

# 2

## **From Plato to Croce: Western Philosophy of Art**

### **2.1 The Greek Mimesis Theory of Plato and Aristotle: A Study with Reference to Classical Sculptures and Renaissance Paintings**

Men, unlike other animals have a unique and developed sense of taste, emotions and feelings, which are sometimes derived from the world around him. These factors lead him to that point where he finds certain outlets for these impulses. Ever since the dawn of civilization, artistic impulse in men has always been present in various forms. Initially, men had the first priority of survival and survival instincts which led him to make various kinds of instruments for hunting animals for food, he learned to make pitchers and storage to stock up on food and water and clothes from animal skin and fur to protect themselves from the elements of nature. These kind of objects are utilitarian and they serve various purposes for survival and comfort of the people. As men further developed these activities, he acquired the skills to make these everyday objects aesthetically pleasing as well, and this impulse to make the everyday items more and more attractive finally led to the emergence of the fine arts, which is art that is made mainly for the sake of the sense of beauty and the aesthetic experience it provides to the viewer. The fine arts are not so much valued for their utility in day to day life, but for the role they play in the cultural life of the people and the aesthetic experience they provide.

The art world is a very diverse and huge subject and defining the term 'Art' is nearly impossible. Art has many faces and many styles. According to the tradition and lifestyle of a particular time, the face of art also changes. In accordance to this, philosophers and thinkers of those particular times also came up with different theories

and analyses when it came to appreciating or critiquing a work of art, may it be painting, sculpture, music, dance, drama, poetry and such. They strove to work out the different meanings and the various intellectual, aesthetic and emotional values regarding a work of art. Questions such as, what purpose art is supposed to serve to society and humankind? What is the true nature of art? Its utilitarian properties and aesthetic experience or a deeper realization of the material world through art are discussed topic. The answers to some of these questions are discussed by some of the philosophers and theoreticians of various eras.

Artists such as in ancient Greece began to carve idealistic figures of men and women out of stones and marbles which depicted their gods such as in the *Statue of Zeus or Poseidon* [Plate 2.1]. Discontent with plain anatomical accuracy, the Greek's concept of ideal beauty was achieved by ideal proportions and serene virtue of expression [81]. By carving a figure out of the ordinary block of stone and making it look like a man or a woman, the artists had somewhat made the ordinary piece of stone into a monumental piece which represents values and ideas.

Human beings have a natural tendency to imitate whatever they see around them. Objects in nature or even behaviors of certain individual have always been a fascinating thing to mankind. As Aristotle points out, it is this drive to imitate that keeps our traditions alive, and the uniformity of social life in human civilization owe it much to this imitative tendency [82].

While some of these practices are done knowingly for the sake of utilitarian purpose, but majorities of these are done unconsciously as a matter of habit. However, there are also a different kind of tendency in human beings to imitate things or individuals just for the sake of leisure and fun. The origin of art forms such as mime, drama, dance, etc. can be found in these imitative tendencies of man. Sometimes an artist paints objects and scenes on his canvas derived from nature that impresses him such as a trees, rivers, hills, human figures, or a face, and so on. The pleasure of the artists in such kind of art lies in his technical skill, and ability to recreate the illusion of reality on his canvas or on a block of stone while the viewer appreciates the skill of the artist in creating such an illusion [83].

Even the viewer enjoyed this state of self-deception. They enjoyed appreciating the works like children being deceived by the artificial objects which resembles reality and they praised the artists for bringing about such illusion in ordinary object [84].

Such life-like magnificence and excellent craftsmanship can be observed in the work of famous Greek Sculptures, (which are now mostly Roman copies) such as in the Hellenistic sculpture of *Laocoon and his Two Sons* [Plate 2.2]. In this sculpture, one can observe the painstaking and precise carving of anatomically precise figures. The sculptor has paid significant attention to the expression of fear and anguish in the subjects' faces which are highly realistic. Moreover, the subjects also have perfect muscular physiques, which was a common Greek conception of ideal beauty.

This tradition of imitative art was first prevalent in ancient Greece and thus the Greek thinkers such as Plato came up with the first theory of art as imitation of reality. The Greeks were also known for their fascination with beauty. They admired beauty and while making their art such as the sculpture of a man or a woman representing their gods, they always chose the beautiful men and women of their society as their model. Perfect body proportions, muscular physique and beautiful faces were some of the important traits of a typical Greek sculpture [85].

By the time, these realistic traditions were prevalent in Athens. Plato was among the first philosophers that took up the problem of aesthetics. His theory of imitation is the first aesthetics theory to tackle the nature of art and aesthetic experience. For Plato art is an imitation of the natural world which is in turn is a copy of the world of ideas. For Plato, the world of ideas is the highest form of existence, and the objects in nature are imperfect copies of this world of ideas. Ideas are the principles of things. They are universal, not plain mental processes or beliefs in human minds but perfectly independent of both. For Plato, the world of ideas exists at the top of the hierarchy. Nothing is more perfect than the ideas existing independently. Next, comes the world of nature. In contrast to the world of ideas, as mentioned above, according to Plato, the world of nature is illogical, dynamic, momentary and ever changing. The world of nature is due to the interaction of the world of ideas with matter. All reality that the objects or things possess is as according to the influence of ideas. The objects owe their existence to the existence of ideas [86].

Plato had a love-hate relationship with art and he extremely urged the prohibition of painters and poets from his ideal republic, and furthermore in the itinerary of his disagreement presented a comprehensive theory of Imitation or Mimesis. He established that art is an imitation of nature, and that it is dangerous, along with bogus basis for opinion that imitation deviate from both the laws of ethics and also from the logical perception of the world. For the first time, it was established that the admiration of such art and forms just for its quality of likeness with natural objects was a silly mind-set. Plato declared that art is not just a copy, but a copy of a copy [87]

The art of representation, then, is a long way from reality; and apparently the reason why there is nothing it cannot reproduce is that it grasps only a small part of any object, and that only an image. Your painter, for example, will us a shoemaker, a carpenter, or other workman, without understanding any one of their crafts; and yet, if he were a good painter, he might deceive a child or a simple-minded person into thinking his picture was a real carpenter, if he showed it them at some distance [88].

According to Plato, there are two levels of existence. The first and the truest form of existence according to Plato is the world of 'Ideas'. The basic matter without any physical form or order exists in this level, and from this level of ideas, the material world manifest as a solid rigid structure with neat forms. Thus the material world, or what people call nature is a copy or an imitation of the actual ideas of the objects, and in turn, art is a copy of those objects in nature or the material world which makes it a copy of a copy, twice removed from reality [89].

Thus, in Plato's view art leads the viewer far away from reality and into a world of illusion which was unacceptable in his republic. Through the work of the artists, reality is twice removed. Summing it up, in art, it is not only the external forms that are imitated for the sake of imitation but anything and everything gets reflected in art. Just to imitate life and nature for the sake of imitation can never be the complete purpose of the artists or art and that is why it cannot be treated as a complete theory of art. Modern theories and philosophies in art accept the possibility of creating images from emotions, mental states and feelings which result in abstract forms which stand for themselves and not a copy of forms in nature.

Besides the sensuous physical objects as seen in nature which are represented or copied by artists in their paintings and sculptures, poetry and drama also copies super

sensuous elements such as feelings or emotions, passions, love, etc. which are represented in sensuous form such as bodily changes and facial expressions which are also irrational [90].

In *The Republic*, Socrates states,

We were speaking just now of the painter who can produce what looks like a shoemaker to the spectator who, being as ignorant of shoe-making to the spectator who, being as ignorant of shoe-making as he is himself, judges only form and color. In the same way the poet knowing nothing more than how to represent appearances, can paint in words his picture of any craftsman so as to impress an audience which is equally ignorant and judges only by the form of expression; the inherent charm of meter, rhythm and musical setting is enough to make them think he has discoursed admirably about generalship or shoe-making or any other technical subject. [91]

According to Plato, art forms such as painting is limited to copying the external aspects of a physical object that either exists in nature such as trees, mountains, animals, humans, etc. or from man-made items such as chairs, houses, shoes, etc. Furthermore, in the literary arts such as poetry, the act of imitation occurs in the presentation of what the various characters have to speak in such a manner as to make the readers or listeners believe that it is the character themselves that are speaking. Drama also consists of not just speech but acting and extending gestures and expression, so as to fully commit to the imitation of the feelings and expressions of the characters of the story [92].

Even though Plato has mentioned that art forms such as painting and sculpture is limited to copying the external surface of physical things, in contrast to art forms such as poetry and drama which also includes imitation of the character's feelings and emotions through speech, bodily and gestures, which are super-sensuous in nature; however, observing sculptures such as *Laocoon and his Two sons* [Plate 2.2], one can easily recognize with the feeling of pain and horror of the characters carved in marble. These physical manifestations of super-sensuous elements such as pain and anguish are represented by the realistic rendering of the furrowed eyebrows, the mouth opened in pain, agony and fear.

Plato's student, Aristotle also made significant contributions to the theory of imitation. He stated that human actions right from birth are mimetic and human beings as

children who learn through imitation and that the capacity to produce a product of imitation is a special quality of the poet or the artist [93]. Aristotle agreed with his teacher up to a certain point that art is an imitation, but he modifies the theory of Imitation into the theory of Representation. His work 'Poetics' initiated a new and revolutionary way of approaching art and has been considered as a priceless contribution to aesthetic theory.

Aristotle's Poetics is considered to be a critical response to Plato's criticism against art. For Aristotle, imitation is more precisely 'Representation'. The work of art such as poetry, drama, painting, sculpture imitate by taking an instance from human actions and will and then these are represented in a new medium or material such as colors, carved sculptures or words. Imitation is not a copy of the shadow of the world of ideas as stated by Plato before Aristotle but it is actually a representation of the ideal reality. Works of art such as poetry achieves idealism by taking up and presenting the essentials and removing the insignificant and transient. Imitation thus in this context is a representation of a deeper reality. For example, a tragic poem represents a character better than average. This would not be possible where the imitations are just copies of the exterior appearances only [94].

According to Aristotle, 'mimesis' is an active aesthetic process. He states that the ability of imitation is given to us by nature, and human beings are endowed with this gift, so as to gradually develop them, and finally create a work of art. In a manner of speaking the poet or artist does not imitate reality but conveys about reality into existence through mimesis. The poet or artist takes inspiration from nature and the already known familiar facts of reality, and then presents them as a work of art through paintings, dramas and poetry in a fresh and attractive way to his viewers and audience.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle states,

Since the objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be either of a higher or a lower type (for moral character mainly answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being the distinguishing marks of moral differences), it follows that we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. [95]

The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects-things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. [96]

According to Aristotle, the reality that is presented to the viewers through the imitation of nature is far superior and universal than the actual object as it exist in nature not only because we are pleased to learn through imitation but also since such kind of truth is superior. The artist or poet creates something that did not exist previously and for which there are no previously existing model. Even while dealing with historical contexts, the artist or poet need to design and produce it in such a way that it is in accordance with his work reaching to a higher level than found in actual reality. Art is fictitious and fabricated but the imitative and aesthetic nature of art encompasses these fictitious deviations and it presents the things to appear as something more beautiful and better than nature [97].

For Aristotle, art has the potentiality to represent deeper insights of the material world and hence it can lead us to the real in a way. He did not agree with Plato's view about the existence of ideas as independent from matter. It is important to note that, according to Aristotle, that while painting or sculpting, the artist is not reproducing the original object but rather a representation of that object. While imitation is the style and technique of art, representation is the ideal objective of art. The style and method has to be imitative since as already established earlier, it is through imitation that the artist can project resemblance between nature and art [98].

Aristotle thinks this is a necessary part of the human society for man to discover that they have such emotions and feelings which would not normally be manifested in everyday life. This can lead the spectators to develop sympathy for the suffering characters, and then it purges their narrow mindedness and makes them learn to identify with the tragedies, horrors and miseries of real life. Another important point that Aristotle stated is that while painting or sculpting, the artist is not actually reproducing the original object. Imitation in this context is not possible because if an artist could make art objects exactly as the original, then in a sense he would be equal to God or the creator, and there would no difference between the objects made by the artists and the things made by God [99].

The characteristic of realism in art is sustained by the act of imitation and up to this point Aristotle agrees with Plato that such kinds of imitations are of the external sensuous forms only. However, there is a major shift in Aristotle's theory in that he considers the act of representational aspect more important than the presentation of mere

forms. The said representation is inner truths, emotional bonds and complexities of life such as happiness, love and sadness. These elements are not imitated but represented in the forms of contents. According to Aristotle, this is the ultimate goal of art and not imitation simply for the sake of imitation. He believes that all forms of art have the ability to represent various aspects of life, but literary arts such as poetry, drama and epics has the greatest potentiality to represent the most vital facets of life. His theory of catharsis points towards the capability of dramatic tragedy to move spectators thoroughly and by arousing pity and fear for the suffering character, it brings about a purging of his narrowness of mind, and makes him able learn and be aware of the sufferings of humanity in general [100]. In dancing, rhythm alone is used without ‘harmony’; for even dancing imitates character, emotion, and action, by rhythmical movement [101].

Thus, bringing into consideration some of the above perspectives from Aristotle’s view on mimesis, what was once considered as unacceptable and objectionable in Plato’s view of art was completely contrasted by Aristotle’s perspective. From the Aristotelian scheme, art now seems to occupy a superior position to that of nature, which is plain and mundane. Art weeds out the insignificant and drab details of nature and achieves idealism by presenting a more beautiful higher form of truth. However, the representation of the various aspects of life are more profound in literary arts such as poetry, drama and epics, as their medium, such as the usage of speech grants them more flexibility for expressing deeper human emotions and the complexities of human life. However, taking into account, the visual arts such as paintings and sculptures, except for a few Hellenistic sculptures like *Laocoon and his Two Sons* [Plate 2.2], most of classical sculptures are more revolved around the ideal physical representation of gods and the dynamic muscular postures of athletes using the so called “beautiful men and women” of their society as their models, as can be seen in the sculpture of *Aphrodite of Knidos* [Plate 2.3] by Praxiteles and *Discobolus* [Plate 2.4].

The theory of ‘Catharsis’ was one of the major contributions of Aristotle to the study of art and aesthetic experience. However, before him the various aspects of cathartic doctrine had already been anticipated by Plato at many instances in his dialogues. The catharsis doctrine was not a completely new and fresh creation of Aristotle’s philosophy. The idea of catharsis was already prevalent in ancient Greece as a religious doctrine way before philosophy, and thus, aesthetics came into existence in Greece. Aristotle as a thinker had simply adopted the ideas and the doctrines of catharsis



along with some modification, and thereby applying it to art and aesthetic experience to illuminate the nature of the effect of a tragic performance to the audience. The generally accepted meaning of catharsis is purification. It is the ridding of something which is undesirable [102].

Aristotle believed in the power of tragedy in drama as a form of simulation which evokes and arouses extreme emotions from the viewers of the drama. He strongly believed that these forms of emotions evoked by tragedy are essential for people to experience from time to time because these levels of emotions are not achieved during our everyday mundane life. However, in tragic dramas, the representation of the characters and their emotions and passions are more idealized than what is actually in real life, and thus it arouses a more powerful reaction from the viewers. Imitation here as well is not imitation as it is, but it is imitation in refined and idealized form to seek a deeper level of emotions, thoughts, understanding of human nature and characteristics. If it was imitation as it is, there would be nothing new for the artists to bring in to his art, and would just be a pale and imperfect copy of nature which neither serves a purpose nor have its own qualities as an object of art. Therefore, selective imitation and imitation as it should be was the framework of Aristotle's contribution to one of the earliest aesthetics theories. It is sometimes necessary for the artists to distort reality in order to express his disgust of life [103].

Aristotle being an ancient Greek philosopher attempted to recognize the act of representing reality in art only through the method of imitation. However, nowadays in the modern era, people and artists have created many more techniques of representation which have been adopted by the artists such as abstraction, idealization, distortion, caricature, symbolization, etc. [104].

The above statements is particularly significant while specifically looking towards the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde movements which makes use of the heavy distortion and abstraction to distort reality so as to attain a higher form of truth. According to Gupta, since representation of life could be attained by other means such as distortion and abstraction instead of imitation, it does not completely rule out the fact that even the most abstracted image can be a representation of something instead of existing as a completely independent object which is an end in itself.

The first venture towards a more symbolic form of art after the prevailing Greco-Roman tradition of accurate anatomies and realistic features would come with the advent of the art of the middle ages, where the approach was more symbolic rather than imitative, leaning more towards Christian iconography as seen in mosaic of *The Raising of Lazarus* [Plate 2.5]. It was only with the arrival of the Renaissance, that the older tradition of Classical Greek's humanistic approach to art was revived.

One of the unique features of the middle age was its passion and search for the unattainable which was beyond their reach. Only such passion found expression in their art. And so, there was very little reality in such endeavors and resulted entirely in a matter of imagination [105]. After centuries of the traditions of the Middle Ages, scholars and thinkers finally shifted their attention from the inquiry of heaven and earth, the search for salvation towards the earth and humans. Humanism, individualism and secularism was propagated by the Renaissance thinkers [106].

Even though the Renaissance revived the ideas and philosophies of Greek classical texts, the art of Renaissance yearned for a spiritual aspiration that was characteristic of the middle ages which was now infused with the Greek classical ideologies. The ideals of Christianity and the middle ages had profoundly influenced the lives of people of that time, resulting in men turning their glance inwards, exploring the soul's hidden mysteries. Therefore, while the quest of the Greek artist was the achievement of the abstraction of ideal beauty which resulted in a certain sameness in their works, the Renaissance leaned more towards the expression of individual countenance and form. In this manner, the majority of modern art had followed the principles of the Renaissance, and not of antiquity. Such passion for individuality led painting to become the favorite art of Renaissance, just as sculpture was to Greece. While Sculpture was best suited for the creation of ideal types, painting achieved the perfect depiction of individual expression [107]. Some of these central principles in the work of Renaissance art can be observed in the works of Botticelli's *Primavera* [Plate 2.6], Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* [Plate 2.7] and Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* [Plate 2.8].

Symbolic gestures play important part in the compositions, such as in *Primavera* [Plate 2.6], the central figure of Venus is raised which stresses her symbolic significance in merging classical and Renaissance ideas concerning love and beauty. Furthermore, it

also acts as a division between “spiritual love” (the Three Graces) and “Physical love” (Zephyr’s ravishing of Chloris) [108]. In *The Last Supper* [Plate 2.7] also, much happens within the pictorial composition after Jesus’ announcement to the apostles. “Peter’s hands grasping the knife, Judas leaning away from Jesus, forming the biggest diagonal away from Jesus, and his face being the only apostle whose face is in the shadows, which is symbolic of evil [109]. Instead of giving Jesus a halo, Da Vinci has framed his head with a window instead, giving a vista of the world outside, which is symbolical of his human plight rather than stressing on his divinity [110]. The same kind of emphasis on gestures is also stressed on Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* [Plate 2.8]. Gods fingers reaching out to Adam is expressive of God’s relationship with humankind [111].

## **2.2 A Study of 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Art from the Perspective of Kant, Hegel and Croce’s Aesthetic Theories**

Both Kant and Hegel were two of the most prominent philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who contributed significant views and theories regarding aesthetics and the fine arts. While Kant’s doctrines has primarily been associated with the development of Formalism and the formalist aesthetics, however, Hegel’s views are regarded as an alternative, content-based approach which also takes into consideration the social and historical context in which artworks are created and comprehended [112].

Kant’s theories stated in the *Critique of Judgment* is a forbiddingly technical product and its proper interpretation still remains the topic of on-going controversy even among Kantian scholars. Kant states that when one makes a judgment of taste, we do not merely declare our subjective personal preference of an object, but rather raise a claim which we regard valid for other people as well. Even though aesthetic appreciation is grounded according to one’s subjective feelings, we consider these feelings as having a peculiar form necessity, because we implicitly demand other people to respond in the same way while making a judgment of taste. With regards to the judgment of taste, Kant points out that people are entitled to bring up the claim to universality only when we are sure that the pleasure derived from the object is exclusively due to the harmony of faculties. However, there are also many other domains for pleasure in an object and Kant’s presentation of the inter-subjective credibility of judgments of taste involves extremely strict constraints on that which may be considered an example of this sort of judgment. By presenting these circumstances, Kant established what have proved to be

one of his most argumentative, yet also one of his most influential views. This is the part of his argument which has been adopted by later thinkers which resulted in him having the reputation as one of the founding fathers of a formalist approach to aesthetics [113].

In the *Critique of Judgements*, Kant states,

The satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object is called “interest”. Such satisfaction always has reference to the faculty of desire, either as its determining ground. Now when the question is if a thing is beautiful, we do not want to know whether anything depends or can depend on the existence of the thing, either for myself or for anyone else, but how we judge it by mere observation. [114]

We easily see that, in saying that it is *beautiful* and in showing that I have taste, I am concerned, not with that in which I depend on the existence of the object, but with that which I make out of the representation in myself. Everyone must admit that a judgment about beauty, in which the least interest mingles, is very partial and is not a pure judgment of taste. [115]

Kant’s philosophy is based on the philosophy of *a priori*. Therefore, his main contribution to aesthetics is the establishment of the primary *a priori* principle of judgment of taste to which the aesthetic experience is due. According to him, this principle is none other than the principle of purposiveness without purpose, or in subjective purposiveness. According to Kant, aesthetic experience is that type of experience of harmony between free imagination and free understanding, closely tied up with the mere apprehension of the form of an object of intuition, and that it is purely subjective. It is also different from the experience of the good and the pleasant. It is disinterested in nature. Kant also talks about the judgment of taste and how it has nothing to do with understanding an object on the empirical level [116].

The Judgment of taste does not concern itself with the utility or purpose of the object. It is not bound with the consideration of the object in its material aspect but it relates to the formal aspect only. When one judges an object to be purposive, it means that the object stands for the idea for an end which it is supposed to serve. “It is the manifestation or representation of an abstract element under the influence of an idea. However, according to Kant in the case of aesthetic judgment, one is free from interest in

the material facet of the object and is concerned with the form only and its relation to the faculty of representing it to themselves [117].

Kant's theories, thereby proposes that when considering the beauty of an object, one should be concerned solely with the formal qualities of that object without presupposing any external purpose, content or concept of what it represents or what it is meant to be. Even though Kant's statements are primarily concerned with objects of natural beauty rather than works of art, they have been used as an entrance to a strictly formalist approach to aesthetics. Taking Kant's statement into account, aesthetic appreciation thereby primarily requires that we strictly take into account, its outward appearance, which is abstracted from any moral, social or political content, which it is seen to represent. Thereby, resulting in the viewer directing their attention exclusively towards its formal qualities rather than its representational qualities. Kant's work is regarded as a significant philosophical background for such views [118].

Formalist aesthetics principles seemed to particularly adhere to the account for modernist works of art which came long after Kant's time. Therefore, it is no surprise that the biggest support for formalism came from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by art critics such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell. The distortions in the works of their contemporaries such as Gauguin and Cezanne can be explained in regards with the emphasis on formal properties of the work rather than illusionistic depiction. Bell, in particular, was concerned with the denial of the significance of representational or narrative characteristics of an artwork. For painting to achieve this sort of purity, it must forsake all narrative and representational aspect which properly belongs to the domain of literature and the three-dimensional space, which is the concern for sculpture. The tendency of modernist painting is embracing flatness, recognizing the properties of shapes and the properties of pigments. Even though formal features are inherent in all painting, Greenberg states that it is only with the development of modernism and abstract art in particular that painting was freed from all inessential burdens [119].

The Post-Impressionists, even though grouped together in one movement, had their own unique style of approach to their works. Post-Impressionist such as Cezanne and Seurat reasserts formal and structural aspects through their art, and on the other hand, Gauguin and Van Gogh ventured more into the emotional content. Post-Impressionism would have profound influences on some of the later, most significant avant-garde movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [120].

Cézanne is of the same generation as the Impressionists, developing his Post-Impressionism in tandem with the rise of that style. From 1864 to 1869, Cézanne submitted intentionally crude, dark, intensely worked paintings depicting mysterious,

morbid, and anonymous orgies, rapes, and murders to the Salon. These works were rejected, as the anti-bourgeois, anti-academic Cézanne knew they would be. In part, they were meant to shock and disgust the jurors. Cézanne's art became increasingly abstract in the last ten years of his life, as can be seen in *Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Bibemus Quarry*[Plate 2.9], painted from 1897 to 1900 [121].

Mont Sainte-Victoire was a favourite theme, almost an obsession, as it appeared in over 60 late paintings and water colors. The deep vista that was seen in the earlier view of the mountain has now been replaced with a more compressed version. The overlapping of representational objects is one of the few devices suggesting depth. Otherwise, the image is an intense network of carefully constructed brushstrokes, lines, and colors that begs to be read as an intricate space less tapestry. The foreground trees bleed into the quarry rock, or on the upper right into the sky. The sky in turn melds into the mountain, from which it is distinguished only by the defining line of the summit. No matter how flat and airless, the image, as with any Impressionist picture, paradoxically is also filled with light, space, and movement. Looking at this hermetic picture, one cannot help but feel how the tension and energy of his early romantic pictures were suppressed and channelled into a struggle to create images that balanced his direct observation of nature with his desire to abstract nature's forms. It is the work of the painter most responsible for freeing the medium from a representational role and giving artists license to invent images that instead adhered to painting his own inherent laws [122].

While Cezanne's concern was primarily with the structural quality of the work, one can notice the emphasis of bright and unnatural colors in the work of Gauguin such as *The Yellow Christ* [Plate 2.10]. Certain publications have given analysis on the symbolic quality of the composition. However, from a formalist perspective, color seems to be the main concern. Post-Impressionist artists such as Cezanne, Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin are critical in understanding modern art because they act as a connecting bridge between the representational and the abstractions of later developments in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The works of Cezanne is one of the most significant and important in the development of the modern art of the 20th century and leading up to abstraction by influencing major modern artists such as Pablo Picasso.

After Post-Impressionism, some of the most prominent precursors to pure abstraction would be the development of avant-garde movements such as Fauvism,

Cubism and German Expressionism. These movements brought about a huge change in both formal properties of the works and also their emotive contents. Fauvism and Cubism is mainly concerned with the formal properties of works displaying distorted, exaggerated and unnatural colors and patterns respectively. Whereas, German Expressionism was more focused on the expressive qualities achieved by the use of unnatural colors and distorted figures.

Although the Fauves gave more emphasis on bright and wild colors, one can also make out a tendency to go towards distortion of forms and by extent inclined towards abstraction. This can be seen when one studies the artworks of some of the major fauvists such as Henri Matisse. The forms in fauvist works comprised purely of color and vigorous patterns along with unconventional color combinations which resulted in creating a startling effect. The works of the Fauvists, to a large extent, were derived from Gauguin's symbolist use of color. Even though there is abundance of lines in Fauve paintings, it was the vivid, non-naturalistic usage of color, and the emotional liveliness that struck the viewers [123].

The style was in a sense expressionist in nature, and generally painted landscapes and figures in which the forms were distorted. Moreover, Fauvism gave importance to individual expression. The artist's direct experience of his surrounding and environment and his emotional response to all of this, and his own intuition were given more importance than the traditional academic theory or elevated subject matter. All elements of the paintings were executed towards this goal. One of the significant contribution of Fauvism to modern art was its radical attempt of separating color from its representational and descriptive purpose and allowing it to exist on the canvas and acknowledging it as an independent element. Color could invoke a mood or feeling and build up a form within the artwork without having to be true to the natural world. Another of Fauvism's artistic endeavor was the all-round harmony and balance of the composition. The Fauves' distorted and simplified forms and vivid colors drew attention to the intrinsic flatness of the paper or canvas. Matisse's *Interior with Eggplants* [Plate 2.11] is a typical example. Within that pictorial area, each element had specific role. The ultimate visual impression of the artwork is to be rigid, cohesive and unified [124].

Matisse's *Woman with the Hat* [Plate 2.12] of 1905 is a composition constructed in color, which is a concept he learned from Cezanne. Throughout the picture plane,

elements such as perspective, shading and modelling are secondary to color, which creates the attributes. The resultant figure is a non-organic mask like quality. The background of the painting is made up of only patches of color [125].

Before the idea of “art for art’s sake” became popular around the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kant had given statements on the nature and purpose of an object of beauty as existing as an independent entity free from purpose, social and personal utility in the *The Critique of Judgment*. According to his theory, while viewing art, the subject matter, content and any other external obligations were not the purpose of art. Art should not have to rationalize any reason for existing, and valued as an object which represents something other than itself. Thereby, his theory elaborates on the disinterested pleasure derived from a work of art, which means the appreciation of beauty not for any external purposes or utility but fully for its own sake. His theory leans towards the notion that the purpose of art is to be purposeless, to be purposive without purpose. Therefore, the way the spectator evaluates, criticize or appreciate the works are fully generated by the disinterested aesthetic pleasure which is completely detached from the worldly issues and agendas [126].

Coming after Kant, Hegel shared similar views with him as well as differed from Kant in other certain aspects. Hegel believed that human beings’ way of making sense out of things such as art, religion and the rudimentary principles of life itself develop over history. Therefore, Hegel takes into account not only the formal aspects of art, but also its content. He is also interested and concerned with history of art along with its ever changing relationship with other aspects of human society, such as religion and philosophy. He established the above three elements, i.e., art, philosophy and religion as ways of apprehending the ‘absolute’ or the nature of things. According to Hegel, art apprehends the absolute through sensory intuition, philosophy through conceptual thought and religion through pictorial imagination [127].

Hegel acknowledged three different levels of human experience: sensuous, super-sensuous and rational. The sensuous level is brought about by our experience of the natural world. This is the level in which one’s daily routine is involved. The super-sensuous level rises above the sensuous level and it is free from sense-contact. At the super-sensuous level, the mind now liberated from sensuous reality and boundaries, brings forth the work of art molded from its own resources. Thereby, artistic intuition is



realized at this level. At this level, the content of experience is brought about by the inner resources of the mind and not from nature. This level also bridges the gap between the sensuous and the rational. Thereby, in Hegelian aesthetics, this level is placed higher than the sensuous, but lower than that of Reason [128].

It is true that art provides the platform for contemplation of oneself and the world in a way that purposive activities do not. However, Hegel is more concerned with the role of art in the development of mind over history. Before the advent of the Greeks, art was symbolic, expounding its meaning by perceptible qualities that displayed features in correspondence with what it represents, such as mythical gods and deities. However, it does not physically resemble the subject. Such form of art were prevalent in countries such as India, Persia and Egypt, in which they sought ways to express meanings that was too subtle to be satisfactorily conveyed in a perceptible form [129].

Such criteria could be observed in tantric diagrams such as the *yantra* [Plate 2.13], in which each abstract elements of the visual diagram such as the dot, interlocking triangles, square, circle and the lotus form are symbolic of the of the creation of the universe. Such underlying structures of the universe are seemingly impossible to be represented with perceptible forms such as human figures. However, tantric diagrams such as in the *yantra* combine all its abstract components neatly into a composite whole to become a symbolic representation of the very process of creation. It is also thereby not surprising that 20<sup>th</sup> century modern artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian took interest in such forms as Klee did to Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Architecture was one of the viable art-form, handling the natural forces of matter and weight. The subject in which such art ventures towards is too abstract to bring order into the natural world. Thus, nature is left abandoned, and such condition is reflected by the materiality of symbolic art. The human body is not represented properly. However unsatisfying this aspect of symbolic art is to some, it still fulfills the role of representing the mind of its creator and spectator. However, with the classical art of the Greeks, the art of sculpture prevailed, which differed from architecture. Sculpture instead represented the human being or the god freed from the nature it has tamed. The sculptures did not strive toward anything unexpressed and no detail was redundant, thereby resulting in an art that was no longer symbolic. With such art, the essence or the intrinsic values of the world was realized in human form, and thus the world reflects the human mind [130].

The Greeks lived closely to the perceptible surface of things before philosophy prevailed. Their mental life was reflected in the demeanor of their bodies and the artistic representation of them in the form of sculpture. However, under the influence of philosophy and Christianity, the human mind began developing an inner mind of thought and imagination which could not be expressed [131].

Hegel puts forth and criticizes some of the more popular guiding principles of artistic creations left by his predecessors. He criticizes some of the popular views that art is an imitation of nature, presentation of emotion, moral improvement of viewers and purging of passion. Principles of art as an imitation holds that artistic aim is the activity of copying nature in such a way that the end result fully correspond to actual facts and the success of such imitation lies in complete satisfaction brought by precise presentation of nature [132].

Hegel criticism of imitation states that, the acceptance of the theory of imitation means forsaking the independent value of art and according to this, art becomes a bare crude repetition of what is already experienced in the physical world. Imitative art produces at most only one of the sensuous features, thereby, creates an illusion which is addressed to only one sense. Various external objects appeal to different sensuous aspects, such as sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. However, artistic creations in accordance with imitation theory are imitation of one sensuous aspect only, namely, which is addressed to the eye or the ear. Therefore, on the sensuous aspect, they are inferior to objects of nature. Imitative artistic creation would be in a sense lifeless or soulless because imitation is possible only of what is sensed i.e. objectively known. Moreover, the theory of imitation does not apply to all arts. It may apply to painting and sculpture but it becomes obsolete when analyzing the properties of other forms of art such architecture, music and poetry [133].

During his time, Hegel was one of those few philosophers for whom the beauty of nature had no importance whatsoever. Nature's status, as a reflection of God, or natural beauty as a datum of purposiveness was of no significance to him. For him, nature is spiritless, or void of meaning, even mundane. Hegel claims that the painting of a landscape is the proper object of human attention and speculative contemplation, and not the natural landscape itself. Just like the landscape painting, in a Kafkaesque claim, the portrait painting of a person can be more like the person than the person himself. When

such natural objects are portrayed in an aesthetic manner, it develops a defined sort of content of what it is inside. Through art, the natural object becomes suffused with a human meaning for the first time. Hegel notes that, it is as if an artistic touch transforms every sensible surface into an eye. Hegel claims that, fine arts, and its history should be comprehended as liberation from nature, not a rejection of its implicit insufficiency but the achievement of a mode of self-understanding no longer set or limited by nature [134].

Such views from Hegel could be noticed when one observes the works of early 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic artists such as J.M.W Turner and Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes. For example, in the Turner's painting, *Rain, Steam and Speed-The Great Western Railway* [Plate 2.14], one can easily recognize that it is the simple composition representing a train along with its natural background on a rainy, stormy day. However, Turner's signature use of wild and visible strokes renders the painting the untamed side of nature that people hardly notice in their everyday life. Through the eyes of Turner, and his own rendering on canvas, one can now find the contemplation on the elements of nature that people usually ignore in day to day life. Similar thing happens with his another painting, *The Fighting Temeraire, Tugged to her Last Berth to be Broken Up* [Plate 2.15]. The painting shows the old warship Temeraire towed up to be later torn down for scraps. Turner's style of presentation in the painting gives a very personal touch to the old ship, almost as if it had human-like qualities, waiting to die after it served its purpose. The subtle rendering of the setting sun radiating an embracing warmth gives the feeling of calmness before death comes. The painting does not seem like a plain recording of the ship's last moment but is infused with highly human-like characteristics. Thus, Hegel's view of contemplation on a work of art rather than nature itself is cohesive when one studies such works.

After a long involvement with strict and precise academic realism, the first signs of breakaway from these conventional representations can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century art movement 'Impressionism', but in history, the oldest recorded man-made marks were not representational. They were highly stylized and symbolic images which leaned towards abstraction. These images range from hundreds of thousands of years to tens of thousands of years ago. It may be stated that human beings started as abstractors and later moved closer towards realism in the West starting from ancient Greek art before moving back to abstraction more recently. Therefore, in a manner of speaking, abstract art is the first and foremost ancient art [135].

Western art moved rapidly towards skilful copying, stylized representation of status, and then returned to painting day to day life and ordinary people. By the mid-1850s, the photographic camera had become popular which could create a realistic record of the physical surrounding. With the invention of the camera, the artists started searching for new approaches to their work, and this gave the artists the freedom to think once again and to free themselves from the constraints of copying and the illusion of likeness. The need to paint exactly what they see in front of them and what is there was re-thought. Impressionism was the first art movement to break away from the long running tradition of copying and painting completely realistic images, and moved towards distortion [136].

However, in the impressionist paintings, viewers could still make out recognizable forms such as landscapes, figures and everyday objects. The paintings are not represented as they are in nature, but through the loose brushstrokes and flecks of raw colors. As can be observed in the Monet's *The Waterlily Pond* [Plate 2.16] and *Woman with a Parasol* [Plate 2.17], the loose brushstrokes and the flecks of raw colors are some of the most distinguished features of the Impressionist paintings. Common themes such as simple landscapes with a pond or even as simple as a scene of an afternoon lunch are represented in their paintings. However, the formal properties of these paintings would have a strong impact on later developments such as Post-Impressionism.

Impressionist style paintings developed in Paris during the 1860s made its way till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Different from Realism, Impressionism was least concerned with political events and rarely reflected such subject matter. Instead, the Impressionist painters were mostly interested in leisure activities, landscapes, picnics, and entertainments. Impressionists were interested in optical realism and the natural properties of light. They were more concerned with the changes in light and color as an effect of weather conditions, times of the day and season. Despite being rejected as unfinished, sketchy works by their contemporaries, Impressionism had a more profound impact internationally in the long run than the preceding styles that France had accepted [137].

The modern culture of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century may be familiar with the central significance related with immediate experience and the empirical ideal, however, concepts such as “experience” are more convoluted, and may be viewed in different and contradictory ways. During the time of the Impressionists, one of the meanings the

concept of “experience” had in philosophical reflection was more of the constant flow of impressions, rather than a convergence with real, autonomous object in the world [138].

Later developments following Impressionism witnessed the works of the Post-Impressionism, whose works broke through the limitations set by the Impressionists. However, they do share the Impressionists’ concern and emphasis on the use of bright colors and distinct visible brushstrokes. The more peculiar features of the Post-Impressionist are that their forms do not dissolve and their boundaries are outlined and defined by clear outlines and sharp color separations [139]. These artists presented their own interpretation of objects and their surrounding through distortions and exaggerated color and brush works. Although the viewers could make out the original source of the images such as hills, trees, houses, human figures, etc. yet the paintings were far away from the accurately detailed and realistic manner of academic art.

A lot more distorted than Turner and the impressionist works, however, a very similar characteristic can be observed in the works of post-impressionists such as Van Gogh. His painting, *The Starry Night* [Plate 2.18] is undoubtedly one of the most iconic works in art history. Van Gogh’s style of depicting the landscape outside is not just a plain imitation of nature, but an expressive array of vibrant energy which takes place through the artistic lens of Van Gogh’s own inner turmoil infused with the way that he sees his surroundings.

The ultimate end of art is a highly subjective topic because, according to the situational needs it can be one thing or the other. It can also even be used as a means of mere amusement or pleasure. It can also serve as a decorative object for the surrounding. With such factors, art is not liberated and free from external needs and subservience. Fine art is not art in the true sense of the term, until and unless it is liberated from such servitude to external ends. According to Hegel, the ultimate end of art is to reveal the divine to the consciousness of the connoisseur. It functions as a medium for revealing the profoundest interests of mankind, a wide extent of spiritual revelations, intuitions and ideas through its forms. The ultimate end of art shares the same as that of philosophy and religion. However, it differs from philosophy and religion as it reveals the divine, in sensuous form [140].

Hegel states that painting is one level abstracted from the three-dimensional structure of sculpture because it reflects three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional

plane. Moving further on, music is again abstracted from space altogether and conceives itself with time, which according to Hegel is more ideal than space. Furthermore, as far as music is concerned, it does not mirror the events or objects of the physical world, but the essence of the mind itself, even though music bends more towards the emotional rather than the intellectual. Hegel, in his philosophy always strove to avoid one-sided views and to include with a sovereign objectivity, all the stages of the evolution of the mind. His inclusion of objectivity is also evident in account of the various aspects of art. The content and meaning of art is undoubtedly important, however, that does not mean that the significance of its formal qualities should be ignored. In Hegel's view, the significance of the content does not exclude the suggestion that art is in some sense an end in itself, and not just a disposable tool for some further purpose. Art can be both an end in itself or it can be a service to morality. The statement that, by Hegel's time, art had done everything that it could possibly do was annulled by the avant-garde movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century [141].

For Hegel, art serves as a means for the development of the mind. Therefore, Hegel's interest is not in the beauty of nature but with the beauty of art. For Hegel, the 'beautiful' is not restricted to "surface prettiness", but rather encompasses all artistic value of both form and content. For Hegel, the history of art is a form of gradual dematerialization, and the development of spiritualization of every forms of self-understanding. Sketching the trajectory of the evolution of art throughout history from various forms of art such as architecture, sculpture and towards painting, music and poetry is indicative of what would be the philosophical importance of these developments for Hegel [142].

The result is that human beings look for less and less sensible or representational images in order to understand themselves. Ironically, Hegel could never have foreseen the extent of freedom exercised by modern artists and he would have been without a doubt horrified by abstract art [143]. However, he seemed to have anticipated the shift in modernist understanding of artistic experience, which shifted from the beautiful and sensuous towards that of being reflexive and conceptual. Thereby, art had become more philosophical, and evoked a philosophical response rather than just purely aesthetic response [144].

The genesis of abstraction can be found and observed in Post-Impressionism. In their works, one might be able to recognize a picture of a person, but on a close up view it might have been constructed of geometric shapes and angles. For example, Georges Seurat created a style of abstraction with a technique known as pointillism. Pointillism is the technique of using dots to create people and places as in his painting of *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* [Plate 2.19]. Pointillism or Divisionism created a uniformed, if vibrant, surface that was a kind of systematized Impressionism [145].

The simplified and distorted works of Post-Impressionist artists such as Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Seurat dominated the art scene of early 20th century and gradually carved the path for the development of modern art. Apart from the Fauvists, the artists who were most concerned with expressive qualities of color, as derived from Post-Impressionism were the expressionist in Germany. The expressionists group outlasted the Fauves and their style prevailed until the outbreak of World War I during 1914. Much like Fauvism, Expressionism made use of color as a means to create mood and emotions but differed from Fauvism in its more inclination towards the emotional and spiritual possibilities of color and form. Moreover, unlike the Fauves, the Expressionists were also less concerned with the formal and structural composition of color [146].

The first group of German Expressionism was established by four German architecture students in Dresden and it was called *Die Brücke*, meaning “The Bridge”, which was so called because the artists’ intention was to create a “bridge”, or a link between their own art and the modern revolutionary ideas, and also between tradition and the avant-garde. This inclination towards bridging between the past and modernity was derived from the philosophy of Nietzsche who believed that society continuously wavers between progress and decline. The *Die Brücke* artists modernized both the spiritual abstraction of medieval art, and the exotic simplified and distorted geometrical aesthetic of African and Oceanic art by merging them with the mechanical forms of the city. Expressionists artists typically used vivid and vibrant colors and occasionally, garish ones too. The harsh angular shapes of the paintings are also reflective of a pessimistic view of society [147].

Such features of the Die Brücke artists could be observed in the works of artists such as Kirchner’s *Self-Portrait with a Model* [Plate 2.20] which is rendered in unnatural

colors and distorted proportions. Kirchner's face in the painting also displays a mask like quality which is reminiscent of African tribal masks.

The Expressionists admiration of Van Gogh and their more recent discovery of Matisse's works are all reflected in their Fauvist-like color liberated from representational role. Furthermore, the disturbing psychological undertones and the decorative patterns are reminiscent of Munch's works such as in *The Scream* [Plate 2.21]. Munch also had profound influences on the works of the German Expressionists [148].

Besides Die Brücke, the other major exponent of German Expressionism was *Der Blaue Reiter* (*The Blue Rider*), developed in Munich. Much like the Brücke artists, the artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* took up art forms from Western art history along with non-Western and folk art traditions to create images that reflect their skepticism towards modern, industrial life. Artists of *Der Blaue Reiter* were more inclined towards expressing a spirituality they believed existed underneath the surface of the visual world. *Der Blaue Reiter* was led by Kandinsky [149].

The Expressionist artists were some of the first in modern art to exploit the expressive qualities of colors and forms to create an artwork. The main goal of the Expressionists was to use flecks of colors, distorted forms and strokes so as to evoke some kind of emotion or feeling from the viewers. A significant amount of distortion and abstraction can be seen in the works of the Expressionists such as in the works of Franz Marc's *Fate of the Animals*[Plate 2.22]. In this work, one can see patterns of colors converging and intersecting one another. Marc invested color with a specific significance like red for domination and yellow for sensuality [150].

Working with figurative as well as abstraction, Paul Klee would emerge to be one of the most influential artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who was also a major influence on post-independence Indian artists as well besides figures such as Kandinsky and Mondrian. During 1901, Klee visited Italy and during his ventures he became familiar with High Renaissance painting, Baroque and that of the early Christian art from which he preferred the latter to that of the former two. During 1906 after his move to Munich, he became acquainted with the works of artists such as Van Gogh, Cezanne and Matisse through various exhibitions. They exposed him to the expressive properties of color and the appeals of what was considered artless and naive at that time [151].



One cannot judge his art as a representation of the phenomenal world. However, it cannot also be judged simply as formal compositions. The appeal of his work is mainly towards the subjective imagination. For these characteristics, his works have been compared to the drawing of children, who draw spontaneously relying on their intuitive impulses rather than observation or careful study. His works have also been compared to that of fantasy of the insane who dwell in a world far away from reality [152].

Such characteristics in Klee's work could be observed in his work such as *Castle and Sun* [Plate 2.23] where he has made use of bright colors and a simple childlike quality to achieve the venture into an unconventional realm. The structure and pattern of the composition is are geometric and abstract in nature rendering it a feeling of fantasy which can also be observed in children's drawings.

Art is regarded as an endeavor by the spirit to objectify or externalize its self-understanding into perceivable sensible form, and thus appropriate this externality as its own, and to express this self-understanding more successfully [153].

Such objectification and externalization of sensible forms in a quest for self-understanding may have been well achieved by the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde artists. By distorting figures and objects of nature into highly abstracted forms, they achieved a sort of individuality in their painting which is reflexive of their own vision of the world.

While Kant's concern was that of the validity of individual's response to an object of beauty, Hegel's concern was towards the meaning and content of the artworks [154]. Hegel's approach grants a significant alternative to formalism, taking into consideration, the importance of content to our appreciation of a work of art. Furthermore, it encompasses the reflection on historical developments [155].

For a long time in history, art had adhered to being an object of imitation and representation of the natural world or some external element but during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain philosophers developed new theories and outlook which was just as significant as the previous prevailing theories. The expression theory of art which was introduced by Eugene Veron and reinterpreted in various forms by thinkers such Tolstoy, Collingwood and Croce [156].

Expression in art as the name also suggest is the function of art in conveying our inner state of mind, such as different kinds of feelings, emotions on to the work of art.

Although the idea of expressing emotions is not really a new statement since ancient thinkers like Plato and Aristotle were already aware of the expressive power of art such as in the Aristotle's theory of catharsis, because the drama and poetry of those times also evoked some kind of emotional responses from the viewers. But during that time, these kinds of properties of art were not termed as Expression but rather they were considered as imitative or representational of the life around us. In the modern sense, the expression theory is more inclined towards art as a mode of expression itself and not as a mode of imitation or representation. In the modern context, a value of art is also measured on the basis of its expressive powers [157].

According to this, taking into consideration, the sculpture of *Laocoon and his Two Sons* [Plate 2.2], viewed from the Greek perspective of mimesis, the sculpture's most significant and striking feature would be its level of skill in able to recreate and represent in precise detail, the struggling body dynamic body posture and most importantly the representation of emotion such as fear and anguish through the facial expressions. However, from the modern context of art as expression, then instead of imitation, it would rather be the expression of emotion through the physical characteristics of the body postures and facial expression.

Croce is one of the most important thinkers regarding the Expression theory of art because according to his theory, he states that in the experience, the spectator becomes spiritually equivalent with the artist. The spectator has to rise to the level of the artist and he has to become one with the artist spiritually [158].

He established the theory that art is that activity of the mind which through its intuitive faculty expresses the images and the forms of the objects. For Croce, aesthetic experience is a purely subjective experience. It is intuition without any intellectual elements and it is the emotion which a work of art communicates. He holds that art is a form of intuition and that the aesthetic experience from that art is intuitive experience. Intuition and art in his view has no conceptual content. It is not a presentation of the universal in sensuous forms, but it is a presentation of the individual which is subjective [159].

According to Croce, there are two forms of knowledge, which are "intuitive knowledge" and "logical knowledge". The intuitive knowledge is the knowledge obtained through imagination and it is individualistic and subjective but the knowledge of the

universal is the logical knowledge and it is the opposite of intuitive knowledge since it is not the knowledge of the individual. It is productive of concepts and not images [160].

However, the statement which asserts that intuition is free from intellectual concepts does not mean for Croce that intuition is just mere sensation or mere formless matter. The mental activity starts with the internalization of external elements which presents itself in the form of sensations and the internalization of these outside elements are done by giving forms to these sensations by molding their abstract form into neatly formed images. For him, sensations are intuitions only when they are subjected to spiritual activity when they are formed, synthesized and expressed [161].

Intuition is that phase of activity which comes before perception and conception. It is by the virtue of intuition that the externality of matter loses its division from the mind, and it becomes a component of spiritual reality. The foremost shape that it attains is that of an image with its own unique peculiarities. It is clear, concrete and expressed. Hence, intuition is an expression also and therefore, Croce denotes the whole activity as “Intuition- Expression” [162]. There can be no pure intuition without expression and expression without intuition. For Croce, aesthetics does not depend on logical concepts and just like intuition it is concerned only with the individual and the immediate images. Imagination is independent of reason, and it comes even before perceptual apprehension of the things as real and unreal. Without imagination, art is never possible and therefore it is nothing but pure intuition-expression [163].

Intuitive activity possesses intuition to the certain level that it expresses them. The meaning of the word ‘expression’ is too restricted. In general, it is conceived as restricted to verbal expressions only. However, apart from verbal expressions, there also exist non-verbal mode of expressions such as color, pattern and sound. So, as observed, the intuition and expression of a poet is verbal expression while that of a painter is non-verbal expression [164].

As mentioned above, intuition is nothing but sensation, which has been subjected to spiritual activity and further objectified and expressed. It is a result of when feelings or impressions pass by means of words from the ambiguous domain of sensibility to the comprehensible domain of contemplative spirit. The mode of expression, whether it be color, pattern, sound or language does not make any difference to the fundamental nature of intuition. Croce also distinguishes between the ordinary and artistic intuition. Intuition

is not a special quality that only artists possess but it is something which is also capable by every other ordinary men, but the difference is the capability of the artist to observe the world around him more keener than the ordinary men which remain unnoticed by the people of ordinary sensibility and to be able to externalize these intuitions into a solid physical manifestation [165].

From the above observation, Croce theory of expression seems to find some identification with Hegel's perspective on art and nature when he stated that the object of art is above the object of nature. The external object only when fused with the artist's intuition and objectified and expressed becomes an object of contemplation. If the painting of *Temeraire* by Turner was done by a different artist, it might have been a very different painting or if the ship itself was observed by an ordinary person with ordinary sensibility, it might not have become the masterpiece that it is today. The perfect melancholic sunset and the color scheme that Turner chose seem to echo his own emotions when he viewed the ship.

Intuition is a part of the aesthetic expression and artistic vision. However, a work of art is a physical entity which serves as a mediator in the reproduction of that artistic vision. Art is a physical manifestation of the artist's thoughts, feelings and ideas and in order to objectify these abstract elements of the mind, the concrete embodiment is extremely necessary. The artist also needs these concrete manifestations to realize the beauty of his own thoughts and images and it acts as a concrete evidence of what he is capable of creating. The power of expression and the ability to give a concrete form to intuition is the one of the most important traits of an artist. An artist who lacks this ability cannot be called an artist. However, Croce feels that these physical embodiments are not needed for recognizing the beauty of the aesthetic expression since all these expressions are self-revealing according to him. It is only for the spectator that such physical embodiment is required. Croce accepts this as part of the artist activity though not the essence of aesthetic activity. The spectator who seeks out aesthetic experience from a work of art must place himself at the level of the artist and reproduce that artistic vision in himself through the help of the artwork [166].

Only when Turner brought his vision of the *Temeraire's* last moments on canvas, was then that people was able to be spiritually and emotionally identify with Turner's own experience of that very moment when he saw the ship tied up. Even with Van

Gogh's *The Starry Night* [Plate 2.18], his expressive and vibrant use of broken strokes and thick paints evokes his own experience of the starry night into that of the spectator when they observe his work.

There are also opinions against the theories of expression that these theories place the artists as more important than the artwork itself. According to the approach of these theories, it is the artist's own personality and character which molds the sensations to a personal expression by infusing it with his own emotions. Hence, it is necessary for the contemplator to know and understand the personality of the artist if he is to critique the work of art. So in a way, the artwork stays as a subordinate to the personality of the artist, and it can never be evaluated or appreciated as an independent entity existing on its own terms only [167]. From an aesthetic perspective, the physical appearance of the work of art has more important role and generally an art lover likes to appreciate the form, harmony of colors and balance which are objective in nature rather than showing curiosity in knowing the personality and the emotional background of the artist [168].

According to the above observations, the expression theory of art leans more towards the super-sensuous elements of life such as emotions and inner spirituality instead of the crude physical elements. which lacks the inner complexities of human life and emotions. Viewing it rather as an expression of certain emotions and spiritual state provides the spectator a deeper level of connection to the works rather than viewing it as an imitation or representation.

### **2.3 Color, Shape and Structure: Formalist Criticism and Modern Art**

Formalism developed from the idea of the 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic of "art for art's sake" which embodies the idea of art as an end in itself [169]. Adhering to the idea that art should serve as only the creation of beauty for its own sake gave rise to the idea of art for art's sake. It is a principle in which the value of art is not based on its social or moral purposes. According to the ideals of art for art's sake, art should be free from utilitarianism, which would only increase the involvement of art into the vulgar domains of everyday life and politics.

Therefore, by shielding it away from such social stains and obligations, art would retain its purity intact and become an entity which serves the purpose of manifesting beauty alone. Nevertheless, many controversies also arose with the theory of art for art's

sake. Detached from the happenings and agendas of life, art was deprived of its social and moral obligations. Artists who adhered to the principle of art for art's sake came to believe that beauty and the creation of beauty were the end purpose of art, and the only thing that mattered in life was the search for beauty. It failed to raise the complexities of life and address social issues leading it to be detached from society. It also limits the many possibilities that art can function in many other ways in the modern world, thus, locking art up in a closed formalist sphere [170].

Clive Bell is one of the most important exponents of formalism. He is firm with the statement that emotional reactions which consist mainly in disinterested pleasure from artworks are evoked by colors, patterns, shapes, outlines, the design and the structures, and all such aspects which are related to the formal qualities only. Paintings claim their aesthetic arousal in its characteristics such as bold outlines, the harmony of color combinations, the rhythms and symmetries in the shapes [171]. Bell also further states that there is nothing wrong with representing life in a work of art, nevertheless he warns that visual art such as painting and sculpture should be appreciated for their form only. He feels that art should be kept above and free from our human interests and purposes. For him, disinterested pleasure from art could only be aroused when spectators do not seek any sort of such human purposes in the works [172].

Formalism was one of the most important exponents in art criticism in the United States during the post-war era. During this time the flourishing of Western modern art shifted its centre from Paris to New York. Clement Greenberg was the leading figure of formalism during this era. He carried on the European formalist tradition that was established by Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Formalists like Greenberg believe that narratives and politics are irrelevant to art, and the presences of such elements in art deprive it of its purity. Even in the cases of artworks where, the artists have put their ideals and spiritual content, such as in the work of Kandinsky and Mondrian, Greenberg evaluated these works only taking into consideration, their formal qualities [173].

The symbolic content in modern art became more unintelligible as it became more abstract. As more abstraction was introduced and developed by the modernist painters such as Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian and American Abstract Expressionism, the intended meaning from the artists' perspective became more opaque. As the symbolic content in modernist art became more and more opaque, the artworks became more

vulnerable to misleading interpretations by the formalist critics who ignored the artists' perspective and their intentions with their works. According to Greenberg, the negation of irrelevant content was accomplished by the American "Abstract Expressionists". He believed that the high arts could shield themselves from the irrelevant influences of the popular cultures of the mass by becoming wholly self-reflective and abstract. Greenberg was a supporter of the idea of art for art's sake [174].

Many of the developments in modern art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to art which were detached from social, narrative, emotive contents and tendencies. They strove to exist purely as art which stands for itself. Many of such ideas can be seen in some of the works of the abstract artists. The pure play of harmony in colors and design without stressing on content and subject matter was a revolutionary idea of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, not all of these abstract tendencies were towards the idea of art existing as an independent entity without a particular purpose besides existing as art as in itself. However, some of the tendencies behind abstraction were not always just the arrangement and appreciation of pure formal qualities of the work. Several artists also used abstraction as a way to express themselves, their thoughts, emotions, the super-sensuous elements of the state of mind and to arouse the same level of mental state in the spectators as well. Artists sometimes used the expressive qualities of patterns and colors to evoke certain mood in the spectators. Instead of realistically rendering the forms, modern artists made use of exaggerated colors and shapes which heightened the emotive and expressive qualities of abstract forms.

Before the advent of modern art and the development of abstract art, art-forms such as architecture and music were frequently held up to painters as pure art, which did not feel the need to imitate the natural world but stood as a completely independent element. But, before abstraction or abstract art, such comparison between painting with music and architecture could not be accepted, since the contemporaries of that time had not yet witnessed a painting that was made up of entirely shapes and colors, devoid of any sort of representation [175].

Before the development of the idea of abstract art, the forms in the prevailing tradition of art belonged to some individual of a particular place whether they be historical or mythical, representing the ethos of that particular time in which they

originated from. Therefore, since such is the case, the statement that held that art was above history was not entirely true.

However, with the development of abstract art, the earlier claimed autonomy and absoluteness of aesthetics emerged in solid form. Painters finally had gained a form of art which dropped the burden of representation of people, history and time, thereby resulting in an art-form in which only aesthetic element was dominant, an absolute universal language made up of colors and shapes [176].

The pure independent forms once masked by extraneous content were now freed and could be directly perceived. This liberation also resulted in an image that cut across the barriers of time and place. The emergence of the principles of abstraction made it possible for people to enjoy images in which the objects are no longer intelligible. Even the simple drawings of children and primitive arts were shown a new light, which were previously considered as artless curios by critics. What was once viewed as monstrous, now became pure form and pure expression. Feelings and thoughts came before the representation of the physical world. With the elimination of representation, art now became universalized, available on a single unhistorical universal plane [177].

The above mentioned properties of abstract art, which is the elimination of natural forms and the unhistorical universalizing, have pivotal significance for the theory of art in general. The view that mathematics was independent of experience was also adopted by the modern abstract artists. Thereby, this resulted in abstract painting cutting off the roots of the classic doctrines of artistic imitation [178]. Art historian, Alfred H. Barr explains that representation in art is a passive mirroring of the physical world and thereby cannot be considered as essentially artistic. However, on the other hand, abstract art is a purely aesthetic activity, seeing that it is completely unconditioned by objects of a certain time, culture and place. It is based purely on its own eternal laws. According to Barr, representation of the physical or external world is a mechanical process of the eye and the hand, and that the artist's creativity and feeling have very little part [179].

In a platonic way, Barr had opposed and shunned the representation of the physical world as a crude rendering of only the surface aspect of nature. He considers the process and practice of abstract design as a discovery of the truer underlying mathematical structure of the world. He also states further, that the mind is most completely itself without the restraint of the need to represent the external world. If he nevertheless values certain older naturalistic works of art, he sees only the formal



construction of the picture and ignores the imaginative process. He abstracts the artistic qualities from the objects that are represented and their meanings and considers them as inevitable impurities with which the artist was burdened with. However, according to Schapiro, Barr's views are somewhat one-sided and grounded by mistaken idea of what representation actually is [180].

Opposing Barr's statement, according to Schapiro, both realism and abstraction assert the sovereignty of the artist's mind. With realism, it is the capacity to recreate the world minutely in and intimate field by a combination of abstract calculations of perspective and color. In abstract art, it is the ability to impose new forms on nature, to mould the abstracted elements of color and line freely without constraints, or to create patterns that corresponds to the subtle mental state of the artist [181].

For instance, the academic painter who follows the representational elements of art such as in romantic art was to express mood on canvas inspired by a certain landscape, he would paint the landscape itself. However, for abstract artists such as Kandinsky, he sought to find a completely imaginative equivalent of that mood using non-representational elements such as expressive colors and shapes. The mood in the abstracted image is very different from the mood in the realistic image. One mood is derived by a clear image of the object and the situation and the other hardly identifies with the conditioning object [182].

Kandinsky looks upon the mood as a function of his personality or a special faculty of his spirit and thereby, he selects the colors and patterns, which for him has the clearest correspondence to his state of mind. These images are not tied sensibly to the physical object but emerge independently as his own fantasy. It is the internality of his mood and is independent of the outside world. The physical objects that underlie the mood may resurface in the abstracted form in a masked and distorted manner. The most responsive viewer, thus, will be the ones that find the most recognition of the counterpart of his own feelings but a final discharge of those feelings [183].

The word 'abstract' implies something which is indistinct, difficult and something which is not easily understood at the first glance. Sometimes, abstract art can be based on real-life objects, natural forms, landscapes and living beings. But, unlike traditional forms of art, abstract art distorts, breaks down and goes beyond the concept and laws of nature and reality. It vaguely portrays these elements in a simplified and schematic way. But

abstract art necessarily does not have to be any of those things. On the contrary, an artist working in an abstract manner might want to make something which is striking, charming and attractive, leading us away from the earthly realities of everyday life. In other words, abstract artists sought for a vision through art for art's sake, pure and simple [184].

Abstraction can be attained with its own unusual value of being the reality or an end in itself. The artist does not feel the need to represent or imitate anything. Abstraction not only produces the pure form of non-representational objectivity as an end in itself but it seeks to explore the innermost emotions such as joy, pain, stress, curiosity, etc. which are abstract in nature. Thus, the key to abstract art also depends upon self-discovery and being able to manifest those feelings into a physical output in the forms of colors, patterns, shapes, etc. Many of the pioneer abstract artists exhibited their works as spiritual exploration and they have done justice to this method which is absolutely inconceivable without a sense of this purpose [185].

Kandinsky is regarded as the pioneer of pure abstraction by many sources. He was one of the first artists to completely abandon recognizable form, so as to produce pure forms of colors which stood for themselves. For example, his *Composition VII* [Plate 2.24] is a display of free-flowing forms which does not resemble anything in the external world. Kandinsky used a variety of contrasting colors placed next to one another so as to create a vibrant image. *Composition VII* is one of the paintings of his series which comprised of 10 large scale paintings painted between 1910 and 1939. It is a seemingly incomprehensible vortex of shapes and colors. It reflects Kandinsky's quest to affirm the need for spiritual awakening in art. At first glance, it seems to look as a product of spontaneous creativity, but it is in fact meticulously composed. There is a powerful diagonal thrust towards the upper right hand corner, and a further sense of fracture between the picture's left and right sides. To the right, the lighter, flatter forms and calmer rhythms symbolize the Garden of Eden [186].

Another key figure in the art of the 20th century was the Dutch-born artist Piet Mondrian. He is the inventor of Neo-Plasticism and was one of the major pioneers of pure abstraction, and a very important contributor to the De Stijl design movement led by Theo van Doesburg. But while he was intellectually influential to art, and accepted as one of the greatest abstract painters of all time, and one of the major figures in modern art of the early 20th century, he however enjoyed little commercial success during his

lifetime. He is best known for his solid and concrete art of the 1920s and 1930s which consisted of flat and plain blue, red and yellow rectangular forms which were separated by thick black lines. These geometric designs in his works are best seen in the real life rather than reproductions, as reproductions make them appear simplistic and bland [187]. Some of his most famous abstract paintings include *Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow and Black* [Plate 2.25]; and *Broadway Boogie Woogie* [Plate 2.26].

In Mondrian's work such as *Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow and Black* [Plate 2.25], he made use of Grid like structures and squares with different colors. Both horizontal and vertical lines are used to divide the picture planes into sections. His philosophy was based on theosophy. He was further influenced by the ideas of mathematician and theosophist, M. H. J. Schoenmaeker and especially Schoenmaeker's book *New Image of the World*. Schoenmaekers stated that there is an underlying mathematical construction of the universe that established true reality. He believed that an artist could access and exhibit this structure with rational manipulations of geometric forms. Mondrian developed an art based on such geometry and, he called it 'Neo-Plasticism'. By plastic in painting, he meant that the world of the painting had a plastic, or three-dimensional reality of its own that is parallel to the harmonious plastic reality of the universe. Therefore, he sought to represent in his art the concealed underlying structure of the cosmos. Starting from 1917, Mondrian struggled to attain this, using complete geometric abstraction, and afterwards succeeded in his efforts upon returning to Paris in the late 1910s. His paintings are noteworthy for their flawless harmony, which are always asymmetrical. Mondrian very accurately assigned every portion in his painting equal weight. Each and every line and rectangle in his paintings are assigned their own identities. Every line exists in its own right and not as a means of defining the colored rectangles and squares [188].

Abstraction in art by modern artists to express the complexities and spiritual aspects of life was achieved by tantra art centuries ago. Tantra artists saw the potentials in simple lines, geometrical shapes and something as simple as a single dot. Some of the pioneers of abstract art from the West, such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Klee sought to reach such spiritual aspects of art and believed that art was not simply just a visual manifestation but an embodiment of certain metaphysical concepts. Mondrian, being among the pioneers of pure abstraction, was interested in Hindu philosophy throughout

his life. He was inspired by the spiritual philosophy of the East, and sought in his work, a plastic expression of the underlying spiritual aspects of life [189].

Non-objective or abstract art goes beyond the limitation of representational art. Abstract art was the external embodiment of a spiritual revolution that materialized only in art. It plunged forward with Theosophy. Theosophy was founded in 1875 in New York as a universal religion. Theosophy went against the constantly rising materialism of the West and sought a revival of spirituality. Theosophy approached life in a mystic, oriental interpretation. In a paper by Peter Fingesten, he mentions that, according to the words of Hindu theosophical leader, Sophia Wadia, it was theosophy which acted as a bridge between the East and West and thereby making it possible for the spread of spiritual knowledge throughout the world [190].

Theosophy made huge impact and influenced leading philosophers, scientists, scholars, artists, etc. Artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky founded their aesthetic principles based on this theosophical philosophy. Mondrian believed and wrote in his notebooks that to attain the spiritual in art, one must use as much little of reality as possible because reality is opposed to spirituality. Above all, he wanted to capture the “pulsating rhythm of life”. Mondrian’s usage of grids of colors in his mature works rose from his monistic theory of the cosmos, because he believed that the physical manifestation of the universe is nothing but an illusion, and everything is spirit. The use of neutral color in his backgrounds is a uniformed continuum, the void or a state of Nirvana. He hoped to go beyond the perceptible physical sphere into that of the eternal. He turned away from nature, not just because it was an illusion to him, but also because, it was an ever-changing manifestation of the constant principles of the spirit. Mondrian acquired this monistic theory of life from the classic Hindu scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, which was popularized by theosophy in the West [191].

Kandinsky and Mondrian derived their aesthetic principles from theosophy, and according to Fingesten, tantric mandalas may have helped them in providing certain formal elements to their endeavor. In his earlier notebooks, Mondrian also gave indication that he believed in meditative practices. It is likely that he was familiar with associated diagrams used in the meditative practices. Kandinsky’s certain remarks also indicate towards his belief in the dormant spiritual potentials of geometric designs. He says that

geometric designs are expressive and rich in possibilities and it unwittingly elevates itself beyond painting and thereby, it is meant to be an admiration more for the soul and less for the eyes [192].

Kandinsky's inclination towards geometric composition can be observed in his painting such as *Composition VIII*[Plate 2.27], in which he has used geometric shapes such as circles, triangles, rectangular grids of various colors, independent line, semi-circles and such. Kandinsky's approach to art freed the artist's subconscious and considerably directed the passage for painting towards a direct manifestation of the artist's intuitions of the underlying inner principles of nature. Of course, this does not mean that all abstract artists are mystics or spiritual seekers, but all looked towards a more refined vision of the world and self-expression. The mature works of Kandinsky and Mondrian, indicates spectator towards nothing ever which is seen in the physical world. These new, original forms create new emotions with which one have to familiarize with. Observing the works of the pioneers of abstract art, the forms and colors they use were a priori filled with spiritual content that arouses a corresponding spiritual reaction from the spectator's soul [193].

When one studies the properties and nature of abstract art, colors and shapes become pivotal elements in appreciating the works, along with the occasional biography of the author which becomes important if the work is an embodiment of the artist's past experience, philosophy and identity. Often times, it is found that formalist approach becomes the primary approach to most works of pure abstraction. With such approach, the background of the aesthetic theories of philosophers such as Kant, who laid the foundation for formalism becomes primarily relevant. While some abstract artists use pure abstract forms, however, it is important to note the underlying principles behind such forms. Even pure abstractionists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian were heavily influenced by theosophical doctrines. Thereby, having a purely formalist approach also limits the core principles of such works.

Color also plays a very significant role for the modern artists, especially in pure abstraction where color and shapes becomes the dominant medium for expression. Exploring the properties of unnatural, exaggerated color schemes and combinations has allowed the artists to break through the barriers and limitations of mirror imitations.

While studying the formal features of abstract art, it is found that color, texture and shape plays a pivotal role. However, throughout the history of art, color still remains a comparatively neglected aspect, even though historians and theorists have attempted to tackle its properties and problems for more than a century. The strongest study of color in modern school was followed extensively in Germany, depending on a tradition of aesthetic formalism and philosophical phenomenology. The 17<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an extensive development in chiaroscuro, whilst color gained a new independence during the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of modern art. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the main emphasis was given on the objective status of color in the world, what its nature was, and how it could be arranged into a coherent system of relationship [194].

However, from the time of Newton, the emphasis became increasingly subjective, concerned more with the understanding of color as articulating the mechanisms of vision and perception. After the establishment of Newton's color theory, the aspects of color theory most interesting to artists have been the formulation of color systems as an addition to the theories of harmony and the study of how color relate to the inner-workings of perception and how the properties of certain color affect the spectators [195].

The interplay between colors and patterns became an important aspect especially for the pioneers of pure abstraction such as Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich. The impact of Theosophy and its substantial influence are also apparent in their usage of color and form and their opinions on the spiritual and societal roles of the modern artists [196].

Alderton, in his article, discusses about the writings of theosophists and authors such as Charles Webster Leadbeater and Annie Besant and their emphasis on the spiritual dimension of humanity along with incorporation of the exploration of color and form. Their exploration of such underlying spiritual construct of the universe validated the modern artists' zeal for the underlying internal realities beyond the physical sphere of existence and how that makes the artists an important contributor to society [197].

This also gave the modern abstract artists a model for synesthetic abstraction. Leadbeater believes that the physical body is limited and a source of anxiety and furthermore, his doctrines suggest that true freedom lies in physical death. Abstract art is also a manifestation of the modern artists' pursuit beyond the purely physical dimension. This is not to say that abstraction was by no means only defined by theosophical principles. However, there is a similar pattern and resonance between their doctrines. The

depiction of this non-physical or the so called invisible reality is achieved through color and form and can be read as a forerunner to the cognition of abstraction [198].

Kandinsky, being one of the pioneers of pure abstract art was influenced by Theosophy and the teaching of Blavatsky. Kandinsky is a crucial figure in this context because of his theosophical influence in his artistic endeavor as a connecting bridge between shape and color with that of the spiritual realm. In their zeal towards the visual manifestation of such non-physical dimension, shape and color became a reflection of the spiritual domain [199]. Art historian, Sixten Ringbom, in his paper, writes about Helena Blavatsky's book, *Key to Theosophy*, which gives insight on the objectives of Theosophy. Kandinsky acknowledged her as the pioneer who established the close tie between the Indian cultures with that of the West. The Theosophist methods are based on ancient wisdom and knowledge. Kandinsky acknowledged theosophy as the spiritual alternative to the presiding materialism of their time [200].

Kandinsky's deviation from the depiction of physical forms towards the spiritual was correlative to his interest towards the occult according to Ringbom. Kandinsky also responds to Leadbeater and Besant's theory of the correlation between color and emotion. Kandinsky's influence spread to other abstractionists such as Mondrian, and theosophy happened to be the philosophical background behind such move towards the spiritual. It also forms the basis of Mondrian's interest in the spiritual qualities of the geometric forms as seen in much of his mature works.

Reynolds in his book, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art* maintains that Kandinsky and Mondrian make use of theoretical doctrines in order to encourage the spectator towards the underlying inner effects of color and form [201].

One way of viewing abstract art is a space in which the spectator must use the internal feelings which are aroused by shapes and colors in order to connect with the work. When viewing such abstract works, one may also experience a sense of disembodiment. Abstract art reaches such spiritual domain through disembodiment. The spectator is carried away from their attachments to the physical material world, and into the world of abstract art through imagination, feeling and spirit [202].

Kandinsky also considers music to be a driving factor in his abstract by the phenomena of synaesthesia. For him music was an influential form of expression in his pursuit of representing the spiritual domain and the realm of the soul as opposed to the

material world. Kandinsky, in his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* states that a painter who does not find any satisfaction in the mere representation, however artistic, in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease in which music achieves this end. Music is even called “that other abstract” because it is the most non-material of all the arts [203].

Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual Art* draws strongly upon the theoretical doctrines of theosophical concepts of knowledge, humanity and the universe. Kandinsky believed that observing the interplay of independently existing patterns of colors renders a psychological effect and a relative spiritual vibration. Combination of various shapes and colors produces different effects in the mind of the viewers.

Kandinsky observed an interconnected harmonic possibility between the two. He has taken into example, red, which quickens the heart and reminds the spectator of blood and flame and such vibrant and sharp color finds resonance with sharp shapes like the angular shape of the triangle. Kandinsky also used the triangle as a representation of the “the life of the spirit”. In the upright triangle, the lower portion of the shape is broad and is a representation of the masses, the unenlightened portions of humanity. The upper portion of the triangle becomes narrower, and it is a representation of the fewer people who are enlightened enough to be placed at these elevated stages. At the apex of the triangle, is placed just one single man. Even those who are close to him fails to understand his message and considers him a mad man [204].

This concept of the triangle has strong Theosophical connections. These various developments in the arts such as the act of painting music to transcend beyond the conventional physical senses, the symbolic property of the shape of the triangle paving a path to higher consciousness can all be traced back to theosophical doctrines. However, this is not to say that, there is a distinct genre of theosophical art, nor did Theosophy alone gave birth to modern abstract art.

Thus, from the above study, it can be observed how the Western pioneers of abstract are tightly connected to the ancient spiritual philosophies of the East. Before the advent of abstraction in modern art, Western artists were too concerned about the physical likeness and the representational aspects of art. However, these were thoroughly challenged by the abstract artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian and the various spiritual influences they had from the East. Spirituality in art and the underlying abstract



principles of the world of matter, the cosmos were for the first time, embodied in concrete form on canvas in the West.

Abstract art can also wander away from nature and real life objects entirely. It can be portrayed visually by plain geometrical shapes, known as geometric abstraction. Moreover, it can even be visualized through lyrical abstraction as well. Abstract art is mainly shaped by three other major art movements, namely Romanticism, Impressionism, and Expressionism. With the advent of the 19th century, for the first time, artists experienced freedom which had never existed during the Renaissance period because of their patronage from the church. In addition to that, during this period, private patronage from the public went up extensively and this ensured that the artists could earn their keep from their artworks. The *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* [Plate 2.28] of 1872 by James McNeill Whistler is one of the finest examples of abstract art from the 19th century. Instead of putting emphasis on the representation of objects, this painting focused on the visual response [205].

Before the development of pure abstraction, Cubism also gave significant emphasis towards the formal properties of their works. Cubism also contributed their fair share on the distortion and breaking down of forms to create highly abstracted and distorted artworks. Cubism opened up almost innumerable new possibilities for the treatment of visual reality in art and was the initiative point for many later abstract styles in modern art.

Cubism was the most influential style of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which developed from Paris. Cubism was primarily a revolution in the previous artists approach to their usage of space both on the flat surface of the picture and in sculpture [206]. The primary European impulse for Cubism developed from Cezanne's new spatial organization, in which he built up images out of constructions of color. Other major influences came from tribal art. This provided the European artists, a new unfamiliar, non-Classical way to represent the human figure [207].

Cubism was not simply an innovative style that initiated new ways of thinking about the look of art. It was significant because it brought in new ways of thinking about the purpose of art, which happened when its subject matter shifted from the still lifes and portraits that were embedded within cubist abstraction to the analysis of the very

language of painting. Picasso was the first to break through the limits of abstraction as seen in the works of Cezanne, Derain, and Matisse [208].

By breaking down objects and forms down into distinct areas or planes, the artists sought to show different viewpoints and multiple perspectives at the same time within the same pictorial space, so as to suggest their three dimensional form. In doing so they also gave emphasis to the two dimensional flatness of the canvas instead of giving importance to the illusion of depth. This approach marked a revolutionary breakthrough with the European tradition of creating the illusion of depth and real space from a fixed viewpoint using methods such as linear perspective, which had always been a key technique of realistic representation from the Renaissance onwards.

Such dispersal and rearrangement of an object or scene meant that a painting could now be seen as less as a sort of window on the world but more as a physical object on which a subjective response to the world is depicted. As far as when it came to the artistic technique or method, Cubism paved a sense that a rigid and solid pictorial structure could be created without the use of conventional viewpoint or modelling [209].

Much like in Cezanne's work, the cubists' emphasis on the structural and formal qualities of the work can be observed. In Picasso's *Portrait of Dora Maar* [Plate 2.29] and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* [Plate 2.30], one can observe his emphasis on the structural qualities of the work. The portrait of Dora Maar is a distorted and structural breakdown of photographer Dora Maar's portrait. The facial structures are rearranged and distorted and Picasso's interest in the formal quality of the work can be observed. Even in the painting of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Picasso's focus on the structural and formal quality of the work can be observed. Picasso's interest in the formal characteristics of African Tribal masks which is displayed by the two figures on the right side can also be observed. However, taking into consideration the work of Picasso such as *Guernica* [Plate 2.31], it would be inadequate to appreciate the work only through the formalist tradition. Even though, Picasso has used cubist forms in the works, many of the elements and subjects in the picture plane are symbolic of the voice against the horror and atrocities of war. Furthermore, being a commissioned work by the Republican government, the social message and emotional provocation of the painting cannot be ignored in favour of the formalist approach which would completely ignore the symbolism and the message the work conveys.

It is clear that African art had a profound influence on some of the important avant-garde artists such as Gauguin, Vlaminck, and Picasso among many others whose contributions are crucial in the development of modern abstract art. African artifacts were introduced in the European context by Portuguese explorers as early as 15<sup>th</sup> century. Even so, in the western context, these artifacts were not considered primarily as works of art or artistic creations but rather as ethnological objects. The aesthetic properties of these objects found appeal in a number of European artists who played pivotal roles in the development of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century modern movements [Plate 2.32 and Plate 2.33]. The Fauves and the Cubists came to value and appreciate the formal properties of African art whereas Die Brücke artists noticed and valued the emotional façade [210].

The background of these above mentioned views arose during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Cezanne. By breaking up forms in the picture plane into planes of color, he sought for a way to add structural solidity to the fleeting quality of Impressionists' works. The Fauves and Cubists being familiar with Cezanne's works were impressed by the formal qualities of African tribal art. This was the most profound burgeoning of the ideas laid down by Cezanne in which natural forms was reduced to their simplified geometric counterparts. In contrast to the Fauves and Cubists, the German Expressionist seemed to have valued the sentimental and emotional aspect of the African tribal art rather than its formal qualities. Artists of the German expressionists such as Schmidt-Rottluff, Nolde and Pechstein's works *Woman with a Bag* [Plate 2.34], *Dr. Rosa Schapire* [Plate 2.35], and *Mask Still Life III* [Plate 2.36] exhibit the crude geometric properties in their works as seen in African tribal art.

While Cezanne and the cubists' concern is primarily with the formal qualities of the work, one can still make out the representational forms such as landscapes and figures. However, pure abstractionists such as Malevich got rid of the representational forms entirely. Malevich's suprematist compositions were also some of the most important works in contributing to the development of abstract art. His painting, *Black Square* [Plate 2.37] is one of the most important examples of such paintings. Here, Malevich has depicted a single square colored black. There are various interpretations regarding the significance and the concept behind the black square. However, the most common interpretation lies in the concept of an independently existing black square which is an end in itself. The perception of such object according to Malevich should be

independent of logical reasons for the absolute truth can only be grasped through pure feelings [211].

Basically, Malevich created his Suprematist compositions by citing his desire to let art free and independent from the burdens of the object. Malevich went on to criticize representational art as thievery from the natural world, and furthermore quoted that the artist must build on the basis of speed, mass and the direction of movement. In his abstract paintings, he displayed strong and deep impressions of falling or floating by putting shapes on a plain background which had no indications of spatial interpretations. But, relationships can be sometimes evident from overlapping so that when depth and volume is rarely hinted at, there are no indications of purely two-dimensional patterns [212].

During the 1950s, art historian, Herbert Read began a critical reaction against formalism. According to Read, to fully appreciate a work of art, it is necessary for the spectator to fully understand and appreciate the underlying content of the work. A beautiful literary companion to the work aids the formal qualities of the work which results into a more complete aesthetic experience [213].

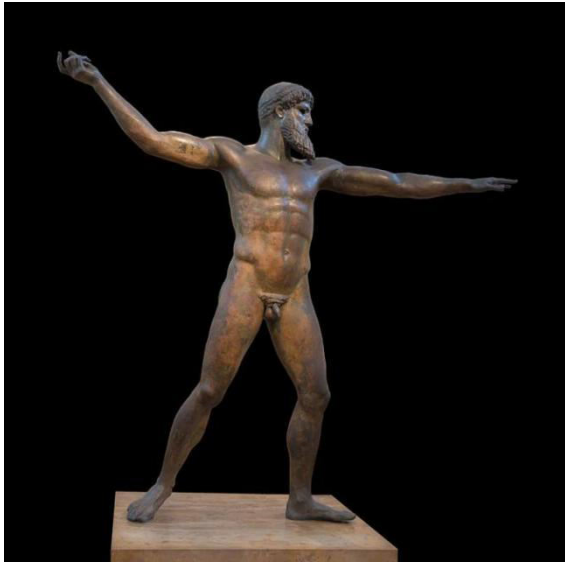
Read states that the art critic should be careful not to misinterpret the intended meaning of the artwork put forth by the artist by introducing his own interpretation, symbols and metaphors that are irrelevant to the ones intended by the artist. In his view, the artist's deepest emotions and thoughts are expressed in the content of the artwork. Read recommends that art criticism should properly take into consideration the hidden content behind the work instead of obscuring such expression [214].

In support of Read's statements, art historian, Barbara Rose also states that to keep up with the art being done during the present times, the critics must also take into account the implicit elements and ideals in the work and its intentions. Many modernist works are reflective of social, political and historical situations, so evaluation should take into consideration these contexts in which the work was created. In contrast to this however, the formalist tendencies have removed the social contexts and contents which were originally meant to be there for some of the artworks that initially were aiming towards communicating the contents and ideas [215].

It can be observed that formalism does not necessarily adhere to only abstract art but is also significant in approaching representational works as that of the Cezanne and

the cubists where emphasis was given mainly on the structural quality of the landscapes and figures instead of their content. Pure abstraction of Malevich such as in the *Black Square* [Plate 2.37] is most cohesive with formalism, because the square exists completely independent of servility and representation of anything outside itself. However, in the pure abstract works of Kandinsky, the color is representational and symbolic of emotions and deeper spiritual quests. Therefore, even though formalism is a significant approach to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is however not sufficient to fully comprehend the content of the works that have deeper meanings and symbolic of something other than itself.

# Plates



**Plate 2.1:** Statue of Zeus or Poseidon, bronze, c. 460 B.C.E.

Image Source: [ancientrome.ru](http://ancientrome.ru)



**Plate 2.2:** Laocoon and his Two Sons, marble, c. 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Image Source: Adams, L. Schneider. *A History of Western Art*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2006.



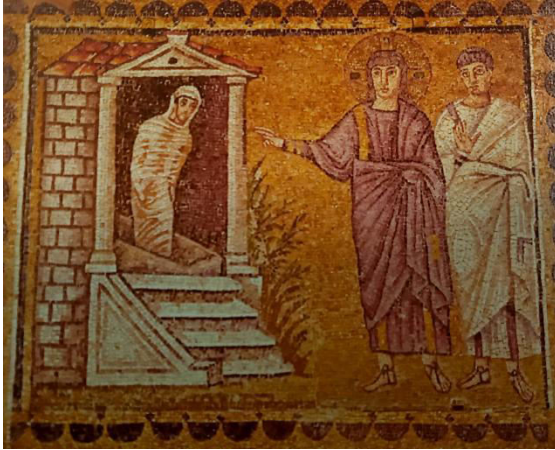
**Plate 2.3:** Aphrodite of Knidos (Roman copy), Praxiteles, marble, c. 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

Image Source: [discover.hubpages.com](http://discover.hubpages.com)



**Plate 2.4:** Discobolus, marble, c. 450 B.C.E.

Image Source: [brown.edu](http://brown.edu)



**Plate 2.5:** The Raising of Lazarus, mosaic, c. 6<sup>th</sup> century

Image Source: Dixon, Andrew Graham. *The Definitive Visual Guide: Art*. Dorling Kindersley, 2008.



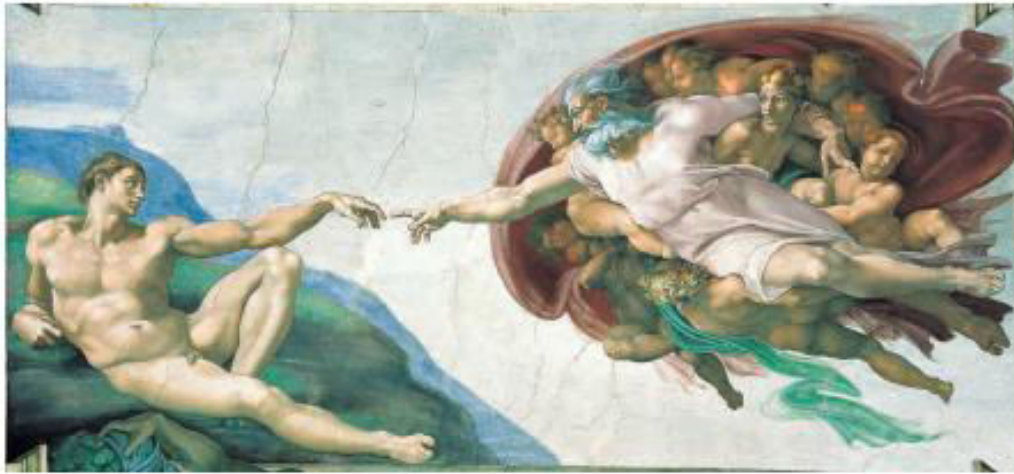
**Plate 2.6:** Primavera, Sandro Botticelli, tempera on panel, c.1482, (202\*314 cm).

Image Source: news.artnet.com



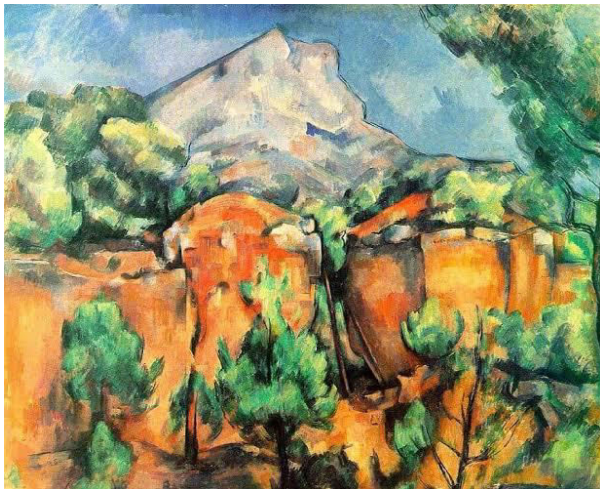
**Plate 2.7:** The Last Supper, Leonardo da Vinci, tempera on gesso, pitch, and mastic, c.1495-98, 460\*880 cm.

Image Source: britannica.com



**Plate 2.8:** Creation of Adam, Michelangelo, fresco on ceiling, 1511, (280\*570 cm).

Image Source: [michelangelo.net](http://michelangelo.net)



**Plate 2.9:** Mont Sainte Victoire Seen from the Bibemus Quarry, Paul Cezanne, oil on canvas, 1897, (65.1\*80 cm).

Image Source: [paulcezanne.org](http://paulcezanne.org)



**Plate 2.10:** Yellow Christ, Paul Gauguin, oil on canvas, 1889, (91\*73 cm)

Image Source: [gauguin.org](http://gauguin.org)





**Plate 2.11:** Interior with Eggplants, Henri Matisse, oil on canvas, 1911, (212\*246 cm).

Image Source: henrimatisse.org



**Plate 2.12:** Woman with a Hat, Henri Matisse, oil on canvas, 1905, (81\*60 cm).

Image Source: henrimatisse.org



**Plate 2.13:** Diagram of Shri Yantra.

Image Source: ciis.edu



**Plate 2.14:** Rain, Steam, and speed - The Great Western Railway, J.M.W. Turner, oil on canvas, 1844, (91\*122 cm).

Image Source: Dixon, Andrew Graham. *The Definitive Visual Guide: Art*. Dorling Kindersley, 2008.



**Plate 2.15:** The Fighting Temeraire, Tugged to her Last Berth to be Broken Up, J.M.W. Turner, oil on canvas, 1838, (90.7\*112.6 cm).

Image Source: Dixon, Andrew Graham. *The Definitive Visual Guide: Art*. Dorling Kindersley, 2008.



**Plate 2.16:** The Water Lily Pond, Claude Monet, oil on canvas, 1899, (88\*93 cm).

Image Source: [claude-monet.com](http://claude-monet.com)



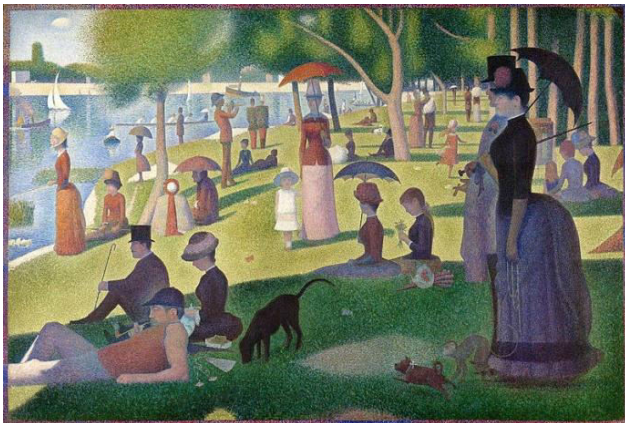
**Plate 2.17:** Woman with a Parasol, Claude Monet, oil on canvas, 1875, (100\*81 cm).

Image Source: [academiaesthetics.com](http://academiaesthetics.com)



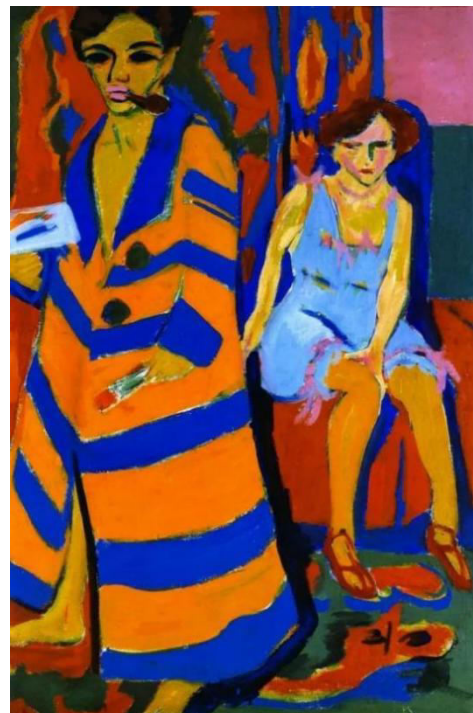
**Plate 2.18:** The Starry Night, Vincent Van Gogh, oil on canvas, 1889, (73.7\*92.1 cm).

Image Source: [britannica.com](http://britannica.com)



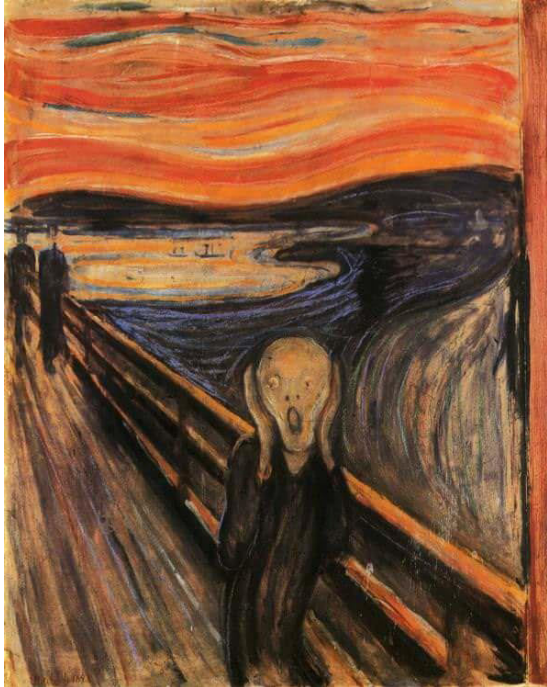
**Plate 2.19:** A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, Georges Seurat, oil on canvas, 1884-86, (207.6\*308 cm).

Image Source: [artandculture.google.com](http://artandculture.google.com)



**Plate 2.20:** Self-Portrait with a Model, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, oil on canvas, 1907, (150\*100 cm).

Image Source: [arthive.com](http://arthive.com)



**Plate 2.21:** The Scream, Edvard Munch, oil, tempera, and pastel on cardboard, 1893, 91\*74 cm).

Image Source: edvardmunch.org



**Plate 2.22:** Fate of the Animals, Franz Marc, oil on canvas, 1913, (195\*268 cm).

Image Source: wikipedia.org



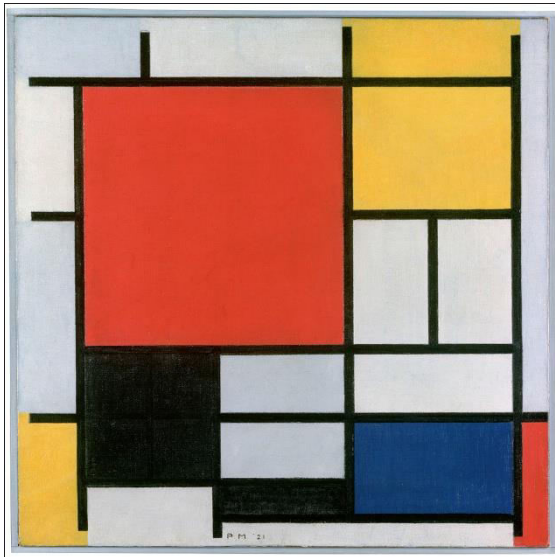
**Plate 2.23:** Castle and Sun, Paul Klee, oil on canvas, 1928

Image Source: thehistoryofart.org



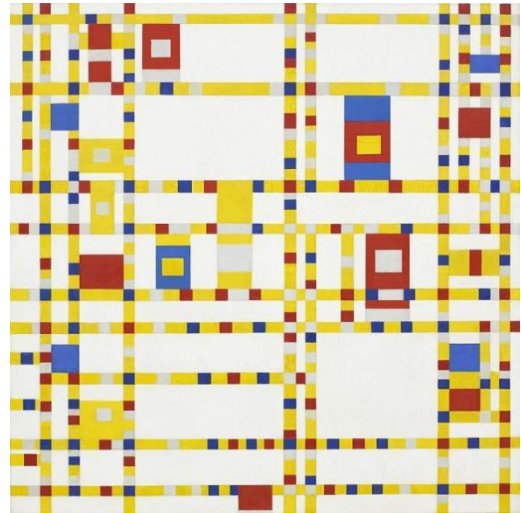
**Plate 2.24:** Composition VII, Wassily Kandinsky, oil on canvas, 1913, (200\*302 cm).

Image Source: wassilykandinsky.net



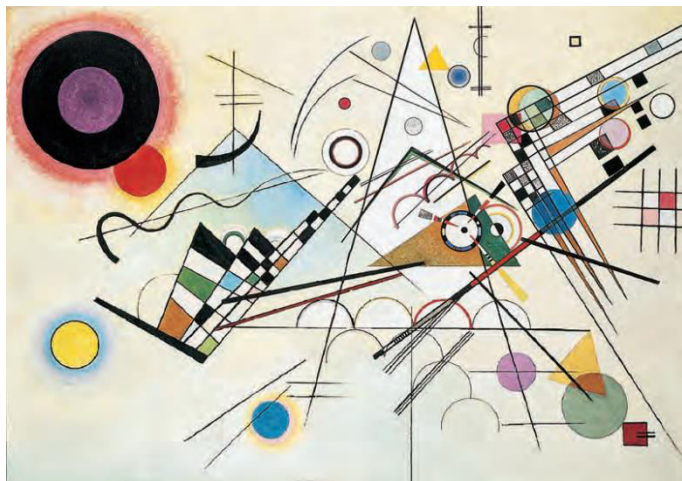
**Plate 2.25:** Composition with Red, Blue, Yellow, and Black, Piet Mondrian, oil on canvas, 1928, (45\*45 cm).

Image Source: wikipedia.org



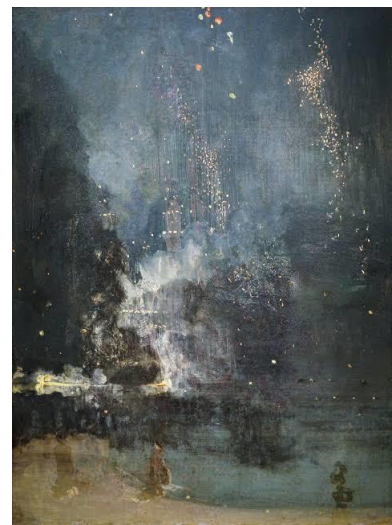
**Plate 2.26:** Broadway Boogie Woogie, Piet Mondrian, oil on canvas, 1942-43, (127\*127 cm).

Image Source: Dixon, Andrew Graham. *The Definitive Visual Guide: Art*. Dorling Kindersley, 2008.



**Plate 2.27:** Composition VIII, Wassily Kandinsky, oil on canvas, 1923, (140\*200 cm)

Image Source: Adams, L. Schneider. *A History of Western Art*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2006.



**Plate 2.28:** Nocturne in Black and Gold-The Falling Rocket, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, oil on canvas, c. 1872-1877, (60.3\*46.6 cm).

Image Source: smarthistory.org



**Plate 2.29:** Portrait of Dora Maar, Pablo Picasso, oil on canvas, 1937, (92\*65 cm).

Image Source: [terraingallery.org](http://terraingallery.org)



**Plate 2.30:** Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, Pablo Picasso, oil on canvas, 1907, (244\*234 cm).

Image Source: [pablocicasso.org](http://pablocicasso.org)



**Plate 2.31:** Guernica, Pablo Picasso, oil on canvas, 1937, (350\*780 cm).

Image Source: [pablocicasso.org](http://pablocicasso.org)



**Plate 2.32:** Mbangu mask, wood, pigment and fibre.

Image Source: [historymuseum.ca](http://historymuseum.ca)



**Plate 2.33:** Mask of Gabon.

Image Source: [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)



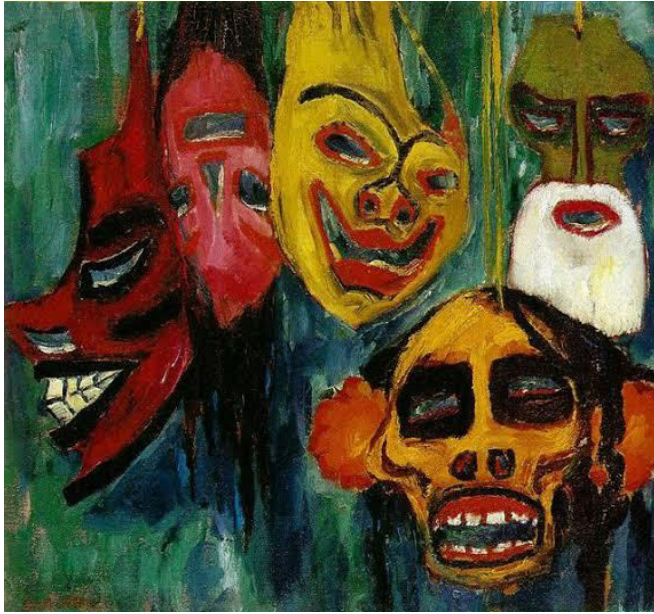
**Plate 2.34:** Woman with a Bag, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, oil on canvas, 1915, (95.2\*87.3 cm).

Image Source: [wikiart.org](http://wikiart.org)



**Plate 2.35:** Dr. Rosa Schapiro, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, oil on canvas, 1919, (100.6\*87.3 cm).

Image Source: [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)



**Plate 2.36:** Mask Still Life III, Emil Nolde, oil on canvas, 1911, (74\*78 cm).

Image Source: [wikiart.org](http://wikiart.org)



**Plate 2.37:** Black Square, Kazimir Malevich, oil on canvas, 1915, (80\*80 cm).

Image Source: [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)