

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 9

(No image provided)

9. In his 1912 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, the Expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky wrote the following.

“Generally speaking, color directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.”

Select and fully identify at least one Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky’s ideas about art. Making specific reference to both the quotation above and your selected work, analyze how your example reflects Expressionist ideas. (10 minutes)

Background:

This question asks students to choose an Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky’s ideas and to analyze how the chosen work reflects Expressionism. It is intended to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of a major twentieth-century style and, in a wider context, a major artistic sensibility.

Kandinsky, a key figure of early-twentieth-century German Expressionism, was Russian by birth. He gave up a career in law to attend art school in Munich. In 1911 Kandinsky and a handful of other artists founded the Blue Rider (Der Blaue Reiter), an important group within early German Expressionism. Shortly afterward, he published *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, an influential treatise on nonobjectivity that addressed the sensorial and symbolic properties of color. He proposed that each color has its own effect on the psyche and further argued that the artist is motivated by an inner necessity to create. He began to draw parallels between painting and music as art forms capable of conveying the spiritual.

Between 1909 and 1914, Kandinsky developed his mature style. His imagery turned from expressionistic landscapes to restless, energetic abstractions. Kandinsky moved from representation towards non-objectivity and began to use musical terms like “composition” and “improvisation” in the titles of his works. In a sweeping series of innovative paintings executed during the years before World War I, he attempted to translate the most profound human emotions into universally comprehensible symbols and visual sensations. Kandinsky’s works, along with his theoretical writings, were pivotal to future developments in Modernism.

Kandinsky was a broadly educated intellectual who left behind a wide variety of writings. He was influenced by theosophy, a religious philosophy that drew from sources as diverse as mysticism, Buddhism and Neo-Platonism in pursuit of an underlying universal harmony. In 1911 he began a correspondence with Arnold Schoenberg, a composer whose innovative ideas about music were radical and influential. This dialogue helped Kandinsky develop the idea that an artist can orchestrate color, line and shape to express inner feelings and spirit much as a composer of music can orchestrate sound. Kandinsky wrote, “Schoenberg’s music leads us into a new realm, where musical experiences are no longer acoustic, but purely spiritual. Here begins the ‘music of the future.’”¹ Kandinsky further

1. Kandinsky, W. (1994). *Complete Writings on Art*. De Capo Press.

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Question 9 (continued)

expanded on the correlation between art and music: “The richest lessons are to be learned from music. With few exceptions and deviations, music has for several centuries been the art that uses its resources not to represent natural appearances but to express the inner life of the artist and to create a unique life of musical tones.”²

Expressionistic art rejects naturalism in favor of subjective and emotional responses. This approach appears throughout the history of Western art. For example, the *Ebbo Gospels* and the *Röttgen Pietà*, as well as works by Grünewald and El Greco, can be examined in terms of expressionistic qualities. German Expressionism burgeoned during the early-twentieth century when related groups of artists simultaneously began to pursue a new visual language that was, in part, a reaction to Positivism, a prevalent philosophy centered on empiricism, objectivity and reason. The German Expressionists’ rejection of mimetic art mirrored shifting concepts of reality hypothesized in new scientific theories by thinkers such as Albert Einstein. Expressionism was also manifest in other genres of art such as literature and music.

Artists can pursue expressionistic aims through a variety of means that derive from what is personal and subjective. The emphasis on subjective feelings and inner psychological states makes Expressionist painting a departure from both Impressionism and Realism.

Students have 3 tasks:

- (1) Students must identify at least one Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky’s ideas about art.
- (2) Students must engage the quotation.
- (3) Students must address how the selected painting reflects Expressionist ideas.

Better responses will discuss an appropriate painting. These responses will apply an understanding of Kandinsky’s ideas to the analysis of the chosen work.

Weaker responses will simply repeat sections of the quote without demonstrating how the quote relates to Expressionist painting. These responses will have trouble linking the quote to the chosen work. In addition, weaker responses may discuss a work that is less appropriate or unsuitable.

Points to remember:

- The intent of the question is to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of Kandinsky’s ideas about art and to extend those ideas to the works of other Expressionist artists.
- An identification should include artist and title, but if a description shows that a student is referring to a specific work that can be identified, the student should earn credit.
- Appropriate examples include Expressionist works by Kandinsky, Marc, Matisse, Derain, Rothko and Newman.
- Other examples may include Kirchner, Kokoschka, Nolde, Pollock, Krasner and Bacon if the student connects Kandinsky’s ideas about art to Expressionistic qualities in a particular work.
- Artists that predate Kandinsky but are related to Expressionism may be appropriate selections, including late-nineteenth-century artists such as Whistler, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Munch.
- High-scoring essays will address both the use of color and the expression of feeling.
- Strong responses may address parallels of art and music.

2. Kandinsky, W. (1994). *Complete Writings on Art*. De Capo Press.

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Question 9 (continued)

- Students may discuss more than one painting.
- This is a 10-minute question.

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Identifies an Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky's ideas about art. Analyzes with a high degree of specificity how the selected painting reflects Expressionist ideas. Analysis makes specific references **both** to the quotation **and** the selected painting. There are no significant errors.
- 3** Identifies an Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky's ideas about art. Analyzes with a fair degree of specificity how the selected painting reflects Expressionist ideas. Analysis makes specific references **both** to the quotation **and** the selected painting. The answer is less full and/or may be unbalanced.
- 2** Identifies an Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky's ideas about art. Attempts to analyze how the selected painting reflects Expressionist ideas. Discussion is weak and unbalanced or does not directly reference the quotation or the selected example.
- OR**
Fails to identify an Expressionist painting but engages the quotation and connects Kandinsky's ideas about art to Expressionism.
- Note: The highest score an essay can earn without identifying an appropriate painting is a 2. The highest score an essay can earn without engaging the quotation is a 2.**
- 1** Identifies an Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky's ideas about art but contains no other discussion of merit.
- OR**
Fails to select and identify a painting but attempts to engage the quotation and connect Kandinsky's ideas about art to Expressionism.
- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit because it fails to identify an appropriate Expressionist painting and makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.
- This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes.

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Select and fully identify at least one Expressionist painting that reflects Kandinsky’s ideas about art. Making specific reference to both the quotation above and your selected work, analyze how your example reflects Expressionist ideas. (10 minutes)

Kandinsky's ^{oil} painting *Improvisation #28*
 from about 1907, reflects Kandinsky's ideas
 greatly. Kandinsky's piece is entirely non-representational.
 His artistic representation comes through with
 splashes of harmonizing colors and thick, black
 outlining lines. Simply in the title "Improvisation"
 there is a direct correlation between his visual
 art and the emotional experience of music (in
 which one can improvise) that is used as an allegory
 in this quote. Kandinsky's ~~own~~ lack of
 representation is based on Einstein's theory of an
 intangibility. His goal as an Expressionist was
 to express emotion. Emotion and the soul
 are very abstract concepts; thus, the abstraction
 of his work is an appropriate representation.
 "The color is the keyboard" shows that
 color is his tool; it ~~creates~~ creates the
 "notes" that then register within the viewer.

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Franz Marc's animals in the forest uses ~~the~~ strong colors such as red, blue, and yellow, he was able to "directly influence the soul." By ~~say~~ stating blue was the spiritual color of man; yellow, female; and red, matter; Marc was able to show the ~~power and~~ ~~control~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~primary~~ ~~colors~~ ~~to~~ ~~control~~ the "color keyboard" the use of sharp jagged lines ~~that~~ ~~mean~~ ~~disrupting~~ ~~peace~~ and intense diagonals ~~in~~ Franz made demonstrates his control, ^{and} force, ~~and~~ ~~control~~ ~~over~~ the "piano's" strings. His art depicts the ~~social~~ collapse of society in a very ~~very~~ soothing manner, using familiar animals, he is able to "touch the souls" of many viewers as well as inform them of this underlying issue. His brush strokes recall that of jazz music, which could ~~the~~ further solidify Kandinsky's writing. By selecting only the primary colors for his works, Marc ~~visual~~ shows ~~his~~ that it's his "hand that plays," not other contemporary artists.

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Abstract Expressionist painting can relate to Kandinsky's ideas on color due to the removal of concrete subject matter that is a feature of abstract expressionism. Rothko's color field paintings from the middle of the twentieth century uses color exclusively to create an emotional response. When viewing Rothko's work, ~~the~~ the only element that stimulates the eye (or the hammer of a piano string) is color. The Artist uses color and explores the opposition between fields of color, creating areas of tension between transitions of color. When viewed as a whole, Rothko's color field paintings has the ability, using Kandinsky's logic, to create a harmonious optical "chord" such as the harmonics of a chord played in music.

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2010 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 9

Overview

This question asked students to choose an Expressionist painting that relates to Kandinsky's quote and analyze how the chosen work reflected Expressionist ideas. There was no image accompanying this question. It was intended to give students an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of a major twentieth-century style and, in a wider context, a major artistic sensibility. Students needed to read the text and think abstractly about how it related to the art movements and theories of its specific time. This question offered students an opportunity to make an argument to support their choice and thesis.

Sample: 9A

Score: 4

This essay identifies an Expressionist painting, *Improvisation 28*. The incorrect date of the painting given in the essay was considered a minor error because this inaccuracy does not detract from the argument. The student specifically refers to the painting as “splotches of harmonizing colors and thick, black outlining lines” and states that it is “non-representational.” The essay goes on to connect the title of the painting to “the emotional experience of music (in which one can improvise)” and then identifies the quote as an allegory. The student draws a connection between the artist and the theories of Einstein, linking the “lack of representation” in the painting to “Einstein’s theory on intangibility.” Then the essay points to the artist’s focus on “[e]motion and the soul” and analyzes the meaning of the quotation, saying, “color is his tool; it creates the ‘notes’ that then register within the viewer.” This essay shows an overall understanding of Kandinsky’s ideas about art and makes specific references to the chosen painting and the quotation, thus earning a score of 4.

Sample: 9B

Score: 3

This essay identifies an appropriate Expressionist painting. Although there is an error in the title, the essay’s content clearly demonstrates that Franz Marc’s *The Fate of the Animals* is being discussed. The student indicates knowledge of the color theories of Marc, another Blue Rider artist, saying, “blue was the spiritual color of man; yellow, female.” The essay makes specific references to the painting as well as to the quotation, mentioning the “sharp jagged lines” and noting how the artist “demonstrates his control and force, over the piano’s strings.” The discussion is less complete than that of an essay receiving a score of 4, and the response contains minor errors, thus earning it a score of 3.

Sample: 9C

Score: 2

This essay does not identify a specific painting but instead discusses a body of work, “Rothko’s color field paintings.” The student correctly states that the Rothko work “uses color exclusively to create an emotional response.” The essay connects Rothko’s works to the quote, saying “the only element that stimulates the eye (or the hammer of a piano string) is color.” The student discusses Rothko’s work in general, describing “areas of tension between transitions of color.” The essay concludes by relating the color field paintings to the musical language of the quotation, saying that Rothko’s work “has the ability . . . to create a harmonious optical ‘chord’ such as the harmonies of a chord played in music.” The essay demonstrates a basic understanding of Rothko’s work and engages with the quotation, but it does not identify and discuss a specific painting, thus earning it a score of 2.