

Wassily Kandinsky

Gordon, I. (1969). Kandinsky Watercolors. *Members Newsletter* (4), 12.

(Henry) To Kandinsky, the human spirit was an important component in the creation of artwork. He believed that "the art must express the spirit." The expressive use of color was a crucial to the spiritual significance of his artwork. The text quotes, "To penetrate beneath surface appearances and attain an art of spiritual harmony it was necessary, he believed for the artist to free himself from dependence on nature and the representation of visual objects." I find this fascinating because relying solely off of the affect of color relationships (as to include shapes) to convey the "inner" life of an object. The text explains the life of Kandinsky and his movement into the heading of an "abstract German expressionist."

I enjoyed how the reading included the spiritual significance of Kandinsky's artwork. I wish that the reading delved further into what "spirituality" really is considered in terms of Kandinsky. Additionally, I would have liked there to be more examples of Kandinsky's use of color and shape as a means of creating an emotional experience that ultimately conveys a kind of "representation" of an object. I am also curious as to how Kandinsky chose objects of significance and how human spirituality was infused into the creation of the artwork.

Arnold Schonberg Center. 2012. 3 January 2014

<http://www.mat.ucsb.edu/~g.legrady/academic/courses/12w259/Kandinsky_%20Color%20Theory.pdf>.

Ashmore, Jerome. "Sound in Kandinsky's Painting." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35.3 (1977): 329-336.

Cavna, Michael. Agnes Martin: To celebrate the great painter, Google Doodle offers meditative muted beauty. 22 March 2014. 22 March 2014

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2014/03/22/agnes-martin-to-celebrate-the-great-painter-google-doodle-offers-meditative-muted-beauty/>>.

Cotter, Holland. "Agnes Martin." *Art Journal* 57.3 (1998): 77-80.

Dabrowski, Magdalena. "Kandinsky Compositions: The Music of Spheres." *MoMA* 19 (1995): 10-13.

Fingesten, Peter. "Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art." *Art Journal* 21.1 (1961): 2-6.

Gordon, Irene. "Kandinsky Watercolors." *Members Newsletter* 4 (1969): 12.

Henry, Michael. *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*. New York: Continuum, 2009.

Reinhold, Heller. "Kandinsky and Traditions Apocalyptic." *Art Journal* 43.1 (1983): 19-26.

Selz, Peter. "The Aesthetic Theories of Wassily Kandinsky and Their Relationship to the Origin of Non-Objective Painting." *The Art Bulletin* 39.2 (1957): 127-136.

This reading was chosen based on my desire to further understand the spiritual component of Kandinsky's methodology. The reading mentions an essay written by Kandinsky himself called "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" that I will likely look into further. According to Selz, Kandinsky did not conceive of color in "its physical and material aspects but rather in its emotional effect." I find this intriguing as I myself am struggling to understand the relationship between color and its emotional affect. For me, I find that the emotional significance of color itself is a product of the cultural materials that we associate with it. So how then is Kandinsky able to separate the physical and material aspects from the emotional effects? Kandinsky "lost faith" in the rational and scientific methods to explain reality and believed that reality could be understood purely by "means of creative intuition." He does not believe that art is considered rational action. This characteristic is congruent with the ideas of abstract expressionism.

The reading overall provided me with repeated information. I felt that I was able to better grasp the ideas with abstract expressionism, but I still would like to delve further into the significance of spirituality in abstract art.

Henry, M. (2009). *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky*. New York: Continuum.

The reading speaks largely on how Kandinsky utilized abstract, non-representational means in order to see past the visible exterior layer, hence the title "seeing the invisible." Michael Henry additionally brings into play the ideas of psychoanalysis and how it pertains to Kandinsky's philosophy of art. An example exists between the differences in which Kandinsky and Van Gogh approach an object. Van Gogh utilizes stylistic forms in order to recreate an object. Contrastly, Kandinsky represents the object in colors that possess a psychological significance. In this way, he creates the "inner" life of an object. I would like my own artwork this semester to be representations of particular objects or environments. Thus, this reading was very helpful in regards to providing me a potential direction to into.

Ashmore, J. (1977). Sound in Kandinsky's Painting. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35 (3), 329-336.

Music served as the purest form of abstraction according to Kandinsky. Where paintings are physically present and depicting recognizable shapes and colors, sound is created purely by our minds through invisible vibrations. Kandinsky was largely

interested in "synesthesia." He apparently claimed that he had this unique ability; however, critics question the validity of that claim. This ability allows one to essentially "mix" two senses. For Kandinsky he could "see" sounds through colors. Often during painting, Kandinsky was interested in painting a picture of the sound he heard. Ashmore states, "Kandinsky recognized that a representation of the sound which for him was spirit required an image different from both a physical thing and an abstraction of one." The reading further describes how the process of painting was purely intuitive.

I enjoyed this reading because I think it would be interesting to incorporate sound into my paintings. However, I do not have "synesthesia" abilities as claims Kandinsky, my moods are (like anyone else) largely affected by the noises. For a future project, I would be very interested in seeing how I intuitively interpret different types of music into colors. Would people be (Dabrowski) able to match those paintings with those songs that I was listening to? I am realizing after all of these readings that I have a strong interest in the psychological aspects of expressionism (color association, sound association). Currently, I am trying to find a direction that my artwork can go without feeling uncomfortable with showing my artwork.

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Selz, Peter. "The Aesthetic Theories of Wassily Kandinsky and Their Relationship to the Origin of Non-Objective Painting." The Art Bulletin 39.2 (1957): 127-136.

I would like to keep record of Kandinsky's synesthetic ideas after learning about the incorporation of sound in art.

Yellow: warm, cheeky and exciting, disturbing for people
Sound: Loud, sharp trumpets

Blue: Deep, inner, supernatural, peaceful
Sound: flute (light blue), cello (dark blue)

Green: stillness, peace, hidden strength, passive
Sound: middle position violin

White: silence with possibilities
Sound: the pause that breaks

Black: an eternal silence, without future or hope, extinguished, immovable
Sound: final pause

Gray: immovability, which is hopeless
Sound: Soundless

Red: alive, restless, confident, power, strength, joy
Sound: Fanfare, Tuba, deep notes on the cello, high clear violin

Orange: radiant, healthy, serious
Sound: middle range church bell, alto voice, alto violin

Violet: morbid, extinguished, sad
Sound: English horn, bassoon

Dabrowski, M. (1995). *Kandinsky Compositions: The Music of Spheres. MoMA (19), 10-13.*

Dabrowski wonderfully quotes, "...The guiding principle in the creation of a composition was the artist's emotional response to events of an internal nature. That feeling was the result of a combination of experiences: on one hand, those perceptions that arose from the artist's inner world; on the other, the impressions the artist received from external appearances, events, or concepts." This sentence alone sums up perfectly what I am trying to better understand (Fingesten)rstand in my own artwork. How the combination of internal events and external events act together to create the "internal nature" of the artist. Kandinsky felt that this internal nature was the "vibration" of the soul as corresponded to the external elements. Dabrowski further states, "He [Kandinsky] intended his pictorial rendering of his spiritual feeling to strike the same emotional chord in the spectator, through the expressive qualities of the work." This

reading is by far my favorite reading thus far; I feel that I am now able to understand the “spiritual” component that Kandinsky has alluded to in many of the other readings. According to the reading, the spirituality is the life of the artist that is intuitively transferred onto something tangible. Thus, others are capable of experiencing the same inner state of the artist as a result of the emotional vibrations that the artist’s creation evokes through the utilization of color associations. This reading truly articulates wonderfully the thoughts that I have been trying to make sense of in my own mind.

Fingesten, P. (1961). Spirituality, Mysticism and Non-Objective Art. *Art Journal* , 21 (1), 2-6.

Kandinsky is attempting to find expression of the “pure spirit.” This is what inhabits the terms of “pure aesthetics.” Interestingly, Kandinsky’s artwork was compared to the ideas of Mondrian who believed that the universal was an “illusion and that everything is spirit.” Both of the artists believe in the ideas of spirituality’s incorporation in geometric shapes. Kandinsky states...“ we recognize the spirit of our time in the realm of construction, not as clear ‘geometric; construction, which is immediately noticeable, rich in possibilities and expressive, but as an inscrutable one, which inadvertently lifts itself beyond painting; and which, therefore, is meant less for the eye than the soul.” I found this interesting with my own intuitive sense of artwork. I naturally feel more drawn to geometric shapes; however, I do not believe that there is a spiritual component to my own geometric designs. In a way I do feel that my designs were creative in a “meditative” type mind frame- and thus, there is a distinct possibility that my artwork is spiritual given the definition of spirituality in previous sources. Regardless, I am interested in how formal elements such as shape may possess significance in their creation. Many of my interests are solely focused on the incorporation and understanding of color, neglecting the significance of shape.

Kandinsky, Wassily. Concerning the Spiritual in Art. Trans. M.T.H. Sadler. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977.

Kandinsky discusses in his book “Concerning The Spiritual in Art” that “...He seeks in a work of art...some inner feeling expressed in terms of natural form... fulfill their purpose and feed the spirit...where the spectator does feel a corresponding thrill in himself” (Kandinsky, 2). For Kandinsky, abstract expressionism provides the vehicle in which the human spirit can be transcended through the harmonious rhythm of form and color (Kandinsky, 28). Color, which cannot stand alone due to the limiting edges of the surface of the canvas, relies on form. Form can have spiritual aspects, where color possesses raw emotion, creating a color-form harmony that takes on mystical aspects. He discusses “essential connection” between the two elements. For example, he constitutes yellow as a “sharp” color to the human eye. According to Kandinsky, sharp colors should remain alongside “sharp” forms, such as a triangle or square (Kandinsky, 29). However, deeper colors, such as blue, function harmoniously with the smooth

outer form of a circle. A yellow triangle or a blue circle, are in perfect spiritual harmony (Kandinsky, 29). Kandinsky states, "Form is nothing but the separating line between surfaces of color- that is its outer meaning. But, it has also an inner meaning, of varying intensity, and properly speaking, form is the outward expression of this inner meaning... form-harmony must rest only on a corresponding vibration of the human soul." In the artwork, *Composition VII* (1913), Kandinsky uses a palette dominated by the optically active colors of blue and yellow (Kandinsky, 37). Yellow oscillates towards the viewer, whereas blue recedes into the depth of the picture plane. The expressive combination of colors, and the forms in which the colors are presented, evoke a rhythmic, emotionally moving piece. The materiality of the artwork appears subverted; however, the strong underlying forces, that reside beyond the surface, becomes captivating to the viewer through the art piece's rhythm and harmony of the human soul.

Reinhold, H. (1983). *Kandinsky and Traditions Apocalyptic. Art Journal*, 43 (1), 19-26.

This reading was not particular helpful regarding the topic of color relationship and spirituality. Many of the subjects discussed regarded Kandinsky's rendering of the apocalypse. He was especially concerned with the destruction of the cosmos. In my opinion, I feel that this is largely an effect of anxiety in Kandinsky. When viewing some of the works that Kandinsky created, the apocalypse is not a subject matter that I immediately conclude. Rather, the feeling of the apocalypse is something that I am more inclined to experience.

Wassily Kandinsky: 1866-1944 a Revolution in Painting (Basic Art) Hajo Dutchting

The reading discusses the biographical aspects that led to Kandinsky's beliefs and ideas. I am less interested in what produced an artist; but rather the conceptual ideas and the execution of those ideas in painting. The reading was incredibly difficult to get through.

[Agnes Martin](#)

1. Cotter, Holland. "Agnes Martin." *Art Journal* 57.3 (1998): 77-80.

Agnes Martin appears to be a creature of habit as her process was highly disciplined and based off of routine. For 25 years, she performed the same routine when producing a painting. First, her paintings always were the same size (6' X 6' or 5' x 5') and she began with applying 2 layers of gesso to the canvas. She added a thin acrylic water wash. With a ruler, she drew light grey lines in a horizontal orientation. Although her color schemes differed from painting to painting, the overall style remained consistent. I find that my striving to paint is similar to Agnes Martin in that I enjoy routine and order. My current SMP project depends on my the "rules" that I have set up for in order to push my process to become more routine.

However, my purpose is quite different from Agnes Martin. Martin's inspiration is derived from a "a vision of a finished product" in her mind. However, this is not the case for me. My finished product is my least concerning factor of my artwork. For me, the process is the most significant aspect of painting. I would agree with Martin's creating artwork requiring alone time. I too, enjoy working alone. Martin states "make us aware of perfection in the mind. The Greeks knew that in the mind you can draw a perfect circle, but that you can't really draw a perfect circle. Everyone has a vision of perfection, don't you think? A housewife wants to have a perfect home." I have never considered a strong desire for perfection serving as inspiration to make artwork. However, after reading Martin's words, perfection to me may play a role in my artwork. I do not yet know how; however, I am aware of my obsession for perfection in all other areas of my life. The idealistic goals are often incapable of being met; therefore, it would make sense that I remove the finished product as being an important factor to my artwork and rather embrace the process, where imperfections can be made without consequence. Essentially, I am lowering my own expectations for myself by enjoying the present moment of creating.

2. Tuttle, Richard. "Occasion of Her Ninetieth Birthday." American Art 16.3 (2002): 92-95.

The reading describes the writer's appreciation of Agnes Martin's artwork for the transcendental qualities that it holds. Agnes Martin was not at all concerned about representation; her images were not meant to recall the New Mexican landscape in anyway. Rather, her artwork was an attempt to "bridge the gap between looking and seeing." Objectivity of the material world is easily looked upon, but the deeper existential qualities of non-objectivity require *seeing*. Her artwork is composed of lines, which directly separates her artwork from the natural world. I would have to disagree with my use of line acting to separate my artwork from nature. In strange ways, I feel that my artwork does represent the natural world; however, I am unclear on how this can be. Perhaps my artwork's connection to nature exists due to nature providing me happiness, and thus inspiring me to produce more artwork. In this sense, I could agree with Agnes Martin. According to the writings, she attempted to portray her happiness through her artwork. She painted the qualities of herself that were so closely associated with her New Mexican identity: She loved the landscape and the activities that one could do on such a beautiful landscape. In that way, our paintings have similar qualities. Agnes Martin's paintings prior to 1967 were based off of perfection and perception, separating them from the world. However, after 1974, her paintings evolved to become more representative of happiness and recognition, providing grounding to this world. I would agree that my paintings are less about perfection as the final product is of no concern to me in an attempt to avoid having to fit the standards of perfection and acceptance. I am freer to enjoy my artwork by disregarding my care for the final product.

3. Rembert, P. Virginia. "Agnes Martin/Paintings and Writings by Arne Glimcher." Woman's Art Journal 24.1 (2003): 53.

Agnes Martin produced art in New Mexico because the landscape and light of the landscape fulfilled her. According to the reading, she was searching for a "transcendent beauty." My artwork, as described above, is not necessarily about nature. However, nature facilitates my happiness, which fuels my desire to paint. Therefore, nature is in some way a contributing factor to my own creative process. If I feel unhappy, I tend to be repulsed by painting because painting for me is so dependent upon the enjoyment of the process. How might one enjoy something when they are so deeply unhappy? I am unsure as to how my artwork fits into the term "transcendent beauty." My artwork is not focused upon the beauty that it provides others; but rather the beauty that it provides me during the process.

**4. Cavanaugh, Michael. Agnes Martin: To celebrate the great painter, Google Doodle offers meditative muted beauty. 22 March 2014. 22 March 2014
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2014/03/22/agnes-martin-to-celebrate-the-great-painter-google-doodle-offers-meditative-muted-beauty/>>.**

I read this article in the Washington Post, as it was a reaction to Google's front-page doodle of an Agnes Martin piece. The term "emotional mediation" struck me. This term provides a sense of overlapping interest between Martin and myself. I feel that meditation exists in many forms and trying to differentiate the types of meditation has been difficult to articulate. I consider dissecting a leech ganglion a form of mediation; however, different than the mediation occurring in response to creating artwork. Like Martin, my creating artwork is my form of mediation. It is what provides me with emotional release as I am communicating my "inner-self" that cannot be represented any other way. Like Martin, I am interested in "emptying my mind" and freeing myself from the constant distractions that plague everyday life. Agnes Martin quote, "when I think of art, I think of beauty. Beauty is the mystery of life. It is not in the eye, it is in the mind." For me, beauty is a purpose for producing artwork. I find beauty in the process rather than the finished product. So unlike Martin, I feel that a painting becomes alive, it breathes, only during the moments of creation.

5. Hatje, Cantz. Agnes Martin Writings. Ed. Herausgegeben Von Dieter Schwarz. New York: Coverimage, 2005.

The book is about the Agnes Martin's essays during the 1970's. I found many of her essays to be inspirational more in regards to life rather than art. First off, Agnes Martin is highly interested in obedience to the conscious mind. She considers that the mind is composed of various parts. The outside part, the "conscious mind", makes an individual aware of perfection, happiness, and sublimity. When the conscious mind tells the inner mind "yes" we are led to happiness. However, when

the conscious mind tells the inner mind “no” we are led to unhappiness. Having the ability to obey the conscious mind provides us with happiness and self-acceptance. When the conscious mind tells us “no” we are left astray and are unable to see the beauty and happiness of life. She considers self-knowledge as the greatest form of wisdom. The self-knowledge is derived from the discipline to listen to the outside mind. She writes, “Until you can clear up your true identity you will be tied to a repetition of this life.” Agnes Martin ties these ideas into her artwork. Her artwork is based purely off of visual perception. Literary allusions and representational references are completely absent. Happiness is the ultimate goal in her later work (where perfection comprises the earlier work). Happiness exists with the knowledge of oneself through the obedience of the outside mind. This, at least, is my understanding from one particular essay. I am thinking about how these ideas might apply to my own artwork. I have not considered the activity of rational thought to dictate my actions in creating artwork. I feel that when I over-rationalize what I am doing, I tend to lose inspiration. Inspiration for me is exclusively driven by the inner mind that is devoid of logic. I agree that the mind does require obedience to the rational mind. For example, I occasionally compare my artwork to the artwork of others, which ultimately discourages me. The rational mind tells me to not do this. When I listen to this advice, I ultimately find myself much happier. I am unsure as to the connection of these writings to my own artwork.

6. Martin, Agnes. Perfection is in the Mind: Interview with Agnes Martin Joan Simon. 1995.

Agnes Martin discussed the ideas of transcendence and abstraction. She states that our minds are capable of going beyond this world. For example, Martin talks about beauty as one of the mysteries of life. She believes that beauty is a response in our minds to perfection. She considers her paintings as nonobjective, as the horizontal lines are removed from the natural world. The fact that people are able to respond to her artwork proves the idea of transcendence from this world. Thus, according to Martin, beauty is the form of transcendence because we are seeking perfection even though perfection is not of this world. In relationship to my own artwork, I would have to disagree completely. I identify myself as scientist in addition to artist. I do agree that beauty is synonymous with happiness. A depressed person finds no beauty in the world, because they do not find happiness. I am unsure if happiness is a reaction to beauty or vice versa. Regardless, beauty is a reaction to the very tangible world that we live in. I don't believe us capable of entering higher thought than what biology has programmed through natural selection (as a result of our environmental selective pressures). I feel that my artwork is beautiful because it is one of the truest forms of happiness to me. In that sense, I would agree with Martin.

7. Haskell, Barbara and Anna Chave. Agnes Martin. New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1993.

My question prior to reading this was: how did Agnes Martin evoke a sense of contentment and happiness in her artwork? As the book discusses, her process

played an important role. Agnes Martin had certain sensitivity to her artwork. The graphic lines were so precisely and lightly drawn onto the surface. Her process was very contemplative, evoking the senses of calmness, softness, and peacefulness. Most of the book included many images as described above. Her lines, as mentioned previously, were out-of-this world. Still even after reading and looking through the book, I am unsure as to how to rationalize the sensations that she brings. Martin states that making art is intuitive and it is not the artist actively attempting to pull out particular emotions. Rather, it is solely reliant on how the viewer responds. After understanding Martin's process, I feel that I can relate in regards to the sensitivity.