

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)

Wassily Kandinsky was born in Moscow into a merchant family. In 1871 the family moved to Odessa, where his parents soon divorced. The boy was looked after by his aunt. In Odessa Kandinsky studied in a classical gymnasium and had private lessons in music, drawing and painting. In 1886 he returned to Moscow to begin studying law and economics at the Moscow University. While a student, in 1889, he got commissioned by the "Society for Natural Science, Ethnography and Anthropology" to go on a research expedition to Vologda. The strong folk art of northern Russia made a lasting impression on him, and the results of his trip made an impression on the Society, which chose him their member.

In 1892 Kandinsky got his Law degree. He became a lecturer at the Moscow University, and married his cousin Anna (Anya) Chimiakina. He pursued his academic career but at the same time paid more and more attention to art. Thus in 1895 he took the post of art director of a publishing house in Moscow. The year of 1896 was a turning point in Kandinsky's life - he refused an offer from the University of Tartu to head one of their departments in order to devote himself to the study of painting. Together with his wife, who was very reluctant to leave Moscow and the settled life, he went to Munich and began his art studies at Azbè's art school. The school of Anton Azbè was very popular among Russians, but brought only disappointment to Kandinsky, he found drawing "smelly, apathetic, expressionless, characterless" models thoroughly disgusting. Nevertheless he dutifully took the classes for two years, simultaneously visiting a course of anatomy and working en pleine-air every day. At Azbè's Kandinsky met two compatriot painters, Alexis von Jawlensky and Marianne von Werefkin, who became close friends of his.

In 1900 Kandinsky entered the Munich academy of art, the class of Franz von Stuck, "the foremost German draughtsman" of the period.

Active creativity and organizational capabilities always attracted different intellectuals who were in search of new tendencies in art to Kandinsky. Indeed, organization and teaching were to become the main strands that would run alongside Kandinsky's artistic activities throughout his life. He was never solely a painter, but a theoretician, and organizer at the same time. Gifted author he expressed his views on art and artistic activity in his numerous writings.

In 1901 in Munich together with Rolf Niczky, Waldemar Hecker, Gustav Freytag and Wilhelm Hüggen he founded "Phalanx", an association for avant-garde artists. During four years the association organized twelve exhibitions of its members. The same year the "Phalanx School of Painting" opened under Kandinsky's directorship. It was in the "Phalanx School" that Kandinsky met [Gabriele Münter](#), an art student, who was to become his pupil, companion, and critic until 1914.

In the 1900s Kandinsky traveled much - he visited Holland, Switzerland, Italy, France, North Africa, returned to Russia several times, but spent most of the time in Murnau, in the Bavarian Alps. During those years he turned to Russian folklore as a source of topics. [The Golden Sail](#). 1903, [Couple Riding](#). 1906, [Volga Song](#). 1906. Colored woodcuts also make up a significant portion of his early work. [Farewell \(Large Version\)](#). 1903, [The Singer](#). 1903.

But it was his landscapes, built on color dissonances, which gradually took him to his most famous works, works of abstraction. Later he wrote that his sources were "[Cézanne's](#) paintings and late Fauvism, particularly the work of [Matisse](#)". [Old Town II](#). 1902, [The Blue Mountain](#). 1908, [Cemetery and Vicarage in Kochel](#). 1909. The play of colored spots and lines in his landscapes gradually pushed out the images of the real world.

In 1911 together with a friend, a German painter Franz Marc, Kandinsky founded the society "Der Blaue Reiter" (Blue Rider), which also published an illustrated almanac. The aim of this society, according to its founders, was "to destroy barriers between the different forms of art", collect and promote new ideas in painting, theater and music. The same year his first theoretical work "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" was published. In the book, he postulated an inner relationship between music and painting.

At the same time Kandinsky took part in numerous exhibitions throughout Russia, Holland, France and Germany. His first one-man show at the "Der Sturm" gallery in Berlin exhibited 64 works of 1902-1912. The painter was in close contact with Russian avant-garde artists, such as the Burliuk brothers, Natalya Goncharova, Michail Larionoff, Kazimir Malevich and others, helping them to promote their art in international shows.

The outbreak of the First World War took Kandinsky by surprise, with his Russian passport he at once became a hostile alien in Germany. He immediately fled to Switzerland and after three months returned to Russia.

Kandinsky settled in Moscow, feeling the necessity to get new Moscow impressions, "breathe Moscow" and get "firm ground under his feet". In February of 1917 he married for the second time; his new wife Nina Andreevskaya was 27 years younger. There, in 1917, he "saw revolution from my own windows". After the Bolshevik revolution he became involved in the development of the cultural policy of the new regime: he was a member of the collegiate of NarComPros (People's Commissariat of Enlightenment) (1918), became one of the organizers and the first director of the Museum for Artistic Culture in Moscow, a post he held until January 1921. In November 1919 he became a chairman of the All-Russian commission for acquisitions for the museums of the Department of Fine Arts. In 1920 he was appointed professor of aesthetics at Moscow University. In 1920 he took an active part in founding the InKhuK (Institute for Artistic Culture) and was one of its professors. The curriculum Kandinsky worked out for InKhuK was based in part on his earlier ideas about the interrelations of painting and music, and the analysis of fundamental forms and colors. Later Kandinsky took the curriculum and the teaching methods he had tried out at InKhuK to the Bauhaus, where they became a fundamental part of his teaching of art.

At the same time he found energy for his own paintings, though critics call his Moscow output "strikingly heterogeneous", "cool and rational" the artist did not stop in his development. To his Moscow period belong such interesting works as [Moscow I](#), [In Grey](#), [Red Oval](#), [White Stroke](#), [Red Spot II](#). Meanwhile Kandinsky grew disillusioned with the new power and its politics. His independence, refusal to serve propaganda purposes, and at last his abstract art, which was branded damaging and subversive, irritated the Communists and many fellow artists. So the opportunity to go to Germany in 1921 as a representative of the Moscow Academy of Arts "to establish contacts and constant relations with institutions and persons of art" was very welcome.

Kandinsky came to Berlin in 1921 and never returned to Russia. From 1922 till 1933 he taught at the Bauhaus (the college of building and art construction in Germany). The years in Bauhaus were full of theoretical search, experiments both in painting and in the sphere of creating synthetic art. In Bauhaus Kandinsky befriended his colleague, German painter and professor, Paul Klee. They both valued each other as people and painters, and demonstrated respect for each other's artistic principles. In the 1920-30s Kandinsky's name became world famous. He was proclaimed the theoretician and leading figure of abstract painting. In addition to teaching courses, Kandinsky became actively involved in delivering lectures; his exhibitions took place almost yearly in Europe and America.

The main work of Kandinsky's Bauhaus period is large painting [Composition VIII](#).

After the closing of the Bauhaus by the Nazis in 1933, Kandinsky moved to France and settle in Neuilly-sur-Seine, not far from Paris. There he wanted to find a temporary refuge, but it happened to become his constant and last house for the next ten years.

Living a little bit isolated from French artistic circles, Kandinsky did not lose contacts with international art, his studio was visited by many artists and critics, who came to Paris. In 1936 he participated in the exhibition "Abstract and Concrete" (London), "Cubism and Abstract Art" (New York). After the exhibition of "Degenerative Art" in fascist Germany, 57 of his pieces in German museums were confiscated, many works of the painter were destroyed.

In 1939 Kandinsky and his wife became French citizens. His late works (during the 10 years in France he created 144 oils, 250 watercolors and gouaches) are characterized by severe forms and somewhat mechanistic compositions. His last major work, [Composition X](#).

Kandinsky died on 13 December 1944 in Neuilly-sur-Seine at the age of 78.

-Olga's Gallery

<http://www.abcgallery.com/K/kandinsky/kandinskybio.html>

Russian painter, whose exploration of the possibilities of abstraction make him one of the most important innovators in modern art. Both as an artist and as a theorist he played a pivotal role in the development of abstract art.

Born in Moscow, December 4, 1866, Kandinsky studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany, from 1896 to 1900. His early paintings were executed in a naturalistic style, but in 1909, after a trip to Paris during which he was highly impressed by the works of the Fauves and postimpressionists, his paintings became more highly colored and loosely organized. Around 1913 he began working on paintings that came to be considered the first totally abstract works in modern art; they made no reference to objects of the physical world and derived their inspiration and titles from music.

In 1911, along with Franz Marc and other German expressionists, Kandinsky formed Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) group (so called for Kandinsky's love of blue and Marc's love of horses). He produced both abstract and figurative works during this period, all of which were characterized by brilliant colors and complex patterns.

Kandinsky's influence on the course of 20th-century art was further increased by his activities as a theorist and teacher. In 1912 he published *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, the first theoretical treatise on abstraction, which spread his ideas through Europe. He also taught at the Moscow Academy of Fine Arts from 1918 to 1921 and at the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, from 1922 to 1933.

After World War I (1914-1918), Kandinsky's abstractions became increasingly geometric in form, as he abandoned his earlier fluid style in favor of sharply etched outlines and clear patterns. *Composition VIII No. 260*, for instance, is composed solely of lines, circles, arcs, and other simple geometric forms. In very late works such as *Circle and Square*, he refines this style into a more elegant, complex mode that resulted in beautifully balanced, jewel-like pictures.

He was one of the most influential artists of his generation. As one of the first explorers of the principles of nonrepresentational or "pure" abstraction, Kandinsky can be considered an artist who paved the way for abstract expressionism, the dominant school of painting since World War II (1939-1945). Kandinsky died in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a suburb of Paris, on December 13, 1944.

<http://www.mcs.csueastbay.edu/~malek/Kandin.html>