

Abstract Art – Lesson One

Colour and Spontaneity

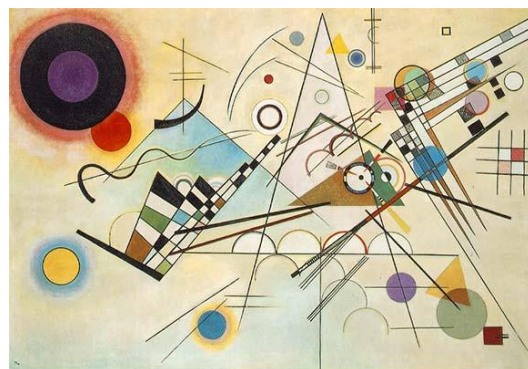
Spontaneous Drawing & Collage in the Style of Wassily Kandinsky

Wassily Kandinsky, considered the 'Father of Abstract Art,' was among some of the first artists to explore pure abstract art. His paintings from 1910 are considered to be among the first completely abstract compositions in modern art history.

"The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul."



"Colour is the keyboard; the eyes are the harmonies; the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul."



“Lend your ears to music, open your eyes to painting, and stop thinking! Just ask yourself whether the work has enabled you to 'walk about' into a hitherto unknown world. If the answer is yes, what more do you want?”

Automatic Drawing

(To Music if Desired)

Materials: white or black paper, crayons/pastels, coloured pencils, coloured paper, scissors, glue stick, circle stencils or circular objects to draw around, ruler.

- Gather some crayons or pastels (any medium which will cover the paper easily) and choose two or three colours complimentary colours that go well together.
- When applying colour to the paper, explore movement, try out circular motions, wavy lines, straight lines crossing over each other, let your hand move gesturally in a way which comes naturally to you.
- Fill in negative spaces with a complimentary or contrasting colour (which ever feels right to you).
- Draw circles or other shapes on top of your first colour application.
- Start adding cut out shapes using coloured paper.
- Try outlining areas that have emerged with paint pens, adding cut-out bits of sheet music, tissue paper or any other desired material.



Acrylic Circle Painting in the style of Kate Green

Materials: medium sized canvas, acrylic paints, brushes, sponges, roller, palette knife, paint pens, circle labels.

Optional: spray paint (white is good)



Above: Diptych by Kate Green. Notice the contrasting colours of red and green, cool, and hot!

Kate Green on her practice:

"I'd describe myself as a SONG PAINTER, using paint to 'sing with colour'. Visceral, visual utterances of shape, hue and mark are my vocabulary - a whole heart, mind, body & soul thing. I love colour and movement, pattern, and detail, working in layers and getting messy. Key themes for me are order and chaos - pattern and gesture.

I'm excited by the extravagant dimensions and intimate details that I see - a joyfulness in the very act of creating and aim to reflect this in my work. My style leans towards Abstract Expressionism, seeking to represent and communicate things unseen, making the invisible visible. I love to encourage creativity in others. It adds dimension, taste, depth, texture and richness to life, aiding expression, taking us beyond the seen and ordinary."

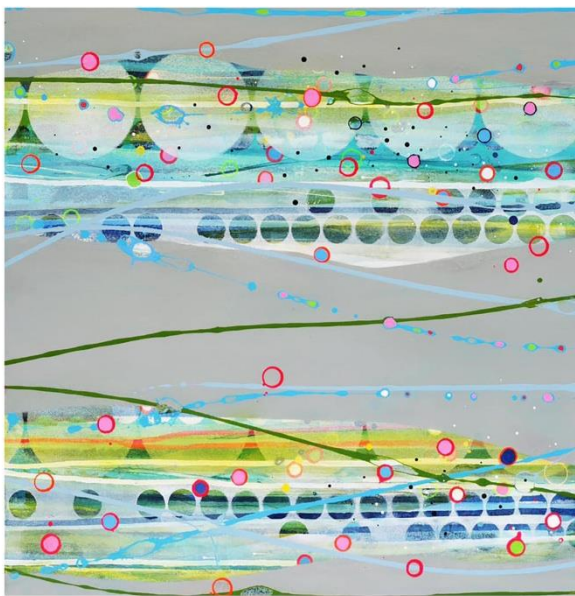
For more of Kate's process, paintings and to watch videos of her in action, follow the links below:

<http://kategreenart.com/index.html> or <https://www.facebook.com/KateGreenART/>

Colour Theory Teaching

Here we explore contrasting and complimentary colours, colours that blend well together – this is important to bear in mind when creating, but do not be afraid to break the rules, continue to be spontaneous!

- How acrylic paint behaves – opaque and transparent paint – getting the consistency right.
- Examples of Kate Green's process – the order of doing things.
- Layers and the benefit of using neutrals alongside very bright colours.



Above left K. Green "Stay Still" - notice the contrast between "busy" and "quiet", bright, and dull.

Above right K. Green - notice how some areas have been softened with white on the last layer but you can still see a lot of activity and layers with red, orange, yellow, blue, and pink underneath.

Beginning Painting

- First Layer – choose three colours that blend well together (possibly including white).
- You can use the same gestural movements or pick a shape that emerged during your automatic Kandinsky-inspired drawing!
- Cover the canvas completely with your desired colours (experiment with different tools e.g. sponges, rollers, brushes). Bear in mind that much of this first layer may get covered up.

* The painting needs to be completely dry before the next stage – dry with hair dryer or leave to dry for an hour naturally.

Apply Circle Labels (on to your DRY canvas!)

- You will be applying the circle labels on top of your dry painted canvas; you can apply them in lines or at random using different sizes. It might be better to start with slightly smaller ones and leave the biggest ones for the next layer.
- You can also apply star stickers and smaller stickers/labels – but be aware that these are fiddlier to remove later (but worth the effect)!
- If there are any areas of your painting that you really like, cover it up with a circle label so that when you take it off later, you will be able to see it.
- You are going to cover this with a new layer with a contrasting colour.



Above left – notice the darks and lights, and contrasting colours applied on top of each other.

Above right – see how some circles are outlined, and others are left as remains of where the labels were.

Painting Second Layer

- Use a contrasting colour to paint blocks, lines or continued gestural marks that you used in the first layer. Go with what feels natural to you; we are all different and have unique gestures and mark-making styles.
- Try outlining some labels with paint pen if you do not want to lose too much of the colour of your first layer.
- You can thin down some white paint with a little water and put flecks or dots on by tapping your hand.
- You could even try drizzling it over in gestural motions!

- Dry with a hairdryer or allow to dry completely – leave the circles on.

Third Layer – Applying Larger Circles

- Here you can apply larger circles stickers, or you can cut out other shapes from label paper, or if you want straight lines, apply some masking tape.
- Choose a neutral colour (e.g. grey, cream or beige), to pare down and contrast with areas that you want to be bright and with focus.
- Use colours you used in the first layer to bring out and enhance areas that you like.



Above: Close-ups of M. Pires's "Delight in the Detail" painting.

Above right: Kate Green – notice the different ways of applying paint.

Experiment with Transparent and Opaque Paint

- You can draw around your bigger circles with a pencil, take off the label and then fill it in with a new colour or an opaque neutral. Just have fun experimenting and enhance the areas that you like.
- Start taking off the first labels you put on (give a bit of a dry with a hairdryer first) you might need a craft knife or palette knife to cut underneath if it's really stuck.
- If there are any areas where the second layer has bled underneath, touch it up with a paint pen or brush and turn it into something beautiful!
- It will be at this stage that your painting will begin to "say something" – a title or message may emerge through the process of making it. Mine gave me the feeling of looking at something very close-up, like looking at petri-dishes or images under a microscope – and reminded me of diagrams of chlorophyll in science class!



Above left: Notice how Kate has used grey spray paint to gently soften and add another layer.

Above right: Notice how bigger circles seem to have been applied near the end, with a softer spray of white/pale paint. Look at the little straight-edged red shapes as final details.

Details and Finishing Touches

- All your labels/stickers should now have been removed.
- If the painting seems too bright or wild, you might want to consider lightly softening some areas with a bit of white or neutral spray paint (best to do this outside).
- If you are not experienced with spray paint, make sure you practise first on a bit of old cardboard! You don't want to completely cover up your precious work.
- Be sure to consider blocking out certain areas again – perhaps with some more circle labels.
- You might want to flick or dot some very small star type flecks on or make some abstract shapes that appeared in your Kandinsky drawing.
- If it seems balanced to you, do not do anything else!

Appraisal / Summary of Teaching Points / Conclusion

Take a moment to write some notes on what you have learned - this will help you throughout this course!

About Abstract Art processes and concepts:

Art as being non-representational

Art as a process/celebration/record of a musical experience

Visual expression as a revelation or harnessing of unseen thoughts, feelings and subconscious

Colour theory

Movement and gesture

Paint: bright and dull, cool and hot, transparent and opaque

Paying attention to positive and negative space

Layering

About Yourself: What Have you Found Out?

(There are no “wrong” answers!)

Are you a wavy line person or more straight line?

Do you find it natural to be spontaneous and intuitive, or are you more of a methodical thinker?

Do you like patterns or are you more of a “random” person?

Have you enjoyed discovering how paint behaves and which colours you are drawn to?

What kind of gestures/motions have you enjoyed trying out?

What shapes seem to be emerging naturally for you (organic, geometrical etc)?

Future Considerations:

What colours/combinations would you choose for another painting in this style?

Would you enjoy painting/dancing in the middle of a piece of canvas roll?! (I’m going to try it!

– look out for a future video on the Facebook group)

Enjoy your first lesson!

Chat with your tutor Madeleine in the Abstract Art private Facebook group!
This group has been set up exclusively for members Abstract Art, as a place to ask questions, get feedback on your work and share experiences, tips, and advice with fellow students.

