

Still Life: Plate of Peaches, 1879-80. Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 73.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser 78.2514.4

< PAUL CÉZANNE >

Paul Cézanne's (b. 1839, Aix-en-Provence, France; d. 1906, Aix-en-Provence) complex still lifes are an important part of his quest for empirical truth in painting. Because these inanimate objects did not move, like human subjects might, during the painting sessions, and they were available any time of day or night, they were an ideal subject for a slow-working, analytical artist like Cézanne. Sometimes the fruit or flowers he used would wither and die before the painting was completed and would need to be replaced by paper flowers and artificial fruit.

His work was motivated by a desire to give sculptural weight and volume to everyday objects. In Cézanne's still lifes ambiguities abound. As if by magic, the tablecloth we see in *Still Life: Plate of Peaches* is able to levitate several pieces of fruit without any visible means of support. The use of mixed perspectives adds to the precarious effect. Everything is as tentative and perplexing as it is stable and tangible.¹

Cézanne painted almost 200 still lifes, focusing on simple household items. He loved the rich colors and basic shapes of fruit. He also liked the challenge of creating a great painting using everyday objects. He appreciated fruits and flowers as the products of nature, as well as common domestic objects like pitchers, jars, and bottles, which he felt held an admirable sense of craftsmanship.²



"I will astonish Paris with an apple," he once said.³

Cézanne set up his still lifes with great care. A testimony by an acquaintance describes his method of preparing a still life: "No sooner was the cloth draped on the table with innate taste than Cézanne set out the peaches in such a way as to make the complementary colors vibrate, grays next to reds, yellows to blues, leaning, tilting, balancing the fruit at the angles he wanted, sometimes pushing a one-sous or two-sous piece [French coins] under them. You could see from the care he took how much it delighted his eye."⁴ But when he began to paint, the picture might change in unusual ways. Cézanne seems to be painting from several different positions at once. He believed that the beauty of the whole painting was more important than anything else—even more important than the correctness of the rendering.⁵

Pablo Picasso, born 42 years after Cézanne, said, "My one and only master . . . Cézanne was like the father of us all." Cézanne is therefore often described as the "father of modern art."⁶

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Still Life: Plate of Peaches*, 1879–80

- ▶ Look carefully at this work. What do you notice?
- ▶ What would it be like to bite into one of these peaches? Are they ripe? Do they have an aroma? How might they taste? Write a short paragraph about that experience. Then share it with your classmates. Do you have similar or different ideas?
- ▶ The bluish wallpaper with sprays of leaves found in the background of this still life appears in fourteen of Cézanne's still life paintings.⁷ What about it might have appealed to Cézanne?
- ▶ Cézanne painted this still life more than a century ago. What aspects of it seem familiar and easily understood? Are there also parts of the painting that are puzzling? What is confusing about them?
- ▶ The elements in this painting are simple: a table, white tablecloth, blue ceramic plate, and peaches. Try recreating this still life setup as closely as possible with real objects. Compare your arrangement to Cézanne's. How are they similar? Describe the areas where Cézanne departed from reality to enhance the impact of the total painting.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- For generations the training of artists included copying works by the masters. Copy Cézanne's painting as closely as you can. Then recreate the still life with real objects and invent a new style to interpret this setup. What did you learn from each experience?
- Cézanne took great care in setting up the still lifes that he would then paint. He might even adjust the angle of an object by propping a coin or two underneath it to slightly change its incline.

Collect and arrange your still life. In choosing the objects consider their formal characteristics: color, form, and texture, as well as their personal meaning to you. Then carefully assemble the objects you selected into an arrangement. When you arrive at a still life setup that pleases you, draw it, paint it, or photograph it.

- In addition to his still life paintings, Cézanne is also known for his landscapes and portraits. In books or on the Internet research other painting genres that Cézanne worked in. What are the similarities and differences in how Cézanne treated each of these subjects? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Still life had several advantages for Cézanne. It was both traditional and modern. This allowed Cézanne to build on the achievements of the past while pursuing his own unique vision.

Forbearers of the still life tradition in France include Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin (1699–1779), Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), and Édouard Manet (1832–1883). A younger artist, Pablo Picasso, said, "My one and only master . . . Cézanne was like the father of us all." Research the still life paintings created by these artists and compare them to Cézanne's. How did Cézanne build on the achievements of the past? Why do you think Picasso referred to him as the "father of us all"?

< ROBERT DELAUNAY >

As it was for many literary and artistic figures of the day, the Eiffel Tower, built for the Exposition Universelle de Paris of 1889, became a symbol of modernity for Robert Delaunay (b. 1885, Paris; d. 1941, Montpellier, France). Delaunay envisioned breaking down boundaries and transforming Europe into a global community, and the Eiffel Tower, in its capacity as a radio tower, embodied international communications. He first painted the tower in celebration of his engagement to fellow artist Sonia Terk in 1909 and would make it the subject of at least thirty works over the next few years and again in the 1920s.

Delaunay's early treatments of the Eiffel Tower use a limited palette and simple blocklike forms. Centrally located within each of the compositions, the Eiffel Tower assumes the iconic drama of a portrait. The more dynamic representation of *Eiffel Tower with Trees* signals a shift in the artist's style. Delaunay showed the tower from several viewpoints, capturing and

synthesizing several impressions at once. It is significant that this painting was executed when he was away from Paris, working from memory.

Eiffel Tower with Trees marks the beginning of Delaunay's self-described "destructive" phase: the solid form in his earlier works becomes fragmented and begins to crumble. Delaunay chose a subject that allowed him to indulge his preference for a sense of vast space, atmosphere, and light, while evoking a sign of modernity and progress. Delaunay's achievements in style represent a new century and its shift toward urbanization.

Many of Delaunay's images are views from a window framed by curtains. In *Eiffel Tower* the buildings bracketing the tower curve like drapery. The vantage point of the window allows the Eiffel Tower series to combine exterior and interior spheres, and recalls a traditional, Romantic notion of the open window.



LEFT TO RIGHT

Eiffel Tower with Trees (Tour Eiffel aux arbres), summer 1910. Oil on canvas, 126.4 x 92.8 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1035. Robert Delaunay © L&M Services B.V. Amsterdam

Eiffel Tower (Tour Eiffel), 1911 (dated 1910 by the artist). Oil on canvas, 202 x 138.4 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.463. Robert Delaunay © L&M Services B.V. Amsterdam

Red Eiffel Tower (La tour rouge), 1911-12. Oil on canvas, 125 x 90.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1036. Robert Delaunay © L&M Services B.V. Amsterdam

VIEW + DISCUSS

Before showing the class Robert Delaunay's paintings, project a photograph of the Eiffel Tower. You may even be able to locate vintage photographs online. Robert Delaunay is known to have owned more than one postcard with a photo of the Eiffel Tower that he may have used as a reference for some of his paintings.

Ask students what they notice as well as what they know about the Eiffel Tower. You may want to provide some background information so that the students understand that the Eiffel Tower was not only an impressive architectural structure, but also a symbol of Parisian modernity.

- ▶ Show: *Eiffel Tower with Trees*, 1910

How is Delaunay's painting similar or different from the photograph of the Eiffel Tower? What adjectives would you use to describe this work?

- ▶ Show *Eiffel Tower* (1911) and *Red Eiffel Tower* (1911–12)

How are these works similar and different from each other? Which one do you prefer? Why?

- ▶ Over his lifetime Delaunay concentrated (some say obsessively) on particular places, painting them again and again. If you were to choose a place to explore again and again, where would you choose? Why?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

EXPLORATIONS

- The Web site for the Eiffel Tower contains information on many aspects of the landmark. To understand the importance that the Eiffel Tower held for Parisians at the turn of the 20th century, go to www.tour-eiffel.fr/teiffel/uk/.
- When construction of the Eiffel Tower was announced in 1888, Paris went into an uproar. People didn't want a hideous eyesore like that in their backyard. They called it a "metal monster" and were sure that it would fall on their homes and crush them.⁸ No one guessed that it would become a beloved symbol of France. But in 1889 when the Paris Exposition opened, it was the Eiffel Tower that attracted the most visitors and soon became an international symbol.

Many groundbreaking ideas were initially criticized, but eventually embraced by the public. Do you know examples of art, literature, architecture, inventions, or ideas that initially prompted public criticism, but eventually won acceptance? What are they? Why do you think they were criticized?

- In addition to Robert Delaunay, many other artists, including Marc Chagall (1887–1985), Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau (1844–1910), and Georges Seurat (1859–1891), painted the Eiffel Tower in their different styles. Look at paintings by these artists featuring the Eiffel Tower. How are they similar or different from Delaunay's approach?
- In addition to painters, writers and poets have found the Eiffel Tower and Delaunay's paintings of it to be inspiring. The last few lines of Blaise Cendrars's (1887–1961) poem "Tower," written in August 1913 and dedicated to Robert Delaunay, reads:

You are everything
Tower
Ancient god
Modern beast
Solar spectrum
Subject of my poem
Tower
Tower of the world
Tower in motion⁹

Discuss this excerpt and how it relates to both the Eiffel Tower and Delaunay's paintings of it. Then create a poem for a place that is special to you. To whom will you dedicate your poem? Why?

Landscape at Céret (Paysage de Céret), Céret, summer 1911.
Oil on canvas, 65.1 x 50.3 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.538. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York



< PABLO PICASSO >

Pablo Picasso (b. 1881, Málaga, Spain; d. 1973, Mougins, France), one of the most dynamic and influential artists of the 20th century, experimented with many different artistic styles during his long career, including the historic introduction of Cubism.

Cubism is widely regarded as the most innovative and influential artistic style of the past century. Inspired by the volumetric treatment of form by the French Post-Impressionist artist Paul Cézanne, Picasso and Georges Braque (1882–1963) embarked on Cubism’s first stage of development. Although both artists worked independently in their own studios, they met frequently to discuss their progress and learn from each other. Beginning in 1908, Picasso and Braque deepened their relationship until it verged on collaboration. During the summer of 1911 they spent time together in the south of France in Céret, a popular artists’ colony. They compared their work and debated new possibilities. They were inventing a new style together, and both artists are credited for the development of Cubism. Some of their paintings are so similar that many critics find it difficult to tell them apart. As Braque would recall, “Picasso is Spanish and I’m French: we know all the differences that entails, but during those years the differences didn’t count.”¹⁰

The Cubist style emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, rejecting the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, and modeling as well as refuting time-honored theories of art as imitation of nature. Cubist painters were not bound to copying form, texture, color, and space; instead, they presented a new reality in paintings that depicted radically fragmented objects whose several sides were seen simultaneously. The monochromatic color scheme was suited to the presentation of complex, multiple views of the object, which was now reduced to overlapping opaque and transparent planes. Cubism led to abstraction and necessitated new ways of looking at art.

At its climax, Braque and Picasso brought Analytic Cubism almost to the point of complete abstraction. In *Landscape at Céret*, painted during that summer of 1911, patches of muted earthy color, schematized stairways, and arched window configurations exist as visual clues that must be pieced together. For this painting, as with all Cubist works, the total image must be “thought” as much as “seen.”¹¹

VIEW + DISCUSS

Before showing students Picasso's *Landscape at Céret* tell them that they are going to see a work by the artist Pablo Picasso that he painted while staying in a town in southern France during the summer of 1911—a hundred years ago. On the Internet browse photos of Céret. Although some things about the town will have changed over a century, students should still be able to get a good idea of the terrain and architecture of the region. Ask students to imagine and perhaps create a list or sketch of what they expect to see in the painting *Landscape at Céret*.

- ▶ Show: *Landscape at Céret*, 1911
- ▶ What do you notice?
- ▶ How is the painting different from what you imagined? Are there any ways that it is similar to what you expected?
- ▶ How is this painting different from traditional landscapes?
- ▶ What clues does Picasso provide to let us know that the subject of this painting is the town of Céret?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- The Cubists developed a new way of depicting space from multiple and mixed perspectives. They believed that there was no single fixed view of nature, and that objects and spaces surrounding them (figure and ground) should be given equal importance and broken into geometric components or facets.

For your Cubist work, set up a still life composed of common objects. Bowls, bottles, jugs, fruits, and musical instruments are common subjects for Cubist works. Draw the still life from several different perspectives, overlapping the various views on a single sheet of paper. You may want to move to the left or right, or vary your perspective by raising or lowering your viewpoint. You will now have a layered drawing reflecting multiple perspectives. Then, using colored pencils or paint, emphasize the portions of the drawing that appeal to you most. Although your drawing was based on observation, the finished drawing may bear little resemblance to its original inspiration; nevertheless your work is a record of your multiple perceptions.

- In order to “see” *Landscape at Céret*, the viewer must piece together the fragments and clues that Picasso provides into a vision of a place. The total image must be “thought” in order to be “seen,” and each person will see it differently.

To demonstrate this, provide an 8.5 x 11 photocopy of Picasso's *Landscape at Céret* to each student. Then give each student a piece of tracing paper to cover the photocopy. With colored pencils ask students to *find* the *Landscape at Céret*, and create their landscape using the photocopy as a starting point. When done, remove the photocopy and replace it with a white sheet of paper underneath so that only the student work can be seen. Discuss the varied interpretations.

- Some of the paintings that Braque and Picasso created are so similar that even critics and art historians have difficulty telling them apart. In 1911 Braque painted *Rooftops at Céret*.¹² You will be able to find a reproduction of it online. Compare the two paintings. There are many similarities; are there differences as well?

In 1913 another Spanish painter, Juan Gris (1887–1927), created a work he titled *Landscape at Céret*.¹³ You will find this work on the Internet as well. Compare these various impressions of Céret and the styles of the artists who painted them.

RIGHT *Composition 8 (Compositie 8)*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 94.4 x 55.6 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1227. © 2011 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Virginia

BELOW *Tableau No. 2/Composition No. VII*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 104.4 x 113.6 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1228. © 2011 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust c/o HCR International Virginia



< PIET MONDRIAN >

For more than a decade after graduating from art school, Piet Mondrian (b. 1872, Amersfoort, The Netherlands; d. 1944, New York City) created drawings and paintings that focused on landscapes and nature. In 1911 Mondrian visited an Amsterdam exhibition of Cubist paintings by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso and was inspired to go to Paris, where he began to develop an independent abstract style. Seeking to refine the rhythms of what he saw, Mondrian began drawing the area in which he lived. After sustained work and many adjustments, these initial compositions evolved into flat planes of interlocking rectangles that no longer showed objects. Although Mondrian's sources exist in the natural world, his images are reduced to the essentials. He stated, "For in nature the surface of things is beautiful but its imitation is lifeless. The objects give us everything, but their depiction gives us nothing."¹⁴

Tableau No. 2/Composition No. VII, painted a year after his arrival in 1912, exemplifies Mondrian's new approach. Mondrian broke down his subject—in this case a tree—into



interlocking black lines and planes of color. He also limited his palette to close-valued ochre and gray tones that recall Cubist canvases.

Mondrian went beyond the Parisian Cubists' degree of abstraction. His subjects are less recognizable, in part because he avoided any suggestion of volume, and, unlike the Cubists, who rooted their compositions at the bottom of the canvas in order to suggest a figure subject to gravity, Mondrian's scaffolding fades at the painting's edges. In works such as *Composition 8*, based on studies of Parisian building facades, Mondrian went even further in his refusal of illusionism and the representation of volume.

Throughout his life, Mondrian continued to move toward greater abstraction. His goal was to discern an underlying structure in the world by means of the fewest, clearest elements. He sought to remove all clutter, paring away everything inessential,¹⁵ eventually even rejecting diagonal lines. Like many pioneers of abstraction, Mondrian's impetus was largely spiritual. He aimed to distill the real world to its pure essence, to represent the dichotomies of the universe in eternal tension. To achieve this he focused on stability, universality, and spirituality—through balancing horizontal and vertical strokes.¹⁶

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Tableau No. 2/Composition No. VII*, 1913

- ▶ Describe this painting as carefully as possible. Be sure to include colors, lines, shapes, composition, and paint application in your description.
- ▶ This painting was derived from Mondrian's study of a tree. Are there qualities in this painting that seem to reference the original subject, or have all traces of its source been eliminated? Explain your response.

Show: *Composition 8 (Compositie 8)*, 1914

- ▶ Describe this painting as carefully as possible. Be sure to include colors, lines, shapes, composition, and paint application in your description.
- ▶ This painting was derived from Mondrian's studies of Parisian building facades. Are there qualities in this painting that seem to reference the original subject, or have all traces of its source been eliminated? Explain your response.
- ▶ Mondrian painted these works in successive years. Compare them to each other. What similarities and differences do you notice?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- *Tableau No. 2/Composition No. VII* was based on Mondrian's study of a tree. *Composition 8 (Compositie 8)* was inspired by Parisian architecture. Mondrian was known to have created many naturalistic drawings and paintings, including more than a hundred pictures of flowers. Reflecting years later on his attraction to the subject, he wrote, "I enjoyed painting flowers, not bouquets, but a single flower at a time, in order that I might better express its plastic structure."

Begin your own work by drawing a subject that inspires you. Like Mondrian, it may be a flower, tree, or building, or something else that attracts you. Then work towards simplifying your subject until you feel you have captured its *essence*. It may not still look like the subject you began with, but it will retain something of its original structure and its meaning to you.

- Over his lifetime, Mondrian evolved from a Dutch landscape painter into an artist of international influence. Research the evolution of his work from its focus on nature, to his late work that explored rhythm, tension, and balance. Which works do you find most interesting? Why?
- Mondrian cultivated simplicity in both his life and his paintings. He lived alone in what has been described as "cell-like" severity, deliberately reducing both art and life to the minimum.¹⁷ By 1918 Mondrian's subject matter consisted of vertical and horizontal rectangles and lines, their colors limited to black, white, gray, and the primaries red, yellow, and blue. Working with these limited means Mondrian created some of the most grand and austere paintings of the 20th century.¹⁸ Despite limiting his choices, Mondrian was able to innovate and experiment enormously within his chosen parameters. Although we live in a world that touts infinite choice as a positive, can you think of other instances where limiting choices is beneficial? Explain.

Yellow Cow (Gelbe Kuh), 1911. Oil on canvas, 140.5 x 189.2 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1210



< FRANZ MARC >

Franz Marc (b. 1880, Munich; d. 1916 Verdun, France), the son of a landscape painter, studied religion and philology, but decided to devote himself to becoming an artist. In 1907 he went to Paris, where he encountered the art and artists of the day. It was during this period that he began the intensive study of animals that was to lead to his mature style. He said that he wanted to recreate them “from the inside,” and made himself so complete a master of animal anatomy that he was able to give lessons in the subject to other artists. During the early years of the 20th century, a back-to-nature movement swept Germany, anchored in the belief that a return to the land would rejuvenate what was perceived to be an increasingly secularized, materialistic society. Marc found this nature-oriented quest for spiritual redemption inspiring. In a 1908 letter he wrote, “I am trying to intensify my feeling for the organic rhythm of all things, to achieve pantheistic empathy with the throbbing and flowing of nature’s bloodstream in trees, in animals, in the air.”¹⁹ Gradually Marc began to change his artistic language as he became less interested in an image true to nature and more in painting as a symbol of another view of reality.

He believed that animals possessed a certain godliness that men had long since lost. “People with their lack of piety, especially men, never touched my true feelings,” he wrote in 1915. “But animals with their virginal sense of life awakened all that was good in me.”²⁰ By 1907 he had devoted himself almost exclusively to the representation of animals in nature. Although Marc had a deep knowledge of anatomy, his goal was not zoological accuracy, but rather capturing the essence of each animal in his paintings.

To complement this imagery, through which he expressed his spiritual ideals, Marc developed a theory of color symbolism. In a letter to fellow artist August Macke (1887–1914) dating from 1910, Marc assigned emotional values to colors. “Blue is the male principle, astringent and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, gay and spiritual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy and always the color to be opposed and overcome by the other two.” In 1911 Marc produced *Yellow Cow*, an image of a joyous cow leaping through the air, and emphasized the impression of happiness and femininity through his extensive use of the color yellow.²¹

VIEW + DISCUSS

Before showing Franz Marc's painting to the class, tell students that they are about to see a work called *Yellow Cow*. Have them do a drawing of what they think this work will look like.

Show: *Yellow Cow (Gelbe Kuh)*, 1911

- ▶ Take some time to look at this painting. What do you notice?
- ▶ Where are we? What is happening?
- ▶ Franz Marc believed that colors could stir deep emotions and associations. What emotions do the colors used in this painting evoke in you? How has the artist accomplished that?
- ▶ Marc created his own personal color symbolism where "blue is the male principle, astringent and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, gay and spiritual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy and always the color to be opposed and overcome by the other two." How does knowing this information change your understanding of the painting?
- ▶ Is this a place you would like to visit? Explain your response.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Early in his career Marc studied the anatomy of animals and even taught the subject to other artists. Marc painted horses, dogs, cats, monkeys, and cows as well as other animals.

Drawing animals requires fast thinking and quick execution. Although there are many excellent books that will enable you to learn more about drawing animals and their underlying structure, close observation is perhaps the best teacher.

Choose an animal that you can observe. If you have a pet, you have a handy model; if not a visit to the local park or zoo will provide many possibilities. Make many quick drawings of the animals you observe. What did you learn about the animal you drew through this experience?

- In his essay "How Does a Horse See the World?" Franz Marc wondered, "Is there a more mysterious idea for the artist than the conception of how nature may be mirrored in the eye of the animal? How does a horse see the world, how does an eagle, a deer or a dog? How poor and how soulless is our convention of placing animals in a landscape familiar to our own eyes rather than transporting ourselves into the soul of the animal in order to imagine his perception?"²²

Marc asks us not just to perceive an animal, but to truly empathize. Create a drawing or painting that seeks to look at the world as an animal experiences it. When finished, show the work to classmates and discuss what experiences and perceptions you sought to include.

- For younger students, provide an outline of the cow in Marc's painting. Students can color it in any way that appeals to them and then place their cow in a new environment.
- Several novelists have written their books from an animal's point of view. If you are interested in a selection of books that look at life from an animal's perspective go to www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6431059 where you will find several recommendations.
- Marc created his own personal color symbolism. Ask your students about their associations with the primary colors red, yellow and blue. For instance, yellow might be associated with both "caution" and "butter." Then have each student create a work in which these color associations are expressed in a painting.



Improvisation 28 (second version) (Improvisation 28 [zweite Fassung]), 1912. Oil on canvas, 111.4 x 162.1 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.239. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

< VASILY KANDINSKY >

Born in Moscow, Vasily Kandinsky (b. 1866, d. 1944, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France) spent his early childhood in Odessa, Russia (now Ukraine). His parents instilled in him a love of music that led him to pursue a kind of painting that could be as abstract and emotional as music. Many of the titles that Kandinsky gives to his paintings are terms more usually associated with music, and he classified each as coming from a different inspiration.

IMPRESSIONS Direct impressions of “external nature” expressed in a drawing/painting form

IMPROVISATIONS Paintings which were inspired by “events of the spiritual type”

COMPOSITIONS Works which were less spontaneous than either of the other two categories because they were shaped and worked out in a series of studies over a long period of time²³

Several of Kandinsky’s abstract canvases share a literary source, the Revelation of Saint John the

Divine. Revelation brings together the worlds of heaven, earth, and hell in a final confrontation between the forces of good and evil. The plot of the story proper (ch. 4–22) is driven by a powerful conflict between the forces, both earthly and spiritual, of good and evil. In the simplest terms, it states that there will be a time of great tribulation on the Earth that combines natural disasters with war on an unprecedented scale, followed by an age of peace where a new heaven and a new earth replace the old. Kandinsky described his *Improvisations* series as manifestations of events of an inner spiritual character. With *Improvisation 28 (Second Version) (Improvisation 28 [zweite Fassung])*, his style had become more abstract and nearly schematic in its spontaneity. This painting’s sweeping curves and forms, which dissolve significantly but remain vaguely recognizable, seem to reveal cataclysmic events on the left and symbols of hope and the paradise of spiritual salvation on the right.²⁴ In the painting images of a boat and waves (signalling the global deluge) emerge on the left, while the paradise of spiritual salvation appears on the right.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Improvisation 28 (second version)*
(*Improvisation 28 [zweite Fassung]*), 1912

- ▶ Describe this painting as carefully as you can.
- ▶ What areas are puzzling or difficult to identify?
- ▶ Recognizable symbols appear to be embedded in this painting including a boat, waves, a serpent, an embracing couple, a shining sun, candles and, perhaps, cannons. What other symbols can you identify?
- ▶ Historians have noted that there is a marked difference between the mood Kandinsky created on the left side of this painting and the right side. What choices has the artist made to impart a different emotional impact?
- ▶ Imagine yourself taking a journey through this painting. Where would you enter? Look around and describe what you see, your route, and what you might discover along the way.
- ▶ Kandinsky's titles for his paintings reflect the influence of music on his thinking about art. What type of music do you think *Improvisation 28 (second version)* suggests? Ask students to each select a piece of music that for them has some of the same emotional qualities. Project the painting while each of the musical selections is played. Have students discuss which music best complements the painting.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Kandinsky believed that art should express the inner character of things, not their surface appearance. His work seeks to reveal this essence through shape, line, and color. Provide each student with four small sheets of drawing paper and drawing materials that include color (colored pencils, Craypas, or crayons are fine). Ask students to create non-objective compositions to express these words through the use of line, shape, and color only:

Anger
Loneliness
Precision
Exhaustion

Display the completed works and discuss. What similarities can be seen in how different students interpreted the same word? Are there unique responses as well? As you view the students' work, are there conclusions that can be drawn about how people interpret emotions through certain colors, shapes, and lines?

- Kandinsky explored the epic and enduring theme of the struggle between good and evil. Create a work of art—a painting, sculpture, story, poem, dance, or musical piece—that focuses on this theme in any way that is relevant to you.
- The paintings that Kandinsky titled *Impressions* and *Improvisations* were generated from his responses to nature and spiritual beliefs. The paintings called *Compositions* reflect a greater degree of input from the conscious mind. Have students use one of these approaches to create a painting. After the painting is complete, ask each student to write about his or her inspiration and process to explore these various approaches.
- Kandinsky orchestrated his paintings to balance things that were recognizable with areas of pure painting. He understood that people might need a few recognizable symbols to get them engaged in looking. He stated,

*"I did not wish to banish objects completely. . . Objects, in themselves, have a particular spiritual sound. . . . Thus, I dissolved objects to a greater or lesser extent within the same picture, so that they might not all be recognized at once and so that these emotional overtones might thus be experienced gradually by the spectator."*²⁵

Discuss this statement with your students and ask whether or not they agree with Kandinsky's tactic.

RESOURCES

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Paul Cézanne

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- 11 Adapted from Jan Avgikos's entry on www.guggenheim.org
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*Resources appropriate for younger students.

ABSTRACT Art in which the elements—line, shape, texture, or color—rather than a recognizable object have been stressed.

ANALYTIC CUBISM This initial phase of Cubism (ca. 1908–12) refers to the “analysis” or “breaking down” of form and space. In this approach figures and objects are depicted in an austere, depersonalized pictorial style that employs a limited palette of ochres, browns, greens, grays, and blacks, which were considered less expressive than a full range of color. Sometimes the technique of *papier collé* (from the French *coller*, meaning to paste or glue), was used and fragmented pieces of newspaper, wallpaper, tickets, cigarette packages, and other everyday printed materials were incorporated into paintings.

CUBISM A style of painting, developed between 1907 and 1914 as a collaboration between Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, in which objects are represented as deconstructed cubes and other geometric shapes.

IMPRESSIONISM A late-19th century art movement that dealt with the effects of light and color. Impressionist artists used these effects to capture the immediacy or “impression” of a moment.

POST-IMPRESSIONISM A movement that embraced the idea of art as a process of formal design with purely expressive aims and included Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Georges Seurat, and Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).