

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a large, pale yellow circle at the top center, surrounded by various other shapes including a red circle, a blue triangle, and a black curved line. The bottom half of the image is dominated by a large, dark, curved shape that resembles a hand or a wing, with a red and yellow shape below it. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century abstract art.

# ABSTRACT ART

(n) An art style which uses the visual language and techniques of form, line, and color to create a composition which does not represent a visual reality. Abstract art may explore how different colors work together, express complex emotions and concepts, or simply work freely without being constrained to reality.

## SUB-GENRES WITHIN THE ABSTRACT ART FAMILY CAN INCLUDE:

**EXPRESSIONISM** (O'Keefe, Pollock, Kandinsky)

**SUPREMITISM** (Malevich)

**ORPHISM** (Robert and Sonia Delaunay)

**DE STIJL** (Mondrian)

**COLOR FIELD** (Rothko)

Many artists who worked in Abstract worked in more “traditional” styles as well. There is also a large body of work which blurs the lines between representational art and abstract art, such as many works by Pablo Picasso.

## ETYMOLOGY

**ABSTRACT:** From the Latin “*Abstractus*” meaning “drawn away,” from the past participle “*Abstrahere*” meaning “to detach, pull away, divert.”





## Wassily Kandinsky

b. 16 December 1866  
Moscow, Russian Empire

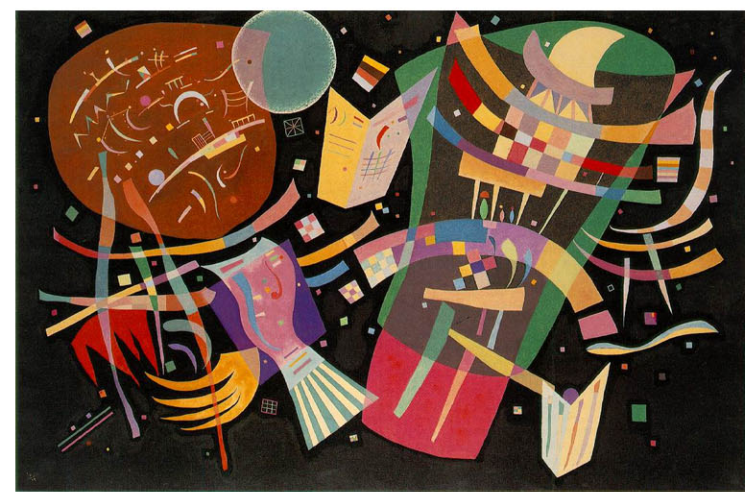
d. 13 December 1944  
Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

*"The Father of Abstract Art"*

Kandinsky was a 30-year old law and economics professor until the fateful day he first saw a Monet painting. After that, he abandoned everything to create art. While his first paintings were Monet-like, he was one of the first to fully embrace abstraction because he was a Synesthete; Kandinsky literally saw sounds as swirling colors around him, and attempted to re-create this feeling of "seeing sounds". He painted in Germany until WWI erupted. When he returned to Russia, the Bolshevik Revolution changed his homeland. He helped found the new artist school in Moscow, until the new government forced him and his "too individualistic" out of the country. He then returned to Germany and taught at the famous Bauhaus Art School until the newly empowered Nazi party closed the school, banned his work, and forced him, with his "degenerate" art, out of the country in 1932. He then painted in Paris until the Nazi invasion forced him into "retirement". He died of a stroke shortly after the Allied Liberation.



Kandinsky, Wassily  
Several Circles; 1926  
Oil on Canvas; 140.3 cm x 140.7 cm  
Solomon, Guggenheim Museum, NYC



Kandinsky, Wassily  
Composition X; 1939  
Oil on Canvas; 110 cm x 195 cm  
Kunstsammunlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany

*"Composition X" is one of Kandinsky's final pieces; the Nazi occupation of France meant that most artists living there had to either paint in styles the Nazis approved of, or not paint at all. As a artist whose work had been publicly displayed in the Nazi's "Degenerate Art" exhibit in 1937, Kandinsky could not afford to attract any attention, and apparently did not paint at all.*



Kandinsky, Wassily  
Composition VII; 1913  
Oil on Canvas; 20 cm x 300 cm  
The State Tretyakov Gallery; Moscow





## Paul Klee

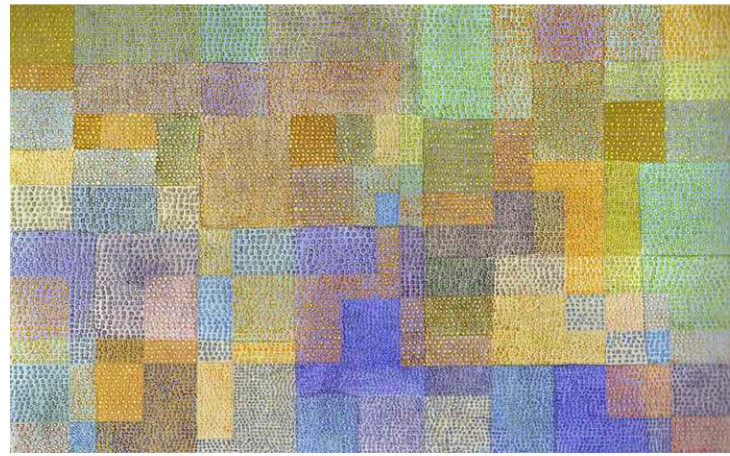
b. 18 December 1879  
Munchenbuchsee, Switzerland

d. 29 June 1940  
Muralto, Switzerland

*"Color and I are one. I am a painter"*  
-1914, after a trip to Tunis

As the son of a music teacher and singer, Klee's childhood was filled with instruments and songs. However, bored with modern music's seeming shallowness compared to Bach and Mozart, he turned away from music to art as a career. Despite being a good draftsman, he struggled to find a personal art style.

After marrying pianist Lily Stumpf, and becoming a stay-at-home dad, Klee's art bloomed in a different direction after he visited Tunis in Africa and saw color, and light, in a new, vibrant way. He embraced Abstract art and color use, abandoning his former realistic style. He taught at the Bauhaus Art school with his friend Kandinsky, and, like him, was evicted from teaching by the Nazis. Labeled a Jew, he and Lily fled Germany for his homeland of Switzerland after a Gestapo raid on his home. He died there in 1940.

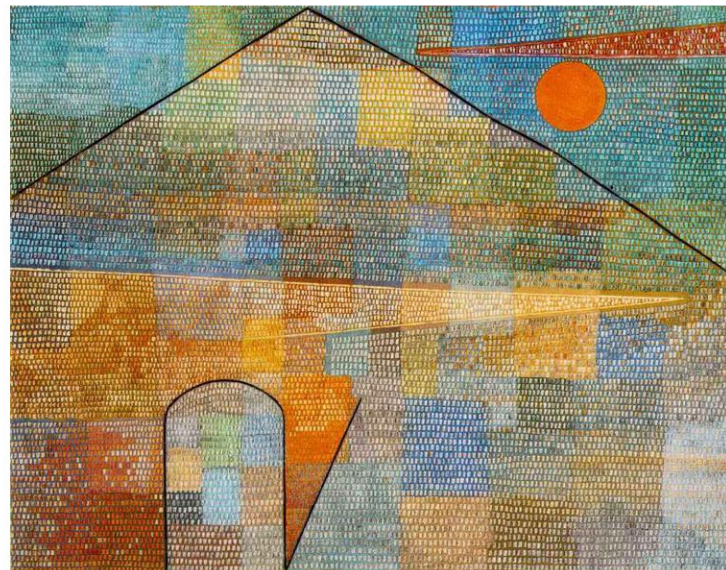


Klee, Paul  
**Polyphony; 1932**  
Tempera on Linen; 66.5 cm x 106 cm  
Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland

*In music, Polyphony (Greek for "many-sounds") is two or more independent melodies sung at the same time, producing a complex whole. Byzantine and Gregorian chant, Bach fugues, even a simple song sung in a round, are types of Polyphony. This is one of the many pieces where Klee combined his love of classical music with his modern, abstract, art.*



Klee, Paul  
**Camel (in a rhythmic landscape with trees); 1920**  
Oil on Canvas; 48 cm x 42 cm  
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany



Klee, Paul  
**Ad Parnassum; 1932**  
Oil on Canvas; 126 cm x 100 cm  
Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland

*This is considered one of Klee's masterpieces. The name identifies it as the sacred mountain of Greek mythology; home of the muses, Apollo, and the Delphi Oracle. Klee borrowed pointillism techniques to create a nearly shimmering surface of dots layered on colored blocks.*





## Robert Delaunay

b. 12 April 1885

Paris, France

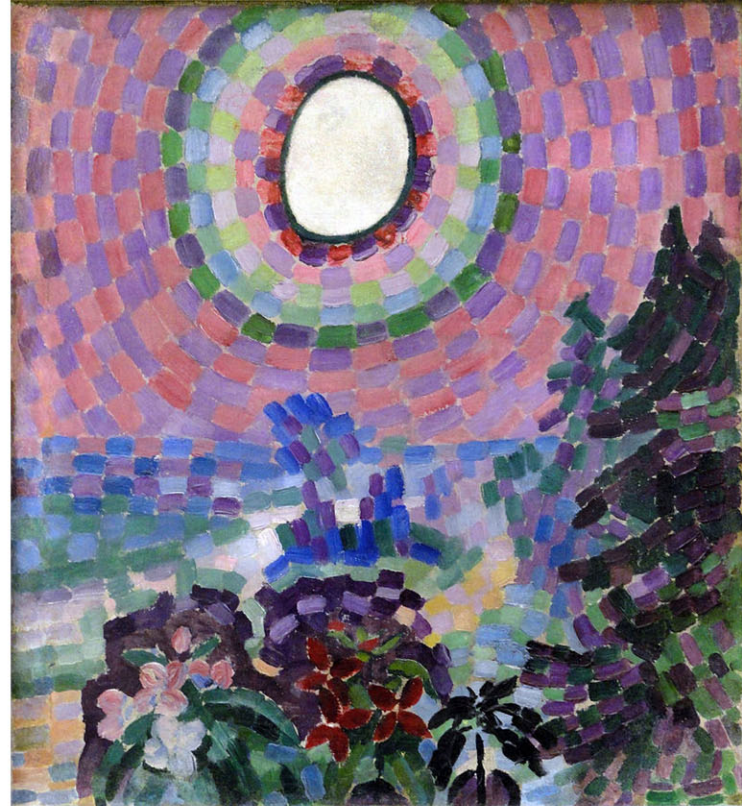
d. 25 October 1941

Montpellier, France

*"Father of Orphism"*

Initially creating mosaic like paintings with daubs of bright colors, (see *Paysage di Disque*, right) Delaunay, inspired by Picasso's style of Cubism and his wife's quilting skills, pioneered a style later called "Orphism". In Orphism, the strong geometric shapes of cubism are highlighted with equally strong color, and different colors are set against each other, to experiment with how different colors can suggest movement, or even make each other appear brighter or duller together.

Fleeing France for Spain during WWI, Robert designed theatrical stages for plays for theaters and sold his art to support his family. They returned to France in the 1920's, only to flee Paris again in the face of Germany's invasion in 1940. Sick with cancer, Robert Delaunay died in southern France in 1941.

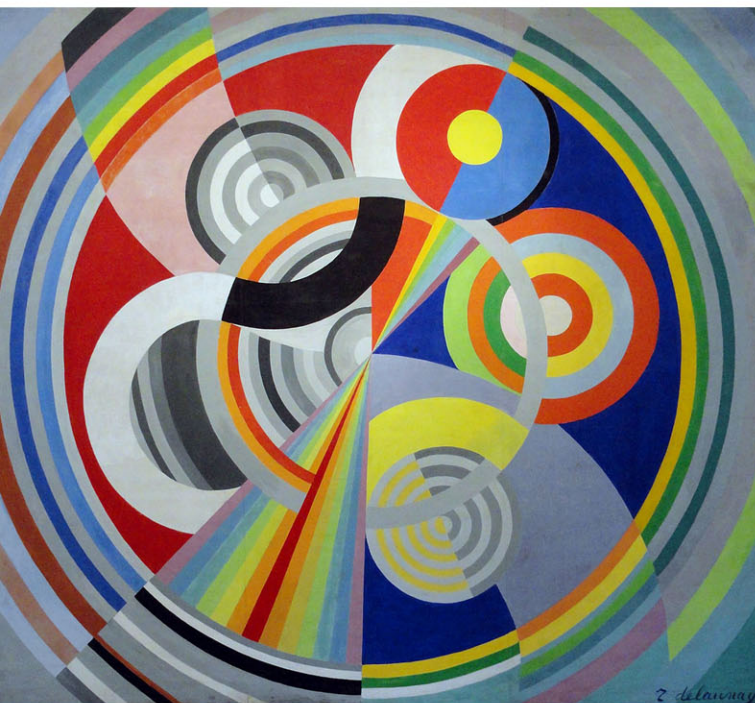


Delaunay, Robert

*Paysage du Disque*, 1906-07

Oil on canvas, 55 cm x 46 cm

Musee national d'Art Moderne, Paris

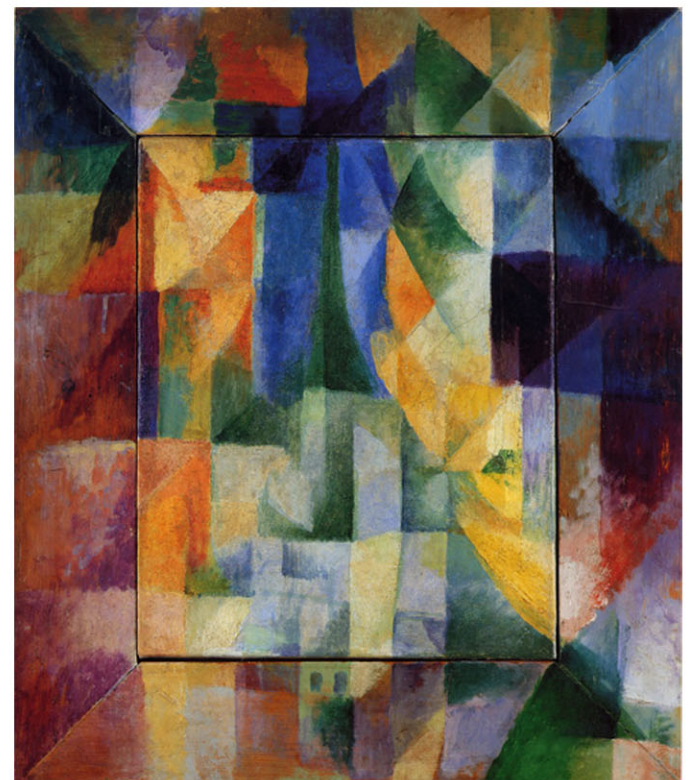


Delaunay, Robert

*Rythme no. 1; Decortion for the Salon de Tuileries*

Oil on Canvas

Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris



Delunay, Robert

*Silmultaneous Windows on a City*, 1912

Oil and Wax on Canvas; 80 cm x 70 cm

Kunsthalle, Hamburg Museum



# Sonia (Terk) Delaunay

b. 14 November 1885  
Russian Empire (modern Ukraine)

d. 5 December 1979  
Paris France

*“Color is the skin of the world”*

Adopted at the age of five by her maternal uncle and aunt, Sonia Teck attended the best schools in St Petersburg and traveled widely with her parents. Her first works after art school were influenced by the bright colors and strong shapes of Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Rousseau, and Henri Matisse. In addition to painting, she worked in fashion and fabric. Orphism, the style of abstract art she and Robert were known for, was inspired by the quilt Sonia pieced together for their son's crib. After her family's wealth was seized by Russia's new government after the Bolshevik Revolution, Sonia supported her family during WWI by designing costumes for Spanish operas while her husband designed the scenery. After WWII and her husband's death, she focused more on painting. She and her son, a jazz historian, donated over 100 original Delaunay works to found the core collection of Paris's Musée National d'Art Moderne.



Terk-Delaunay, Sonia  
**Market at Minho**, 1915  
Oil and wax on Canvas  
Private Collection

*Sold in 2002 for 4.59 million euros, this piece was painted during the Delaunay's exile in Spain during WWI. Sonia attempted to use color to evoke the movement and activity of a village market.*

Terk-Delaunay,  
Sonia

**Dress**

1925-1928

Printed Silk with  
Metallic  
Embroidery

Musee de la Mode  
de la Ville de  
Paris, Musee Gal-  
liera



Terk-Delaunay, Sonia  
**Prismes electriques**, 1914  
Oil on Canvas; 250 cm x 250 cm  
Musee National d'Art Modern, Centre Pompidou, Paris





# Piet Mondrian

b.7 March 1872

Amersfoort, Netherlands

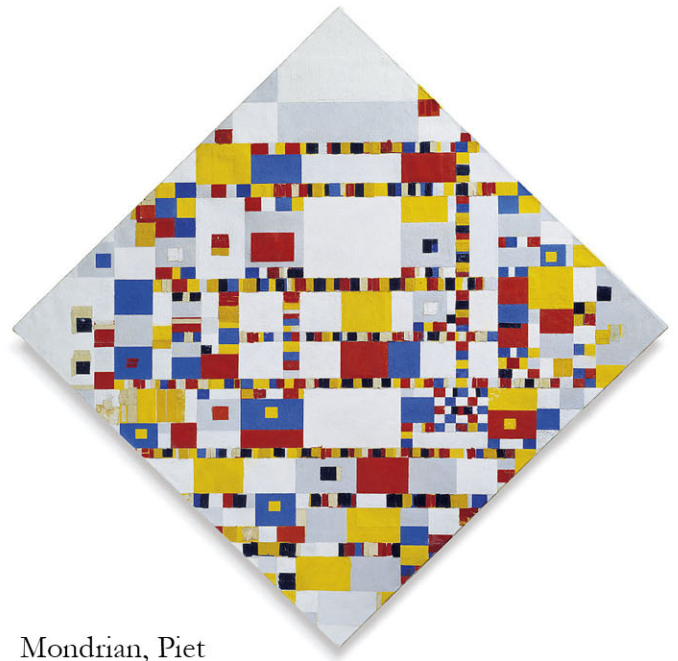
d. 1 February 1944

Manhattan, NYC

Mondrian's career spanned the very traditional to the complete abstract. His early paintings were done in an Impressionistic style, and look similar to works by Monet or Van Gogh, but as he spent time with Pablo Picasso he began to embrace Cubism.

Mondrian was trapped in neutral Netherlands during WWI, caring for his sick father and later living in an artist's colony. There, he began to play with reducing his paintings down to the most basic vertical and horizontal elements, and working only in primary colors.

After WWI, Mondrian moved to Paris and began producing the grid-like paintings for which he would become renowned. Forced to flee Paris for London as WWII broke out, he eventually arrived in New York, where his style became more intricate. He died of pneumonia before the war's end.



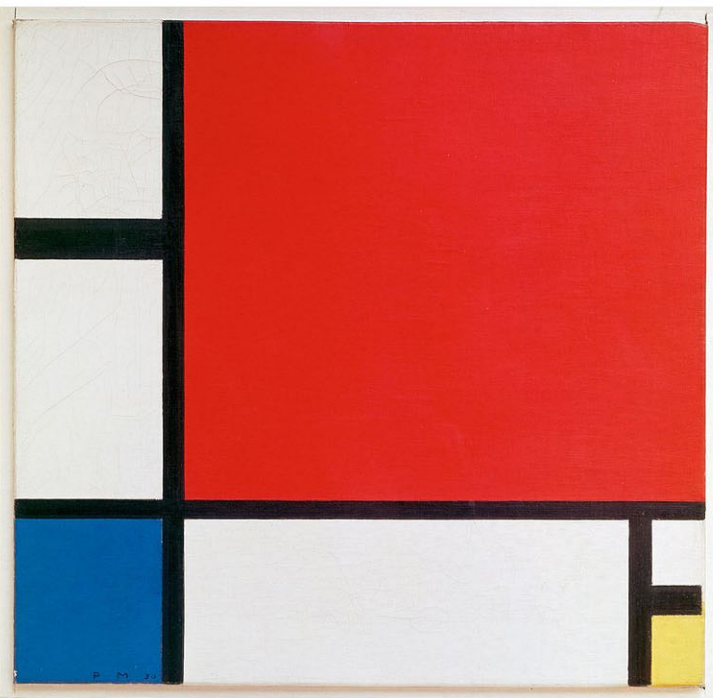
Mondrian, Piet

## **Victory Boogie-Woogie (unfinished) 1944**

Oil and Paper on Canvas; 127 cm x 127 cm

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands

*Left unfinished by his death, Mondrian created this in honor of the expected victory of the Allies in WWII. Despite the unfinished state, it shows the more complex style Mondrian had recently adopted.*

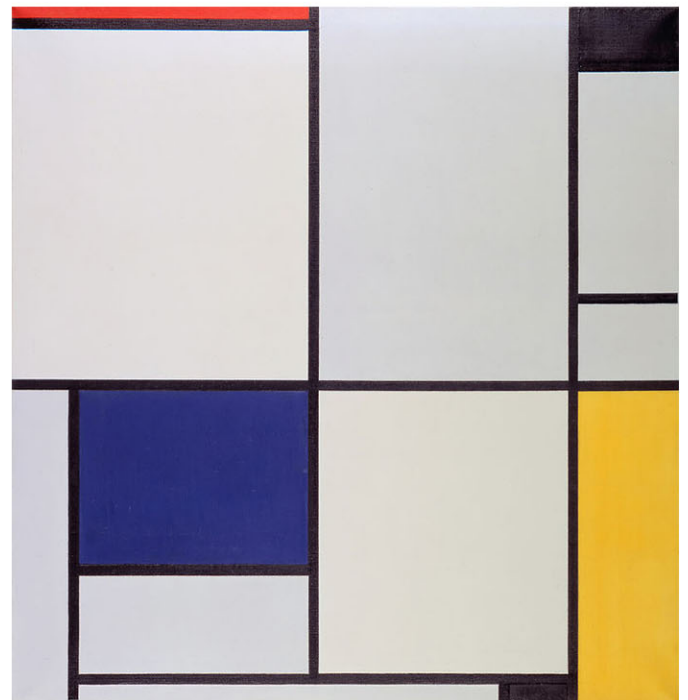


Mondrian, Piet

## **Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow; 1930**

Oil and Paper on Canvas; 59.5 cm x 59.5 cm

National Museum, Belgrade, Serbia



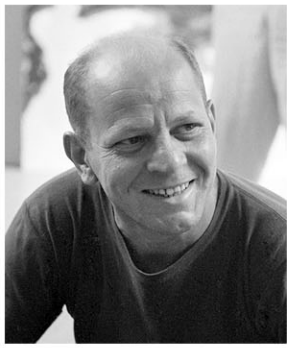
Mondrian, Piet

## **Tableau I; 1921**

Oil on Canvas; 102 cm x 10 cm

Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Netherlands





## Jackson Pollock

b 28 January 1915  
Cody, Wyoming

d. 1 August 1956  
Springs, New York

Despite being America's most famous artist during his short professional life, Jackson Pollock's critics often derided his works, calling them "...not art-it's a bad joke", and re-naming Pollock "Jack the Dripper". Pollock himself said his art was "*motion made visible [as] memories, arrested in space.*" Pollock's style of painting, called "Action Painting", meant that the act of painting itself, the flinging and swirling of the medium, was as much, or more, a part of the art as the final painting. Today, Pollock's paintings are slowly disintegrating, as the thick layers of oil and house paint fall off the raw, untreated, unstretched canvases. Conservators are arguing whether these works should be preserved, or if the disintegration should be allowed to continue, as in homage to Pollock's sense that the "real art" happened long ago, and allow the record to fade, just as memories do.

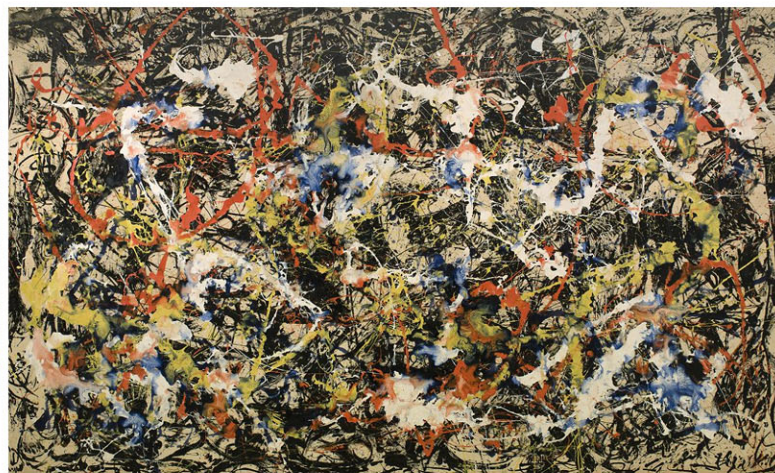


Pollock, Jackson  
Ocean Greyness; 1953  
Oil on Canvas; 146.7 cm x 229 cm  
Guggenheim Museum, NYC

*This painting, one of Pollock's last, shows less splattering techniques, and more heavy brushstrokes. It also shows the tension between absolute abstraction and loose representation of a concrete image (the eyeballs). Towards the end of his life, Pollock abandoned drip painting and began styles like this, but died too soon to fully explore this style.*



Pollock, Jackson  
Autumn Rhythm (No. 30); 1950  
Enamel on Canvas; 266.7 cm x 525.8 cm  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC



Pollark, Jackson  
Convergence, 1952  
Oil on Canvas; 237.5 cm x 393.7 cm  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, USA





## Georgia Totto O'Keefe

B. 15 November 1887  
Sun Prairie, Wisconsin

D. 6 March 1986  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

*I've been absolutely terrified every moment of my life, and I've never let it keep me from doing a single thing I wanted to do."*

While she's best known for her flower paintings, Georgia O'Keefe would never have been discovered by gallery owner (and later, husband) Alfred Stieglitz, if it hadn't been for her charcoal abstract drawings (see Drawing XIII, right). Nearly half of O'Keefe's works are pure abstracts, playing with color contrasts, a sense of movement, and interpretations of moods or music.

O'Keefe split her time between New York, the capital of the art world, and New Mexico, a land which captured her artist's eye. An independent woman, she converted her car into a mobile art studio she could drive to the best locations, and continued to paint even as her eyesight failed in old age.



O'Keefe, Georgia  
**Drawing XIII**; 1915  
Charcoal on Paper; 61.9 cm x 47 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC



O'Keefe, Georgia  
**Blue and Green Music**, 1921  
Oil on Canvas; 58.4 cm x 48.3 cm  
Art Institute of Chicago



O'Keefe, Georgia  
**Series I-No. 3**; 1918  
Oil on Canvas; 50.8 cm x 40.6 cm  
Milwaukee Art Museum