

Beyond cubism, the multiple forms of geometric abstraction

Following on from the Cubist experiments, the Dutch artist Theo Van Doesburg advocated the idea of a universal art based on a mathematical and objective approach. In Paris in 1930, he founded Art Concret, a group that disassociated itself from the previous experiments in abstraction by rejecting a direct vision of nature in favour of a specific universe governed by arithmetic and geometry.

The movement's followers came together in Paris, at joint exhibitions at the Denise René Gallery or at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, which was first held in 1946. They featured works by artists of different sensibilities: In 1949, Josef Albers began his Homage to the Square series, which demonstrates the influence of colour on visual perception.

For Aurélie Nemours, the square embodies the structures of the universe and, therefore, invites the viewer to interact with both the centre and the edges of the painting. Contrasts, blacks and whites, both horizontal and vertical, reveal the quest for transcendence on the canvas. This desire to ascribe spiritual values to art is also evident in the oeuvre of Ève Gramatzki, whose works reflect the importance accorded to the subject matter and lines. Following in the footsteps of her aunt, Aurélie Nemours, Ode Bertrand strove for rigour and simplified forms, focusing specifically on the rhythm of the assembled elements.

The use of simple geometric shapes led François Morellet to employ an arbitrarily devised mathematical system for creating his works, a far cry from any spiritual quest. The founder of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel in 1961, Morellet adopted an approach in which the viewer was actively engaged: the work was installed in a specific exhibition space in which the lighting played a part and where the movement of the visitors was part of the creative process. This interactivity with the public is a feature of the work of Carlos Cruz-Diez, where the way we see the colours changes from different viewing angles and with different degrees of brightness, thus highlighting the ephemeral nature of perception.

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