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# PATHS TO ABSTRACTION

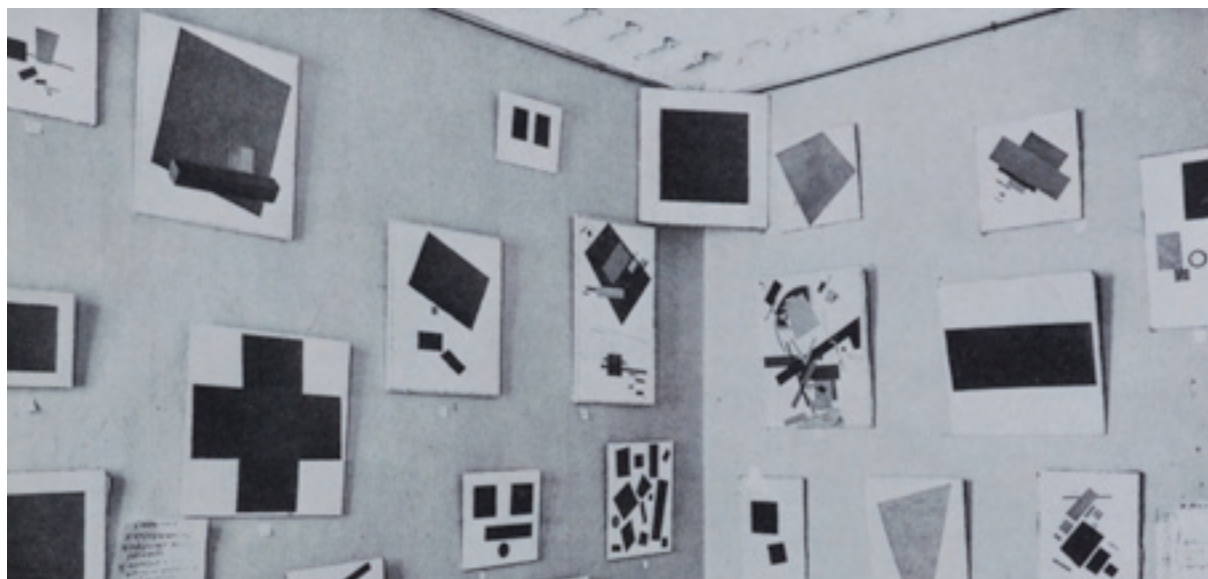
1867–1917

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ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

EDUCATION KIT

# PATHS TO ABSTRACTION

## 1867–1917



We are on the way to a completely new art; it will be related to painting in the same way that, up until now, music is related to literature. It will be pure painting in the same way that music is pure literature.

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1912

### THE EXHIBITION

Curator Terence Maloon has secured representative works of more than 40 of the leading artists of the late 19th and 20th centuries including Whistler, Monet, Cézanne, Matisse, Munch, Gauguin, Picasso, Kandinsky, Klee, Derain, Denis, Marc, Duchamp, Braque, Bonnard and Mondrian. These works are from 59 institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; Museu Picasso Barcelona; Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou; Tate Modern; Tate Britain; Kunstmuseum Bern; J Paul Getty Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum as well as private collections.

### INTRODUCTION

In the first decades of the 20th century, a radical new approach to art emerged almost simultaneously across Europe and in the United States: abstraction.

Abstraction was never a 'movement', it didn't originate in one place, and it wasn't practised by one cohesive group of artists. Instead, it evolved gradually, as artists experimented with colour, form and materials, calling into question some of the traditional functions of art – narrative and representation. The final decades of the 1800s saw a proliferation of artworks in which the figure or the landscape was – in increasing degrees – abstracted, distorted or simplified. The first purely abstract works were exhibited to large public audiences at the Salon d'Automne exhibition held in Paris in 1912.

The paths to abstraction were varied and unpredictable. In 1867, the London-based artist James McNeill Whistler began emphasising the 'musical' qualities of painting.

In 1890 in Paris, Maurice Denis declared that 'a picture is essentially a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order'. By 1917, many artists had abandoned representation altogether, while some moved freely between abstraction and figuration.

### WHISTLER AND HIS INFLUENCE

In 1867, Whistler began giving his works 'musical' titles such as *Symphony in white*, *Harmony in silver and blue* and *Arrangement in grey*. He intended the titles to draw attention to aspects of painting that were customarily overlooked: colour, tone, shape and composition. Above all, Whistler encouraged viewers to look at rather than through the painting's surface.

Of all his works, his *Nocturnes* were the most extreme, the most controversial and, ultimately, the most influential. These landscapes, painted in tones of grey or brown, are devoid of any picturesque, anecdotal and illustrative content. They are simultaneously empty and full, obscure and luminous, allusive and enigmatic.

In Paris, Whistler's paintings were exhibited alongside those of the Impressionists. In London, where he spent most of his life, he was a key figure in Aestheticism, which emphasised decorative qualities over narrative or representation.

Although Whistler's work was fiercely criticised, his reputation became immense. Georges Seurat, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondrian all made works in a Whistlerian idiom, as did artistically inclined photographers at the turn of the century such as Alvin Langdon Coburn and Edward Steichen in the US.

## MONET AND CÉZANNE

French Impressionism – which developed from the 1870s – was a significant forerunner to abstract art. The Impressionists deliberately chose unexceptional, everyday motifs, with the result that their intense colours and vigorous brushwork gained in prominence.

Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne made no effort to disguise the materiality of their paintings. They wanted to emphasise the unity and integrity of the entire image over any specifically descriptive detail. In subsequent decades, the pioneers of abstraction venerated these two artists as exemplars of ‘pure painting’.

When the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky first saw Monet’s *Haystacks* exhibited in Moscow in 1895, he was struck by the ‘unsuspected power of the palette’ and the way in which ‘objects were discredited as an essential element within the picture’. Kandinsky admired the exact things that had provoked criticism by Monet’s contemporaries.

Cézanne – who had participated in the first and third of the historic Impressionist exhibitions in 1874 and 1877 – shared with Monet a way of simultaneously building up and breaking down images in discrete brushmarks, which they called *taches*. Both artists were identified by their admirers and detractors alike as ‘painters of the *tache*’. In Cézanne’s hands, the *tache* became a building block for intricate experiments in composition. His search for the interconnection of *taches* (he called them ‘*rappports*’) was laid bare in his watercolours, where the ground of the paper itself becomes an integral part of the composition.

## NABIS

In 1888, in the company of Gauguin, Paul Sérusier created *The talisman*, a small, vibrant landscape in glowing reds, greens and blues. The painting caused a sensation when he showed it to his fellow art students in Paris, inspiring them to entertain the possibility of a new kind of art. They called themselves Nabis (the Hebrew word for ‘prophets’).

The common features of the Nabi style were a frank use of non-naturalistic colour, stylisation in drawing and design, and emphasis on the picture plane – ‘the pure arabesque’ with ‘as little *trompe-l’œil* as possible’, in Denis’ words. Shunning the realism and naturalism of their contemporaries (including the Impressionists), they promoted an artificial and synthetic concept of art – in short, they became strongly inclined towards abstraction. Their ideas were applied equally to painting, decorative arts and design objects.

There were intersecting sub-groups of the Nabis who were bonded together by close friendship and ideological affinity. Denis belonged to a religiously inclined faction, whereas Bonnard, Édouard Vuillard and Félix Vallotton shared a worldly outlook that revelled in modernity and took its bearings from cosmopolitan city life.

From the early 1890s onwards, Vuillard in particular developed a concision and rigorous formal integration in his work that is strikingly abstracted. A similar approach is evident in early paintings by Matisse, Picasso, Kandinsky and Mondrian.

## GAUGUIN AND THE PRIMITIVIST WOODCUT

In 1893 Paul Gauguin returned to France from his first, three-year sojourn in Tahiti. He turned his hand to a series of woodcut prints, as a way of popularising the imagery of his Tahitian paintings. In effect, he began a new and vital tradition in printmaking, reviving one of the most ancient and direct techniques of graphic reproduction. His primitivist woodcuts, with their simplified forms and decorative organisation, ushered in possibilities for an intensified degree of abstraction.

Kandinsky was one of many avant-garde artists throughout Europe who adopted the medium, which became the ensign of modern art in Norway, Germany, Switzerland and Russia. He produced his first completely abstract woodcuts in 1911–12. The series of woodcuts illustrating his book *Klänge* retraced the stages of his evolution towards non-objective art. Starting from a primitivist, Gauguinesque symbolism, the prints culminated in purely abstract images which proposed a completely new visual language. Easily reproduced and distributed, prints and artists’ books played an important role in communicating ideas and overcoming isolation. Far and wide, the primitivist woodcut prepared the ground and spread the seeds of abstraction.

## THE EXALTATION OF COLOUR

When Matisse showed his ground-breaking paintings in the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1906, critics used the words ‘abstract’ and ‘abstraction’ to describe them. The violent treatment of forms and clashing colour earned Matisse, and those who shared his style, the name ‘Fauves’ (wild beasts).

Paintings by Matisse and his friend André Derain from 1905–06, while clearly based on the observation of figures, landscapes and interiors, no longer described their motifs consistently or comprehensively.

During those years Matisse and Derain developed a close working relationship, which allowed them to flout convention and pursue their experiments. In their hands, the human figure – no less than an interior, landscape or still life – became the pretext for an independent creation. Their liberties of handling shocked their contemporaries.

Many of the earliest abstract painters were vitally connected to Fauvism. Kandinsky, Gabriele Münter and Alexei von Jawlensky witnessed its debut in Paris. Mondrian went through a Fauve phase, and Robert and Sonia Delaunay never really deviated from it. All these artists endorsed the Fauve’s love of colour: František Kupka and Kandinsky exploited colour as ‘visual music’, liberating it from its descriptive or imitative role and treating it as an autonomous compositional element. The Delaunays and Kupka rearranged the colours of the spectrum in their paintings, creating new configurations of rainbow colour.

Kandinsky acknowledged the attraction of Matisse’s art, but questioned its reliance on distortion. He wondered if a painter could avoid recourse to distortion by with naturalism, replacing figurative forms with abstract ones.

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Both line and colour make us think and dream. The pleasures we derive from them differ in nature, yet they are perfectly equal and are absolutely independent of the subject of the picture.

Charles Baudelaire, 1868

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## CUBISM

Cubism developed out of the creative partnership of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. They were inseparable friends, visiting each other's studios almost daily, with the result that their work became virtually indistinguishable.

Between 1908 and 1914, neither artist signed or dated his canvas on the front. As Braque explained: 'In the early days of Cubism, Pablo Picasso and I were engaged in what we felt was a search for the anonymous personality. We were inclined to efface our personalities in order to find originality.'

Most historians of Cubism regard Braque's 1908 paintings done at L'Estaque as a watershed. Features of the Cubist style came together for the first time: limited colour, a relatively even tonality, shaded facet-planes, linear scaffolding and rich, painterly textures in drifts of subtly modulated brushstrokes.

By 1910–11 Cubism had reached the brink of abstraction. The paintings and graphic works Picasso produced in Cadaqués in 1910 were notionally figures, landscapes, interiors and still lifes, but these objects were treated in a similar, apparently interchangeable manner. With minimal adjustment, a still life could become a figure, or a landscape a still life. Images had been pared down to a syntax that appeared to be quite independent of any subject.

Mondrian (whose early works are much indebted to Cubism) believed that Picasso and Braque had avoided the logical consequences of the style by not following its implications all the way through. In response to Cubism, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Fernand Léger, Mikhail Larionov, Robert Delaunay and others were prompted to take their final steps towards abstraction.

## 1912–17: THE LIMITS OF ABSTRACTION

By 1917, the most radical possibilities of abstraction had already been seized and the newly expanded parameters of modern art were set. There were paintings of extraordinary complexity or unprecedented simplicity, of lyrical exuberance, intellectual severity and the most whimsical playfulness. There were also works featuring completely novel materials and techniques, painstakingly ordered or randomly generated.

The year 1917 saw the publication of the Dutch magazine *De Stijl*, which made a compelling argument for the integration of abstract painting, sculpture, architecture and design.

In March, the first Dada exhibition, held in Zürich, was notable for the predominance of abstract works: Dada (a movement that, internationally, included Hans Arp, Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp) and abstraction were initially synonymous.

In October, the Bolshevik revolution broke out in Russia and, for an extraordinary moment, abstract artists including Kasimir Malevich and Iván Kliun helped define the revolution's 'advanced' style.

As World War I drew to a close, in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Italy, Portugal and many other countries, abstract art was a well-established feature of contemporary cultural life.

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All quotes are sourced from the exhibition catalogue, *Paths to Abstraction 1867–1917*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 2010, except Vallotton's quote on Cézanne which is from Philippe Dagen, *Pour ou contre le fauvisme*, Somogy, Paris 1996.

This printed education kit is also available online with extended resource material for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities and gifted and talented students across a range of curriculum areas. [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/resources](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education/resources)

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Art Gallery of NSW  
Art Gallery Road, The Domain,  
Sydney 2000, Australia  
[pp@ag.nsw.gov.au](mailto:pp@ag.nsw.gov.au)

### IMAGE CREDITS:

Cover: Kasimir Malevich *House under construction* 1915–16 (detail) oil on canvas, 97 x 44.5 cm  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.  
Purchased 1974

Installation of Suprematist paintings by Malevich as photographed in the *0.10* exhibition  
St Petersburg, 1915

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### WEBSITES

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The Guggenheim  
[www.guggenheim.org](http://www.guggenheim.org)

J Paul Getty Museum  
[www.getty.edu/museum](http://www.getty.edu/museum)

MoMA The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
[www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)

Museu Picasso Barcelona  
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Victoria & Albert Museum  
[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)



## WHISTLER AND HIS INFLUENCE

As the light fades and the shadows deepen all petty and exacting details vanish, everything trivial disappears, and I see things as they are in great strong masses: the buttons are lost, but the garment remains; the garment is lost, but the sitter remains; the sitter is lost, but the picture remains.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler

### James Abbott McNeill Whistler

*Nocturne in grey and silver, the Thames*, c1873

oil on canvas, 44.7 x 60.3cm

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1947

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ART:** **Identify** the colours you can see. What could the strokes of white paint be? What time of the day do you think it is? If you were on the bank of the Thames, what sounds and smells would you experience? **Discuss** how Whistler has simplified this scene.

Whistler was influenced by Japanese art. **Find** examples of Japanese prints and compare these to Whistler's paintings. Whistler has blurred and flattened this scene. **Use** a view finder to plan a composition for a painting. **Experiment** with squinting your eyes to blur your vision.

**MUSIC:** Whistler believed that colour and form could have the same effects as music. **Listen** to different styles of music. **Select** a piece that complements this painting. How does this painting and music make you feel?

**HSIE:** **Locate** the Thames River on a map of London. **Find out** how the Thames contributed to the development of London. **Discover** the types of transport and industries that occurred on the Thames at the end of the 19th century. Do any of them survive today?

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The *Nocturnes* reflect a radical approach to composition and subject matter. Respond to *Nocturne in grey and silver, the Thames* and suggest why Whistler's approach is radical. Why are these artworks referred to as 'subjectless' paintings?

Whistler challenged Victorian narrative painting and French Academic art, suggesting the viewer should look at a work of art and observe its effect and composition as opposed to looking through it, thereby only seeing the subject. How did this notion affect the way artists painted and how did it change the role of the viewer?

In March 1867, Whistler renamed his earlier paintings with titles that suggested music. Investigate these artworks and suggest why Whistler chose to associate music with his paintings. How does the act of renaming affect the viewer's response? Discuss how this decision played an important part in the evolution of abstraction.



## MONET AND CÉZANNE

A picture by Cézanne is a deliberately conceived object, isolated, sufficient unto itself, which finds its highest expression within the limits of its own frame.

Félix Vallotton

### Paul Cézanne

*Banks of the Marne* c1888

oil on canvas, 65 x 81.3 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 2008 with funds provided by the Art Gallery of New South Wales Foundation, the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales, and donors to the Masterpiece Fund in joint celebration of the Foundation's 25th anniversary and Edmund Capon AM OBE's 30th anniversary as Director of the Gallery

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **Describe** what is in the foreground, middle ground and background of the painting. **Note** the reflections in the water. Cézanne painted outdoors 'from nature'. **Visualise** the weather conditions on the day this work was started. **Invent** a weather report.

**Observe** the individual strokes of paint on the surface of the canvas. Are they applied in a particular direction? **Discuss** how they add up to create a unity in the painting. **Experiment** with painting a landscape with a similar colour palette and brushstrokes.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:** **Locate** the Marne River on a map of France. **Find out** about this region and its climate. **Create** a graph to show how it changes with the seasons. **Compare** the information you have collected to Cézanne's painting.

**MATHS:** **Photocopy** an image of *Banks of the Marne* c1888.

**Count** how many geometric shapes you can find within this painting.

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Analyse this painting and discuss its formal qualities. How does it differ from artworks created a generation before? In what way has Cézanne responded to and developed the ideas of his predecessors? What is the 'tache' and how did this revolutionise the way painters responded to the world? What role did Cézanne play in the path to abstraction?

According to curator Terence Maloon, avant-garde artists of the late 19th century such as Whistler, Cézanne, Monet, Manet and Degas 'challenged the lowly status of the sketch' and 'harnessed the aesthetics of the sketch to higher compositional purposes'. Discuss this idea and consider how this affected the modern artists of the early 20th century.

Consider Vallotton's quote above and discuss why he describes Cézanne's art practice in this way. Do you think this is an accurate description of Cézanne's approach? Analyse *Banks of the Marne* to justify your point of view.



## NABIS

Had the Nabis wanted to make such a bold decision, abstract art could have been invented in 1895.

André Chastel

### Édouard Vuillard

*The doors* 1894

gouache on cardboard, 50.8 x 41.6 cm

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Felton Bequest, 1952 © Édouard Vuillard/ADAGP.

Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **List** the colours you can see. What is the mood of this work? How does the colour scheme suggest this mood? **Imagine** what the whole room looks like.

**Extend** the image and design the rest of the room. **Consider** the colour scheme you will use.

**Focus** on the figure. What is the figure doing? Why has Vuillard placed the figure in the corner of the composition?

**Imagine** the events taking place in this scene. **Invent** a scenario for what happens next.

**ENGLISH:** This is a view of an interior domestic space.

**Create** a word bank for this painting. **Write** a story to accompany this artwork, including the figure, details you can see and your list of words.

**MATHS:** **Count** how many squares and rectangles you can see in this painting. **Look** around your classroom. **Identify** all the shapes you can see. **Create** a drawing of your classroom based on these shapes.

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Respond to this artwork subjectively. What makes it intriguing and unique? How does the artist draw you into the composition? Consider his approach to the subject matter. How has he captured a sense of space? Why do you think he chose to portray this scene? Discuss your observations and interpretation of the work with the class.

Research the Nabis. Name the artists and outline the influence they had on abstraction. Discuss the concepts and theories they employed in their artmaking. Develop a painting appropriating the stylistic intentions of this group.

Source Maurice Denis's 'The definition of neo-traditionalism' from 1890. Discuss why the Nabis renamed their approach to painting and if this is a more appropriate term for this group.



## GAUGUIN AND THE PRIMITIVIST WOODCUT

Wood engraving is by definition stylised and leaves as much to the imagination as it gives us to see; it is an advantageous means of expressing the visionary character of all perception...

Maurice Godé

### Franz Marc

*Tiger* 1912

woodcut, 20 x 24.1 cm

Collection: Brooklyn Museum of Art,

Ella C Woodward Memorial Fund

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **Describe** the types of lines used in this print. **Observe** how Marc has stylised the tiger and created the pattern of the fur. **Research** the process of creating a woodcut print. How old is this art practice? What types of wood can be used? **Discuss** the advantages of printmaking.

**VISUAL ARTS:** **Select** an animal that is symbolic to you. **Draw** your animal from memory. **Use** bold lines to simplify and stylise your animal. **Transfer** your drawing to scratch foam board and print a series of prints.

**DRAMA:** **Imagine** walking through the jungle and encountering this tiger. **How** would you react? **Create** a role-play about this encounter using the print as a starting point.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:** **Compare** and contrast the art of woodblock printing to mechanical reproduction. **Explore** the advantages and disadvantages of each practice. **Write** a procedure for one of the techniques.

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

As one of the oldest forms of graphic reproduction, the woodcut carries a primitivist aesthetic. What makes this approach appealing to artists exploring a new way of seeing? What effect are they trying to harness?

Franz Marc was interested in the essence of the subject, peeling back the layers to expose the spirit within. How does the graphic effect of the woodcut suggest this notion? Consider the artist's attempt to simplify form, use repeated patterns and shapes as well as his treatment of space within the composition. Develop a critical study of this artwork based on your observations and research.

Research the use of the woodcut in other cultures. How does it differ from and also show similarities to Marc's approach? Create your own monotone woodcut based on a similar theme. How does this process differ from other art-making you have explored?





## THE EXALTATION OF COLOUR

...objects harmed my pictures.

Wassily Kandinsky

### Wassily Kandinsky

*Study for 'Painting with white border' (Moscow) 1913*

watercolour, gouache, ink, 39 x 35 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1982

© Wassily Kandinsky/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **List** the colours you can see. **Describe** the variety of marks in the artwork. **Reflect** on how this artwork makes you feel. What do you think Kandinsky meant when he said 'objects harmed my pictures'? Do you think this artwork was created randomly or carefully planned? **Discuss** your response in class.

Kandinsky wanted to create art that affected the viewer in a similar way as listening to music. **Paint** a series of small watercolour paintings while listening to music in class. **Use** colour expressively and layer your work.

**Review** your paintings then select, title and exhibit the paintings you feel are resolved.

**ENGLISH:** Kandinsky was interested in creating art that conveyed emotions. **Look** at this work closely and consider the emotions it presents. **Compile** a list of adjectives to accompany this artwork. **Write** a poem in response to this artwork using your adjectives.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY:** **Construct** an experiment in class to test how people respond to different colours. **Brainstorm** a list of questions for the class to use in this research. **Graph** your results and present these to the class.

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Kandinsky's intention was to detach reality from the recognisable and enhance the concept of the spiritual. Discuss this notion with the class, drawing references from Kandinsky's body of work. Using *Study for 'Painting with white border' (Moscow) 1913* as evidence, argue whether Kandinsky has successfully achieved his aim.

Research and develop a case study on the Blaue Reiter group and its significance to abstraction. Consider the origins of this movement and the artists' attempt to expand the concept of art.

Describe the differences between Kandinsky's improvisations, impressions and compositions. Find examples of each approach and discuss how each has played a significant role in influencing artists of the next generation.



## CUBISM

The Cubist reflection consists essentially of stripping back all the proportions and ends up with projective, primordial forms like the triangle, the rectangle and the circle.

Paul Klee

### Georges Braque

*Glass of absinthe 1911*

oil on canvas, 37 x 28.7 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1997

© Georges Braque/ADAGP. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **Describe** what you can see in this artwork and the colour range Braque has used. **Reflect** on the scale of the work. Would you have the same response if the painting was larger? **Contemplate** how this painting makes you feel.

**Visual Arts:** **Set up** a still life in class and draw the arrangement from different angles. **Cut** up your drawings then arrange several pieces in a Cubist composition showing multiple perspectives. **Use** pencil to work into your composition and define certain areas.

**ENGLISH:** **Research** the life of Georges Braque. **Find** out about the friendship between Braque and Pablo Picasso. **Discuss** how the artists supported each other's vision for a new type of art. **Use** the information collected to write a diary entry for the day Braque created this painting. **Describe** the process he took to create this painting. **Imagine** how Cubism was first viewed by art critics and the art world.

**MATHS:** **Photograph** a still life from various angles (45, 90, 180 and 360 degrees) using a digital camera. **Print** these photographs and pin them up. **Compare** what can be seen from the various angles. **Discuss** how Cubist artists were aiming to show multiple perspectives.

## 7-12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Analyse this artwork and discuss Braque's approach to painting a still life. Consider the structural qualities and the significance of the picture plane. What is the artist's main concern and how does this artwork reflect Cubist theory?

In 1914 Mondrian wrote, 'Cubism has taken a great stride in the direction of abstracting, and in this sense belongs both to our time and to the future: hence it is modern not in content, but in effect'. What do you think Mondrian is suggesting? Refer to particular Cubist artists and artworks to support your point of view.

Using myVirtualGallery on the Gallery's website ([www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/mvg](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/mvg)) create an exhibition with text panels of ten artists from the collection, including Braque, using the theme 'The evolution of painting'. Write a catalogue essay outlining the reasons for your selection.

## 1912–17: THE LIMITS OF ABSTRACTION

Art no longer cares to serve the state and religion, it no longer wishes to illustrate the history of manners, it wants to have nothing further to do with the object, as such, and believes that it can exist, in and for itself, without 'things'.

Kasimir Malevich

### Kasimir Malevich

*House under construction* 1915–16

oil on canvas, 97 x 44.5 cm

Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1974

## K-6 LOOKING AND MAKING ACTIVITIES

**VISUAL ARTS:** **Nominate** the focal point in this composition. **Observe** the strong use of diagonal lines and how they create a sense of movement. **Cut** out a range of coloured geometric shapes and arrange them into a composition that is pleasing to you.

**Look** closely at the texture of this painting. Can you see any brushstrokes? How do you think Malevich created this painting? Are we looking at an aerial view? **Draw** your own home from above, and simplify your drawing into shapes and lines.

**MATHS:** **List** the shapes you can see. What does this work remind you of? If this was a tower, do you think it could stand? **Explain** why or why not. **Rearrange** the shapes in this painting to construct a design for a tower that would be able to balance upright.

**HISE:** **Research** the technological developments that impacted on society at the beginning of the 20th century.

**Focus** on changes in architecture and the types of buildings that have been designed to house a growing population.

## 7–12 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Research Malevich's art practice. Consider his influences, concepts and theories as well as his understanding of the real. How does the quote above suggest his approach to artmaking? Create a visual diary of his body of work. Develop a case study on your favourite painting and discuss your findings with the class.

Suggest how the audience of the time might have reacted to Malevich's paintings. Would they have embraced or criticised abstraction? As part of today's audience, how do you view Malevich's practice? Discuss how his body of work is a reflection of early 20th-century thinking.

Where does abstraction go after the artists of 1917? Create an art timeline for the 20th century. Suggest how the paths to abstraction played a significant role in influencing artists of the mid to late 20th century.



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Remember that before being a war-horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, a picture is essentially a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.

Maurice Denis, 1890

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