

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXPLORES DEVELOPMENT OF ONE OF
MODERNISM'S GREATEST INVENTIONS: ABSTRACTION**

***Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925* Is a Broad Cross-Disciplinary Examination of
Abstraction's Earliest, Radical Years**

Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925

December 23, 2012–April 15, 2013

The Joan and Preston Robert Tisch Exhibition Gallery, sixth floor

NEW YORK, December 18, 2012—*Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925*, on view at MoMA from December 23, 2012, to April 15, 2013, explores the advent of abstraction as both a historical idea and an emergent artistic practice. Commemorating the centennial of the moment at which a series of artists invented abstraction, the exhibition is a sweeping survey of more than 350 artworks in a broad range of mediums—including paintings, drawings, prints, books, sculptures, films, photographs, recordings, and dance pieces—that represent a radical moment when the rules of art making were fundamentally transformed. Half of the works in the exhibition, many of which have rarely been seen in the United States, come from major international public and private collectors. The exhibition is organized by Leah Dickerman, Curator, with Masha Chlenova, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

A key premise of the exhibition is abstraction's role as a cross-media practice from the start. This notion is illustrated through an exploration of the productive relationships between artists, composers, dancers, and poets in establishing a new modern language for the arts.

Inventing Abstraction brings together works from a wide range of artistic mediums to draw a rich portrait of the watershed moment in which traditional art was wholly reinvented.

Roughly one hundred years ago, a series of rapid shifts took place in the cultural sphere that in the end amounted to the greatest rewriting of the rules of artistic production since the Renaissance. Invented not just once, but by different artists in different locales with different philosophical foundations, abstraction was quickly embraced by a post-Cubist generation of artists as the language of the modern.

One of the first pictures in the exhibition, *Woman with a Mandolin*, made by Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973) in 1910, shows how he approached the brink of abstraction before turning away. Beginning in December 1911 and across the course of 1912, a handful of artists, including Vasily Kandinsky (Russian, 1886–1944), Robert Delaunay (French, 1885–1941), and Frantisek Kupka (Czech, 1871–1957), presented the first abstract works in public exhibition. *Inventing Abstraction* surveys the early history of abstraction from this pioneering moment through the mid-1920s, when it was broadly embraced by the avant-garde.

The exhibition takes an international perspective, and includes work by artists from across Eastern and Western Europe and the United States, such as Hans Arp (German/French, 1886–1966), Fernand Léger (French, 1881–1955), El Lissitzky (Russian, 1890–1941), Kazimir Malevich (Russian, 1879–1935), Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872–1944), and many others.

From the start, abstraction was an international phenomenon, with ideas, images, and people traveling across borders through a new modern media and exhibition culture. Its pioneers were far more closely linked than is generally known. Highlights in *Inventing Abstraction* include Kandinsky's *Composition V*, his most ambitious early abstract work; an important sequence of Mondrian paintings that traces the development of his work from his famous Tree pictures of 1912 to a group of superb early Neo-Plastic paintings; works by Malevich documented in his display at the landmark "0.10" exhibition held in Petrograd in 1915; a group of early rare works by avant-garde artists Katarzyna Kobro (Polish, 1898–1951) and Władysław Strzemiński (Polish, 1893–1952), *calligramme* poems by Guillaume Apollinaire (French, 1880–1918), dance notations by Rudolf von Laban (Hungarian, 1879–1958) and musical scores by Arnold Schoenberg (Austrian, 1874–1951).

Directional speakers in the galleries play sound recordings of musical compositions by Arnold Schoenberg and Luigi Russolo, and readings of experimental poetry by Blaise Cendrars, Guillaume Apollinaire, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Jean (Hans) Arp, and Tristan Tzara. Four of the landmark artists' books shown in the exhibition—by Vasily Kandinsky, Apollinaire, Kruchenykh, and Tzara in collaboration with Arp—can be further explored in touchscreen displays with page-turning software.

A chart mapping the dense web of relationships among the artists represented in *Inventing Abstraction* appear at large scale on the title wall. Vectors connect individuals whose acquaintance in the period between 1910 and 1925 could be documented. The names of those with the most number of connections within this group appear in red. These key "connectors"—charismatic, socially adept figures with contacts in many social pools—played a particularly important role in the dissemination of ideas. Many in this group—including Vasily Kandinsky, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Guillaume Apollinaire, Tristan Tzara, and Alfred Stieglitz—were editors of literary and art reviews who built impressive networks in their correspondence, commissioning manuscripts, requesting reproductions, and soliciting support. The chart was produced as a collaboration between the exhibition's curatorial and design team and Paul Ingram, Kravis Professor of Business, and Mitali Banerjee, graduate student, Columbia Business School, and other students.

SPONSORSHIP:

The exhibition is made possible by Hanjin Shipping.

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This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The accompanying seminars are made possible by MoMA's Wallis Annenberg Fund for Innovation in Contemporary Art through the Annenberg Foundation.

REINVENTING MUSIC, 1910–1925:

Visitors to *Inventing Abstraction* will end their tour of this sweeping exhibition in a musical sound chamber, with a playlist selected by Q2 Music, the online contemporary classical stream of WQXR, the nation's most listened-to classical music station. This standalone, enclosed space immerses visitors in groundbreaking and forward-looking music composed between 1910 and 1925. From the earliest developments of serialism by Schoenberg and Webern to the trailblazing, arrhythmic strokes of Stravinsky to the sonic washes of Debussy and Varese, the sound chamber presents a sonic snapshot of early-20th-century experimental composers whose music fed the imagination of their fellow iconoclasts in the visual arts. Liner notes and expanded playlists are available at wqxr.org/q2music. Q2 Music will also produce additional parallel programs that explore music in the period of 1910–25, and they will webcast concerts and conversations that MoMA is coproducing with David Lang and Bang on a Can (see Public Programs).

PUBLICATION:

Published in conjunction with the exhibition, *Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* traces the development of abstraction as it moved through a network of modern artists. The richly illustrated catalogue presents a wide range of artistic production—including paintings, drawings, books, sculptures, films, photographs, sound poems, atonal music, and non-narrative dance—to draw a cross-medium portrait of these watershed years. An introductory essay by Leah Dickerman, Curator, The Museum of Modern Art, is followed by 36 focused examinations of key artists, artworks, events, and issues in the early history of abstraction, written by authoritative scholars in their respective fields, including Matthew Affron, Yve-Alain Bois, Masha Chlenova, Ester Coen, Christoph Cox, Hubert Damisch, Rachael DeLue, Hal Foster, Mark Franko, Matthew Gale, Peter Galison, Maria Gough, Jodi Hauptman, Gordon Hughes, David Joselit, Anton Kaes, David Lang, Susan Laxton, Glenn D. Lowry, Philippe-Alain Michaud, Jaroslav Suchan, Lanka Tatersall, and Michael Taylor. 9.5" w x 12" h; 376 pages; 446 illustrations. Hardcover, \$75. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and **available exclusively at the MoMA Stores and online at MoMAstore.org** for the first eight weeks of the exhibition. Available to the trade through ARTBOOK | D.A.P. in the United States and Canada. Published and distributed by Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada.

LIVE MUSIC PROGRAMS:

In conjunction with the exhibition, MoMA and Bang on a Can present a pair of concerts that reveal how pioneering European composers of 100 years ago forever changed the music in New York. Each concert pairs two composers—an early-20th-century innovator, and a New Yorker they influenced. The music is performed by alumni and faculty of the Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival at MASS MoCA, a program dedicated entirely to the creation, study, and performance of the most adventurous music of our time.

Consonant Abstraction: Claude Debussy and Steve Reich

Tuesday, February 26, 2013, 6:00 p.m., The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1

This evening, the first in the series, features works by Claude Debussy and Steve Reich. It is a rare performance of the chamber ensemble arrangement of Debussy's landmark orchestra piece *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, which was made by one of Schoenberg's students for his

private performing society in Vienna; plus two Reich classics, *Electric Counterpoint* and *Different Trains*. This concert will be streamed live on wqxr.org/q2music. Following the concert, Steve Reich joins David Lang for a conversation.

Tickets: \$10 adults; \$5 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$5 full-time students with current I.D.

Dissonant Abstraction: Arnold Schoenberg and Morton Feldman

Monday, March 4, 2013, 6:00 p.m., The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1

This second evening in the series features one of Arnold Schoenberg's shortest, oddest, most intense pieces, *Herzgewächse*, a shockingly expressive vocal miniature originally written for Vasily Kandinsky's journal *The Blue Rider*. Morton Feldman's meditative work *Three Voices*, for solo voice and two prerecorded solo voices, a luxurious, introspective setting of a poem by Frank O'Hara, has a much slower tempo than the Schoenberg piece, but is ultimately no less intense.

Tickets: \$10 adults; \$5 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$5 full-time students with current I.D.

WEBSITE:

Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1920 is accompanied by an interactive website (MoMA.org/InventingAbstraction) that allows users to explore hundreds of works from the exhibition and track personal and professional relationships between the dozens of artists in the show--interactions that ultimately made the invention of abstraction possible. Texts about individual works and artists shed light on pioneering figures who radically transformed the rules of painting, sculpture, music, dance, and design in the first decades of the twentieth century. Interviews with the show's organizers provide behind-the-scenes insights into the research and planning that went into the exhibition. Over the course of the show, discussions with contemporary artists will be added to the site, examining early abstraction's legacy in the 21st century.

AUDIO GUIDE:

The accompanying audio guide features extensive commentary by Leah Dickerman, organizer of the exhibition. MoMA Audio is also available for check out on site, as well as online at MoMA.org/audio, and as a podcast on iTunes. MoMA Audio is available free of charge courtesy of Bloomberg.

No. 68

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org.

Hours: Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday.

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). **MoMA.org:** No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs).

Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.