendency towards yellow, and coldness a tendency towards blue; yellow and blue form the first great, dynamic contrast.^[37] Yellow has an *eccentric* movement and blue a *concentric* movement; a yellow surface seems to move closer to us, while a blue surface seems to move away.^[38] Yellow is a typically terrestrial color, whose violence can be painful and aggressive.^[39] Blue is a celestial color, evoking a deep calm.^[40] The combination of blue and yellow yields total immobility and calm, which is green.^[41]

Clarity is a tendency towards white, and obscurity is a tendency towards black. White and black form the second great contrast, which is static.^[38] White is a deep, absolute silence, full of possibility.^[42] Black is nothingness without possibility, an eternal silence without hope, and corresponds with death. Any other color resonates strongly on its neighbors.^[43] The mixing of white with black leads to gray, which possesses no active force and whose tonality is near that of green. Gray corresponds to immobility without hope; it tends to despair when it becomes dark, regaining little hope when it lightens.^[44]

Red is a warm color, lively and agitated; it is forceful, a movement in itself.^[44] Mixed with black it becomes brown, a hard colour.^[45] Mixed with yellow, it gains in warmth and becomes orange, which imparts an irradiating movement on its surroundings.^[46] When red is mixed with blue it moves away from man to become purple, which is a cool red.^[47] Red and green form the third great contrast, and orange and purple the fourth.^[48]