Guggenheim Presents Vasily Kandinsky: 
Around the Circle

Over Eighty Paintings and Works on Paper from Guggenheim Collection on View in Museum Rotunda

Exhibition: Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle  
Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York  
Location: Rotunda levels 3,4,5  
Dates: October 8, 2021–September 5, 2022

(NEW YORK, NY— August 26, 2021)—From October 8, 2021, through September 5, 2022, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle. Drawing from the Guggenheim’s exceptional collection of works by Kandinsky, the exhibition features approximately eighty paintings, watercolors, and woodcuts, as well as a selection of his illustrated books, spanning the artist’s earlier years in Russia and Germany and through his exile in France at the end of his life. The presentation, installed along the midsection of the museum’s spiral rotunda, reconsiders Kandinsky’s career not as a fixed path from representation to abstraction, but as a circular passage through persistent themes centered around the pursuit of one dominant ideal: the impulse for spiritual expression.

Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle is organized by Megan Fontanella, Curator, Modern Art and Provenance.

Vasily Kandinsky (b. 1866, Moscow; d. 1944, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France) is recognized as a major artistic innovator. He was among those who advanced nonrepresentational modes of art-making, to lasting effect. Uprooted time and again, the artist’s stylistic evolution was intimately tied to his sense of place and his meaningful intersections with artists, musicians, poets, and other cultural producers who shared his transnational vision and experimental bent.
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle portrays how, in seeking to free art from its ties to nature and representation, Kandinsky remained committed to exploring a subject matter based on what he called the artist’s “inner necessity.” Persistent themes—from memory and identity to sensorial experience and spirituality—are traced in the work of an artist whose theories and works continue to resonate today.

Kandinsky’s groundbreaking career unfolds in chronologically reverse order proceeding upwards along the Guggenheim’s spiral ramp. The exhibition begins with the artist’s final chapter, set in France, when the natural sciences and Surrealism, as well as an abiding interest in Russian and Siberian cultural practices and folklore, informed his biomorphic imagery and prompted recurrent themes of regeneration and metamorphosis. Arranged on the fourth level, works from his decade at the Bauhaus, a German school of applied art and design, manifest Kandinsky’s conviction that art could transform self and society. This body of work reflects the revitalization of his abstract style following his renewed contact with the Russian avant-garde in the late 1910s. The artist increasingly adopted geometric motifs, and in particular the circle, as a vehicle for his emotive language. The final section of the exhibition, positioned towards the apex of the rotunda, examines Kandinsky’s earliest paintings, made while he was living in or around Munich. There he participated in heightened vanguard activity across multiple disciplines. In time the artist interrogated the expressive possibilities of color, line, and form, inspired in part by contemporary music. At every turn Kandinsky responded to his environment and developed new ways to probe the spiritual in art.

Presented concurrently with Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle is a series of solo exhibitions on the lower levels 1–2 of the Guggenheim rotunda that features the work of contemporary artists Etel Adnan, Jennie C. Jones, and Cecilia Vicuña.

**Funders**

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This exhibition is made possible by Vladimir Potanin, foundation trustee and philanthropist. The Leadership Committee for this exhibition is gratefully acknowledged for its support, with special thanks to the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation, Barbara and Andrew Gundlach, Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Jill and Andrew Conway, as well as the Arnhold Family, FX and Natasha de Mallmann, J. Ira and Nicki Harris, Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder, Elizabeth R. Rea, Rowland Weinstein, Peter Bentley Brandt, the Peter Lawson-Johnston Family, Mary and John Pappajohn, Sabina and Harlan Stone, Elliot and Nancy Wolk, and Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker.

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**About Vasily Kandinsky**

Vasily Kandinsky was born on December 16, 1866, in Moscow. From 1886 through 1892 he studied law and economics at the University of Moscow, and in 1889 he undertook an ethnographic expedition in
the Vologda province in northern Russia. He later declined a teaching position in order to study art in Munich with Anton Ažbe from 1897 to 1899 and at the Kunstkademie with Franz von Stuck in 1900. Kandinsky taught in 1901–03 at the art school of the Phalanx, a group he cofounded in Munich. One of his students, the German artist Gabriele Münter, would be his companion until 1914. In 1902 Kandinsky exhibited for the first time with the Berlin Secession and produced his first woodcuts. In 1903 and 1904 he began his travels in Italy, the Netherlands, and Tunisia and made visits to Russia. He showed at the Salon d’Automne in Paris from 1904.

In 1909 Kandinsky was elected president of the newly founded Neue Künstlervereinigung München (NKVM), whose first show took place at Heinrich Thannhauser’s Moderne Galerie in Munich later that year. In 1911 Kandinsky and Franz Marc formed Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), a loose confederation of artists, writers, and musicians, and began to make plans for Der Blaue Reiter Almanac, although the publication would not appear until the following year. Kandinsky’s seminal treatise On the Spiritual in Art was published in December 1911. He and Marc withdrew from the NKVM that month, and shortly thereafter the Blaue Reiter group’s first exhibition was held at the Moderne Galerie. In 1912 the second Blaue Reiter show was held at the Galerie Hans Goltz, Munich. Kandinsky’s first solo show was held at Der Sturm gallery in Berlin in 1912. In 1913 one of his works was included in the Armory Show in New York and the Erste deutsche Herbstsalon at the Der Sturm gallery in Berlin. Kandinsky lived in Russia from 1914 to 1921, principally in Moscow, where he held a position at the People’s Commissariat of Education.

Kandinsky began teaching at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in 1922. In 1923 he was given his first solo show in New York by the Société Anonyme, of which he became vice-president. Lyonel Feininger, Alexei Jawlensky, Kandinsky, and Paul Klee made up the Blaue Vier (Blue Four) group, formed in 1924. Kandinsky moved with the Bauhaus to Dessau in 1925 and became a German citizen in 1928. After the Bauhaus closed under pressure from the Nazi government in 1933, Kandinsky settled in Neuilly-sur-Seine, near Paris; he acquired French citizenship in 1939. Fifty-seven of his works were confiscated by the Nazis in the 1937 purge of so-called “degenerate art.” Kandinsky died on December 13, 1944, in Neuilly.

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation was established in 1937 and is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary art through exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications. The international constellation of museums includes the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and the future Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. An architectural icon and “temple of spirit” where radical art and architecture meet, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is now among a group of eight Frank Lloyd Wright structures in the United States recently designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site. To learn more about the museum and the Guggenheim’s activities around the world, visit guggenheim.org.

Visitor Information
Admission: Adults $25, students/seniors (65+) $18, members and children under 12 free. Open
Thursdays through Mondays from 11 am to 6 pm. Pay What You Wish hours are Saturdays from 4 to 6 pm, with free admission on Saturday on the House, offered once each month. Timed tickets are required and available at guggenheim.org/tickets. Explore the Guggenheim with our free Digital Guide, a part of the Bloomberg Connects app. Find it in the Apple App Store or in the Google Play Store.

The Guggenheim is implementing health and safety measures in consideration of visitors and employees. In compliance with the New York City mandate, COVID-19 vaccination is required for admission to the Guggenheim for anyone who is eligible. Face masks are mandatory inside the museum for anyone over the age of two. Policies should be reviewed in advance of a visit; they are posted on COVID-19 Safety Measures: What to Expect When Visiting.

For publicity images, visit guggenheim.org/pressimages
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guggenheim.org/social

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#1610

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
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Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Review New York (1071) Location Ramp 3, Bay 30
Vasily Kandinsky
*Untitled*, 1941
Gouache on gray paper
18 7/8 x 12 3/8 inches (47.9 x 31.4 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R82

*Paper cycle 1 (October 2021–April 2022)*

Vasily Kandinsky
*Untitled*, 1940
Gouache on black paper
19 5/8 x 13 3/4 inches (49.9 x 34.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R87

*Paper cycle 2 (April–September 2022)*

Ramp 3, Freight Wall
Vasily Kandinsky
*Vertical Accents*, July 1942
Oil on plywood
12 5/8 x 16 1/2 inches (32.1 x 41.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1192

Ramp 3, Bay 38
Vasily Kandinsky
*White Figure*, January 1943
Oil on board
22 5/8 x 16 1/2 inches (57.5 x 41.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
47.1140

Vasily Kandinsky
*Ribbon with Squares*, January 1944
Gouache and oil on board
16 1/2 x 22 3/4 inches (41.9 x 57.8 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
47.1141
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 3, Bay 38
Vasily Kandinsky
Twilight, June 1943
Oil on board
22 3/4 x 16 1/2 inches (57.8 x 41.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1223

Vasily Kandinsky
Fragments, May 1943
Oil and gouache on board
16 1/2 x 22 13/16 inches (41.9 x 57.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1224

Vasily Kandinsky
Little Accents, January 1940
Oil on plywood
12 5/8 x 16 1/2 inches (32 x 42 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R119

Ramp 3, Bay 37
Vasily Kandinsky
Around the Circle, May–August 1940
Oil and enamel on canvas
38 1/4 x 57 5/8 inches (97.2 x 146.4 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1222

Ramp 3, Bay 36
Vasily Kandinsky
Capricious Forms, July 1937
Oil on canvas
35 x 45 3/16 inches (88.9 x 114.8 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.977
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 3, Bay 36
Vasily Kandinsky
*Various Actions*, August–September 1941
Oil and enamel on canvas
35 1/8 x 45 3/4 inches (89.2 x 116.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
47.1159

Ramp 3, Bay 35
Vasily Kandinsky
*Violet-Orange*, October 1935
Oil on canvas
35 3/16 x 45 7/8 inches (89.4 x 116.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.334

Vasily Kandinsky
*Yellow Painting*, July 1938
Oil and enamel on canvas
45 13/16 x 35 inches (116.4 x 88.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.964

Ramp 3, Bay 34
Vasily Kandinsky
*Dominant Curve*, April 1936
Oil on canvas
50 7/8 x 76 1/2 inches (129.2 x 194.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.989

Ramp 3, Bay 33
Vasily Kandinsky
*Blue World*, May 1934
Oil with sand on canvas
43 1/2 x 47 3/8 inches (110.5 x 120.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.989
**Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle**
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

**Ramp 3, Bay 33**
Vasily Kandinsky
*Striped*, November 1934
Oil with sand on canvas
31 7/8 x 39 3/8 inches (81 x 100 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
46.1022

**Ramp 3, Bay 32**
Vasily Kandinsky
*Accompanied Contrast*, March 1935
Oil with sand on canvas
38 3/8 x 63 7/8 inches (97.5 x 162.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.338

**Ramp 3, Bay 31**
Vasily Kandinsky
*Green Accent*, November 1935
Tempera and oil on canvas
32 x 39 3/8 inches (81.3 x 100 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.340

**Ramp 4, Bay 49**
Vasily Kandinsky
*Graceful Ascent*, March 1934
Oil on canvas
31 5/8 x 31 3/4 inches (80.3 x 80.6 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.970

Vasily Kandinsky
*Environment*, October 1936
Oil on canvas
39 1/4 x 32 inches (99.7 x 81.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.973
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 49
Vasily Kandinsky
_Calm_, 1926
Oil on wood panel
19 x 18 1/4 inches (48.3 x 46.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 41.284

Vasily Kandinsky
_Levels_, March 1929
Oil on board
22 1/4 x 16 inches (56.5 x 40.6 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1049

Vasily Kandinsky
_Gloomy Situation_, July 1933
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper
18 5/8 x 26 3/8 inches (47.3 x 67 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R145

Vasily Kandinsky
_Into the Dark_, May 1928
Watercolor on paper
19 x 12 9/16 inches (48.3 x 31.9 cm)
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, on extended loan to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 1970.90
_Paper cycle 2 (April–September 2022)_

Ramp 4, Bay 48
Vasily Kandinsky
_Composition 8_, July 1923
Oil on canvas
55 1/4 x 79 inches (140.3 x 200.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift 37.262
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 48
Vasily Kandinsky

Colored Sticks, 1928
Varnished tempera on paperboard
16 7/8 x 12 7/8 inches (42.9 x 32.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
38.306

Ramp 4, Bay 47
Vasily Kandinsky

Inclination, December 1931
Oil and tempera on board
27 1/2 x 27 1/2 inches (69.9 x 69.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1176

Vasily Kandinsky

Decisive Rose, March 1932
Oil on canvas
31 7/8 × 39 3/8 inches (81 × 100 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1178

Vasily Kandinsky

Pink Sweet, December 1929
Oil on board
27 1/4 x 18 7/8 inches (69.2 x 47.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R69

Vasily Kandinsky

Glimmering, July 1931
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
13 7/8 × 13 11/16 inches (35.2 × 34.8 cm)
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, on extended loan to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
1970.23

Paper cycle 1 (October 2021–April 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 46

9/30/2021
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 46
Vasily Kandinsky
*Yellow Accompaniment*, February–March 1924
Oil on canvas
39 1/8 x 38 3/8 inches (99.2 x 97.4 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
39.264

Vasily Kandinsky
*Blue Painting*, January 1924
Oil on canvas board
19 15/16 x 19 1/2 inches (50.7 x 49.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Gift, Fuller Foundation, Inc., 1976
76.2277

Ramp 4, Bay 45
Vasily Kandinsky
*Several Circles*, January–February 1926
Oil on canvas
55 3/8 x 55 1/4 inches (140.7 x 140.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
41.283

Vasily Kandinsky
*Far Away*, November 1930
Oil on board
13 9/16 x 9 9/16 inches (34.4 x 24.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Estate of Karl Nierendorf, By purchase
48.1172.521

Ramp 4, Bay 44
Vasily Kandinsky
*In the Black Square*, June 1923
Oil on canvas
38 3/8 x 36 3/4 inches (97.5 x 93.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.254
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 44
Vasily Kandinsky
*Extended, May–June 1926*
Oil on panel
37 1/2 x 17 3/8 inches (95.3 x 44.1 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
39.279

Vasily Kandinsky
*Three Sounds*, August 1926
Oil on canvas
23 3/4 x 23 1/2 inches (60.3 x 59.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
41.282

Ramp 4, Bay 43
Vasily Kandinsky
*Circles on Black*, 1921
Oil on canvas
53 3/4 x 47 1/8 inches (136.5 x 119.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
46.1050

Vasily Kandinsky
*Blue Circle*, 1922
Oil on canvas
43 x 39 inches (109.2 x 99.1 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
46.1051

Ramp 4, Bay 42
Vasily Kandinsky
*Blue Segment*, 1921
Oil on canvas
47 1/2 x 55 1/8 inches (120.7 x 140 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1181
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 42
Vasily Kandinsky
Red Oval, 1920
Oil on canvas
28 3/16 x 28 1/16 inches (71.6 x 71.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
51.1311

Ramp 4, Bay 41
Vasily Kandinsky
White Center, 1921
Oil on canvas
46 3/4 x 53 3/4 inches (118.7 x 136.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R98

Ramp 4, Bay 40 (Avant Bays)
Vasily Kandinsky
Study for “Gray Oval”, 1917
Watercolor, india ink, and graphite on paper
10 x 11 1/4 inches (25.4 x 28.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
39.246

Vasily Kandinsky
Untitled, March 1918
Watercolor and ink on tracing paper, mounted on cardboard
sheet: 10 3/16 x 13 11/16 inches (25.9 x 34.8 cm); mount: 10 5/8 x 14 3/8 inches (27 x 36.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection
41.247
Paper cycle 2 (April–September 2022)

Vasily Kandinsky
Untitled, January 1918
Watercolor, india ink, and pencil on paper
10 3/4 x 15 inches (27.3 x 38.1 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
41.250
Paper cycle 1 (October 2021–April 2022)
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 4, Bay 40 (Avant Bays)
Vasily Kandinsky
*Picnic*, January 1916
Watercolor, india ink, and pencil on paper
13 9/16 x 13 7/16 inches (34.4 x 34.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
47.1058

Vasily Kandinsky
*Untitled*, 1918
Watercolor and ink on paper
11 1/4 x 9 inches (28.7 x 22.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
49.1236

Paper cycle 1 (October 2021–April 2022)

Vasily Kandinsky
*Untitled*, 1920
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
9 × 11 11/16 inches (22.9 × 29.7 cm)
The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R45

Paper cycle 2 (April–September 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 59
Vasily Kandinsky
*Sounds*, 1912
Illustrated book with twelve color and forty-four black-and-white woodcut prints
edition 122/345
11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches (29.2 x 29.2 cm) overall
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
70.1923

Vasily Kandinsky
*Über das Geistige in der Kunst. Insbesondere in der Malerei*, 1911
(dated 1912)
Book, first edition
8 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 1/2 inches (21 x 18.4 x 1.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Gift, Fritz Bultman, 1981
81.2880

9/30/2021
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 59
Vasily Kandinsky
Über das Geistige in der Kunst. Insbesondere in der Malerei, 1912
(originally published by R. Piper, München, 1911)
Bound volume, second edition
second edition
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Library, New York
A2000.2

Vasily Kandinsky
The Art of Spiritual Harmony, 1914 (originally published by R. Piper, München, 1911)
Bound volume
first English edition
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation Archives
A2012.2

Vasily Kandinsky
Der Blaue Reiter, 1914 (originally published by R. Piper, München, 1912)
bound volume
second edition
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation Archives
A2012.3

Vasily Kandinsky
Der Blaue Reiter, 1914 (originally published by R. Piper, München, 1912)
bound volume
second edition
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation Archives
A2021.55

Ramp 5, Bay 58
Vasily Kandinsky
Black Lines, December 1913
Oil on canvas
51 3/8 x 51 5/8 inches (130.5 x 131.1 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.241

Vasily Kandinsky
Light Picture, December 1913
Oil and natural resin on canvas
30 3/4 × 39 1/2 inches (78.1 × 100.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.244
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 57
Vasily Kandinsky
Painting with White Border, May 1913
Oil on canvas
55 1/4 x 78 7/8 inches (140.3 x 200.3 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.245

Vasily Kandinsky
Watercolor after “Painting with White Border”, 1915
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
5 1/16 x 13 1/4 inches (12.8 x 33.6 cm)
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, on extended loan to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
1970.37
Paper cycle 1 (October 2021–April 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 56
Vasily Kandinsky
Landscape with Factory Chimney, 1910
Oil on canvas
26 x 32 1/4 inches (66 x 81.9 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
41.504

Vasily Kandinsky
Small Pleasures, June 1913
Oil on canvas
43 1/2 x 47 1/4 inches (110.5 x 120 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
43.921

Ramp 5, Bay 55
Vasily Kandinsky
Landscape with Rain, January 1913
Oil on canvas
27 3/4 x 30 7/8 inches (70.5 x 78.4 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.962
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

**Ramp 5, Bay 55**
Vasily Kandinsky
_Pastorale_, February 1911
Oil on canvas
41 7/8 x 61 7/8 inches (106.4 x 157.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
45.985

Vasily Kandinsky
_Sancta Francisca_, 1911
Reverse glass painting
6 1/8 x 4 5/8 inches (15.6 x 11.8 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
53.1361

Vasily Kandinsky
_Lion Hunt_, 1911
Reverse glass painting in artist's painted frame
3 11/16 x 5 3/8 inches (9.4 x 13.6 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
84.3215

**Ramp 5, Bay 54**
Vasily Kandinsky
_Improvisation 28 (Second Version)_ , 1912
Oil on canvas
44 5/16 x 64 inches (112.6 x 162.5 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R.
Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
37.239

**Ramp 5, Bay 53**
Vasily Kandinsky
_Blue Mountain_, 1908–09
Oil on canvas
42 1/4 x 38 7/16 inches (107.3 x 97.6 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R.
Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift
41.505
Exhibition Checklist
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

**Ramp 5, Bay 53**

Vasily Kandinsky

*Sketch for "Composition II", 1909–10*

Oil on canvas

38 3/8 x 51 5/8 inches (97.5 x 131.1 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection

45.961

**Ramp 5, Bay 52**

Vasily Kandinsky

*Winter Landscape with Church, 1910–11*

Oil on board

13 x 17 1/2 inches (33 x 44.5 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift

37.502

Vasily Kandinsky

*Landscape with Rolling Hills, 1910*

Oil on board

13 x 17 5/8 inches (33 x 44.8 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, By gift

41.503

Vasily Kandinsky

*Group in Crinolines, 1909*

Oil on canvas

37 5/8 x 59 3/16 inches (95.6 x 150.3 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection

45.966

Vasily Kandinsky

*Landscape near Murnau with Locomotive, 1909*

Oil on board

19 7/8 x 25 5/8 inches (50.5 x 65.1 cm)

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

50.1295
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 51
Vasily Kandinsky
Study for “Landscape with Tower”, 1908
Oil on board
13 x 17 9/16 inches (33 x 44.6 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
38.501

Vasily Kandinsky
Tunisian Sheep Festival, 1905
Tempera on paperboard with colored facing paper
16 1/2 × 22 1/2 inches (41.9 × 57.2 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
46.1008

Vasily Kandinsky
Amsterdam—View from the Window, 1904
Oil on board
9 3/8 x 13 inches (23.8 x 33 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection
46.1055

Vasily Kandinsky
Munich, ca. 1901–02
Oil on canvas board
9 3/8 x 12 5/8 inches (23.8 x 32.1 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
50.1292

Vasily Kandinsky
Fishing Boats, Sestri, 1905
Oil on canvas board
9 3/8 x 12 7/8 inches (23.8 x 32.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
50.1293

Vasily Kandinsky
Pond in the Park, ca. 1906
Oil on board
13 x 16 1/8 inches (33 x 41 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
The Hilla Rebay Collection
71.1936.R8
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

Ramp 5, Bay 51

Vasily Kandinsky
The Golden Sail, 1903
Woodcut with watercolor and metallic paint additions
5 x 11 3/4 inches (12.7 x 29.8 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
71.1943

Vasily Kandinsky
Church, 1907
Woodcut
image: 5 1/4 x 5 13/16 inches (13.3 x 14.7 cm); sheet: 7 3/16 x 6 1/8 inches (18.2 x 15.6 cm)
1970.141

Vasily Kandinsky
Women in the Woods, 1907
Woodcut
image: 5 3/4 x 7 5/8 inches (14.6 x 19.4 cm); sheet: 6 5/8 x 8 1/2 inches (16.8 x 21.6 cm)
1970.1411

Vasily Kandinsky
Two Birds, 1907
Woodcut
image: 5 3/8 x 5 11/16 inches (13.6 x 14.4 cm); sheet: 6 3/16 x 6 inches (15.7 x 15.3 cm)
1970.1412

Vasily Kandinsky
Sunday, ca. 1904–05
Woodcut, printed in black
4 1/2 × 7 15/16 inches (11.5 x 20.1 cm)
1970.1417

Vasily Kandinsky
Merchants, 1903
Woodcut
image: 2 3/4 x 6 1/4 inches (7 x 15.8 cm); sheet: 4 1/8 x 6 9/16 inches (10.5 x 16.6 cm)
1970.1418
Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Friday, October 8, 2021 – Monday, September 5, 2022)

83 artworks
Vasily Kandinsky (b. 1866, Moscow; d. 1944, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France) is recognized as a major artistic innovator and painting theorist. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, he was among those who advanced nonrepresentational modes of art-making to lasting effect. The artist’s stylistic evolution in this regard was intimately tied to his sense of place and the communities with which he engaged. Kandinsky gained insight from his meaningful intersections with an array of artists, musicians, poets, and other cultural producers, especially those who shared his transnational vision and experimental bent. Uprooted time and again, he adapted with his every relocation across Germany, back to Russia, and eventually to France—all against the backdrop of the sociopolitical upheavals occurring around him.

In this exhibition, Kandinsky’s work unfolds in reverse chronological order, starting with his late-life paintings and proceeding upward along the Guggenheim’s spiral ramp. Such an approach invites a novel experience of the artist’s career. His was not a fixed path from representation to abstraction, but rather a circular passage traversing persistent themes centered around the pursuit of one dominant ideal: the impulse for spiritual expression. This, what Kandinsky called the artist’s “inner necessity,” remained the guiding principle through the periodic redefinitions of his life and work.

The presentation begins here, on the rotunda’s third level, with Kandinsky’s final chapter, set in France. The natural sciences and the Surrealist movement, as well as an abiding interest in Russian and Siberian cultural practices and folklore, informed his organic imagery and prompted recurrent themes of renewal and metamorphosis. Arranged on the fourth level are paintings from his decade of teaching at the Bauhaus, a progressive German school that promoted a synthesis of the arts. The body of work from this period manifests Kandinsky’s conviction that art could transform self and society, and it exemplifies the revitalization of his “non-concrete” style following his direct contact with the avant-garde in Russia in the late 1910s. The artist adopted geometric motifs, in particular the circle, with its connotations of balance, as a vehicle for his emotive language. The final section of the show, located on the fifth level, examines Kandinsky’s earliest paintings, made while he was living in or around Munich. There he participated in heightened vanguard activity across multiple disciplines, fluidly moving between painting, poetry, and stage composition, for example. Pastoral landscapes and cataclysmic scenes emerged from his dissatisfaction with urban industrialization and perceived materialism. In time the artist interrogated the expressive possibilities of color, line, and form, inspired in part by contemporary music.

At every turn Kandinsky responded to his environment and developed new ways to probe the spiritual in art. These paintings, watercolors, and woodcuts drawn from the museum’s extensive Kandinsky collection illuminate the journey of an artist who would not leave behind the precedents of representation or of his own early work altogether, even as he explored the transcendent potential of abstract forms.

Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle is organized by Megan Fontanella, Curator, Modern Art and Provenance.

To learn more about the exhibition, download the Guggenheim Digital Guide, available for free on the Bloomberg Connects app. Look for this icon.

#KandinskyAroundTheCircle
Works from left to right, listed vertically:

VASILY KANDINSKY

*White Figure (La figure blanche)*
January 1943
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 47.1140

*Little Accents (Petits accents)*
January 1940
Oil on plywood
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R119

*Vertical Accents (Accents verticaux)*
July 1942
Oil on plywood
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1192

*Twilight (Crépuscule)*
June 1943
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1223

*Fragments*
May 1943
Oil and gouache on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1224

*Ribbon with Squares (Ruban aux carrés)*
January 1944
Gouache and oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 47.1141
VASILY KANDINSKY

White Figure (La figure blanche)
January 1943
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 47.1140
VASILY KANDINSKY

Little Accents (Petits accents)
January 1940
Oil on plywood
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R119
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Vertical Accents (Accents verticaux)*

July 1942

Oil on plywood

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,

Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1192
VASILY KANDINSKY

Twilight (Crépuscule)
June 1943
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1223
VASILY KANDINSKY

Fragments
May 1943
Oil and gouache on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1224
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Ribbon with Squares (Ruban aux carrés)*
January 1944
Gouache and oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 47.1141
VASILY KANDINSKY

Red Accent (L’accent rouge)
June 1943
Oil on board, mounted to panel
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R137
Around the Circle (Autour du cercle)
May–August 1940
Oil and enamel on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1222

Around the Circle, one of Kandinsky’s last major paintings, is a milestone in the artist’s circular journey. It reflects not only contemporary concerns but also his abiding interest in the belief systems and folklore of Russian and Siberian cultures. The dominant red circle at top center; the form cresting the undulating lines of “sacred waters” below; and a third, upside-down stylized humanoid form at bottom right have all been interpreted as potential allusions to shamans, or spiritual leaders and healers, in states of transformation. At bottom left, a lunar orb glows in the expanse beyond an open doorway, which is connected to a set of stairs with no physical support. This could be a portal to the cosmos, or some otherwise indeterminate space beyond the picture plane, in a probable nod to alternate dimensions or to the capacity for mystical ascendance.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Capricious Forms (Formes capricieuses)
July 1937
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.977
VASILY KANDINSKY

Yellow Painting (La toile jaune)
July 1938
Oil and enamel on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.964
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
1940
Gouache on black paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R87
VASILY KANDINSKY

Various Actions (Actions variées)
August–September 1941
Oil and enamel on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 47.1159
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
1941
Gouache on gray paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R82
VASILY KANDINSKY

Dominant Curve (Courbe dominante)
April 1936
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.989

In his late-life work Kandinsky often favored pastel hues reminiscent of Eastern Orthodox icon painting and his Russian heritage. The natural sciences also informed his compositions; he had for some years collected organic specimens, illustrations from journals, and scientific encyclopedias. In Dominant Curve, for instance, the figures within the green rectangle in the upper left recall microscopic marine animals, while embryo-like shapes appear elsewhere. These biomorphic forms gesture to rebirth and regeneration, an optimistic view that stands in contrast to the mounting European political crisis that precipitated World War II (1939–45). A suspended set of steps at right, a motif that appears in other works from this period, may allude to elevation or transition.
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Blue World (Monde bleu)*
May 1934
Oil with sand on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.969
VASILY KANDINSKY

Striped (Rayé)
November 1934
Oil with sand on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1022
VASILY KANDINSKY

Violet-Orange
October 1935
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.334
During his initial years in France, Kandinsky experimented with the application of sand over pigment, or mixed pigment with sand, as had other artists including Surrealist André Masson. He created a small body of paintings with rich, textured forms and dimensional surfaces. In this example, *Accompanied Contrast*, interlocking colored planes and smaller floating elements project slightly from a light-toned background. By 1936 Kandinsky ceased utilizing sand, shifting his focus to an iconography of suggestive signs and symbols in his unwavering search for inner expression.
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Environment (Environnement)*
October 1936
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.973
VASILY KANDINSKY

Green Accent (Accent vert)
November 1935
Tempera and oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.340
Kandinsky left his adopted country of Germany after the Bauhaus—the school of applied art and design at which he had taught since 1922—closed under political pressure in summer 1933. Yet his subsequent work created in France conceals the downhearted mood that precipitated his relocation, instead exhibiting a lighter palette and increasingly organic imagery. Kandinsky explained: “Paris, with its marvelous light (both strong and soft), had expanded my palette. Other colors appeared, other forms, radically new, or that I had not used for years. All of this, of course, in an unconscious fashion.” While the scaffolding-like division of space and curvilinear forms in Graceful Ascent resemble slightly earlier works, the pastel hues and subtle background mark the evolution of the artist’s style. Interestingly, Graceful Ascent was painted over a composition from Kandinsky’s Bauhaus period.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Into the Dark (Ins Dunkel)
May 1928
Watercolor on paper
VASILY KANDINSKY

Levels (Etagen)
March 1929
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1049
VASILY KANDINSKY

Colored Sticks (Bunte Stäbchen)
1928
Varnished tempera on paperboard
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 38.306
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Far Away (Fern)*
November 1930
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Estate of Karl Nierendorf, By purchase 48.1172.521
VASILY KANDINSKY

Pink Sweet (Rosa-Süß)
December 1929
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R69
VASILY KANDINSKY

Glimmering (Flimmern)
July 1931
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
VASILY KANDINSKY

_Gloomy Situation (Trübe Lage)_
July 1933
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R145

Among Kandinsky’s fellow Bauhaus instructors was the painter Paul Klee (1879–1940), a friend and sometimes artistic rival from the pre–World War I days when both artists lived in Munich. At the Dessau Bauhaus (1925–32), their families even shared adjoining residences. The regular exchange of ideas and artworks between the pair left its mark on Kandinsky’s practice. Following Klee and others, Kandinsky adopted a spray technique whereby medium is applied over stencils to animate shapes. He began overlapping the forms with hard edges that fade out gradually across the work’s surface. Kandinsky’s artwork titles likewise evolved to reflect an uncharacteristic poetry reminiscent of Klee’s own manner of titling. _Gloomy Situation_ dates to around the time of the Bauhaus’s final closing by faculty vote, on July 20, 1933, due to political pressure. The somber brown hues in the work bring to mind the Sturmabteilung (SA), the paramilitary force of the Nazi party in Germany, also known as “Brownshirts” due to their uniforms’ color.
Kandinsky believed his *Compositions* series constituted his most accomplished output. Between 1910 and 1939, he produced ten paintings that investigate colors and forms and their psychological and spiritual effects. In the present example, the colorful, geometric shapes create a pulsating surface that is alternately dynamic and calm, aggressive and quiet.

*Composition 8* additionally represents an important touchstone in the relationship between Solomon R. Guggenheim and Kandinsky. The collector—and later museum founder—purchased this painting in summer 1930 during his first meeting with the artist, which occurred at the Dessau Bauhaus, where Kandinsky was a teacher. One of the artist’s greatest patrons, Guggenheim would go on to acquire a considerable number of Kandinsky’s works in various mediums and from all periods of his artistic production.
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Blue Circle (Blauer Kreis)*
1922
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1051
VASILY KANDINSKY

Yellow Accompaniment (Gelbe Begleitung)
February–March 1924
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 39.264
VASILY KANDINSKY

Blue Painting (Blaues Bild)
January 1924
Oil on canvas board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Gift, Fuller Foundation, Inc. 76.2277
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Extended (Ausgedehnt)*
May–June 1926
Oil on panel
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 39.279
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Three Sounds (Drei Klänge)*
August 1926
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 41.282
Here the artist layered precise and transparent circles to produce a variance of rich chromatic relationships across flat, oscillating planes. He then applied varnish to select forms, such as the largest black circle, thus introducing an interplay of matte and glossy surfaces. The dark background in the picture, with its atmospheric effects, nonetheless suggests the infinite space of the cosmos and evokes celestial movement and the planetary hours system. Kandinsky intended his dynamic, and yet ordered, universe to transcend its formal properties. Of his recurring circle motif, he remarked: “If I make such frequent, vehement use of the circle in recent years, the reason (or cause) for this is not the geometric form of the circle, or its geometric properties, but my strong feeling for the inner force of the circle and its countless variations.”
VASILY KANDINSKY

In the Black Square (Im schwarzen Viereck)
June 1923
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.254
VASILY KANDINSKY

Calm (Stilles)
1926
Oil on wood panel
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 41.284
VASILY KANDINSKY

Bright Unity (Helle Einheit)
April 1925
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.273
VASILY KANDINSKY

Inclination (Neigung)
December 1931
Oil and tempera on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1176
VASILY KANDINSKY

Decisive Rose (Entscheidendes Rosa)
March 1932
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1178
Circles on Black (Krugi na chyornom; Kreise auf Schwarz) 
1921
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1050

Circles on Black is the last work Kandinsky painted before his return to Germany after largely spending the years of World War I (1914–18) and the Russian Revolution (1917–23) in his native Moscow. Encounters with the vanguard Constructivist and Suprematist artists there, who were in pursuit of a universal aesthetic language, led Kandinsky to expand his use of geometric forms and overlapping, flat planes. However, he distanced himself from their respectively “mechanistic” and “pure” art by insisting that even his most abstract works retained expressive content. The appearance of rotating shapes, black-and-white grids, and monochromatic backgrounds in his work emerged from his search for pure forms that could be emotive without directly referencing reality, rather than from a desire to reduce representation to its most basic shapes.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Red Oval (Krasny oval; Rotes Oval)
1920
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 51.1311
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Blue Segment (Siny segment; Blaues Segment)*

1921

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1181
VASILY KANDINSKY

White Center (Bely tsentr; Weißes Zentrum)
1921
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R98
VASILY KANDINSKY

_**Picnic (Picknick)**_  
January 1916  
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 47.1058
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
January 1918
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 41.250
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
March 1918
Watercolor and ink on tracing paper, mounted to paperboard
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 41.247
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
1920
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R45
VASILY KANDINSKY

Study for *Gray Oval* (Entwurf zu *Graues Oval*)
1917
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 39.246
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
1918
Watercolor and ink on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 49.1236
VASILY KANDINSKY

Untitled
1920
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
The Hilla Rebay Collection 71.1936.R45
On the Spiritual in Art

Kandinsky champions abstract visual representation, unfettered by tangible subject matter, to express the artist’s inner self. It was his belief that artworks thus made could counter the harm of materialism and introduce society to a more transcendent and communal way of being. In the text Kandinsky describes the three categories of painting he employed in pursuit of his utopian goals: “Impressions,” or articulations of “external nature”; “Improvisations,” drawn from the artist’s “internal nature”; and “Compositions,” or more deliberate and planned arrangements. He also emphasizes the psychology of color and form that could communicate an “empirical-spiritual” experience, decrying the art world’s sole focus on originality. The mystical nature of the text reflects Kandinsky’s interest in the occult and Theosophy. He observes: “[W]e see already before us an age of purposeful creation, and this spirit in painting stands in a direct, organic relationship to the creation of a new spiritual realm that is already beginning, for this spirit is the soul of the epoch of the great spiritual.”
In spring 1912, on the heels of the first Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) exhibitions in Munich, Kandinsky and Marc (with support from August Macke and Gabriele Münter) produced Der Blaue Reiter, a compendium intended to demonstrate affinities across diverse disciplines, cultures, and epochs. It contains thirteen full-length articles, 141 images of artworks and artifacts, the script for Kandinsky’s stage play Der gelbe Klang (The Yellow Sound), and three musical compositions. Kandinsky explained: “In the book the entire year must be reflected; and a link to the past as well as a ray to the future must give this mirror its full life.”

Despite aiming for cultural exchange, European modernists were enchanted by the perceived “authenticity” or supposed “razzle” of folkloric and non-European objects assembled in Der Blaue Reiter, underscoring the complex and insidious nature of prevailing conceptions regarding “primitivism” and ethnography. This voyeuristic engagement in the service of aesthetic and spiritual inspiration reflected the imperialist and colonialist attitudes of the era.
Klänge (Sounds)
1912 (dated 1913)
Illustrated book with twelve color and forty-four black-and-white woodcut prints, edition 122/300
(R. Piper, Munich)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 70.1923

Sounds—a “musical album,” as Kandinsky called it—consists of fifty-six woodcuts (created ca. 1907–12) and thirty-eight prose poems (written ca. 1909–11). The artist, who also conceived the book’s design, from typeface to binding, intended for the images and the text contained therein to harmonize with one another, achieving a “synthetic unity” even when they have no outward connection. His fascination with the sounds of speech is evident here; he often uses poetic devices, such as repetition, to disassociate words from their meanings. Layout, typography, and punctuation are also manipulated in unconventional and disorienting ways. Dadaists in Switzerland in particular greeted the poems with much enthusiasm for their defiance of literary norms.

Sounds is yet another example of Kandinsky’s attempts to transcend divisions between various artistic vehicles. Some years later, he recalled of the publication: “This is, for me, a ‘change of instrument’—the palette to one side and the typewriter in its place. I use the word ‘instrument’ because the force that motivates my work remains unchanged, an ‘inner drive.’ And it is this very drive that calls for a frequent change of instrument.”
VASILY KANDINSKY

Light Picture (Helles Bild)
December 1913
Oil and natural resin on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.244
Kandinsky believed that color, shape, and line could translate an artist’s “inner necessity,” or impulse for spiritual expression, into universally accessible statements and propose a more utopian vision for humanity. *Black Lines* is among the artist’s first truly abstract paintings, containing, by his own testimony, no reference to the natural world. The network of thin, agitated lines, carefully painted to mimic pen drawing, indicates a graphic, two-dimensional sensibility while the underlying, vibrant forms suggest various degrees of spatial depth. While Kandinsky would continue to experiment with abstraction for the rest of his career, he also returned on occasion to encoded or quasi-representational imagery.
A trip the artist took to Moscow in autumn 1912 inspired *Painting with White Border*. On his return to Munich, where he had been living intermittently since 1896, Kandinsky searched for a way to record “those . . . extremely powerful impressions I had experienced in Moscow—or more correctly, of Moscow itself.” After producing at least sixteen preparatory works in a number of mediums, Kandinsky finally arrived at the pictorial solution to the painting: the white border. It rises like a wave from center bottom and up the right side of the canvas. Outlining his theories about the sounds and feelings he associated with various colors, Kandinsky wrote in his 1911/12 treatise, *On the Spiritual in Art*, that the color white expresses a “harmony of silence . . . pregnant with possibilities.” The canvas includes schematic allusions to a horse-driven Russian troika (the three diagonal, black lines at top left) and to the Christian martyr—and Moscow’s patron—Saint George on horseback (the arched form at center), with his white lance aimed at the dragon (bottom-left corner).
VASILY KANDINSKY

Watercolor after *Painting with White Border*  
(Aquarell nach *Bild mit weissem Rand*)  
1915  
Watercolor, ink, and graphite on paper  
The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, On extended loan to the  
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Landscape with Rain (Landschaft mit Regen)*
January 1913
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.962
VASILY KANDINSKY

Small Pleasures (Kleine Freuden)
June 1913
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 43.921
Kandinsky described his *Improvisations* (1909–14), as “chiefly unconscious, for the most part suddenly arising expressions of events of an inner character, hence impressions of ‘internal nature.’” The title of this series is a nod to terminology from music, a discipline that captivated him throughout his life. Arnold Schoenberg and other experimental composers influenced Kandinsky’s new visual vocabulary and his own desire to disrupt aesthetic conventions. Kandinsky was additionally interested in synesthesia, a phenomenon in which the senses are commingled and felt simultaneously, such as experiencing color as a tone in one’s mind.

In *Improvisation 28 (Second Version)* it is possible to find abstracted figurative elements relating to both cataclysmic events and redemption—a favored dichotomy of the artist, who sought to overcome what he witnessed to be the rampant materialism of his own epoch. The canvas contains images of a boat and waves (signaling a global deluge), a serpent, and, perhaps, cannons, as well as an embracing couple, a shining sun, and what appears to be a church or tower (top-right corner).
Kandinsky translated elements of his printmaking practice to painting; clearly delineated forms and flattened perspective pervade his jewel-colored Bavarian landscapes from around 1910. Kandinsky and the German artist Gabriele Münter, then his romantic companion, had begun to spend considerable periods in Murnau, a small village near the German Alps, where in 1909 Münter had bought a house—without electricity or running water. There, they brought their easels outdoors to capture the surrounding countryside; both were also avid cyclists and cultivated a kitchen garden. Such activities coincided with the German Lebensreform (life-reform) movement, which promoted the restorative effects of a return to the land in reaction to rapid urban industrialization.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Pastorale
February 1911
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.965
Adding to his collection of Russian lubki (small popular prints), religious icons, and other folk objects, from around 1908 Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter acquired Bavarian Hinterglashbilder (reverse glass paintings). Münter and later Kandinsky created their own reverse glass paintings with flat, stylized forms and decorated wooden furniture, especially for Münter’s country house in Murnau, a center of artisanal crafts. In cases such as *Lion Hunt*, Kandinsky’s handmade wooden frame, adorned with traditional Bavarian colored dot patterns, has survived. Although he continued in this period to also depict his then-preferred themes—the land and modern life—Kandinsky treated them in an increasingly abstract and daring manner, with brilliant colors.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Sancta Francisca

1911

Reverse glass painting

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 53.1361
VASILY KANDINSKY

Group in Crinolines (Reifrockgesellschaft)
1909
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.966
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Landscape near Murnau with Locomotive*  
*(Landschaft bei Murnau mit Lokomotive)*  
1909  
Oil on board  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 50.1295
VASILY KANDINSKY

*Landscape with Rolling Hills*
*(Landschaft mit welligen Hügeln)*
1910
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 41.503
VASILY KANDINSKY

Winter Landscape with Church
(Winterlandschaft mit Kirche)
1910–11
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 37.502
VASILY KANDINSKY

Sketch for Composition II (Skizze für Komposition II)
1909–10
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 45.961

Around 1909 Kandinsky embraced an increasingly expressionistic style and shifted from natural scenes to apocalyptic imagery. This was likely in response to the mounting sociopolitical tensions leading up to World War I, and what he perceived to be a clash between matter and spirit in human society more generally. A preliminary sketch for Composition II, this composition balances opposing forces: cataclysmic events on the left side, with the paradise of salvation on the right. His horse-and-rider motif, located here at center (as well as more legibly in Blue Mountain), symbolizes the artist’s crusade against conventional aesthetic values and his hope for a spiritual revolution or “great upheaval.” In Munich Kandinsky eventually helped to convene a transnational group of progressive European artists united by similar ideals under the name Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider) in 1911. In addition to frequent appearances in his art, the horse-and-rider motif constituted the cover design of his 1911/12 theoretical treatise, On the Spiritual in Art, as well as Der Blaue Reiter, the 1912 volume he coedited with the German painter Franz Marc. The final painting Composition II was destroyed during World War II.
VASILY KANDINSKY

Blue Mountain (Der blaue Berg)
1908–09
Oil on canvas
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,
By gift 41.505
VASILY KANDINSKY

**Merchants (Kaufleute)**
1903
Woodcut

**Sunday (Sonntag)**
ca. 1904–05
Woodcut

**Munich (München)**
ca. 1901–02
Oil on canvas board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 50.1292

**Amsterdam — View from the Window**
(Amsterdam — Blick aus dem Fenster)
1904
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1055

**The Golden Sail (Das goldene Segel)**
1903
Woodcut with watercolor and metallic paint additions
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 71.1943

**Tunisian Sheep Festival (Fête de moutons)**
1905
Tempera on paperboard with colored facing paper
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 46.1008

**Fishing Boats, Sestri (Fischerboote, Sestri)**
1905
Oil on canvas board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 50.1293

**Pond in the Park (Parkteich)**
ca. 1906
Oil on board

**Two Birds (Zwei Vögel)**
1907
Woodcut

**Women in the Woods (Frauen im Wald)**
1907
Woodcut

**Church (Kirche)**
1907
Woodcut

**Study for Landscape with Tower (Studie für Landschaft mit Turm)**
1908
Oil on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection 38.501
Since 1896 Vasily Kandinsky had predominantly lived in Western Europe, where he experienced heightened cultural exchange, joining or founding artist groups in Munich that broke with convention by promoting radical new styles and techniques. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 compelled the artist, a Russian citizen, to leave Germany and suspend these fruitful relationships. Kandinsky described his sudden dislocation in a letter: "I feel as if torn from a dream. . . . I was living in a time when such things would be impossible. My illusion was taken from me. . . . [S]piritual culture wound back for an indefinite time."

Returning to his native Moscow, the artist initially focused on watercolors and drawings as a means to explore his creative instinct and perhaps make sense of his new reality. The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia not only tempered his impulse to resume painting on canvas and at larger scales but also eliminated his financial security due to the Bolshevik expropriation of his real estate holdings. With his artistic output stalled, Kandinsky attempted to regain his footing through appointments to various political and cultural entities. In this context he closely observed the work of El Lissitzky, Kazimir Malevich, Liubov Popova, Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Vladimir Tatlin, and other Russian avant-gardists who emphasized the technical and scientific. While Kandinsky adopted their geometric vocabulary, he maintained his commitment to spiritual expression and to intuition.

The artist, who had married Nina Andreevskaya in Russia, returned to Germany in 1922 and began teaching at the Staatliches Bauhaus. Established by the architect Walter Gropius, this progressive school endeavored to bridge fine and applied art—and, later, art and technology. Bauhaus faculty comprised both established and future innovators, including Anni Albers, Josef Albers, Herbert Bayer, Marianne Brandt, Marcel Breuer, Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy, Oskar Schlemmer, and Gunta Stölzl. In this generative period Kandinsky further delved into the correspondence between colors and forms and their psychological and spiritual effects. He especially seized upon the circle as a signifier for the cosmic realm, and as evocative of balance and harmony. Nina and Vasily Kandinsky remained at the Bauhaus until 1933, when the school was definitively closed due to pressure from the Nazi government.
The arts were ever present in Vasily Kandinsky’s upbringing, even if his decision to pursue such a profession was circuitous. He spent his youth in his birthplace of Moscow and in Odessa, Russia (now Ukraine), studying law and economics at university before changing course in 1895 to become a manager in the Moscow printing house Kushnerev. A year later his encounter with one of Claude Monet’s Haystacks (Les meules, 1890–91) paintings, as well as a performance of Richard Wagner’s opera Lohengrin (1850), inspired, by his own recollection, his full commitment to the arts and his move to Munich, a nexus of vanguard activity. Memories of Russia, such as brightly decorated furniture and votive pictures from the homes of the communities he had visited as an ethnographer in northern Russia in 1889, would define Kandinsky’s early work and resurface throughout his career, as would Romantic historicism, lyric poetry, folklore, fantasy, and other subjects of his youth.

The years spent in or around Munich were tremendously fertile for the artist. He steered the city’s leading avant-garde groups, including Phalanx and Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists’ Association of Munich), and his poetry as well as his groundbreaking treatise Über das Geistige in der Kunst (On the Spiritual in Art) were published. He painted side by side in the Bavarian countryside with his partner Gabriele Münter, and the pair also engaged with the decorative arts and folk practices. Notably, in 1911 Kandinsky and Franz Marc formed Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), a loose, transnational confederation of artists, writers, and musicians united by an interest in the expressive potential of color and the symbolic—often spiritual—resonance of forms. This period of intensified collaboration across various artistic disciplines spurred Kandinsky’s creative growth.

By 1913 his recurrent motifs—among them the horse and rider, rolling hills, towers, and trees—had become subsidiary to line and color. As his calligraphic contours and rhythmic forms revealed scarcer traces of their representational origins, Kandinsky began to approach abstraction and elicit what he called the "hidden power of the palette." Though he was not the first to experiment with abstraction, either among his modernist peers or within the context of its rich history in diverse world cultures, his intrepid work marked a broader shift toward nonrepresentational art, which proved to have an enduring impact.
Kandinsky lived and worked in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine in his last decade. While the artist’s style shifted in his new setting, his final move to France also surfaced long-held concerns. He incorporated a soft palette of pastels and jewel tones conjuring his early depictions of Russian and fairy-tale subjects—and revealing little of the dejection surrounding his departure from Nazi Germany in late 1933. He continued his experimental approach to materials as well, testing the application of sand over pigment. Earlier, Kandinsky had collected organic specimens and scientific encyclopedias; this interest intensified as he embraced imagery related to the natural sciences, such as botany, embryology, and zoology. Contact with the art of Jean Arp and Joan Miró additionally impacted his intricate arrangements and biomorphic forms.

Many among the Parisian vanguard were familiar with alchemical, astrological, and occult practices, in part given the literary and artistic pursuits of the Surrealists, who aimed to unlock the unconscious and irrational mind. Against this backdrop Kandinsky’s own memories of his youthful encounters with the mystical reemerged. As late as a 1937 interview, discussing influential precedents, the artist recalled his formative 1889 field work as an ethnographer in northern Russia: “There, I saw farmhouses completely covered with painting—nonrepresentational—inside. Ornaments, furniture, crockery, everything painted. I had the impression I was stepping into painting that ‘narrated’ nothing.” He likewise sustained a preoccupation with the literature and belief systems of several Russian or Siberian cultures, including those with shamanic narratives involving transformation and ascendance.

By mid-1942 wartime shortages in Nazi-occupied France led Kandinsky to cease painting on large canvases and instead make small-scale works on board. This final group of inventive compositions exemplifies the personal iconography that recurred at every stage of his production.
Watercolors, drawings, and prints were central to Kandinsky’s artistic production throughout his career, both as independent works and studies for oil paintings. However, when the artist returned to Russia in late 1914, following his sudden departure from Germany at the outbreak of World War I, he produced works on paper exclusively for a time, revisiting the canvas only briefly in 1916. He explained his intensive focus on the watercolor medium to the German artist Gabriele Münter: “They prepare me for the large paintings, which are slowly taking shape in my soul.” The upheaval of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, which led to Kandinsky’s economic downturn, nonetheless stymied the artist’s creative output and delayed his return to the canvas until mid-1919.

His works on paper during this period of personal and professional transitions further demonstrate Kandinsky’s alternation between representational forms and the experimental abstraction of his prewar canvases. His artistic development, like that of others in his milieu, was far from linear. Even after his plunge into total abstraction around 1913, allusions to land, sea, and sky reappear to varying degrees in subsequent works. In addition, boats or boat-like motifs occur with frequency, potentially suggesting an individual traversing the course of life. Around 1915–16 Kandinsky made a group of etchings and watercolors with mostly recognizable forms, as seen here in Picnic (Picknick, January 1916). He referred to such works as “bagatelles” (trifles), a name proposed by Münter for their small scale and affordability.
Arriving in Munich from Moscow in 1896, at thirty years old, Kandinsky began his artistic studies. He soon abandoned classroom instruction to work *en plein air* (out of doors), painting on small-format, portable boards or canvases. His works from this developmental phase demonstrate a Neo-Impressionist style of dabbled brushwork.

From around 1904 to 1908 Kandinsky traveled more widely with his partner, the German artist Gabriele Münter. They spent their time in the Netherlands, Italy, and other European locales, and sailed to North Africa for an extended stay in Tunisia, then a French protectorate. Kandinsky’s independent wealth sustained the artist-couple’s itinerant lifestyle, which was prompted in part by his desire for distance from his marriage with his first wife, Anja. He and Münter followed well-trodden itineraries and typified the bourgeois fascination with what they perceived as “picturesque” or simpler ways of life in colonized lands, in contrast with their urban vantage point.

Kandinsky and Münter spent a year in Paris, in 1906–07. The daring use of nonnaturalistic and vibrant colors in the paintings of the so-called Fauves (“wild beasts”) further influenced Kandinsky’s shift to magical fairy-tale pictures painted in a decorative Art Nouveau style. Russian folk costumes and themes also made their way into his work, and, attracted to the hand-hewn immediacy of the woodcut, he increasingly turned to printmaking as a primary medium. In June 1908 the pair rejoined the artistic community in Munich, armed with the visual acuity they had gained during their years abroad.