

# Does Abstract Art Have a Limit?

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# The terms ‘abstract’ and ‘abstraction.’

## General:

Verb ‘abstract:’ *OED*: “to withdraw, take away; to separate in mental conception; to consider apart from the concrete;”

Noun ‘abstraction:’ *OED*: “the act of abstracting;” “the act of separating in thought;” “the result of abstracting; a mere idea;”

Adjective ‘abstract:’ *OED*: “separated from matter, practice, or particulars; ideal; abstruse.”

Verb ‘abstract:’ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (MWCD)* “remove, separate; to consider apart from application to or association with a particular instance;”

Noun ‘abstraction:’ *MWCD*: “the act or process of abstracting;” “the state of being abstracted;”

Adjective ‘abstract:’ *MWCD*: “disassociated from any specific instance;” “expressing a quality apart from an object.”

## Art:

‘Abstraction’ in visual art: Harold Osborne: 1. “a mode of representing objects which reduces the amount or particularity of the detail depicted;”

2. a work in which “neither the work itself nor any of its parts represents or symbolizes objects in the visible world.”

## Etymology:

‘Abstract:’ Medieval Latin *abstractus* the Latin past participle of the verb *abstrahere* meaning ‘to drag away.’

This etymology underlies the preceding definitions as well as thinking of abstraction as “In thought, leaving out, by not attending to, the apparently irrelevant distinguishing features (or even common features) of the several individuals falling within a class.” (Antony Flew)

# The Organic Development of Abstraction in Art History

# REPRESENTATIONAL ART



Pieter Bruegel, *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565

# MANNERISM



El Greco, *Laocoön*, 1610





John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1821



J. M. W. Turner, *The Lake of Zug*, 1843



J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed*, 1844





Edouard Manet, *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, 1881-1882



Vincent Van Gogh, *Cypresses*, 1889





Vincent Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889



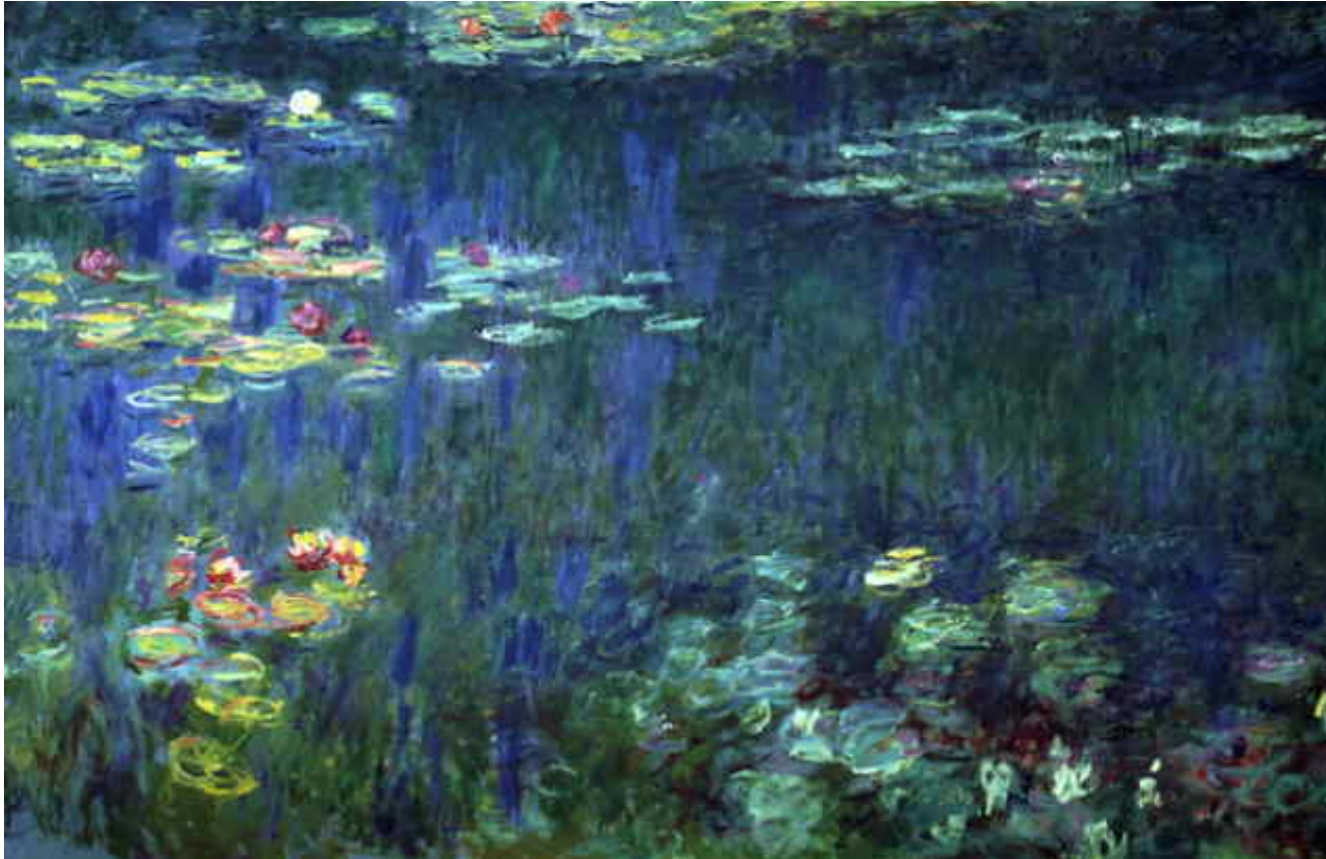
Paul Gauguin, *Fe Tata Te Miti (By the Sea)*, 1892





Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893

# IMPRESSIONISM



Claude Monet, *Waterlilies, Green Reflection, Left Part*, 1916-1923



# FAUVISM



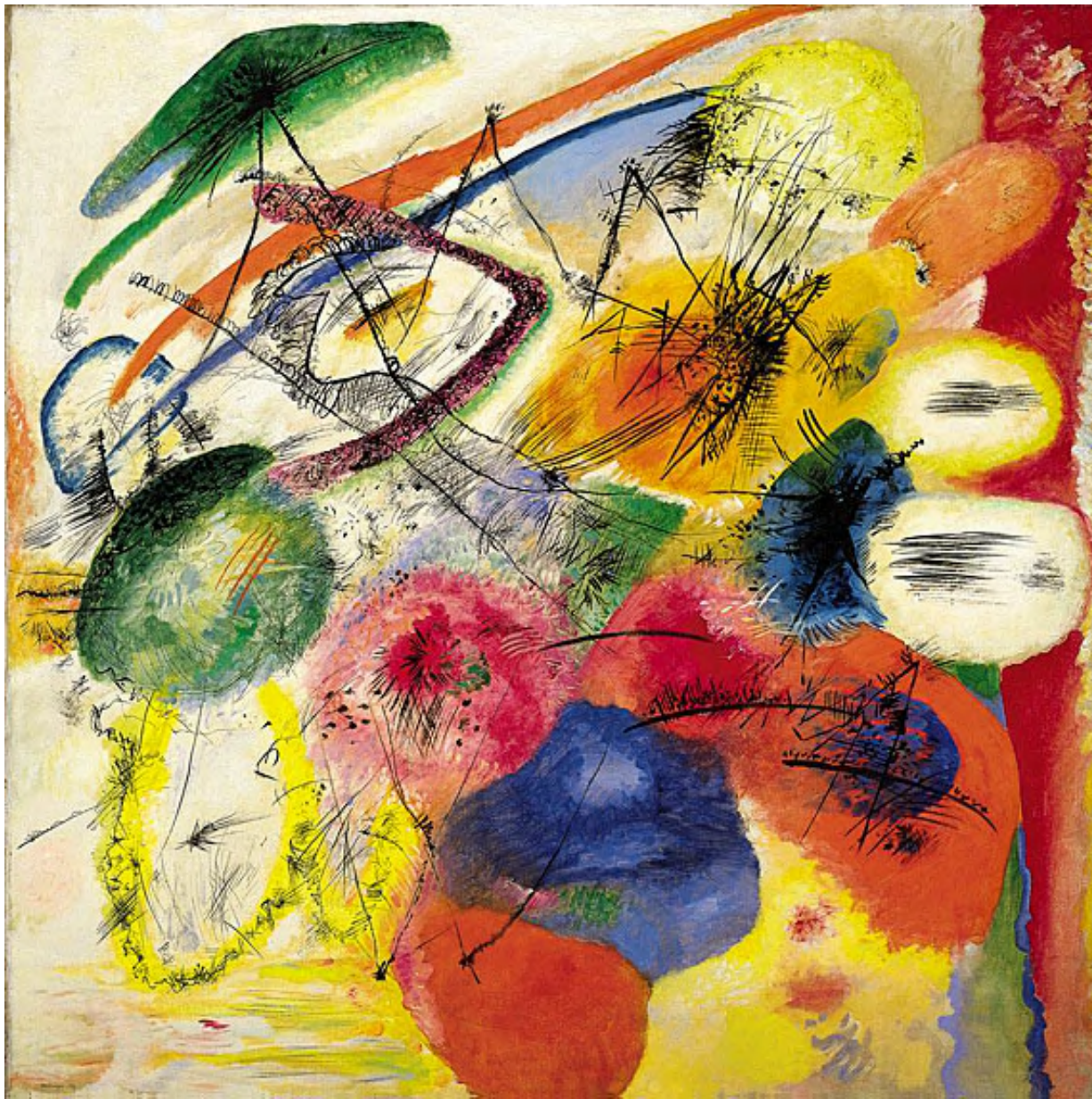
Maurice Vlaminck, *Landscape with Red Trees*, 1907

# EXPRESSIONISM



Chaim Soutine, *Landscape*, 1921





Wassily Kandinsky, *Black Lines* 19



# ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM



Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950



# ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM



Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950

# The Geometric Development of Abstraction in Art History

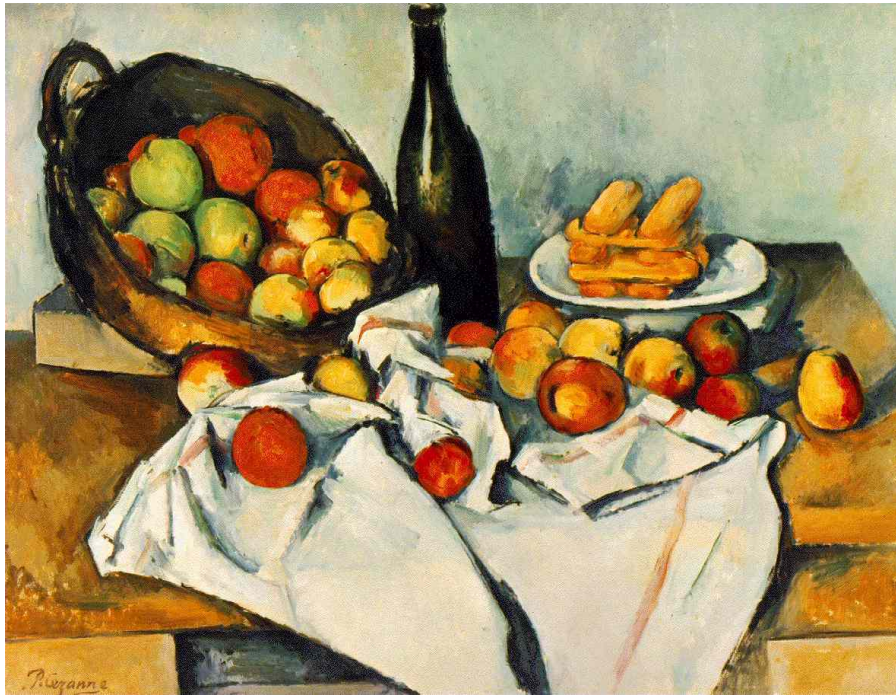


# REPRESENTATIONAL ART

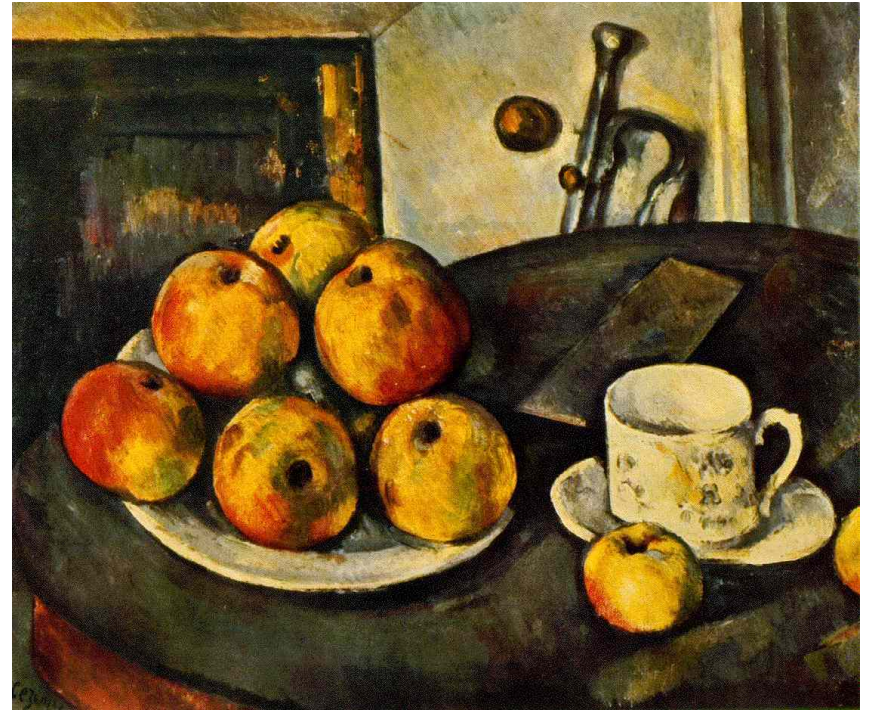


Pieter Bruegel, *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565





Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Basket of Apples*, 1890-1894



Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Apples*, 1890-1894





Paul Cézanne, *Monte Sainte-Victoire Seen from Les Lauves*, 1904-1906

# ANALYTIC CUBISM



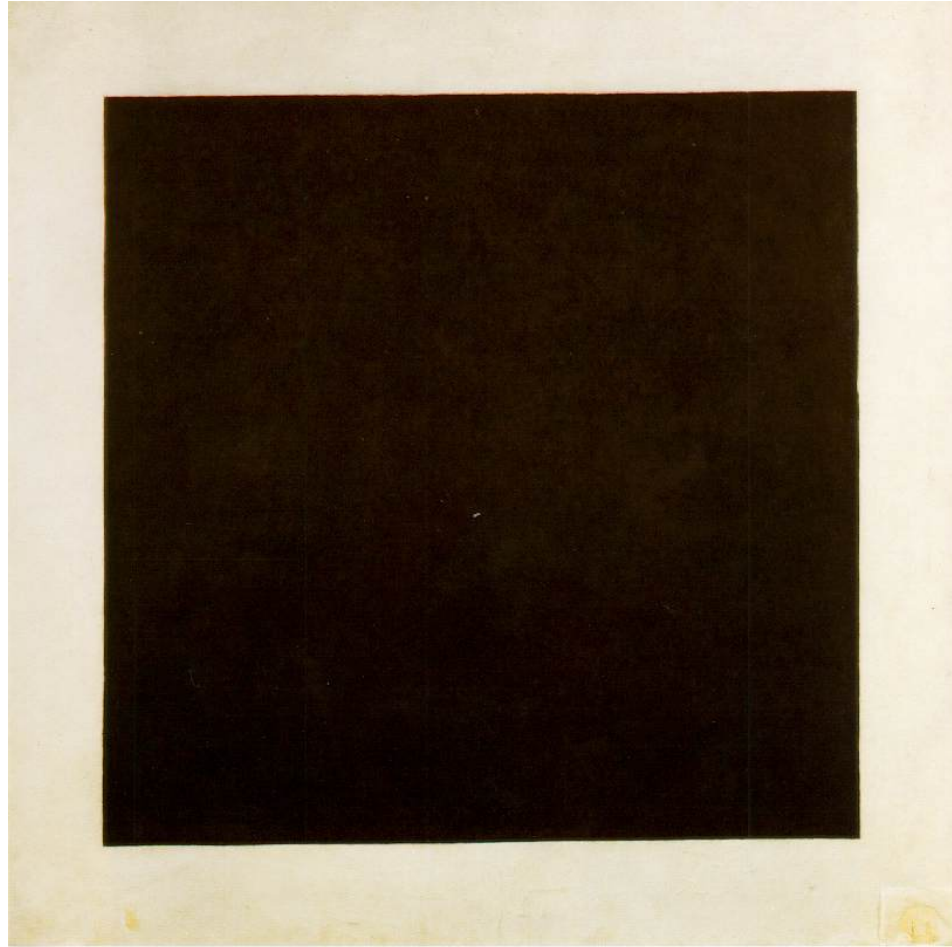
Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 1910



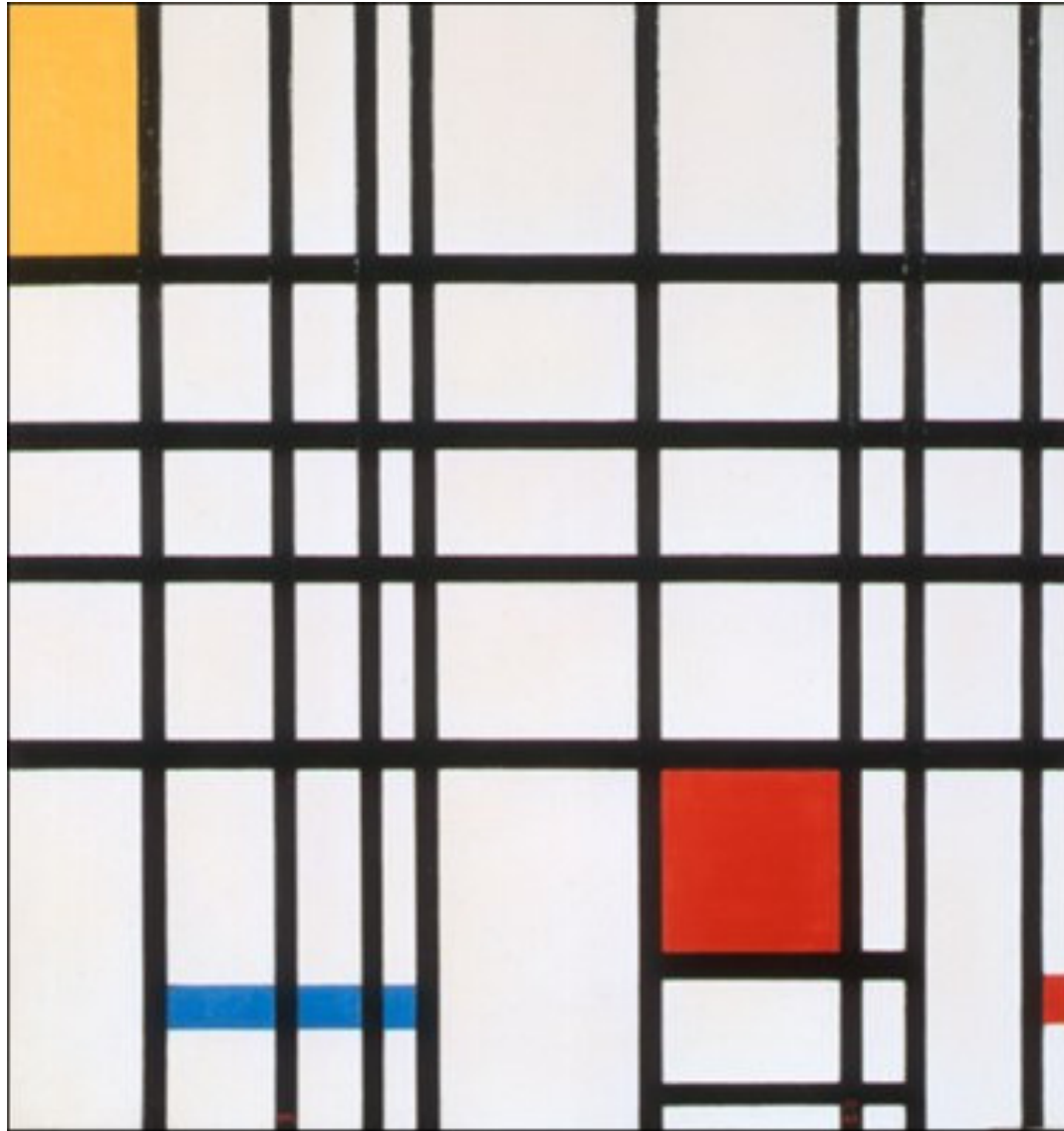


Henri Matisse, *Bathers by a River*, 1916-1917

# SUPREMATISM

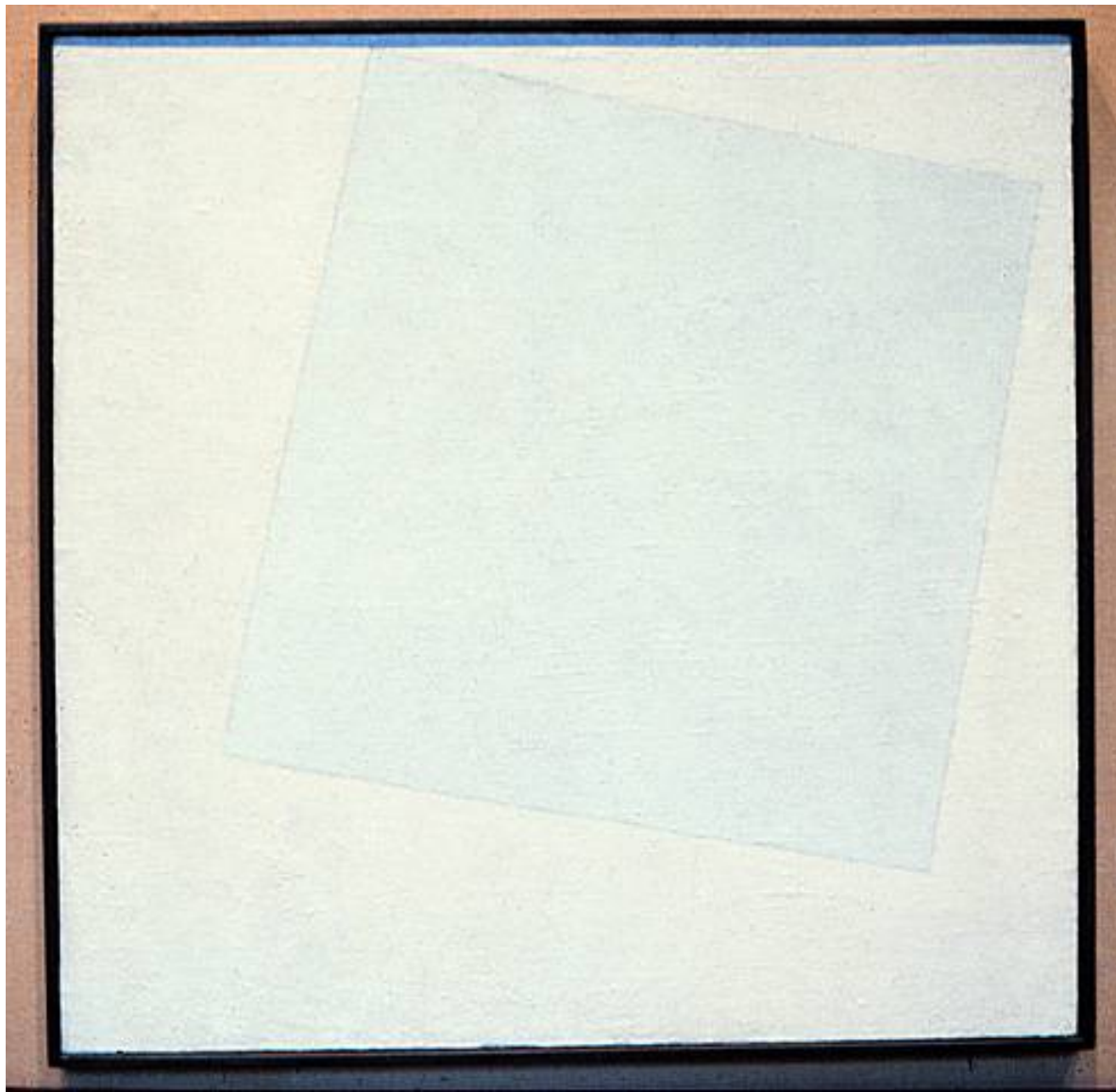


Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1913



Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)  
*Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red* 1939-1942





Kasimir Malevich, *White on White*, 1918

# COLOR-FIELD PAINTING



Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1956



Mark Rothko, *No. 14*, 1960,  
(1903-1970), 1960



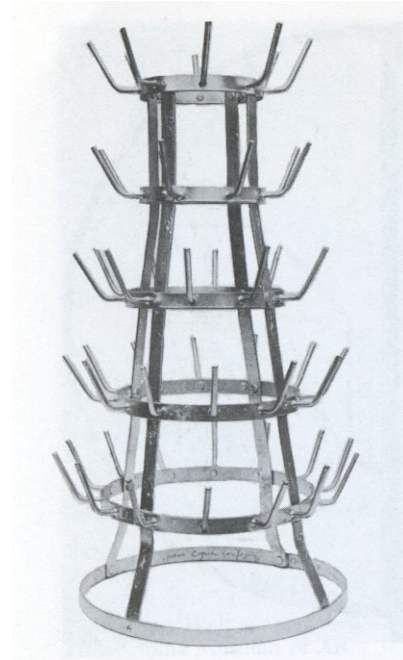


Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting*, 1960-1966

# The Challenge of Dadaism



# DADAISM - READYMADES



*Fountain*, Marcel Duchamp, 1917

*Bottlerack*, Marcel Duchamp,  
1914

# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

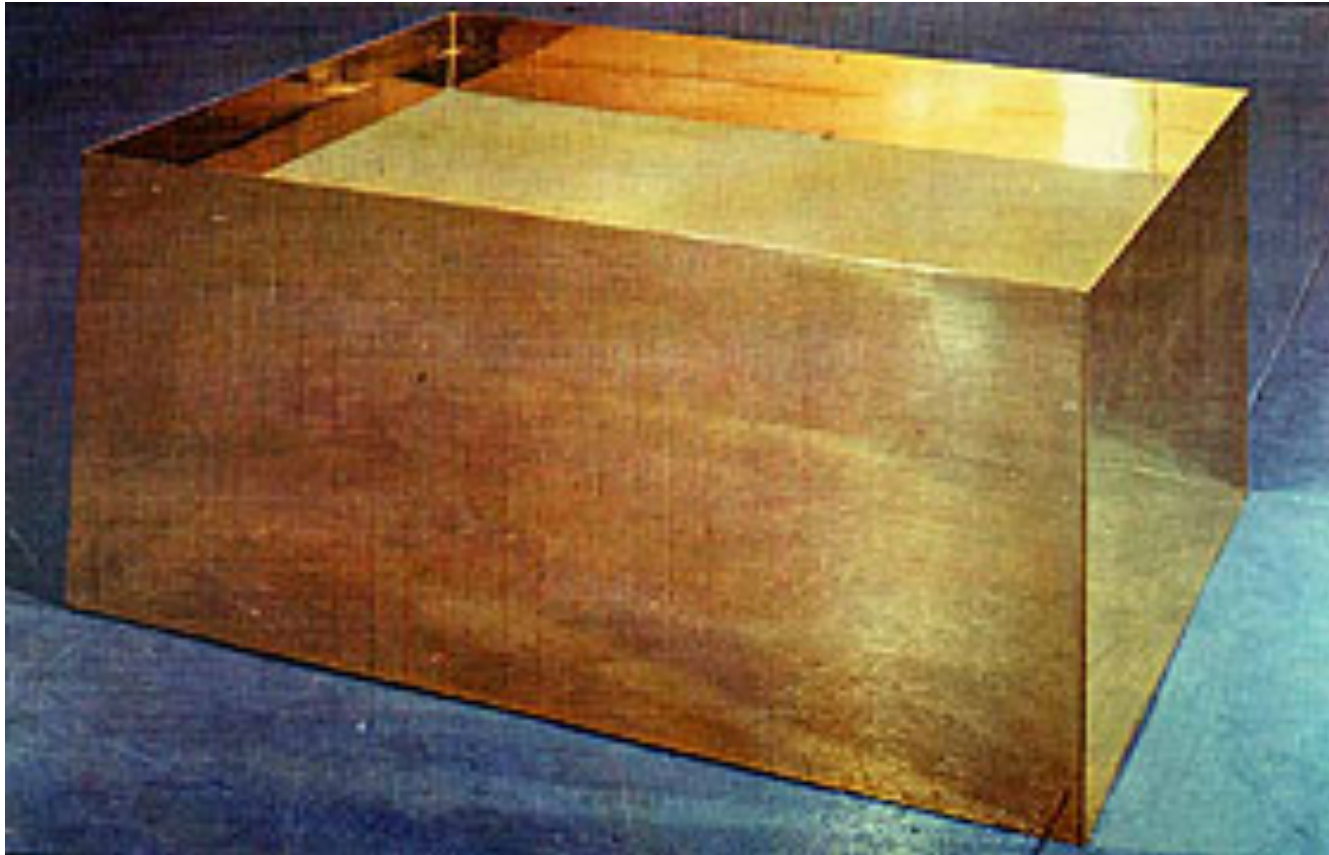
# POP ART



*Marilyn, Andy Warhol, 1964*



# MINIMALISM



*Untitled*, Donald Judd, 1969



*Untitled*, Donald Judd, 1968

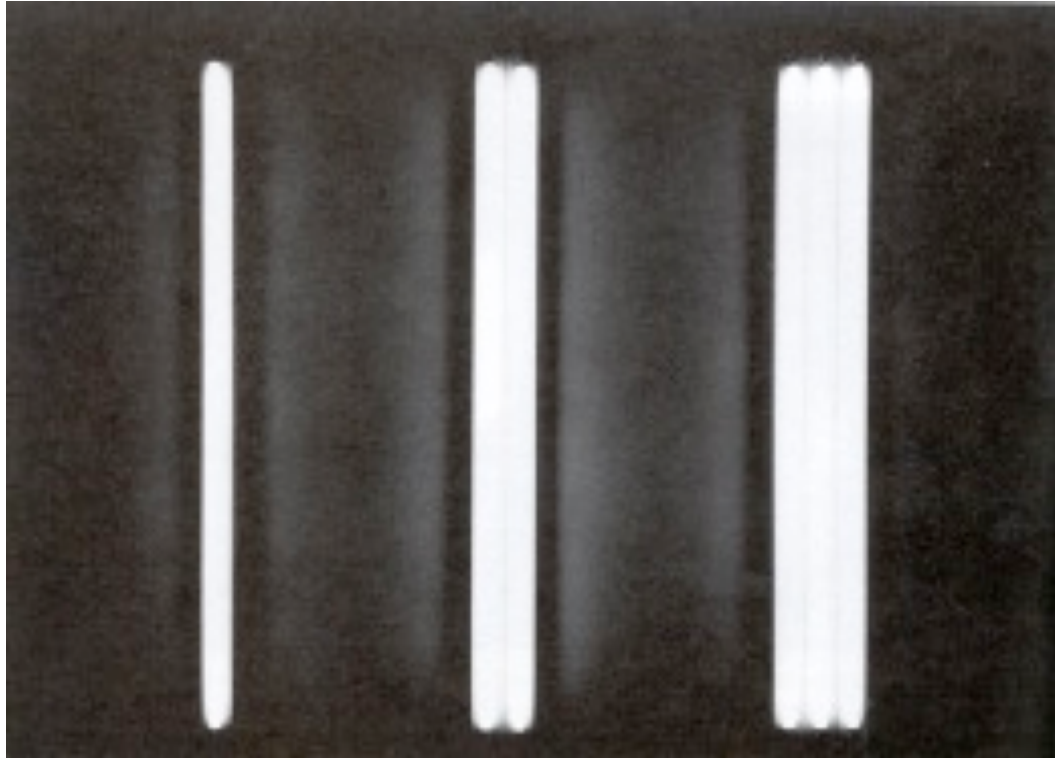


*Untitled*, Donald Judd, 1969

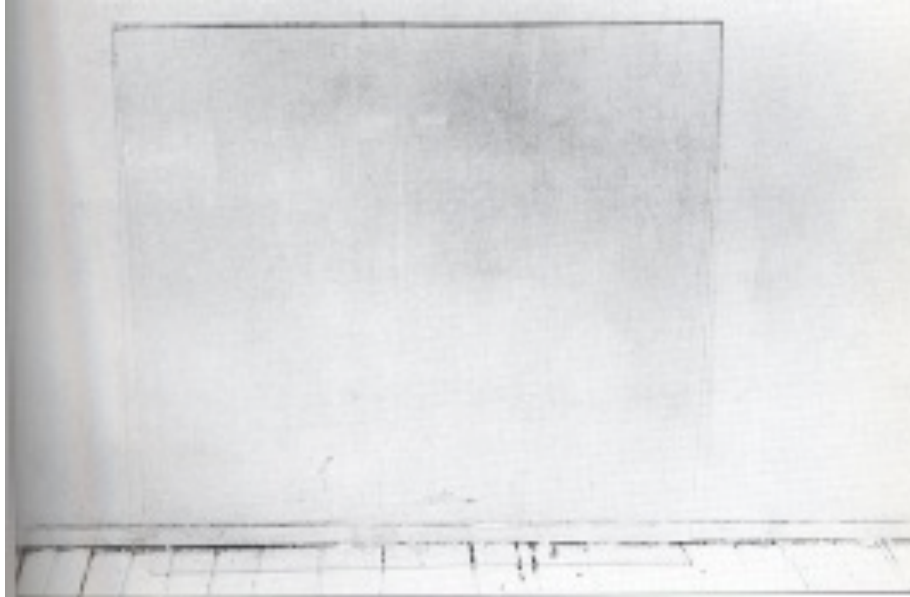




*Untitled*, Donald Judd, 1970

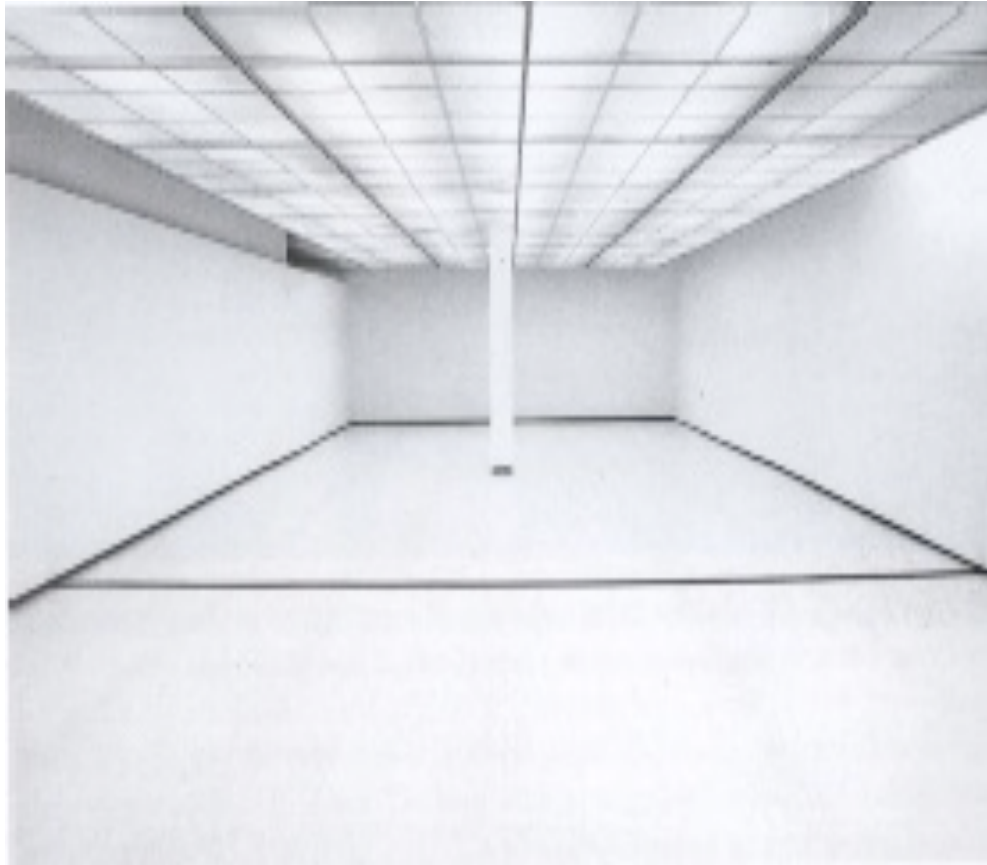


Dan Flavin, *the nominal three (to William of Ockham)*, 1964



Joseph Kosuth  
*Any Five Foot Sheet of Glass  
to Lean Against Any Wall, 1965*





Robert Irwin, *Black-Line Volume*, 1975-1976

# EARTHWORKS



Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970

# EARTHWORKS



Walter de Maria, *Lightening Field*, 1971-1977



# BODY ART/PERFORMANCE ART



Chris Burden, *Bed Piece*, 1972

# CONCEPTUAL ART

**wa-ter** (wă'tēr), *n.* [AS. *wæter* = D. *water* = G. *wasser*, akin to Icel. *vatn*, Goth. *watō*, water, also to Gr. *ὕδωρ*, Skt. *udan*, water, L. *unda*, a wave, water; all from the same root as E. *wet*: cf. *hydra*, *otter*<sup>1</sup>, *undine*, and *wash*.] The liquid which in a more or less impure state constitutes rain, oceans, lakes, rivers, etc., and which in a pure state is a transparent, inodorous, tasteless liquid, a compound of hydrogen and oxygen, H<sub>2</sub>O, freezing at 32° F. or 0° C., and boiling at 212° F. or 100° C.; a special form or variety of this liquid, as rain, or (often in *pl.*) as the liquid ('mineral water') obtained from a mineral spring (as, "the *waters* of Aix-la-Chapelle").

Joseph Kosuth, '*Titled (Art as Idea as Idea) [Water]*', 1966

# CONCEPTUAL ART



Joseph Kosuth, *Clock (One and Five)*, 1965



# CONCEPTUAL ART

ALL THE THINGS I KNOW  
BUT OF WHICH I AM NOT  
AT THE MOMENT THINKING -  
1:36PM; JUNE 15, 1969

Robert Barry, 1969

# Theses of Abstraction

- 1. To effect an artwork of any kind of artwork, the artist whose work it is must be responsible either for the production of an apprehensible object or objects of some kind or kinds of apprehensible object which she means the artwork to be, or she must be responsible for the production and/or use of an apprehensible object or objects of some kind or kinds of apprehensible object by which her intended identification of the artwork with some object or objects of some kind or kinds of object can be effected. In the latter case, the object which the artwork is to be understood to be may or may not itself be apprehensible. However, in either kind of case, an object or objects of some kind or kinds of object either is or can be singled out with which the artwork is meant to be identified, as intended by the artist whose artwork it is.



- 2. A work of art is originally dependent on a public perceptual object or objects which it is meant to be or through which its identity is made comprehensible, or which a part or parts of it is meant to be and through which the identity of another part or parts of it is made comprehensible. Apprehension and appreciation of the work originally dependent on such an object can occur in virtue of apprehending that object as long as the object continues to exist. Apprehension and appreciation of the identity of a work of art may be subsequently dependent on, or may occur in virtue of apprehending, an object or objects of which each of the following things is true: a) any such object is so causally and historically linked to an object or objects on which the work is originally dependent that, in virtue of this linkage, the apprehension of the identity of the artwork and any relevant appreciation of the work can be effected by such a subsequent object as much as the original; and b) any such object is recognized by the artist whose work it is to be as adequate to that apprehension and any such appreciation as is any object on which the identity of the work was and may continue to be originally dependent.

- 3. An artist who means to make a work of art must be intentionally related in two senses to any object which she means the work to be. In the first sense, the artist must intend to single out some object or objects of some kind or kinds of object in some way or combination of ways of singling something out. In the second sense, the artist must intend that the object or objects singled out be understood to be a particular artwork by that artist.

- 4. An artist must utilize at least one object which existed prior to his intention to produce a work of art in order to produce a work of art. Accordingly, no work of art can come into being - or no object can have or acquire the property of being a particular work of art - which is not indebted to an object which existed prior to its origination, and where any preexistent object utilized to produce the work is either an object, such as a camera or film, which is utilized according to some practice relevant to the origination of an object of the kind of object dependent on the practice, or is an object, such as the body or mind, on which the use and/or understanding of the use of an object of any kind of object to be used to make art depends. Further, any object which is used in a particular act of use to produce a particular work of art is that object before that act is that act.



- 5. The objects with which artworks and any of their parts are meant to be identified are either selected, specified, or created, or are produced by some combination of the actions of selecting, specifying, or creating. Specification is the use of language to single out an object with which an artwork is meant to be identified, and determining the limits of Abstraction in art depends on specification.
- 6. Objects on which works of art are dependent presuppose subjects to whom they are directed and concern both the awareness and the agency of subjects to whom they are directed.

7. Any public perceptual object on which an artwork is wholly or partially dependent - either originally, subsequently, or both - must either be displayed in such a way that its relevance to the artwork can be understood by the appropriate audience, or the relevance of such an object to the artwork must be made known to the artworld. That at least must be the case if the object with which the artwork is meant to be identified is to exhibit a limit of Abstraction which can be understood art historically.

8. Artworks need not be aesthetic objects, and even important artworks need not be aesthetic objects, at least not as the concept ‘aesthetic’ is traditionally understood.

9. The objects to which it is possible to respond aesthetically may include some which are not perceptual, and as an artwork need not itself be a perceptual object, some artworks may elicit aesthetic experiences which are not themselves perceptual.



- 10. When a subject singles out in awareness a public perceptual object on which all or part of an artwork is dependent, an ‘artistic complex’ is formed of which the subject, the object, and the event of awareness linking them are constituents. Ineliminable elements of such an artistic complex - including properties of the constituents of the complex and relations which hold between them - can be used to address those elements to result in an object in which a limit of Abstraction is exhibited or through which such a limit is thereby determined.