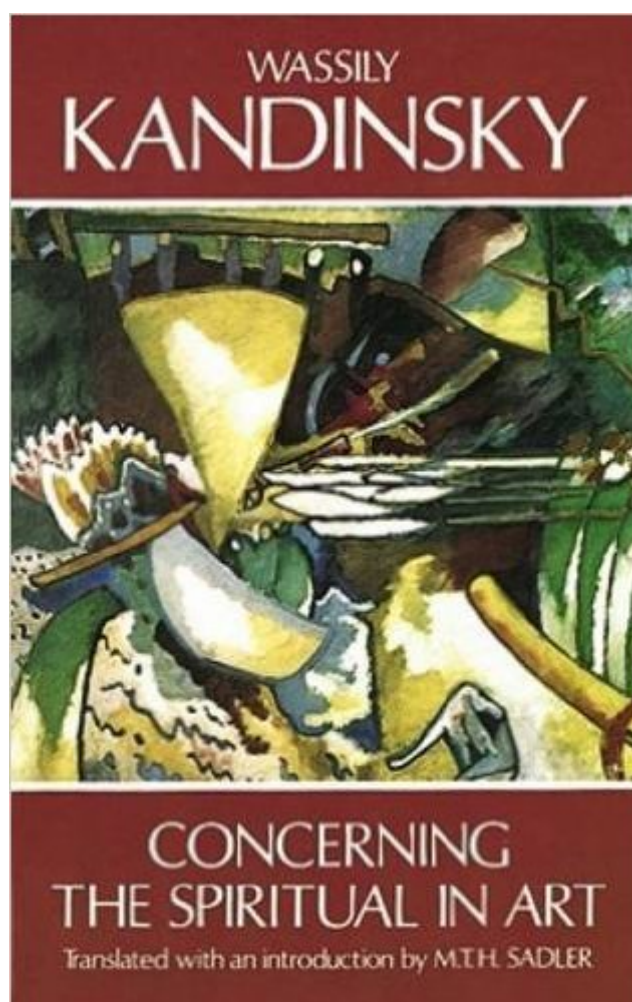


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Concerning The Spiritual In Art



Synopsis

A pioneering work in the movement to free art from its traditional bonds to material reality, this book is one of the most important documents in the history of modern art. Written by the famous nonobjective painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866â1944), it explains Kandinsky's own theory of painting and crystallizes the ideas that were influencing many other modern artists of the period. Along with his own groundbreaking paintings, this book had a tremendous impact on the development of modern art. Kandinsky's ideas are presented in two parts. The first part, called "About General Aesthetic," issues a call for a spiritual revolution in painting that will let artists express their own inner lives in abstract, non-material terms. Just as musicians do not depend upon the material world for their music, so artists should not have to depend upon the material world for their art. In the second part, "About Painting," Kandinsky discusses the psychology of colors, the language of form and color, and the responsibilities of the artist. An Introduction by the translator, Michael T. H. Sadler, offers additional explanation of Kandinsky's art and theories, while a new Preface by Richard Stratton discusses Kandinsky's career as a whole and the impact of the book. Making the book even more valuable are nine woodcuts by Kandinsky himself that appear at the chapter headings. This English translation of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* was a significant contribution to the understanding of nonobjectivism in art. It continues to be a stimulating and necessary reading experience for every artist, art student, and art patron concerned with the direction of 20th-century painting.

Book Information

Paperback: 96 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications; Revised edition (June 1, 1977)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486234118

ISBN-13: 978-0486234113

Product Dimensions: 0.2 x 5.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (65 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

All art students are advised to read this short masterpiece but I suspect few young artists take the time to read the book that best explains the concepts that lead to abstract painting in the modern era. I think it would be useful if I pointed out some of the most important and interesting themes and ideas that Kandinsky explains so that you can see the vast range of this short 80 page book. First, Kandinsky was greatly influenced by music and recognized that music was judged under different standards than was painting. For example, music is not judged by how much the music sounds like noises in nature. We would never go to a symphony to hear the musicians imitate dogs barking, or ambulance sirens, or police whistles. Yet painting is judged by how well the painter reflects the natural world in a realistic style. Thus for Kandinsky, the ability for painting to lose the object, would free painting to pursue the spiritual. However, the ability for the painter to paint without painting the object is very much a challenge. He gives advice to the reader on the use of line, form, and color to try to achieve this goal. But Kandinsky recognized how fragile this makes the painting process, for any brush stroke or color or shape can evoke the material world again. Kandinsky wishes the artist to free themselves from the material world so that they can express their inner impulses. Thus the abstract painting requires contemplation to reveal its meaning. Furthermore, the meaning may be a projection of the inner life of the viewer as much as it is the inner life of the artists. This concept is not new to music but it certainly was new to painting in 1911. Now we hear about the Rothko chapel in Fort Worth, where large abstract paintings by Mark Rothko create a meditative space for contemplative viewers.

The 1910s was surely the most exciting, radical, innovative and genuinely NEW period in the history of all the arts, writing, music, painting, cinema, dance. It was also one of the few periods when creative frenzy was escorted by critical might, and is almost as famous for its artistic collectives, its 'isms', its iconoclasm and its spectacularly aggressive, wipe-the-slate-clean manifestoes as it is for any one artwork produced. Today, however, there aren't many of these manifestoes that possess more than quaint historical value. Kandinsky's 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art' is one, and probably to our own shame, speaks as loudly to us today as it did to the artist's contemporaries. A cry against all that is bogus or a dead-end in art - the bourgeois-currying; the trend-following; the excessively materialistic, naturalistic or representational; art in which formal invention is not matched by emotional power - the book demands a return to spirituality in art in an age where a godless faith in science has resulted in a soulless culture. Kandinsky is the artist who said that 'Art was close to religion', and his concept of painting is heavily bound up with his Russian orthodox upbringing (as well as later exposure to theosophy). One does not have to be a card-carrying mystic, however, to

recognise the truth of his central argument, that the only art with the power to truly move us is that which is ruthlessly faithful to the artist's inner need, not public taste or contemporary styles. This belief led Kandinsky towards abstraction: he rejected the idea that a painter should draw what was on the surface, instead of its inherent spirit or harmony (if this led to a cul-de-sac in 20th century art, this is because Kandinsky's mimics lacked his moral drive).

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