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“After Cubism: Purism and Geometric Abstraction” by Rose-Carol Washton Long, 1966

ROSE-CAROL WASHTON LONG

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome you to this opening lecture of the Guggenheim Museum's winter and spring program. This series of nine talks is planned to cover the major trends in painting and sculpture of the last 50 years. Today's lecture will deal with the developments of geometric abstraction and purism, two somewhat similar yet diverging results of cubism that manifested themselves just before and after World War I.

The two names most commonly associated with the geometric abstraction of the teens are Piet Mondrian, whose painting you see on your left, and Kazimir [01:00] Malevich, whose painting you see on the right. They called their developments by various names, Malevich using the term for works like this “suprematism” and Mondrian using the word “neoplasticism” for such paintings. Other terms that have been used to describe this sort of work have been nonrepresentational, because the paintings do not contain any recognizable object but are just made up of flat geometric shapes; and nonobjective is the other term that is given to paintings of this name.

This last term is really a mistranslation of the German word *gegenstandslos*, which was originally used in connection with these paintings to mean “without objects.” As we shall see from the lecture, the connotation of subjectivity or sentimentality [02:00] or personal expression which the word “nonobjectivity” carries is very far indeed from both the intentions and practices of Malevich and Mondrian.

Their interest in order and in perfect form is also reflected in the works of the purists, a movement which began in 1918 by Amédée Ozenfant and Charles Edouard Jeanneret, who is better known to all of you as Le Corbusier. And this is a painting by Ozenfant done in the '20s. Although they use similar geometric forms, the purists worked with the object, but all three have one thing in common, and that is their desire to create paintings which represent a perfect universal order.

[03:00] Now, in order to understand these divergent people one must begin by looking at cubism, for cubism was truly the most complete artistic revolution since the Renaissance. The works of Picasso and Braque from the 1910 and '11 and '12 period -- and this is a Braque of 1911 - departed almost completely from the traditional idea of painting. And if we compare this Braque with this [Ang?] from the middle of the nineteenth century we can perhaps just see how revolutionary the Braques and Picassos were; revolutionary in that they departed from the traditional notions of space, form, color, and even subject matter.

First of all, the cubists, Picasso and Braque, no longer considered painting to be an illusion of the external world, an illusion [04:00] of the space you are in. This Ang is really creating on the canvas an illusion of space; through the devices of perspective, recedes back to this point, the objects in the foreground being made larger, though getting smaller as they recede in the background, just as you would see. So, the painting traditionally is conceived as an illusion, an illusion of our world. You can almost say the painting since the time of the Renaissance is really to be a window on another scene, but still employing all these laws as we would see these laws' perspective.

Now, the cubists departed from this entirely, because they said, “What is a painting, really, except it is a two-dimensional canvas with paint on it? And since,” they said, “This is truly, really what a painting is, we must emphasize this. No longer are we going to paint an illusion of space or depth, [05:00] reflecting the external world, the physical world, on the canvas. We will work with this very idea of what a painting is.” And thus, there is an object here.

This is actually a painting of a man with a guitar, but instead of seeing things directly, as though they were looking out a window, Picasso and Braque saw the world conceptually, and they thought, “There’s no reason why we can’t represent many different aspects of a man or a guitar. We’d like to represent him conceptually.” So, they would place pieces of the guitar -- here’s the bottom of the guitar, right there -- and that might be seen as though you were looking directly on it.

While here -- this is the top part of the guitar -- this is seen from an entirely different angle. Also, the shoulder of the man is completely fragmented; all facets of him are fragmented, so you can see him from many different angles, not just from one [06:00]; whereas this painting is just seen from one angle. The painter is painting it directly on from one point of view, whereas this is seen from many different points of view.

Now, to emphasize the idea that it is the painter who is creating the space and the paint that is doing the work, this also contributed to the fragmentation of the object, and thus the whole canvas is covered with a similar texture so that space is completely flattened out and there is an emphasis upon this two-dimensional quality. At the same time, Picasso and Braque were very interested in this whole problem of creating space, of creating the illusion of space on the canvas, and so in their fragmenting of the object they create small pockets of space.

Here you see, by placing a dark area here, this tends to recede, and this patch of white will tend to come forward, creating an illusion of space in this area, but not a total illusion of space, [07:00] as Ang was interested in. Also, there was this emphasis on creating the painting as an object in itself, and this is something that is very important and was picked up by the abstractionists. Now, in their reduction of form, Picasso and Braque wished to reduce things to the simple, most elementary level, and thus you see these forms reduced to squares, triangles, geometric forms in a pattern of a grid system.

In some of their paintings the object is almost totally unrecognizable, and in this painting by Picasso of late 1911, it’s almost impossible even to recognize any form of a violin or a man. It’s very difficult in this one, but in this one of a few months later by Picasso the representational [08:00] object is almost totally gone, and this is why you see the words down at the bottom, “*Ma Jolie*,” placed on the painting -- actual words placed in a painting -- again, to give you, the spectator, some idea of what this painting is about.

Neither Picasso nor Braque were interested in complete abstract paintings. They always wanted to maintain this balance between what they considered the real or the conceptionally real and the abstract, and thus, by late in 1911 and ’12, they were beginning experimenting with other forms. That is, in these two paintings -- two collages -- they begin taking objects from the real world

and placing them on the canvas; that is, taking pieces of paper -- wallpaper here; music -- and placing them on the canvas.

Again, playing around with this idea of “What is a painting?” Also, playing around with the whole idea of how is space to be created? And [09:00] here, instead of painting in shadows, there are shadows created just by placing this piece of paper, which simulates a chair caning on the canvas, and placing, of course, then a rope around the entire construction. The rest of this is all drawn in.

From these developments, instead of analyzing form, they began to synthesize form and to create out of these simple geometric shapes an entirely new form. Here, you see out of these simple geometric shapes a triangle and a circle. They create the effect of a guitar. Instead of breaking down the guitar into facets, as they had done in the earlier painting that you saw on the screen by Braque, here they are putting it together in a new order. Or, as in this harlequin, you can see, by using these simple forms, they again put them together in a new way and create the harlequin [10:00].

Now, the innovations were begun by Picasso and Braque, but other painters in Paris were fascinated by these cubist ideas and soon were experimenting with this new form, this new way of painting. This is a painting by Gleizes, a Frenchman, and here is one by Léger. They were members of a group called the Golden Section and exhibited together, and it was these painters who were more frequently known throughout the Western world than Picasso or Braque.

You can see that their analysis of form is, in a way, more superficial than Picasso's or Braque's, and there is still a more clinging, actually, to the object. Léger is very interesting for his attempt to work with cubes, as you can see here, rather than flat geometric planes. Another member of this group, the Golden [11:00] Section, is [Delaunay?], who also began to develop somewhat abstract paintings, as in this one called *Windows*, but also using these flat planes.

Now, Malevich, who we mentioned earlier, was born in Russia in 1878, and he began painting around 1906. And soon, by 1910, he had become acquainted somewhat with the developments of Picasso and Braque, for the Russian collectors were very interested in the French avant-garde and went often to Paris. One of the collectors, Shchukin, had 50 Picassos in his collection by 1912, and he occasionally allowed a few painters to enter his rooms as though they were a museum.

And so, immediately, the most avant-garde paintings were available to the Russians, [12:00] and we can see in a painting by Malevich -- this is by Malevich from 1911 -- immediately how he has picked up this cubist idiom. This is a painting by Gleizes, and as I said before, it was really to the periphery of cubism that someone like Malevich was drawn, for the actual experiments of Picasso and Braque were almost too difficult to grasp at once.

You see, at the same time the fragmenting of form -- the simplifying of form into trapezoids and parallelograms, as with the Gleizes, at the same time, the scenes are very recognizable. This Gleizes is a landscape, and here, this is called *The Morning in the Country After the Rain* [sic], two peasants walking with their buckets through a wood -- through the village, rather. At the

same time, Malevich has not completely [13:00] moved from this idea of traditional perspective. If you notice, the forms in the foreground are large, and the tiny forms in the background -- this is another figure in the background -- the forms get smaller.

At the same time, Malevich is working with this whole problem of the two-dimensional canvas and trying to emphasize it, and even though he does use some traditional perspective, he makes the painting of equal intensity throughout the canvas, thus what is closest to us in the foreground, this bright red, is used equally strong in the sky, which is supposed to be far away and thus not quite so intensely red. And he uses the color in this way to flatten out the canvas, to make it of one dimension, to remind you continually just what a painter is and what he is doing.

By 1912 -- this is the Malevich on the right -- you can see Malevich getting slightly more abstract. This is a painting [14:00] called *Woman with Buckets: Dynamic Movements* [sic], and to show the movements, he has repeated this form, the conoidal form of the bucket right here, throughout the whole painting. The painting is made up of these series of cones.

This reflects somewhat the Italian version of cubism called futurism who, while they were interested in the fragmentation of form, were also interested in conveying what they felt was the essence of modernity that is movement. And so, to represent movements here of a dancer they repeated through multiple images. Here, the feet are repeated several times throughout the painting. Malevich picks this up and repeats this through these multiple images.

Now, he also experimented with the collage [15:00] works that had been done by Picasso and Braque. Here is the Malevich on your left, using some of these overlapping techniques -- the flat planes; the broad flat planes. The color, of course, is quite different. You notice that Malevich uses pinks, violets, blues, and reds, not the ochre/mustard/brown palette of the cubists here, of the Picasso and Braque. Also, one sees that Malevich seems to be fascinated by these large square areas repeated here and here, and we find this will be coming up in the paintings of the following year.

Malevich was somewhat of a mystic and also at the same time somewhat of a rebel. He envisioned a new society to be created. He wrote, and I quote, “A true absolute order in human society could only be achieved [16:00] if mankind were willing to base this order on lasting values. Obviously, then, the artistic factor would have to be accepted in every respect as the decisive one. As long as this is not the case, the uncertainty of a provisional order will [obtain?] instead of the longed-for tranquility of absolute order.”

Now, to achieve this absolute order, Malevich one must do away with the sentimental, one must do away with the material world, must do away with any notions of individuality, and thus, by 1914, in his paintings he was doing just this. He was working with what he felt were the least individual, the least particular -- that is, with pure colors, red-blues and yellows, and blacks, of course, and white -- and pure form; just the most simple form: Squares, rectangles, and [17:00] parallelograms.

The first one was actually a black square on a white background, and these were the paintings that Malevich gave the name suprematism. Malevich wrote about these paintings, “In the year

1913, in my desperate struggle to free art from the ballast of the world of objects, I fled to the form of the square and exhibited a picture which was nothing more or less than a black square upon a white background. The critics moaned, and with them the public, ‘Everything we loved is lost; we are in a desert. Before us stands a black square on a white ground.’”

Of course, Malevich intended just the opposite, and he’s being very sarcastic here, for by “suprematism,” and by using these [18:00] black squares on the white ground, he meant to ensure the supremacy of pure feeling, not individual feeling, but feeling that reflects the eternal, pure, absolute order. And also, Malevich likened these works, these early supremative works, to primitive art through their use of simple forms, and he said about his supremative square it could be likened to the primitive marks and symbols of Aboriginal man which represented in their combinations not ornament but a feeling of rhythm.

And of course, we, I think, don’t need to be reminded that these elementary forms -- this is a slide of Stonehenge in England from Neolithic times -- that this not only had a feeling of rhythm, but it also had some [19:00] religious feeling, too. It was intended to be a religious monument, perhaps a funerary place. We’re not sure. At any point, Malevich’s mysticism -- some people say that he was a theosophist -- comes through in this use of -- well, this reminds one of a cross.

By 1916 and ’17, Malevich was beginning to depart from the severity of these earlier suprematist forms. Here, we see him expanding his palette, using grays, rusts, in addition to the pure primary colors, and also using again more complex forms. The forms now are on a diagonal, on a bias. In 1918, he created his famous *White on White*, which many of you may have seen at the Museum of Modern Art.

Again, this is a painting that has caused great controversy, [20:00] for, as he’s commented about his first suprematist painting, the black square on white -- people groaned at that and said they were lost; they were in the desert; they could not understand-- again, you’ve probably heard many people yourself see this painting in the Museum of Modern Art and comment, “Why is this a painting?” or “What has this to do with art?”

Malevich was, however, trying, he said, to capture a sensation of infinity, of new space of which there is no measure, and thus he uses the purest white; uses two forms similar -- the square turned on an axis here and within another square -- which he felt might capture, and I quote, “A corner of the cosmos; a journey through time.” Malevich had a great effect on the developments of Russian art, [21:00] especially on graphic art, and through him and his pupil Lissitsky, he also affected art in the West, for Lissitsky came to Germany and worked in the Bauhaus.

And as many of you know, when Hitler disbanded the Bauhaus in 1933 many of its students came to this country, many of its students like Josef Albers and the architects van der Rohe and Gropius. Malevich also had an effect on sculptural developments. Here, this is the Gabo constructivism, and these developments of constructivism will be treated next week in the lecture by William Stephens exploring this whole new development in sculpture.

Now, Mondrian was born in 1876 in Holland. This is a self-portrait done by him in 1900. He always intended to be a painter [22:00] and painted this one done in rather academic styles. By

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1909, he was aware of the experiments of the neoimpressionists, and here we see this landscape done in almost a Van Gogh but somewhat art nouveau manner. By the end of 1911, he had decided to go to Paris, where he felt the most original, the most experimenting [*sic*] things were done, and immediately we can see the influence of the cubists upon his work.

This is a Mondrian on the left just after he came to Paris in December 1911, and this was done in 1912. Again, this is a Braque on the right. I think we can see the similarities right off: The flattening-out of the planes done by Mondrian; his interest, though, in the grid system of the cubists. He is not so much interested in this problem of fragmenting space, analyzing it, but he's rather much more interested in the flat patterns and the grid system [23:00].

He began experimenting with this grid, with these vertical and horizontal forms, much more intensely, and by the end of 1912 we can see this almost abstract painting of an apple tree. We can see, however, that still the semi-abstract pictures are very tied and related to nature, and if we look at this drawing on the right I think you can begin to see just how this has developed. He had begun with this tree, the idea of the tree, right in the middle here, and if we look, rather, at a painting of 1909 -- this is a detail of that painting you saw before -- I think you can see that this is based on the tree form, though subverted with cubist elements.

Even in this painting -- which is totally abstract, just made up of, again, pastel [24:00] rectangles with a few arcs and curves here -- we can again see that its basis still lies in the natural world. Here, you can see how he begins at once to simplify and put into a pattern these forms. This is the pencil sketch for this painting; this is subtitled *Church*, and I think you can begin to pick out the windows of the church up here at the tower, up there, and then the cross down at the bottom.

We look at a later sketch for this same painting; it becomes much more abstract, but having seen the earlier one, it now becomes somewhat more decipherable. Again, those are the double windows here of the church, and just barely is that cross visible. The tower is now just completely into pattern. Now, one may ask why Mondrian himself was interested in this whole problem of abstracting. [25:00] Like Malevich, Mondrian, we know, was a theosophist, but we know this absolutely for Mondrian. We know he joined in 1909 and had been interested and been friendly with members of the Theosophical Society since the late '90s.

Now, you may be interested in just exactly what theosophy is. Theosophy was a movement that was very popular with intellectuals at the turn of the century and well into the teens of our own century. It believed that there was one divine wisdom or knowledge that lay behind all reality, all philosophies. It believed that all religions and philosophies contributed to it, but too much was veiled under reality and materialism to really understand the absolute order of the world.

And since Mondrian was very involved [26:00] with this, he felt, in keeping with his theosophical principles, that the only way to get at this absolute order was to throw off any connotations of the material world to throw off any notions of individuality, any notions of the particular; and thus, he felt by using the purest forms, the simple as forms, he would more completely capture the idea of the absolute. And I'd like to read you what he wrote in his notebook in 1914, just after this particular painting was done.

He wrote, “Art is higher than reality and has no direct relation to reality. Art, being superhuman, fosters the superhuman element in man and has consequently become a means of human evolution as effective as religion. Naturalistic or realistic [27:00] art, on the contrary, entertains man with human things, and the beauty we thus admire is hardly more beautiful than what we see with our own eyes. The artist, by his intuition, sees things much more spiritually than does the common man. This is why he sees a more beautiful reality, and this is why his art is of benefit to the common man.” And thus, Mondrian felt, actually, that through his art, through his paintings, he might be part in some coming revolution of the spirit of man.

Now, earlier, in the fall series, I discussed the paintings of Kandinsky and mentioned also that Kandinsky was a theosophist, and he was also interested in this whole problem of abstraction. And this is a Kandinsky on the right, and this is a Mondrian on the left, both from the same year, 1914. They both appear primarily abstract, but it’s very interesting the different means they took. [28:00] For Mondrian to achieve this symbol of the absolute order and perfection of the universe, he used a pattern of grids, of flat planes, whereas, for Kandinsky, this attempt to show this absolute order was rather to do away with the object or to use the object in a hidden manner so that you, just upon quick glance, could not see it.

But also, there’s a tremendous difference in the very way the paint is used in these two men, Kandinsky being much more painterly, using paint thickly and more richly. I don’t know if this can be seen so well in the two slots, but comparing these two paintings, standing them right next together, you can see how differently the paint is used. Also, there is nothing precise about the Kandinsky. The forms and colors are just swimming in this open, empty space. It’s very interesting that both [29:00] of them were interested in theosophy, both of them interested in abstract painting, and yet Malevich and Mondrian seemed to follow one line much more closely, that of the geometric abstraction.

Now, during the war, Mondrian went back to Holland, and there he began further experiments with this whole problem of geometric abstraction. He met another fellow Hollander in 1916 named van Doesburg, whose painting you see here on the left. Van Doesburg was also experimenting with these notions developed by cubism, and he had developed paintings such as this one. He called this composition *Derived from a Cow*, and there’s a whole series of sketches, which I do not have a photograph, in which he starts out with the basic form of the cow and then puts it into geometric planes, and this is his last study of that. This is intended to be the center of the cow, [30:00] but of course, it’s plainly impossible to tell that just from looking at that.

But these experiments of van Doesburg had an effect on Mondrian, and Mondrian began now to work in much flatter planes, broader, larger planes, and to work in in plain pure color so that by 1921 he had evolved the type of paintings -- this particular painting here on your left for which he is most famous. And he worked in this idiom until he died in one thousand nine hundred 1944, continually experimenting but still using three colors primarily, red, blue, and yellow, and of course, white and black, and squares, rectangles, and thin straight lines.

Now, Mondrian was very interested in trying to achieve a dynamic balance or a dynamic equilibrium in his paintings. He did not want his paintings to appear [31:00] static; for him, this universal order was something enriching, eternally giving. Now, thus, his paintings are never

symmetrical. Now, by symmetrical, we mean if you divided a painting directly down the middle, it would be exactly the same on both sides, and this is something you never can see in a Mondrian.

In fact, he's continually working at first with elements that seem unstable. For example, he places the largest square, the blue one, at the top, and you would think that he might place the square at the bottom. That would give a greater feeling of stability. And if we think all the way back to Renaissance paintings -- for example, this one by Raphael -- again, it is modeled on putting the heaviest form on the bottom. This achieves the most stable feeling. Again, this is built on the triangle, and the widest part is at the bottom.

Mondrian is much more fascinated by the type of patterns that you see in a Mannerist painting. Instead of having [32:00] all the weight at the bottom, instead of trying to create a stable feeling, the Mannerist painters, playing with all these Renaissance forms -- and he puts the heaviest, the widest portion here in the middle, so a sort of a diamond is achieved. And you know that a diamond narrows, down here to the hands, to a very small portion, resting on its very end, and that achieves a very unstable figure, because it could go to either side.

Now, Mondrian is, in a sense, working with this very idea, for by putting the largest form at the top, he's creating a rather unstable feeling. At the same time, he is balancing this large form, for all paintings are essentially balanced. They can either be balanced dynamically or statically, stably or unstably, but all good painting is balanced.

So, to achieve this balance, he's also working and using this white area here and here. Now, in traditional painting there was generally a background and a foreground, and the foreground could be called [33:00] a positive area, and the background could be called a negative area.

Now, you could say he's using these pure colors -- the blue and the red -- as the positive areas and using the white as the background or negative area, and yet he's working to mix up these and to have white become the positive area and the blue and the red the negative. He's playing with these, and he's playing with these in a way that was begun in the late nineteenth century by such a painter as Degas.

Here, the traditional forms -- the figures, which would usually be in the foreground; the primary, dominant heavy balance -- are now in the background, and what used to be the negative area -- the background; the space -- has actually now become the positive area, balancing the entire painting.

And this is something that Mondrian works with in these abstract paintings. He says, and I quote, [34:00] about his neoplasticist developments, “As the line must be opened straight to express expansion in definite and exact terms, so color, to achieve the same expression, must be open, pure, bright, for then it radiates vital force.

“If it is closed and confused it obstructs the vital force and expresses the dominance of limitation. Neoplasticism, by its technique and especially by its concentration on the flat surface,



is able to reach even in color the balanced expression of the one and the other,” and by that obscure term at the end he means the absolute, the universal.

Now, while he was in Holland, Mondrian belonged and developed a group called the De Stijl group, in which he worked with architects, sculptors, and other painters. This group hoped to apply these principles developed by Mondrian and van Doesburg to all the arts, [35:00] and here you can see a sculpture by the artist-sculptor Vantongerloo employing these same developments, these same ideas of negative and positive space.

Here, the sculptor is actually using empty space around here in a positive and vital way. Most sculptors up to the twentieth century had actually ignored this whole idea of using the space around the sculpture and working within it, trying to contain it as something positive.

Now, you see these developments of geometricism also affecting architecture developments. This is another member of De Stijl group, Rietveld, and this is the Schroder House, done in 1924. The De Stijl members wrote a magazine, and in the magazine, they said that “a new Europe had begun to grow within us. It does not consist [36:00] of words but of visual deeds and inner strength.”

And they said, “We do not call out to the nations to unite or join us; those who join us already belong to the new spirit, and only to gather with them is it possible to form the spiritual body of the new world.” So, even in the architecture and in the sculpture, there was this attempt to complete a complete new environment which would completely reform and uplift mankind.

Now, Mondrian was very interested in all this, because he found the forms of the city, of the mechanical world, more true, more real, more relevant to this absolute order he envisioned than he did the natural world. We find a parallel with this in the work of Albers. Van Doesburg, the other member who founded De Stijl along with Mondrian, went to the Bauhaus again in 1921, [37:00] and he was partially responsible for doing away with the romantic expressionism of the Bauhaus and introducing many of these ideas of how to relate art to society and change man’s environment.

Albers was one of the painters who was at the Bauhaus, and as I said before, when Hitler closed it, he came to this country and is responsible for a great deal of the hard-edged geometric type of painting that has developed in this country. This is an Albers from 1964. There are many differences with the Mondrian, this one involving you more optically, but it isn’t a direct line from these early developments.

Now, the works of the purists. This is by Ozenfant on the left, and this is by Le Corbusier on the right. Although they use objects -- and here they differ from Mondrian and Malevich -- they are working with objects that are recognizable. There still is an interest, [38:00] a desire, for these artists to reflect a universal order.

They owe much to cubism, as does Mondrian and Malevich. I think if we can compare this Ozenfant painting of the 1920s with this early cubist collage, it is immediately evident about these flat forms, these prismatic shapes, coming from the cubist revolution.

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However, the purists, who declared themselves a movement in 1918, declared that they were after cubism, because they felt that the cubism of Picasso in 1914 had become too decorative, and they would use this painting as evidence it was no longer concerned with structure or eternal order or analyzing form. No, it was now just putting pretty colors and pretty forms on a canvas in a very decorative, pleasing [39:00] manner, but not in an eternal manner.

They also wrote about cubism and said that cubism was too obscure; it didn't have titles, and it had no meaning. They were very interested in again having the public understand painting, and they did not want it to be obscure or hermetic. In their manifesto, they wrote that cubism was dying and that it was a decorative art, and they said there was a hierarchy of arts, and that the decorative arts were clearly at the bottom.

They said -- and now I'm quoting from their manifesto -- “purism expresses not the variations, but the invariant. The work ought not to be accidental, exceptional, impressionist, inorganic, picturesque, but on the contrary, it should be static and expressive of the [40:00] invariant; again, of this order.”

Now, they were fascinated by the machine and by the mass-produced objects. This is a painting by Ozenfant, really after the commonplace objects that could be found in the marketplace but that came from the factories, as these do, which were all completely identical. Or this painting by Corbusier; again, it has some reflection of this [ethic?] of the machine. They were fascinated by the machine because they felt that it was the result of geometry, and geometry or mathematics was again the expression of the perfect, divine order.

But whereas Mondrian and Malevich wished to express this divine, absolute, perfect order through pure geometric forms -- the square, the triangle, [41:00] and the pure colors -- Le Corbusier and Ozenfant felt that they must bring this down to their age, and they felt that the machine was the symbol of their age.

They wrote, “Nobody today could deny the aesthetic which is disengaging itself from the creations of modern industry. More and more buildings and machines are growing up in which the proportions, the [play?] of their masses, and materials used are such a kind that many of them are works of art, for they based on number; that is to say, on order.”

Le Corbusier had started as an architect originally, and he worked from 1906 to 1910 in Paris and Berlin. He had come to Paris and settled there in 1912 and begun working on painting. He hovered [42:00] back and forth between architecture and painting, and eventually turned to architecture. But these ideas that he developed in his paintings are reflected again in his architecture, the architecture which would be perfect, geometric, and here, in Corbusier's case, almost symmetrical, and again, which would revolutionize the environment.

This is the interior of a house that Corbusier designed for his friend Ozenfant, and you can see this idea of creating space and also in planes. It's very interesting to just point out that he used these Thonet chairs, which many of us search for in junk shops or antique shops. He used these

because these were an example for him of mass production; chairs that were always the same, were not at all hand-done.

We see in the facade of the house again using these same principles [43:00] that were developed by Malevich and Mondrian, and now by Corbusier in his house by enclosing space in the interior. Here, he's walled in a garden. I don't know if you can see. Right here, there's a small door, and then this is an interior garden with a hole to the roof, to the air coming through. And it's very interesting, the flat planes and at the same time capturing the space in the middle.

In conclusion, I'd like to just place on the screen two paintings of the 1960s, one by Rosenquist, a pop painting, and one by [Ankowitz?], an optical painting. In a sense, they reflect these two developments of purism and the geometrical abstraction of the 'teens, but here, this use of bright color and geometric forms is not used to [44:00] really express the idea of a universal, absolute order, but is used purely to play on you optically.

And here, these machine forms or forms taken from mass production from advertising are, again, not used to glorify the machine, to glorify the machine age which is to bring us to a new era of beauty, but instead is used ironically to comment on just what the machine has done to us. These developments from 1920 up to the present day will be traced in the next eight lectures and will try to explain the different changes that have taken place. As I said, the next lecture will be next Saturday and will be on constructivism in sculpture. Thank you. [45:00]

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