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TWO PATHS TO ABSTRACT ART: KANDINSKY AND MALEVICH

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ABSTRACT

Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich were both great Russian painters who became pioneers of abstract art during the second decade of the twentieth century. Yet the forms of their art differed radically, as did their artistic methods and goals. Kandinsky, an experimental artist, approached abstraction tentatively and visually, by gradually and progressively concealing forms drawn from nature, whereas Malevich, a conceptual innovator, plunged precipitously into abstraction, by creating symbolic elements that had no representational origins. The conceptual Malevich also made his greatest innovations considerably earlier in his life than the experimental Kandinsky. Interestingly, at the age of 50 Kandinsky wrote an essay that clearly described these two categories of artist, contrasting the facile and protean young virtuoso with the single-minded individual who matured more slowly but was ultimately more original.

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Experimental and Conceptual Innovators

> Through the whole history of art two kinds of talents and two different missions are simultaneously at work.
>
> Wassily Kandinsky, 1916[1]

Two of the greatest painters of the modern era - Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich - were Russian. Both made their greatest contributions in the second decade of the twentieth century.[2] And both are universally recognized as pioneers of abstract art, which became one of the century's most distinctive artistic developments.

Kandinsky and Malevich have been studied by scores of art historians. These scholars have recognized that Kandinsky and Malevich arrived at abstraction by very different approaches, just as they have recognized that the two artists' forms of abstract art differed greatly. As is common in art history, however, these differences have been considered in isolation, as idiosyncracies of these two artists. Yet recent research has shown that Kandinsky and Malevich are archetypal cases of two different types of artistic innovator. Recognizing this can give us a more systematic understanding of why Kandinsky's and Malevich's careers, and art, differed in the ways they did.

Studies of several hundred important artists have shown that artistic innovators can broadly be divided into two groups.[3] *Experimental* innovators generally have imprecise visual goals. Their uncertainty leads them to work tentatively, by trial and error. Their innovations consequently appear gradually, over long periods, as they make discoveries in the process of executing their paintings. In contrast, *conceptual* innovators typically use their art to express their ideas or emotions. Their goals for their work can be stated clearly, before its execution, and they can consequently plan their paintings precisely, and execute them systematically. Conceptual

innovations appear suddenly, as the embodiment of new ideas.

The long periods often required to develop experimental innovations mean that they usually occur late in an artist's career. In contrast, the most important conceptual innovations are usually made by young artists, who can create bold new forms without being hampered by long-established habits of thought.

The Seeker and the Finder

> Woe to the artist whose reason interferes with his "inner dictates" while he is working.
>
> Wassily Kandinsky, 1938[4]

> The new complexity in the modern development of art, the necessity for the conscious use of scientific geometric methods become clear in the creation of a system of movement for new classical structures.
>
> Kazimir Malevich, 1919[5]

In a remarkable essay titled "Reminiscences," written when he was at the peak of his career, Kandinsky described the development of his art. He recalled one key event that occurred in 1896, when he was 30, that contributed to his decision to become a full-time artist. At an Impressionist exhibition in Moscow, for the first time Kandinsky came upon a painting that was not strictly realistic:

> That it was a haystack, the catalogue informed me. I didn't recognize it. I found this nonrecognition painful, and thought that the painter had no right to paint so indistinctly.

In spite of his discomfort, Kandinsky discovered that the painting had seized his imagination:

> I noticed with surprise and confusion that the picture not only gripped me, but impressed itself ineradicably upon my memory... What was... quite clear to me was the unsuspecting power of the palette, previously concealed from me, which exceeded all my dreams. Painting took on a fairy-tale power and splendor. And,

> albeit unconsciously, objects were discredited as an essential element within the picture.[6]

Kandinsky thus explained that he was powerfully affected by a visual event, as his first sight of a Monet not only revealed the power of art, but also planted the seed that would eventually grow into the realization that art need not be representational.

A second key event occurred several years later, after Kandinsky had moved to Munich to study painting:

> I was enchanted on one occasion by an unexpected spectacle that confronted me in my studio. It was the hour when dusk draws in. I returned home with my painting box having finished a study, still dreamy and absorbed in the work I had completed, and suddenly saw an indescribably beautiful picture, pervaded by an inner glow. At first, I stopped short and then quickly approached this mysterious picture, on which I could discern only forms and colors and whose content was incomprehensible. At once, I discovered the key to the puzzle: it was a picture I had painted, standing on its side against the wall.

The next day, Kandinsky was unable to recreate his enchantment with the picture: "even on its side, I constantly recognized objects, and the fine bloom of dusk was lost." He drew a simple conclusion: "Now I could see clearly that objects harmed my pictures."[7]

Yet this conclusion immediately produced a "terrifying abyss" for Kandinsky, as he confronted a momentous question: "What is to replace the missing object?"[8] He feared that a purely abstract art would degenerate into mere decoration, devoid of emotional or spiritual significance. His eventual solution to this problem was based on the belief that non-representational art would remain meaningful if it grew out of representation: if the artist began with real objects, then obscured them by blurring or simplying their forms, the viewer would sense their presence, and feel their impact, even if only subconsciously. Making abstract art

therefore involved masking: “concealment wields an enormous power in art.” Even greater possibilities were raised by using both explicit and implicit forms, “the combination of the hidden and the revealed.”[9]

The empirical and visual source of Kandinsky’s belief in the validity of abstract art points to his experimental nature as an artist. The same is true of the extended process by which he gradually developed his form of abstract art. Thus he reflected in 1913 that

> Only after years of patient toil and strenuous thought, numerous painstaking attempts, and my constantly developing ability to conceive of pictorial forms in purely abstract terms, engrossing myself more and more in these measureless depths, did I arrive at the pictorial forms I use today...
>
> I sometimes look back at the past and despair at how long this solution took me.

Yet he recognized that he could only proceed intuitively, letting forms arise in the course of painting:

> My only consolation is that I have never been able to persuade myself to use a form that arose within me by way of logic, rather than feeling. I could not devise such forms, and it disgusts me when I see them. Every form I ever used arrived “of its own accord,” presenting itself fully fledged before my eyes... or else constituting itself actually in the course of work, often to my own surprise.[10]

What Kandinsky came to understand was that for him progress necessarily occurred gradually, and that abstract art could come only at the end of a “long path, which I *had* to follow”:

> It is impossible to conjure up maturity artificially at any particular time. And nothing is more damaging and more sinful than to seek one’s forms by force... One can philosophize about form; it can be analyzed, even calculated. It must, however, enter into the work of art of its own accord... Thus, I was obliged to wait patiently for the hour that would lead my hand to create abstract form.[11]

Kandinsky described painting as a "struggle with the canvas," in the course of which he "derived spiritual experiences from the sensations of colors on the palette."[12] While he was working he was constantly sensitive to the developing image:

> The artist "hears" how something or other tells him: "Hold it! Where? The line is too long. It has to be shortened, but only *a little bit*!" "Just *a little bit, I tell you*!" Or: "Do you want the red to stand out more? Good! Then add some green. Now they will 'clash' a little, take off a little. But only *a little*, I tell you."

Response to the work in progress was essential: "One must have the perception to 'listen' when the voice sounds. Otherwise, no art."[13] Kandinsky consequently rejected calculation or preconception: "My advice... is to mistrust logic in art."[14]

Malevich's attitude was very different. He believed artistic forms should follow rules: "in constructing painterly forms it is essential to have a system for their construction, a law for the constructional inter-relationships of forms."[15] Progress in art need not be gradual: "in art it is not always a case of evolution, but sometimes also of revolution."[16] His own form of abstract art, Suprematism, was a case in point: "I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is to Suprematism, to the new realism in painting - to non-objective creation."[17]

Malevich believed that the time had come for art to abandon imitation of the external world: what was now needed was "the formation of signs instead of the repetition of nature."[18] These new signs would be ideas, "flowing from our creative brain."[19] Artists "should abandon subject and objects if they wish to be pure painters."[20] Unlike the movements it succeeded, including Cubism and Futurism, Suprematism would not create forms by breaking real objects into component parts, but would build directly with abstract forms: "It is not constructed out of

the dynamic elements of the objects, like some Futurist pictures,... it is a harmoniously constructed image of abstract elements."[21] As he explained in an essay of 1922 titled "Suprematism as Pure Cognition," these elements would exist solely in the work of art: "Represented spaces, planes and lines exist only on the pictorial surface, but not in reality."[22] In the same year, Malevich's disciple El Lissitzky explained that in Suprematism symbols did not have to have immediate meanings: "A sign is designed, much later it is given its name, and later still its meaning become clear."[23]

The judgments of art historians support the characterization of Kandinsky as an experimental innovator. Alan Bowness remarked that during his approach to abstraction "Kandinsky was a man struggling in the dark. He was aware of this - it is part of his historic importance that he admitted that neither the creation nor the appreciation of a work of art is an exclusively conscious process."[24] Kandinsky's friend and biographer Will Grohmann stressed that Kandinsky achieved abstraction not decisively, based on theory, but tentatively, based on vision:

> It is only with the greatest caution that Kandinsky made the transition to abstract forms. Had he been guided by theory alone, he could easily, after he wrote *On the Spiritual in Art* (i.e. from 1910 onward), have completely eliminated naturalistic elements from his painting. In actual fact it took him four years to reach that point, and he was still painting landscapes as late as 1913. Kandinsky did not want to paint decorative works, states of mind, or music. He consciously aimed at the pictorial, and for this reason he had to try to retain the forms he had intuitively discovered, but at the same time he filled them with the content of his lived experience.[25]

Analyzing Kandinsky's work of this same period, David Sylvester compared his practice to that of another great experimental artist:

> The incompleteness of these paintings - the way that passages are left unresolved - is something like the incompleteness of an unfinished Cézanne still life. The Cézanne is a record of a groping after the forms of external objects in which honesty compels that what cannot be said with certainty is better left unsaid: a Kandinsky of the *Blaue Reiter* period [1911-14] is its counterpart in terms of a groping after the forms of feelings.[26]

Ulrike Becks-Malorny contrasted the spontaneity and freedom of Kandinsky's art with the calculation and predetermination of Malevich and his followers:

> There is... a fundamental difference between Kandinsky's art and that of his Suprematist compatriots. Whereas the Suprematists gave priority to the construction of a picture, employing radically streamlined elements and materials, precise analysis and conscious design, Kandinsky saw the expressive, true essence of the picture solely in its composition, namely the free combination of manifold pictorial elements.[27]

Unlike most experimental artists, Kandinsky routinely made preparatory drawings, watercolors, and even oil sketches for his paintings. Unlike conceptual artists, however, for whom a painting is often an enlarged replica of a final preparatory image, Kandinsky's paintings are generally the last, and most abstract, stage of a progression, in which the image progressively became more abstracted from reality as each sketch moved farther away from the recognizable representational forms of the first drawing. Thus when Kandinsky spoke of hiding or concealing objects in the approach to abstraction, he was not referring to a process that occurred in the course of application of layers of paint to a single canvas, but rather to one that was carried out in a series of separate works. One consequence of this is that ambiguous objects in his paintings can often be identified by consulting the related preparatory works:

> Kandinsky's *Improvisations*... retain unmistakable references to his favorite, recurrent motifs. They contain multiple and abstract images of horses, riders, boats, rowers, waves, cannons,

> graveyards, citadels and reclining lovers... In formulating the *Improvisations* between 1911 and 1913, the artist made preparatory watercolor sketches. By studying a group of related watercolors with the final oil version, it becomes clear that Kandinsky moved away from the object, obscuring the specific motif so only allusions to its representational origins are retained. Sometimes he executed a detailed watercolor on which he based a canvas... In the large oil painting the forms have been obscured to an even greater degree than in the preparatory study. The images have been abstracted from nature to such an extent that they cannot easily be identified or "read."[28]

Art historians' analyses of Malevich equally support the view that he was a conceptual innovator. John Golding described Malevich's concern with mathematics as he approached abstraction: "Malevich had always been interested in geometry, but it is now, between 1913 and 1915, that it becomes for him an obsessive concern."[29] John Milner observed that by 1913 "Malevich began to make the mathematical basis of his work a primary consideration," noting that Malevich and his colleagues Lyubov Popova and Vladimir Tatlin "were all three *constructing* figures on the basis of geometry in 1913. Individuality, likeness and character were all of secondary importance." Milner concluded that "In preferring generalized construction to specific detail, and the approach of constructing with geometry, these painters relinquished the whole realist tradition."[30]

Larissa Zhadova explained that Malevich's Suprematism was intended to symbolize the cosmos, but not to represent it:

> His pictures can be described as images of the world's cosmic space. But they are not copied from nature; this is not the space one sees by looking at the blue sky above one's head. They are hypothetical images, conceptual images, plastic formulation images, "factorizations" carried out by the artist's imagination.[31]

Suprematism was based on a radical new idea. Thus Mike O'Mahony described the *Black Square*

that initiated Suprematism "not as a culminating point but as a new beginning, a *tabula rasa* upon which new cultural forms and ideas could be developed."[32] H. H. Arnason also described the *Black Square* as revolutionary, "a new beginning that corresponded to the social transformation occurring around [Malevich] in the years leading up to the Russian Revolution."[33]

Malevich's art did not evolve slowly, like Kandinsky's, but changed rapidly. Golding recognized that this speed was a function of the conceptual nature of the work: "During the years following the launch of the *Suprematist Manifesto* [in 1915] Malevich's thought was evolving at the same dizzying and heady rate as the evolution of his painting itself."[34] Curiously, however, after its rapid development during 1915-18, Suprematism stopped as abruptly as it started, as Malevich ceased painting for about five years. This may have been an early instance of a phenomenon that has plagued a number of conceptual innovators in the arts, who have suffered dry spells when they ran out of new ideas.[35] Golding believed this was the case, for he described Malevich as "the prototype for countless subsequent abstract artists who having reached their goal - or at least a distillation of the ideas and sensations they were seeking to evoke - only find themselves in the tragic position of wondering how to go further, how to avoid the endless repetition of the climax of their achievement."[36]

Measuring Careers

> There has never been a "thermometer" for measuring the level of art, and there will never be one.
>
> Wassily Kandinsky, 1936[37]

Kandinsky was a great artist, but he was not a great quantitative social scientist. In an essay written in 1936, he argued that it was impossible to determine when in an artist's career he had done his best work, for art experts often disagreed, and there was no valid way to resolve

these disagreements, because quality in art cannot be objectively determined:

> In the case of generally and rightly acknowledged artists, some specialists constantly rate their early period far higher than their later works, while other experts maintain the opposite. Thus, there exist not simply individual works, but whole periods, made up in turn of numerous individual works, for which no one has ever devised any yardstick of quality either.[38]

Kandinsky was wrong on both counts: quality in art can be determined systematically, and experts' disagreements over artists' best periods - when disagreements occur - can be satisfactorily resolved.

Even as Kandinsky denied that systematic standards for artistic importance could exist, he identified the key standard: "Ask yourselves... whether the work of art has made you free of a world unknown to you before."[39] In art, as in scholarship, importance is a function of innovation. Important artists are innovators whose work changes the practices of their disciplines, by revealing worlds unknown before; important periods are those in which these innovative works appear.

Art historians have devoted considerable amounts of energy to identifying the most important artists, and to identifying their most important periods. And many art historians have devoted considerable amounts of energy to recording systematically the results of these many micro-level studies, by weaving them into summary narratives of the history of art. The resulting surveys of art history nearly always contain photographs chosen to illustrate the most important contributions of the most important artists. No one of these books can be considered definitive, because no single scholar's judgments can be assumed to be superior to those of his peers, but pooling the evidence of the many available books can effectively provide a survey of art scholars'

opinions on what constitutes a given artist's most important period.

Tables 1 and 2 provide tabulations, distributed by the artists' ages at the date of execution, of all the illustrations of works by Kandinsky and Malevich, respectively, contained in 33 surveys of art history, published since 1990.[40] Table 3 uses these distributions to identify the most important periods in these artists' careers - the individual years or spans of years represented by the most illustrations.

According to Table 3, Kandinsky's best single year was 1913, while Malevich's was 1915. Neither of these results is surprising. Grohmann declared that "For Kandinsky,... 1913 was the most fruitful of the prewar years." This was the time of Kandinsky's arrival at a genuinely abstract art: "He has now mastered the abstract style of expression, and is in possession of the full range of his pictorial means."[41] And it was in 1915 that Malevich painted the *Black Square*, which he described in the *Suprematist Manifesto* of the same year as "the face of the new art," and as "the first step of pure creation in art."[42] In December of 1915, in Petrograd Malevich presented the *Black Square*, with 38 of his other paintings, at the famous "0,10" exhibition, which publicly launched the new art of Suprematism. Milner observed that "this exhibition was of enormous importance to Malevich for it provided the platform from which he launched a whole new movement and attitude to art."[43]

Malevich's breakthrough in 1915 occurred at the age of 37, while that of Kandinsky in 1913 occurred when he was 10 years older, at 47. Malevich's breakthrough was also more highly concentrated than that of Kandinsky. Thus Table 3 shows that paintings made in the single year of 1915 accounted for fully one-third of Malevich's total illustrations in the textbooks surveyed, whereas Kandinsky's paintings of 1913 account for less than a quarter of his total illustrations.

The table also shows that the same effect appears if we consider longer periods, but that the longer the period we consider, the smaller the difference between the two artists. Thus Malevich's best three years and best five years both account for larger shares of his total illustrations, respectively, than do Kandinsky's best periods of the same lengths, but by progressively smaller margins.

Tables 1-3 thus show that art scholars agree that Malevich's most important work was done at a considerably earlier age than Kandinsky's, and furthermore that Malevich's breakthrough into abstraction was made more precipitously than that of Kandinsky, and dominated his career to a greater extent. These results are consistent with the general analysis of conceptual and experimental innovators, for conceptual artists typically innovate earlier in their careers, and arrive at their innovations more suddenly, than do experimental artists.

Additional evidence on the life cycles of Kandinsky and Malevich can be drawn from the decisions of a different group of art experts. In 2003, when the Manhattan building of the Museum of Modern Art was closed for renovations, Houston's Museum of Fine Arts presented an exhibition of works selected from the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. The Houston museum was given "nearly carte blanche access" to the New York museum's holdings, and the exhibition was described as "a lucid overview of modern art since 1880," or less formally as a "greatest-hits compilation of modern art."[44]

The 200 works in the Houston exhibition included three paintings by Malevich, and four by Kandinsky. The former were painted in 1913, 1915, and 1918, when Malevich was 35, 37, and 40, respectively, while the latter were all painted in 1914, when Kandinsky was 48. The three Maleviches were chosen from among seven paintings held by the Museum of Modern Art,

executed from 1914-35, while the four Kandinsky were chosen from among a total of nine, executed from 1909-24.[45] This careful selection of important works from one of the world's greatest collections of modern art therefore reveals that the Houston curators judged that Malevich's greatest work was done in his late 30s, while Kandinsky's was done in his late 40s. In this they agreed not only with the authors of the textbooks surveyed above, but also with an earlier group of curators of the Museum of Modern Art. In 1992, that museum published a book, titled *An Invitation to See*, that contained photographs and discussions of 150 works selected from the museum's collection, chosen to show a wide audience "a few of the best or most characteristic" works. One Malevich, painted in 1915, was included in *An Invitation*, as were four Kandinskys - the same four selected for the Houston exhibition in 2003.[46] Contrary to Kandinsky's fear that art experts would disagree about artists' best periods, these various sources thus reveal a consensus that Malevich reached his peak considerably earlier in his life than Kandinsky.

Two Paths to Abstract Art

> Woe betide him who relies on mathematics - on reason.
>
> Wassily Kandinsky, 1931[47]

> Nowhere in the world of painting does anything grow without a system.
>
> Kazimir Malevich, 1919[48]

Kandinsky and Malevich both believed that the great art of the future would be abstract, and during the years immediately prior to World War I these two Russian artists, and the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, became the pioneers of abstract art. Yet the abstract forms they created differed radically, and the same is true of their artistic methods and goals. Kandinsky dreamed of

an abstract art that would originate in nature, in which natural forms would be simplified and harmonized through the judgment of sensitive and experienced artists. In contrast, Malevich foresaw an abstract art that rejected nature, in which mathematics would be used systematically to construct revolutionary new forms that would become understood as symbols of the dynamism of a revolutionary new society.

Recognizing the difference between the empirical seeker Kandinsky and the conceptual finder Malevich serves to give us a deeper understanding of their attitudes and their achievements. Like Cézanne and other great experimental artists, Kandinsky worked cautiously and slowly toward an uncertain aesthetic goal, whereas Malevich, like Picasso and other conceptual innovators, proceeded rapidly and confidently toward an art that expressed his ideas. Kandinsky's impact was greatest on later artists whose concern was with the aesthetic values of their work, whereas Malevich became an inspiration for later conceptual artists, for having "liberated the concept of painting from that of picturing."[49]

Epilogue

> It is evident that those artists who serve two opposing worlds must essentially differ.
>
> Wassily Kandinsky, 1916[50]

Interestingly, the distinction made in this paper between conceptual and experimental artists would come as no surprise to Kandinsky, for he proposed essentially the same scheme in 1916.[51] He pointed out that the common distinction between "modern" and "old-fashioned" artists was not a meaningful one, because the division changed with every new fad. He argued that what was needed was an "enduring taxonomy," which he proceeded to offer.

Kandinsky made a fundamental distinction between *virtuoso* artists and *creative* artists.

The former were facile and protean:

> *The virtuoso* has a brilliant, versatile talent that is extremely sensitive to every impression, reacts very strongly to everything beautiful, and with the greatest skill and ease develops in many directions - often completely different, sometimes contradictory; a talent that can disdain means of expression (drawing and color) and completely change them.

The virtuoso's art was based on imitating other artists:

> Unable to create in isolation, he needs outside influence...
> The virtuosos form "schools." Carried away by the strange dream, they create works increasingly inferior to the originals... Such artists are like starlings who do not know a song of their own, but imitate more or less well that of the nightingale.

In contrast, the creative artist was a single-minded individualist who matured slowly:

> The *creative artist* comes into the world with his own soul's dream. The justification for his existence is the materialization of this dream. His whole talent exists merely for this goal alone. Therefore, it is stubborn, seemingly unpliable, adverse to impressions, does not let itself be carried away by the trends of the day, stands apart, is misunderstood, and is initially overlooked. Such artists are often bad students in school, do not want to obey the teachers, often fail their exams, and are considered less talented even by their friends. They see other art and everything else around them with their own eyes. When they speak with the help of nature, they do so in their own way, and even here cannot conform to the currently accepted "correct principle." Thus, in the beginning of their careers and often for many, many years, they are considered "second class" artists.

Yet the creative artist persevered, and slowly achieved greatness:

> The creator of the new walks straight ahead on his own difficult path. When later on the art historian looks back at the artist's career, he sees a straight line. He sees that from the beginning the line (drawing), and the color (harmony), remain the same, and that during the course of the work they develop, purify, concentrate, and are brought to perfection.

It is clear that Kandinsky's brilliant, versatile, protean, precocious, imitative, and ultimately superficial virtuoso is the type referred to here as conceptual, and that his stubborn, individualistic, single-minded, persistent, original, and eventually triumphant creative artist is the experimental innovator. Kandinsky did not categorize individual artists in this 1916 article, but it is not difficult to infer some of his assignments from earlier writings. So for example in his celebrated book, *On the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1912, he described Cézanne as "the seeker after new laws of form," who "had the gift of seeing inner life everywhere," and could consequently activate even inanimate objects in creating pictures. In contrast, Kandinsky described Picasso as "led on always by the need for self-expression, often driven wildly onward." He portrayed Picasso as a daring mountain climber of art, whose abrupt and radical changes of style baffled even his disciples:

> Picasso throws himself from one external means to another. If a chasm lies between them, Picasso makes a wild leap, and there he is, standing on the other side, much to the horror of his incredibly numerous followers. They had just thought they had caught up with him; now they must begin the painful descent and start the climb all over again. In this way arose the latest "French" movement, Cubism.[52]

In 1916 Kandinsky was living in Russia, where he was overshadowed by Malevich with his many conceptual followers, and it is not difficult to see his comment that virtuosos formed schools as a bitter reference to Suprematism. He would later complain to an interviewer that in Moscow paintings were being made in laboratories.[53] Although he clearly felt neglected, Kandinsky consoled himself in 1916 with the thought that his achievement would ultimately be greater and more profound than that of the more protean and flamboyant Malevich. Thus he concluded that the creative artist "will still realize his dream in one way or another, as long as the

dream remains alive within him. Thus unlike the virtuoso, he needs *inner development*."[54]

As discussed above, Kandinsky did not believe that the quality of art would ever be measured. Now that a way of measuring artistic quality has been devised, however, Kandinsky would no doubt be pleased by the fact that this yardstick confirms that his work did grow in importance until later in his life than that of his conceptual rival Malevich.

Footnotes

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2. David W. Galenson, "The Greatest Artists of the Twentieth Century," NBER Working Paper 11899 (2005), Table 2.

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4. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 832.

5. K. S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915-1933*, Vol. 1 (London: Rapp and Whiting, 1968), p. 91.

6. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 363.

7. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 369-70.

8. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 370.

9. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 170-71.

10. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 370.

11. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 393, 396.

12. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 372-73.

13. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 799.

14. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 827.

15. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 100.

16. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 94.

17. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 37.

18. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 94.

19. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 92.

20. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 34.

21. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 2, p. 95.

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23. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers, *El Lissitzky* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 335.

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25. Will Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1958), p. 145.

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27. Ulrike Becks-Malorny, *Wassily Kandinsky* (Cologne: Taschen, 2003), p. 126.

28. Vivian Barnett, *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), pp. 29-30.

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33. H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, fifth ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), p. 204.

34. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, p. 74.

35. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses*, p. 86.

36. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, p. 78.

37. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 787.

38. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 786.

39. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 828.

40. For a listing see Galenson, "The Greatest Artists of the Twentieth Century," Appendix.

41. Grohmann, *Kandinsky*, p. 128.

42. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 38.

43. Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*, p. 120.

44. Galenson, *Old Masters and Young Geniuses*, p. 43; John Elderfield, ed., *Visions of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003), p. 6.

45. This information was drawn from the Museum of Modern Art's listing of its collection on its web page.

46. Helen Franc, *An Invitation to See*, revised edition (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), pp. 6, 50, 62-63.

47. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 758.

48. Malevich, *Essays on Art*, Vol. 1, p. 100.

49. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, pp. 78, 184; Dore Ashton, *The New York School* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1992), pp. 82, 113, 124; Arthur Danto, *Unnatural Wonders* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2005), p. 250.

50. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 413.

51. The quotations in the following paragraphs describing the two types of artist are from Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 413-15.

52. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, pp. 151-52. On Picasso as the prototype of the versatile conceptual innovator, see David W. Galenson, "And Now for Something Completely Different: The Versatility of Conceptual Innovators," NBER Working Paper 12039 (2006).

53. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 476.

54. Lindsay and Vergo, *Kandinsky*, p. 415.

Table 1: Illustrations of Paintings by Kandinsky in 33 Textbooks, by Year of Execution

Year	Age	Illustrations	Year	Age	Illustrations
1903	37	1	1919	53	1
1908	42	4	1920	54	1
1909	43	4	1922	56	1
1910	44	7	1923	57	7
1911	45	15	1924	58	1
1912	46	2	1925	59	3
1913	47	19	1926	60	3
1914	48	8	1936	70	1
1916	50	1	1940	74	1
1917	51	1	1944	78	2
1918	52	1	Total		84

Source: All tables in this paper are based on the textbooks listed in David W. Galenson, “The Greatest Artists of the Twentieth Century,” NBER Working Paper 11899 (2005), Appendix.

Table 2: Illustrations of Paintings by Malevich in 33 Textbooks, by Year of Execution

Year	Age	Illustrations	Year	Age	Illustrations
1907	29	1	1920	42	1
1911	33	1	1924	46	1
1912	34	4	1925	47	2
1913	35	9	1926	48	2
1914	36	9	1927	49	4
1915	37	31	1929	51	1
1916	38	8	1932	54	2
1917	39	1	1933	55	3
1918	40	9	1935	57	3
1919	41	1	Total		93

Table 3: Best Periods in Careers of Kandinsky and Malevich

	date	age(s)	n	% of total illustrations
Best year				
Kandinsky	1913	47	19	23
Malevich	1915	37	31	33
Best 3 years				
Kandinsky	1911-13	45-7	36	43
Malevich	1913-15	35-7	49	53
Best 5 years				
Kandinsky	1910-14	44-8	51	61
Malevich	1912-16	34-8	61	66