

Whitechapel Gallery announces landmark Abstract art exhibition for 2015

A major new exhibition tracing a century of Abstract art from 1915 to today will open at the Whitechapel Gallery in January.

It brings together over 100 works by 100 modern masters and contemporary artists including **Carl Andre, David Batchelor, Dan Flavin, Andrea Fraser, Piet Mondrian, Gabriel Orozco, Hélio Oiticica, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Rosemarie Trockel, Theo Van Doesburg** and **Andrea Zittel**, taking over six exhibition spaces across the gallery.

The exhibition takes a fresh look at this new art for a modern age, and asks how art relates to society and politics.

Curated by Iwona Blazwick OBE, Director, and Magnus af Petersens, Curator at Large, Whitechapel Gallery, *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915 – 2015*, (15 January – 6 April 2015), is international in its scope. As well as following the rise of Constructivist art from its revolutionary beginnings amongst the avant-garde in Russia and Europe, the exhibition sheds new light on the evolution of geometric abstraction from continents across the globe including Asia, the US and Latin America.

The exhibition begins with Kazimir Malevich's *Black and White. Suprematist Composition* (1915), one of a series of paintings included in the famous exhibition *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings: 0.10* in Petrograd, now St Petersburg, in the same year, prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917. This is the starting point for telling the story of Abstract art and its political potential over the next century.

Arranged chronologically, the exhibition is divided into four key themes:

- 'Communication' examines the possibilities of abstraction for mobilising radical change.
- 'Architectonics' looks at how abstraction can underpin socially transformative spaces.
- 'Utopia' imagines a new, ideal society, which transcends hierarchy and class.
- 'The Everyday' follows the way abstract art filters into all aspects of visual culture, from corporate logos to textile design.

The exhibition includes paintings, sculptures, film and photographs spanning the century from 1915 to the present, brought together from major international collections including Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; The Costakis Collection, Thessaloniki; National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Tate, London; and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

Further exhibition highlights include an entire wall filled with photographs documenting the radio towers of Moscow and Berlin by Aleksandr Rodchenko and László Moholy-Nagy amongst others, blow-up archive photographs of iconic exhibitions running through the history of abstraction and a selection of magazines which convey revolutionary ideas in art and society through typography and graphic design.

Press Release

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Notes for Editors

- The first examples of Abstract art emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. Both a historical idea to come out of the Modernist movement and an evolving artistic practice, abstraction was an international phenomenon that gathered speed rapidly from late 1911 when a series of artists including Wassily Kandinsky, Robert Delaunay and František Kupka broke away from tradition and presented works of art with no discernible subject matter, instead using colour, shape and texture to create new images. Other early pioneers of Abstract art include Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee and Hans Arp. The movement evolved over the 20th century and into the 21st century, affected by social movements, historical events and a rapidly changing modern culture of connectivity.
- Key moments in the history of Abstract art include the seminal exhibition *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings: 0.10* in St. Petersburg in 1915, which saw Kazimir Malevich present a series of paintings that depicted blocks of colour floating against a white background, the first example of geometrical abstraction. In the aftermath of the Revolution of 1917, artists Lyubov Popova and Aleksander Rodchenko emerged as central exponents of Russian Constructivism, inspired by the pre-Revolutionary work of Malevich and Tatlin. While in Europe in the 1920s and 30s, Piet Mondrian and Theo Van Doesburg founded De Stijl, an artistic movement which in turn influenced the Bauhaus style. While abstraction has generated other more expressionist movements, for example post war Abstract expressionism in the 1940s and 50s, these strands are not examined in this exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. In Brazil in the late 1950s and 60s Neo-Concretist artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica developed a new social and participatory way of working. Today, contemporary artists still experiment and challenge ideas of representation and reality, influenced by society and the evolving world around them. Examples of this can be seen in work by artists such as Sarah Morris and Armando Andrade Tudela who demonstrate the influence of Abstract art on contemporary design and brands.
- *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915 – 2015*, 15 January – 6 April 2015 is curated by Iwona Blazwick OBE, Director, and Magnus af Petersens, Curator at Large, with Sophie McKinlay, Acting Head of Exhibitions and Candy Stobbs, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery. The Curatorial Advisory Committee for the exhibition includes: Tanya Barson, Curator, Tate; Briony Fer, Professor of Art History, University College London; Tom McDonough, Professor in Art History, Binghamton University, New York; and Jiang Jiehong, Director of the Centre for Chinese Visual Arts, Birmingham City University.
- *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915 – 2015* is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue with essays by the Curatorial Advisory Committee alongside Iwona Blazwick and Magnus af Petersens.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm.

Admission £11.95/£9.85 concs (including Gift Aid donation) £10.85/£8.85 concs (without Gift Aid). Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR. T + 44 (0) 20 7522 7888, info@whitechapelgallery.org, whitechapelgallery.org

Press Information

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