



Kandinsky: Pioneer of Abstract Art and Philosopher of Color

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Abstract. Wassily Kandinsky is one of the most influential artists of the 20th century and is regarded as a pioneer of abstract art. His works and theories not only changed modern art but also opened a new way for the spiritual and philosophical exploration of art. Kandinsky emphasized that art is not only a visual expression but also a projection of the inner world and the spiritual level. Through non-figurative forms and colors, he created a new artistic language designed to reveal inner emotional and spiritual power. Kandinsky's contribution lies not only in his paintings but also in his theoretical works, such as *On the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*, which provide an important theoretical basis for understanding and analyzing abstract art. This research discusses Kandinsky's artistic transformation, his philosophical background, philosophical exploration in abstract art, his art theory, and his influence and legacy.

Keywords: spiritual exploration, inner necessity, art and philosophy integration.

1 Introduction

Kandinsky began his career with traditional and impressionistic landscapes, focusing on Russian folklore and realistic subjects. When Kandinsky saw Monet's *Haystack* for the first time in 1896, though confused and disturbed, he was also struck by the painting's unreality. This experience made him realize that painting need not be figurative, and he began to explore other possibilities of art[1]. Returning to his studio one evening, Kandinsky saw a painting he had painted on its side on the wall, which took on a beautiful abstract form in the dim light. He realized that the presence of objects might hinder the expressiveness of art, concluding that “objects are harmful to my painting.” He then created *The Blue Rider* in 1903, one of his most significant works. He depicted the rider in *The Blue Rider* less in fine detail and more as a sequence of colors, marking his transition from figural art to abstract art[2]. A large part of Kandinsky's transformation was influenced by music. The performance of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow shocked him. In the sounds and notes of the orchestration, Kandinsky discovered all the colors synchronized with irregular lines and shapes. For him, music is a parallel of painting and the ultimate abstract art. He thought art should not only depict external reality but mainly reflect the inner, psychic world of

the artist[3]. His views are philosophically associated with idealism, believing that the ultimate basis of all reality is something mental, such as the mind, spirit, reason, or volition[4]. After this period, Kandinsky's artistic ideas formed a complete abstract art theory. Therefore, along with Franz Marc, they formed the Blue Rider in 1911, named after one of Kandinsky's paintings from the Phalanx era[5]. He used the Blue Rider as a symbol of the organization because the rider also symbolizes a struggle against tradition, a battle between good and evil. In this battle, the good rider triumphs, as the spirit will triumph against matter, and abstraction will triumph against representation. The choice of color is not random. Blue refers to the romance of the knights; it is a celestial, spiritual color that, according to Byzantine painting, represents the transcendental world. When the blue is dark, it predisposes a feeling of peace; when it sinks into black, it reflects human sadness[6].

2 Kandinsky's Philosophical Background

Kandinsky was heavily influenced by the symbolism of his time, which provided him with a visual language that allowed him to convey complex ideas and emotions. Symbolism emphasizes guiding the audience into the spiritual realm through indirect means, aligning with Kandinsky's artistic concept. Symbolic language theory emphasizes that words can have a strong emotional impact if their literal meaning is masked. Kandinsky applied this theory to the visual arts, arguing that by hiding and obscuring objects, visual objects could be given the evocative power that symbolic poets and playwrights give to words[7]. There is a profound relationship between symbolism and metaphysics, both involving the exploration and expression of the nature of reality and existence. Metaphysics provides an interpretative framework that enables works of art to be seen as symbolically expressing deeper philosophical or ontological ideas. Metaphysics deals with the nature of existence, reality, and the basic structure of the universe, including the nature of time and space and the relationship between matter and spirit[8]. Symbolism relies on the metaphysical assumption that works of art are not merely objects of sensory experience but symbols of a deeper meaning[9]. Kandinsky was also influenced by theosophy, a blend of Eastern religions, mysticism, and spiritual philosophy. Theosophy emphasizes the wholeness and inner harmony of the universe, believing that all existence is a unified whole and that all phenomena are different manifestations of this wholeness[10]. Theosophy prompted Kandinsky to pursue the dialectical unity of cosmic harmony and spiritual truth through art. Through color, shape, and composition, he seeks to reveal the wholeness and inner harmony of the universe. Theosophy also provided Kandinsky with a framework for exploring the spiritual dimension of existence, presupposing the existence of a secret divinity and willful power[11].

3 Philosophical Exploration in Abstract Art

Kandinsky completed *Composition VIII*, which best reflects his philosophical exploration in abstract art. Finished in 1923, it is a painting of lines, circles, and triangles,

with colors and directions of lines differing from each other[12]. Kandinsky's painting is deeply influenced by metaphysics, with his exploration of the symbolism of color and shape serving as an artistic expression of the nature of existence and reality. Through abstract art, Kandinsky tried to reveal the spiritual essence behind the material world and explore the deep structure of existence. Kandinsky's art theory aligns with metaphysical concepts, where every element in the work has profound spiritual symbolic significance. Blue means quiet and peaceful; red means passion and power; yellow symbolizes warmth and optimism. The painting with blue, yellow, and red colors represents material entities perceived through vision. However, Kandinsky did not paint real objects; the color lumps transmit feelings to people. These feelings are mental entities and the essences of the real objects, making Kandinsky's art exploration metaphysical. Moreover, the shapes in *Composition VIII* determine his metaphysical concepts. Triangles, with their stable structure, symbolize the universe's stability, while lines with different directions represent the universe's changeability and unpredictability. Circles, being lines end-to-end, symbolize the circulation and eternity of the universe.

4 Kandinsky's Art Theory

Kandinsky's artistic ideas can be analyzed from his two works, *On the Spiritual in Art* and *The Blue Rider Almanac*. Kandinsky saw art as a way to explore the spiritual world, believing that art is not only the imitation of the external world but also the expression of inner spiritual experience. *The Spiritual in Art* discusses in detail how Kandinsky conveys this spiritual pursuit through art. His works seek to transcend material reality and reveal spiritual truths hidden behind the visible world[13]. Kandinsky sees the artist as a spiritual leader or prophet, believing that the artist has the responsibility to guide the audience to explore a higher spiritual realm through his work. Artists should convey the harmony and truth of the universe through their creations and awaken people's awareness of the inner spiritual world. Kandinsky also emphasized that art is universal and can speak directly to the viewer's mind across cultures and time. He believed that true works of art transcend specific historical and cultural contexts to convey universal spiritual experiences and emotions[14]. Moreover, *The Blue Rider Almanac* served as a unique platform that brought together a diverse range of artistic expressions, including painting, music, poetry, and other visual arts. Kandinsky and Franz Marc, the key figures behind this publication, believed that each art form had the capacity to convey profound spiritual and emotional experiences, transcending the boundaries of conventional artistic categories. While these art forms differed in their modes of expression, they shared a common purpose: to resonate with the viewer or listener on a deep spiritual level. For Kandinsky and Marc, painting communicated through color, form, and composition; music through melody, harmony, and rhythm; poetry through the evocative power of language and metaphor. They saw these art forms not as isolated practices but as complementary avenues that, when combined, could produce a richer and more holistic spiritual experience. This belief in the interconnectedness of the arts was a radical departure from the artistic norms of

their time, emphasizing the potential of a unified approach to foster a deeper engagement with the spiritual dimensions of human existence[15].

5 Kandinsky's Influence and Legacy

Wassily Kandinsky's impact on the world of art and culture is profound and far-reaching, marked by his pioneering efforts in abstract art and his theoretical contributions to understanding the essence of artistic expression. As one of the leading figures in the development of abstract art, Kandinsky embarked on a creative journey that sought to redefine the purpose and language of art. Moving away from the traditional practice of replicating the visible world, he explored the inner connections between color, form, and the spiritual dimension, ultimately advocating for a new artistic paradigm that emphasized emotional and psychological experiences over mere representation. His work no longer relied on concrete objects but communicated emotional and spiritual experiences through unique combinations of color, line, and shape [16]. Kandinsky's work was groundbreaking in that it challenged the conventions of art that had prevailed for centuries. Rather than depicting concrete objects or familiar landscapes, his paintings utilized a rich combination of colors, lines, and shapes to evoke inner feelings, moods, and spiritual states. Through his innovative use of color theory and compositional structures, Kandinsky communicated a deeper, non-verbal language that resonated with the subconscious mind. This approach was central to his artistic philosophy, as he believed that art should transcend the material world and reflect the universal human experience on a spiritual level. As he once noted, "Color is a power which directly influences the soul."

Beyond his artistic practice, Kandinsky was an influential art theorist whose writings continue to inspire and shape modern art discourse. His seminal work, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1910), laid the philosophical groundwork for abstract art by examining how visual elements, such as color and form, could be harnessed to convey complex emotions and mental states. In this book, Kandinsky delved into the psychological effects of colors, associating each hue with a specific feeling or spiritual quality. For example, he associated blue with spirituality and peace, yellow with vitality and aggression, and red with strength and confidence. His theories on the spiritual and psychological functions of art extended beyond mere aesthetics; they were a call to artists and viewers alike to recognize the potential of art as a medium for profound emotional and existential reflection. Kandinsky's legacy also extends to his role as a cultural educator and advocate for the democratization of art. During his time as the director of the Moscow Museum of Painting and Culture in 1919, he played a critical role in shaping the cultural landscape of post-revolutionary Russia. He founded the Institute of Art and Culture and proposed a series of cultural programs aimed at improving the public's aesthetic and cultural literacy through comprehensive art education [17]. Kandinsky believed that by exposing people to the transformative power of art, it was possible to elevate their consciousness and foster a more enlightened and harmonious society.

Kandinsky's influence also extended into the realm of pedagogy. As a teacher at the Bauhaus School in Germany, he was instrumental in developing a curriculum that integrated artistic creativity with industrial design. His teachings emphasized the importance of understanding the fundamental principles of color, form, and composition, and he encouraged students to experiment with new techniques and materials. This approach not only enriched the Bauhaus movement but also helped establish a new model for art education that has continued to influence art schools worldwide. Moreover, Kandinsky's legacy can be seen in the continued evolution of abstract art throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. His innovative ideas paved the way for countless artists to explore non-representational forms, resulting in a diverse range of artistic movements, including Abstract Expressionism, Color Field painting, and Minimalism. The principles Kandinsky established remain foundational to these movements, where the focus is on the emotional and spiritual possibilities of visual art. Kandinsky's work continues to inspire contemporary artists and thinkers. Museums, galleries, and academic institutions around the world still engage with his art and theories, ensuring his place in the pantheon of modern art. By transforming the understanding of what art could be, Kandinsky not only opened up new avenues for artistic exploration but also created a lasting framework for thinking about the intersection between the visual, the emotional, and the spiritual. In summary, Kandinsky's contributions to art and culture were multifaceted. He was a visionary artist who redefined the relationship between color and form, a theorist who provided a philosophical foundation for abstract art, and an educator who believed deeply in the power of art to shape cultural and social consciousness.

6 Conclusion

Wassily Kandinsky's artistic ideas not only have a profound influence in the field of visual art but also reveal the spiritual essence of art on a philosophical level. The core concepts presented by Kandinsky in "On the Spiritual in Art" and "The Almanac of the Blue Rider" emphasize that art is not merely an imitation of the external world but an expression of the inner spiritual world. This philosophy imparts a deep symbolic meaning to works of art, appealing directly to the viewer's emotional and spiritual experience through color, shape, and abstract form. The philosophical significance of Kandinsky lies in his belief that art serves as a means of spiritual exploration and that artists have the responsibility to guide their audience into a higher spiritual realm through their creations. This perspective transcends the material boundaries of traditional art, elevating it as a pursuit of truth and cosmic harmony. His concept of "inner necessity" underscores that artistic creation should be driven by the artist's internal needs rather than external market or societal pressures. This notion profoundly impacted the development of modern art and provided a new perspective and methodology for the philosophy of art. Kandinsky's interdisciplinary contribution is evident in his seamless integration of art and philosophy, conveying complex spiritual and philosophical ideas through his artwork. His theories and practices not only enriched the means and forms of artistic creation but also offered new materials and ideas for phil-

osophical exploration. Kandinsky's artistic ideas and works transform art into not just a form of visual enjoyment but also an ideological and spiritual experience, promoting the deep integration and mutual development of art and philosophy.

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