

Wassily Kandinsky: Pioneer of Abstract Painting (1866-1944)

This five-part lecture series will explore the life and work of the Russian painter, Wassily Kandinsky. A pioneer of abstract modern painting, Kandinsky employed his synaesthetic and spiritual sensibilities to reveal the unique interrelationships between color, form, and sound. His groundbreaking treatise from 1911, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, continues to influence artists and creatives to this day. Kandinsky carried Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to a new apotheosis of expression, paving the way for interdisciplinary exploration in all artistic media.

1. Early Years: From Moscow to Munich (1866-1896)

Born in 1866 in Moscow to well educated, upper-class parents, and raised in Odessa, Kandinsky showed an early talent for drawing, piano, and cello. He entered the University of Moscow in 1886 to study law, ethnography, and economics, but his interest in art and music only continued to increase. After completing his degree in 1892, he started his career by lecturing in law at the university. In 1896, he abandoned Russia and the law to study painting in Munich.

2. Munich, Münter, Murnau, and Metamorphosis (1896-1914)

After studying painting at the Munich Academy, Kandinsky opened his own school in the alps. He embarked upon a personal and artistic partnership with his pupil, Gabriele Münter, that included years of travel throughout Europe. Gradually, Kandinsky's style became increasingly abstract, until he made the final breakthrough to non-objective painting in 1910. The following years saw the publication of his treatise, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, and the founding of *The Blue Rider*, an association of artists named after Kandinsky's eponymous painting. *The Blue Rider* artistic movement exerted a vast influence on European culture through the publication of the multi-disciplinary *Blue Rider Almanac*.

3. Return to Russia (1914-1921)

The outbreak of World War I necessitated Kandinsky's return to Russia. Severing his relationship with Gabriele Münter, he married a young woman in Moscow, Nina Andreevskaya, and settled into the Soviet system. In rapid succession, he became a professor at the Moscow Academy of Fine Arts, a member of the People's Commissariat for Public Instruction, director of the Moscow Museum for Pictorial Culture, professor at the University of Moscow, and founder of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences. In spite of his success, however, Kandinsky found the rise of Social Realism stifling, and so, upon receiving an invitation to teach at the *Bauhaus*, he and his wife left for Berlin.

4. Bauhaus (1921-1933)

At the *Bauhaus*, Kandinsky began a productive period of painting and pedagogy, consolidating his theories regarding spirituality, psychology, and form in his second treatise, *Point and Line to Plane*, published in 1926. The stimulating exchange between Kandinsky and his equally synaesthetically inclined colleagues, Paul Klee, Lyonel Feininger, and Alexej von Jawlensky bore fruit in the formation of the *Blue Four* group, which exerted an international influence, stretching as far as California.

5. Paris (1933-1944)

The rise of the Third Reich and enforced closure of the *Bauhaus* led Kandinsky and his wife to emigrate to Paris, and seek French citizenship. The artist's work was denounced by the Nazis as "degenerate," and many of his paintings were confiscated and destroyed. Kandinsky's final years led to a refinement and synthesis of his styles and subjects, combining his early expressionistic elements with the geometric structure of his Bauhaus period and surrealist biomorphic forms in intricate, complex compositions. Kandinsky died in Paris in 1944, leaving the bulk of his vast *oeuvre* to the French state. His work became the foundation for the Pompidou collection.