

Painting Poems

by

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Introduction to the Poems

With the advent of the abstract in painting during the period just prior to World War One, many artists, especially in Paris, seemed to be crossing a threshold to fresh experiences in perception and thinking, in feeling and in the deep will.

The following poems are a response to specific paintings: the sequence of trees by Piet Mondrian leading towards his abstract grids; the colour compositions of Robert Delaunay; and the minimalist works of Kasimir Malevich.

The *poem-sequence* is a form that parallels the *series* in painting; and each seems to parallel the living thinking that characterises contemplative consciousness.

In *Mondrian*, *The Black Journal of Robert Delaunay*, and *Kasimir's Canvas* I incorporate phrases quoted from the artists' journals, among others purporting to be from those sources. This ambiguity regarding authentic quotation is employed most extremely in the spurious attribution of the epigraph to Delaunay, in which the neologism 'mage' is the present tense for an imagined verb 'to magic', therefore 'I (create, form through) magic the image'. In the Delaunay sequence the (authentic) epigraph by Apollinaire translates as 'I have given all to the sun / all but my shadow' (from *Les Fiançailles*).

Mondrian

Let us now perform the work of daylight.
~ Piet Mondrian

1. Red Tree (1909-10)

And darkness shall be prepared
for the ascent.

Antennae
tuned towards an opening cosmos,
through a filigree of branch and twig
the earth streams upward,
suppliant,
stretching
up from nature towards vision,
red into blue ...

The universal towers far above us:
substance reaches out towards
its origin:

Tree-ness,
breathing just beyond
the Fibonacci sequence of
its fingertips ...



2. Horizontal Tree (1911)

Immense quietude: the elm
encloses all activity
within its cantilevered arc.
It weighs the air,
sensing through the ganglia
of twigs,
 between
its many branchings,
intricately-foliated light.

*Winter. Thought: an
after-image of the universal
still envisioned
in this tree's cerebral
cortex.*



3. Grey Tree (1912)

Exuberant
divisions of space
these forms become, emergent
between luminous

scales of the air.
Intensity of sky has pressed
branches from another
dimension, out past

overlapping zones
of the north light's mosaic.
Pulsate in its veins,
idea is heroic.



4. Flowering Apple Tree (1912)

The tragic will be overcome.

The fragrant cosmos of its blossom
stuns my senses:
upwelling of earth
in a cloudburst of sunlight ...

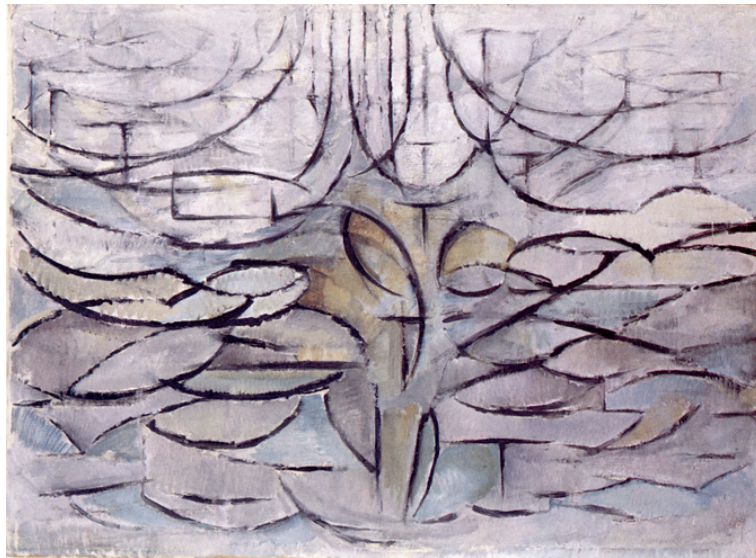
*The surface of things gives delight;
their inwardness, life.*

Between two worlds the tree
refines these elements
in its alembic:
the tinted patterns of light,
a tincture of the earth;

distils original vision:
the Tree.

Once it stood in Paradise,
source of our division;
now it is an icon of return.

I cannot bear to see it.



5. Oval Composition - Trees (1913)

a tree
the not-tree
leafing / unleafing
light into scintillating
forms / here / also not-here
forever active in the foliage of
consciousness in me : it is living
(this unity in single consciousness)
The annihilation of our tragic vision
occurs when every di/vision is resolved
in an act of art embodying the universal;
this tree dissolves towards an idea / as I -
my senses emptied - see the cosmos tugging
at the pigment \ becoming / more than I am
: the intersection of a drama / Autumn now
has come to the process of the paint : the
forms, subjected to the restless flickering
of my thought across the open surface of
this canvas / perceiving leaf / not-leaf
in the light of our human dis/position
(a determinate image of the universal)
I can no longer work this way : the
abstract shall be abstract always
and now in my future mind I see
flat planes of primal colour
delineated by the vertices
and black the void
of unthought
light



The Black Journal of Robert Delaunay

Je mage l'image

~ attributed to Robert Delaunay

*J'ai tout donné au soleil
tout sauf mon ombre*

~ Guillaume Apollinaire

1.

1912: The poet gives the Orphic word. And the veil is torn asunder, an open Mystery now before us: Light. All is light.

Paris, City of Light. Roof-line and gable are luminous intersections of thought; my mind a mordant, holding the image.

I paint the Windows sequence. Just to see through.



2.

1913: I shall understand the synchromatic movement of light, as it interacts in all its simultaneous contrasts.

The colour-wheel. Radiance, the universal gravity of light; this cosmos opening out before my eyes, inside my eyes.

I paint the Sun and Moon. The image being I-image.



3.

1914: I have lived in light. I have given all except my shadow. Ah, Sonia, what is left for me to paint? The shadows.

I stare out into the Paris night. Colours once spoke to me; but now I hear only the shrill tessitura of their silence.

I paint furniture. The light that was in me eclipsed.

Kasimir's Canvas

A surface lives; it has been born
~ Kasimir Malevich

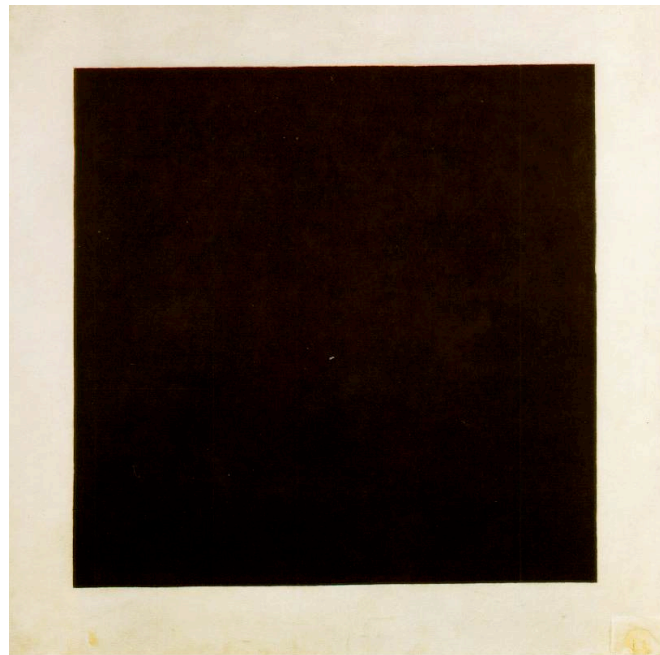
1. Black Square (1915)

Transforming myself
in the zero of form,

this pure sensation
dark against the white

dissolve of horizons,
resonant upon that

tabula rasa canvas is,
a mind can be, is.



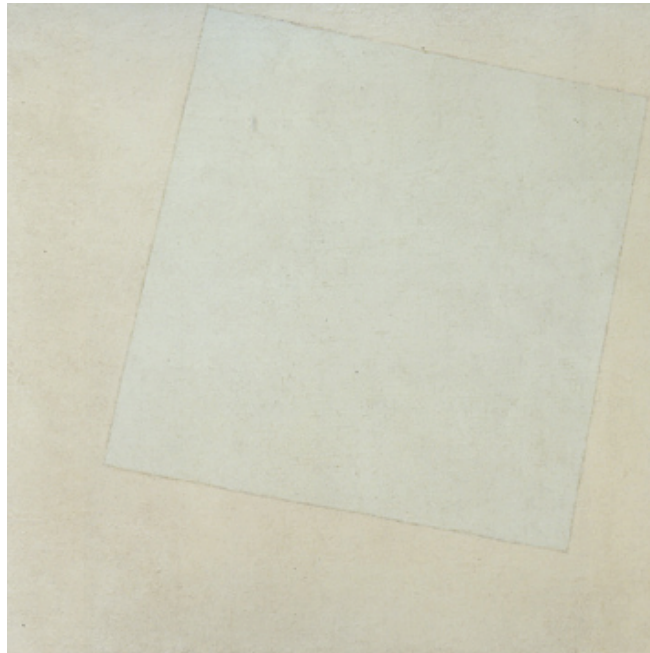
2. White on White (1918)

Nothing in itself
but itself, awakening

sensation in that space
between the thing

and thought, apotheosis
of the non-object:

distinction without
difference.



3. Suprematism (1915)

So the new is manifest;
never have I been so much

the inside, sensing
through these images

a solitude within
the surface worked upon:

a single bare and frameless
icon of our times.

