

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONDRIAN MEMORIAL EXHIBITION OPENS AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Sponsored by the Netherland-America Foundation, a retrospective memorial exhibition of the works of the Dutch painter, Piet Mondrian, opens today (Wednesday, March 21) at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street. The exhibition will include about fifty oils and drawings by this Dutch artist who was the leading painter of the de Stijl group in Holland, and will cover the period from 1900 until the painter's death in New York in February 1944. The exhibition has been directed by James Johnson Sweeney, Director of the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture.

Born March 7, 1872 in Amersfoort, Holland, Mondrian spent many years in Paris and was the originator of neo-plasticism. The artist summed up his life work and hopes as follows:

"It is my conviction that humanity, after centuries of culture, can accelerate its progress through the acquisition of a truer vision of reality. Plastic art discloses what science has discovered: that time and subjective vision veil the true reality.

"Despite oppressive factors, the great plastic art of the past has made us feel true reality: it has always struggled to abolish the barriers that prevent expression of this reality. In plastic culture, from the remotest past down to the present, we see a growing evolution toward freedom, from the limitations of time and subjectivity."

Together with Theo van Doesburg and de Stijl group his influence has been great on modern architecture, typography, and layout design. He himself once wrote of the aims of the group as follows:

"We hoped to make the public aware of the possibilities of pure plastic art and endeavored to demonstrate its relationship to and its effect on modern life. Modern architecture and industry responded to our influence, but painting and sculpture were little affected."

At a memorial service held shortly after Mondrian's death, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Director of Research in Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, spoke of Mondrian as follows:

"Mondrian was an artist of great international reputation and importance... the greatest Dutch painter of our time. Mondrian gave his life to his art more completely than any artist I know of. Fifty years ago he turned his back on life as it is led by ordinary artists. He became a devotee of art.... concentrating upon his painting with quiet fanaticism. The paintings which he produced with such ardor are, I believe, unmatched in the history of art for their single-mindedness....

His art possesses an extraordinary power--a power so subtle and intense that during the past twenty-five years it has influenced the arts of practical design throughout the world...."

Shortly before his death Mondrian said to an interviewer:

"I have had a happy life, for my work. A little difficult. It is difficult to express--to paint what you feel. It is a great struggle. I know that it would be torture if I did not get it on the canvas. I feel never free--there is always this compulsion driving me on. When a picture is finished I am satisfied for a short while, and then the pressure comes again. It is always going on."

The lenders to the exhibition are:

Mr. and Mrs. Walter C. Arensberg	Mrs. Marie Johanna Ootmar
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clifford	Mrs. Charles H. Russell, Jr.
Mrs. Henri Crommelin	Mrs. George Henry Warren, Jr.
Miss Katherine S. Dreier	Miss Charmion Wiegand
Mrs. Valentine Dudensing	Miss Ella Winter
A. E. Gallatin	Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo
Harry Holtzman	Art of This Century
M. Martin Janis	Nierendorf Gallery
Sidney Janis	Philadelphia Museum of Art
Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, Jr.	Valentine Gallery
The Miller Company	Yale University Art Gallery
Mr. and Mrs. George L. K. Morris	

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The Netherland-America Foundation was founded in 1921 by a group headed by the Honorable Franklin D. Roosevelt, Edward W. Bok, Dr. Henry van Dyke, and Hamilton Holt. Honorary members of the Foundation include the President of the United States, the Queen of The Netherlands, the Netherlands Ambassador to the United States, and the American Ambassador to The Netherlands. The Honorary President is Mr. Thomas J. Watson, and the active President is Mr. Peter Grimm. The Chairman of the Art Committee is Mrs. Wylie Brown.

The Directors are Mr. Winthrop W. Aldrich, Mr. Joseph Clark Baldwin III, Mr. Arthur A. Ballantine, Dr. Adriaan J. Barnouw, Mr. Edwin Foster Blair, Mrs. Wylie Brown, Mr. James M. Cecil, Major Candler Cobb, Mr. Arthur V. Davis, Mr. A. H. de Goede, Mr. Gayer G. Dominick, Mrs. Frank N. Doubleday, Dr. Stephen Duggan, Mrs. Marshall Field, Jr., Hon. J. S. Frelinghuysen, Mr. Harold de Wolf Fuller, The Rev. Robert I. Gannon, S.J., Dr. Harry D. Gideonse, Mr. Peter Grimm, Mr. Walter Phelps Jacob, Mr. P. J. Kooiman, Mrs. Edgar W. Leonard, Mr. Jackson Martindell, Mrs. Clark H. Minor, Mrs. Edgerton Parsons, Mr. Lewis E. Pierson, Mrs. Harold I. Pratt, Mrs. Peter Rathvon, The Rev. Edgar Franklin Romig, D.D., Brigadier General David Sarnoff, Mr. Montgomery Schuyler, Mr. Arthur Surkamp, Mr. Juan T. Trippe, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mr. George S. Walden, Mr. Thomas J. Watson, and Mr. Paul M. Wiswall.

# THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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Exhibition of  
PIET MONDRIAN  
March 21 - May 13, 1945

The Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53 Street, New York

## CHECKLIST

- 1 PORTRAIT OF DR. X. c.1900. Charcoal drawing, 27 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".  
Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 2 STANDING NUDE. 1900 (dated). Charcoal drawing, 18  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 11  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
(sight). Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 3 RIVER SCENE. c.1905-1906. Oil on wood. 8  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 10  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent  
by Mrs. Henri Crommelin, Dobbs Ferry, N. Y.
- 4 CHRYSANTHEMUM. 1908-1909? (dated 1906 by P.M. c.1942). Oil,  
26  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 16  $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Lent by Miss Ella Winter.
- 5 NIGHT. c.1908. Oil, 13  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 19  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Lent by Mrs. Marie  
Johanna Ootmar, Kelowna, British Columbia.
- 6 HAYSTACKS. c.1909. Oil, 11  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 16  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent by Mrs. Marie  
Johanna Ootmar, Kelowna, British Columbia.
- 7 TREES AT NIGHT. c.1909. Oil on cardboard. 10  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 15". Lent  
by Mrs. Marie Johanna Ootmar, Kelowna, British Columbia.
- 8 TREE. c.1909. Oil on cardboard, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 15". Lent by Mrs. Marie  
Johanna Ootmar, Kelowna, British Columbia.
- 9 EUCALYPTUS. 1910 (dated). Oil, 20 x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Harry  
Holtzman, New York.
- 10 RECLINING FIGURE. 1910 (dated). Charcoal drawing, 34 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 62 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".  
Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 11 MAN'S HEAD. 1911 (dated). Charcoal drawing, 11 x 9". Lent by  
Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 12 SKETCH OF TREE. Meudon, France. 1911. Charcoal drawing, 7 x  
4  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 13 SKETCH OF TREE. Meudon, France. 1911. Charcoal drawing, 4  $\frac{7}{8}$  x  
7". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 14 TREE. 1911. Oil, 37 x 27  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent by the Nierendorf Gallery,  
New York.
- 16 COMPOSITION. (based on church facade). Holland.  
1914 (dated 1912 by P.M. c.1942). Charcoal drawing, 39 x 24  $\frac{7}{8}$ ".  
Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 17 OCEAN. 1914 (dated). Charcoal drawing, 35  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 48  $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Lent  
by Art of This Century, New York.
- 18 PIER AND OCEAN. Domburg. 1914 (dated). Crayon drawing with  
wash, 34  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 44". The Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Simon  
Guggenheim Fund.
- 19 COMPOSITION IN GRAY. 1919 (dated). Oil, 33 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (diagonal).  
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Walter C. Arensberg, Hollywood.
- 20 COMPOSITION IN GRAY. 1919 (dated 1915 by P.M. c.1942). Oil,  
38 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 21 COMPOSITION IN GRAY, RED, YELLOW AND BLUE. 1920 (dated). Oil,  
39  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 39 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.

- 22 COMPOSITION IN GRAY, BLUE, YELLOW AND RED. 1921. Oil, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent anonymously.
- 23 COMPOSITION IN GRAY, RED AND BLUE. 1922-25 (dated). Oil, 19  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 19  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Lent by Mrs. Valentine Dudensing, New York.
- 24 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, BLUE AND RED. 1925. Oil, 15  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 12  $\frac{5}{8}$ ". The Museum of Modern Art, gift of Philip Johnson.
- 25 COMPOSITION IN BLACK AND WHITE. 1926 (dated). Oil, 44  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 44  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (diagonal). Lent by Miss Katherine S. Dreier, New York.
- 26 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND BLUE. 1926 (dated). Oil, 33  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 33  $\frac{3}{8}$  (diagonal). Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gallatin Collection.
- 27 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND RED. 1926 (dated). Oil, 19  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 28 FOX TROT B. 1929 (dated). Oil, 17  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 17  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Lent by the Societe Anonyme Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.
- 29 FOX TROT A. 1930 (dated). Oil, 43  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 43  $\frac{1}{4}$ " (diagonal). Lent by the Societe Anonyme Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.
- 30 COMPOSITION NO. 1. 1931 (dated). Oil, 32 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Miss Charmion Wiegand, New York.
- 31 COMPOSITION IN BLUE AND YELLOW. 1932 (dated). Oil, 16  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 13". Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gallatin Collection.
- 32 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, RED AND BLUE. 1933. Oil, 16  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13  $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Lent by Sidney Janis, New York.
- 33 COMPOSITION. 1932. Oil. Lent by M. Martin Janis, Buffalo.
- 34 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND BLUE. 1935 (dated). Oil, 28 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Mr. and Mrs. George L. K. Morris, New York.
- 35 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND YELLOW. 1935 (dated). Oil, 34 x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent anonymously.
- 36 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, BLUE AND YELLOW. 1936 (dated). Oil, 28  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 27  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Lent by Mrs. George Henry Warren, New York.
- 37 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, RED AND YELLOW. 1936 (dated). Oil, 31 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 38 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND RED. 1936 (dated). Oil, 40  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 41". The Museum of Modern Art, gift of the Advisory Committee.
- 39 COMPOSITION IN RED AND WHITE. 1936 (dated). Oil, 23  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 22  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Lent by Mrs. Charles H. Russell, Jr., New York.
- 40 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND RED. 1938 (dated). Oil, 55 x 55" (diagonal). Lent anonymously.
- 41 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, BLUE AND YELLOW. 1935-42 (dated). Oil, 39  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 20  $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Lent by the Valentine Gallery, New York.
- 42 RHYTHM OF STRAIGHT LINES. 1935-42 (dated). Oil, 28  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 27  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Clifford, Radnor, Pa.
- 43 COMPOSITION IN WHITE AND BLUE. 1936-42 (dated). Oil, 24  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 23  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 44 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, RED, BLUE AND YELLOW. 1939-42 (dated). Oil, 29  $\frac{5}{8}$  x 26  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". Lent by Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, Jr., Haverford, Pa.



- 45 COMPOSITION IN YELLOW AND RED. Picture No. 9. 1939-42 (dated). Oil, 31 1/4 x 28 7/8". Lent by Miss Katherine S. Dreier, New York.
- 46 LONDON. 1940-42 (dated). Oil, 32 5/8 x 28 1/8". Lent by the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo.
- 47 NEW YORK CITY. 1942 (dated). Oil, 47 1/8 x 45 1/8". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 48 BROADWAY BOOGIE WOOGIE. 1942-43. Oil, 50 x 50". The Museum of Modern Art, given anonymously.
- 49 COMPOSITION IN WHITE, RED, YELLOW AND BLUE. Picture No. 2. 1936-43 (dated). Oil, 23 5/8 x 21 3/4". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 50 TRAFALGAR SQUARE. 1939-43 (dated). Oil, 57 1/4 x 47 1/4". Lent by Harry Holtzman, New York.
- 51 VICTORY BOOGIE WOOGIE. 1944. Unfinished. Oil, paper and scotch tape on canvas, 70 3/4 x 70 3/8" (diagonal). Lent by courtesy of The Miller Company, Meriden, Conn.
- 52 COMPOSITION. 1939. Oil, 40 x 41". Lent by Art of This Century, New York.
- 53 COMPOSITION. 1939-42. Oil, 29 5/8 x 25 3/4". Lent anonymously.

## CHRONOLOGY

Born: March 7, 1872 at Amersfoort and given the name Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan. In later life he changed and abbreviated his name to Piet Mondrian.

Mother: Johanna de Krop

Brothers: J. C. Mondriaan died  
W. F. Mondriaan living in Bloemfontein, Union of South Africa  
L. C. Mondriaan living in Holland

Sister: Carel living in Breda, Holland

The family came originally from The Hague. Mondrian's father moved to Amsterdam to teach, and about 1880 moved to Winterswyk, near the German border.

1886 Mondrian received first lessons in painting from his uncle, a professional painter, Frits Mondriaan

1891-4 attended Academy of Fine Arts at Amsterdam

1894-6 evening classes at Academy and worked at commercial drawings during day

1896-08 commercial work to earn living and exhibits paintings at various art circles in Holland

1908 under influence of Toorop, Sluyters and through his acquaintance with paintings by Matisse, in an exhibition of contemporary painting brought to Holland by Conrad Kickert, Mondrian began to put his more traditional Dutch approach aside

1910 Mondrian went to Paris

1911 exhibition Moderne Kunstkring, arranged by Kickert - first notable showing of new European art in Holland. Mondrian's Mill now in the Kroller-Muller Collection was included

1913 Mondrian exhibited at Salon des Indépendants, Paris

1914 Mondrian returns to Holland

1916 Mondrian met van der Leek. Plans work for De Stijl Review with van Doesburg

1917 first issue of De Stijl appears

1918 manifesto of de Stijl group signed by all members except van der Leek who had resigned

1919 Mondrian returns to Paris to his studio which he had kept

1920 Mondrian published Noo-Plasticism through the Galerie de L'Effort Moderne in Paris

1923 de Stijl exhibition at Leonce Rosenberg's Galerie de L'Effort Moderne. Paintings by Mondrian included

1925 Mondrian left de Stijl group

1926 First Mondrian painting publicly exhibited in U. S. by Societe Anonyme, New York

1939 September. Mondrian left Paris for London

1940 October 3 arrived in New York from London

1942 First American one-man show at Valentine Gallery, New York

1944 February 1 Mondrian died, buried at Cypress Hill Cemetery, Queens, L. I.

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MONDRIAN

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

by James Johnson Sweeney

Piet Mondrian came of a family of painters. But none of his immediate family, as he said, "was willing to give up everything for art." He was the oldest of four brothers and a sister. His father was a school teacher at Amersfoort, near Amsterdam, where Piet Mondrian was born March 7, 1872. His father, he recalled, "was always drawing, though it was only a hobby with him." His uncle Frits Mondriaan, however, was a professional painter. And it was he who gave Mondrian his first lessons in painting in oils when he was about fourteen. From the outset Mondrian was deeply interested. But when it became clear that Mondrian wanted to devote his life to art his father tried to dissuade him. He had no money to pay for his studies. Finally a family friend agreed to arrange it for him. And at the age of nineteen Mondrian left the little village of Winterswyk near the German border, where his family had settled eleven years earlier, to return to Amsterdam to attend the Academy of Fine Arts.

There he spent three years attending day and evening courses at the Academy of Fine Arts. His master was August Allebé, the teacher of such well known figures of the 'nineties in Holland as Jan Veth, the essayist and art historian, der Konderen and Toorop. But at the time Mondrian's attention was primarily concentrated on technical and scientific drawing. His father insisted that if he intended to follow art as a career he should safeguard himself with a Hochschule diploma in drawing, painting, art history and anatomy which would qualify him to teach.

"At twenty-two began a very difficult time for me. To make a living I did many kinds of work - bacteriological drawings used for text books and class rooms, portraits, copies of pictures in museums, and taught as well, and then I began to sell landscapes. It was a hard struggle but I managed to make a living and was glad to be able to make just enough money to be able to do what I wanted to do."\*

His idol at the outset was Breitner, the painter of urban Amsterdam - old quarters of the city under snow, canals bordered by venerable houses with countless staring windows in the soft, melancholy atmosphere of rainy weather or spring thaw. Breitner was regarded a naturalist or realist, and in this character had a particular attraction for Mondrian.

Another important influence which Mondrian claimed he shared with practically all his contemporaries of those years in Amsterdam was that of the Barbizon school paintings collected by Mesdag and placed on public view about the close of the century. Even in his seventies Mondrian still recalled an unfinished Daubigny among them - a painting of sheep in the early morning which he had "thought fine."

But with the first years of the new century fresh associations and more venturesome approaches began to have their effects. Jan Toorop, who had been one of the leaders of movement of reaction against impressionism in The Hague in 1890, had also been a student of Mondrian's master, Allebé. After leaving the Academy, Toorop had participated in the exhibitions and activities of the Société des Vingt in Brussels. There he had undergone (with Ensor) the influence of Manet through the intermediary of Guillaume Vogels, then turned in the spirit of the early 'nineties to an arabesque, decorative linearism which combined a mystic symbolism and a seductive oriental character. Through the exhibitions and discussions of the Société des Vingt Toorop became acquainted with all the major directions of the last decades of the nineteenth century from the work of Seurat on the one hand to that of Munch on the other; from the work of the English pre-Raphaelites to that of the Austrian Gustave Klimt. And the young men of the Art Circle which he founded in The Hague in 1890, not only invited such guests as Paul Verlaine and the Sar Peladan of the Rose-et-Croix to address them, but were prompt and ardent admirers of van Gogh. Out of his early eclectic phase Toorop in the middle 'nineties had evolved a linear idealism which it has been said has influenced directly or indirectly half the vanguard

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\*Jan Bradley, "Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944." Knickerbocker Weekly, Vol. III, no. 5, Feb. 14, 1944. p. 16.



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painters of Holland. Even today we see it clearly followed in the work of Johan Thorn Prikker and Willem van Konijnenburg - and it certainly underlies the early explorations of such men as van der Leek, Doesburg, and at a greater distance perhaps, Mondrian.

By the first years of the twentieth century Toorop had combined a pointillist technique with these linear stylizations. This was the period in which Mondrian came to know him. Toorop was applying his paint in "spots," as Mondrian described it, "pure colors in little blocks - not so pictorial as Seurat" - . The older painter had undoubtedly an important influence on Mondrian. When Mondrian was asked what he thought of Hedler, for example, even in his seventieth year he replied: "Toorop liked him very much." As artists they drew apart after Mondrian's return from Paris; but they remained close friends for years. Even at the time of his death Mondrian was corresponding with Toorop's daughter, the painter Charley Toorop, whose son shortly before had been in New York working in the films with Joris Ivens.

Another important influence of Mondrian's pre-Paris years was that of the painter Jan Sluyters. In Dutch art of the first decade of the present century there were two clearly opposed camps: the "pictorial romantics," on the one hand, and on the other the stylizers, followers of Toorop such as Konijnenburg and Prikker who outlined their forms arbitrarily with heavy contours, or actually divided the surface of their paintings into distinct compartments of color. Sluyters belonged to the former group - the "pictorial romantics." He was temperamental, eclectic, sensual - a student of Breitner whom he always regarded his master, but essentially an expressionist of a virtuosity that rivalled van Dongen's in his early days. In 1906 Sluyters sent to Paris where he discovered "modern art" - Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec and others. He came back full of his enthusiasm and a friendship developed between him and Mondrian which was to last for several years.

In spite of such associations, however, Mondrian's work did not begin to show definite effects of their influence until after 1906. Even as late as that we find the dark conventional palette of his early days in a characteristically conventional Dutch landscape such as River Scene or the distantly van Gogh sentiment of Night. But soon after Toorop's influence and that of Sluyters began to appear, Mondrian's next step was landscapes and still lifes in pure shining colors. An old village church in Zeeland stood in lavender shadow rising in relief against a bright sky. In a dune landscape he put natural colors aside. He depicted the dune, pure blue, as a gently rising wave in which the sky was reflected - because as he said that expressed more completely than the yellow sand the purity and calm of the scene.

At the time there was still a definite element of the symbolist in Mondrian - perhaps an outgrowth of his association with Toorop, or of his interest in Hindu philosophy which had also engaged him over several years. But in this there was already an anticipation of much later developments.

For example, in a flower piece of the period he tried to express himself by symbolic means. He wanted to convey the idea of life and death through a great white fading chrysanthemum seen against a bright background near a black curtain. The flower was like a ghostly corpse in silhouette - withered, the green leaves hanging down like the bony arms of a skeleton; and high against the frame stood the delicate, almost ethereal blossom, with some of its petals drooping and languishing along the stem, some curved gently inward.

But there was still, he felt, too great an element of naturalism in his art. In a letter he wrote in 1916 regarding this canvas, he said: "So to what you say about the appearance of a flower. You are surprised that I wish to dissect the delicate beauty and transform it into vertical and horizontal lines. I very readily admit your wonder, but it is not my intention to depict the delicate beauty. That which in the flower affects us as beauty and does not arise from the deepest part of its being, is beautiful but not the deepest beauty. I too find the flower beautiful in its physical appearance; but there is hidden in it a deeper beauty. I did not know how to depict this when I painted the dying chrysanthemum with the long stem. I formed it through emotion and the emotion was human, perhaps universally human; later I found too much emotion in this work and painted a blue flower differently. This stood stiffly



staring and already promised more of the immovable."

Gradually, however, this conventional symbolism gave way to a technical exploration of the divisionist technique with which he had come in contact either through Toorop's work, or pre-fauve Matisse. A new clarity of palette appears. And in three canvases of 1910, one of which is in the Municipal Museum in The Hague, ultramarine and red are the only colors employed though the forms are still naturalistic. When Sluyters saw Mondrian's Mill of the same period, now in the Kröller-Müller Collection, in which vermilion red was the dominant he protested - "but you exaggerate." In looking back Mondrian said, "I felt very happy for that moment". Exaggeration in his opinion represented nature more truly in a picture than conventional Breitner naturalism. For "it is impossible to imitate or abstract a representation of nature, but it is possible to create a valid equivalent which is the true pictorial reality."

In 1910 another of his friends, Conrad Kickert the art critic on the Telegraaf, the most advanced paper of the time in Holland, urged him to move to Paris. Kickert was also a painter who knew the Paris art world. It was he who had brought the Matisse to Holland two years earlier which had so deeply impressed Mondrian. Mondrian was naturally without sufficient funds to make the trip. But Kickert found a patron for him in a Dr. Ootmar, who purchased six paintings, four of which are included in this exhibition. Kickert met Mondrian at the Gare du Nord and shortly afterwards found him a studio in the building 26 rue du Deport from which he did not move (except during 1914-18) until 1936 when the house was torn down to make room for the expansion of the Gare Montparnasse.

In Paris at the time of Mondrian's arrival cubism, full fledged, was beginning to make itself seriously felt. Kickert was a great admirer of Picasso. And it was Kickert's enthusiasm that introduced Mondrian to the work of the cubists in general. Mondrian was immediately attracted by it. Just as the cubists were reacting from the emotional excesses of the fauves in the direction of a subdued palette, Mondrian had come to feel that while the pure colors he was employing in his work just before his departure from Holland were beginning to approximate the "intensity" he sought, they "still expressed too much individual emotion." Cubism pointed the way. "Then," he continued in his letter about the chrysanthemums, "I had a period of sober colors; gray and yellow began to make my line more fixed." He was especially influenced by the work of Léger and, later, Picasso. "Of all the abstractionists I felt only the cubists had discovered the right path."

Nevertheless, then as always after, Mondrian remained the solitary seeker. Kickert and Schelfhout, an academic painter interested in cubism, brought him to Léger's studio. Léger asked him to go to see Picasso, but he found an excuse not to go. He explained later, "because Picasso was a man of such strong personality that I felt he would influence me and so I did not go to meet him." The cubists had found a way out of conventional descriptive painting towards the creation of a new pictorial reality. Their way suggested one to him. He saw the possibility of carrying their enterprise to a logical conclusion out of which he could derive elements for his expression stripped of the descriptive associations. But he found cubism "still more or less naturalistic," and too little concerned with "the logical consequences of its own discoveries." It was not developing abstraction to its ultimate goal. And Mondrian's way and that of the cubists gradually drew apart.

In July 1914 Mondrian, totally unaware of the impending crisis, left Paris to pay a visit to his father in Holland. He had planned a brief stay, taking only his valises with him. But when war was declared and the frontier closed, his family was upset by the thought of his departure. He remained; and the war kept him there for the next five years.

During his period of research in Paris as his interest in orthodox cubism paled, Mondrian had made many sketches from nature of trees, houses in the process of demolition, and church facades. Later, in his studio, he would abstract certain elements from these sketches, further simplify them, then recompose them with primary consideration to their relations and rhythmic organization on the surface of the canvas, and slight regard for their naturalistic

order. In the earliest of these, color was completely disregarded. But only temporarily. As he wrote shortly afterward (again in words which might apply to any of the boldest of his essays of ten or twenty years later), "I am not abandoning color, but I want it only just as intense as possible. I am not neglecting line, but I want it in its strongest expression. The flaccid line in the natural appearance of things is a relaxation of form." Several of these canvases were exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris. And when he withdrew from his father's home to Domburg in the autumn of 1914 this was the direction he followed: studies of churches and buildings after nature, studies of the pier and the incoming waves on the beach, and abstract compositions derived later in his studio from these sketches.

And as he proceeded with this research he excluded, more and more, all curved lines from his painting, till finally his compositions consisted only of crossed verticals and horizontals, each one separate and detached from the other. From his observation of sea, sky and stars, he sought to produce pictorial equivalents of their physical relationships through a multiplicity of such crossing vertical and horizontal lines.

Yet even in such work Mondrian felt he was "working as an impressionist." Color in his cubist work like the cubist's own color was applied in an impressionist fashion. There was a restlessness in it, a response to individual emotion in the brushwork, which he hoped to eliminate in order to achieve that ideal calm he envisaged as the product of an equilibrium of opposed forces of line and color in composition. In 1916 while staying at Loenen, near Amsterdam, he met van der Leek, a follower of der Kinderen in the direction of linear stylization. Van der Leek at the time was still painting in naturalistic forms but in flat areas of pure colors--not primary colors, but unbroken areas of color. Mondrian saw in this approach a solution to his problem, namely, a means to escape the emotional restlessness of the impressionists' technique. And from this time forward he clung steadfastly to such unbroken flat areas of color in every phase of his work; and van der Leek, in exchange, adopted Mondrian's concept of crossed vertical and horizontal lines as a basis for his composition, until he returned to a naturalistic idiom a few years later.

Shortly after Mondrian's meeting with van der Leek he had a message from Theo van Doesburg from Utrecht. Doesburg had planned to start a review and hoped that both Mondrian and van der Leek would join him in his project. Mondrian had been writing for himself for some time and welcomed the opportunity to have his theories on painting published. The result was the foundation of De Stijl, the magazine around which so many of the most adventurous efforts in all the arts were to center in Holland during the next few years. Doesburg was an architect. He had also been an art writer for various periodicals. And like Mondrian's friend, Kickert, he had now turned to painting. But it was primarily as the propagandist of the de Stijl movement that he had his value. He had an inexhaustible curiosity regarding new movements in the arts. English vorticism was as welcome to the editor of De Stijl as Hungarian constructivism; he was as happy to lecture on the same platform with the Merzist Schwitters, as to publish a piece on Futurist music. And through Doesburg's efforts architects such as van Eesteren, Oud, Rietveld, Wils, and Van't Hoff won a hearing in Holland and the neo-plastic researches of Mondrian and Doesburg's own elementarism were spread throughout Central Europe. But Mondrian remained the painter of the movement.

Still Mondrian had not satisfied himself. Even after solving his problem of color application through his lessons from van der Leek he found himself confronted by still another difficulty. The surfaces of his color areas were now flat and tranquil just as the background was, but he still found himself faced by two independent elements in his picture: a detached plane and a background and the two separated by a suggestion of space. This produced an effect of recession into the picture plane. How was he to fuse these two into the unity he sought?

The solution was his next major step. He "brought the rectangles together; space became white, black or gray; form became red, blue or yellow. Uniting the rectangles was equivalent to continuing the verticals and horizontals of the former period over the entire composition. It was evident that rectangles, like all



particular forms, obtrude themselves and must be neutralized through the composition. In fact, rectangles are never an aim in themselves but a logical consequence of their determining lines which are continuous in space; they appear spontaneously through the crossing of horizontal and vertical lines. Later in order to abolish the manifestation of planes as rectangles, I reduced my color and accentuated the limiting lines, crossing them one over the other. Thus the planes were not only cut and abolished, but their relationships became more active."

And this was the basis of Mondrian's mature style which, with relatively minor modifications, was to be his vehicle down to his last unfinished work, his 1944 Victory Boogie-Woogie.

Mondrian's fundamental aim in art was to transcend the particular and to express the universal. He was the great uncomprising classicist of the early 20th century. Romantic art deals with the particular; for Mondrian the particular was a trammel, a fetter. He felt that naturalistic forms in painting were limited forms by the very definition of their specific references "the particularities of form and natural color evoke subjective states of feeling which obscure pure reality." For Mondrian reality was that essential quality we find in nature, not its surface appearances. The appearances of natural things were constantly changing, but this living quality, this inner reality of nature, was constant - universal. In his opinion a truly universal art should provide through its own medium an equivalent for this inner reality, or living quality, rather than merely a reflection of surface features. In other words, he wanted a cleaner universal basis of expression than naturalistic representation in painting could give him - a purer base for the universal expression of the classicist than any painter before him had achieved. This is what he meant by his frequently repeated insistence that we must "destroy the particular form." This is why in his art, he pursued the tangent of the arc described by the cubist movement toward a further simplification of elements, instead of returning with it to a relative naturalism after its first severe disciplinary phase had served its end.

Cubism was not the solution, but besides pointing a step in the direction of destroying the particular form it also clarified Mondrian's basic problem for him. Through cubism he came to realize that he might achieve an equivalent for the living quality or inner reality of nature through an interplay of contrasting pictorial elements and through the tension of their relationships. From his cubist experience he learned that in painting this living quality of nature can only be effectively conveyed through a tension or equilibrium of the forces which contrasted forms and colors exert on one another; also that pure means provided the most effective way to achieve this tension. He saw that in a picture the only dependable source of energy for such an interplay of forces lay in a persistent, equilibrated contrast between an invariable element and a group of variables. He found that for him the only constant relation in painting was the right angle. Variety he saw most universally expressed through contrasting simple forms and primary colors, never naturalistically limited. And on these bare premises all the work of Mondrian's last twenty-five years was based.

At times he moved too far in one direction for his own satisfaction, at times too far in another. The crosses of vertical and horizontal lines of his first post-cubist period were "too restless." The large white canvases of the late 'twenties and early 'thirties composed of a single rectangle of black lines with one, two or three meticulously placed rectangles of primary color were "too static" - "too monumental", in his own words. His 1918 checkerboard compositions where only black and white were used were "too far from reality." In his later pictures he felt the solid black lines oppressive; and in his first New York painting we see these black lines eliminated in favor of colored bands.

Finally in his Broadway Boogie-Woogie, 1943, and his unfinished Victory Boogie-Woogie, we find him drawing all the strands of his research together. Here we have the restlessness and variety of minor form that he had in his first post-cubist phase contrasted with a constant dominant rectangularity throughout the composition. The primary colors of his mature years are mingled with softer, secondary squares reminiscent in tone of the golds and grays of his cubist work. And he has broken the aggressiveness of his lines,

character of the colored bands of his first New York work with a brilliant multicolored mosaic effect. The whole canvas now dances with variously-sized rectangles of different colors. The eye is led from one group of color notes to another at varying speeds: at the same time contrasted with this endless change in the minor motives we have a constant repetition of the right angle theme like a persistent bass chord sounding through a sprinkle of running arpeggios and grace notes from the treble.

In a letter written shortly before his death, Mondrian wrote: "~~true~~ Boogie-Woogie I see as similar in intention to mine; destruction of melody (natural aspect) construction through continuous oppositions of pure means. Dynamic rhythm."

The foregoing article will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art.