

Name :

Hour :

## Wassily Kandinsky - Abstract Watercolor Paintings



Wassily Kandinsky was a Russian abstract painter. In fact, he is often credited as the founder of abstract, or nonrepresentational painting! He was born in Moscow in 1866, and, when he was older, studied law and economics at the University of Moscow.

In 1895 Kandinsky attended an exhibition of French impressionist art and decided that his calling was not in law or economics, but in painting. To explore this new passion further, Kandinsky moved to Munich to study and practice German **impressionism**.

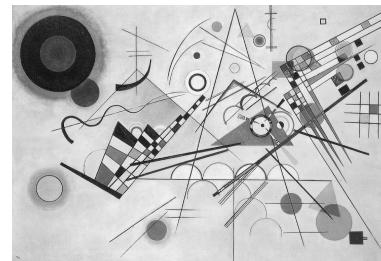
(Impressionists used short brushstrokes and color to emphasize the way light falls on objects. Van Gogh and Monet were impressionists.)

Kandinsky traveled a lot during the early 1900's. Especially influential were his trips to Paris where artists were involved with **fauvism**, a style of art characterized by aggressive use of bold colors. Under this influence Kandinsky began to develop ideas about the power of pure color. He discovered the impact of **nonrepresentational** by accident one day in his studio when he saw one of his paintings tipped on its side. When he saw the painting from a new angle he noticed that the colors, lines, and shapes were descriptive on their own; representation was not key to understanding the work. He combined these two discoveries into a new style of painting.



In 1911 Kandinsky helped form Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) group. These artists focused on the **expressive** qualities of art. During this period Kandinsky created **abstract** paintings that exhibited brilliant colors and complex patterns of **organic** shape. (See the image on the left.) He sought to reduce, or eliminate, the representation of objects without slipping into painting decorations. In his abstract paintings, Kandinsky did not contain his colors with lines.

Around 1920, Kandinsky's work changed dramatically. His paintings still contained areas of bold color, but the shapes he used were less **organic** and more **geometric**. (See the image on the right.)



**MUSIC** was very important to Kandinsky, and his abstract paintings are a reflection of that. Most of his paintings are titled with musical terms. Examples are **Improvisations**, **Impressions**, and **Compositions**. To further illustrate how he aligned painting with music, Kandinsky once said that color is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, and

the soul is the piano with many strings. He believed that he saw color when he heard music.

Kandinsky's artwork created a lot of controversy. He was criticized because much of his artwork had no real subject. Kandinsky insisted painting was like a piece of music. It did not have to be about something. Instead its beauty came from the arrangement of its elements, just like music gets its beauty from the arrangement of notes on a musical scale.

## VOCABULARY

Principles of art:

**Emphasis** - a place of directed focus in an artwork. Emphasis shows that something is important.

**Movement** – arranging the elements in an artwork in a way that directs the eye to roam around the work.

**Rhythm** – a regular repetition of elements to help create movement. For example, rhythm is the way the eye glides smoothly or jumps rapidly across an artwork.

Art History:

**Impressionism** – use of many brushstrokes to record the way light affects the color of an object.

**Fauvism** – use of bright, intense colors to show the mood of a painting.

**Representational** – artwork with recognizable subject matter.

**Abstract** – artwork that stresses the importance of elements and principles of design, rather than subject matter. Abstract (or nonrepresentational) artists select and then exaggerate or simplify the forms suggested by the world around them.

## PROJECT

For this project you will be creating an **abstract watercolor painting** in the style of Wassily Kandinsky. You should take the following into consideration when planning and creating your artwork:

- ❖ How is your painting like a piece of music? What does a lot of activity say? What do changes in activity say? Etc.
- ❖ How does your use of **color** contribute to the type of “music” you are creating? How does your use of **line** contribute? **Shape**?
- ❖ Does your painting show a sense of **movement** and **rhythm**?
- ❖ Is there **emphasis** or a **focal point**?
- ❖ Are you **blending** the watercolors effectively?
- ❖ Are you using the pen and ink neatly?
- ❖ Are you using your time wisely?

