

Meet the Masters
November Program

Victor Vasarely "Tridem K"**Louis Moillet "The Circus"**

Victor Vasarely (b. 1908) The Hungarian-French painter. He was the most influential master in the realm of Op Art. Although his earlier paintings belonged in the general tradition of Concrete Art, Vasarely in the 1940's devoted himself to Optical Art and theories of perception. He began with a serious study of the works and ideas of Mondrian and Kandinsky, as well as the entire history of color theory, perception, and illusion. Since a large proportion of contemporary statements in Optical Art are observable in his works, they may be used to illustrate these statements generally. Vasarely's art theories, first presented itself in the replacement of easel painting with what he called "kinetic plastics." This was kinetic multi-dimensional plastic art.

In Vasarely's paintings various devices are utilized to create illusions of movement and metamorphosis within the abstract organization. The artist was a pioneer in the development of almost every form of optical device for the creation of a new art of visual illusion. He divided his works into systematic categories in which he explored different aspects of art and illusion. Using small, standard color shapes - squares, triangles, diamonds, rectangles, circles, sometimes frontalized, sometimes tilted, in flat brilliant colors against equally strong contrasting color-grounds. He set up retinal vibrations that dazzle the eye and bewilder perception.

While Vasarely used the theme of Planetary Folklore and his basic color/form units, he was simultaneously experimenting with arrangements of cubes seen in a form of perspective known as axonometric projection. These compositions were called "Tri-Dim" (for three-dimensional). "Tridem K" is one variation on this theme. These cubes consist of three visible colored side patterns. The cubes, however, are unstable, thrusting and receding into negative and positive space, meaning that if you look at them long enough they shift perspective, on one moment seeming to thrust forward, in the next to recede. Each element is purposely ambiguous, constantly shifting position. Vasarely referred to this phenomenon as "the optical illusion of perpetual motion."

Louis Moillet was a Swiss-born painter who was a close friend of the artists Paul Klee and Auguste Macke. In 1914 the three of them traveled to Tunisia, bringing back a rich yield of watercolor sketches and shared influences. During the same period they also visited Paris, where the experiments of the Cubists were to have a profound influence on their work. In this work, a colorful depiction of a circus performance, complete with exotic animals and costumed performers led by the strangely charismatic clown. The geometric shapes and fractured space of early cubism can be seen. However, the sharply receding, almost bird's eye perspective from the foreground balcony to the performance on the stage far below, revealed behind a lifted curtain, is the artist's innovation.

Discussion Questions:

1. How many different shapes can you count in these pictures?
2. There are many colors in these blocks of cubes, squares and circles. Can you name all the colors the artist used? Sometimes the artist uses the primary colors (red, yellow, blue) to achieve secondary colors (purple, orange, green): sometimes black or white can be mixed to achieve a tint or shade.
3. Do you think "The Circus" looks like a circus? Why or why not?
4. Would you know this is a circus scene if no one told you?
5. How are these paintings the same? How are they different?
6. Is the art work realistic or abstract?
7. Could you make a picture of a circus, people or animals using only geometric shapes?
8. Can you find different shapes in your classroom? Now find "hidden" shapes.

Hands-on Art Activity: Abstract Geometric Painting

Materials: Tagboard (appr. 8" x 10")
Pencils
Rulers, protractors, compasses
Watercolors
Soft brushes, assorted sizes
Water tubs, newspapers, paper towels

Directions:

1. Discuss geometric shapes and how they can be combined to form infinite designs.
2. Using pencil and geometric shapes draw a design or picture.
3. Shapes may be overlapped, or combined in many ways.
4. Think carefully about the design in order to produce either an abstract or pictorial composition.
5. Paint the design using colors which are consistent with the design.
6. Keep colors clean and fresh, try to avoid "over mixing"
7. A good choice for colors would be colors which are wither all warm or all cold.
8. Make sure each student's name appears on the front of the work.