Mondrian
Schools Resource

Created by Bernie McGonagle
PIET MONDRIAN BORN 1872
AMERSFOORT, THE NETHERLANDS

FAMILY VERY POOR
MOTHER OFTEN SICK

Father primary school teacher, religious fanatic, Calvinist.

Often away from home on church business.

Moves to Winterswijk.

Mondrian age 8

Father teaches him to draw.
Uncle a professional landscape painter, teaches Mondrian how to paint.
Art gave him a way to escape his difficult life.

Age 17-20

2. Teaching
Diplomas 1889-1892.

1892 Leaves home.

Girl writing 1892-1895.

• Recipes to become an artist.
• Enrolls in Academy of Visual Arts Amsterdam.
• Drew from models.
• Painted still life.
• Copied old masters.

Monrian a copy of this painting by Paul Gabriel 1889.

Monrian 1905 Oostzijl pulse mill along the Gein river by moonlight.

Location: Winterswijk near Mondrian's home town.

Sheaves of rye in the field. 1890-92.
Oil on cardboard.
In the foreground: trees, sheaves of rye and a plough.
In the background: a mill and a church tower.

Although painting landscapes was discouraged at the academy, Mondrian was a prolific landscape painter.

The Royal Wax Candle Factory 1895.

Portrait of a lady. 1896-1900. Black crayon, watercolour and opaque white on paper.

To make a living, Mondrian made copies of museum paintings and scientific drawings.

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\ NATIONAL GALLERY of IRELAND
MONDRIAN

1872 - 1944

MAP OF THE NETHERLANDS

AMSTERDAM
AMERSFOORT
WINTERSWIJK
BRABANT
BELGIUM
GERMANY

MONET IN HIS GARDEN 1890.

MONDRIAN WAS DRAWN TO BRABANT, A REGION IN SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS.
- STAYED FOR 2 YEARS.
- PAINTED CONTINUOUSLY.
- LIMITED HIS SUBJECTS TO FARMYARD SCENES, COW STUDIES AND FARMHOUSES WITH LOW ROOFS.

IN 1907 HE SEES THE EARLY WORK OF VINCENT VAN GOGH IN AMSTERDAM.
- IT HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON HIS WORK.
- BOLD BRUSHWORK.
- VIBRANT COLOURS.

OTHER INFLUENCES

A NUMBER OF DUTCH ARTISTS LIVING IN PARIS WERE REGULAR EXHIBITORS IN THE NETHERLANDS.
SO MONDRIAN AND OTHER DUTCH ARTISTS WERE AWARE OF THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN FRENCH ART.

FARMHOUSE, BRABANT, 1904.

- KNOWN AS THE HAGUE SCHOOL IN THE NETHERLANDS (1860-1890).
- FAST BRUSHWORK.
- PAINTED EVERYDAY LIFE.

- GREY BROWN TONES OF HAGUE SCHOOL.
- BRUSHWORK OBVIOUS.
- A NEW DEPARTURE—MONDRIAN'S PAINTINGS ARE NOW GEOMETRIC ARRANGEMENTS RATHER THAN AN ATTEMPT AT NATURALISTIC REPRESENTATION.

- HIS WORK VISIBLY CHANGED.

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Mondrian 1872-1944

Woods near Oele 1908

- Oele is 45 km from Winterswijk.
- Large canvas, 128 x 158 cm.
- The subdued grey colours of the Hague School are absent.
- Colours blue, violet, red, yellow and orange are very dynamic.
- Linear movement.
- ZP treatment of the woods.

Theosophy

House in sunlight 1909

- Age 36

Exhibition of Mondrians work

- In large group show at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum 1909.
- Firmly establishing Mondrian as part of the Dutch avant-garde.

Avant-Garde?

- It's a military term.
- Describes the front line of an army going into battle.
- Artists were compared to soldiers.
- A strong force, challenging long established perceptions about art.

Luminists

- Similar to Seurat and pointillism.
- Hundreds of small dots of pure colour.
- Windmill in sunlight 1908.
- This pointillist technique was known as luminism in the Netherlands.

Van Gogh

Munch

Seurat

- In 1909 Mondrian became a member of the Theosophical Society.
- Theosophical beliefs:
  - Humanity is one family.
  - All religions are helping human beings reach perfection.
  - There is another harmonious reality behind the reality we see day to day.

IN THEOSOPHY THESE FLOWERS ARE SEEN AS A SYMBOL OF ENTIRE LIFE CYCLE - GROWING, BLOOMING, DECAYING.

FROM 1900 ONWARDS MONDRIAN DRAWN PAINTED AND EXHIBITED SINGLE FLOWERS.

CHRYSTANHEMUM IN A BOTTLE. CIRCA 1917.

- HE PAINTED SUNFLOWERS, LILIES, AMARYLLIS BUT HAD A SPECIAL INTEREST IN CHRYSTANHEMUMS. AGE 37.

MAP OF THE NETHERLANDS

- IN 1908 AFTER THE AMSTERDAM EXHIBITION MONDRIAN VISITS THE SEASIDE TOWN OF DOMBURG IN ZEELAND FOR THE FIRST TIME. HE MEETS OTHER AVANT-GARDE ARTISTS THERE.
- HERE HE EXPERIENCES THE DUTCH LANDSCAPE LIKE NEVER BEFORE.
- NATURE UNSPOILED.
- NATURE VAST, INFINITE WITH BOUNDLESS EXPANSES.
- THE LIGHT LUMINOUS AND BREATHTAKING.

- IN ZEELAND WE SEE MONDRIAN SIMPLIFYING HIS SUBJECTS EVEN MORE THAN IN PREVIOUS WORKS.
- DUNES, SEA, LIGHTHOUSES AND CHURCH FACADES ARE PARED DOWN TO THEIR MOST BASIC ELEMENTS. TO THEIR ESSENCE.
- NOT SURPRISINGLY HIS COLOURS ALSO LIGHTEN.

- DUNE II 1909.
- A DUNE IN STRONG SUNLIGHT ENDLESSLY PULSATING, VIBRATING WITH LIFE AND COLOUR.
- THE DUNE THEME WAS NEW TO MONDRIAN.
- THIS IS NATURE UNIFIED, UNSPOILED, INFINITE.
- THE TRUTH OF THE LANDSCAPE RATHER THAN ITS OUTWARD APPEARANCE.

- THIS LIGHTHOUSE IS A CONVERTED GOTHIC CHURCH TOWER.
- NO SPATIAL DEPTH.
- HE FOCUSES HERE ON THE POWER OF THE VERTICAL, POINTILLIST-LUMINIST TECHNIQUE.

- CHURCH TOWER AT DOMBURG 1911.
- CHURCH FACADE SIMPLIFIED, FLATTENED.
- HE REMATERIALIZES HIS SUBJECT.

- CHURCH FACADE LOOKS TRANSPARENT AND SEEMS NOT OF THIS WORLD.

MONDRIAN MOVES TO PARIS IN 1912.

- PARIS 1912.

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CUBISM IS A REVELATION! I SAW A CUBIST EXHIBITION IN AMSTERDAM IN 1911 AND THAT BROUGHT ME TO PARIS.

VIOLIN 1911-12 PICASSO.

WHILE HE WAS THERE HE DEVELOPED AN ENTIRELY ORIGINAL ABSTRACT STYLE THAT WENT FAR BEYOND CUBISM.

A TRANSITION TOWARDS ABSTRACTION.

THE RED TREE 1908.

COLOURS RED YELLOW AND BLUE.

THE VIBRANT

COLOURS AND ENERGETIC BRUSHWORK CONVEY THE PULSATING INNER LIFE OF THE TREE.

GRAY TREE 1911-12.

MOVING FURTHER TOWARDS SIMPLIFICATION.

EVERY PART OF THE COMPOSITION IS OCCUPIED WITH BRANCHES THAT STRETCH AND ELONGATE CREATING GEOMETRIC GRID LINES AND 2D PLANES.

BLOSSOMING APPLE TREE 1912.

THE APPLE TREE HAS VIRTUALLY DISAPPEARED AMID THE FLOW OF LINES AND PLANES.

WHAT REMAINS IS TREENESS.

MONDRIAN INHERITED THE GRIP AND LIMITED COLOUR SCHEME FROM CUBISM.

HE SPENT 2 YEARS IN PARIS 1912-14.

FROM 1913-14 ARCHITECTURAL THEMES DOMINATED HIS WORK.

THIS WAS A NEW THEME FOR MONDRIAN.

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MONDRIAN

1872 - 1944

- Secular architecture inspired by his surroundings in Paris.
- Influence by Theosophy he may have regarded demolition and rebuilding as a metaphor for man's evolution to a higher level.
- The geometric structures of buildings lent themselves very well to the block and grid shapes of Cubism.

- Glittering light on the sea and movement of the waves become a pattern of crosses of varying lengths.
- This is the great change.
- A switch from Cubism to pure abstraction.

**What is Abstract art?**

- From the Stone Age to the Modern era (1860s) art has been mostly representational.
- Abstract artists make no attempt to imitate the world.
- Instead of work marks are made for their own sake.
- Abstract art has been with us for over 100 years.
- Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) are considered important pioneers in the development of abstract art.

**Composition in Oval with Colour Planes 2, 1914.**

- Mondrian returned to Domburg Beach for inspiration.
- A new theme occupied him for the first few years of his stay in the Netherlands.
- The sea.
- Almost penniless he came here to Domburg Beach with a sketchbook and a stump of charcoal.
- Day after day he studied the sky, the sea, the waves, the wave breaker poles.
- The result is what Mondrian himself called 'the great change'.
- He even sketched by moonlight or with closed eyes so determined was he to capture the essence of his subject.

**Composition No. 10 Pier and Ocean 1915.**

- Mondrian sought out the deeper meaning behind the visible appearances of the world.
- In this painting he distils, he reduces, he refines, he simplifies, he purifies.

**World War I 1914 - 1918**

- 1914 Mondrian returns home.
- Father seriously ill.
- The outbreak of World War I meant Mondrian was unable to return to Paris for 4 years.

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MONDRIAN HAD HIS FIRST EVER ONE MAN SHOW AT THE WILHELM GALLERY IN THE HAGUE IN 1914. THIS WAS AN EXHIBITION OF HIS BEST CUBIST WORK DONE IN PARIS. HE SOLD SEVERAL WORKS TO IMPORTANT COLLECTORS. THIS REPRESENTED HIS ENTRY INTO THE INTERNATIONAL ART WORLD.

MONDRIAN'S FATHER DIED IN 1915. HE JOINED AN ARTISTS' COLONY IN LAREN, FOKN FROM AMSTERDAM. HERE HE MET TWO ARTISTS THAT HAD A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON HIS WORK. THEO VAN DOESBURG INSPIRED MONDRIAN TO FOCUS ON THE THEORIES BEHIND HIS ABSTRACT WORK.

BART VAN DER LECK WAS A TALENTED STAINED GLASS ARTIST AND WAS ALSO MAKING HIS OWN JOURNEY TOWARDS ABSTRACTION. VAN DER LECK'S PIONEERING USE OF PRIMARY COLOURS IN FLAT PLANES OF RED, YELLOW AND BLUE HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON MONDRIAN'S WORK.

FROM NOW ON MONDRIAN'S ART IS COMPLETELY ABSTRACT.

MONDRIAN MET A PHILOSOPHER OF THEOSOPHY CALLED M.H.J. SCHOENMAEKERS. HE WAS WORKING ON THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF LINES. HE SUGGESTED THAT REALITY COULD BE EXPRESSED IN THE OPPOSITE FORCES OF HORIZONTAL (FEMININE ENERGY) AND VERTICAL (MALE ENERGY).

WITH SCHOENMAEKERS' IDEAS MONDRIAN COULD PUSH HIS OWN PAINTING TO THE VERY LIMIT.

MONDRIAN AND THEO VAN DOESBURG SET UP A MAGAZINE CALLED...

"DE STIJL" OR THE STYLE.

MONDRIAN SUBMITTED HIS IDEAS ABOUT PAINTING IN A MANUSCRIPT CALLED NEOPLASTICISM OR NEW ART.

1917

DE STIJL

PLASTICISM REFERS TO THE PHYSICALITY OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW ART

- DOESN'T IMITATE THE VISIBLE WORLD.
- ABSTRACT.
- HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL LINES.
- PRIMARY COLOURS.
- NO SUBJECT MATTER.
- NO SURFACE DECORATION.
- FLAT SURFACES.
- IMPERSONAL.

IT REVEALED THE UNIVERSAL HARMONY AND DIVINE STRUCTURE THAT CONNECTS ALL BEINGS.

AN ART THAT WOULD HELP SOCIETY START AGAIN AFTER THE HORRORS OF W.W.I.
DE STIJL

DE STIJL HAD A GREAT INFLUENCE ON THE FOLLOWING...

ARCHITECTURE.

FURNITURE DESIGN.

TYPOGRAPHY.

MONDRIAN:

1872 - 1944

1919 - 1920

ROUSSES TO PARIS. 

HE USES HIS OLD STUDIO THAT HE HAD BEEN ABSENT FROM FOR 5 YEARS INTO A MODEL OF INTERIOR DESIGN BASED ON DE STIJL PRINCIPLES. IT BECAME A TALKING POINT AMONG CRITICS AND THE PUBLIC.

1921 - DEVELOPS A NEW STYLE

COMPOSITION WITH LARGE RED, BLUE, YELLOW, BLACK, GRAY AND BLUE 1921.

STRONG VERTICALS AND HORIZONTALS.

HIS LIFE NOW DEDICATED TO PURE FORM.

1921 - MONDRIAN LOVES TO DANCE.

HE HEARD BOOGIE WOOGIE MUSIC FOR THE FIRST TIME.

BEING IN NEW YORK CITY WAS THE HAPPIEST TIME OF HIS LIFE.

1940

STAYED IN NEW YORK.

HE USES COLOURED TAPE TO PLAN HIS PAINTINGS INSTEAD OF PAINT.

1943-1944

VICTORY BOOGIE WOOGIE.

A POSSIBLE ANTICIPATION OF VICTORY IN WW2.

1939-1945

WORLD WAR 2

MONDRIAN SURVIVED THE SPANISH FLU THAT CLAIMED 50 MILLION LIVES WORLD WIDE IN 1918.

1943-1944

PAINTING IS NOT FINISHED.

MONDRIAN DIES OF PNEUMONIA IN 1944.

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS

1872 - 1944

MONDRIAN

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- COMPOSITION NO.10 PIER AND OCEAN.1915 MONDRIAN.

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COURTESY OF MONDRIAN:

- CIRCA 1917
- DUNE 11 1909
- LIGHTHOUSE AT WESTKAPELLE 1909
- CHURCH TOWER AT DORDRECHT 1911
- THE RED TREE 1908
- GRAY TREE 1911-1912
- BLOOMING APPLE TREE 1912
- COMPOSITION OF TREES 1912-1913
- COMPOSITION IN OVAL WITH COLOUR PLANES 2. 1914
- COMPOSITION NO. 5 WITH COLOUR PLANES. 1917
- COMPOSITION WITH LARGE RED PLANE, YELLOW, BLACK, GREY, BLUE. 1921
- LOZENGE COMPOSITION WITH YELLOW LINES 1933
- VICTORY BOOGIE WOOGIE 1943-1944

COURTESY OF VAN GOGH MUSEUM AMSTERDAM (VINCENT VAN GOGH FOUNDATION).
- PEASANT WOMAN LIFTING POTATOES 1885.

COURTESY OF THE RIKSMUSEUM.
- A WINDMILL ON A POLTER WATERWAY. PAUL GABRIEL 1888
- COSTELLOE MILL ALONG THE GIN RIVER BY MOONLIGHT. MONDRIAN 1905

COURTESY OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO.
- LOZENGE COMPOSITION WITH YELLOW, BLACK, BLUE. REP AND GRAY. 1921

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND.
- PORTRAIT OF A CHILD (UNKNOWN).
- PORTRAIT OF MICHAEL ESPOSITO 1912.
- SARAH CECILIA HARRISON.
- PORTRAIT OF JUSTIN MC CATHRY (1830-1912)
- HAROLD WATT.
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