

MODULE 8

# Colour, form, painting

## SCHOOL, WORKSHOP

Age 12–15, 2 Hours, 3 Lessons

School, Workshop

Age 12–15, 2 hours, 3 lessons

Painting, collage

Theory of colour, theory of form, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee

### YOU WILL NEED

A4 paper, A3 paper, coloured paper, coloured pencils, watercolours, scissors, glue sticks, colour copies of paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee

### INSTRUCTIONS

In this module participants learn about the theory of form and colour, and about the painting of the famous artists, Bauhaus masters and pioneers of abstract art, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. First they examine selected works by the two artists and investigate the effect and expression of colour and form. Then they produce their own interpretations using techniques of painting and collage.

Step 1: The group examines paintings by Kandinsky and Klee. Participants describe what they see and what figures they can discover. There are no limits to the imagination here.

Step 2: In the next step special attention is paid to colours, lines and basic geometrical forms. Which elements appear? How are they combined with one another? Can the paintings be completely reduced to geometrical forms (circles, triangles, squares and rectangles)?

Step 3: Now colour copies of the paintings are distributed and the participants cut out the geometrical forms. They rearrange these to make their own collages, combining elements from different paintings and using coloured pencils and watercolours to create their own figures. Additional geometrical forms can be cut out of coloured paper and included in the collages.

Step 4: Finally the pictures are displayed on the wall and viewed by the group. What effect do the colours have? What new formations are created by the geometrical forms? What might the next stage of abstraction look like?

### BACKGROUND

When he founded the Bauhaus in 1919, the architect Walter Gropius was seeking to bring together the arts and crafts. The goal was to train a new type of artist in the field of design and architecture to create products suitable for industrial mass production. The school set out to shape society as a whole by influencing the way people lived. Creating collective “comprehensive artworks” (Gesamtkunstwerke) was one important aspect. Interdisciplinarity and experimentation were also central to the educational concept. Training at the Bauhaus began with a single-semester preliminary course, using new and experimental educational methods to impart knowledge of materials and basic design principles. After the preliminary course students moved on to the workshops, each of which was headed by a master of form and a master of works.

Paul Klee was called to the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar in 1920 by Walter Gropius. He was one of the most important visual artists of twentieth-century classical modernism. His diverse oeuvre is clas-

sified variously as Expressionism, Constructivism, Cubism, Primitivism and Surrealism. In 1921 Klee became head of the bookbinding workshop, in 1922 head of the metal workshop and from 1922–23 to 1925 head of the glass painting workshop. He taught his elemental design theory in the preliminary course, both in Weimar and in Dessau. Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* was published in 1925 as the second volume of the series of Bauhaus Books. From 1926–27 to 1930 he was in charge of teaching of free sculptural and artistic design, from 1927 he headed the free painting workshop. From 1927 to 1929–30 he taught theory of design in the weaving workshop. Klee left the Bauhaus on 1 April 1931 to take up a professorship at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. He was dismissed immediately after the Nazis came to power.

Wassily Kandinsky – a friend of Klee's – was called to the Staatliche Bauhaus in Weimar in June 1922 by Walter Gropius. He remained at the Bauhaus until its closure in Berlin in 1933. Kandinsky was an Expressionist artist and one of the pioneers of abstract art. He is often quoted as claiming to have created the world's first abstract picture. When Kandinsky was called to the Bauhaus he was already one of the greats of modernism in art. During his time there he came into contact with Russian Constructivism and geometrical structures finally found their place in his paintings. In Weimar he led the wall-painting workshop and taught classes on abstract form elements and analytical drawing in the preliminary course at all three locations. In Dessau he was head of painting, from 1927 he directed the free painting workshop and free painting class. In 1926 he published the important Bauhaus book *Point and Line to Plane*. In 1933 Kandinsky emigrated to Paris.

## REFERENCE TEXT ON PAINTING AT THE BAUHAUS

Text by Flora Selunka on the visual arts at the Bauhaus:

*"It is hard to reconcile fine art at the Bauhaus with the functionalist orientation of the school as a whole. And yet it is the famous names that we today associate with the Bauhaus: Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Gerhard Marcks, Oskar Schlemmer, Johannes Itten and Georg Muche. Although training in fine art was not an overt objective of the Bauhaus, most of its teachers were visual artists. As well as teaching theory of form and colour and contributing to the preliminary course they frequently taught in the workshops as masters of form. Although each workshop was headed jointly by a master of form and a master of works, the role of master of form was always viewed as more important. This imbalance was not overcome until the first graduates began teaching as young masters after the move to Dessau. The role and influence of fine art at the Bauhaus was a permanent source of contention. In Dessau the visual artists were restricted to teaching students basic principles. At the same time Kandinsky and Klee offered free painting classes, which were sometimes held in their own private studios. But the Bauhaus was always a meeting place and inspiration for the artistic avant-garde – and profited from the fame of its 'great' painters. Alongside numerous lectures, a series of Bauhaus Books were published, which included Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* and Kazimir Malevich's *The World as Objectlessness*."*

IMAGES, REFERENCES, BOOKS, LINKS

*Paul Klee: Die Kunst des Sichtbarmachens*: Materialien zu Klees Unterricht am Bauhaus; [Ausstellung im Seedamm Kulturzentrum, Pfäffikon SZ, Stiftung Charles und Agnes Vögele, 14 May to 30 July 2000], author: Klee, Paul ; Baumgartner, Michael; Paul Klee Stiftung; Seedamm-Kulturzentrum, ISBN: 3716512192, publisher: Benteli, 272 pages, year of publication: 2000

*50 Bauhaus Icons You Should Know*, author: Straßer, Josef, ISBN: 9783791341972, publisher: Prestel, 157 pages, year of publication: 2009  
On Amazon.ca: <https://amzn.to/2kEUQOd>

*Meister Klee! Lehrer am Bauhaus*, authors: Eggelhöfer, Fabienne; Thöner, Wolfgang; Keller Tschirren, Marianne, ISBN: 9783775733540, year of publication: 2012

*Wassily Kandinsky – Wege zur Abstraktion*, authors: Brucher, Günter, Kandinsky, publisher: Prestel, Munich / London / New York 1999, ISBN: 3791320564