

Wassily Kandinsky

Pioneer of Abstract Art

28 March – 7 September 2025

The oeuvre of Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), one of the greatest figures in modern art, was long considered the first expression of non-figurative art at the beginning of the 20th century. While it is now recognised that the origins of abstraction are multiple, the theoretical work of the Russian-born artist and his role as initiator, publisher and teacher continue to demonstrate his decisive contribution to the idea of an 'autonomous' art, freed from any reference to the outside world.

Through the donations and subsequent bequest of his widow Nina Kandinsky, the Centre Pompidou holds the most complete collection of the artist's works. The paintings presented here all belong to the collection of the Centre Pompidou-Musée national d'art moderne. This retrospective traces Kandinsky's extraordinary itinerary through Russia, Germany and France. In five chapters, the exhibition reviews his figurative beginnings, the genesis of his abstract art in Munich, his return to his native Russia during the revolutionary period, his teaching activities at the Bauhaus and his final years in Paris.

Kandinsky and synaesthesia

Kandinsky was capable of synaesthesia, an involuntary neurological phenomenon in which a person perceives several senses as associated. In his case, hearing was associated with sight, sounds and colours were intimately linked in his mind. As a result, he was able to “see the music”, as he discovered after a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*: “I could mentally see all my colours, they were before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines took shape in front of me”, he explained. For him, it was the experience of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). This special ability led him to compare the palette of colours with the timbre of each instrument. Based on this system of correspondence, Kandinsky developed an aesthetic of dissonance that would pave the way for abstraction.



Accord réciproque (Reciprocal Accord), 1942. Oil and Ripolin on canvas, 114 x 146 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Hélène Mauri/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

“ **Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.** ”

Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1911



Park von Saint-Cloud, dunkle Allee (Saint-Cloud Park, Shaded Path), 1906. Oil on canvas, 48 x 65 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

Beginnings: The Years of Learning

After a short academic career in law and economics, Kandinsky left Russia in 1896. Intent on studying painting, he moved to Munich (Germany), the city of Jugendstil, the German equivalent of the French Art Nouveau. In addition to tempera painting he learned wood engraving. In 1901, he co-founded the Phalanx artists' group and the next year, set up the art school of the same name, where he was to meet the young painter Gabriela Münter, his future companion. After the closing of the school in 1904, the couple travelled in Europe, choosing the Netherlands as their first destination, followed by Tunisia and Italy, before settling in Paris (1906-1907). During this period, Kandinsky executed many outdoor oil studies with a palette knife, as well as multicoloured scenes in tempera on a black ground that recall Russian folktales. During these four formative years, the artist developed the potential for abstraction within his pictorial means.

Murnau: Towards Abstraction

In summer 1908, Kandinsky and Münter settled in Munich. Charmed by the picturesque little town of Murnau, its landscapes and its folk art, they spent the summer there in order to paint outdoors. This stay marked the spectacular birth of a new expressionist painting. Kandinsky's broad brushstrokes came together in increasingly autonomous blocks of vivid colours and the constraints of mimetic rendering no longer seemed to exist. In December 1911, he provided the key to his research on abstraction in his first book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*: "It is evident therefore that colour harmony must rest only on a corresponding vibration in the human soul; and this is one of the guiding principles of the inner need." In May 1912, Kandinsky and his artist friend Franz Marc published the famous *Blaue Reiter Almanach*, a revolutionary manifesto for the synthesis of the arts without boundaries or categories.



Improvisation 3, 1909. Oil on canvas, 94 x 130 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Adam Rzepka/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

It is evident therefore that colour harmony must rest only on a corresponding vibration in the human soul.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1911



Im Grau (In Grey), 1919. Oil on canvas, 129 x 176 cm.
Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

Russia: The Years of Transition

When Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August 1914, Kandinsky was forced to leave the enemy country and return to his homeland. Perturbed by this turn of events, he did not produce a single oil painting in 1915, only abstract graphic works which at times attest to the austerity of the period. In 1917, during a summer holiday with his new wife, Nina Andreevskaya, he temporarily went back to figurative works.

After the October Revolution, Kandinsky took part in the reorganisation of the new Bolshevik government's cultural institutions. He made ties with the Suprematist and Constructivist avant-garde, as reflected in the more pronounced geometry and primary colour accents in his paintings. But he continued to defend his aesthetic convictions and the underlying spiritual values now considered outmoded. Isolated and embittered, Kandinsky left Russia a second time and returned to Germany in winter 1921.

“ *Im Grau* was the conclusion of my dramatic period, when I accumulated so many forms. ”

Wassily Kandinsky, Letter to Hilla Rebay, 4th of June 1936

Bauhaus: The Years of Theory

In summer 1922, Kandinsky was officially appointed to the revolutionary Bauhaus school in Weimar (Germany), founded in 1919 by the architect Walter Gropius on the basis of a multidisciplinary approach integrating all the arts. As a "Form Master", Kandinsky directed the wall painting workshop and taught alongside many renowned artists. The increased graphic clarity of his compositions prompted him to designate his production from the Weimar years as his "cold years". In 1926, he published his second major theoretical treatise, *Point and Line to Plane*. Between 1925, the year the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, and 1933, when Hitler's rise to power led to the closing of the school, Kandinsky produced no fewer than 289 watercolours and 259 paintings before he was once again forced into exile, this time in France.



Auf Weiss II (On White II), 1923. Oil on canvas, 105 x 98 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Hélène Mauri/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn



Entassement réglé (Regulated Heap), 1938. Oil and Ripolin on canvas, 116 x 89 cm. Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Bertrand Prévost/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

Paris: The Years of Maturity

In December 1933, the Kandinskys moved into a modern building in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris. "Paris, with its marvelous light (both strong and soft), had expanded my palette", wrote the artist. The austerity of the final Bauhaus paintings gave way to joyous forms rendered in a light palette dominated by pastel and citrus colours. Kandinsky developed a new style merging the strict geometry of Constructivism and the fantasy of the biomorphism introduced by the French Surrealist artists. His work evolved through contact with them, particularly Jean Arp and Joan Miró. After the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Kandinsky had to use pieces of wood or cardboard in place of primed canvases; his palette darkened, and the compositions became more detailed and structured.



Wassily Kandinsky,
Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/
Georges Meguerditchian/Dist.
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Guided tours

The mediation team offers you guided tours to discover the works from the exhibition, in an active and sensitive way.

Individual tours

Visit in Spanish included in the price of the ticket. Inscription on the same day at the reception. 25 people maximum. Wednesday at 6 pm

Groups

In Spanish, English and French
25 people maximum
By prior reservation:
educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu

Family tours

Only for the semi-permanent exhibitions
Sundays at 11.30 am

Discover all our activities (tours, workshops, events...) on our website:
centrepompidou-malaga.eu

Information

Opening hours

9.30 am to 8.00 pm, every day
Ticket offices close at 7:30 pm
The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except holidays and days before holidays), 1 January and 25 December

Prices

Temporary exhibitions:
€4, concessions: €2.50
Semi-permanent exhibitions:
€7, concessions: €4
Semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions:
€9, concessions: €5.50

Contacto

Pasaje doctor Carrillo Casaux, s/n
[Muelle Uno, Puerto de Malaga]
T. (+34) 951 926 200
info.centrepompidou@malaga.eu
educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu

centrepompidou-malaga.eu



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