

Losing Form – The Movement to Abstraction

The first major encounters with abstractness in art stemmed from the ideas of the enlightened Expressionists of Germany around the turn of the 20th century. Concentration in the freedom of form was first experimented with intensely by Vassily Kandinsky, a scholar and an ardent advocate of the spirituality in art and music. Kandinsky was a law and economics graduate with a professorship opportunity that left his focus to study art in Munich, where he would encounter the styles of Cubism, Expressionism, Fauvism and Orphism. Together, the ideas and problems faced could all be seen in work by Kandinsky, who began his career at age thirty in 1909.

As he moved out into the modern art scene in Germany, he met a few key future leaders of the secession from the Parisian Salon, but he had already started a group called Phalanx in 1901 and by 1904 was accepted into the Salon. His personal relationship with the rigidness of their criticism and acceptance of artistic freedom in their exhibits enabled him to combat the flaws and develop new landscapes for mysticism and romantic transcendentalism. Kandinsky and others like Macke, Marc and Münter had a solution in their group known as “The Blue Rider” after one of Kandinsky’s own paintings.

Kandinsky worked near his home in Murnau and painted oil on glass with broad brushstrokes as depiction of rolling landscapes with bright arbitrary color patches with openness in form. The following year, 1910 was a major turning point in his style, as his watercolor painting Improvisation shows us a metaphor for spirituality and the incompleteness of anything fitting to the borders. Indiscriminate objects form for the introspective viewer but in total ambiguous to the objective, materialistic reality we face.

Kandinsky claimed this movement had its uses for his idea of an “Epoch of Great Spirituality” which would overcome the material stumbling blocks of this earth and transcend to the spirit depicted in art as it paints itself from each viewer’s subjective experience and fantasy.

Kandinsky’s involvement in Theosophy and occult religious groups influenced his continuation of style in oil by Composition IV in 1911. Although his abstractness of reality still leaves remnants of tangible objects in his early oil paintings, he is more focused on the ambiguity of form and color to paint a dream on canvas. Kandinsky was obsessed with the connection of depicted art and music, the fleeting arrangement of specific tones in accord, like his attempts on the easel; he subsequently named all of his later musical expression by names such as “Composition”, “Impression” and “Improvisation” with numbers. His next major turn can be observed in the work entitled Black Lines no. 189 which entirely abandons the subject of focus; alliterating the vision he had from short-sightedness which made him see bright kaleidoscopic patches of colors. The title “Black Lines” is ambiguous because the lines only seem to arbitrarily connect the large primary hues spread across the canvas like through fog.

Kandinsky’s main concern at this point was to allow the fullness of introspective perception in art as a whole, destroying the mindset of “art for art’s sake” and the flatness of character obtained from the reflection of such fickle depictions in works with incomplete attempted reality. He believed in the importance of freedom of individual orientation to the painting when he stumbled across one of his own paintings flipped over and found no immediate memory or past reflection, representing the constant accessibility to new experience in the search for personal substance. He calls to abandon

the attempts at objectiveness in the ideas of Classical antiquity in style and encourages free form.

It is believed that Kandinsky had ideas of inner creative force influenced by the movements in revolutionary Russia, socialism and anarchism. He wanted association with loose authority in the feeling for color, the full allowance of personal reaction to the ambiguity but deterministic flow of the hues; characterized by a focus on spiritual strength of expression rather than external relationships or manual skill, as enlightenment transcends experience. It can be easily seen in his most reputable series of “Compositions” the conflict and renewal affects of a biblical Genesis and beginning versus Apocalypse of Revelations; only through the style but the ambiguity is unable to be seen through but presents the viewer with his own shade of perspective and that in itself is the reason for the creation of art, the enlightenment of the people and a means to express creative solution to the problems of every day life. This was necessary in a time of great strife, the onset of the First World War, an appearance of isolation and solitude of all the world’s nations and the futuristic drive for intensity of present experience.

Later, the other members of “The Blue Rider” group would paint in a more symbolic and revered Expressionist rebellious tone. Visions of colorful animals enduring total freedom in birth and eternal loss in their meaning of death. Cubism influenced the enhancement of perspective and multiplicity in form for objects; an extreme deviation from the Renaissance style of 3D perspective, the fourth dimension of time is added to produce moving effects: like a frame of action. Kandinsky’s work would accomplish this similar goal by the time it took for the subject to recognize himself in the mirror of the canvas and the individual necessity for self-creation and spiritual outreach in modern life.