

# **Visionaries : Creating a Modern Guggenheim**

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# Visionaries : Creating a Modern Guggenheim

## Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

Coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, *Visionaries: Creating a Modern Guggenheim* showcases over 170 modern works from the permanent collections held in New York and Venice. The exhibition explores both the avant-garde innovations from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries as well as the radical activities of six museum patrons who brought to light some of the most significant artists of their day and helped shape the institution. Foremost is the museum's founder, Solomon R. Guggenheim (1861–1949), who, with support from his trusted advisor, German-born artist Hilla Rebay (1890–1967), set aside a more traditional collecting approach to become a great champion of nonobjective art—exemplified by the work of Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), one of the first artists he collected in depth.

This exhibition is made possible by **LAVAZZA**  
TORINO, ITALIA, 1895

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The Guggenheim Foundation's formative collection was subsequently shaped through major acquisitions from Guggenheim's peers who shared his pioneering spirit. These acquisitions include a group of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early School of Paris masterworks from Justin K. Thannhauser (1892–1976); the eclectic Expressionist inventory of émigré art dealer Karl Nierendorf (1889–1947); the incomparable holdings of abstract and Surrealist painting and sculpture from self-proclaimed “art addict” Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979), Solomon's niece; and key examples from the estates of artists Katherine S. Dreier (1877–1952) and Rebay, both pivotal figures in promoting modern art in America. *Visionaries* is organized by Megan Fontanella, Curator, Collections and Provenance.

This resource unit focuses on the art and ideas explored in *Visionaries* and suggests techniques for incorporating these themes into visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is available on the museum's website at [guggenheim.org/artscurriculum](http://guggenheim.org/artscurriculum), with images that can be downloaded or projected in the classroom. The images may be used for educational purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read this guide, browse our website, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 212 423 3637.

Everybody was telling me that “this modern stuff was the bunk.” So as I have always been interested in things people told me were the bunk, I decided that, therefore, there must be beauty in modern art. . . . I got to feel those pictures so deeply that I wanted them to live with me. —Solomon R. Guggenheim<sup>1</sup>



## < SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM >

Born into a wealthy mining family, Solomon R. Guggenheim was a successful businessman who developed a passion for collecting the art of his time. Hilla Rebay—his art advisor from 1929 until his death—convinced him of the importance of European modernist artists, particularly nonobjective artists, such as Vasily Kandinsky.

Guggenheim preferred to personally select artworks for his collection. A trip to Europe with his wife Irene and Rebay in 1930 gave him the chance to do just that. Rebay introduced the Guggenheims to many contemporary artists, including Marc Chagall (1887–1985) in Paris and Kandinsky and Paul Klee (1879–1940) at the Bauhaus, a state-sponsored school of art and applied design where both artists were teaching at the time in Dessau, Germany.

In 1937 Guggenheim established his foundation, and two years later he opened the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. By that time he had amassed some eight hundred artworks. In 1943

Rebay commissioned architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) to design a permanent museum for Guggenheim’s growing collection, though neither Guggenheim nor Wright lived to see the landmark building open its doors to the public in October 1959.

Over the years the foundation acquired artwork from several people who shared Guggenheim’s collecting interests and whose pursuits often intersected. Kandinsky’s *Dominant Curve* (April 1936) was first purchased by Peggy Guggenheim in 1938. Peggy then sold the painting in 1945 to the dealer Karl Nierendorf in New York, who sold it to Peggy’s uncle, Solomon, in 1946. Peggy later classified her sale to Nierendorf as one of the “tragedies” of her collecting life.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it was the decision not to purchase an artwork that led to regret. Rebay secured Chagall’s *Paris through the Window* (1913) for Solomon’s collection, but as a collector in her own right she regretted not being able to buy it for herself.<sup>3</sup>

LEFT Marc Chagall, *Paris through the Window* (*Paris par la fenêtre*), 1913. Oil on canvas, 136 x 141.9 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.438 © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris; RIGHT Vasily Kandinsky, *Dominant Curve* (*Courbe dominante*), April 1936. Oil on canvas, 129.2 x 194.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.989 © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Marc Chagall, *Paris through the Window*, 1913  
Vasily Kandinsky, *Dominant Curve*, April 1936

- ▶ Look together at Marc Chagall's painting. Ask students to describe it.
- ▶ This painting is often thought of as autobiographical. The artist painted it just a couple of years after he moved to Paris from Russia. This move was a major cultural change for him, but he was inspired by the modernity of his new home. Ask students to look again at the painting with this in mind.
- ▶ Solomon R. Guggenheim loved this painting so much that he hung it in his dining room. Read the quote at the top of this section to students, and ask them why they think he wanted this artwork to "live with" him. What kinds of objects do they want to "live with" and why?
- ▶ Now look together at Vasily Kandinsky's *Dominant Curve*. What do students notice? Describe the mood of the painting.
- ▶ Kandinsky also made *Dominant Curve* shortly after he moved to France. He was forced to leave Germany because the Nazi government closed the school where he was teaching. Living in a Parisian suburb led to a period of creative freedom for him. He moved away from rigid geometry toward biomorphic imagery. His palette lightened. Ask students to look again at the artwork with this in mind, and discuss its mood in light of this information.

# EXPLORATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- The Guggenheim Museum is made up of many collections. Solomon R. Guggenheim amassed the original collection himself, but other significant collections have been donated to or purchased by the museum over the years. Ask students if they have any collections. These could include collections of stickers, coins, or stuffed animals.

Encourage them to share more about their collections with a partner. (If students do not have any collections, they can use a collection in the classroom as an example.) What have they chosen to collect and why? How do they display their collections, if at all? Now, ask students to imagine they are going to build a museum to house their collection. How could their museum's architecture reflect the collection for which it is built? Challenge them to draw and name the museum for their collection.

- After all the time, money, and passion Guggenheim put into collecting, he decided to construct a building in which to display his collection. In 1943 Hilla Rebay, his art advisor and the museum's first director, commissioned architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design the new building. Encourage students to look at the artwork that makes up the Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection online: [guggenheim.org/artwork/special\\_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/special_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection). What qualities do the artworks have in common? What kind of museum would they imagine building for this collection? Show them pictures of the inside and outside of the building designed by Wright: [guggenheim.org/the-frank-lloyd-wright-building](http://guggenheim.org/the-frank-lloyd-wright-building). Do students see connections between the collection and the building? Why or why not? As a class, debate the match between the collection and the building.
- Vasily Kandinsky's *Dominant Curve* was originally owned by Peggy Guggenheim, Solomon's niece. She then sold the work in 1945 to art dealer Karl Nierendorf, who soon after sold it to Peggy's uncle, Solomon. Peggy later said she regretted selling it, calling the sale one of the "tragedies" of her collecting life. Discuss this history of the painting with students. What do they think goes into the decisions collectors make to buy and sell artworks? Have students ever made a decision they later regretted? Ask them to write about that decision and how they dealt with its aftermath.

*I bought . . . one of Mondrian's [paintings] (for myself; for nobody will like it), a white oil painting with 4 irregular lines. I love it, but it was mainly in order to keep the wolf from the door of a great, loveable man [that I bought it]. . . . I feel that Mondrian's painting emanates something sacred, that is why I gladly keep it.*  
— Hilla Rebay<sup>4</sup>

Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. 1: Lozenge with Four Lines*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 75.2 x 75.2 cm, vertical axis: 105 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R96 © 2017 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust



## < HILLA REBAY >

Hilla Rebay was an artist, collector, and essential advisor to Solomon R. Guggenheim. It was Rebay who convinced Guggenheim to collect mainly nonobjective art, or art that does not represent the empirical world, and it was Rebay who introduced Guggenheim to Europe's avant-garde artists.

Born in Germany to an aristocratic family, Rebay was trained as a portrait painter, but later focused on nonobjective art and branched into the medium of collage in the mid-1910s. She believed nonobjective art could lead to social progress and spiritual fulfillment. She met Guggenheim not long after her arrival in the United States in 1927, and eventually served as the first curator and director of his Museum of Non-Objective Painting, which opened in New York in 1939. Later, she commissioned architect Frank Lloyd Wright to build what she called a “temple of spirit” to house Guggenheim's collection.

As she was helping Guggenheim collect, she was simultaneously amassing her own collection, often exhibiting it side by side with Guggenheim's. After his death in 1949, Rebay resigned as director in 1952. Rebay tried to establish her own museum and research center, but her efforts were unsuccessful. She did form the Hilla von Rebay Foundation, and several key works from her private collection entered the Guggenheim Foundation's holdings after her death in 1967.

Rebay and Guggenheim did not always agree on art. During their 1930 visit to Europe to see and purchase art, Rebay was taken with Piet Mondrian's (1872–1944) *Composition No. 1: Lozenge with Four Lines* (1930). Guggenheim, on the other hand, was not interested in Mondrian's work and continued to resist adding his work to the foundation's collection until 1949.

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. 1: Lozenge with Four Lines*, 1930

- ▶ Look together at Piet Mondrian's painting and ask students what they notice. Encourage them to describe it in detail, even though the painting may seem simple. For instance, they can describe it in terms of symmetry, line (thickness, length, etc.), and cropping.
- ▶ In the early 1920s, Mondrian began to paint off-white backgrounds divided by black horizontal and vertical lines, often with blocks of primary colors. He said these restricted elements in his art were like the opposing forces in nature. Ask students to make a list of opposing forces in nature (e.g., night/day) and opposing forces in art (e.g., light/dark). Do they think this painting captures a balance of opposing forces, as Mondrian suggested? If so, how?
- ▶ In 1918 Mondrian turned a square canvas 45 degrees and created his first "lozenge" painting. He considered these new diamond-shaped paintings to be about cutting, or cropping. Where do students see that taking place here? How would the painting be different if the lines were not cropped?
- ▶ Hilla Rebay was taken with Mondrian and his work, but Solomon R. Guggenheim was not until many years later. Ask students to make arguments on Rebay's and Guggenheim's behalf. Would they advise someone to buy this painting? Why or why not? Then read Rebay's quote at the beginning of this section and ask students to compare her justification for buying it to their own.

# EXPLORATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Hilla Rebay was the primary advisor to Solomon R. Guggenheim as he amassed his collection. She was also the first curator and director of his museum. For this activity, challenge students to step into Rebay's shoes. Tell them that the Guggenheim Museum wants to put up an exhibition of three to five works from either the Hilla Rebay Collection ([guggenheim.org/artwork/special\\_collection/the-hilla-rebay-collection](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/special_collection/the-hilla-rebay-collection)) or the Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection ([guggenheim.org/artwork/special\\_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/special_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection)). Students will have to go online and select works. Then they should develop a title and introductory text for the exhibition. Encourage them to think about the many different ways to choose these artworks: by artist, time period, movement, color palette, subject matter, and so on. Students' final exhibitions can be displayed either with printouts of the artworks they chose or as PowerPoint presentations. What choices did students make as curators and why?

As a variation on this activity, ask students to imagine they are advisors to an art collector. They have been authorized to buy three artworks on behalf of the collector from these two collections. Which artworks would they purchase and why? Challenge students to write a letter to the collector to justify their choices.

- Piet Mondrian reduced the elements of his painting to black horizontal and vertical lines on an off-white background, sometimes incorporating blocks of primary colors. He is far from the only artist who has imposed restrictions on his own work. Ask students why they think artists might want to restrict their choices. What are the benefits of reducing your choices, in art or in life? For this activity, ask them to limit their choices while making a painting. Begin with the elements of line and color. For instance, they might choose to only work with zigzag lines in yellow on a black background. After they have made their paintings, ask them to describe how it felt to be so restricted and to describe the choices they had available to them.

*The gallery will be ruled by artistic progress, the recognition of artistic individuality, and the promotion of aspiring individual artists. . . . The “Moderne Galerie” will draw into its sphere of interest all that is fresh, powerful, distinct, modern in the best sense, whether or not an illustrious “name” stands behind it. —Heinrich Thannhauser <sup>5</sup>*

## ◀ JUSTIN K. THANNHAUSER ▶

In 1963 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation received an important gift of seventy artworks from Justin K. Thannhauser, a German-Jewish art dealer. The selections complemented the works already in the Guggenheim collection by expanding the eras and movements that were represented and allowing the institution to tell a fuller story of modern art and its origins. Specifically, the gift added Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works from the nineteenth century and over thirty works by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973).

The son of Heinrich Thannhauser, a Munich art dealer, Justin developed a close relationship with Picasso from the time his family staged a major exhibition of the artist’s work in 1913. Justin became an important conduit to Picasso, and promoted other giants of modern art.

Justin took over for his father after World War I, but despite many successful exhibitions—of Claude Monet (1840–1926), Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), and Henri Matisse (1869–1954), to name a few—dissolved the gallery in 1937. The rise of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist party had made Germany an unfavorable place for avant-garde art, compelling Thannhauser to move

the gallery to France. Vincent van Gogh’s (1853–1890) *Mountains at Saint-Rémy* (July 1889) and Picasso’s *Le Moulin de la Galette* (Paris, autumn 1900) are examples of artworks from the Thannhauser Collection that enable the Guggenheim Museum to tell the story of the origins of modern art. Van Gogh’s painting, with its heavy impasto, powerful brushstrokes, and strong colors, represents the contributions of Post-Impressionism. Picasso’s painting gives visitors a glance into the origins of his groundbreaking career.



TOP Vincent van Gogh, *Mountains at Saint-Rémy* (*Montagnes à Saint-Rémy*), July 1889. Oil on canvas, 71.8 x 90.8 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser 78.2514.24  
BOTTOM Pablo Picasso, *Le Moulin de la Galette*, Paris, autumn 1900. Oil on canvas, 88.2 x 115.5 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser 78.2514.34 © 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Vincent van Gogh, *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, July 1889  
Pablo Picasso, *Le Moulin de la Galette*, Paris, autumn 1900

- ▶ Look together at Vincent van Gogh's painting. Ask students what they notice. Then ask them to imagine stepping into this place. What would they see, hear, smell, or feel? List adjectives to describe the place.
- ▶ Now look together at Pablo Picasso's painting. Ask students to explore the same questions.
- ▶ Compare the sensory descriptions and adjectives that arise. Ask students what they think each artist thought of the setting he painted.
- ▶ These paintings are both responses to societal changes at the time, such as industrialization and urbanization. Van Gogh, deep into his career by the time he painted this, sought solace in nature from the pressures of the city. Picasso, not even twenty years old at the time, was excited by the bustling city of Paris and its nightlife. Ask students how this information affects their thoughts on the paintings.
- ▶ Both paintings were part of a group of artworks given to the Guggenheim Museum by Justin K. Thannhauser, a gallery owner and art collector. The gift helped the Guggenheim tell the story of modern art's origins. What do students think they can learn about the beginnings of modern art by looking at these paintings?

## EXPLORATIONS

### FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Justin K. Thannhauser's collection complements the Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection. For this activity, encourage students to examine the Thannhauser Collection online ([guggenheim.org/artwork/special\\_collection/thannhauser-collection](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/special_collection/thannhauser-collection)) and compare it to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection ([guggenheim.org/artwork/special\\_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/special_collection/solomon-r-guggenheim-founding-collection)). What are the differences in the artworks in terms of date, subject matter, style, and so on? What did the gift of the works in the Thannhauser Collection add to the Guggenheim Museum's holdings and the stories it can tell?
- Thannhauser had a long relationship with Pablo Picasso and collected many of his works. Challenge students to find the Picasso works in the Thannhauser Collection online and—either digitally or with printouts—arrange them in chronological order. What do students notice about how Picasso's work evolved over the years?
- Each of these paintings communicates the artist's point of view through use of color, line, movement, and perspective. The artist's biographical details can also provide context. In the case of *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, we know that Vincent van Gogh painted the picture while recovering from an episode of mental distress at a hospital in southern France. He believed painting outdoors would improve his health. When Picasso painted *Le Moulin de la Galette*, he was a young man who had just visited Paris for the first time and found the sights and innovations of the capital city dazzling.  
  
Encourage students to write about each of these scenes in the first person, from the artist's point of view. For older students, encourage them to support these first-person accounts with research about the time period, place, and artist's life.
- Both of these paintings take the artists' temporary residence as their subject. Ask students to look again at the paintings and discuss what they think the artists thought was interesting or important about the places they depicted. Then ask students to identify a place that is important to them. Maybe it is a place they have visited, a place that is key to their family's identity, or a place they see every day. Challenge them to draw or paint the place through their own personal lens, emphasizing what is interesting to them.



Jackson Pollock, *Alchemy*, 1947. Oil, aluminum, alkyd enamel paint with sand, pebbles, fibers, and wood on canvas, 114.6 x 221.3 cm. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice 76.2553.150  
© 2017 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

[I will create] a center where artists will be welcome and where they can feel that they are cooperating in establishing a research laboratory for new ideas. . . . This undertaking will serve its purpose only if it succeeds in serving the future instead of recording the past.  
— Peggy Guggenheim <sup>6</sup>

## ◀ PEGGY GUGGENHEIM ▶

Peggy Guggenheim, like her uncle Solomon R. Guggenheim, was a tireless promoter of modern art. After spending her twenties and thirties living among the bohemian intellectuals and artists in Europe, she began collecting in earnest with money from her family's mining fortune.

Early on Peggy made a list of the artists she eventually wanted to have in her collection. Her interests were more comprehensive than those of Hilla Rebay, her uncle's art advisor, who stuck to nonobjective art and was opposed to the Surrealist works Peggy embraced. Peggy's drive to fulfill her vision was so great that even during wartime she resolved to "buy a picture a day."<sup>7</sup>

As the war progressed and her collection became endangered, Peggy sent it to the United States disguised as household goods. She and the artist Max Ernst (1891–1976), who later became her husband, soon followed. Back in her native New York, she opened Art of This Century, a museum/gallery that became a meeting place for European émigré artists and pioneers of the New York

school. She was an important early patron for Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) in particular, offering him his first show in 1943 as well as a monthly stipend that allowed him to quit his job as a maintenance worker at Solomon R. Guggenheim's Museum of Non-Objective Painting. She championed him throughout his life and her contract with him guaranteed her acquisition of seminal works like *Alchemy* (1947). *Alchemy* demonstrates his early all-over painting techniques, from its layers of paint skeins to its early use of commercial paints to its incorporation of string, sand, and pebbles.

In 1947 Peggy returned to Europe where she bought the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice, and eventually opened her collection to the public in 1951. She donated the palazzo and her collection—some three hundred works—to the Guggenheim Foundation in 1970 and 1976, respectively. Her Surrealist works and American school paintings fill critical gaps in the foundation's own holdings. She lived in the palazzo until her death in 1979.

# VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Jackson Pollock, *Alchemy*, 1947

- ▶ Look together at Jackson Pollock's painting. Ask students what they notice.
- ▶ Tell students what materials Pollock used: oil paint, aluminum paint, alkyd enamel paint, sand, pebbles, fibers, and wood on canvas. Ask them to look back at the painting again. What do they notice now?
- ▶ This painting is one of the first in which Pollock used commercial house paint, like this aluminum enamel paint. It was a break from the tradition of using fine art materials like oil paint. Ask students if they've ever painted with oil paint or house paint. How did the materials differ? How are the paints usually applied?
- ▶ What kinds of techniques or actions do they think Pollock used to paint this work? List verbs to describe the process.
- ▶ This painting is one of Pollock's earliest drip paintings. To make it, he put the canvas on the floor and stood over it to drip paint from a can of house paint with a stick. (You may want to show videos of Pollock's painting process, available online). Add to the verb list and then discuss how it is different from one we would use to describe traditional painting techniques.
- ▶ Pollock's neighbors gave the painting its title. Encourage students to define the word "alchemy" and ask them whether they think it fits the painting.

# EXPLORATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Conservators have recently discovered through ultraviolet imaging that *Alchemy* is painted on printed fabric. Conservation work is an important method of learning more about how museum objects are made—as well as repairing and preserving works of art. For this activity, use another painting in this exhibition, Pablo Picasso's *Woman Ironing* (Paris, 1904), as a case study in what conservation can reveal about an artwork. Invite students to explore this *New York Times* feature on iPads, smartphones, or computers: [nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/25/arts/design/hidden-picasso.html?\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/25/arts/design/hidden-picasso.html?_r=0). Then look together at this site, which describes the process conservators went through in treating *Woman Ironing*: [guggenheim.org/conservation/picassos-woman-ironing](http://guggenheim.org/conservation/picassos-woman-ironing). Finally, challenge students to write an educational label for *Woman Ironing* that might appear beside it on the wall of a museum, succinctly incorporating new knowledge conservators have discovered.
- When Peggy Guggenheim opened her museum/gallery Art of This Century in 1942, it took the art world by storm. The architect Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965) designed the space so that paintings protruded from curved walls and light and sound installations filled the galleries. Kiesler had also previously worked with other art patrons—including Katherine S. Dreier and Hilla Rebay—to discuss the design of unconventional spaces for displaying art.

Ask students to think about how the design of a museum—from its walls to its displays—affects visitors' experiences of art. What do they like and not like about the designs of museums they've visited? Challenge students to imagine a new kind of art museum. They can let go of any assumptions about what a museum must have, such as quiet galleries, educational labels, and security guards. What would they design if they could create any space and why? Ask them to submit proposals with drawings.

- Pollock and other artists at the time were inspired by the notion of psychic automatism, in which artists tap into the subconscious by not being in conscious control of their working process. Ask students to experiment with several methods of psychic automatism from the list below (or add new ideas):
  - Spread glue on a piece of paper and drop collage materials onto it at random
  - Close eyes and draw for thirty seconds
  - Apply paint to a surface with different tools: a turkey baster, a stick, a straw

How does the process feel different from traditional art making? What do the products of these experiments capture of the subconscious mind?

*When I came to New York, one of the pleasantest surprises I had was to find that artists I had represented in Germany were known and well thought of in America. It was this more than anything else that encouraged me to open a gallery dedicated to the same progressive movement in art to which all my previous efforts have been dedicated. —Karl Nierendorf<sup>8</sup>*

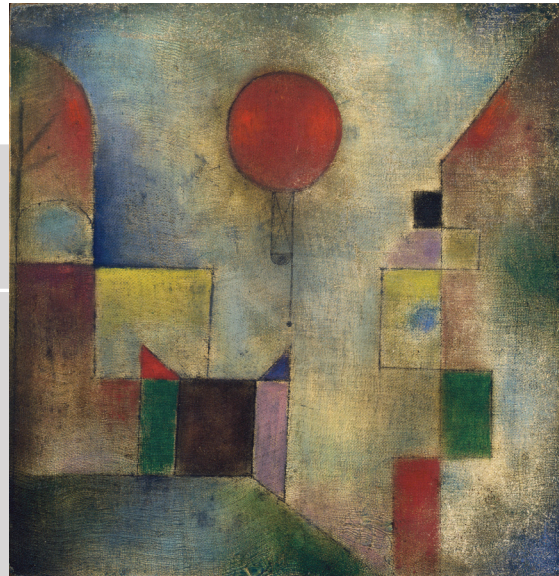
Paul Klee, *Red Balloon (Roter Ballon)*, 1922. Oil (and oil transfer drawing?) on chalk-primed gauze, mounted on board, 31.7 x 31.1 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Estate of Karl Nierendorf. By purchase 48.1172.524 © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

## ◀ KARL NIERENDORF ▶

In 1948 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation purchased the entire estate of Karl Nierendorf, an art dealer whose collection brought important Expressionist, Surrealist, and even early New York school paintings into the foundation's holdings.

Nierendorf sold artwork to Solomon R. Guggenheim even before he moved to the United States in 1936, but after he relocated, his business relationship with Hilla Rebay and Guggenheim accelerated. They shared a passion for the work of Vasily Kandinsky.

Nierendorf moved to the United States because of the unfavorable climate for the promotion of modern art in Germany in the late 1930s. After the war, in 1946, he traveled in Europe for a year and a half to check on friends and relatives and to assess the postwar cultural climate. He also acquired artwork for himself and the Guggenheim Foundation, making large purchases from artist's estates, in particular that of Paul Klee. Nierendorf had a contract with Klee to represent him exclusively in the United States starting in February 1938. After Klee's death in 1940, Nierendorf designated a room of his New York gallery for a permanent installation of the artist's work.



Nierendorf died suddenly only a month after his return to New York in late 1947, and during an important Klee show at his gallery. He had not yet given the Guggenheim Foundation the artwork he'd purchased for the institution. The foundation decided to purchase Nierendorf's entire estate, consisting of some 730 works from Asian and Pre-Columbian art to Expressionism and the early New York school. The collection included over 120 works by Klee, spanning his whole career and including the iconic *Red Balloon* (1922).

*Red Balloon* explores many of Klee's interests, including color theory, geometry, and landscape painting. Like many of Klee's works, it blurs the line between abstraction and representational painting. *Red Balloon* was painted during Klee's time teaching at the Bauhaus, a school of architecture and industrial design in Germany that was a hub for forward-thinking European artists at the time.

# VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Show: Paul Klee, *Red Balloon*, 1922
- ▶ Look together at Paul Klee's *Red Balloon*. Invite students to sketch the painting. Ask them to look at their sketches with a partner and discuss what they notice about the lines and shapes the artist used. Then ask them to look again at the painting and talk about how the artist used color. How do the colors relate to one another, if at all? How do they relate to the shapes, lines, and images?
- ▶ Instead of trying to recreate what he saw in the world, Klee used color to express feeling. Ask students how they think the painting would look if Klee wanted to represent objects more realistically. How would it change the effect of the painting?
- ▶ Klee was a musician and often compared art to music. On a blackboard or whiteboard, list and define words that we use to describe music, such as "rhythm," "tempo," "volume," "harmony," "tone," "pitch," and so on. Ask students to discuss the painting using these terms.
- ▶ Klee would often begin his works by experimenting with lines or tonal values to create a design and then transform these designs into an artwork that told stories. Ask students to look again at the painting with this in mind. What would they guess about his process for painting this artwork? What story does it suggest?

# EXPLORATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- As a younger man, Paul Klee identified as both a poet and an artist. He frequently used text as an element in his artwork, such as the painting *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* (1919), in which he included names of singers from an opera: [guggenheim.org/artwork/2131](http://guggenheim.org/artwork/2131). For this activity, ask students to look back at *Red Balloon* and brainstorm words that come to mind when they see it. Then challenge them to arrange these words into poems. For the next step, ask students to pass their poems to the student next to them and ask each student to make a painting inspired by their classmate's poem. They might want to include words from the poem in their paintings. In the end, compare the paintings to the poems that inspired them and to the Klee painting that began this iterative process.
- Klee often began his artworks with experimental geometric drawings and let these lead to more narrative final works. Challenge students to make an artwork in this way. Students should make abstract drawings with pencil or black pen that experiment with shape and line. They should then look back at these drawings and use them as the starting place for representational images. What kinds of lines, shapes, or colors can they add to transform geometry into anecdote?
- Many artists and art collectors or gallery owners left Germany after the Nazis took power. Karl Nierendorf traveled to the United States in 1936 and, encouraged by the art world he encountered here, decided to establish a gallery in New York early the following year. Klee was one of over one hundred artists included in a 1937 exhibition in Germany organized by the Nazis that was devoted to what they termed "degenerate art." In 1939, Hilla Rebay made purchases on behalf of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation from the German government-sponsored degenerate art sales. Otherwise, these works may have been destroyed. For this activity, ask students to research this time in Germany and its effect on artists and collectors. Why did the Nazis hold this exhibition and sell off or destroy modernist artworks? Why did they feel such art threatened their regime? Then ask students to make connections to today. Challenge them to find an example of art that has been censored in recent years and present the case to the class.

*It is truly extraordinarily sad that the Americans have so little interest in new (and especially, apparently, abstract) art. They will buy our pictures later, once we are all dead and our pictures command tens of thousands. And it is very nice to see how despite all the difficulties you never lose your courage and your incredible energy. . . . Hopefully your countrymen will one day learn to appreciate your merits. —Vasily Kandinsky<sup>9</sup>*

## ◀ KATHERINE S. DREIER ▶

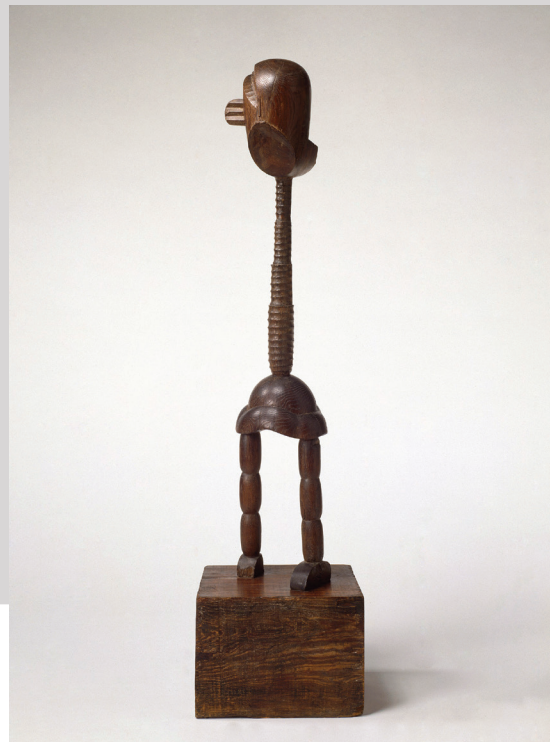
Katherine S. Dreier was an artist and collector who helped found the organization Société Anonyme, Inc.: Museum of Modern Art 1920 to promote modern art in the United States through exhibitions, concerts, lectures, and publications. She cofounded the organization with artists Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and Man Ray (1890–1976), while Vasily Kandinsky served as a vice president from abroad.

Dreier and Hilla Rebay, the first curator and director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, shared many interests and often crossed paths, though their relationship could be contentious. Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian had both independently encouraged the women to meet. Then after Kandinsky's death in 1944, Rebay purchased some of his works for the Guggenheim Foundation from Dreier's collection.

Dreier wanted to establish a museum at her home as an educational resource for art students, but instead, the collection of the Société Anonyme (which she held) was given to Yale University. After Dreier's death, Duchamp, acting as one of her executors, tried to distribute her personal collection the way Dreier would have wanted. It is a testament to her respect and admiration for the Guggenheim Foundation that it received

nearly thirty of her works, including Constantin Brancusi's *Little French Girl (The First Step [III])* (ca. 1914–18).

Brancusi's sculpture is an example of his technique of direct carving, in which the artist was guided by the material's unique qualities—the wood's knots or burls, for instance. The girl's form—her extended neck, tortoise-like pelvis, missing arms, and stick legs—break down the traditional distinctions between representation and abstraction. Dreier likely purchased the sculpture from Brancusi during a visit to his studio in November 1919 that was arranged by Duchamp.<sup>10</sup> She later acquired four more Brancusi sculptures and displayed them in her home.



Constantin Brancusi, *Little French Girl (The First Step [III])* (*La jeune fille française*), ca. 1914–18 (mounted by museum, 1953). Oak on pine base, 152.4 x 38.7 x 32.4 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Estate of Katherine S. Dreier 53.1332 © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

# VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Show: Constantin Brancusi's *Little French Girl (The First Step [III])*, ca. 1914–18
- ▶ Look together at Brancusi's sculpture without revealing its title. Ask students what they notice. How would they describe the material and the form of the sculpture?
- ▶ Ask students to imagine a title for the sculpture and share ideas as a class. Then tell them that the sculpture changed names throughout history. It started out as *Mlle Brancusi*, short for "Mademoiselle Brancusi," meaning "Miss Brancusi." Later it became *The First Step III* after Brancusi's first works in wood that were inspired by his time encouraging a toddler to walk. Eventually it was titled *Little French Girl*. Compare these titles to the ones that students invented. How does each title influence the way they see the sculpture?
- ▶ How would they compare the forms in the sculpture to the traditional form of a little girl?
- ▶ Brancusi, like many other artists at the time, was influenced by African art he saw at museums in Paris, as well as the sculptures of Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), the sculptor he worked for before striking out on his own. As a class, look together at wooden African sculptures (such as these: [deyoung.famsf.org/exhibitions/embodiments](http://famsf.org/exhibitions/embodiments)) and Rodin's sculptures ([musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures](http://musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures)) and discuss the similarities and differences. Where can they see these influences in Brancusi's *Little French Girl*?

# EXPLORATIONS

## FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Many of the collectors whose artworks form the Guggenheim Foundation's holdings displayed their collections in their homes. Both Justin K. Thannhauser and Solomon R. Guggenheim displayed art in their homes and allowed people to come and view them there. Hilla Rebay held special artist teas in Guggenheim's suite at the Plaza Hotel "so that the artists may meet collectors, officials in the art world, gallery owners and also so that the artists might know each other better and thus have more unity in the art world."<sup>11</sup> Katherine S. Dreier, who once said: "unless we . . . live with art, we cannot understand it,"<sup>12</sup> displayed several sculptures by Constantin Brancusi, among many other artists, in her home near Rebay's house in Connecticut. Dreier's home was a destination for émigrés to the United States during World War II, and she hoped to turn it into a museum but was never able to realize her vision.

For this activity, ask students to think about their own homes as places where a collection is on view, and that their family's objects are what make up the collection. Challenge students to sketch a room in their house and select three objects to write educational labels about. Include in the label the approximate date when the object was acquired (or came to the family), the history of how it was acquired, and anything students can learn about its maker. They should also use the label to describe the object's form, materials, and significance.

- *Little French Girl* is unusual in that it went through fairly significant changes from its conception to its present-day state. Originally, it sat directly on the ground; later, a wooden base was added. Its title changed twice. And when Brancusi first photographed this sculpture in 1917 in his studio, it was part of a group of three sculptures, all in wood, the others a cup and column. Brancusi wanted to sell the group together and called the tableau *The Child in the World: Mobile Group*. For this activity, challenge students to imagine this sculpture as part of a tableau of sculptures. What other sculptures would they group with it? Pass out clay (or other materials) and encourage them to create a sculpture to accompany *Little French Girl*. What would they title their sculpture group and why?

Adapted from Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition, unless otherwise noted.

### ABSTRACT

Expressing ideas and emotions by using elements such as colors and lines without attempting to create a realistic picture

### ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

An artistic movement of the mid-twentieth century comprising diverse styles and techniques and emphasizing an artist's liberty to convey attitudes and emotions through nontraditional and usually nonrepresentational means

### ALCHEMY

A power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way

### BIOMORPHIC

Resembling or suggesting the forms of living organisms

### CONSERVATION

The methods of preserving and restoring artworks that are done to maintain their condition

### CROP

To cut off part of a picture or photograph

### CURATOR

A person who organizes exhibitions in a museum or gallery

### ÉMIGRÉ

A person who is forced to leave a country for political reasons

### EXPRESSIONISM

A theory or practice in art of seeking to depict the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse in the artist

### GALLERY

A business that sells paintings, sculptures, and other artworks

### IMPRESSIONISM

A style of painting that began in France around 1870 that uses spots of color to show the effects of different kinds of light, and that attempts to capture the feeling of a scene rather than specific details

### NEW YORK SCHOOL

A loosely associated group of American and European artists and sculptors, especially Abstract Expressionist painters, active in and near New York City chiefly in the 1940s and 1950s (dictionary.com)

### NONOBJECTIVE ART

Art that does not represent the empirical world (*Visionaries: Creating a Modern Guggenheim* exhibition catalogue)

### POST-IMPRESSIONISM

A theory or practice of art originating in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that, in revolt against Impressionism, stressed volume, picture structure, or Expressionism

### PSYCHIC AUTOMATISM

The accessing of material from the subconscious or unconscious mind as part of the creative process, as seen in the art of the Surrealist movement (tate.org.uk)

### REPRESENTATIONAL

Depicting an object in a recognizable manner (dictionary.com)

### RETROSPECTIVE

A generally comprehensive exhibition, compilation, or performance of the works of an artist over a span of years

### SURREAL

Very strange or unusual; having the quality of a dream

### SURREALISM

A twentieth-century art form in which an artist or writer combines unrelated images or events in a very strange and dreamlike way

### SYMMETRY

The quality of something that has two sides or halves that are the same or very close in size, shape, and position



## BOOKS

Davidson, Susan, and Philip Rylands, eds. *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2004.

Druitt, Matthew, ed. *Thannhauser: The Thannhauser Collection of the Guggenheim Museum*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2001.

Fontanella, Megan, ed. *Visionaries: Creating a Modern Guggenheim*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2016.

Gross, Jennifer, ed. *The Société Anonyme: Modernism for America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Guggenheim, Peggy. *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict*. London: Andre Deutsch, 2005.

Spector, Nancy. *Art of this Century: The Guggenheim Museum and Its Collection*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003.

Vail, Karole P. B., ed. *The Museum of Non-Objective Painting: Hilla Rebay and the Origins of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009.

## BOOKS FOR KIDS

Elschner, Geraldine. *The Cat and the Bird: A Children's Book Inspired by Paul Klee*. Illus. Peggy Nille. Munich: Prestel, 2012.

Greenberg, Jan, and Sandra Jordan. *Action Jackson*. Illus. Robert Andrew Parker. New York: Square Fish Books, 2007.

Hollingsworth, A. C. *I'd Like the Goo-Gen-Heim*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009.

Laden, Nina. *When Picasso Met Mootisse*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Massenot, Veronique. *Journey on a Cloud: A Children's Book Inspired by Marc Chagall*. Illus. Elise Mansot. Munich: Prestel, 2011.

Rosenstock, Barb. *The Noisy Paint Box: The Colors and Sounds of Kandinsky's Abstract Art*. Illus. Mary Grandpre. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2014.

Van Reek, Wouter. *Coppernickel Goes Mondrian*. New York: Enchanted Lion Books, 2012.

## VIDEOS

Jackson Pollock painting: [sfmoma.org/watch/jackson-pollock-paintings-have-a-life-of-their-own/](http://sfmoma.org/watch/jackson-pollock-paintings-have-a-life-of-their-own/)

## WEBSITES

History of the Guggenheim Museum and its collections: [guggenheim.org/about-the-collection](http://guggenheim.org/about-the-collection)

Guggenheim Museum's conservation efforts: [guggenheim.org/conservation](http://guggenheim.org/conservation)  
[nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/25/arts/design/hidden-picasso.html?\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/25/arts/design/hidden-picasso.html?_r=0)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Hunch' Started Art Collection," *News & Courier*, December 1, 1935. Scrapbook 4, Box 544, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation records (hereafter SRGF records), A0033, SRGM Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Peggy Guggenheim, *Out of This Century: Confessions of an Art Addict* (New York: Universe Books, 1979), p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> Hilla Rebay to Rudolf Bauer, November 11, 1929. Box 84, Folder 6, Hilla von Rebay Foundation Archives (hereafter HvRF Archives)

<sup>4</sup> Rebay to Bauer, June 3, 1930. Box 84, Folder 10, HvRF Archives. Rebay paid Mondrian 6,000 francs, or approximately \$235 for the work in 1930.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Thannhauser, "Moderne Galerie Heinrich Thannhauser Munchen" (Munich, 1909), pp. 4–5. Translated in Emily D. Bilski, *The "Moderne Galerie" of Heinrich Thannhauser*, exh. cat. (Munich: Judisches Museum Munchen; Edition Minerva, 2008), pp. 19–20.

<sup>6</sup> Peggy Guggenheim to Emily Coleman, September 7, 1941. Emily Holmes Coleman Papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark.

<sup>7</sup> Guggenheim, *Out of This Century*, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Nierendorf, *Kandinsky* (New York: Nierendorf Gallery, March 1941), preface.

<sup>9</sup> Vasily Kandinsky to Katherine S. Dreier, February 29, 1927. Box 20, Folder 567, Dreier Papers.

<sup>10</sup> See Katherine S. Dreier to Mary E. Dreier, November 23, 1919. Mary Elisabeth Dreier Papers, 1797–1963, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>11</sup> "Report of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Activities, June 1940 to June 1941," p. 2, unprocessed, Rebay records.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine S. Dreier, "[Lecture] Before the Members of the School Art League at the Brooklyn Museum, November 20th," pp. 1–2, Dreier Papers.