

Mondrian and De Stijl

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Paris Art Studies - Mondrian and De Stijl chronology:

1872 – Birth of Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan, in Amersfoort, Holland. His father is a strict Calvinist school headmaster.

1892 – Mondrian moves to Amsterdam to study at the School of Fine Art.

1897 – He joins the society of Saint Luke which organizes annual exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum. He paints his first commissions (portraits, church and house murals). He also paints in a Symbolist style landscapes and farms near the family estate in Winterswijk concentrating on the linear rhythms of trees and fences and high horizon lines which flatten the picture space.

1904-1906 – Mondrian paints windmills, haystacks and river views in a Fauve and Expressionist style.

1908 - In Domburg he paints the church, the lighthouse, the dunes and the sea. His style is more Divisionist (inspired by Jan Toorop). He adheres to the Theosophical theories of Helena Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner.

1909 - Retrospective of Spoor, Mondrian and Sluyters at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. He joins the Theosophical Society of the Netherlands.

1911 – First trip to Paris. He could have seen the first Cubist exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants.

1912 - Mondrian moves to Paris. He exhibits at the Salon des Indépendants and signs his work Mondrian with a single «a». He paints still lifes and urban scenes in an increasingly Cubist style.

1913 - The great poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire notes Mondrian's "very abstract Cubism" at the Salon des Indépendants.

1914 - Summer: Piet Mondrian

is in Laren, in Holland. The declaration of war in July will not allow him to return to France. Theo Van Doesburg is mobilized and sent to the Belgian front. There he will meet the poets Evert Rinsema and Antony Kok.

1916 - Van Doesburg visits Mondrian

and introduces him to the German theosophist Mathew Hubertus Josephus Schoenmaekers. Theo Van Doesburg, Eric Wichman and Louis Saalborn found the De Anderen artistic association. Van Doesburg meets the architects Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud, Jan Wils and the painter Bart Van der Leck. They found an artistic club in Leyde called De Sphinx whose object is to promote a new relationship between painting and architecture. Van Doesburg begins designing windows and interior color schemes for Son Vilmos Huszár is moving in the same direction at the same time. Robert Van't Hoff builds in Huis-ter-Heide the villa Henny whose radical geometry immediately gains it an international reputation.

The great Dutch modern art collector Helene Kröller-Müller buys the recent near-abstract work of Van der Leck.

1917 - Van Doesburg paints

his first grid compositions inspired by Mondrian. October: Publication of the first issue of the De Stijl with Van Doesburg as editor. Among the collaborators in this first issue are Mondrian, Van der Leck, Huszár, Gino Severini, Georges Vantongerloo, the poet Kok and the architects Oud, Wils, Huib Hoste and Van't Hoff.

1918 - Gerrit Rietveld designs the first version of

his famous Red-Blue armchair. Van Doesburg designs the color schemes for the Dubbele Sleutel hotel-restaurant built by Wils and for the Bart De Ligt house built by Van't Hoff. He also designs the windows for the Spangen apartment buildings in Rotterdam built by Oud. November: Publication of the first De Stijl manifesto.

1919 ‐ The De Stijl review

is distributed everywhere in Europe. Mondrian returns to Paris.

1920 - Van Doesburg visits

Mondrian in Paris. He meets the Léonce Rosenberg, director of the art gallery L'Effort Moderne. Theo Van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian and Antony Kok sign the second De Stijl manifesto this time devoted to literature. Piet Zwart and Jan Wils design the color scheme for the Gaillard-Jorissen dance institute in the Hague and the Bruynzeel's factory in Zaandam. Van Doesburg organizes in Holland the exhibition «La Section d'Or ‐ Paris. Cubists and neo-Cubists». He visits the Bauhaus in Weimar whose director is Walter Gropius.

1921 ‐ Beginning of «Neo-Plasticism» in the art of

Mondrian. Painting is increasingly reduced to the three primary colors, black and white, and composed of rectangles and squares in simple asymmetrical grids. Depth is completely eliminated. The artist is in search of a pure «cosmic harmony». Mondrian exhibits in «Les Maîtres du Cubisme» at the Galerie de L'Effort Moderne with Picasso, Braque, Gris and Léger. He moves permanently to his famous studio on 26, rue du Départ

in Montparnasse. Van Doesburg's increasingly radical color theories cause a rift with the architect Oud who puts an end to their partnership and leaves De Stijl. Theo Van Doesburg and Nelly Van Moorsel travel through Europe spreading the De Stijl gospel. They meet the Paris Dada chief, the poet Tristan Tzara. Van Doesburg settles in Weimar where he publishes the new issues of De Stijl which takes on more Dadaist coloration. The new collaborators are Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann and Clement Pansaers. Van Doesburg publishes his first philosophical articles under the pseudonym of Aldo Camini. Publication in the review of the third De Stijl manifesto: « Towards an New Formation of the World ».

1922 - Mondrian

retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk museum, Amsterdam to celebrate his 50th birthday. Despite his reputation Mondrian lives in great poverty. He continues to paint flower still lives to earn his living. Van Doesburg founds the Mecano review (Leyden, 1922-1923). He begins teaching De Stijl principles to the Bauhaus students. He meets the Dutch architect Cornelis Van Eesteren who will become a close partner. He further organizes a congress of progressive artists in Dusseldorf and a Constructivist and Dada congress in Weimar.

1923 - Mondrian meets the

writer Michel Seuphor. « Dada tour » in Holland of Nelly Van Moorsel, Theo Van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters and Vilmos Huszár. May: Theo and Nelly Van Doesburg move to Paris. Huszár and Rietveld present the Colored Spatial Composition in the « Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung » and the « Juryfreie Kunstschau » of Berlin. Exhibition « The De Stijl Architects » at the Galerie L'Effort Moderne in Paris. Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren propose three house projects labeled « Counter-constructions ».

1924 - Mondrian's painting

is increasingly pure and dominated by white grounds and black lines. Gerrit Rietveld and Truus Schröder-Schröder build the famous Schröder house in Utrecht. One of the greatest De Stijl realizations, it immediately becomes famous internationally. César Domela joins the group. De Stijl exhibition at the École spéciale d'architecture in Paris. Van Doesburg introduces the diagonal line in his painting and call it a « counter-composition ». This new « Elementarism » is a result of his architectural experiments with Van Eesteren but will lead to a total break with Mondrian. Oud designs the Café De Unie in Rotterdam according to De Stijl principles. The L'Effort Moderne Bulletin publishes the fifth De Stijl manifesto: « Towards a Collective Construction », cosigned by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren.

1925 - Van Eesteren wins

competition for the redesigning of the Unter der Linden avenue in Berlin. Presentation at the Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels in Paris of Frederick Kiesler's Model of a Spatial City designed according to neo-plastic theories. The vicomte de Noailles commissions a wall decoration from Van Doesburg for one of the rooms of his new villa in Hyères built by Robert Mallet-Stevens. Van Doesburg signs the « Elementarism Manifesto ». Beginning of the renovation of the café de l'Aubette in Strasbourg, under the direction of Van Doesburg with the help of Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. It will be completed in 1928.

1926 — Mondrian designs the

plans for an abstract interior for Ida Bienert in Dresden. Model for the neo-plastic décor of a stage play by Michel Seuphor: «The Ephemeral is Eternal». André Kertész photographs his studio.

1927 – Mondrian's first works are shown in the USA by Katherine Dreier. He publishes the article «Jazz and Neo-Plasticism» outlining a new theory of universal rhythm. Publication of commemorative issue for the 10th anniversary of the founding of De Stijl by Van Doesburg.

1928 - Founding by Rietveld with Le Corbusier and Sigfried Giedion of the «Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne» (CIAM).

1929 – Construction by Van Doesburg of his house-studio in Meudon. Van Eesteren is named engineer in chief for urban planning in Amsterdam and plans the new extensions of the city.

1930 – Exhibition of the new art group Cercle et Carré at the Galerie 23 in Paris: works by 50 different geometric and abstract artists including Vantongerloo, Arp, Mondrian and Michel Seuphor present a collaborative work the «Painting-poem». In reaction to the aesthetic and romantic tendencies of Cercle et Carré Van Doesburg launches a new review, Art concret, to defend radical abstraction.

1931 – A rival group, Abstraction-Création, is founded in Paris by Auguste Herbin, Theo Van Doesburg and Jean Hélion. Death of Van Doesburg of a heart attack while on cure in Davos, Switzerland.

1932 – Publication of a last issue of de De Stijl in homage to Theo Van Doesburg. Mondrian retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the artist's 60th birthday.

1934 – Mondrian assists at a Louis Armstrong concert at the salle Pleyel in Paris. Sees regularly the young American painter Harry Holtzman living in Paris.

1935 - Exhibition «Cubism and Abstract Art» at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. An entire chapter in the catalog is devoted to Mondrian and De Stijl.

1937 - Exhibition «Origines et développement de l'art international indépendant», at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, organized by Christian Zervos in Paris.

1938 – Mondrian leaves Paris for London. He lives with the painter Ben Nicholson.

1940 – Mondrian arrives in New York. He finds lodgings thanks to the help of Harry Holtzman who also introduces him to Boogie-Woogie.

1941 – Mondrian exhibits New York City I his first painting composed of colored lines.

1944 – Mondrian weakened by pneumonia dies on 1 February. His last painting Victory Boogie-Woogie remains unfinished. Fritz Glarner and Harry Holtzman photograph and film the New York studio.

1945 – Mondrian retrospective at MoMA.

Principal De Stijl figures :

César Domela 1900-1992 Dutch painter

Jean Gorin 1899-1981 French painter

Vilmos Huszar 1884-1960, Hungarian painter and designer

Anthony Kok 1882-1969, Dutch poet

Piet Mondrian 1872-1944, Dutch painter

Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud, 1890-1963, Dutch architect

Gerrit Thomas Rietveld 1888-1931, Dutch designer and architect

TheoVan Doesburg 1883-1931, Dutch painter, designer and theoretician

Cornelis Van Eesteren 1897-1988, Dutch architect and urban planner

Bart Van der Leek 1876-1958, Dutch painter and designer

Georges Vantongerloo 1886-1965, Belgian painter and sculptor

Jan Wils 1891-1972, Dutch
architect

Piet Zwart 1885-1977, Dutch
industrial designer and typographer