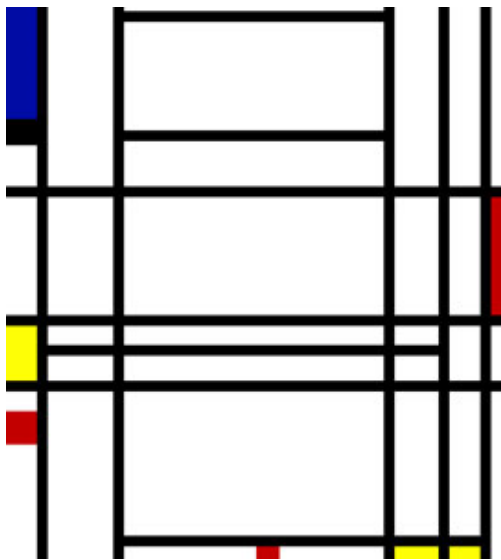


Abstract Art- Uses a visual language of form, color and line to create a composition which may exist with a degree of independence from visual references in the world. In other words, abstract art can be similar to things you see in life, or things you might see in life, but abstract art does not depict them clearly. Western art had been, from the Renaissance starting in the 1300s, up to the middle of the 19th century, an attempt to reproduce an illusion of visible reality. By the end of the 19th century many artists felt a need to create a new kind of art which would encompass the fundamental changes taking place in technology, science and philosophy.

Artistic independence for artists advanced during the 19th century. Patronage from the church diminished and private patronage from the public became more capable of providing a livelihood for artists. In 1913 the poet Guillaume Apollinaire named the work of Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Orphism. He defined it as: the art of painting new structures out of elements that have not been borrowed from the visual sphere, but had been created entirely by the artist...it is a pure art.



*James McNeil Whistler, 1874
Nocturne in Black and Gold*



Piet Mondrian, Composition No. 10

Some artists of the period defied categorization. Georgia O'Keeffe who, while a modernist abstractionist, was a pure maverick in that she painted highly abstract forms while not joining any specific group of abstract artists during the period. Abstract art, nonfigurative art, nonobjective art, and nonrepresentational art are loosely related terms. They are similar, although not of identical meanings.

Abstraction indicates a departure from reality in depiction of imagery in art. This departure from accurate representation can range from being only slight, partial, or it can be complete. Abstraction

exists along a continuum. Artwork that alters for instance, color and form in ways that are obvious, can be said to be partially abstract.

Total abstraction bears no trace of any reference to anything recognizable.

In geometric abstraction, one is unlikely to find references to naturalistic entities (things like plants, animals, figures, and other things found in nature) because rather than things having smooth and curvy lines, things are more



Braque, Woman with Guitar, 1913

structured and edgy in their arrangement. Geometric Abstraction- is a form of abstract art based on the use of geometric forms. Usually geometric patterns that are meant to be optical illusions are NOT considered geometric abstraction. Typically, geometric art refers to shapes that are placed in non-representational ways to make a composition.

Cubism- Was a 20th century art movement, pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, that revolutionized European painting and sculpture. It was based off of mixing geometric ideas into reality based images. In a sense, Cubism altered reality into a more geometric perspective. Pablo Picasso made his first cubist paintings based on Cézanne's idea that all depiction of nature can be reduced to three solids: cube, sphere and cone.

Representational Art, also known as Figurative Art describes artwork— particularly paintings and sculptures— which are clearly derived from real object sources. Representational Art and total abstraction are almost complete opposites but yet representational art often contains partial abstraction. For example, an image might be painted or drawn to the point that it is recognizable (represented), but yet parts of it are altered or not accurate.



Wassily Kandinsky, On White II, 1923

Abstract Expressionism- Art that rejects true visual representation. It has few recognizable images with great emphasis on line, color, shape, texture, value; putting the expression of the feelings or emotions of the artist above all else. It began to rise right after WWII, and is known as the first specifically American made style of art that gained world wide dominance. Jackson Pollock, Wassily Kandinsky, and William de Kooning are the most famous abstract expressionists.

Since the turn of the century, cultural connections between artists of the major European and American cities became active in trying to create an art form equal to Modernism. Those in the abstract field wanted to unite to create an identity behind abstraction that was as strong as the identities behind other art movements. Ideas were able to fertilize by means of artists books, exhibitions and manifestos so that many sources were open to experimentation and discussion, and formed a basis for a diversity of modes of abstraction.

Some approaches towards abstract art drew connections to music. Music provides an example of an art form which uses the abstract elements of sound and divisions of time. Wassily Kandinsky, himself a musician, was inspired by the possibility of marks and associative color resounding in the soul. The idea had been put forward by Charles Baudelaire, that all our senses respond to various stimuli but the senses are connected at a deeper aesthetic level.

Russian Abstract

Kazimir Malevich, Anton Pevsner and Naum Gabo argued that art was essentially a spiritual activity; to create the individual's place in the



Jackson Pollock, Number 1, 1950

world, not to organize life in a practical, materialistic sense. Many of those who were hostile to the materialist production idea of art left Russia. By the mid-1920s the revolutionary period (1917 to 1921) when artists had been free to experiment was over; and by the 1930s only social realist art was allowed due to the rise of Communism.

During the Nazi rise to power in the 1930s many artists fled Europe to the United States. By the early 1940s the main movements in modern art, expressionism, cubism, abstraction, surrealism, and dada were represented in New York. The rich cultural influences brought by the European artists were distilled and built upon by local New York painters. The climate of freedom in New York allowed all of these influences to flourish. The art galleries that primarily had focused on European art began to notice the local art community and the work of younger American artists.



Eventually American artists who were working in a great diversity of styles began to unite into distinct stylistic groups. The best known group of American artists became known as the Abstract expressionists and the New York School. In New York City there was an atmosphere which encouraged discussion and there was new opportunity for learning and growing. Mark Rothko, born in Russia, began with strongly surrealist imagery which later dissolved into his powerful color compositions of the early 1950s. New York City became the center, and artists worldwide gravitated towards it; from other places in America as well.

Abstraction in the 21st century

At the beginning of the 21st century abstraction, abstract art, contemporary painting and contemporary art in general continues in several similar styles. The "crisis" in painting and current art and current art criticism today is brought about by pluralism, which means there

is no consensus, nor need there be, as to a representative style of the age. There is an anything goes attitude that prevails. Into the 21st century abstraction remains very much in view, its main themes: the transcendental, the contemplative and the timeless are exemplified by Barnett Newman and Agnes Martin as well as younger living artists.