



Biography

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky spent his early childhood in Odessa. His parents played the piano and the zither and Kandinsky himself learned the piano and cello at an early age. The influence of music in his paintings cannot be overstated, down to the names of his paintings *Improvisations*, *Impressions*, and *Compositions*. In 1886, he enrolled at the University of Moscow, chose to study law and economics, and after passing his examinations, lectured at the Moscow Faculty of Law. He enjoyed success not only as a teacher but also wrote extensively on spirituality, a subject that remained of great interest and ultimately exerted substantial influence in his work. In 1895 Kandinsky attended a French [Impressionist](#) exhibition where he saw [Monet's](#) *Haystacks at Giverny*. He stated, "It was from the catalog I learned this was a haystack. I was upset I had not recognized it. I also thought the painter had no right to paint in such an imprecise fashion. Dimly I was aware too that the object did not appear in the picture..." Soon thereafter, at the age of thirty, Kandinsky left Moscow and went to Munich to study life-drawing, sketching and anatomy, regarded then as basic for an artistic education.

Ironically, Kandinsky's work moved in a direction that was of much greater abstraction than that which was pioneered by the Impressionists. It was not long before his talent surpassed the constraints of art school and he began exploring his own ideas of painting - "I applied streaks and blobs of colors onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could..." Now considered to be the founder of abstract art, his work was exhibited throughout Europe from 1903 onwards, and often caused controversy among the public, the art critics, and his contemporaries. An active participant in several of the most influential and controversial art movements of the 20th century, among them the Blue Rider which he founded along with [Franz Marc](#) and the Bauhaus which also attracted [Klee](#), Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956), and Schonberg, Kandinsky continued to further express and define his form of art, both on canvas and in his

theoretical writings. His reputation became firmly established in the United States through numerous exhibitions and his work was introduced to Solomon Guggenheim, who became one of his most enthusiastic supporters.

In 1933, Kandinsky left Germany and settled near Paris, in Neuilly. The paintings from these later years were again the subject of controversy. Though out of favor with many of the patriarchs of Paris's artistic community, younger artists admired Kandinsky. His studio was visited regularly by Miro, Arp, Magnelli and Sophie Tauber.

Kandinsky continued painting almost until his death in June, 1944. his unrelenting quest for new forms which carried him to the very extremes of geometric abstraction have provided us with an unparalleled collection of abstract art.

Kandinsky and abstraction

Neither [Marc](#) nor Macke were abstract painters. It was Kandinsky who found that the "interior necessity", which alone could inspire true art, was forcing him to leave behind the representational image. He was a Russian who had first trained as a lawyer. He was a brilliant and persuasive man. Then, when already in his thirties, he decided to go to Munich in 1897 to study art. By the time Der Blaue Reiter was established, he was already "abstracting" from the image, using it as a creative springboard for his pioneering art. Seeing a painting of his own, lying on its side on the easel one evening, he had been struck by its beauty, a beauty beyond what he saw when he set it upright. It was the liberated color, the formal independence, that so entranced him.

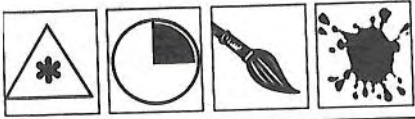
Kandinsky, a determined and sensitive man, was a good prophet to receive this vision. He preached it by word and by example, and even those who were suspicious of this new freedom were frequently convinced by his paintings.

Improvisation 31 has a less generalized title, *Sea Battle*, and by taking this hint we can indeed see how he has used the image of two tall ships shooting

cannonballs at each other, and abstracted these specifics down into the glorious commotion of the picture. Though it does not show a sea battle, it makes us experience one, with its confusion, courage, excitement, and furious motion. Kandinsky says all this mainly with the color, which bounces and balloons over the center of the picture, roughly curtailed at the upper corners, and ominously smudged at the bottom right. There are also smears, whether of paint or of blood. The action is held tightly within two strong ascending diagonals, creating a central triangle that rises ever higher. This rising accent gives a heroic feel to the violence.

These free, wild raptures are not the only form abstraction can take, and in his later, sadder years, Kandinsky became much more severely constrained, all trace of his original inspiration lost in magnificent patternings. *Accent in Pink* (1926; 101 x 81 cm (39 1/2 x 31 3/4 in)) exists solely as an object in its own right: the "pink" and the "accent" are purely visual. The only meaning to be found lies in what the experience of the pictures provides, and that demands prolonged contemplation. What some find hard about abstract art is the very demanding, time-consuming labour that is implicitly required. Yet if we do not look long and with an open heart, we shall see nothing but superior wallpaper.

Kandinsky 1866-1944

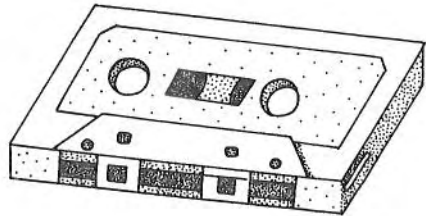


Wassily Kandinsky

Wassily Kandinsky took music and art lessons as a child in Russia, but he did not become a professional artist until he was 30 years old. He gave up his job as a law professor and moved to Germany to study art. In those days, people thought that a drawing or painting had to look like its subject – the more realistic, the better.

The Impressionist painters started to paint pictures that didn't look exactly real. Kandinsky was the first artist to take the final step away from realism: he painted the first totally abstract pictures, paintings that were pure designs, and believed that colors and forms had meanings all their own. He was a musician as well as a painter, and thought of colors as music. Simple pictures were like little melodies to him. Complex paintings were like symphonies. He called many of his paintings "Improvisations", meaning a song made up on the spot, not planned ahead of time.

Young artists can enjoy the music of colors by letting imaginations fly while painting to music!



Kandinsky (CAN-DIN-SKEE) believed that simple pictures were like little melodies and complex paintings were like grand symphonies.

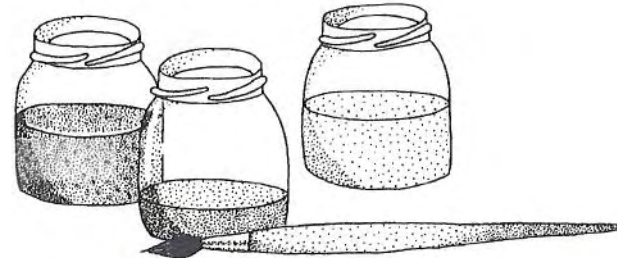
Painting Music

MATERIALS

- watercolors, tempera or acrylic paints
- paintbrushes
- paper, matte board or canvas board
- source of music, on tapes, CD's, or records

PROCESS

1. Select a special piece of music. These well-known classical pieces are great for painting. A librarian will help order and check out cassette tapes from a public library. Any kind of music is for painting, from contemporary rock music to jazz or traditional music from around the world to children's favorite sing-alongs.
 - Bach - *Brandenburg Concertos*
 - Copeland - *Appalachian Spring*
 - Wagner - *The Ride of the Valkyries*
 - Saint-Sens - *Danse Macabre*
 - Ravel - *Bolero*
 - Grofe - *Grand Canyon Suite*
2. Listen to the music selection for 5 or 10 minutes without doing anything else with eyes closed. Stretch out on the floor, if desired. Try to imagine what colors, lines and shapes can be used to show the feelings that the music creates.
3. Now listen to the music again while painting a picture of the sounds. Use lines, shapes and colors without trying to draw any particular object. Create an abstract design that is made up on the spot – an improvisation created without planning or sketching ahead of time.
4. Change the music selection and paint again. Look at the different results to different kinds of music.



Objectives:

Students will learn about artist Wassily Kandinsky as they focus on his life as an artist and a musician.

What You Need:

- tagboard (poster paper) or plain paper
- oil pastels or crayons/color pencils
- a variety of music

What You Do:

1. Students are taught about famous visual artist Wassily Kandinsky and how he was also a talented musician.
2. Students are shown a variety of Kandinsky's work including Kandinsky's circular color studies.
3. Children explore concepts of color and how it relates to emotion. Examples: What emotion do you associate with red? (anger, embarrassment etc.) What emotions do you associate with blue? (sadness, loneliness, calm) What emotions do you associate with yellow? (happiness, contentment, warmth) etc.
4. Children then fold a large sheet of paper into six squares.
5. Students listen to a variety of music and create circular color studies (in each section) based on how the music makes them feel.
6. When students complete their color studies they are put together to make a large piece of art to be displayed on the bulletin board. The results are quite stunning.

