

Module 6: "Piet Mondrian: 'Neo-plastic Art'"

Lecture 16: "Piet Mondrian's Neo-plastic Art and Composition"

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Piet Mondrian: 'Neo-plastic Art'
- ☰ Composition

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Piet Mondrian: 'Neo-plastic Art'



Plate: 1 Red and Blue Chair designed by Gerrit Rietveld in 1917

(Source: Ref. <http://vintageverity.wordpress.com/category/furniture-bible/> June 3, 2012)

Piet Mondrian: 'Neo-plastic Art'

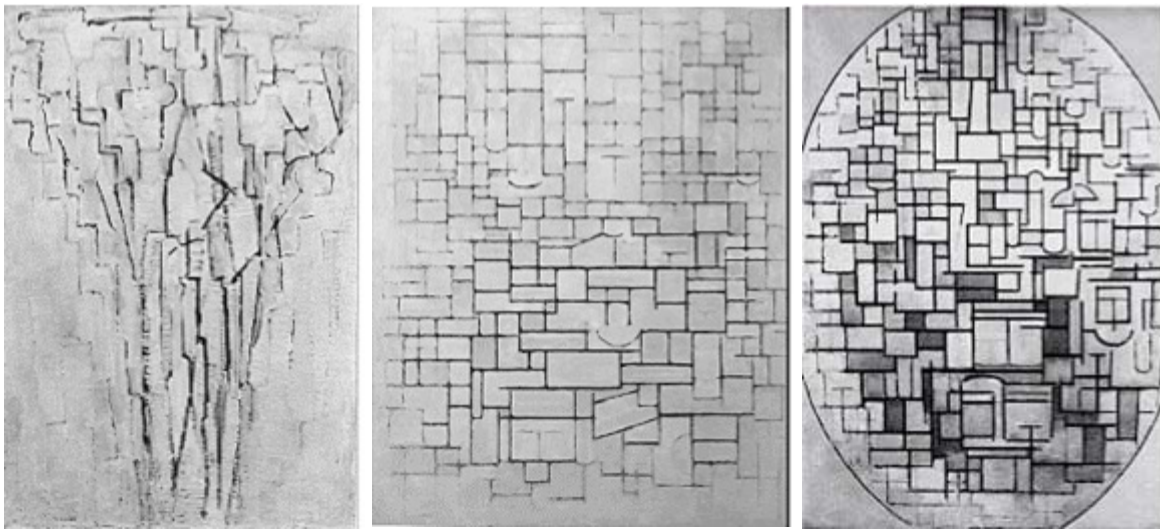
Mondrian's *Pure Plastic Art* ('Neo-plastic Art') philosophy played a very important role in modern art and design. Color did not have to represent and meaning or symbol. Color is as color only. Red and yellow represent the value of red or yellow. Along with the color the straight lines became significant in term of simplicity. Straight lines expressed a new form of aesthetics. Simplicity and minimal representation of form and shapes became the core of industrial products. A new essence of aesthetic beauty emerged that was not realized earlier. The Bauhaus became the source of such new philosophy.

(Read more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Mondrian ; June 4, 2012)

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Plates2 Piet Mondrian (1911-1914)

(Ref. Plates2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Mondrian ; June 4, 2012)

(Source: http://www.google.co.in/search?q=piet+mondrian&hl=en&noj=1&prmd=imvnso&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=1T3MT_D7KluJrAeghpzKDg&ved=0CGgQsAQ&biw=1350&bih=555 ; June 4, 2012)

"The earliest paintings (Piet Mondrian) that show an inkling of the abstraction to come are a series of canvases from 1905 to 1908, which depict dim scenes of indistinct trees and houses with reflections in still water. Although the end result leads the viewer to begin emphasizing the forms over the content, these paintings are still firmly rooted in nature, and it is only the knowledge of Mondrian's later achievements that leads one to search for the roots of his future abstraction in these works."

(Ref. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piet_Mondrian ; June 4, 2012)

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Mondrian's effort to fundamental grammar of form and color led to abstractions. His earlier composition clearly shows his research towards minimalist approach ultimately led to 'straight line' and 'primary colors', which he called '*Pure Plastic Art*' (Plate3). The 'purity of form and color' of Mondrian was closely associated with his spiritual quest to find the inner beauty and aesthetics through the minimum and simplicity. His philosophy has influenced the Industrial Design applications in term of form and color.



Plates3 Piet Mondrian's '*Pure Plastic Art*'

(Ref. Plates3 http://www.google.co.in/search?q=piet+mondrian&hl=en&noj=1&prmd=imvnso&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=1T3MT_D7KluJrAeghpzKDg&ved=0CGgQsAQ&biw=1350&bih=555 ; June 4, 2012)

Minimalism is an art movement in sculpture and painting that began in the 1950s and emphasized extreme simplification of form and color. The Bauhaus introduced through their academic programme and adopted in Industrial Design. It is a Post-WW II movement that cherished with a new expression of aesthetics with the help of 'simplicity' through 'straight-line and pure-color'. Naturally, it is reduced to the basic forms and necessary elements.

Minimalist design has been highly influenced by Japanese traditional design and architecture. The simplicity in traditional housing architecture in Japan attracted many architects including Frank Lloyd Wright. In addition, the work of *De Stijl* artists is a major source of reference for this kind of work. *De Stijl* expanded the ideas that could be expressed by using basic elements such as lines and planes organized in very particular manners. Curve line is not preferred against straight-line.

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Architecture played a very significant role in minimalist expression. *De Stijl* a Dutch movement in 1917 became the real source of inspiration through its Neoplastic Theory. 'Basic elements' became the canon of a new aesthetic appreciation.

Piet Mondrian's theory and work on *Pure Plastic Art* became the inspiration in Industrial Design. The modern product designs are highly influenced by the Neoclassicism movement the movement that led to Minimalism. Minimalism has perfectly harmonized with the modern Industrial Design policy. The spirit of 'mass production' envisages making it is affordable, easy to manufacture and servicing, easy to transport and packaging. Obviously 'Straight Line' truly matched with the spirit of 20th Century Industrial Design.

(Read more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Stijl ; June 4, 2012)

The question arises the proposed theory of Neoplastic Art had its merit in art that had continuity from the earlier art movements. However, the Industrial Design of 20th century quickly adopted the same style because of the production point of view. The new style of Minimalism totally abandoned the earlier decorative style (Rococo and Baroque). Naturally the over-burdened decorative motifs of the earlier style reached to its saturation and the new aesthetic beauty of straight line became new language of Industrial Design. Hence, adoption of Minimalistic style became quite convenient and appropriate for 20th C design. One needs to realize nature does not produce anything in 'straight line'. Introduction of straight line in design is a man-made style that is closely associated with commerce.

Thus Minimalism has become strong tool for efficient, effective profitable manufacturing process. It is time for us to think if proper synthesis of decorative quality with minimalistic principle could create a richer quality design (Classical style). Do we need to revisit and think a new course of creative design through a balanced synthesis of elements of line, form and color?

Theo Van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian is the proponent of a *Utopian Ideal* of 'spiritual harmony and order'. "They advocated pure abstraction and universality by a reduction to the essentials of form and colour; they simplified visual compositions to the vertical and horizontal directions, and used only primary colors along with black and white" (Ref. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Stijl).

The philosophy of essential form and color attributed to a new inspiration not only in the art for but also in Industrial Design. The *Bauhaus* became the cauldron of Neoplastic Art and Design philosophy. It resulted in finding a new form of aesthetic beauty through 'straight line'. Naturally such philosophy greatly influenced the field of Industrial Design.

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Composition

"...posited on the fundamental principle of the geometry of the straight line, the square, and the rectangle, combined with a strong asymmetricality; the predominant use of pure primary colors with black and white; and the relationship between positive and negative elements in an arrangement of non-objective forms and lines."

(Ref. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Stijl).

Based on the pure geometric forms compositions are derived through asymmetric arrangements. Interestingly architecture took the first step to integrate the Neoplastic ideal in their work. Discarding the ornamental quality and introducing the minimal forms through straight lines became a new language of aesthetic expression.

It would necessary to understand the above topic in the perspective of Color, Space and Composition. The term composition in art and design refer to the inner structure of the space arrangement in 2-D or 3-D. Every visual design has to have an inner structure upon which the 2-D or 3-D space is covered with color or desired material (3-D work). Therefore, the planning and arrangement of form and color, in 2/3-dimensional work is the basic foundation of any visual expression. In Art and Design, composition is one of the "formal" elements used along with space, color, color value (lights and darks), and other elements. Piet Mondrian and other contemporary artists and designers have applied the plastic quality of 2-D and 3-D design with the help of color and other elements of design. Each of the above are correlated while forming the composition. At this juncture we have to understand space and composition that becomes the backbone of any successful art and design work. In this relation color plays a very significant role.

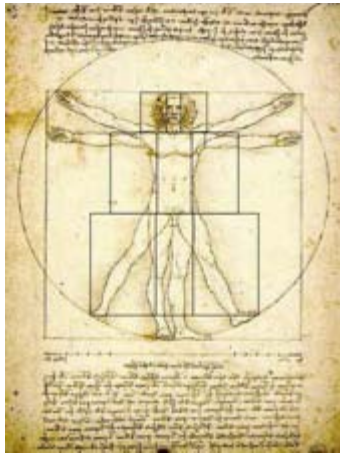


Plate3 Compositional Structure of the Dancing Nataraj
(12th C AD), India

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Color became one of the most important tools for creating composition. In the late 19th century in Europe, many artists, including James Whistler ('*Art for Art's Sake*'), declared that painting is not primarily an imitation of the external world, but rather, an arrangement of shapes and colors on a flat surface. The creativity of an artist cannot be restricted to imitate objects. Whistler initiated a new paradigm 'Art for Art's Sake' to unleash the creative expression. Whistler's "Whistler's Mother" was named *Arrangement in Black and Gray* gave the first indication of such unconventional approach. His work with an abstract tile broke the conventional practice. He attributed his work with the arrangement of colors. The old masters did preliminary compositional studies, many very structural in nature; however, the underlying structure was then covered over by the subject matter of the work, humbly taking a back seat.



Plates4. Leonardo da Vinci's Compositional Structure of Last Supper Mural

(Read more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Last_Supper ; <http://digitalsimple.info/2009/09/golden-ratio/> June 4, 2012)

The success of any form of art depends upon the complex understanding of compositional structures. 'The Golden Ration' ((1:1.618 Golden Ratio) is the corner stone of Renaissance Period that evolved around all the art and architectures became the thump-rule of aesthetic expression. Leonardo da Vinci was highly influenced by the ratios that formed the Golden Ration of Greek Classical architectural structures. In his number of compositions, Leonardo applied the same to construct a stable and harmonious composition.

(Refhttp://www.mathematicianspictures.com/LEONARDO_DA_VINCI_GOLDEN_RATIO_GOLDEN_MEAN/Leonardo_Da_Vinci_Golden_Ratio_Golden_Mean.htm ; June 4, 2012)