



UNDER THE HIGH PATRONAGE OF  
THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING AND QUEEN



MERCATORFONDS - BOZAR BOOKS



# theo van doesburg



a new expression of life, art and technology

Theo van Doesburg.  
A New Expression of Life, Art and Technology

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Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (BOZAR)  
Artistic Director Paul Dujardin  
26 February – 29 May 2016

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Exhibition Curator and Scientific Advisor  
Gladys C. Fabre





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## Avant-garde across the borders

Theo van Doesburg and his comrades-in-arms, De Stijl, the Bauhaus, Dada and other avant-garde groups from after the First World War, feel right at home in the rooms of the Centre for Fine Arts (BOZAR). The works of art on display and the building in which nearly a century later they are being displayed bear witness to one and the same zeitgeist. The idea of constructing a place in Brussels where all of the arts would feel at home dates from just before the war. (The Centre for Fine Arts ultimately opened its doors in 1928.) Music, the visual arts, design, film, theatre, dance, literature and architecture come together in the art-deco masterpiece designed by Victor Horta and exude the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, which Theo van Doesburg also advocated.

*Theo van Doesburg: A New Expression of Life, Art and Technology* is well suited to the interdisciplinary approach which BOZAR stands for today. De Stijl opened up new creative possibilities by removing the barriers between the various art disciplines. The interaction between painting and film, architecture and design led Van Doesburg in 1924 to a more dynamic style – Elementarism – which he also translated spatially in projects such as the Aubette entertainment complex in Strasbourg, carried out jointly with Hans and Sophie Arp-Taeuber. Van Doesburg gathered people from various disciplines, with little regard for the borders between nation states that had only recently fought a world war. The Netherlands, which had remained neutral during the war, had become too narrow-minded for him by 1920. Van Doesburg saw how greater collaboration across borders could lead to better understanding.

In his view the arts were no longer self-contained. Art could indeed save the world, but it had to remain open to other sectors. Van Doesburg worked towards an international style, a new era and greater humanity. He also immersed himself in the latest developments in the fields of technology and science, including Einstein's Theory of Relativity. This interaction between art, technology and science was at the time truly visionary. The promotion of such interactions today forms a key component of BOZAR's own vision for the future. Many hybrid artists are now part of interdisciplinary teams that raze the boundaries between the sciences – whether natural or social – and art, arriving at proposals for alternative ways of living (together).

Theo van Doesburg was an avant-gardist at heart. He was a man of manifestos, pamphlets, lectures, conferences, fraternities and fratricidal disputes. As a militant networker he also had the means to convert a substantial number of people in Belgium to the new international style that he saw before him, including Georges Vantongerloo, Marthe Donas, Karel Maes, Huib Hoste and Jozef Peeters. In this exhibition and its catalogue, particular attention is paid to these Belgian connections.

Alongside *Daniel Buren: A Fresco*, *Theo van Doesburg: A New Expression of Life, Art and Technology* launches a series of exhibitions at BOZAR exploring the meaning and legacy of the avant-garde. *The Power of the Avant-Garde* enables leading contemporary artists to enter into a dialogue with the historical avant-garde from just before and after the First World War, from precursors such as Ensor and Munch via the Expressionists, Futurists, Dadaists and Constructivists to the Bauhaus, where Van Doesburg was one of the family. *Art in Europe 1945–68: Facing the Future* brings together the neo-avant-gardes of Eastern and Western Europe and shows the extent to which artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain arrived at similar developments. The Gutai group that emerged in Japan in 1954 and sculptures by Pablo Picasso will also find a home in BOZAR in 2016.

The Centre for Fine Arts is very grateful to Mr Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, for the support he has lent to this project. The Centre for Fine Arts also wishes to express its most sincere thanks to H.E. Chris Hoornaert, Ambassador of Belgium to the Netherlands. We also acknowledge H.E. Henne Schuwer, former Ambassador of the Netherlands to Belgium, and H.E. Maryem van den Heuvel, Ambassador of the Netherlands to Belgium, for their indispensable contribution to the realization of this exhibition.



This project is part of the Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We therefore also wish to thank Mrs Marjo van Schaik, coordinator of the Arts and Design EU2016 programme.

Our sincere thanks are also due to Mrs Gladys C. Fabre, curator of the exhibition, for her great knowledge and expertise as well as her dynamism and dedication.

We also wish to acknowledge the Dutch museums. Without their support, this ambitious project would never have been possible. Our thanks go to the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, Museum de Lakenhal in Leiden, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, Museum Belvédère in Heerenveen, Museum Drachten and the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD), based in The Hague. Without their belief in the project this exhibition would never have been possible. We also thank the many private collectors for their trust as well as the galleries, namely Galerie Berinson, Galerie Gmurzynska and Roberto Polo Gallery.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the BOZAR EXPO team led by Sophie Lauwers, and in particular Ann Geeraerts, who brilliantly managed the coordination of this exhibition with the help of Carlos González Íscar, as well as Vera Kotaji, who together with the team from Mercatorfonds was responsible for coordinating the exhibition catalogue. We are also grateful to the BOZAR TECHNICS team.

Etienne Davignon

*President of the Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (BOZAR)*

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Culture is there to be shared and experienced with others. That is something I observed when I was studying in the Netherlands, where I met students and lecturers in a direct way that is often uncommon for Belgians. As the cliché goes, the Netherlands is liberating and challenging.

Relations between the Netherlands and Belgium go back centuries. We share a long history. Language renders the link with Flanders obvious and pronounced. But French-speakers are also familiar with Dutch culture.

Directness is certainly also a feature in the work of many Dutch artists. Straightforwardness. Comfortable with itself and endowed with a strong sense of conviction. Theo van Doesburg was such an artist. He was deeply committed and wanted to use his art to bring people closer together. He built bridges between art, technology and science, and heralded the creative Europe of today.

The artistic and the industrial blended naturally in Van Doesburg's oeuvre. In his imagination he saw the pioneering visual language of De Stijl find expression in 'iron bridges, locomotives, cars, telescopes, aeroplane hangers, cable cars, skyscrapers and toys'.

After the First World War, the new style aimed to bring about a modern, harmonious community. It was a remarkable approach at a time when the autonomy of the artist was asserted. Even today, artists are often wrongly regarded by the man or woman in the street as otherworldly, while spreading utopian ideas that become reality all too soon.

To make the dream of De Stijl a reality, Van Doesburg announced his message in Belgium too. Antwerp and Brussels were among the first cities he visited during a European tour. Belgian support for De Stijl and Theo van Doesburg was not insignificant, as is shown by the work of various Belgian artists included in this exhibition.

*Theo van Doesburg: A New Expression of Life, Art and Technology* takes place during the Netherlands Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The theme of the cultural programme of the presidency is 'Exploring Future Europe – Celebrating Dutch Culture'. The EU2016 Creative Challenge Call has launched an appeal to the new generation of artists – including designers, thinkers, scientists, musicians and writers – to help shape Europe.

The keywords here are dialogue, diversity and stimulating the creative process. Less than a century ago Theo van Doesburg set a good example.

Charles Michel

*Prime Minister*





Fig.1 Theo van Doesburg as I.K. Bonset, *I AM AGAINST EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE. I.K. BONSET AND DADA*, 1921

## Style is the man

It is assumed that style is a complicated way of saying simple things, when it is a simple way of saying complicated things.

– JEAN COCTEAU

Although provocative in relation to the universalist objectives of the Dutch De Stijl movement, the title of this essay has the virtue of making it possible to draw a portrait of Theo van Doesburg, that theorist, propagandist, editor of the *De Stijl* magazine and all-round creator: painter, architect, poet, performer and graphic designer. Although apparently at first sight contradicting Van Doesburg's theoretical anti-individualism, this title is in keeping with the originality of his aesthetic approach. His creations emerge from constant questionings, resistances and contradictions. They deconstruct the norms and foundations of the past in order to invent new ones, searching for an ethical or aesthetic order in the chaos of life or arising out of the confrontation between disciplines and new scientific data.

If we add a capital 'M' to 'man', this title can also be adapted to Neoplasticism, the 'essence' and spearhead of the De Stijl movement until 1925–6. In his 'Dialogue on the New Plastic', Piet Mondrian explains that it is the *spirit* that makes man *man*. But the task of art is to express the *superhuman*.<sup>1</sup>

However, one can wonder about the presuppositions of harmony and constant equilibrium attached to the Universe, to that abstract Man: a part of the Great Whole, stripped of any individualism, to which intuition allegedly has access. Consequently, one might ask oneself whether De Stijl, like any style, even a collective

one – in which everyone's participation is nevertheless acknowledged – is not in the end the distinctive expression of a desire for totality filling an existential lack. In other words, it could be said that it is the denial of death and the longing for transcendence that are universal while the various philosophies, religions, social or political ideologies and the resulting works of art remain in a sense singular, the fruit of a culture, a 'collectivity' or even an individual in a moment of history. This is what appears from the various proposals for a total work of art, by the De Stijl movement and all the 'isms', developed in the wake of the First World War. Beyond the philosophical, ethical, ideological or subconscious motivations that prompted Van Doesburg to create, it is his ability to give shape to an 'attitude' that is endearing, original, even prophetic of the future of art.

Many historians have insisted on a kind of division in Van Doesburg's personality, since he substituted his registered birth name Küppers for Doesburg, the name of his biological father,<sup>2</sup> and used the pseudonyms Aldo Camini for his philosophical writings and I.K. Bonset for his Dadaist lettrist poetry. They saw in it a 'counter-life'<sup>3</sup> or the hidden facet of his official personality, as his photographic self-portrait shows him from behind with the inscription '*JE SUIS CONTRE TOUT ET TOUS-I-K-BONSET-DADA*' (I am against everything and everyone-I-K-Bonset-Dada) (fig. 1). Indeed, the latter movement advocated an ideal of clarity and rationality, a desire to create a new world, a new art and a new life for all. Far from seeing a dichotomy between these two approaches – as François Morellet does, in his essay 'Dr De Stijl and Mr Bonset'<sup>4</sup> – I interpret it as a vitalist, intelligent and creative management

of the self. For Van Doesburg, neither the interactivity of opposites nor their conjugation results in a synthesis, but rather in a dynamic that is as existential as it is artistic.

Throughout his career, Van Doesburg kept on destroying these 'everythings' in succession, that is, his supports, or 'crutches' as he called them,<sup>5</sup> in order to rebuild and progress independently. Thus, with Elementarism, he would come to challenge the Neoplasticism established by his friend Mondrian, while in 1926, he proclaimed 'the end of art'<sup>6</sup> and the end of 'isms', banishing the high priests of art to make way for creations (which he called 'life forms') suitable for the modern world. Finally, a year before his death, he defended the concept of Concrete Art, which refers only to itself, while simultaneously contemplating a new journey towards 'white painting'. It is on this favourable psychological and intellectual terrain that Van Doesburg was able to erect an artistic dynamic of complexity<sup>7</sup> in tandem with the evolution of the sciences in the inter-war years. It is therefore on the basis of the man that we will try to piece together the saga of his creative output.

### **Conjugating opposites: nature, abstraction and Dada, or destroying in order to construct**

For the De Stijl movement, abstraction opposes nature and individualism in order to construct a collective modern environment in harmony with the permanent order of the mind and the universe. To achieve this, Neoplasticism advocates an elementary language understandable by all that is limited to the straight line, the rectangle, the three primary colours blue, yellow and red, and the neutrals white, black and grey.

The shift from figurative art to abstraction is generally seen as the fruit of a process of refinement corresponding to the expression of the mind or the intellect. In this perspective, artists accorded more 'reality' to ideas, whether religious, Platonic, theosophic or simply conceptual, than to external reality, which in their

eyes condemned imitation, the representation of nature and the illusionism of perspective. By concerning themselves with the mind more than the eye, they sought with their art to transcend the expression of the egotist individual and different states of mind. They aimed to achieve the universal by extracting or superimposing a mathematical structure on natural forms or by inventing 'visual equivalences' to the laws governing the universe. The reference to nature as a starting point, the *that-on-which* the constructive mind could operate, endured among Cubists and some Futurists, and remained the predominant practice of the artists of the De Stijl movement until 1920, although Mondrian began to relinquish it towards 1916. Van Doesburg's position in this regard was less daring: 'the modern artist does not ignore nature, on the contrary. But he does not imitate it, he does not represent it, he reconstructs it. He makes use of nature, reduces it to elementary forms to obtain a new image ... this new image is then the artwork.'<sup>8</sup> For Bart Van der Leek this reconstruction, or 'transformation' as he called it, governed the creation of his triptych *The Mine* (1916) and of *Leaving the Factory* (1917), and it was part of the process at work in Van Doesburg's still lifes of 1916, his *Composition IX* (1917) and *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* (probably from 1918) (fig. 2), until the famous *Composition VIII* (1920) (fig. 3, 4), in which the original motif, a cow, had completely disappeared.

Thus, Van Doesburg's sketches, preliminary to his abstractions, demonstrate that the real world, to which he is opposed, remains his indispensable starting point. The journey towards abstraction would take place by degrees from one work to the next – a new support – a work that was increasingly refined, until the initial subject faded away, whether a seated woman, a dancer or a cow. One would have to wait for the artist to change discipline, moving from painting to architectural space, for the initially figurative motif to be abandoned once and for all.



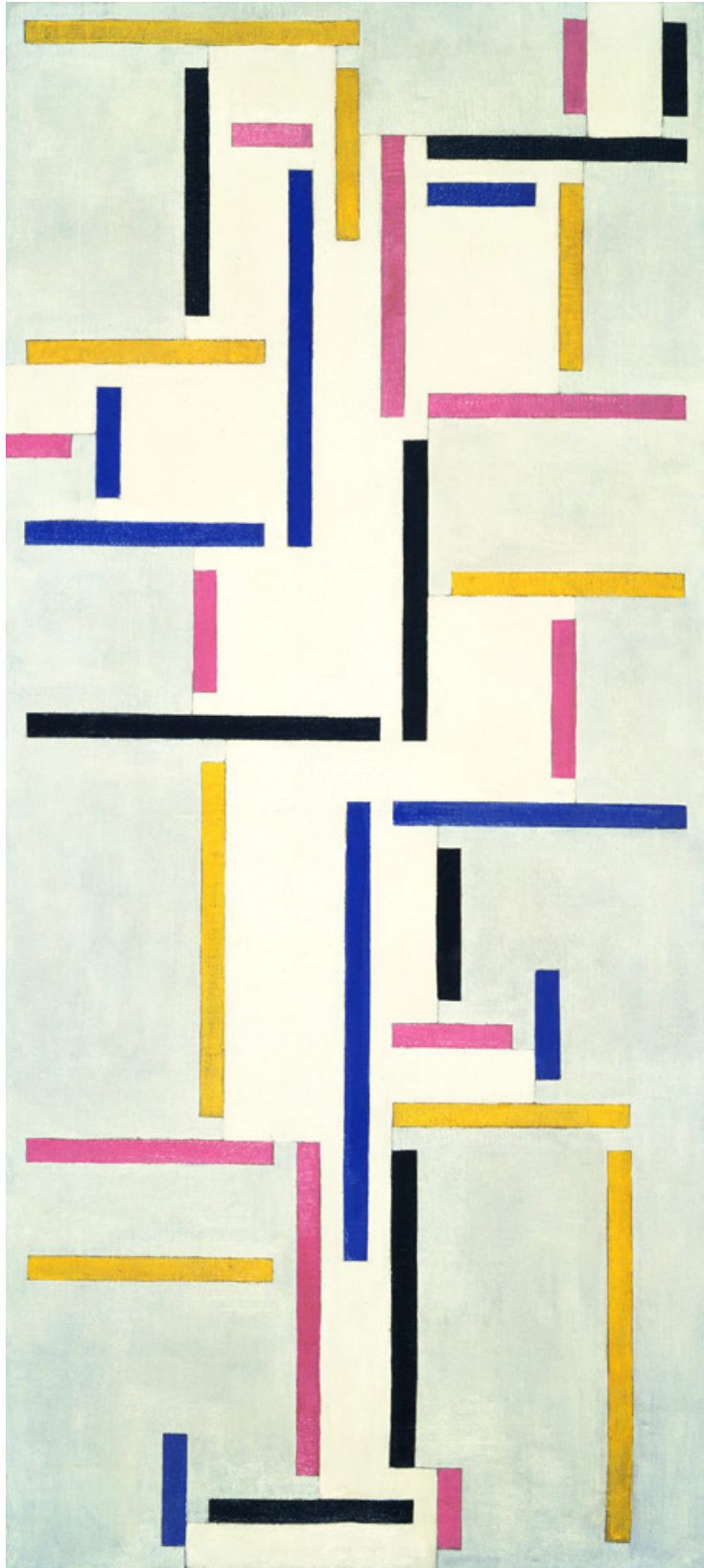


Fig. 2 Theo van Doesburg, *Rhythm of a Russian Dance*, 1918.  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Fig. 3 Theo van Doesburg, *Cow*, 1916.  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

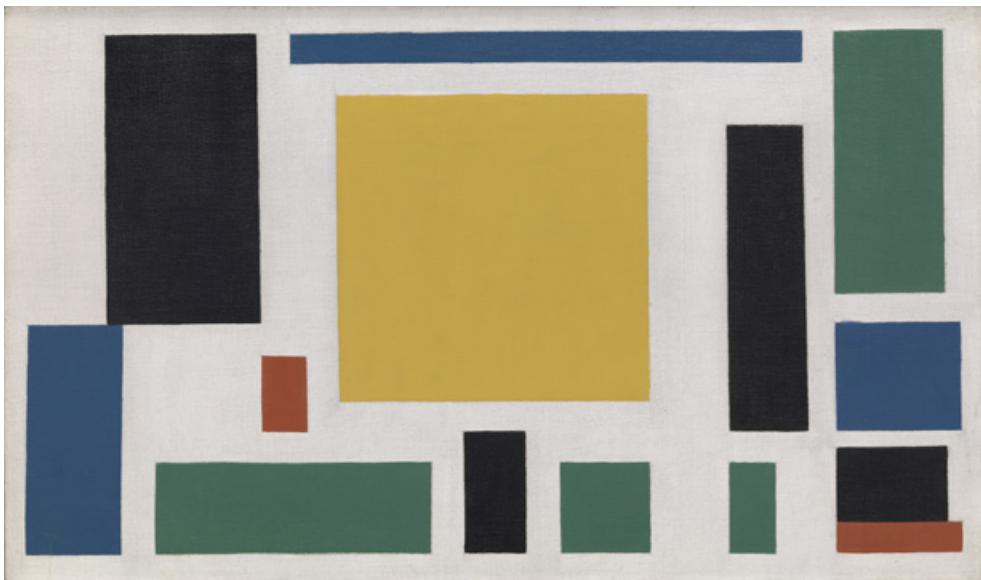


Fig. 4 Theo van Doesburg, *Composition VIII (The Cow)*, 1918 (?).  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The extreme nature of abstraction appealed to the Dadaists of Zurich, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, a professor of textiles at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts, pioneered this radical trend, incorporating it in her tapestries (1916) (fig. 5), collages and the *Duo Collages* (1918), made with her husband, the Dadaist Hans Arp. Coming from a practice-based background and from the so-called minor arts, the Dada group perceived abstraction as a means of destroying the figurative tradition, the hierarchy of the arts and the bourgeois artistic values it undermined, as well as any supplementary pictorial content, whether symbolic, ideological or religious. Abstract art, according to Hans Richter, was a hostile proposition intended to make a scandal. In this respect, the fact that Francis Picabia and Wassily Kandinsky's first abstract paintings – like perhaps Van Doesburg's first Elementarist work *Counter-Composition V* (1924) (cat. 94, p. 173) – were the result of a simple handling mistake on the floor – the canvas having been placed upside down – rather pleased Arp, Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters and Tristan Tzara, who advocated spontaneity and chance as *modi operandi*. In this way the Dada-Constructivist collaboration was able to take place under the banner of abstraction on the basis of culture shock and the principle of destruction in order to construct. This is confirmed by the publication in the October 1921 issue of *De Stijl* of 'The Call to Elementary Art', which was signed by Hausmann, Arp, Ivan Puni and Lászlò Moholy-Nagy in Berlin.

At the Congress of the Union of International Progressive Artists held in May 1922 in Düsseldorf, Van Doesburg had found himself a new ally in the person of the Russian El Lissitzky, who was in search of international recognition. In August, together with Hans Richter, Max Burchartz and Karel Maes, they drafted the manifesto for the IK (International Faction of Constructivist Artists). In order to invigorate this new alliance, in September 1922 Van Doesburg organized the Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists in Weimar,



Fig. 5 Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Vertical-Horizontal Composition*, 1916. Fondazione Marguerite Arp, Locarno

which brought together the adherents of abstraction Van Doesburg, El Lissitzky and Moholy-Nagy, several Bauhaus students (who were taking private classes with Van Doesburg) such as Peter Rohl, Werner Graeff and Max Burchartz, as well as the big names of Dadaism as surprise guests, Tzara, Arp and Richter, in order to energize the common struggle for Constructive Abstraction. The event surpassed the organizer's wildest expectations, judging by Moholy-Nagy's despair at seeing the reunion turn into a happening, as well as accounts published in the magazine *Mécano* no. 3 (Red) and Nelly van Doesburg's memoirs.<sup>9</sup>

In his manifesto *What is Dada?*, Van Doesburg asserted even more strongly his radicalism, verging on nihilism: 'Dada is a yes-no [...] Dada ignores all elevated spiritual content of life, art, religion, philosophy or politics [...] Dada eliminates any dualism commonly accepted between matter and mind, between man and

nature, between man and woman to create an “undifferentiated point”, a point, therefore, beyond the human concept of time and space.’<sup>10</sup>

Within this generalized deconstruction, the main objective of modernity was asserted as the construction of a space-time, passing through a decompartmentalization of artistic disciplines and the influence of cinema. This progressive paradigm shift – from the eternal order of the Platonic universe, which formed the basis of Mondrian’s Neoplasticism, to Einstein’s restricted Theory of Relativity invoked by Elementarism and especially by Van Doesburg’s Concrete Art – will be discussed below.

### **Interdisciplinarity as motor: destruction and mutual borrowings**

In accordance with his desire to change the world, life and technique, developed in his text ‘The Will to Style’ in 1922, it was necessary for Van Doesburg to tackle all disciplines: graphic design, typography, furniture design and above all architecture, the public art *par excellence*. This change of discipline would be crucial to Van Doesburg’s relinquishing of all references to the external world in his later pictorial work.

If this process of abstraction, starting from nature to arrive progressively at a refined figurative art and finally at a geometric (De Stijl) or lyrical composition (Kandinsky), turns out to be the path taken by all abstract artists trained in the fine arts academies; the approach of the pupils graduating from the schools of decorative or applied arts is very different.

The curriculum of the latter reverses the creative process by starting from abstraction, from a mathematical arrangement, in order to make it concrete reality. In other words, a pre-existing geometric pattern serves as a framework for figurative ornamentation.<sup>11</sup> In this approach, geometric forms are objective data and not abstractions of this or that, or else visual

equivalences of musical tonalities or feelings. They are in themselves concrete and do not refer to any essence or idealized hereafter. As a result, the creation of a leaded-glass window, a wall or a floor with a purely geometric pattern takes place without any underlying metaphysical motive, without fear of gratuitousness, but simply by applying skilfully the rules of the trade and by choosing the methods of composition of elementary forms. Thus, in 1905 Jules Bourgoïn published *La Graphique, collection raisonnée d’études et de matériaux, de notes et de croquis pour servir à l’histoire, à la théorie, à la technique des arts et à l’enseignement dans la famille, dans l’école et dans l’atelier* (fig. 6), while Eugène Grasset wrote his *Méthode de composition ornementale* (1907), the first volume of which was devoted to rectilinear elements (fig. 8) and the second to curved elements. Regardless of whether Van Doesburg or any other member of De Stijl was aware of these works, it is striking how their illustrations anticipate, by ten years or more, the ornamental tiling of the De Vonk House (fig. 7), Vantongerloo’s sculptures, Van Doesburg’s model for a monument in Leeuwarden (1917–18) (fig. 9), Neoplastic compositions and Concrete Art, up to the Op Art of the 1960s. Although we cannot claim that the works in these publications had a direct influence, the curriculum was undeniably inducing a predisposition to pure (non-objective) abstraction. If further arguments were necessary, one might also cite Frank Lloyd Wright’s geometric leaded-glass windows, made in 1907–8 for the Avery Coonley House, as an example of a forerunner of decorative abstraction.

As with his painting, Van Doesburg’s first abstract leaded-glass windows started out, from an external reality or an earlier artistic representation, for example a seated woman for *Composition II* (1917), which, with each successive refinement, would become a key geometric module. Until then, the artist therefore proceeded inversely to the designers, who start out from a



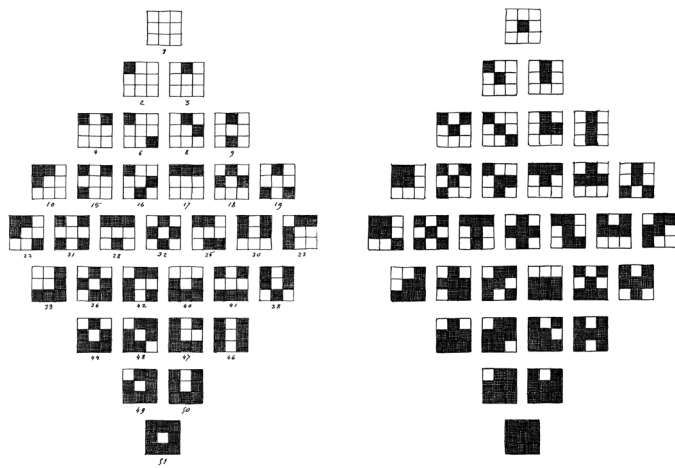


Fig. 6 Study from Jules Bourgoïn, *La Graphique*, 1905

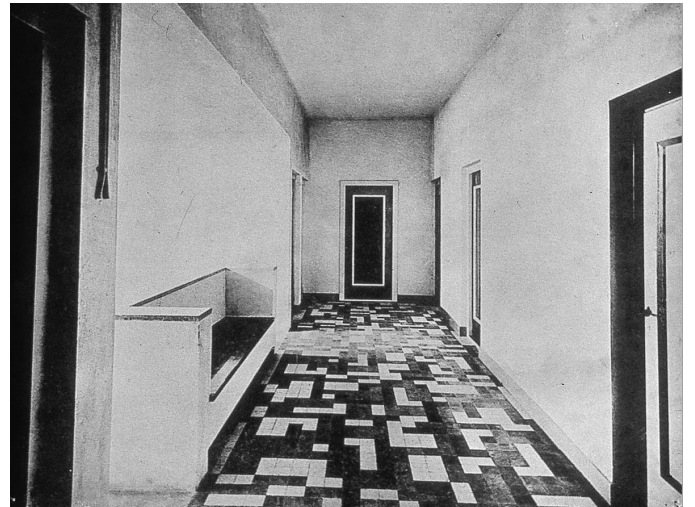


Fig. 7 Theo van Doesburg, Tile floor. Corridor on the first floor of the De Vonk holiday home, Noordwijkerhout, 1917–18

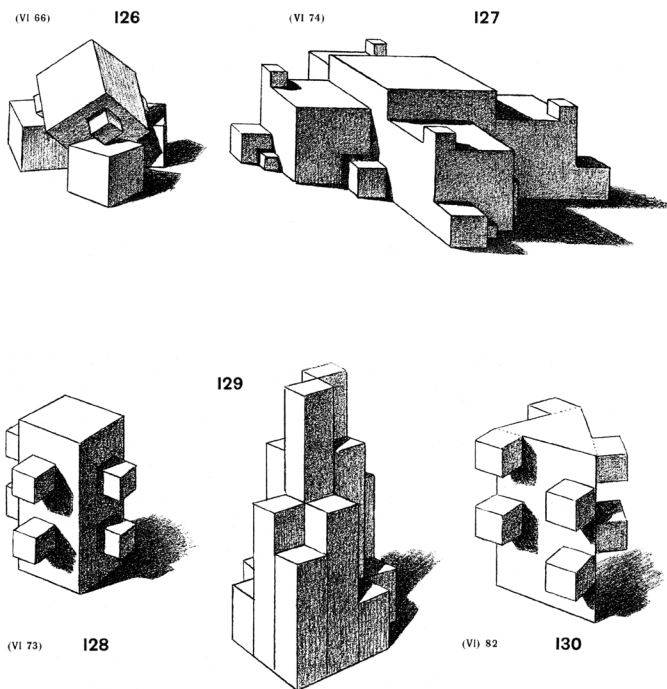


Fig. 8 Studies from Eugène Grasset, *Méthode de composition ornementale: Les volumes*, 1907



Fig. 9 Theo van Doesburg, *Design for a Monument for Leeuwarden* (not built), 1917. Reconstruction 1968. Architect, Jan Wils. Model by Herman Zaalberg

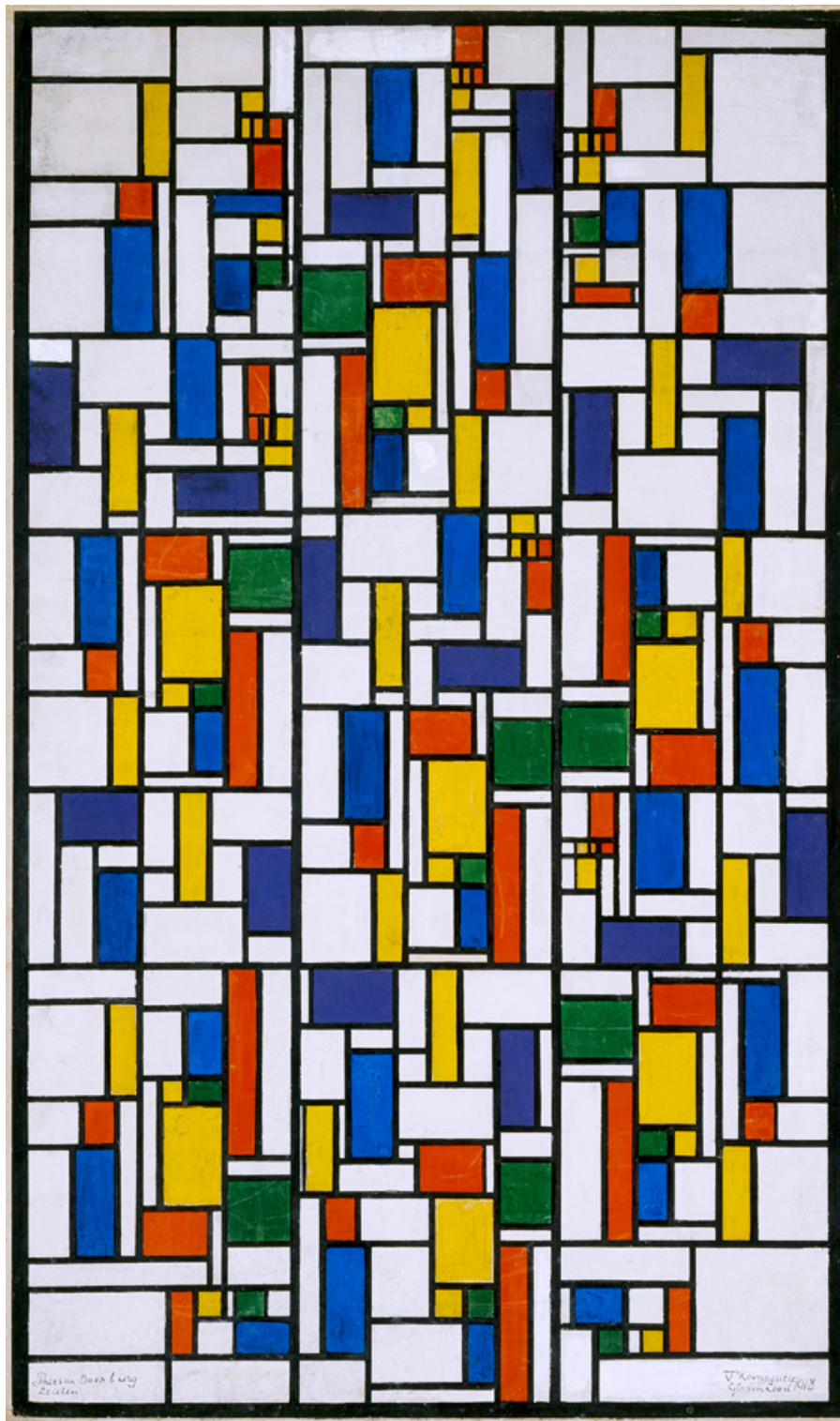


Fig.10 Colour Design for Leaded-Glass Composition V, 1917-18 (?). Kunsthau, Zurich

geometric framework before introducing figurative elements. It is in the implementation of this newly independent module that the methods of decorative composition were applied. In the leaded-glass windows made for buildings in Sint Anthoniepolder Stadhouderslaan, 1917 (cat. 2, p. 34), Katwijk aan Zee (Villa Allegonda, cat. 6, p. 38) and Spangen, 1918 (ill. p. xx), this modular unity would be permuted, inverted or reflected, resulting in a non-objective composition of coloured planes, without any reference to reality.<sup>12</sup> The layout therefore follows a blurring system whose sole purpose is to invigorate the whole while questioning the viewer's gaze. Moreover, the technique of the leaded-glass window involves a structural grid formed of lead strips dividing panes of coloured glass. This grid, underlying all the arrangements and permutations of rectangles, squares and colours would be used and emphasized by Van Doesburg in his Elementarist paintings and in some of the simultaneous *Counter-Compositions*. In the latter, the black linear structure is superimposed on a preliminary composition, thereby becoming a visual element concomitant to this pictorial space. In Mondrian's paintings (*Grid I*, 1918) and later those of Van Doesburg, the functional, mathematical and conceptual grid would become, as Rosalind Krauss states, 'an emblem of modernity, affirming the autonomy of an art that is anti-natural, anti-mimetic, anti-real'.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the grid introduced in a leaded-glass window, the use of a standard unit, such as a brick or tile (not to mention door and window) further enriches Van Doesburg's visual vocabulary. Thus the use of colour-glazed bricks for the façade of the De Vonk House (1917–18) and similar tiles for the interior flooring enable the emergence of a new creative process that would find its echo in painting. The tiled floor Van Doesburg made for the house comprises a rhythmic maze-like pattern of black-and-white units interwoven on an ochre background (cat. 21, p. 55). Its composi-

tion follows the method used in the leaded-glass windows, that is, by the implementation of a modular design, here highlighted in the hall. Van Doesburg would retain from this labyrinthine pavement of white, ochre and black tiles the idea of an optical motion capable of 'pushing back' the wall. Similarly, his *Counter-Compositions* are not contained by the edges of the painting but are intentionally left open. Thus the borders cut into and interrupt the Elementarist composition, so that it appears as a fragment of infinity.

Reversal or inversion as a compositional technique was also practised in painting, whether by accident or design. Thus the *Composition* (fig. 11), which Van Doesburg gave to Sándor Bortnyik in 1922 in exchange for a collage, was none other than, signed upside down, the preparatory gouache for the *Woman's Head* in the 1917 leaded-glass window. *Counter-Composition XII* (cat. 91, p. 170) went from being a horizontal layout to a vertical one. On the other hand, the chance placement on the floor on one side of *Counter-Composition V*, originally diamond-shaped, suggested to Van Doesburg the diagonal layout peculiar to Elementarism (cat. 94, p. 174). That being said, Van Doesburg's fondness for the diagonal as a dynamic element was already evident in the typography of his Dadaist poems, as well



Fig. 11 Theo van Doesburg, *Colour Design for Leaded-Glass Composition. Woman's Head*, 1917. Turned 180 degrees in 1922. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest



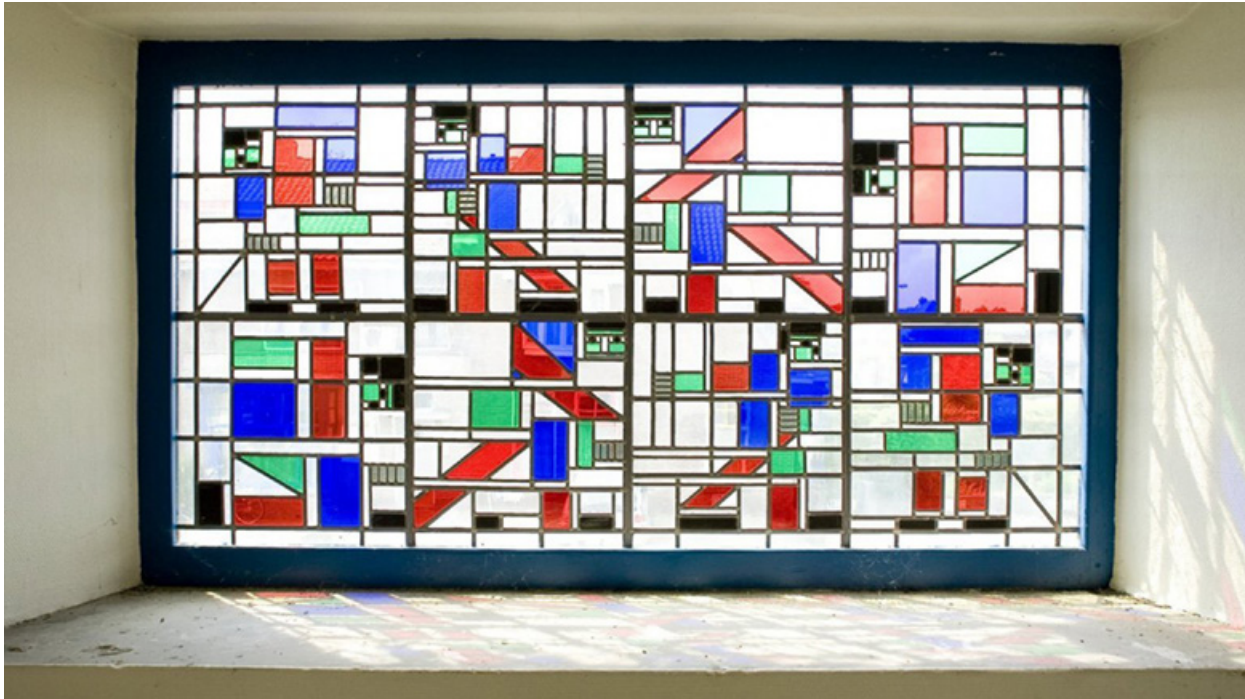


Fig. 12 Theo van Doesburg, *Small Pastorale*, 1922. Landbouwwinterschool, Drachten

as in his design for the façades of apartment blocks in the Spangen district in 1921 (cat. 23, p. 57), where the fan-shaped arrangement of dissonant colours (blue, yellow, green) provide a contrast with the symmetry, weight and monotony of the buildings. It was no longer against nature but against this static architecture – for which he criticized his architect friend Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud – that the painter wanted to assert himself. In a letter dated 3 November 1921, Oud wrote to him: ‘... perhaps he will have the opportunity to discuss it calmly when you will be there. Or must the architect’s traditional dictatorship be replaced by the painter’s?’<sup>14</sup> Lastly, although Neoplastic norms – straight line, orthogonality, primary and neutral colours – were already well established, Van Doesburg often made exceptions, as can be seen from the presence of the colour green and of the diagonal of the sower’s leg in the semi-abstract leaded-glass window *Small Pastorale* (1922) (fig. 12). The variation of the

motif, multiplied eight times in the complete window, with the shifting movements of the head and the different directions of the diagonal, undeniably generate a sense of movement in the design, in other words, the overall composition meets neither the criteria of stasis nor the restricted use of primary colours advocated by Mondrian and Neoplasticism.

Before we continue our analysis of the interaction between painting and architecture, we must touch upon the interaction that developed in the years 1920–3 between painting and so-called ‘pure cinema’, which would lead to new architectural and pictorial approaches. Many of the avant-garde artists – El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy and Marcel Duchamp – would also become influenced by the abstract films of Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling. The birth of abstract cinema bears witness to the desire to integrate in the project movement and optical temporality, mainly by means of light variations, mutations, repetitions, formal sequences



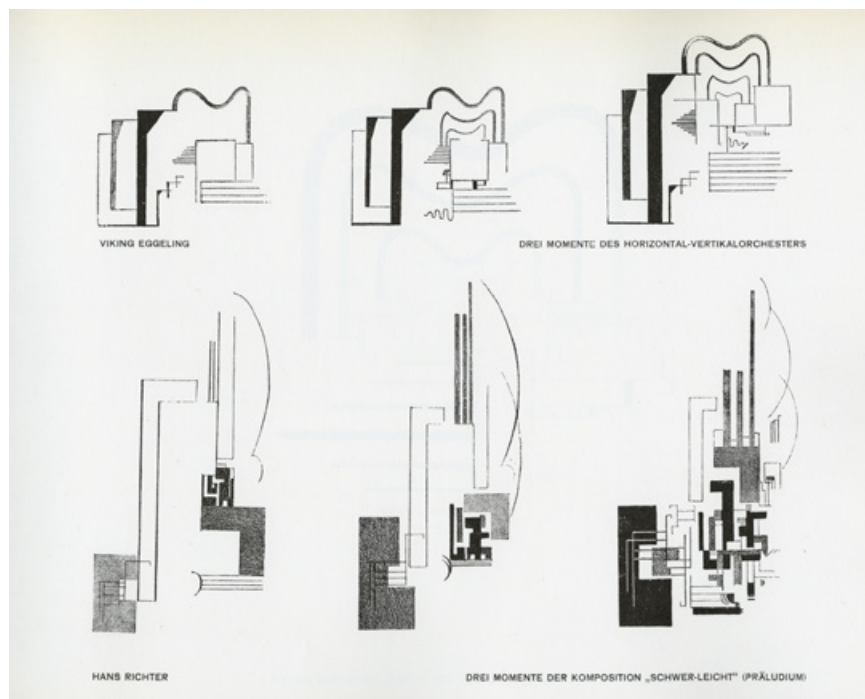


Fig. 13 Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter, studies published in *De Stijl* 4 (1921) nr. 7

and mechanical rhythms. The first trials sought visual equivalencies to musical composition, a model of abstraction, but also sought to integrate them in a prospective total art involving all the senses.<sup>15</sup> To this end, the English artist Duncan Grant created *Abstract Kinetic Collage Painting with Sound* (1914) on a roll of fabric, and Eggeling and Richter made long graphic scores (fig. 13). The latter adopted the format of the Japanese *makimono* scrolls in which a progression of elementary forms unfolds. Richter's *Preludium* (late 1919) and *Fugue* (1920) (cat. 61, p. 122) and Eggeling's *Horizontal-Vertical Mass* (late 1919) and *Diagonal Symphony* (1920) (cat. 59, p. 119) aspire to be a universal language that would restore to the arts their social function in the form of a kind of visual Esperanto.

Van Doesburg played an important role, not only in the promotion of abstract film but also in its development. After travelling to Klein Koelzig where Hans Richter was working, he set about persuading Richter

to limit his visual vocabulary to the straight line, the square and the rectangle: 'The square is the symbol of a new humanity. It is like the cross of the first Christians',<sup>16</sup> he told his friend. The adoption of this elementary vocabulary had the advantage of making it possible to dispense with some hundred preparatory sketches, by composing these geometric designs directly on the screen he was filming, manipulating the forward and backward zoom, enlarging or diminishing the squares, playing with the light, emphasizing the black-and-white contrasts or moderating them with greys and, lastly, making use of a mechanical rhythm imbued with modernity. This simplification in the execution process made it possible for Richter's films *Rhythms 21* (cat. 62, p. 123) and *23* to be screened long before Eggeling's *Diagonal Symphony*, an animated film which had to wait until 1924 for its first screening, and 1925 for its first showing in Berlin.

Richter's *Rhythms 21* was presented in Berlin in

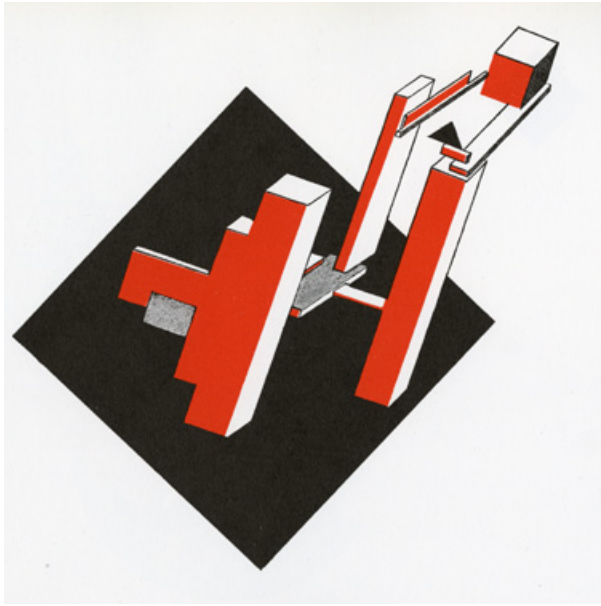


Fig. 14 El Lissitzky, *Of 2 Squares: A Suprematist Story in Six Constructions*, in *De Stijl* 5 (1922) no. 10/11

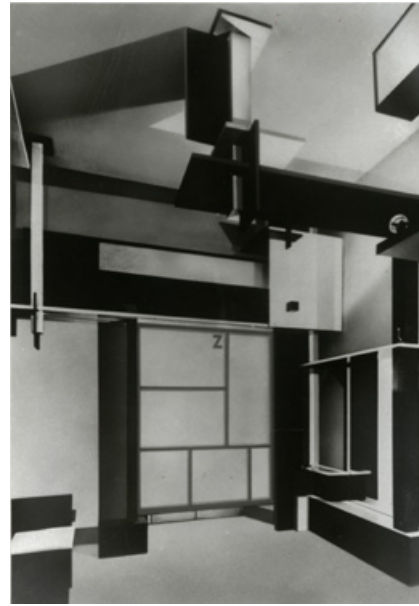


Fig. 15 Ivo Pannaggi, *Casa Zampini*, 1925.

1921 and *Rhythms 23* was screened in Paris, first during a lecture by Van Doesburg and then at the Théâtre Michel during the *Soirée du Coeur à Barbe* organized by Tzara in July 1923. *Rhythms 23*, an extended version of the earlier film, presented a sequence showing shifts, reductions and enlargements of rectangles moving about on a diagonal grid. The centrifugal movement thus produced could not have gone unnoticed by Van Doesburg.

Due to the rare screenings of these films before 1925, it is the earlier graphic scores and the drawings of *Film Moment* published in the Dutch magazine *De Stijl* (July 1921 and 1923, no. 5), the Hungarian *MA* (September 1921), the Russian *Veshch, Gegenstand, Objet* (1922), and the German *G* (1923) that first revolutionized graphic design,<sup>17</sup> paintings and architecture of the international avant-garde, and of Van Doesburg in particular.

The ties that had developed between Van Doesburg, Richter and El Lissitzky in the wake of the Congress of Progressive Artists in May 1922 materialized

with the publication of the painting *Proun* in *De Stijl* magazine in June, the collective manifesto for the KI (International Union of Neoplastic Constructivists) in August, the publication of *On 2 Squares* (fig. 14) and lastly the Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists, both in September. They bear witness to the fruitful exchanges between the three artists, to whom we should add Moholy-Nagy,<sup>18</sup> although we cannot explore his collaboration further in this essay. We will therefore insist only on the axonometric presentation of planes in space of the paintings *Proun* (cat. 69, p. 135) by El Lissitzky, which would first influence Richter and subsequently Laslo Peri, Sándor Bortnyik, Ivo Pannaggi (fig. 15) and Theo van Doesburg. This method of representation of planes in space is apparent in the drawings of *Film Moments* (fig. 16) published in the fifth issue (1923) of *De Stijl*. The latter illustrate essays devoted to abstract cinema: the first written by Van Doesburg, 'Licht-en Tijdbeelding (Film)', and the second by Richter. In turn, these *Film Moments* drawings inspired Van Doesburg's *Counter-Constructions* (1923)

and *Constructions of Space-Time* (1923–4) (fig. 17): studies of planes in primary colours in space, in order to deconstruct the foundations of architecture and reconstruct them under new criteria. This research imagines a free plan, open to the exterior, in which yellow, blue or red walls float in space and generate an impression of movement in the viewer. These instructions regarding the atmosphere were intended for the architect Cornelis van Eesteren so that he could carry them out in the form of models and could visualize their new dynamic by means of axonometric views. These projects were exhibited first at the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne run by Léonce Rosenberg (1923), then at the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture the following year.

The two Paris exhibitions also included studies for the University Hall of Amsterdam (cat. 122, p. 205), which reveals the opposite approach: no longer the influence, through film, of painting on architecture, but that of architecture on painting. The hexagonal form of the main hall led Van Doesburg to adopt a diagonal orientation of his decorative grid underlying coloured squares and rectangles. Following this rapid overview of Van Doesburg's artistic evolution, we can conclude that Elementarism in painting was born of a conjunction of events, artistic encounters, interactions between disciplines and architectural commissions most of which took place in the years 1922–5, that it was confirmed at the Villa Noailles in Hyères (1924–5) – the inspiration for *Counter-Composition XIII* (cat. 93, p. 172) – and that it continued brilliantly in the Aubette building in Strasbourg (1926–7) (cat. 124, p. 208).

### The paradigm shift

On the basis of this art-historical study, one should not conclude that Van Doesburg only became an artist who practised in all the disciplines because he seemed primarily guided by a philosophy of movement. His doubts and questionings, his endless adjustments of



Fig. 16 Hans Richter, *Film Moment*, published in *De Stijl* 6 (1923) nr. 5



Fig. 17 Theo van Doesburg, *Construction of Space-Time IV*, 1923. Harvard University Art Museums. Busch-Reisinger Museum (The Fredric Wertham Collection), Cambridge, MA

an aesthetic, philosophical and social order bear witness to an exigency of thought that dictated his life, his art and the direction of the *De Stijl* magazine. If his own creative output blossomed thanks to the exchanges of ideas and to collaboration with his fellow painters, architects, designers and musicians, the latter, in return, owed him their international recognition in the 1920s.

This frenetic outlook contrasts with that of Mondrian: serene, solitary and meditative, attached to stability and balanced relations between positive and negative, leading to the creation of a new artistic language of pure harmony, uniting mankind, life and the universe in a single whole. As early as 1917, Mondrian and Van Doesburg agreed on the ideal of an environmental art to be built as a unity of form and content. Although this precept would remain unchanged, the content itself would evolve.

As Linda Dalrymple Henderson shows in her remarkable study,<sup>19</sup> for many artists before the First World War, occultism and the new sciences offered,

in their quest to reveal invisible realities, two interesting paths to explore. In 1915 Van Doesburg, along with Mondrian, was drawn to theosophy, as can be seen from one of his first abstract compositions, a copy of an illustration from Charles Webster Leadbeater's book *Man Visible and Invisible* (1902). The title of the painting is revealing: *The Causal Body of the Adept* (cat. 1, p. 33), which is to say: 'the man that has attained the goal of humanity – who has become something more than man!'

In contrast to Mondrian, for whom the influence of theosophy would endure, Van Doesburg's ideas would evolve as the idea of the fourth dimension went through various mutations. For the masters of theosophy, Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater, the fourth dimension constitutes an ether or a hyperspace, connoting the Spirit, the Invisible, the hidden Order of the Universe, notions which were often linked to Plato's 'world of ideas', which associates geometry with the sublime. As a result, the three dimensions attached to perception would be relegated to the sphere of the

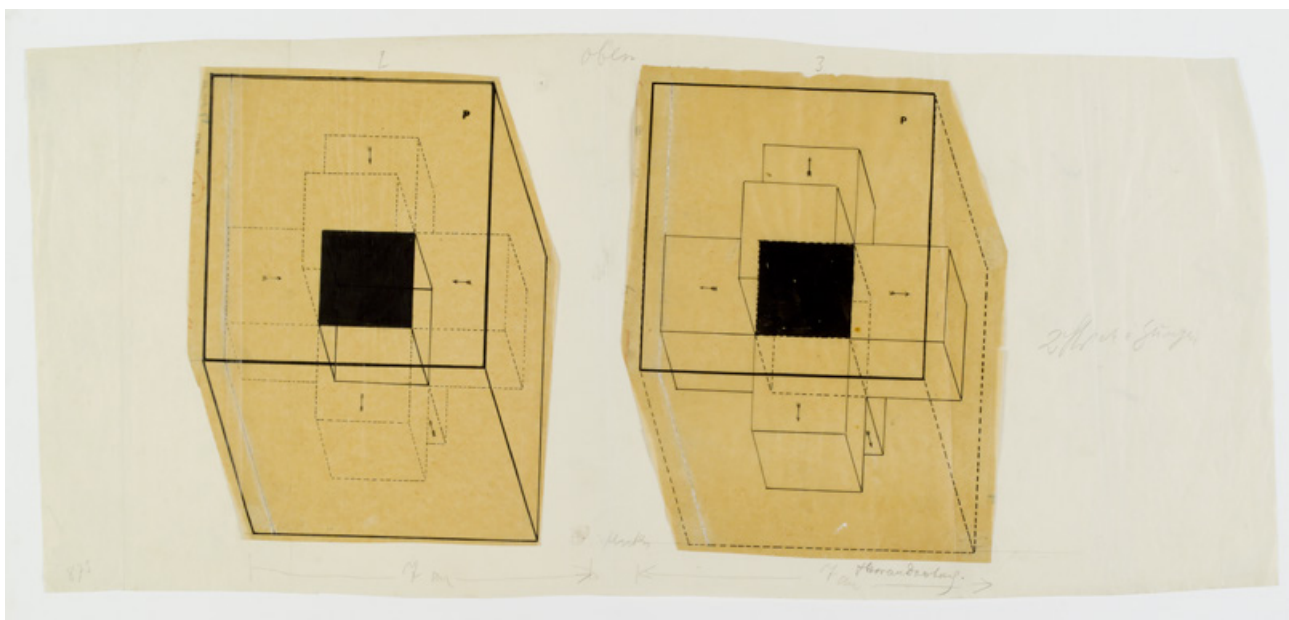


Fig. 18 Theo van Doesburg, *Tesseract with Arrows Pointing Inwards* and *Tesseract with Arrows Pointing Outwards*, 1924–5. Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.



trivial in order to make way for geometrical conceptions with  $n$  dimensions (or non-Euclidian geometries: those of Riemann, Lobatchevski, Poincaré), which Van Doesburg would try in turn to formalize in his *Tesseract* (fig. 15).<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, Einstein's Theory of Relativity (1916), popularized in the early 1920s, would identify time as the fourth dimension of space. A continuum in which the two elements are inseparable and interact is perfectly illustrated in *Arithmetic Composition* (1930) (cat. 133, p. 229). This is a more complex version of a study entitled *Six Moments in the Development of Plane to Space* or *Evolution of the Universal Form no. II in Six Steps* (1926–9) (fig. 19), which the artist had reproduced, dated 1926, in his article on film in *Die Form* (no. 10, May 1929). The painting unites background and motif through the superimposition of two simultaneous progressions, that of the black squares in motion and that of the alternating white and grey background, forming four squares embedded in one another according to the mathematical ratio of 3, 6, 12 and 24. Nevertheless, a reading of the movement remains ambivalent: the first involves a combined movement of the black squares and the white-grey squares of the background towards the top left, while the second implies the return of the background squares in the opposite direction, from the smallest grey square in the top left to the largest grey square encompassing the whole of the canvas. In agreement with Einstein's theory, there is no 'arrow of time' formulation, but an overall space open to infinity.

*Arithmetic Composition* also brings to a climax the desire for an anonymous, precise and smooth style, as expressed in the Art Concret manifesto (1930): 'the technique must be mechanical, that is to say, exact, anti-impressionist', perfectly smooth. The new sobriety

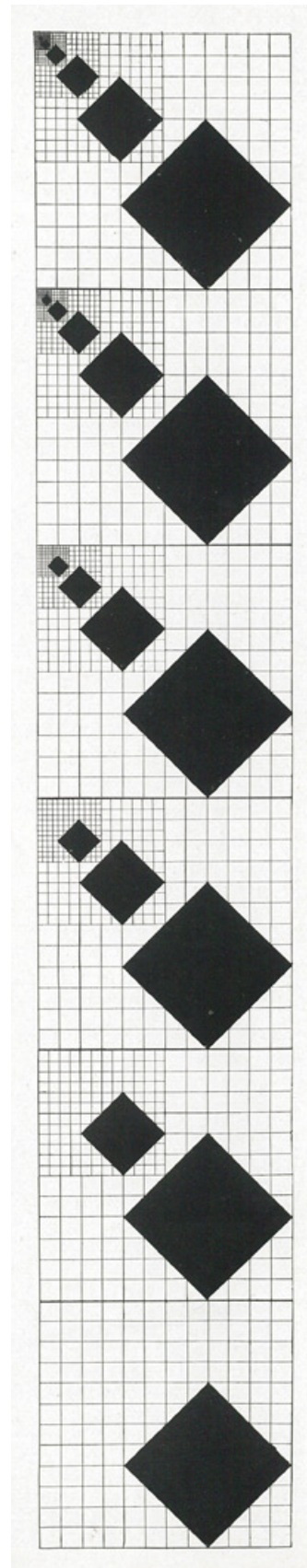


Fig. 19 Theo van Doesburg, *Six Moments in the Development of Plane to Space*, 1926–9. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

limits itself here to neutral colours as those of pure intellectuality: 'painting is a means of optically expressing thought: each canvas is a colour-thought.'

Van Doesburg's growing interest in Einstein's Theory of Relativity as a replacement for a timeless order of the Universe would rekindle the aesthetic differences between Mondrian and himself. However, Van Doesburg did not question the existence of universal harmony, but believed that it presented itself under the new form of space-time, a scientifically more convincing concept. As a result, he would criticize Mondrian's painting for its static equilibrium, which he considered classical, and Mondrian responded in *Vouloir* magazine (no. 25, 1927): 'Neoplasticism is classical only because it is the genuine and pure manifestation of the cosmic balance from which we will not be able to liberate ourselves as long as we are "men".' And yet it is the accessibility to this cosmic balance, its harmonious relations, its immutability, to which Mondrian claimed to have intuitive access, which was beginning to be challenged by the scientific theories of the day.

It is no coincidence that in issue no. 5 of *De Stijl* (1923), cited above, Van Doesburg's article on cinema was followed with a text by Henri Poincaré. The latter had already questioned the possibility of objective scientific knowledge, seeing instead a functional convention (dependent on the measuring instrument or even mathematics), agreed by experts, at any given moment. In *The Value of Science* (1905), he raised the question: 'Does the harmony human intelligence thinks it discovers in nature exist outside of this intelligence? No, beyond doubt, a reality completely independent of the mind that conceives, sees or feels it is an impossibility. A world as exterior as that, even if it existed, would for us be forever inaccessible.'<sup>21</sup> This position invalidated the possibility of a 'new vision' such as that conceived by Mondrian, that is, as a plastic equivalence of an unchanging and universal order.

To conclude, what is fascinating about the De Stijl movement is that within modernity it is balanced on a wire stretched between two points: one representing past certainties which Neoplasticism held onto and the other, in motion, that of Elementarism, founded on the Theory of Relativity, one of the first milestones which would lead to doubt and uncertainty in science. On the one hand, the tranquil, contemplative force of Mondrian, who saw art as the ultimate religion of the future, and on the other Van Doesburg's dynamic of self-organization, combining order and disorder to create 'life-forms' in tandem with the evolution of knowledge. Dead at the age of forty-eight, he was unable to continue his quest.

In any case, as Edgar Morin has written: 'Has one not learned a fundamental first lesson when having learned this one: knowledge could not be guaranteed a foundation? Would that not incite us to relinquish the architectural metaphor in which the word "foundation" takes on an indispensable meaning, in favour of a musical metaphor of construction in movement that would transform, in its very motion, the constituents that compose it? And is it not also as a *construction in movement* [emphasis added] that we could envisage the knowledge of knowledge?'<sup>22</sup> Was that not, after all, what Van Doesburg had tried to express in his *Space-Time Constructions*?

## NOTES

1. De Stijl (March 1919), 'Dialoog over de Nieuwe Beelding' [Dialogue on the New Plastic], in *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, London, 1987, p. 80. This quote will be linked to theosophy and the illustration by Van Doesburg of *The Causal Body of the Adept*, discussed below.
2. Michael White, 'Theo van Doesburg: A Counter-Life', in Leiden/London 2009, pp. 68–75.
3. Tuijn 2003.
4. François Morellet, 'Dr. De Stijl and Mister Bonset', in Lemoine 1990, pp. 180–1.
5. Theo van Doesburg, 'Against Imitative Artists', *De Stijl* (June 1922) no. 6, p. 96.
6. *De Stijl* 7 (1926) no. 73/74, pp. 29–30. Polano 1979.
7. Edgar Morin, *La Méthode : I La Nature de la Nature* (1977), II *La Vie de la Vie* (1980), III *La Connaissance de la Connaissance* (1986), IV *Les Idées* (1991), Paris.
8. Theo Van Doesburg, 'De Stijl der toekomst', in *Drie Voordrachten*, 1917, quoted by Joop Joosten, 'Le contexte d'une évolution', in Lemoine 1990, p. 68.
9. My thanks to Mrs Wies van Moorsel for photocopying the manuscript in French of Nelly van Doesburg. Most of this lively text was published in her memoirs (Moorsel 2000). In the manuscript, Nelly van Doesburg writes: '[...] the fashion in Weimar, for the artists, precisely in order to assert their position as artists, was to dress as extravagantly as possible [...] the women gave up any make-up. Does hated these attitudes and he immediately decided to take the opposing view. Firstly he asked me put on more make-up than I usually did. Then, the height of provocation, he bought himself a bowler hat. But that wasn't enough. Does, increasingly hostile to the atmosphere in Weimar, decreed that a Dada course of treatment was necessary for this good old town.'
10. Polano 1979, p. 395.
11. In *Après le cubisme*, Paris, 1918, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant criticize pure abstraction for its gratuitous assimilation of the geometric pattern of a carpet.
12. For more information on the structural organization of the leaded-glass windows and the ornamental tiling, see Allan Doig, 'Les transformations géométriques et leur signification dans les premières œuvres néo-plastiques de Van Doesburg', in Lemoine 1990, pp. 132–9.
13. Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids, You Say', in *Grids: Format and Image in 20th Century Art*, exh. cat., Pace Gallery, New York, 1979.
14. Hoek 2000, p. 292.
15. *Ibid.*, no. 554, p. 201. On the interaction with music in general, see also Gladys Fabre 'A Universal Language for the Arts: Interdisciplinarity as a Practice, Film as a Model', in Leiden/London 2009, pp. 46–57.
16. Hans Richter, 'Easel-Scroll-Film', in *Magazine of Art*, February 1952, quoted in the brochure accompanying the DVD *Dada Cinéma*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2005, p. 9.
17. For more about the influence of abstract cinema on graphic design, see Gladys Fabre in Leiden/London 2009, pp. 46–57.
18. Moholy-Nagy published the screenplay of an unmade film, *Dynamism of the Great City*, in 1921–2, and in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, published by the Bauhaus in 1925; many articles in *Telehor* 1–2, Brno, February 1936; and others in Hungarian, including 'Film, a game of light' in *Korunk*, Kolozsvár, 1931. His kinetic sculpture *Space-Light Modulator*, on which he worked from 1922 to 1930, bears witness to his desire to synthesize mechanically rotating sculpture, space and light movement.
19. Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Princeton, 1983, and 'Modern Art and the Invisible: The Unseen Waves and Dimensions of Occultism and Science', in *Okkultismus und Avantgarde 1900–1915*, exh. cat., Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 1995.
20. It is possible that the sketches of the Tesseract were inspired by the reproduction on p. 182 of a cube in four dimensions in the work of Maurice Boucher, *Essai sur l'hyperespace: le temps, la matière, et l'énergie*, 1903. It is to Marek Wieczorek that we owe the discovery of a letter from Vantongerloo, dated 7 June 1918, that proves that the latter and Van Doesburg knew this work. On this subject see Marek Wieczorek, 'Entre la sculpture et la peinture: le dialogue de Georges Vantongerloo avec l'infini', in Ghent 2013, pp. 26–32.
21. Henri Poincaré, *La valeur de la science*, Paris, 1905, p. 11.
22. Edgar Morin, *La Méthode III. La connaissance de la connaissance*, Paris, 1986, p. 16.





# DE STIJL

ANTHOLOGIE 1917-22

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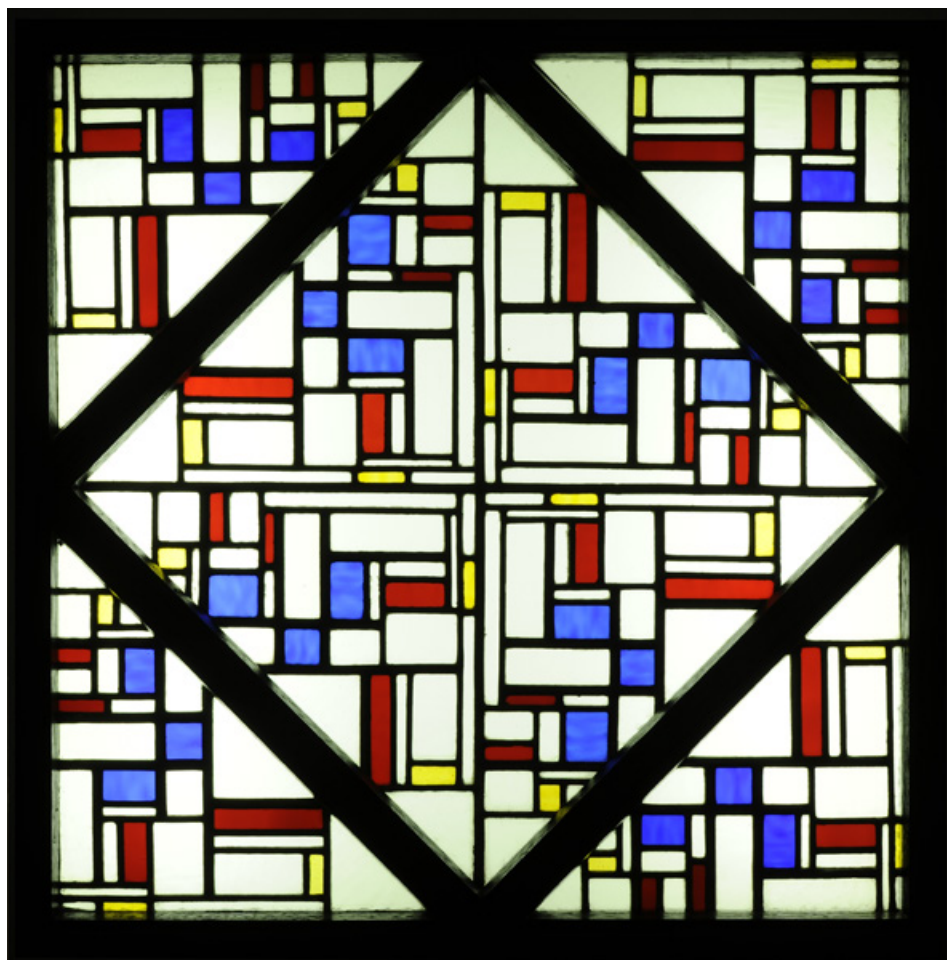




<sup>1</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
The Causal Body of the Adept, 1915

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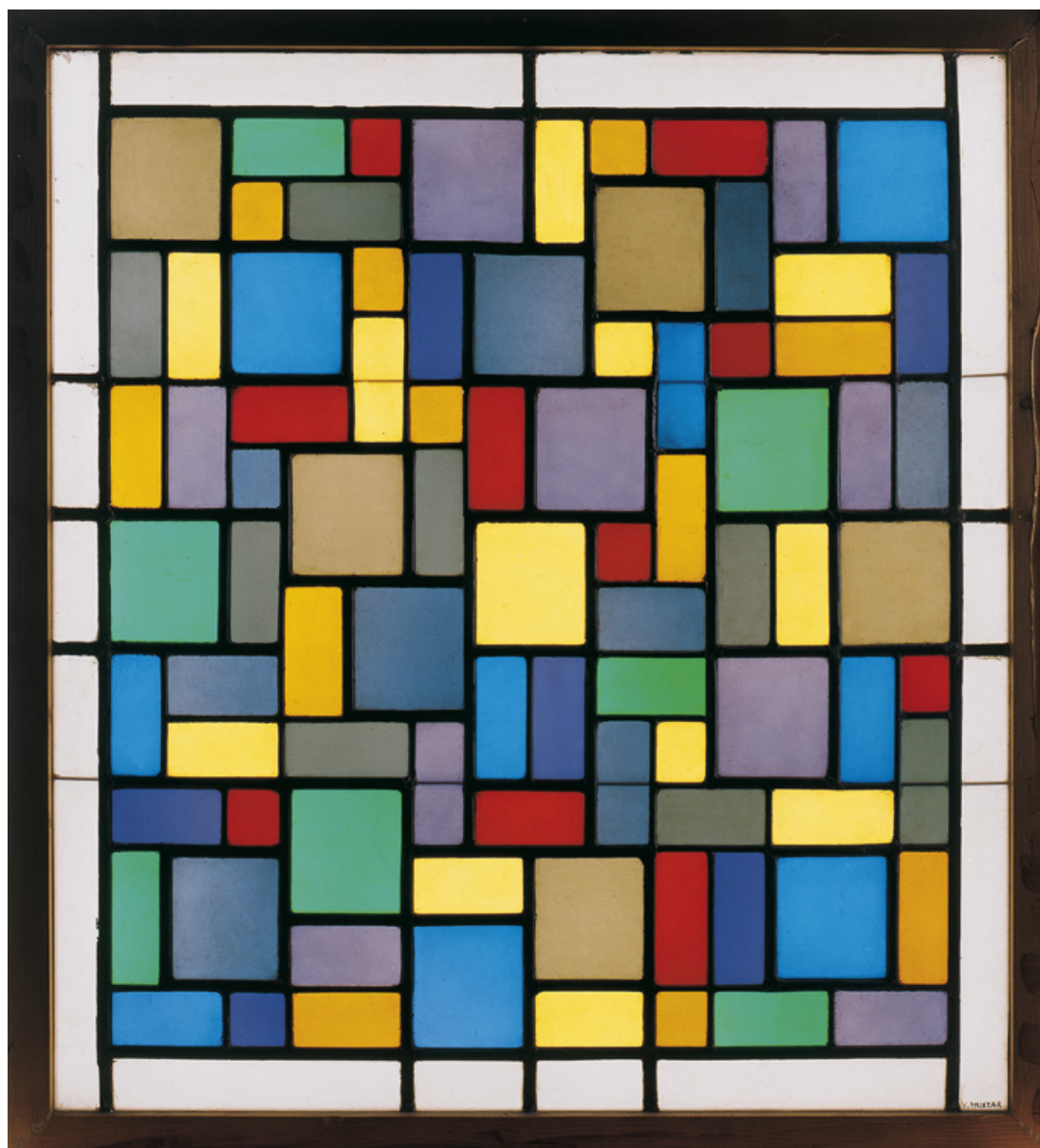
Oil on canvas; 32 x 32 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG



<sup>2</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Composition III, 1917

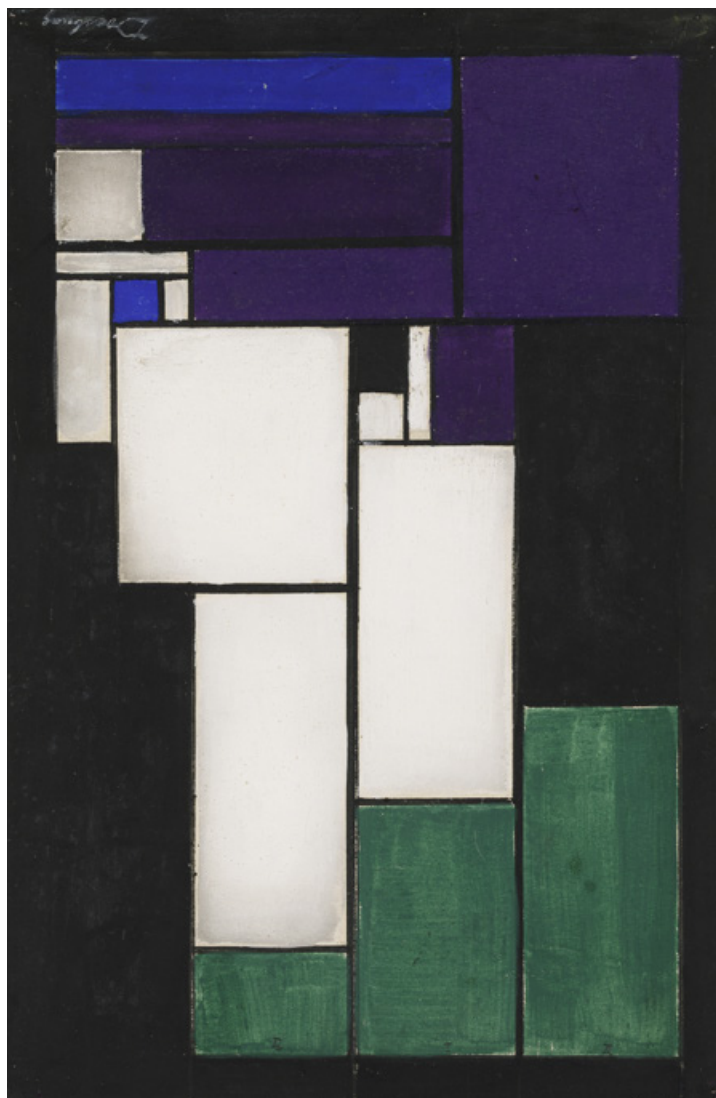
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Leaded glass, wood; 48.7 x 45.2 cm  
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE),  
on loan to Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden. Inv. B 1318



<sup>3</sup> **VILMOS HUSZÁR**  
 Untitled, 1917

Leaded glass; 68 x 61 cm  
 Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg. Inv. 55.005.8.1

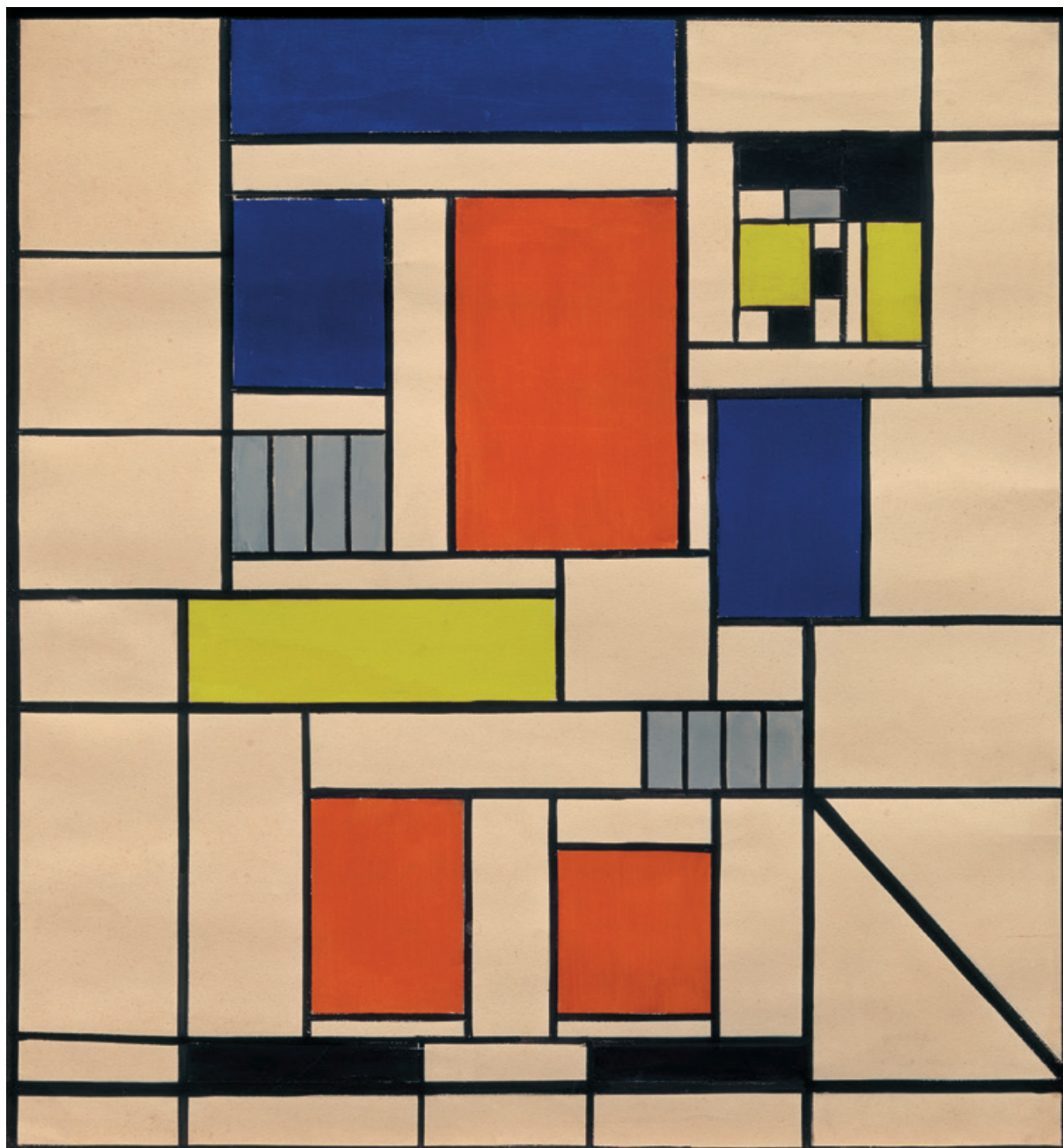


**4 THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Woman's Head, c. 1917**

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Gouache on paper; 36.7 x 24.6 cm  
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Inv. K.72.1





<sup>5</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
The Labourer, 1921

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Gouache on paper; 75 x 70 cm  
Private collection

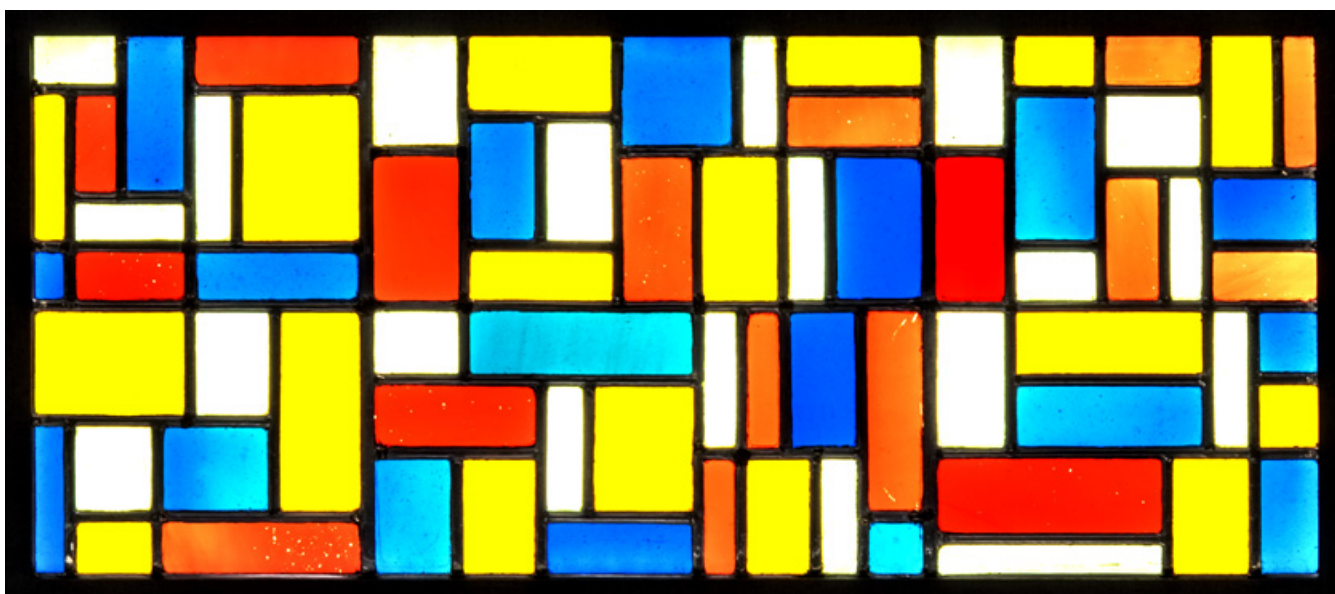


**6 THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Composition VIII, 1918-19

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Leaded glass; 34.5 x 81.5 cm  
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE),  
on loan to Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden. Inv. B 1273

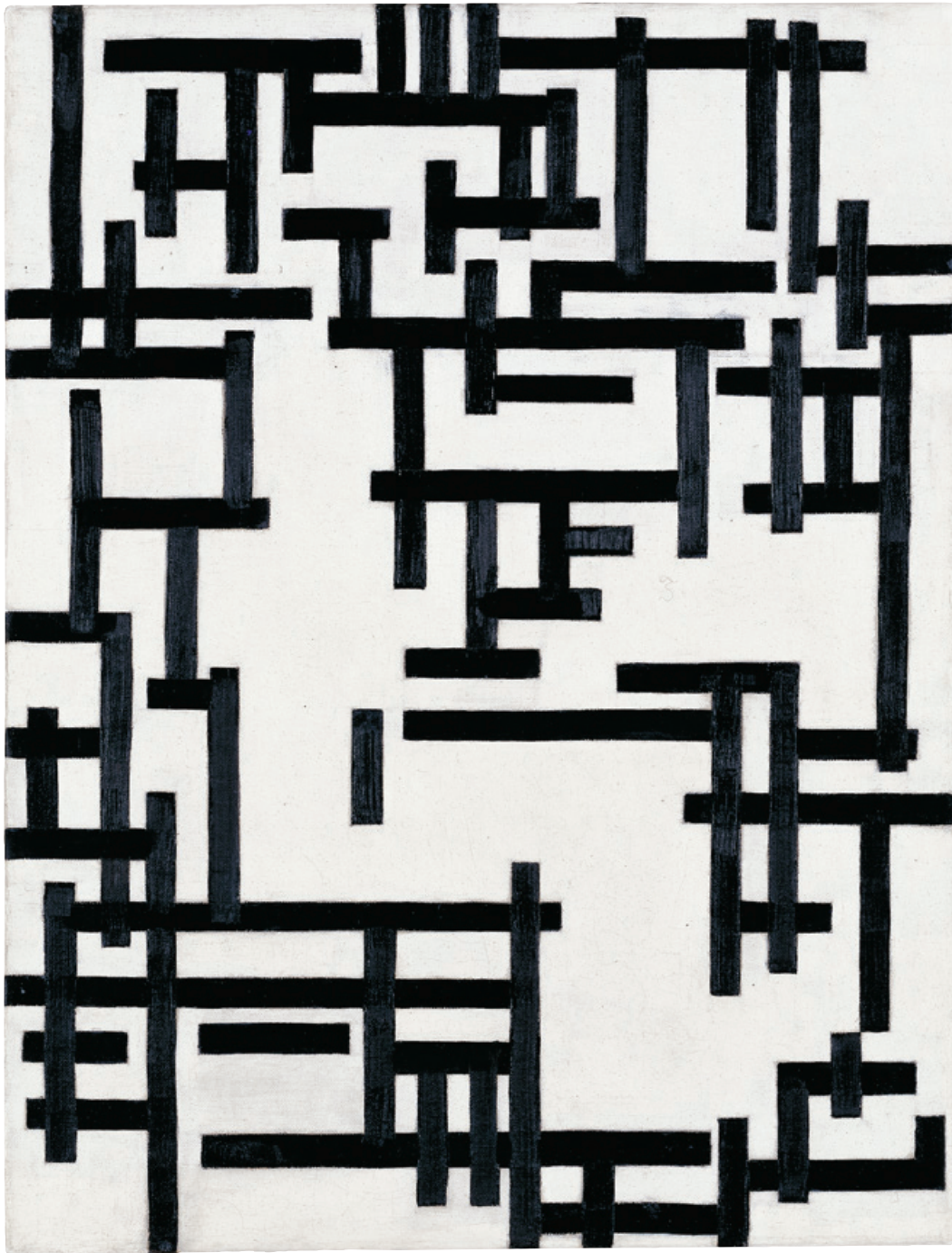




**7 THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Composition VIII, 1918

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Leaded glass; 34 x 80.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG



<sup>8</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Composition XIII (Woman in Studio)\*, 1918

Oil on canvas; 51 x 39.5 cm  
Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur

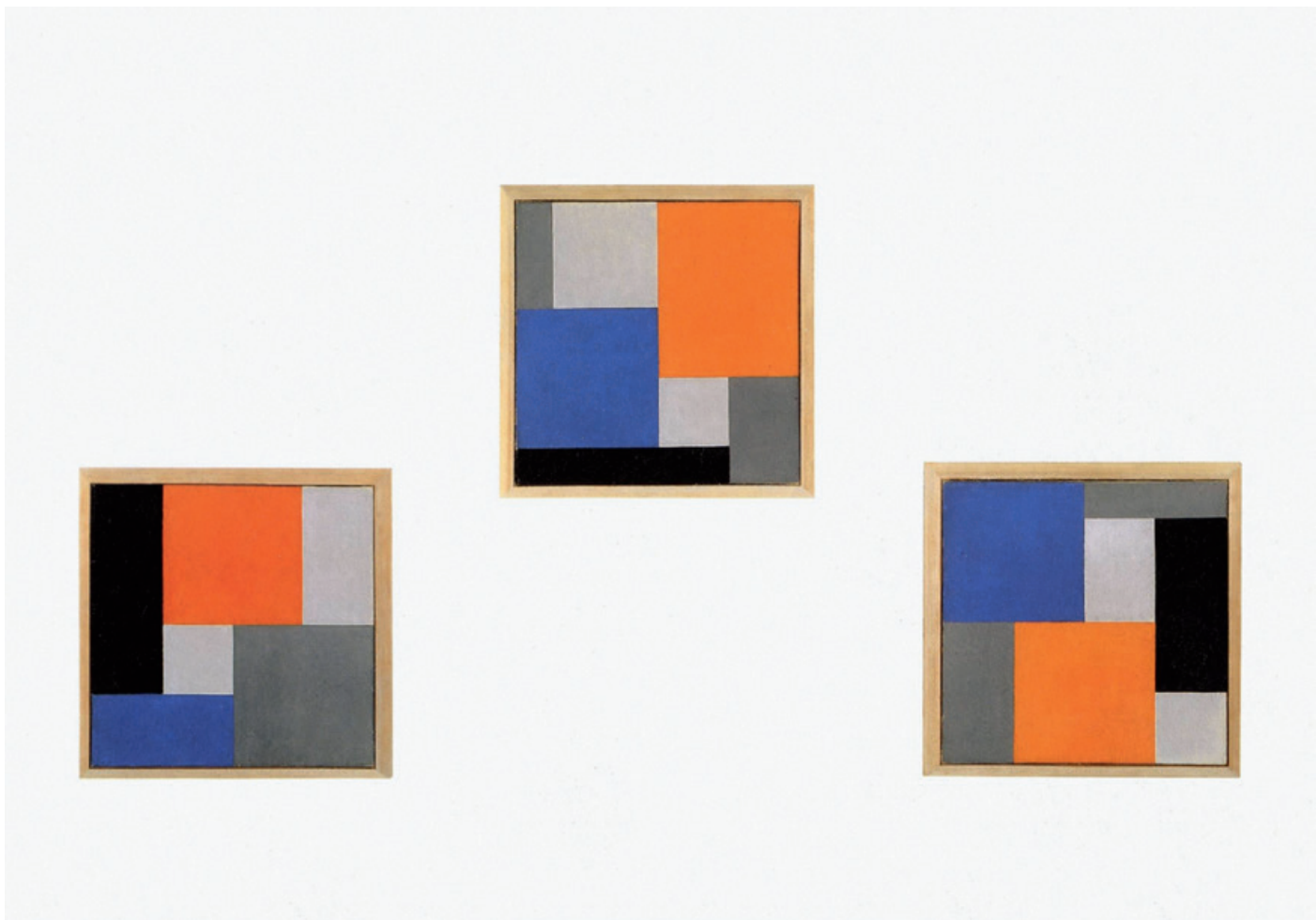




9 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Composition (Seated Figure), 1918**

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Oil on canvas; 48.5 x 33.5 cm  
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, on loan from Triton Foundation Collection



<sup>10</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Composition XVIII in Three Parts\***, 1920

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Oil on canvas, three canvases, 35 x 35 cm (each)  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo



<sup>11</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Composition XXII, 1922**

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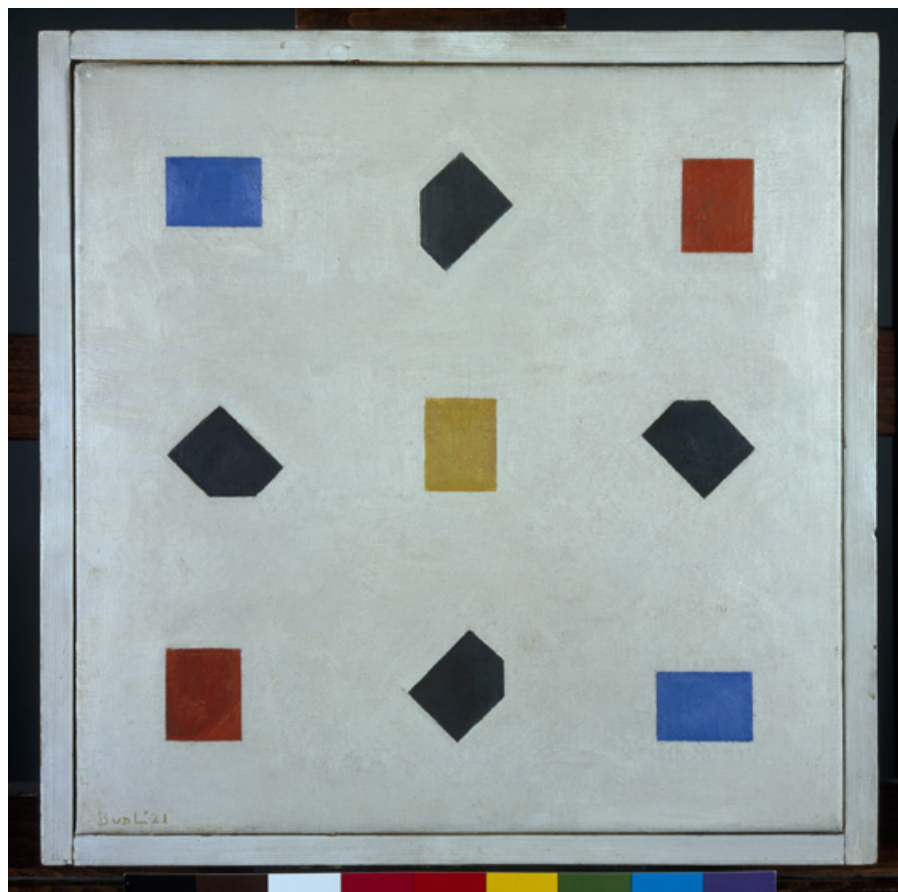
Oil on canvas; 45.5 x 43.3 cm  
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Inv. 94





<sup>12</sup> **BART VAN DER LECK**  
Study for a Mountain Landscape with Mining Village, 1917

Gouache on paper; 111 x 146 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG

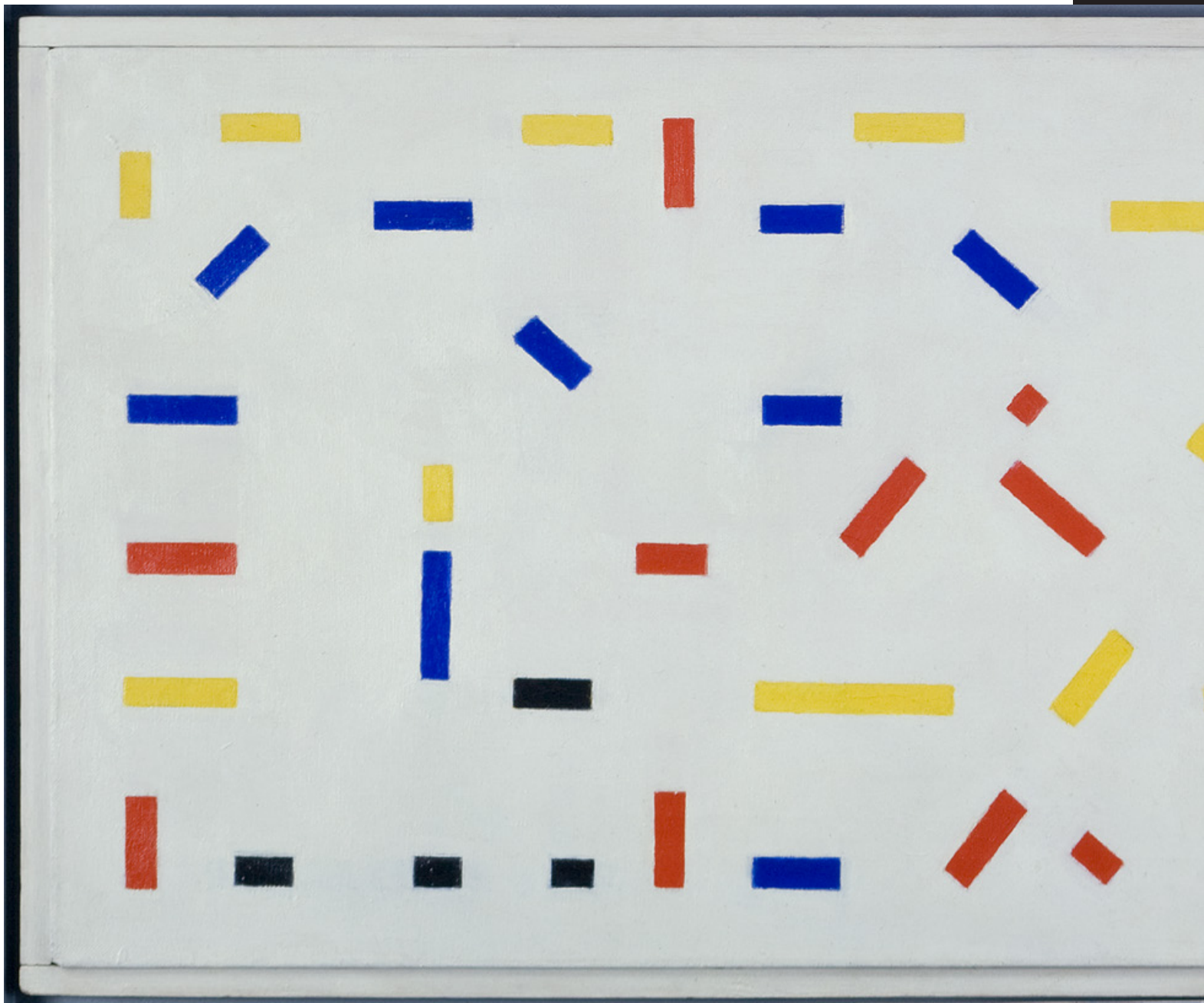


<sup>13</sup> **BART VAN DER LECK**  
Composition '18-'21, 1921

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Oil on canvas; 42.5 x 42.5 cm  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. 26344

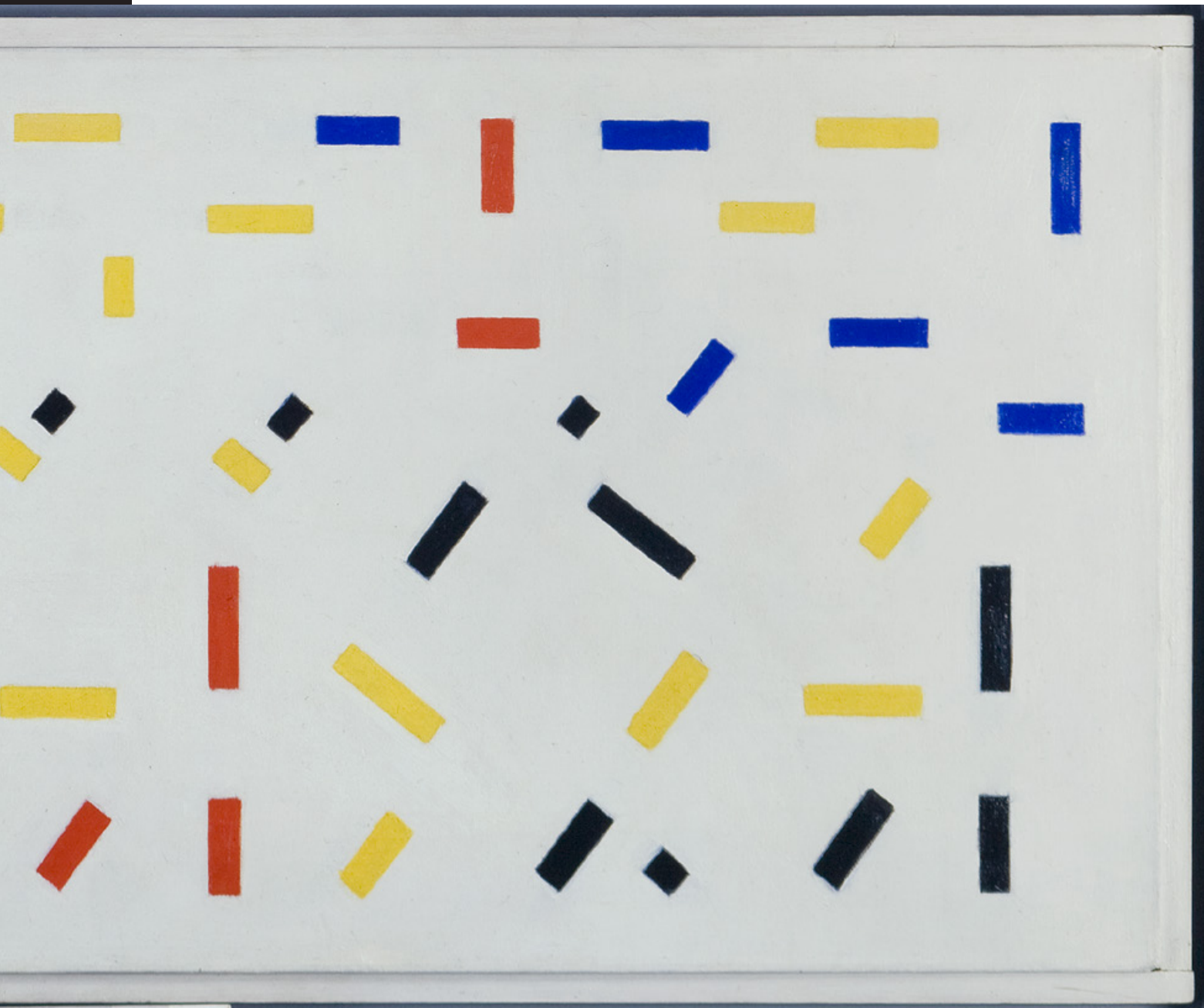




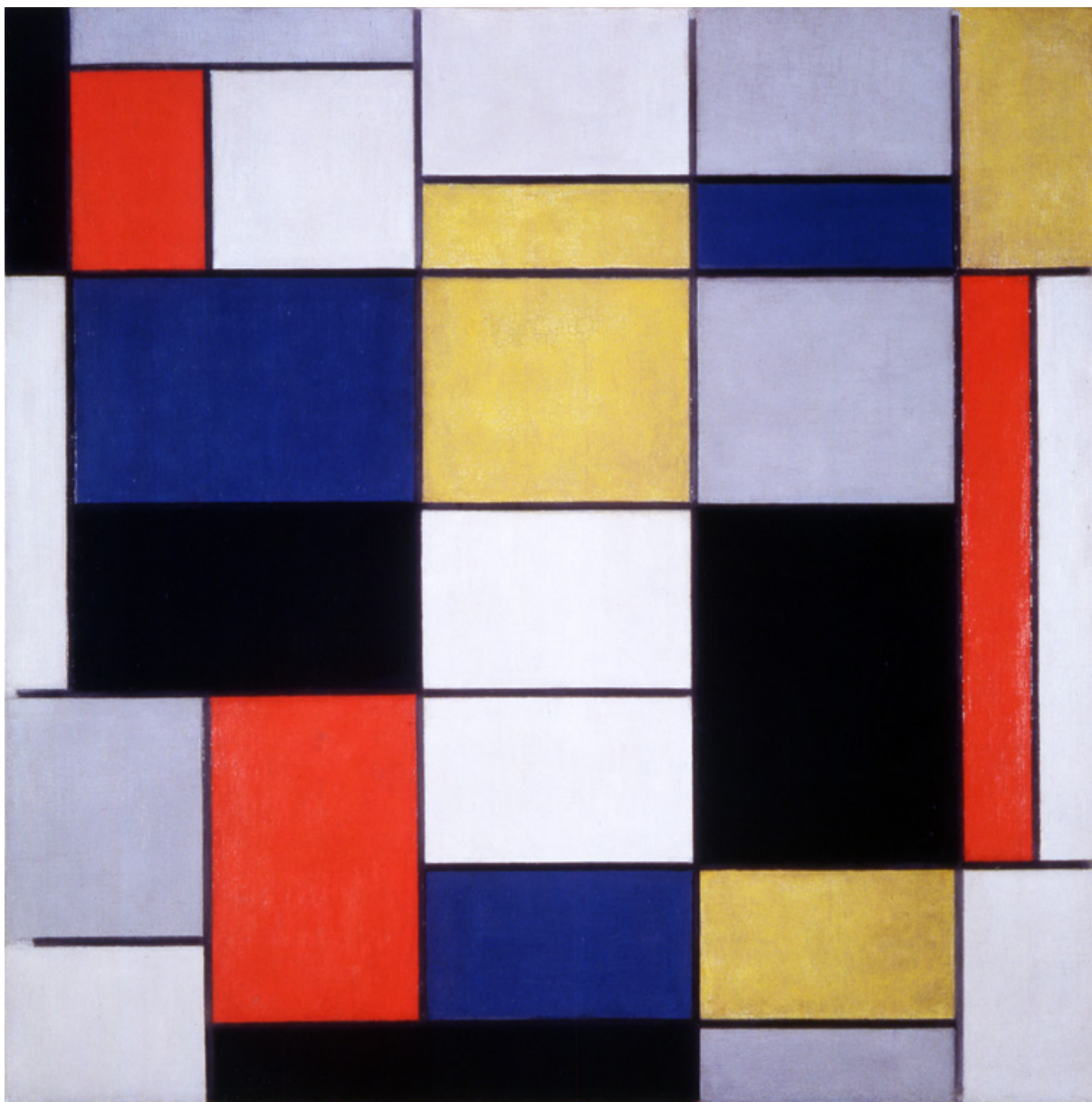
<sup>14</sup> **BART VAN DER LECK**  
Composition 1917 no. 6, 1917

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Oil on canvas; 59 x 147 cm  
Ellen and Jan Nieuwenhuizen Segaar Collection, Antwerp







<sup>15</sup> **PIET MONDRIAN**

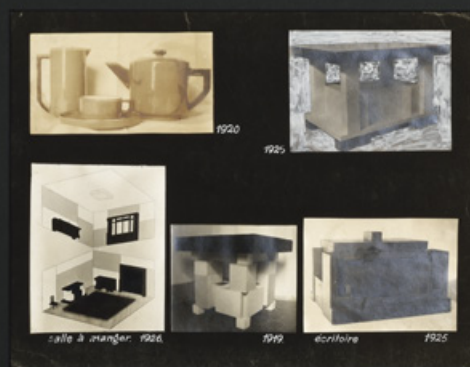
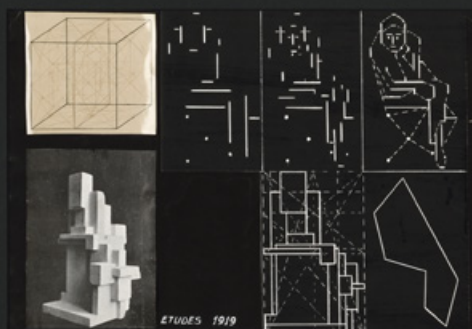
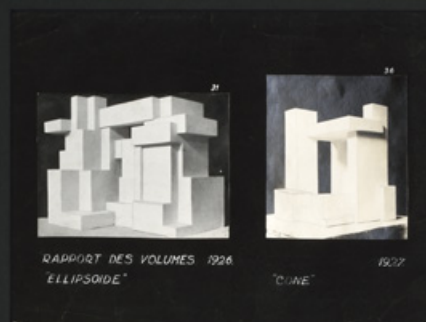
Large Composition A with Black, Red, Grey, Yellow and Blue, 1919-20

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Oil on canvas; 91 x 91 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome. Inv. 5519





16 **GEORGES VANTONGERLOO**  
Collages, 1919–27

Photographs and sketches heightened with gouache on paper; 62 x 76 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG



17 **GEORGES VANTONGERLOO**  
**Construction in the Sphere 2, 1918**

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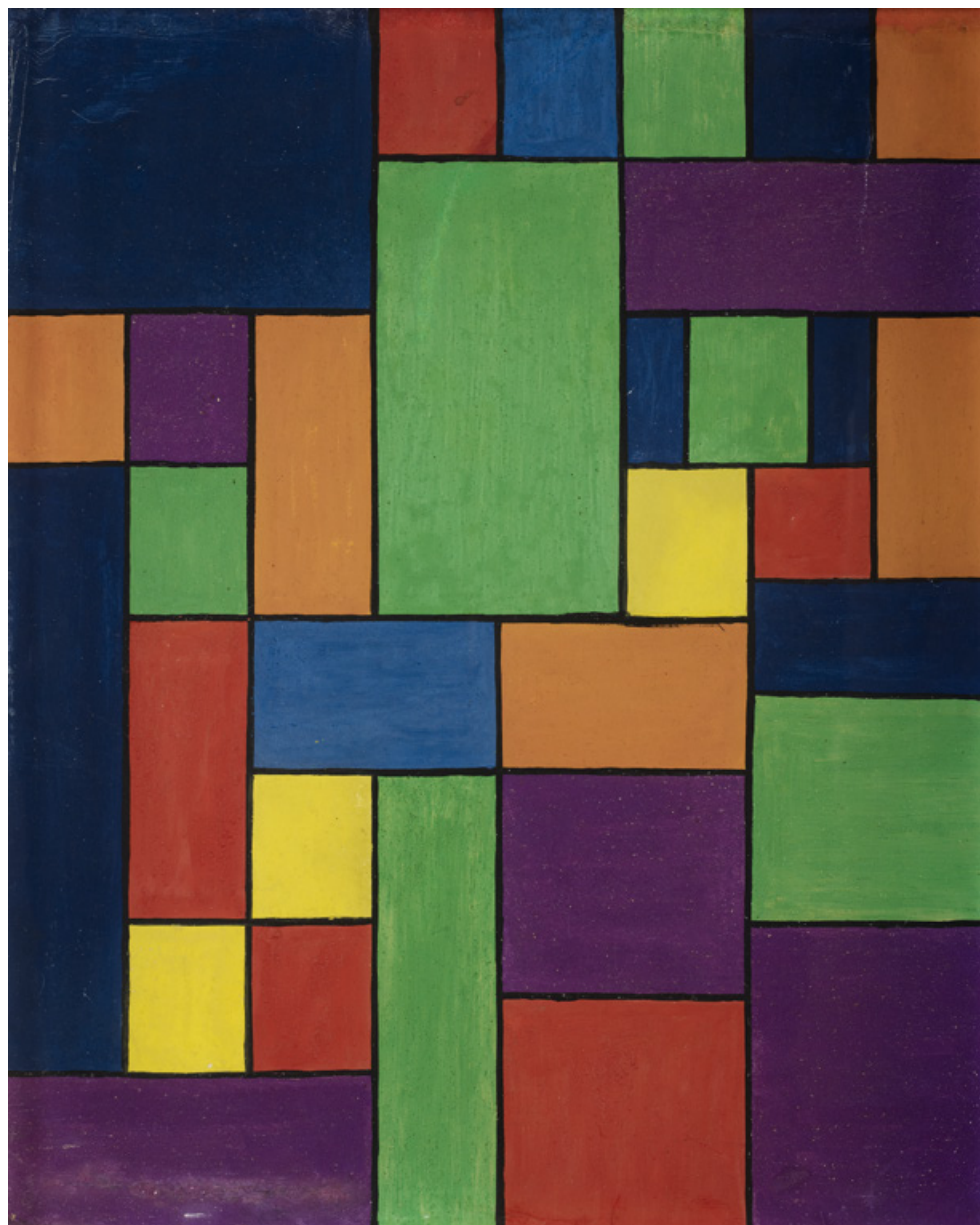
Cement, painted white; 33 x 25 x 25 cm  
Museum Brugge, Groeningemuseum, Bruges. Inv. 1996.GRO0029.XXXI





<sup>18</sup> **GEORGES VANTONGERLOO**  
 Small Triptych, 1921

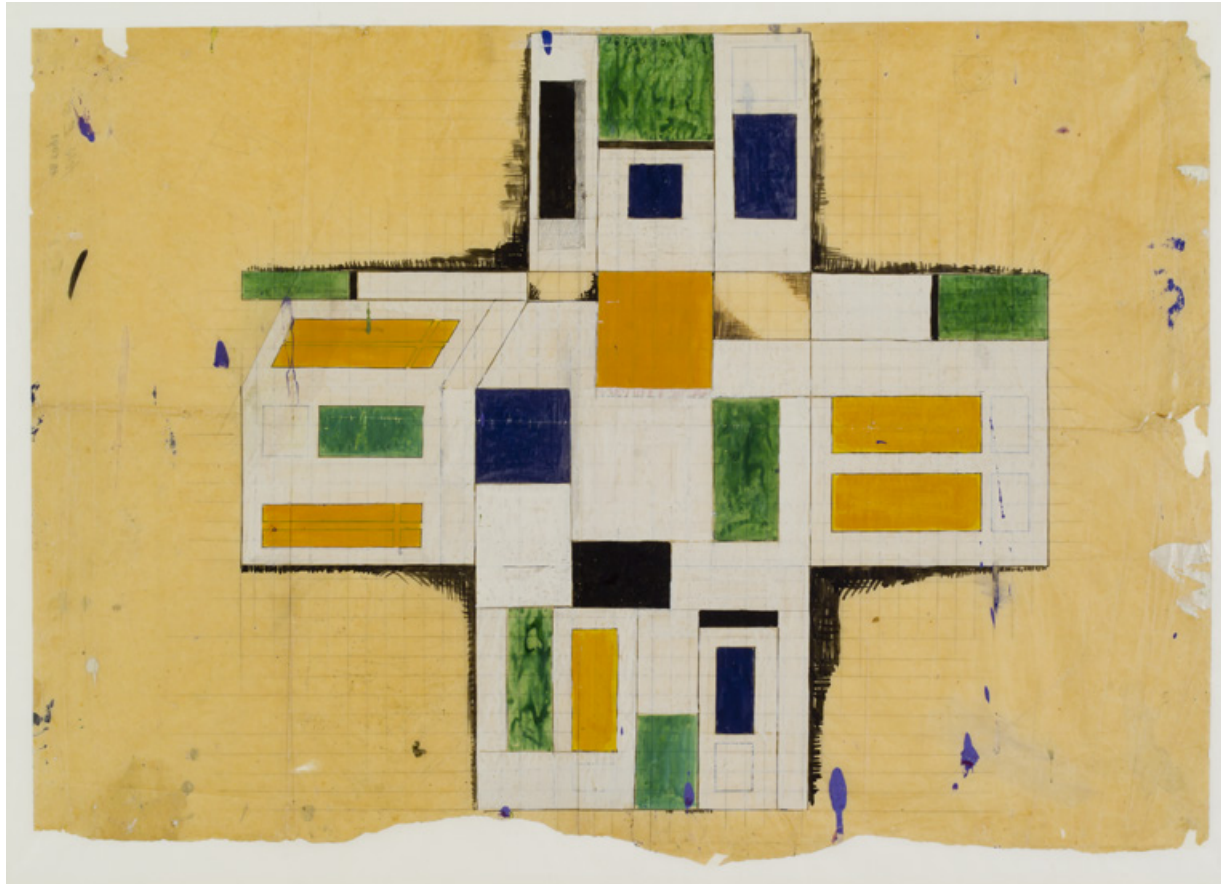
Oil on panel; 13 x 26 x 6 cm (open), 13 x 13 cm (closed)  
 Private collection



**19 GEORGES VANTONGERLOO**  
Study I, Brussels, 1920

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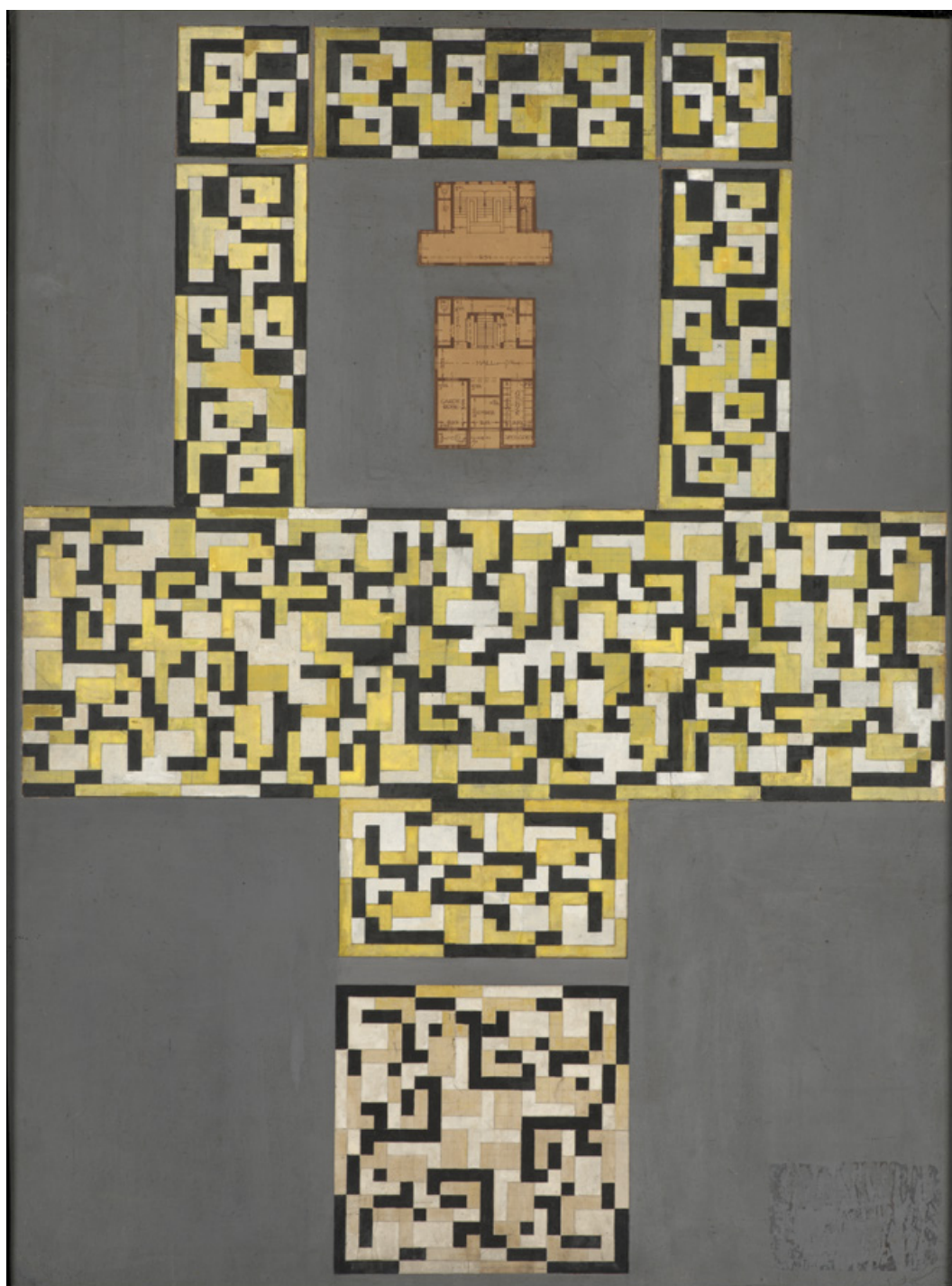
Tempera on paper on cardboard; 62.5 x 50.5 cm  
Mu.ZEE, Ostend. Inv. K002113A



<sup>20</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Design for a Room in the Bart de Ligt House, 1919–20

Pencil, Indian ink and gouache on transparent paper; 61 x 43 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Van Moorsel donation. Inv. DOES AB5093





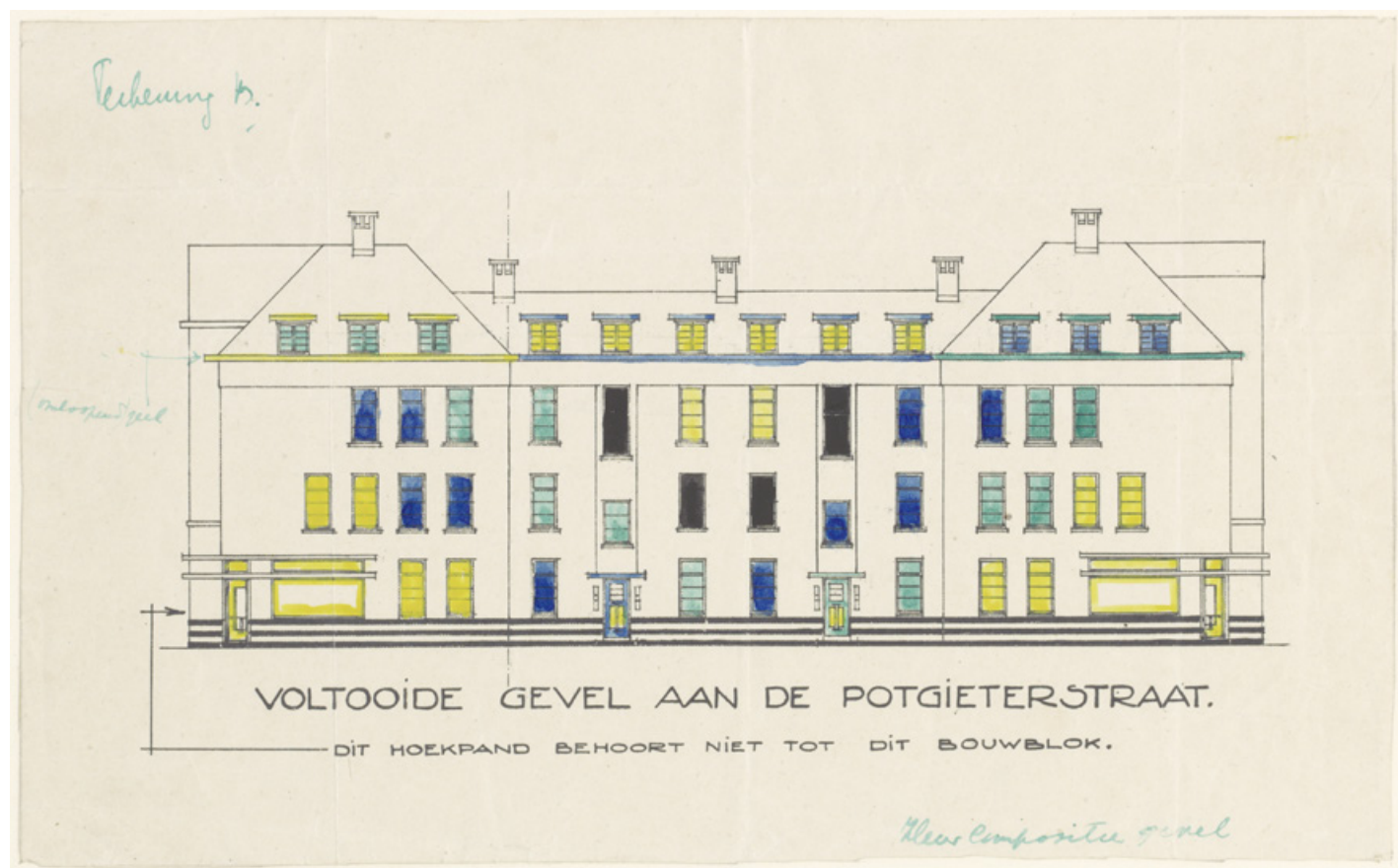
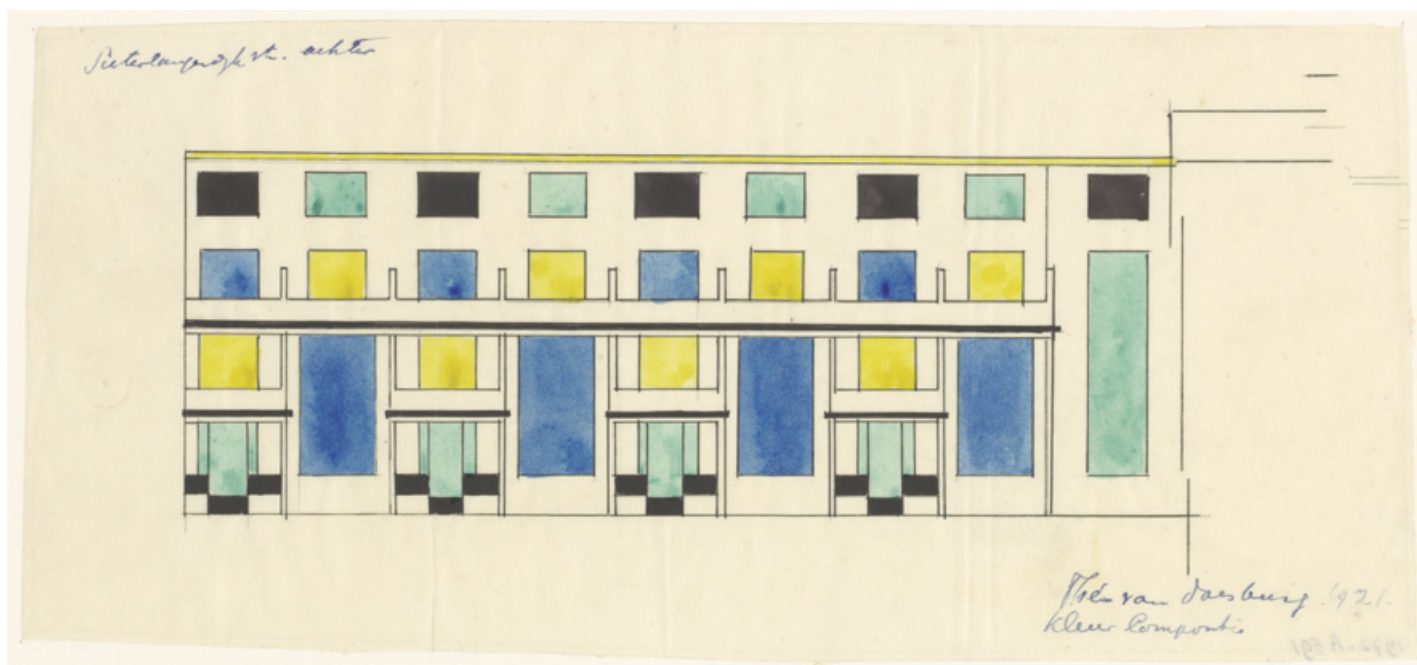
<sup>21</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**

Tile Floor Design for the Entrance and Hallway of  
the De Vonk Holiday Home in Noordwijkerhout, c. 1918

Gouache on paper; 98 x 73.5 cm  
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE),  
on loan to Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden. Inv. B 1326



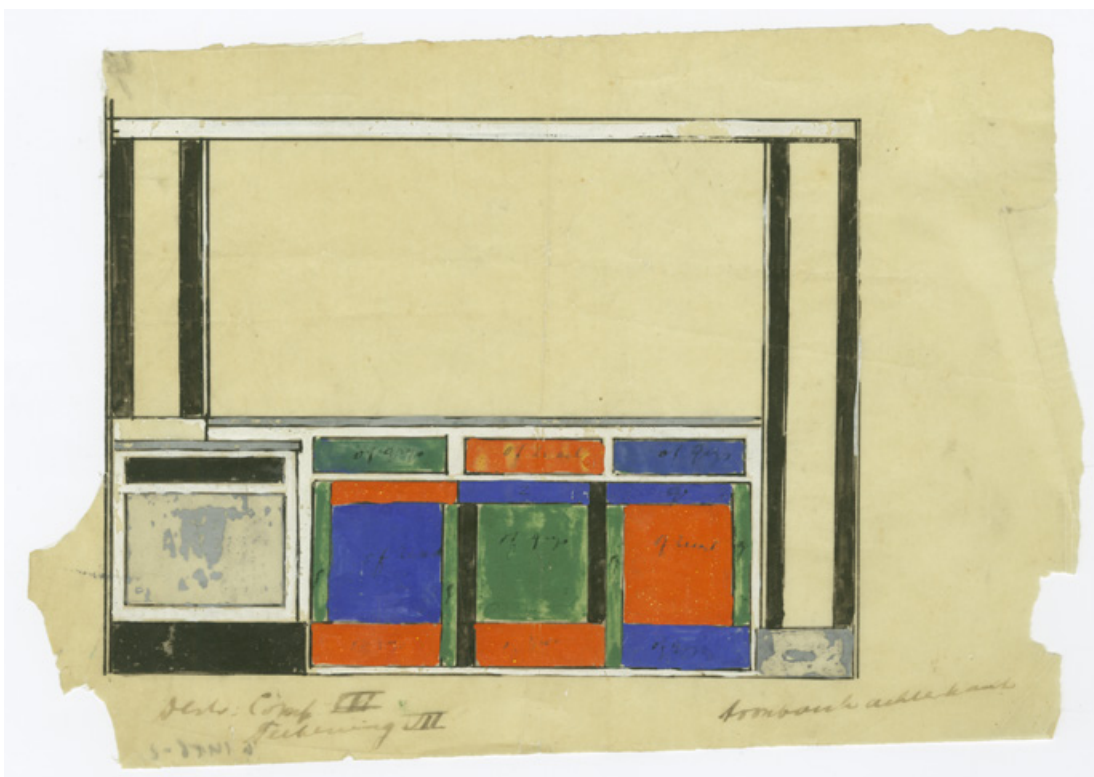
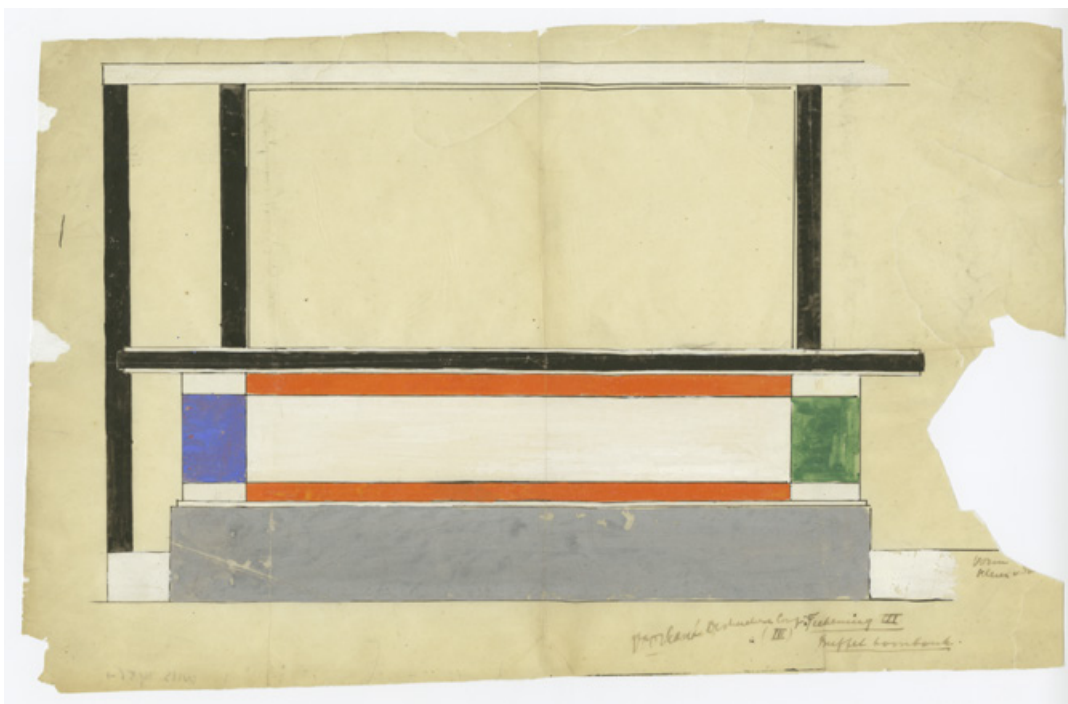




## 23 THEO VAN DOESBURG

Colour Design for the Rear Façade of Pieter Langendijkstraat and the Front Façade of Potgieterstraat (Spangen district, Rotterdam), 1921

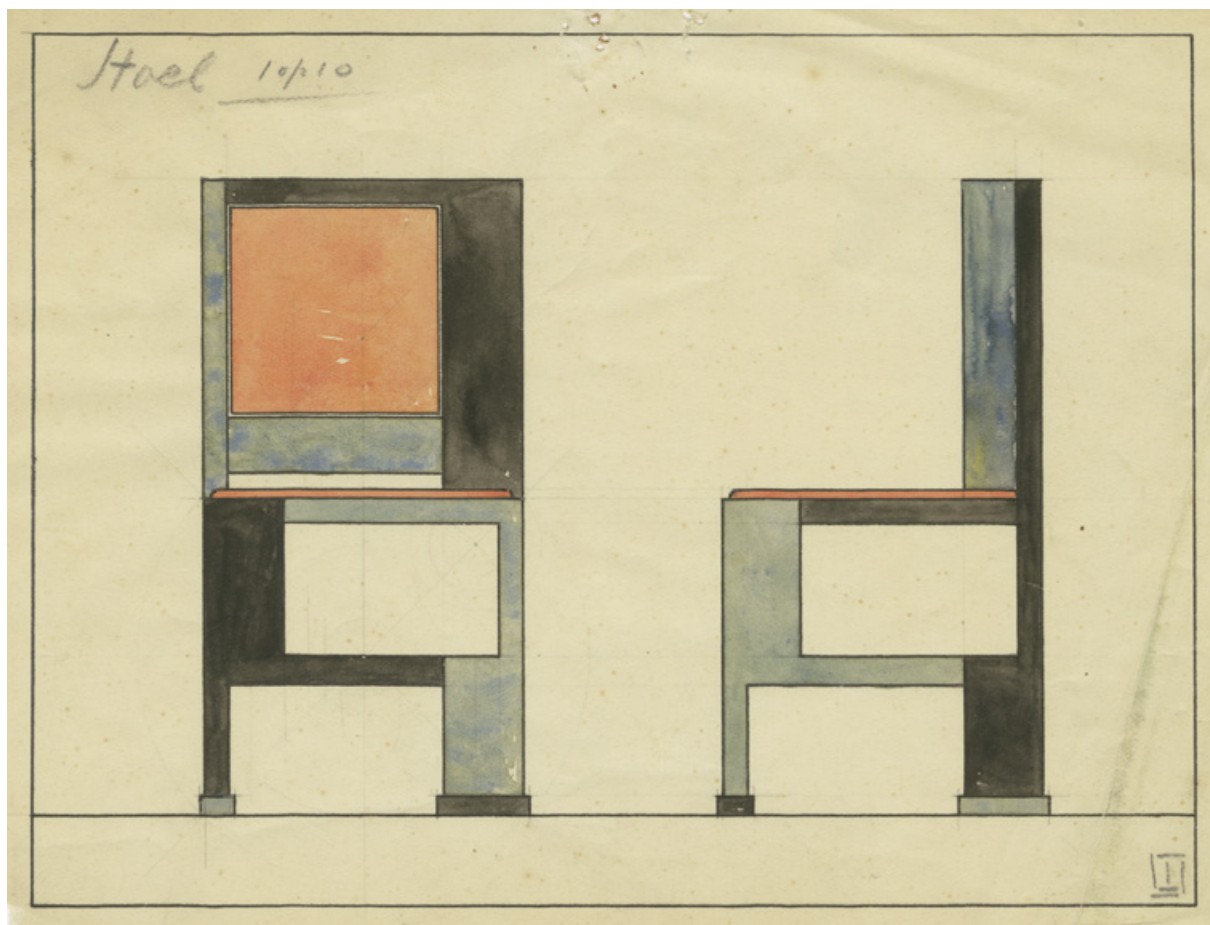
Pencil, Indian ink and gouache on paper; 12 x 26.3 cm / gouache on collotype; 15.8 x 25.6 cm  
Fondation Custodia, Frits Lugt Collection, Paris. Inv. 1972-A.591 and 1972-A.593



24 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Destructive Composition III, Drawing VI / VII, 1918

Indian ink and gouache on transparent paper; 25.5 x 40 cm / 14 x 20 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Archive Wils 1456

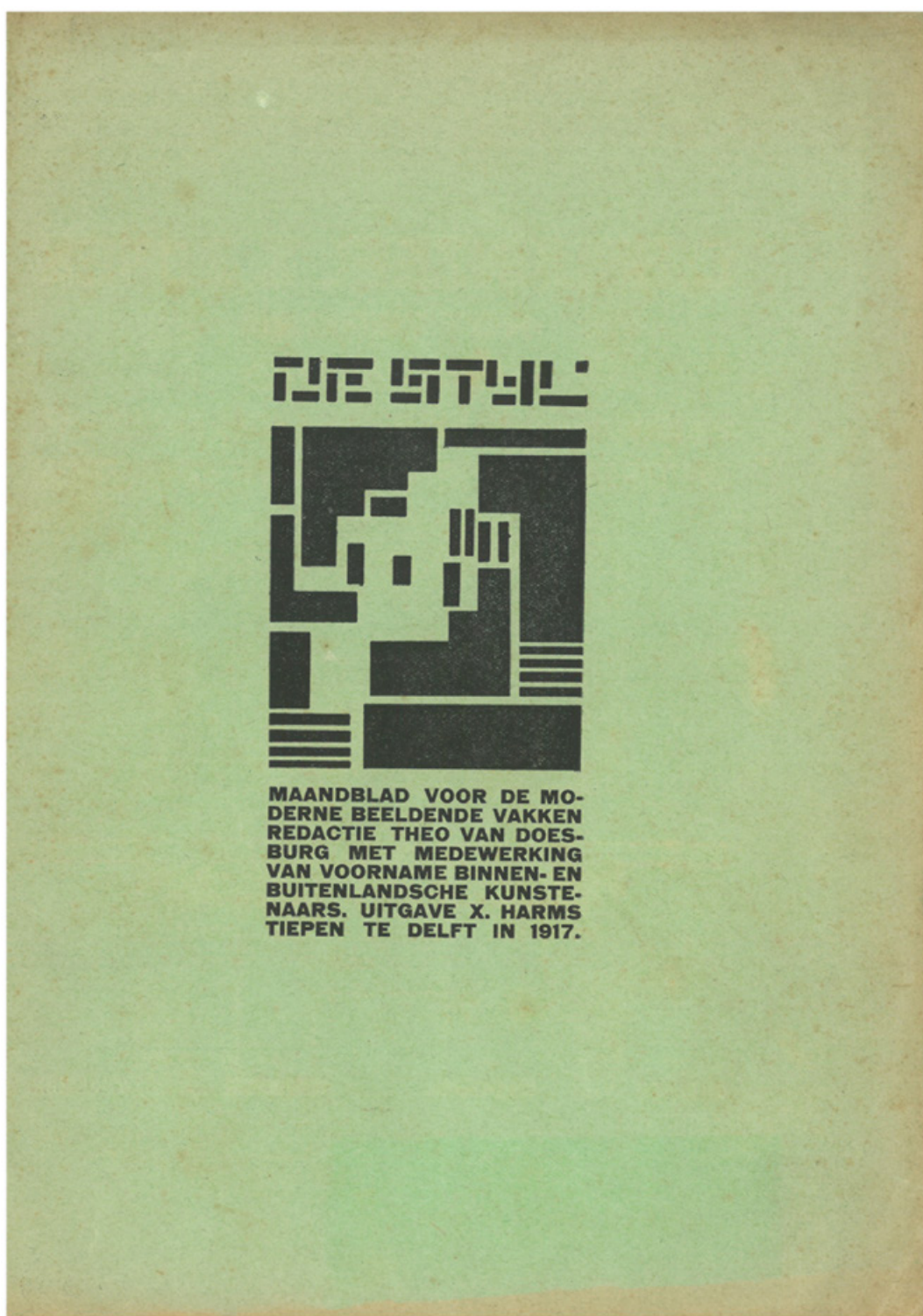




25 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Colour Design for Chair, 1918

Pencil and ink on paper; 13.5 x 17.5 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Archive Wils 1456





26 **THEO VAN DOESBURG, VILMOS HUSZÁR**  
Cover of the magazine *De Stijl* 1, 1917

Print; 26 x 19.5 cm  
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels



27 THEO VAN DOESBURG

### Poster Design for La Section d'Or, 1920

Indian ink, transparent paper on panel; 65 x 62.5 cm

Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), on loan to BOZAR. Inv. AB4980

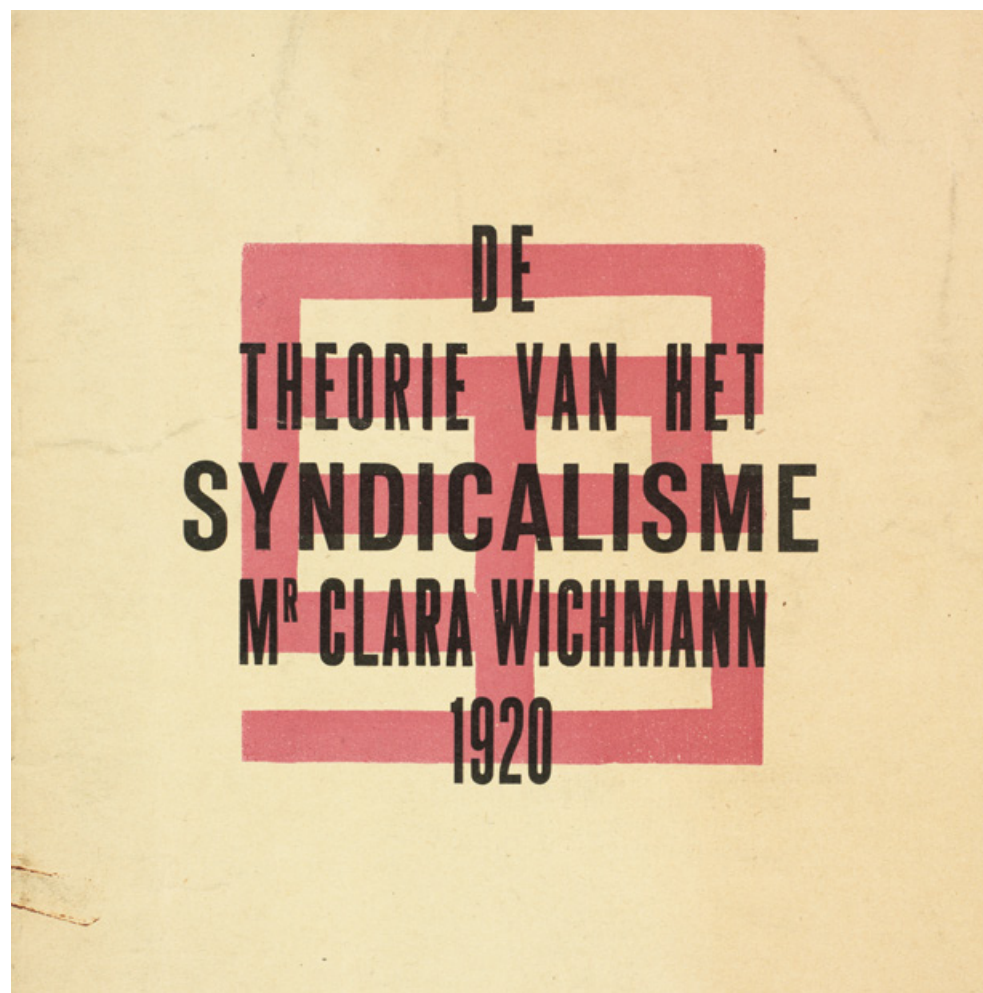


28 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Archer, 1919

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Gouache on paper, 31.7 x 22.3 cm  
Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Inv. K.93.9





**29 THEO VAN DOESBURG**

Book Cover for 'De theorie van het syndicalisme'  
by Clara Wichmann, 1920

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Print; 19 x 18 cm  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. AB4979





Fig.1 Theo van Doesburg [I.K. Bonset], *Denaturalized Matter. Destruction 2*, 1923 (?).  
Fries Museum, Leeuwarden

# Theo van Doesburg and Dada

We will do well with such comrades.<sup>1</sup>

## The international network of Theo van Doesburg

Theo van Doesburg was a networker like no other. This much is evident from his archive, which was preserved by his third wife, the pianist Nelly van Moorsel, and donated to the Dutch State in 1981. It has since been digitized and made accessible by the Netherlands Institute for Art (RKD) in The Hague. An analysis of the surviving correspondence reveals that Van Doesburg's network in the period in which he was most active as an artist (1916–30) totalled about 180 people. Of these, more than half were visual artists, architects or writers. There were about twenty magazine editors, five publishers, five art dealers, five critics and five art collectors.<sup>2</sup>

Van Doesburg found himself in remarkably international and cosmopolitan company, where people travelled a lot and found it easy to move to another country. In Van Doesburg's circle of acquaintances, it was mainly Russians and other Eastern Europeans, but also Belgians and Spaniards, who settled abroad. In addition it is clear that France – especially Paris – and Germany were the preferred gathering places for the international avant-garde of artists, critics and collectors. It was only in the 1930s, when the exodus from Germany began, that the journey to the United States became increasingly popular.

From 1920, over half of Van Doesburg's contacts were working outside the Netherlands. From 1924 they totalled over seventy per cent, of which many

were in Germany and France. As regards the nationality of his acquaintances, the Dutch still comprised the largest group, with twenty-eight per cent. The Germans came second with twenty-one per cent, while the French accounted for thirteen per cent, as did the Eastern Europeans. The Italians came fifth with seven per cent, followed by the Belgians with only six per cent, and several different nationalities making up the rest.

I will here focus on Van Doesburg and his international contacts as a Dadaist. It is not my intention to deal extensively with Dada as a phenomenon in its entirety. Van Doesburg used a pseudonym for his Dadaist literary and plastic work: I.K. Bonset. He also published essays under the name Aldo Camini. In doing so he was keeping his options open so that his 'Constructivist' work would not suffer from his love for Dada.<sup>3</sup> Besides, the name Theo van Doesburg itself was already a pseudonym: at his birth the artist was christened Christian Emil Marie Küpper, and as a young adult he himself chose to take the name of the man who was probably his real father, Theodorus Doesburg.

## The social component

When people talk about art history and the context of the decisions made by artists, they often lose sight of the key role of the social and emotional component.<sup>4</sup> Friendship and respect are sometimes more important than stylistic affinity or career. Van Doesburg was considered by many to have a difficult personality. He was overbearing and could be capricious. He also quarrelled a lot, although he remained loyal to his friends over the years. Sometimes he triggered a truly adverse

reaction in others, as with the Expressionist Jacoba van Heemskerck: 'He is a very unsympathetic man', she wrote to art dealer Herwarth Walden on 2 March 1916, warning him not to trust Van Doesburg. But others reacted more positively to his strong character: the Belgian artist Michel Seuphor (pseudonym of Fernand Berckelaers) described years later the shock and momentum generated in the early winter of 1921 by the *Tot Stijl* lecture given by Van Doesburg in Antwerp, and by the speaker's personality. The Austrian Dadaist Raoul Hausmann described Van Doesburg and his wife as 'entirely modern, worldly people'.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dada: international, playful and contagious**

That Dada was an international phenomenon interwoven with various avant-garde movements would have strongly appealed to the 'modern and worldly' Van Doesburg. The goal pursued by many of the Dadaists was close to his heart: to shake up the old world and prepare it for the new art he was promoting. In the summer of 1921 he wrote to his friend the poet Antony Kok: 'About that Dadaist pamphlet: I discussed it in Paris with the leading Dadaists! They found it a splendid idea, especially if I had it published in Weimar, since it could be the occasion for an international exchange of ideas, over the heads of the Entente!<sup>6</sup> To that end I have received an original drawing from Picabia; from Jean Crotti ditto; from Picabia, Pansears [sic], Ezra Pound, etc., original texts, so that I already have enough material for 1 issue. What would you say if each issue were printed on different coloured paper, e.g. the first issue light blue, the second yellow, the third red, and all of that in good proportions?'<sup>7</sup> Van Doesburg's idea for the Dada magazine *Mécano* was born.

On its foundation in Zurich in 1916, Dada made propaganda for all new forms of art, and encompassed Futurism, Expressionism and Cubism.<sup>8</sup> The Dadaists had a fair amount in common with the Futurists and

the Parisian bohemians: opposition to the bourgeoisie, activism, antagonism, nihilism and a taste for experimentation. The only element that marked Dada out from the rest was the major role played by ironic humour, bordering on insanity.

Van Doesburg's emphasis of his Dada side was perhaps in part an attempt to get into the good books of Tristan Tzara and other Dadaists. In the early 1920s he also often displayed his absurd and playful side to his old friends Antony Kok, Piet Mondrian and the architect J.J.P. Oud. After his encounter with Dada, Van Doesburg increasingly seems to have seen Dadaism as a spiritual refuge. When everyone was opposing him and everything seemed to be failing, there was always Dada. He wrote, on a postcard to Kok: 'They can all drop dead. Long live Dada! [...] It might be best to stop *De Stijl* and to launch a Dadaist magazine: against everyone and everything.'<sup>9</sup>

### **Constructivism versus destruction**

Following First World War, Theo van Doesburg was convinced that a struggle was necessary to allow the superior, spiritual part in human nature to vanquish the inferior, physical part. That would not happen through war and the spilling of blood, but by a reshaping of culture and thought.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1920s he saw this conflict realized in Hegelian terms as thesis (the existing art world), antithesis (Dada) and synthesis (Constructivism). He thought, in effect, that Constructivism would change the individual's environment and therefore people as well.

Van Doesburg initially saw Dada mainly as a means of destroying the old. Dada was a plough with which to prepare the ground for a more constructive art, such as that promoted in *De Stijl*.<sup>11</sup> Later on, his attention shifted from the destructive qualities of Dada to its potential in terms of changing attitudes. This happened under the influence of his contacts with Tristan Tzara,



Kurt Schwitters and other Dadaists. They naturally opposed the idea that they would merely fulfil a serving role, functioning as a transition to something new.<sup>12</sup>

Like his contemporaries Hans Arp, El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Richter and Raoul Hausmann, Van Doesburg was an artist who practised modern art with devotion while at the same time adhering to Dada. Schwitters combined his variant of Dada – Merz – with advertising design. El Lissitzky seems to have very close affinities with Dada in his letters and story for children, *Of 2 Squares*, while his exhibition and graphic designs might be categorized as ‘serious’ modern art.

Van Doesburg concealed himself behind the pseudonym I.K. Bonset to publish Dadaist texts. The name emerged during the spring of 1920. It is supposedly an anagram of ‘ik ben sot’ (I am foolish). Bonset’s earliest poems, *X-Beelden* (X-images) appeared in *De Stijl* 3 (May 1920, no. 7), and in the Italian magazines *Poesia* 1 (August–September 1920, no. 5/6) and *Bleu* (August–September 1920). Van Doesburg claimed that Bonset had been writing poetry since 1913, but in all likelihood he only invented the pen name in late 1919 or in the following spring. The poems he published under this name were therefore largely written in 1920 and post-dated, or they were based on earlier drafts.<sup>13</sup>

Van Doesburg’s objective was to claim a pioneering role not only in art, but also in literature. In March 1921, in an unusually magnanimous gesture, he cited Mondrian’s prose piece *Les grands boulevards*, a collection of poems by his ex-wife Agnita Feis from 1915 and poems by Kok, as examples of underappreciated innovative literature.<sup>14</sup> But according to Van Doesburg, the first would have been I.K. Bonset after all, who in 1913 already wrote such pioneering poetry.<sup>15</sup> What is quite remarkable is Bonset’s ‘Manifesto 69’ (fig. 2), which was sent to Tzara in January 1921 for the envisaged Dada publication *Dadaglobe*. The manifesto is a satire on Mondrian, full of sexual allusions and signed ‘Saint Pierre de la Ligne Droite’.<sup>16</sup>

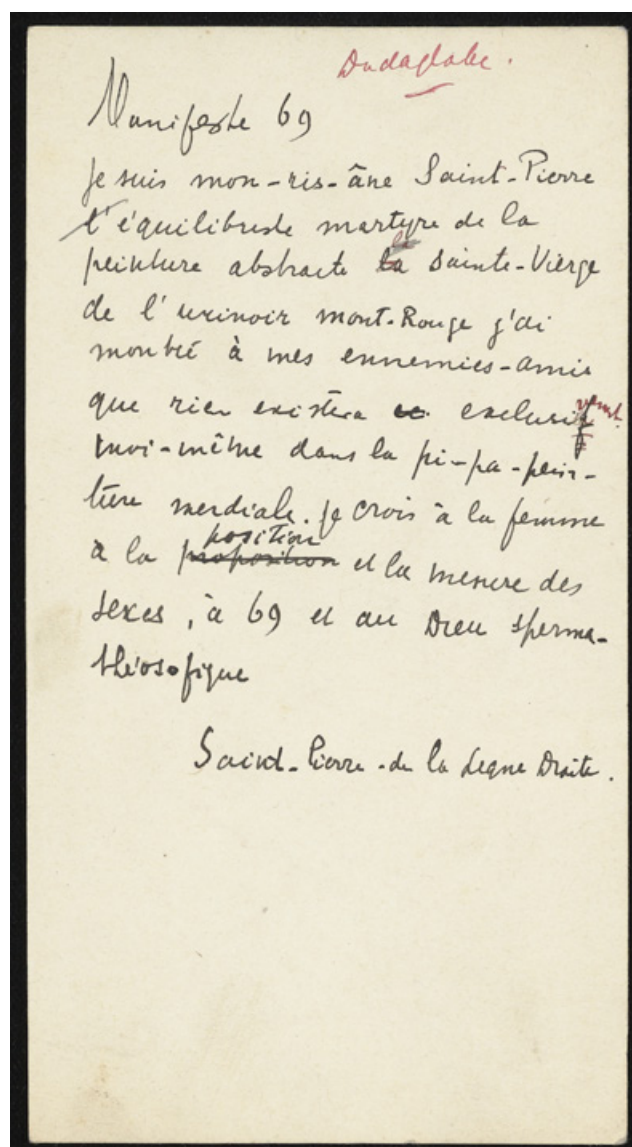


Fig. 2 Theo van Doesburg [I.K. Bonset], *Manifesto 69*, January 1921



Under his own name Van Doesburg took a more descriptive approach. His first article about Dada appeared on 8 May 1920 in *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*, and in 1923 he published a booklet on the subject.<sup>17</sup>

Van Doesburg sometimes even attributed divine qualities to Dada. Shortly after the rupture with Oud in December 1921, he wrote: 'Dada is like the good Lord: forgives everything, understands everything, knows everything, etc. – As Bonset I am not angry with you at all and perhaps there will come a day when I will also see you differently as v Doesburg.'<sup>18</sup> But the notion of Dada gradually weakened. In 1924 the word was virtually synonymous with modernity in general. On 1 July the same year, Nelly van Doesburg wrote to Kok: 'I advise you to bring your blue suit in case we go e.g. to the "Boeuf sur le Toit", a Dada cabaret where they play excellent jazz.'

Van Doesburg was a devotee of both Dada and Constructivism. A direct link between the two movements was established in the founding meeting of the International Constructivists in Weimar on 25 September 1922. Van Doesburg invited not only Constructivist artists, but also his Dada associates, Tzara and Arp. In his eyes, the role of the Dadaists was clear: their criticism could generate new growth.<sup>19</sup> But for others, particularly the Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy, the Dadaists were traitors to the good cause.<sup>20</sup> Van Doesburg's fondness for erecting opposites played a significant role in this respect. His reasoning went like this: out of the creation of contrasts can come movement and only that can bring about changes.

### Van Doesburg's introduction to Dada

Dada only really entered Van Doesburg's universe about three years after its emergence. In December 1919 the Belgian Paul Dermée sent a package containing Dadaist writings to the *De Stijl* magazine. Dermée had been living in Paris since 1910 and was closely

involved with the literary branch of the artist's group La Section d'Or.<sup>21</sup> Dermée obtained Van Doesburg's address from the Ukrainian sculptor Alexander Archipenko, with whom the former had been in contact since 1917 about *De Stijl*. The true impact of Dada was something Van Doesburg only realized during a visit to Paris between 20 February and 10 March 1920. This was the exact moment when there was a great antagonism about the contradictions between the Dadaists and Cubists of La Section d'Or, causing turmoil among Parisian artists.

Van Doesburg wrote the second *De Stijl* manifesto 'De literatuur' during the train journey back to the Netherlands after his stay in Paris.<sup>22</sup> In this text, he was exploring ground that was new to him. After architecture and the plastic arts, it was now the turn of literature. It had to be reduced to its essence, namely, the word, just as painting had to be brought back to line and surface.

In June 1920 Van Doesburg began signing his letters 'Does-dada'. In November, Oud and Van Doesburg addressed each other respectively as 'Oud-dada' and 'Does-dada' in the opening of their correspondence. In January 1921 Van Doesburg wrote to Oud, enthusiastic after his visit to Weimar: 'Soon *De Stijl* will appear more radical than ever. Mountains of material and a new campaign plan. Thoroughbred Dadas in the stables! [...] conspiracies forged to sow discord in the home and to promote immorality. Proclaimed DADAist I.K. Tzara BONSET.'<sup>23</sup> Mondrian also felt strongly drawn towards Dada during this period. He signed his letters 'Piet Dada'.

Tristan Tzara was the most active Dadaist in the 1910s and 1920s. His large network and organizational skills were comparable to those of Van Doesburg and other avant-garde leaders such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and André Breton. Tzara was born in Romania in 1896 as Samuel Rosenstock.<sup>24</sup> From 1915 he always used the pseudonym Tristan Tzara. Like Van



Fig. 3 'Souvenir of I.K. Bonset', Nelly van Doesburg as I.K. Bonset, 1927. RKD

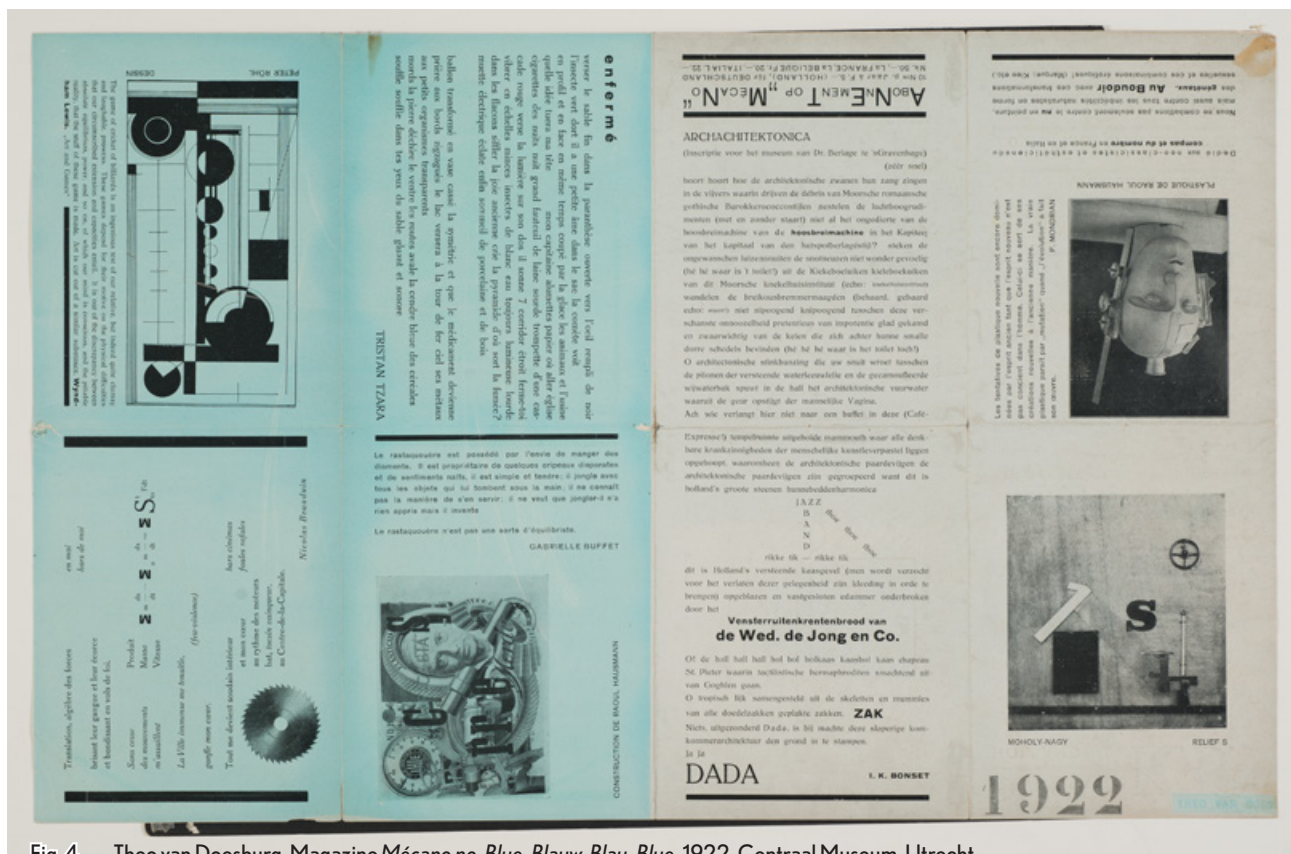


Fig. 4 Theo van Doesburg, Magazine *Mécane* no. Blue, Blauw, Blau, Blue, 1922. Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Doesburg he had several pen names, namely S. Samyro and Mac Robber.<sup>25</sup>

The first contact between Van Doesburg and Tzara dates from May 1920. Van Doesburg's trump card with regard to Tzara was his unique contact with the 'only genuine Dutch Dadaist', I.K. Bonset. Tzara initially was ignorant of the fact that they were one and the same person.<sup>26</sup> The attention that Van Doesburg paid to Dada in *De Stijl* also contributed to his appeal. Encouraged by Tzara, Van Doesburg continued with his plans to establish the Dada magazine *Mécane* (fig. 4), and let himself be strongly guided by the Dadaist in his selection of articles. But even after Van Doesburg moved to Paris and *Mécane* came to a halt, they remained friends.

In March 1920 Van Doesburg wrote a letter to the French painter Francis Picabia: 'I intend to write about the "Dada" movement that interests us very much, with

our aversion to naturalist painting, etc.'<sup>27</sup> Van Doesburg's wording leaves sufficient room for a personal interpretation of Picabia, but the rejection of naturalist painting was a common factor of Dada and De Stijl. Picabia may have been charmed by Van Doesburg, but he also had a few serious reservations, notably that his correspondent had organized exhibitions for La Section d'Or whereas he himself had just left the group. Van Doesburg tried to maintain contact with Picabia for a while, but the latter did not react to his complimentary letters, although he carefully preserved them in a scrapbook.<sup>28</sup>

With Hans Arp, whom Van Doesburg had met via Tzara, an increasingly close friendship grew from 1922, culminating in a plan for a house to be built jointly and the large project for the Aubette in Strasbourg. The intensive correspondence between the two men

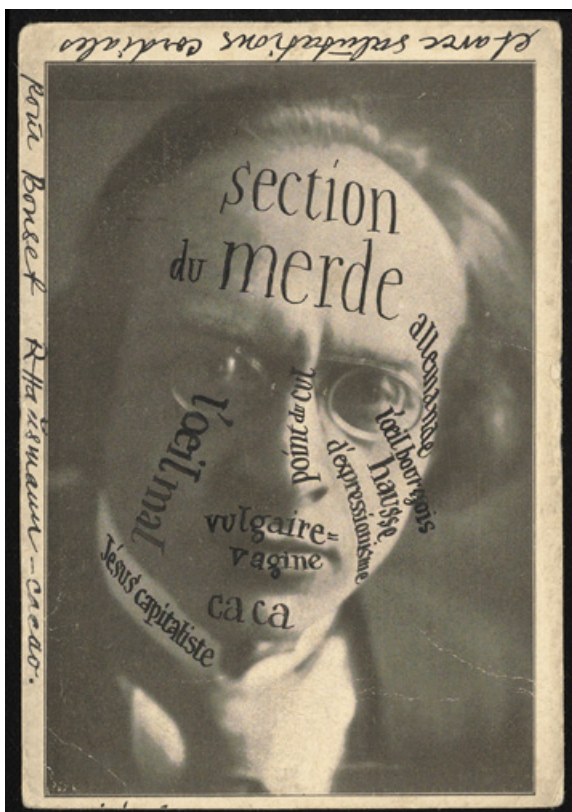


Fig. 5 Raoul Hausmann, *Portrait of Herwarth Walden for Bonset*, 1921

from 1926 has been preserved.<sup>29</sup> Theo van Doesburg also approached other Dadaists via Tzara, including Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes and Philippe Soupault. He wanted to use material from these artists for *Mécano* and *De Stijl*.

Van Doesburg's list of Dada contacts in Germany is long: Schwitters, Hausmann (fig. 5),<sup>30</sup> Hannah Höch, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling and Peter Röhl may be considered members of the movement and were also among his friends.

### Dada Hollande<sup>31</sup>

Dada did not have many followers in the Netherlands. In an article for the American magazine *Vanity Fair*, Tzara listed the following as Dutch Dadaists: 'J.K. [sic] Bonset, Th. van Doesburg and their magazine *Mécano*,

P. Citroen and Bloomfield in Amsterdam.'<sup>32</sup> Following his stay in Berlin, Paul Citroen kept in contact with more politically oriented Dadaists such as Richard Huelsenbeck.<sup>33</sup> In 1918 he established in Amsterdam the Holland-Dada-Centrale with his brother-in-law Erwin Blumenfeld, who later became a renowned photographer. No concrete actions are known to have come from this centre. Van Doesburg and Citroen seem to have had little contact.

In February 1920, a series of Dada evenings was organized in Amsterdam by the actor-painter Louis Saalborn and the wealthy Belgian violinist Arthur Petronio, who resided in the Netherlands from 1910 to 1924. Petronio was among other things the editor of *La Revue de Feu*.<sup>34</sup> Van Doesburg, who detested both Petronio and Saalborn, ignored their Dada activity. During the period of their Dada soirées, he went to visit Mondrian in Paris. In a letter to Tzara of December 1920, he attributed himself a monopoly: 'I am the only one to defend Dada.'<sup>35</sup>

The series of Dada performances by Van Doesburg, Nelly van Moorsel, the Hungarian-born painter Vilmos Huszár and Schwitters in January and February 1923 was a genuine *succès de scandale* in the tradition of the Futurists and Dadaists.<sup>36</sup> The idea for this tour surfaced in August 1922, when Huszár was visiting Van Doesburg in Weimar.<sup>37</sup> Soon afterwards Van Doesburg presented a grandiose plan to Tzara. As well as Schwitters and Hausmann, with Nelly van Moorsel on the piano, Tzara, Arp, Ribemont and others would were to perform. Unfortunately 'Bonset would be abroad', but thanks to advertising via sandwich men and in the press, decorated theatres, as well as music and modern dance, the event would be a resounding success. The Netherlands would be cleansed of 'all the leftovers of Rembrandt and Van Gogh, and of greasy, cheesy romanticism.'<sup>38</sup>

The short series of Dada soirées staged in November 1922 in Germany was encouraging. Van Doesburg



wrote to his friend Kok: 'Dada liberates and opens up the psyche [...] The sheep-like audience is the same the world over.'<sup>39</sup> The Dutch reality was very different: the grandiose tour was reduced in late December 1922 to a series of trial performances without sets or costumes.

But then the tide turned. After a successful evening in The Hague with Van Doesburg as introducer, Nelly van Moorsel on the piano, Huszár performing shadow-theatre with his mechanical doll and Schwitters as Dada poet, invitations followed from many other cities. In Amsterdam the police even had to restrain the waiting audience. The newspapers were full of scathing reviews, which made people even more curious. Fortunately the artists had insisted that they would share the income from the sold tickets. Plans were made for a much bigger tour with the collaboration of the French Dadaists in November 1923.<sup>40</sup> But despite the artists' enthusiasm, it came to nothing.

### Van Doesburg and Dada in Belgium

Van Doesburg did his best to gain a foothold in Belgium. He gave lectures there, sought contact with like-minded people and approached publishers. Josef Peeters promoted Constructivism and Dada in his magazine *Het Overzicht*. Peeters was a very similar figure to Van Doesburg, especially regarding his character. This made any idea of collaboration impossible between the two men. Mondrian mentioned in a letter to Van Doesburg of 3 October 1921 that he could not get along with Peeters and that he found his work a jumble.<sup>41</sup>

In December 1921, *De Stijl* published a short piece about Paul van Ostaijen's *Bezette Stad* (Occupied City) written by a recalcitrant Bonset.<sup>42</sup> An article appeared in *Mécano* no. 4/5 (white) in 1923 about the Belgian avant-garde, in which Peeters was ridiculed. The Netherlands and Van Doesburg himself also came off badly in this piece by Bonset, just like Van Ostaijen.

In August 1921 Van Doesburg published in *Het Getij* an analysis of the Belgian situation, describing it as divided between servile Francophilia, on one hand, and Flemish political activism, on the other. According to Van Doesburg, the only people of any importance were: Clément Pansaers, who was among the core group of Dada since the appearance of the Dada issue of *Ça ira* in March 1921; sculptor Georges Vantongerloo; painter Karel Maes; and musician, poet and plastic artist E.L.I. Mesens. Van Doesburg here described *Bezette Stad* as a weak imitation of *La fin du monde* by Blaise Cendrars.<sup>43</sup>

Van Doesburg was initially deeply impressed by Pansaers. This artist was one of the few Belgian Dadaists, a mysterious figure and a typical *poète maudit*. In the early 1920s he settled in Paris, where he made a small number of Dadaist works. He wrote among others *Le Pan-Pan au cul du nu nègre* (1919) and *Bar Nicanor* (1920). In late April 1921 he left the Dada movement. He died in late October 1922. But in the dispute between Pansaers and Tzara, Van Doesburg soon made clear that his loyalty was with Tzara.

Van Doesburg's contacts in Belgium did not deliver what he had expected, despite his positive depiction of the influence of *De Stijl* in Belgium in the anniversary issue *10 jaar Stijl*, published in 1927.

### Van Doesburg and Dada in Italy

While Van Doesburg made manifestos, poems and collages in a Dada spirit as I.K. Bonset, he philosophized in a Dada manner under the name of Aldo Camini. By his own account, Van Doesburg had found a manuscript by Camini at the studio of the Milanese painter CC (Carlo Carrà). In the May 1921 issue of *De Stijl* he published the first three chapters of *Caminoscopia*, a novel by a 'recently deceased, completely unknown painter-writer, called Aldo Camini'. Giovanni Papini, whose book *De blinde loods* (The Blind Pilot) was highly

praised by Van Doesburg, was an important influence, as were Dada and Futurism.

The use of this Italian pseudonym leads us to consider briefly Van Doesburg's relationship with Dada and Futurism in Italy. In this it is important to stress that Futurism and Dada were closely entwined with the political left in Italy in 1920 and 1921.<sup>44</sup> The Italian Futurists tried to enter government as a political party. There was moreover a close affinity between the Futurists and the Bolshevik revolutionaries in Russia.

During this time Van Doesburg was in close contact with the Italian artist Enrico Prampolini. Such contact was only natural in the light of their international political and artistic activism. In 1920, Prampolini's Casa d'Arte Italiana in Rome was closely linked to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who hoped that the artistic revolution would also influence politics. Members of the socialist government already supported Prampolini's Casa d'Arte Italiana. Prampolini was also in contact with Tzara and Dada from 1916. He participated in the international Dada exhibition in Zurich the same year and spread Dada ideas via the *Noi* magazine (fig. 6).<sup>45</sup> He also declared himself a supporter of Dada in an undated letter to Picabia from about 20 July 1920.

Another Italian Dadaist was Julius Evola, remarkably enough a right-winger, who was in contact with Tzara from 1918. Evola made Dada work in the years until 1922, but stopped painting and writing poetry after that and turned to esotericism and philosophy. Together with Aldo Fiozzi and Gino Cantarelli from Mantua, Evola was the editor of *Bleu* (fig. 7), a magazine that appeared from July 1920 to January 1921. This published work by Dadaists from across Europe, as well as work by Ivo Pannaggi and other more traditional Italian artists. It also printed several texts by Van Doesburg and Bonset.<sup>46</sup>

Van Doesburg was in turn negative and positive about Futurism. On 18 August 1921 he wrote to Hausmann in a wonderful mix of French and Italian: 'Je crois



Fig. 6 Magazine *Noi*



Fig. 7 Magazine *Bleu*

que Marinetti est encore beaucoup intéressant. [...] l'arte est una battaglia furiosa et je crois que Marinetti est un des plus beau cadavres del tempo moderno.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he bought a painting by Giacomo Balla in 1926 and another by Gino Severini in 1928.<sup>48</sup>

### Criticism of Dada

Van Doesburg's enthusiasm for Dada was not without reservations. In early 1924 he advised Kok: 'It's best simply to go your own quiet way, and to realize any potential "Dadaist" publications etc. under another name.'<sup>49</sup> He again distanced himself from Dada in a letter to Kok dated early 1923: 'The Dada soirées are tremendous. This is of course quite dangerous for me since I am not Dada. We have invitations from every city.'<sup>50</sup>

The possibility of immersing himself entirely in Dada and of giving up his 'Constructive' work was never an option for Van Doesburg. On the one hand, he was too closely attached to the Constructive aspect of his work for a new art and a new society. Van Doesburg held contrasts in high esteem and saw them as the motor for growth and change. However, he was also convinced of the value of modern art. The all-embracing irony of Dada, when applied to everything, focused too much on the aspect of destruction. On the other hand, Van Doesburg never adhered to Dada one hundred per cent, for the simple reason that he had no other source of income and in his view it was impossible to live off Dada alone.

### NOTES

1. 'Solche Kameraden können wir gut gebrauchen', wrote Hans Richter about Tzara in a letter to Van Doesburg, undated (October 1922), Van Doesburg Archive, RKD, The Hague (hereafter VDA), file 168.
2. I made this numerical analysis for my thesis (Tuijn 2003). Because this work is not readily accessible outside the Netherlands, I have quoted liberally from it here.

3. For the latest literature on Van Doesburg: Alied Ottevanger (ed.), *'De Stijl overal absolute leiding'. De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok*, Bussum, 2008; Leiden/London 2009. On Dada and Van Doesburg: Berg/Buelens 2014; Boef/Faassen 1995; Boef/Faassen 1999; Schippers [1974] 2000. Other important literature relating to Van Doesburg and Dada: Entrop 1988; Entrop 1994.
4. See Alex Rutten, 'Steun, weerklank en vriendschap. Over sociaal kapitaal en de breuk tussen Piet Mondriaan en Theo van Doesburg', in *Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies* (December 2012).
5. In a letter quoted by Maria Elena Versari, 'International Futurism Goes National: the Ambivalent Identity of a National/International Avant-Garde', in Jacek Purchla and Wolf Tegethoff (eds), *Nation, Style, Modernism* (CIHA Conference Papers 1), Krakow and Munich, 2006, p. 186, n. 21.
6. The term 'Entente' was used in the early 1920s to refer to the allied European powers: the United Kingdom, Russia and France.
7. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, 24 June 1921, VDA, file 2204.
8. See Hubert van den Berg, 'Dadaist Subjectivity and the Politics of Indifference', in Willem van Reijen and Willem G. Weststeijn (eds), *Subjectivity*, Amsterdam, 2000, p. 34.
9. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, 12 November 1920, VDA, file 2204.
10. These ideas are influenced by those of the philosopher Schoenmaekers writing around 1910 in the journal *Eenheid*. See Hans Renders and Sjoerd van Faassen, 'Ik zocht den dood en vond het leven: een keerpunt in Tilburg. Theo van Doesburg in de jaren 1914-1915', in *Zacht Lawijd, literair historisch tijdschrift* 13 (2014) no. 3, p. 128.
11. This is a recurrent metaphor. See, among others, Beckett 1979 and Baljeu 1974.
12. See also Eliason 2002, pp. 178-9.
13. See Sjoerd van Faassen and August Hans Den Boef, 'Ik moet zingen, altijd maar weer zingen van u. Liefdesgedichten van Theo van Doesburg voor Lena Milius', in *Jaarboek Letterkundig Museum* 8 (1999), pp. 59-99, namely pp. 80-90.
14. Van Doesburg's reaction to Mondrian's prose piece was initially very negative in a letter dated 28 March 1920 to Oud. Feis's collection was titled *Oorlog: Verzen in staccato*, for which Van Doesburg designed the jacket despite their break.
15. See Sjoerd van Faassen and Hans Renders, 'Manifest II van De Stijl: De literatuur (1920)', in *Zacht Lawijd* 12 (2013) no. 1, pp. 44-57.
16. See also Eliason 2002, p. 74, where he draws attention to the importance attached by the incorporeal Bonset to the corporeal. Eliason also looks in detail at Camini's articles in *De Stijl* (Eliason 2002, pp. 92-116).
17. The article appeared in *Nieuwe Amsterdammer* 279 (8 May 1920). The promised second part, about which he also writes to Tzara, never appeared. The booklet *Wat is Dada?*, The Hague, 1923, sold well during the Dada tour in 1923.
18. On the occasion of Oud's rejection of Van Doesburg's colour schemes for apartment blocks in Spangen. Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, 18 December 1921, Fondation Custodia, Paris (hereafter FC), inv. no. 1972-A.565.
19. See Eliason 2000, for a description of Tzara's talks, in which he

emphasized the irreconcilable opposition between Dadaist and Constructivist principles.

20. Craig Eliason has also devoted a part of his thesis to this subject. His theory that Van Doesburg wanted to turn the Weimar conference into a Dada performance by deliberately arranging the failure of a conference he himself organized, is very interesting. Eliason draws a parallel with Tzara's organized sabotage of the Congrès de Paris. However, I think such reasoning underestimates the sympathy for Dada held by most of the Constructivist participants – with the exception of Moholy-Nagy. See Eliason 2002, p. 127.
21. See Jan de Heer, 'Theo van Doesburg en Paul Dermée. De eerste contacten van Van Doesburg met dada', in *Zacht Lawijd* 12 (2013) no. 1, pp. 28–43. Françoise Lucbert, Université Laval, Québec, is currently conducting extensive research into the Section d'Or exhibitions of 1920–1.
22. See *Zacht Lawijd* 12 (2013) no. 1, p. 51.
23. Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, n.d. [January 1921], FC, inv. no. 1972-A.603.
24. For more information on Tzara, see among others: Henri Béhar, *Tristan Tzara*, Paris, 2005; Marc Dachy (ed.), 'Le Dossier: DADA', *Magazine Littéraire* 446 (October 2005); Tristan Tzara, *7 Dada-manifesten* (trans. Jan H. Mysjkin), Nijmegen, 1998, pp. 79–85; Michael Ilk, *Brancusi, Tzara und die rumänische Avantgarde*, Bochum and Rotterdam, 1997.
25. There are for instance pen drawings from May 1917 signed Mac Robber. See Raoul Schrott (ed.), *Dada 15/25. Post scriptum oder die himmlischen Abenteuer des Hr.n Tristan Tzara*, Innsbruck, 1992, pp. 89 and 149.
26. Bonset's identity was long a secret; only Lena Milius, Nelly van Moorsel, Antony Kok, J.J. Dee and J.J.P. Oud knew about it. In *Merz* of July 1923 (no. 4, p. 44) Schwitters suggested that Van Doesburg and Bonset were the same person. But in 1927 Van Doesburg still referred to Bonset as 'one of the main collaborators' of *De Stijl*. He even took up the name Bonset again in 1929 in division B of the artist group Blanc. See Hoek 2000, no. 650.
27. 'J'ai l'intention d'écrire du mouvement "dada" qui nous, avec notre dégoût de la peinture à la manière de la nature etc, intéresse beaucoup.' Letter from Van Doesburg to Picabia, 29 March 1920, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris (hereafter BLJD).
28. Picabia scrapbook in BLJD.
29. See my article 'Brieven over de Aubette', in Guigon et al. 2006, pp. 50–81.
30. In 1922 Hausmann executed a portrait of Van Doesburg in the photocollage *Die Menschen sind Engel und leben im Himmel*. See Eliason 2002, p. 55.
31. Dada Hollande is the title of a manifesto by I.K. Bonset: *Dada Hollande I.K.B. Manifest 0,96013*. Published in *Mécabo*, Blue (1922).
32. See Henri Béhar, *Tristan Tzara. Œuvres Complètes, vol. 1, 1912–1924*, Paris, 1975, p. 598.
33. See Boef/Faassen 1999, pp. 16–17 and Boef/Faassen 1995, pp. 40–1. For Citroen, see also Herbert van Rheaden et al., *Paul Citroen. Kunstenaar, docent, verzamelaar*, Zwolle and Heino, 1994.
34. See Boef/Faassen 1999, pp. 17–20.
35. Letter from Van Doesburg to Tzara, 8 December 1920, BLJD, TZR C 4086. At least two articles on Dada appeared in Dutch newspapers in 1920: Wenzel Frankemölle, 'Het dadaïsme', in *De Amsterdammer*, 10 January 1920, and Adrienne Lautère-Heineken, 'Uit het Parijsche leven', in *Haagsche Post*, 10 April 1920. See Hubert van den Berg and Gillis Dorleijn (eds), *Avantgarde! Voorhoede? Vernieuwingsbewegingen in Noord en Zuid opnieuw beschouwd*, Nijmegen, 2002, p. 164.
36. Since this tour is commented on in several publications I will dwell too much on the subject here. See among others: Straaten 1983, pp. 115–16; White 1997; Hubert van den Berg (ed.), *Holland's bankroet door dada*, Amsterdam, 1995; Kurt Schwitters in *Nederland*, exh. cat., Heerlen, 1997, pp. 18–25; Boef/Faassen 1999; Moorsel 2000, pp. 62–5 and 84–7; Schippers [1974] 2000.
37. See the letters from Huszár to Van Doesburg of 22 May, 14 August and 4 September 1922, VDA, file 90.
38. See the letter from Tzara to Van Doesburg, 8 September 1922, VDA; letter from Van Doesburg to Tzara, 18 October 1922, BLJD, inv. no. TZR C 4099; letter from Nelly van Doesburg to Tzara, 21 December 1922, BLJD, inv. no. TZR C 4113; letter from Van Doesburg to Tzara, 29 December 1922, BLJD, inv. no. TZR C 4102.
39. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, 20 November 1922, VDA, file 2205.
40. Letter from Van Doesburg to Tzara, 3 February 1923, BLJD, inv. no. TZR C 4104.
41. See Boef/Faassen 2013, pp. 17–26.
42. On Van Doesburg and Van Ostaijen, see José Boyens, 'Paul van Ostayen en Theo van Doesburg, twee verwante theoretici die niet nader tot elkaar wensten te komen', in *De Gids* 142 (1979), nos 3 and 4.
43. See Boef/Faassen 2013, pp. 27–30. The book in question is Blaise Cendrars, *La fin du monde, filmée par l'Ange N.-D.: roman*, Paris, 1919, with colour illustrations by Fernand Léger.
44. See Maria Elena Versari, 'I rapporti internazionali del futurismo dopo il 1919', pp. 577–606 (consulted on [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)).
45. See Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), *Dadas on Art. Tzara: Arp, Duchamp and Others*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971 p. 116.
46. Van Doesburg's article 'L'art monumental' appeared in *Bleu* 1 (July 1920). In *Bleu* 2 (August–September 1920) there appeared a poem by Bonset and the literature manifesto of *De Stijl*. The third issue included an article by Prampolini on the international exhibition in Geneva.
47. 'I think that Marinetti is still very interesting. [...] art is a furious battle and I think that Marinetti is one of the most beautiful corpses of modern times.' Letter from Van Doesburg to Hausmann, 18 August 1921, in *Hanna Höch. Eine Lebenscollage. Archiv-Edition, vol. II (1921–1945)*, part 1, 1995, pp. 39 and 44.
48. Giacomo Balla, *Velocità astratta + rumore*, 1913–14; Gino Severini, *Mare=Ballerina*, 1914. Both were sold to Peggy Guggenheim by Nelly van Doesburg in 1939 and have since been in the Guggenheim Venezia collection. See Van Moorsel 2000, p. 251.
49. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, 5 February 1924, VDA, file 2206.
50. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, 15 January 1923, VDA, file 2206.





1922

ADMINISTRATIE EN VERTEGENWOORDIGING VOOR HOLLAND: „DE STIJL“ UTR. JAAGPAD 17 LEIDEN. — PARIS: RUE DU MOULIN VERT 51 TER PARIS XIV.

# AAN DE ADMINIST

GÉRANT LITTÉRAIRE: I. K. BONSET

No 4 5 en

ADMINISTRATIE: UTR. JAAGPAD 17, LEIDEN (HOLLAND)

**HOLLAND'S BANKROET DOOR DADA**

■ N.B. Thuisbezorging zonder prijsverhoging.

No. 1 White, Blanc, Wit, Weiß. 1923

1923

Et je trouve qu'on a en tort de dire que le Dadaïsme, le Cubisme, le Futurisme, reposaient sur un fond commun. Le deux dernières tendances étaient surtout basées sur un principe de perfectionnement technique ou intellectuel tandis que le Dadaïsme n'a jamais reposé sur aucune théorie et n'a été qu'une

## Protestation

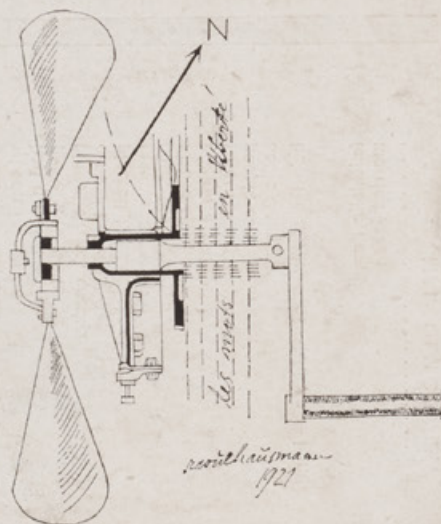
(Tristan Tzara)

Dada est la force désintéressée, ce n'est pas une maladie, pas une énergie pas une vérité.

Evola

Waar het hart leeg van is loopt de neus van over.

Bonset



ADMINISTRATIE EN VERTEGENWOORDIGING VOOR HOLLAND: „DE STIJL“ LEIDEN. PARIS: LIBRAIRIE „SIX“ 5 AV. DE LOWENDAL PARIS 7e

# AAN DE ADMINIST

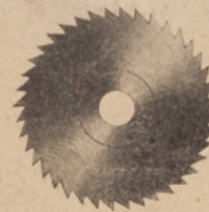
GÉRANT LITTÉRAIRE: I. K. BONSET

No. 1 White, Blanc, Wit, Weiß. 1923

1923

ADMINISTRATIE EN VERTEGENWOORDIGING VOOR HOLLAND: „DE STIJL“ LEIDEN. PARIS: LIBRAIRIE „SIX“ 5 AV. DE LOWENDAL PARIS 7e

MECHANICIEN PLASTIQUE: THEO VAN DOESBURG



MÉCANO

AAN DE ADMINIST  
„DE STIJL“  
HAARLEMMEERST  
LEIDE

BILANZ DES STAATLICHEN BAU



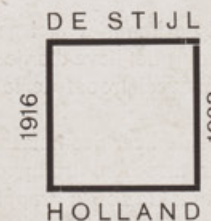
VAN DOESBURG KOMMT NACH WE

1921

BEGRÜSSU



Nur das □ des Stijls ist gesetzlich geschützt



Freut sich, daß di  
in der Malerei (N  
schon einen derart  
Kunstentwicklung

Paris 1923

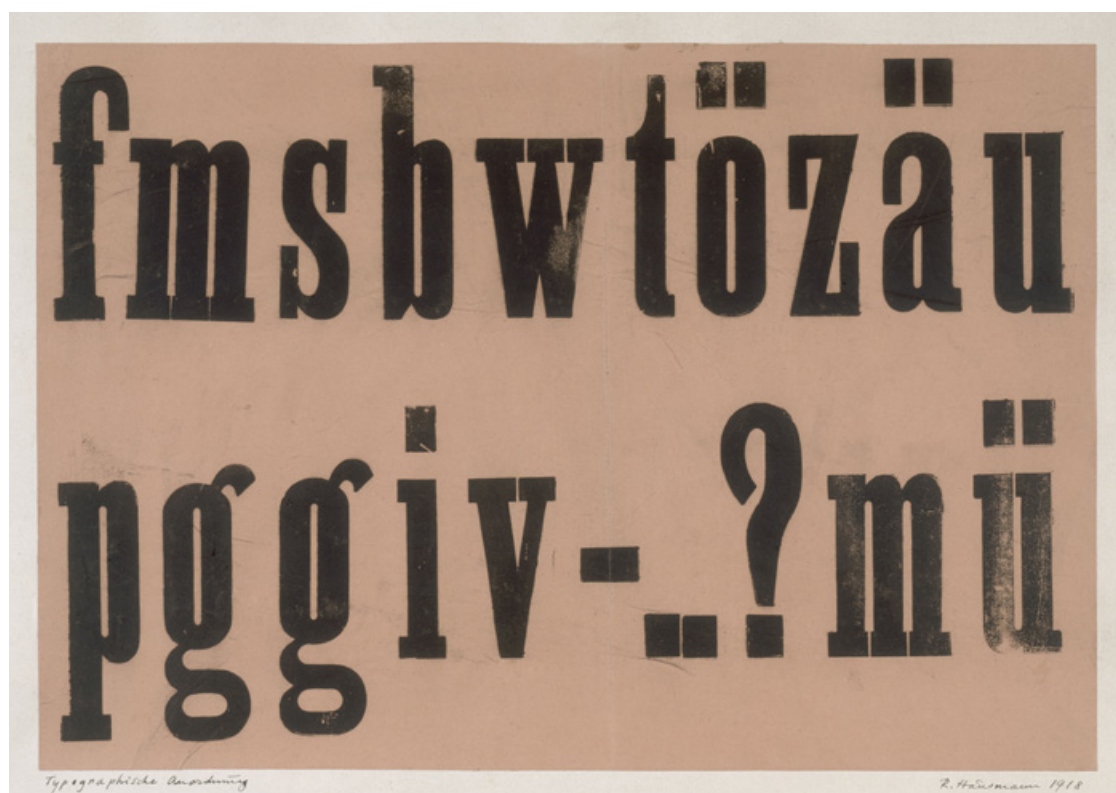
SCHON VIELE B  
DAS □

ABER nur wenige

VERS

Van buiten kwadraat van bin



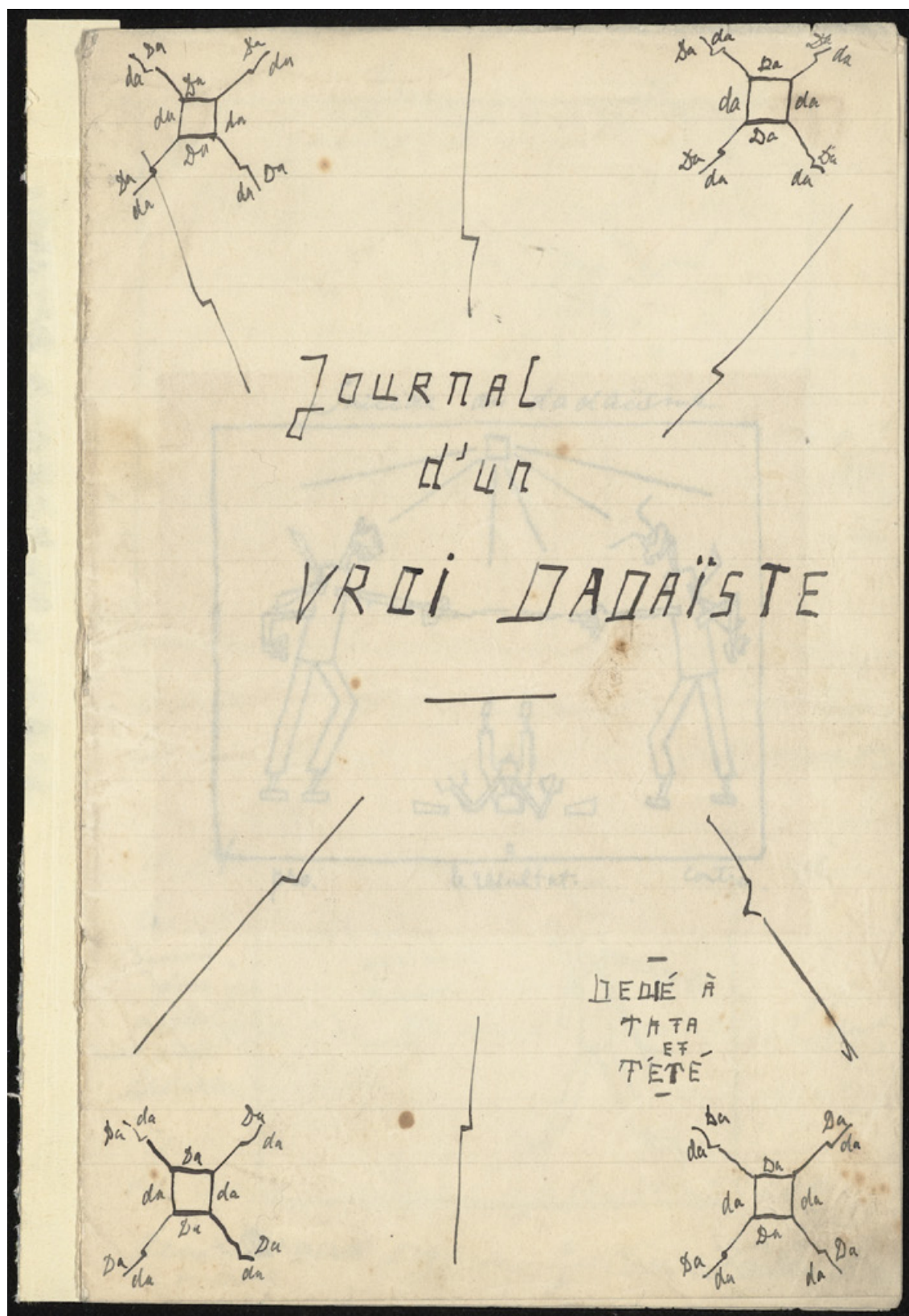


30 **RAOUL HAUSSMANN**

Poster Poem, 1918

Print, proof. Typographic printing on orange paper, stuck on paper; 48 x 65.5 cm (paper support)  
Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle, Paris.  
Inv. AM1974-8





31 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Diary of a True Dadaist, c. 1923

Handwritten manuscript with drawings, 21 x 14.5 cm  
Collection RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague





# ABONNEMENT OP „MÉCANO“

10 Nos p. Jaar à F. 5.— (HOLLAND), für DEUTSCHLAND Mk. 50.—, La FRANCE, La BELIQUE Fr. 20.—, ITALIA L. 22.—

GEORGES RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES

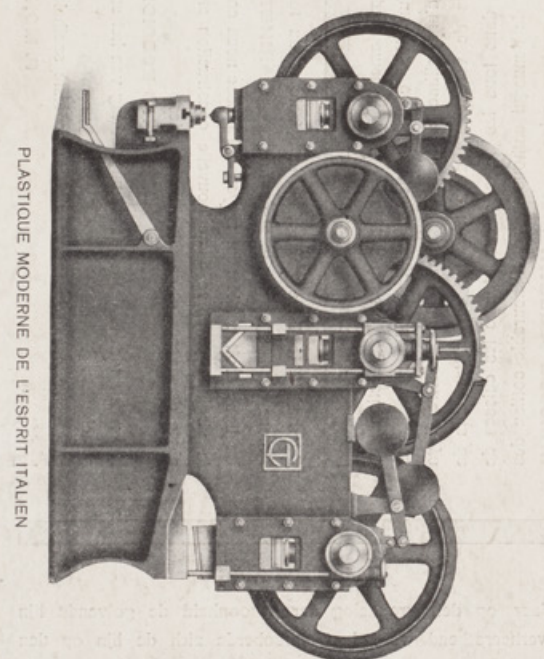
les hostes lavabo. Il y a un moment du jeu où l'on joue à ne pas jouer, et où cela finit mal. C'est maintenant. Il faut que la rue pour vous soit triste en sortant. Et qu'il n'y ait plus de consolation au fond de votre estomac. DADA est un cancer, et donne le cancer. Il détruit le fonctionnement des spécialités et fait bourgeonner les cellules indifférentes avec une effrayante rapidité. Il faut que vous ayez la connaissance de votre mal. L'air que les vents alligés du printemps vous envoient est dur et froid comme du fer. La société et ces charmes sont morts. Et réfugiés dans votre lit vous savez que vous avez un cancer du cœur, un énorme cancer de votre cœur devenu éponge jusqu'aux talons et qui presse sans le battre un sang hideux et fétide comme le jus d'une mare à purin où se vautre encore un cochon commercial. Mais DADA connaît la chorégraphie et la manière de s'en servir. Pour s'amuser il vous racole. Et avant de faire avec vous le simulateur de l'amour, il jette dans la poêle des tranches de cactus. Et soudain jaillit une efflorescence de serpent du Mexique et d'étranges gloxinias en celluloïd que l'on vous sert froids. Et les larmes de la lune tombent dans des cornets à piston qui vous préparent le café. Et phonographe du Puytren attend votre petit cri de la fin. Car il faudra bien que vous malmetiez au travers du cancer de votre cœur, au travers du cancer que je vous aurai donné.

La Chimie est une science cloportée et s'avance avec la vitesse d'un myriapode. Les artistes qui colonisent cette science comme les prêtres poètes qui colonisent le hasard en ont tiré des résultats merveilleux. C'est ainsi qu'on découvre le rôle du fer, du calcium, du zinc dans l'organisme humain et leur nécessité. Et l'on attend de découvrir la même nécessité pour des corps nouveaux. Afin de faire durer le plaisir plus longtemps on les exhume peu à peu avec de grands cris religieux. Mais il est un corps auquel on ne pensait pas et qui prit le part de s'isoler lui-même des vieilles chaires et musciennes: c'est DADA. le dada qui spontanément au contact de l'air humide et sentimental se transforme en acide dadatique, et ne laisse après lui qu'un petit résidu noir et une fumée bleuâtre. DADA a toujours existé, on le lui reproche assez. Mais qui le savait? et qui donc aujourd'hui le sait? DADA est plus terrible que vous ne pensez. Vous le posez sur l'eau, et il tourne en rond avec une flamme qui pétille. Et vous commencez à rire en venant vers lui, vers ce joli jeu. Vous amis de DADA, vous êtes sans danger. Nous sommes notre propre danger. C'est pourquoi dans les magasins de parfumerie ou de bijouterie nous jetons des pierres et brisons les glaces qui renvoient notre image. DADA n'est plus un jeu. Il n'y a plus de jeu nulle part. Il n'y aura plus de jeu nulle part, mais une terreur sans nom devant tout ce qui est pourri, devant ce qui éternit encore et que DADA a détruit et détruira, devant la couche de cendre où subsiste comme souvenir les dents noircies qui ont chiqué les mots à sonnettes, les airs clairs de lune et

MANIFESTE A L'HULLE

GERANT LITTÉRAIRE: I. K. BONSET

MÉCANICIEN PLASTIQUE: THEO VAN DOESBURG



ADMINISTRATIE EN VERTEGENWOORDIGING VOOR HOLLAND: „DE STIJL“ LEIDEN.  
PARIS: LIBRAIRIE „SIX“ 5 AV: DE LOWENDAL PARIS 7<sup>e</sup>

## 33 THEO VAN DOESBURG

Mécano no. Jaune, Geel, Gelb, Yellow, 1922

Print; 32 x 52 cm

Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. AB4984



# MAN RAY NEW-YORK DADA



## ANTIKUNSTENZUIVEREREDEMANIFEST

Toegewijd aan de ongelukzwevende temperatuur van Dada

Kunst en filosofie zijn geheel verteerd door de vervelende herhaling van steeds eenzelfde thema. Europa is ingesloten tusschen zuivere logica en gitaar. Geleerden en kunstenaars vastgebonden aan één en hetzelfde touw. Ieder zijn stalletje en boven elk stalletje een verveerd en piepend uithangbord. Gevangen in de magie der vruchtbare onnoozelheid, wentelen kunstenaars en geleerden om de versleten as van den centrifugalen frommel der mufte, fatsoendelijke, burgerlijke intelligentie. De intellectueele thema's kleppen en keeren weer, jollen rond, CARNAVAL van gekleurd slijk, poep, blik en ontstoken hersenen. De zuivere logica en de gitaar — de zuivere gitaar en de logica — gitaarlogica — logicagitaar — logicagitaar — gicalogitaar — taargilocagi — gicalotaargi — lotaargigica — gitaar, gitaar, gitaar, logica, logica, logica, logicanus, ANUS. Al dat geklepper en gedraaf achter „La Femme assise“ en rondom de „Natures mortes“, Kant-Hegel-Fichte-Schopenhauer-Bolland-Spinoza heeft geen andere beteekenis dan zichzelf zooveel mogelijk met woorden en ijdeltuiterij op te blazen, opdat men toch vooral den schijn niet zou ontgaan op iets te lijken dat NIETS is. Niemand ontgaat de kans zich te verheugen elk uur, zonder daarbij op de stilstaande pendule te kijken en zich te besmeuren met fatsoen, ethiek en ALIBABA-moraal in de keiharde beddeplank van zijn bestaan, die hij met een vloek „leven“ noemt. NOOIT HEEFT IEMAND DEZE BONBON GEHEEL OPGEZOGEN zonder in de verzoeking te komen erin te — bijten. Mij is de nicotine, de RADIO-MACARONI en de WHISKY-SODA meer waard dan de champignons, die Uw monniken en buffelgeleerden kweeken tusschen hun oksels. Kleine schimmelgewassen, die zij zuivere rede of geestelijke esthetiek noemen, omdat zij het vermogen

missen hun kop snel in het rond te draaien om alle zijden der wereld tegelijk te zien. Het is om het even of gij bremmeriaansch, hollandistisch of op z'n havelaarsch gecastreerd zijt. Eunuchen zijt ge allen. Waarlijk, ge gelooft zoo vast en zeker aan de logica van Uw eigen krankzinnigheid, dat de ééne gezonde gedachte, welke gij gevonden zoudt hebben door Uw keiharden kaaskop eine halbe Stunde op Uw geboterden romp rond te draaien (en welke gedachte daarin bestaat, dat ja en neen, vol en ledig, zuivere alogica en onzuivere logica identiek zijn), U voortdurend ontgaat. Dada is het eenige afdoende stopmiddel om U van Uw kunst-en-logica-diarrhéé te genezen. Dada is de kurk op de flacon van Uw domheid. Vergeet daarbij niet, dat de looden hersenmassa van Uw dialectici te weinig poreus was om er ook maar één enkele levende en bewegelijke gedachte, een ijsvuurdenkbeeld door te laten. Gij weet dat alles nog zoo niet. Dada weet het. En ik zeg U nu, dat Uw intellectueele zwaarwichtigheid even materieel is als de steenen uitwerpsels, die men iederen morgen op Uw hoofdkussen vindt. En nu, nu we elkander zoo van anus tot anus de waarheid gezegd hebben, zou ik U willen verzoeken dezen kleinen vergiftigen dolk van mij aan te nemen (ik kocht hem in CALICANOIRO), niet om daarmee de klinker van Uw ziel te treffen, doch alleen maar om hem achter den nagel van Uw rechterwijsvinger te laten wegglijden als een bajonet in een schede. Ge likkebaardt al vooruit om de pornografische dubbelzinnigheid (voor wien houdt ge mij?) welke ge meent te speuren en de bedorven schelvisch, die ge goed verpakt achter Uw kleeren meedraagt verheugt zich reeds om zijn gewaande prooi: De rossige STOPPELHEIBLOESEM-KINNEBAK waarop 20 eeuwen u kristelijk-deemoedig geranseld hebben steekt zoo ver buiten Uw vlakke borsten, dat ik mij veroorloof U voortaan te gebruiken als wandelstok van Dada.

Holland 31.1.1921

I. K. BONSET

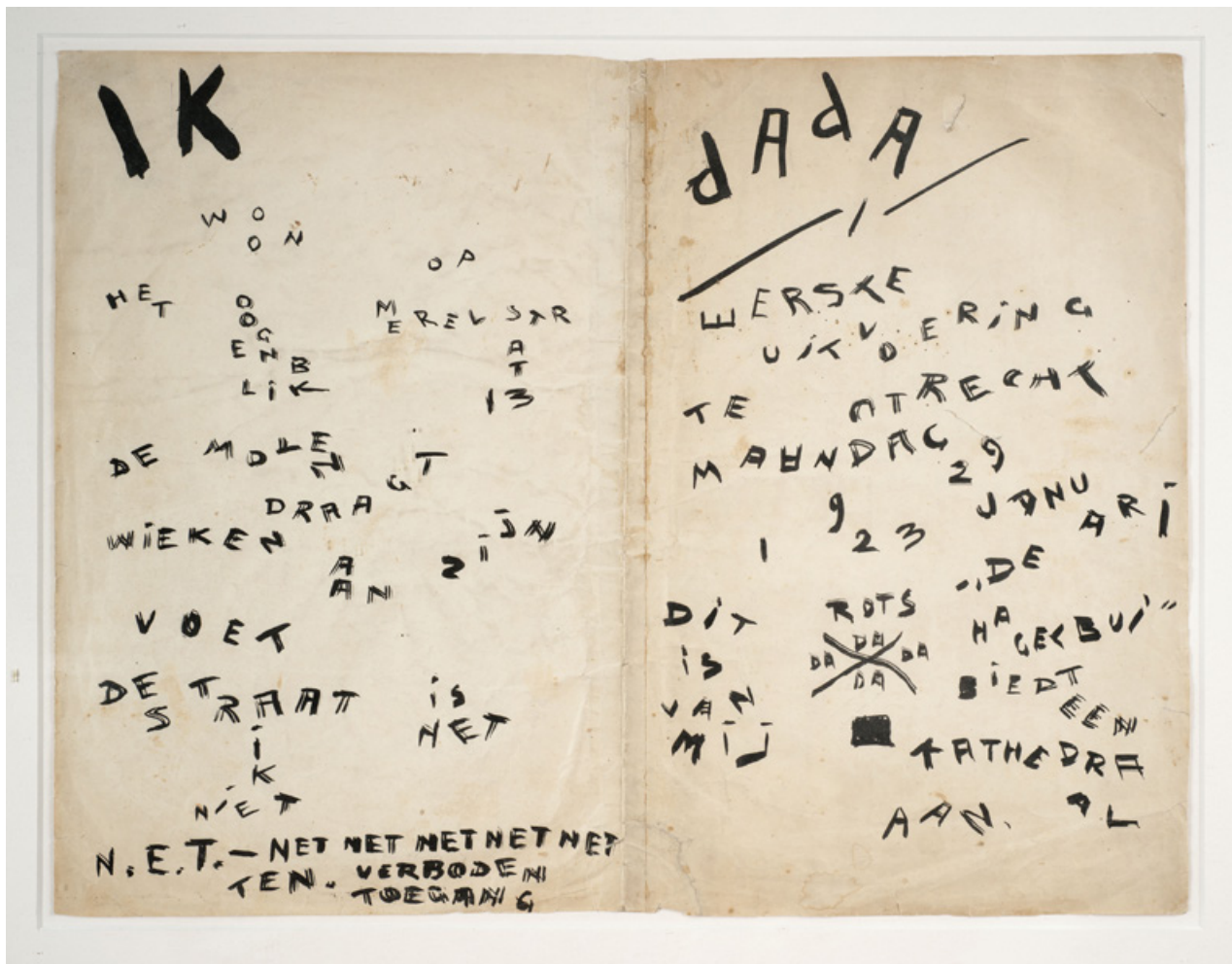
AB4384

## BABORD POUR TOUS

à Tristan Tzara

Babord détachez mon cerveau bleu  
Babord éloignez mon voisin de gauche  
Babord donnez-moi de l'eau potable  
Babord prenez garde aux montagnes  
Babord songez à l'arsenic  
Babord changez l'encre qui est jaune  
Babord protégez-moi des courants d'air  
Babord souvenez-vous de l'année dernière  
Babord souvenez-vous de la chaleur  
Babord souvenez-vous des promeneurs de cactus  
Car nous passons  
nous passons et les hirondelles passent avec nous  
mais nous crachons en l'air  
et les hirondelles crachent sur nous





34 ANONYMOUS

'I Dada...' [Dada Document for Utrecht soirée], January 1923

Ink on paper; 34 x 45 cm

Gilles Gheerbrant Collection, France





36 THEO VAN DOESBURG,  
KURT SCHWITTERS, KÄTE STEINITZ  
Die Scheuche. Merz nr. 14/15, 1925



**Int. Concert- en Theater-Bur. DE HAAN & Co., Papestr. 5a, Den Haag, Tel. 5393.**

**HAMLET** **Pyjama**

**dada** **NEAT** **NEE** **ROTS**

„Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,  
Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt“.

**DILIGENTIA**  
**ZONDAG 28**  
**JANUARI des**  
**namiddags**

**KURT SCHWITTERS**  
**PÉTRO VAN DOESBURG**  
**THEO VAN DOESBURG**

Anfang und Beginn der grossen  
glorreichen Revolution in  
Revon.

Dadasofische inleiding van  
Tje marcie per le bestie

DE Professor Jansen had de gewoonte, om altijd in zijn  
linnen jas te loopen, niet alleen in de college tijden,  
maar ook buiten. Op die manier gekleed liep hij  
eens voor zijn woning op iemand te wachten.  
Daar trad een vreemde op hem toe en vroeg hem:  
„U is zeker kapper? Och knip me even het haar.  
L'amour est un puits sur une Cathédrale“

**MECANO**  
**Anna Blume**  
**BLEIÉ**  
**MERZ**  
**Wat is dada**

**Groote Balans Opruiming.** **„DADA N'A JAMAIS RAISON.“**

**PRIJZEN DER PLAATSEN:** Zaal I f 2.50, Zaal II en Front-Balcon f 2.-,  
Zij-Balcon f 1.50, plus Stedelijke Belasting.

**KAARTVERKOOP DAGELIJKS AAN DILIGENTIA.**

Druk S. VISKOPPER Den Haag

37 THEO VAN DOESBURG

Poster for Dada Tour in the Netherlands, 1923

Print; 62 x 85 cm

Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. AB6011







38 **KURT SCHWITTERS**  
Mz 285 für Nelli 1936, 1927

Collage on paper; 18 x 14.1 cm  
Private collection



39 **KURT SCHWITTERS**  
**Anna Reihe 188, 1920**

Collage, tram tickets on paper; 14.2 x 11.2 cm  
 Private collection

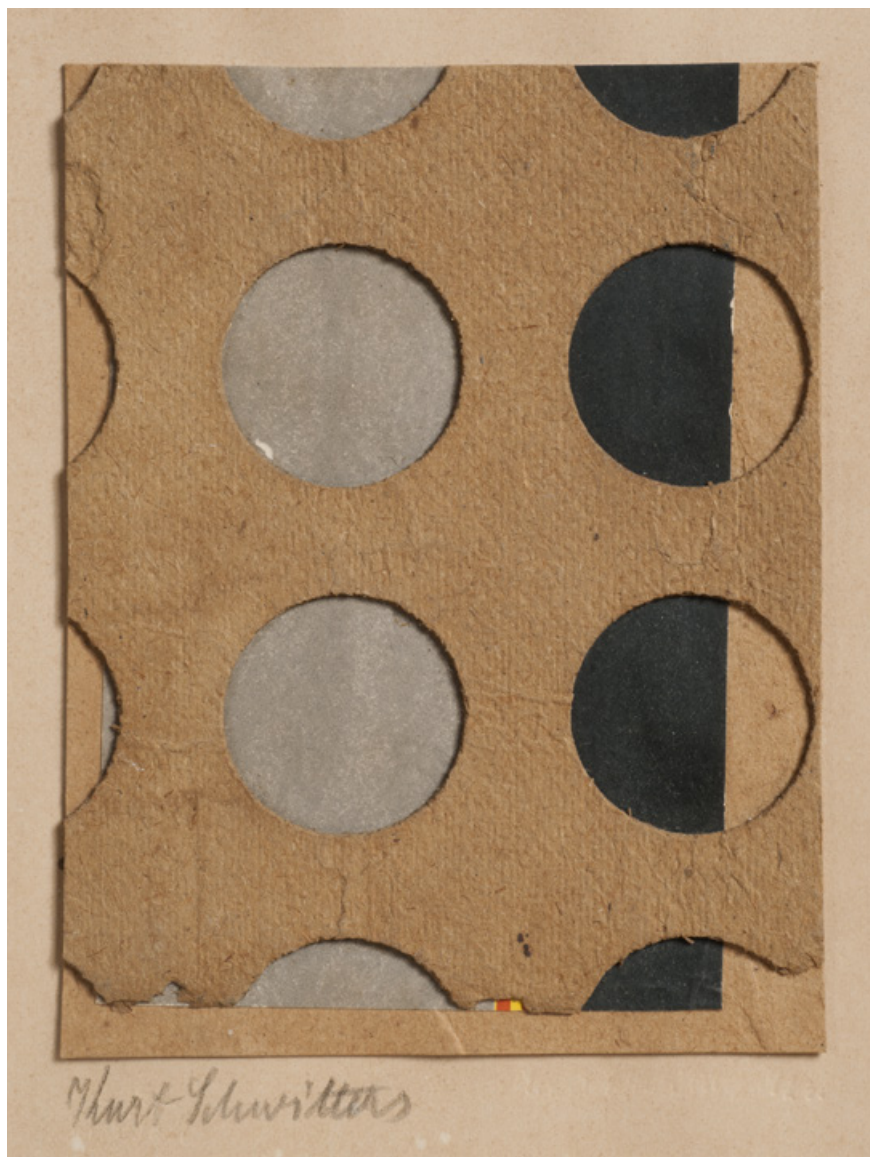




40 **KURT SCHWITTERS**  
 Untitled (I.K. Bonset), 1925

Collage, tram tickets on paper; 17.5 x 14.5 cm  
 Private collection





<sup>41</sup> **KURT SCHWITTERS**  
Untitled, c. 1927

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Collage, perforated cardboard on paper; 13.5 x 10.3 cm  
Private collection



42 **KURT SCHWITTERS**  
Untitled, 1931

---

Collage on paper; 18.5 x 14 cm  
Private collection



43 **THIJS RINSEMA**  
Horsemen, 1927

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Gouache on paper; 46 x 51 cm  
Museum Dr8888, Drachten. Collection Ottema-Kingma





44 **THIJS RINSEMA, KURT SCHWITTERS**  
**Box Collage, n.d.**

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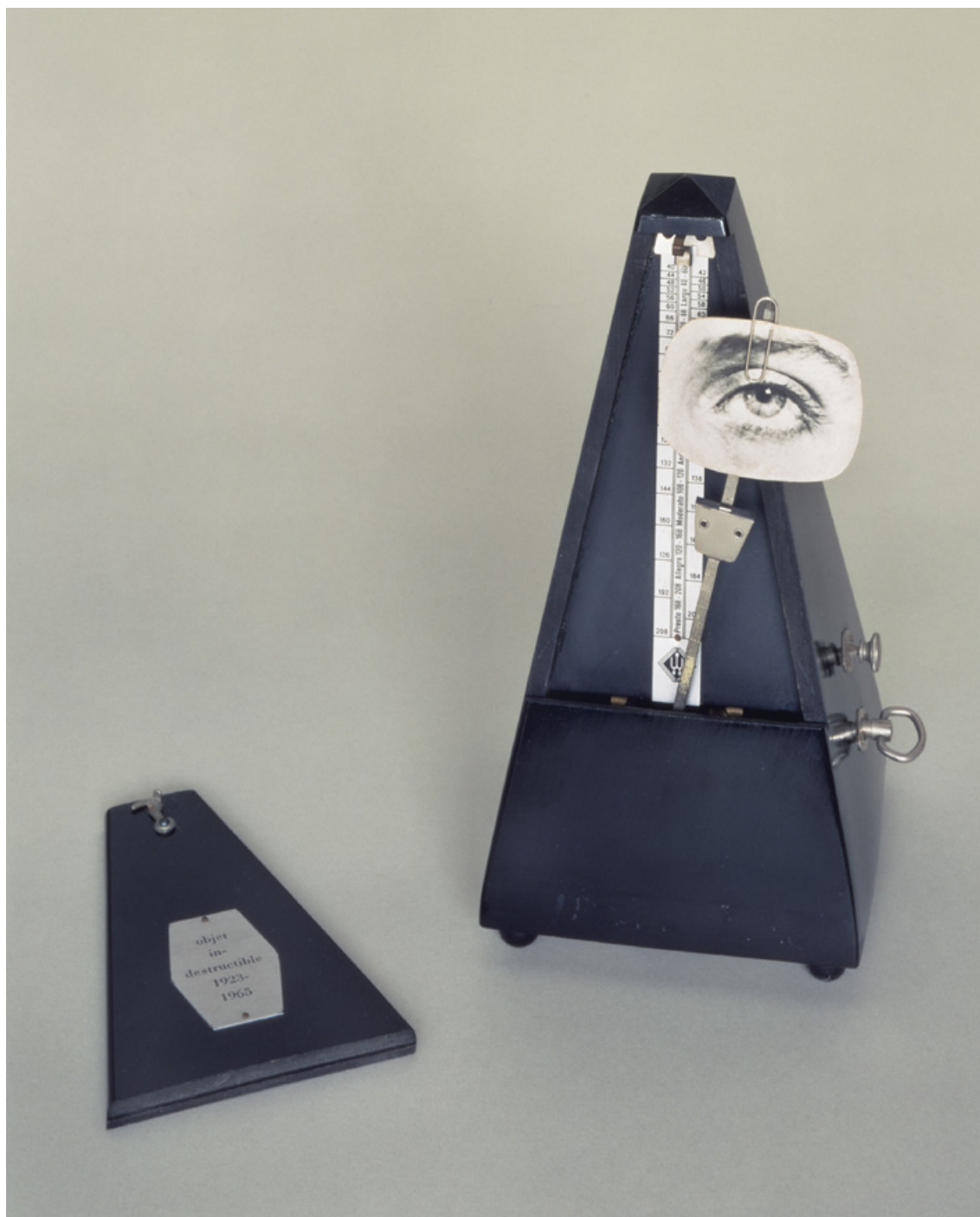
Wood, veneer; 12 x 15 x 15 cm  
Private collection





45 **BERNHARD BRACH-ZINEK**  
Political Dadaism, 1925

Collage; 27.3 x 23 cm (with frame)  
Private collection

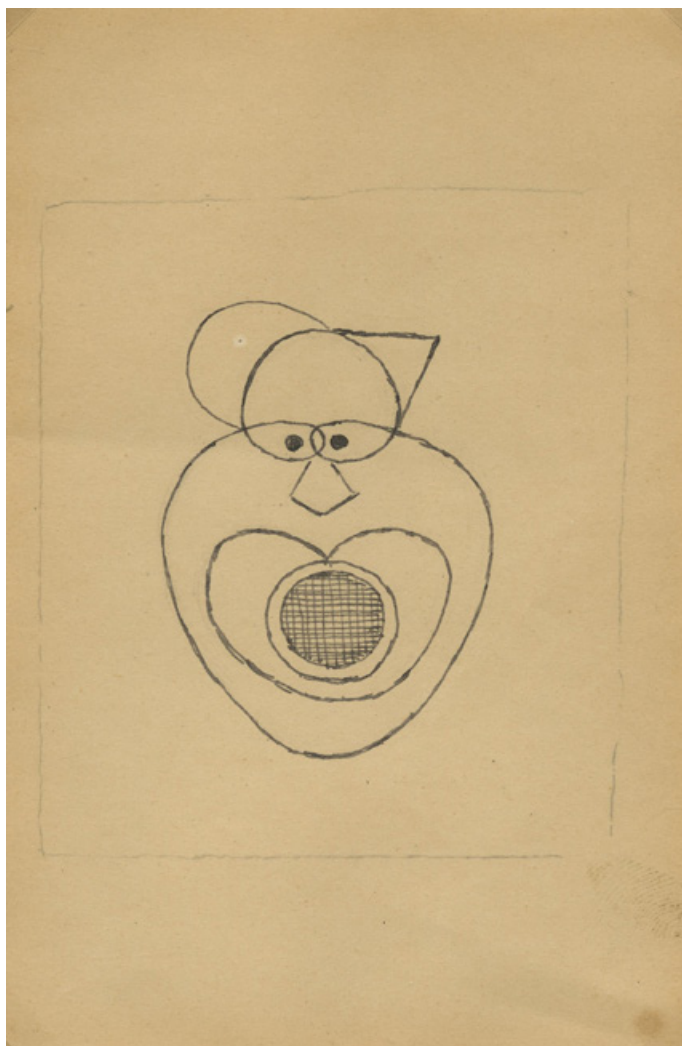


46 **MAN RAY**

Perpetual Motion, 1923-71

Metronome; 22.5 x 11 x 11 cm

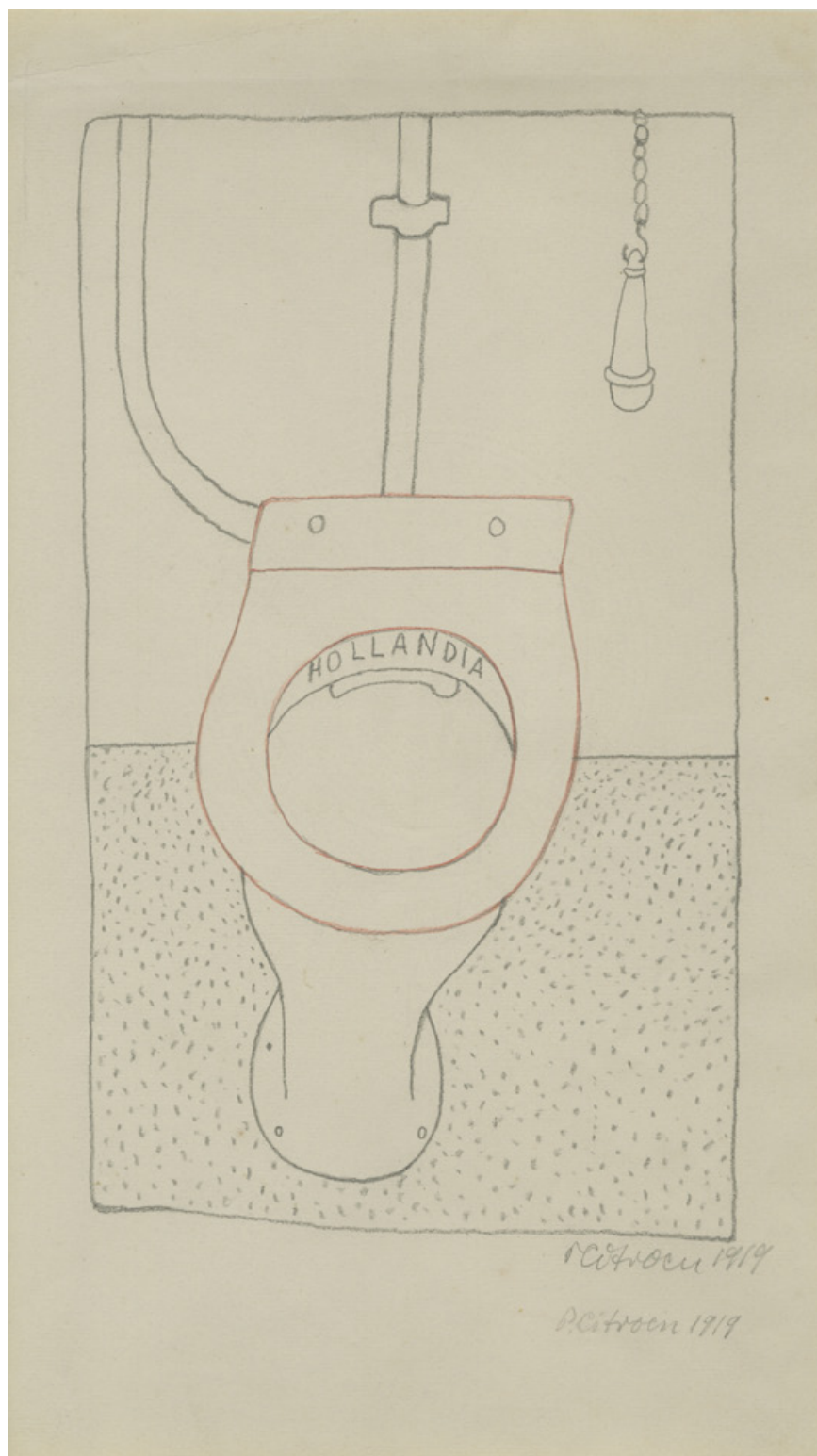
Private collection, courtesy Galerie 1900-2000, Paris



47 **SERGE CHARCHOUNE**  
Dada Drawing, 1921-2

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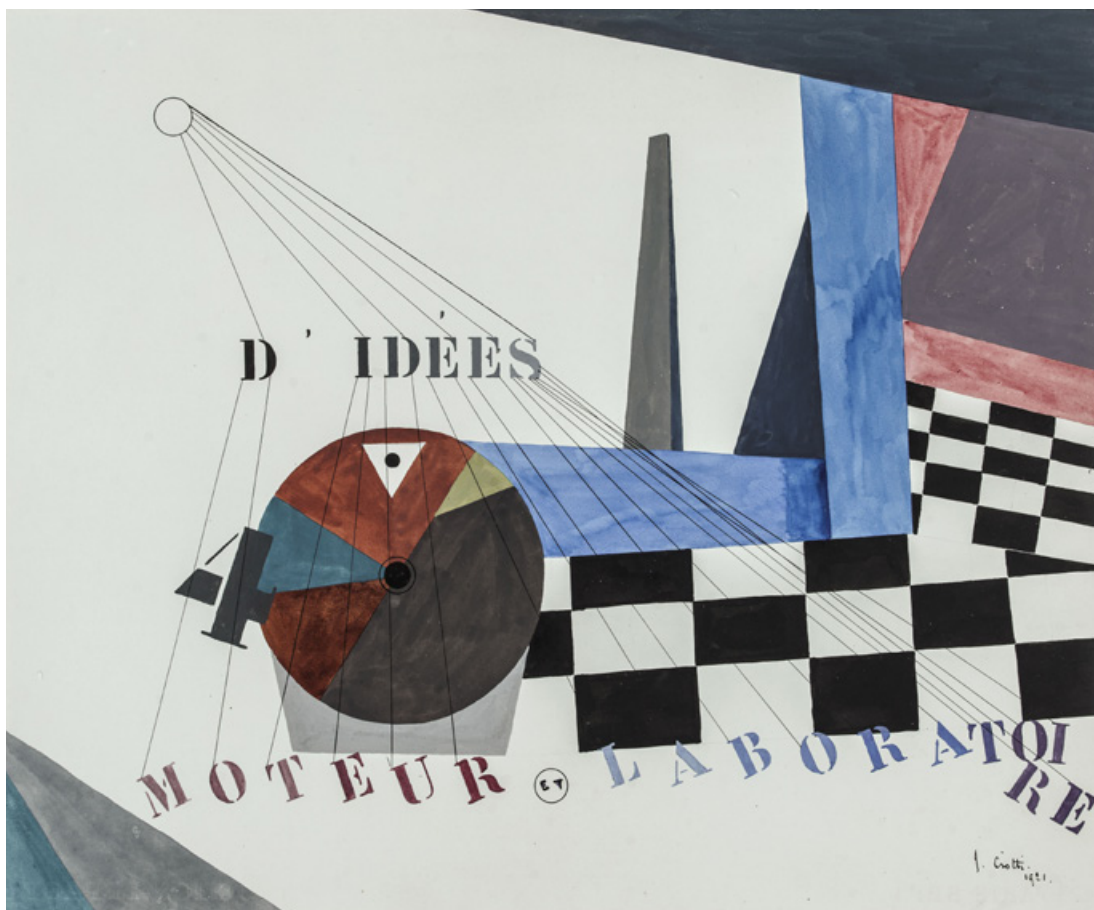
Ink and pencil on paper; 12 x 8 cm  
David and Marcel Fleiss Collection, Galerie 1900-2000, Paris



48 **PAUL CITROEN**  
Hollandia, 1919

Pencil and colour pencils on paper; 34 x 21 cm  
David and Marcel Fleiss Collection, Galerie 1900-2000, Paris





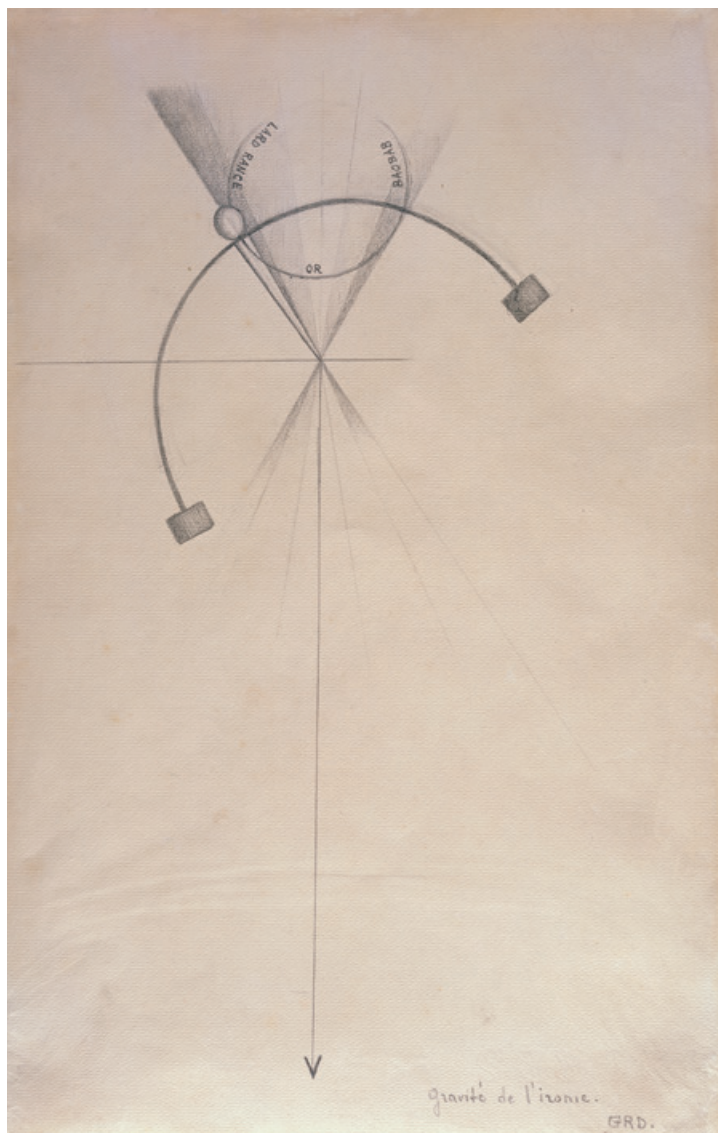
49 **JEAN CROTTI**  
Laboratory of Ideas, 1921

Watercolour on paper; 44 x 54 cm  
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Inv. AMD 311



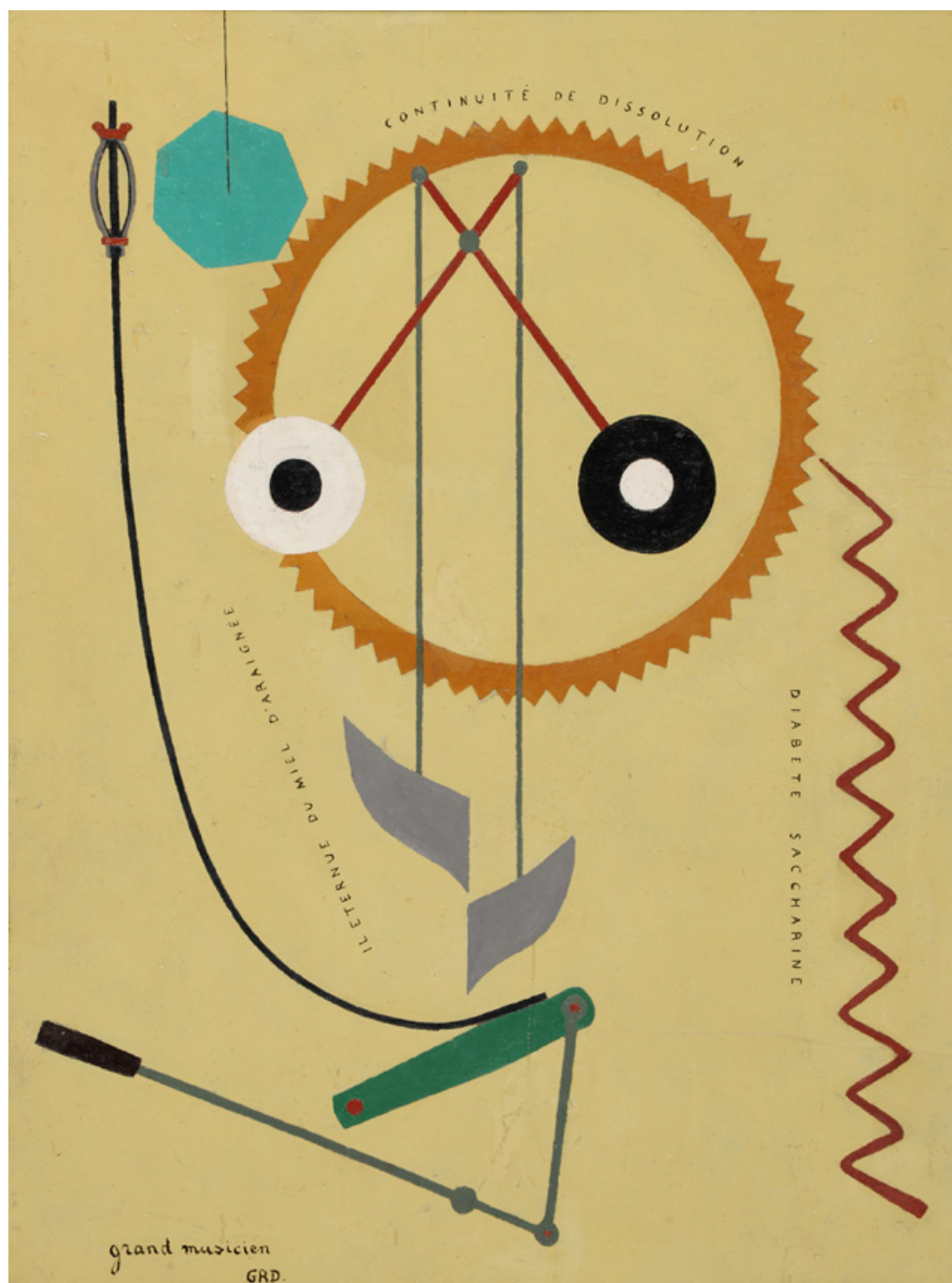
50 **JEAN CROTTI**  
**The Bride that Decamped, 1921**

Oil on canvas; 81 x 65 cm  
 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Inv. AMVP1559



<sup>51</sup> **GEORGES RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES**  
**The Gravity of Irony, 1919–20**

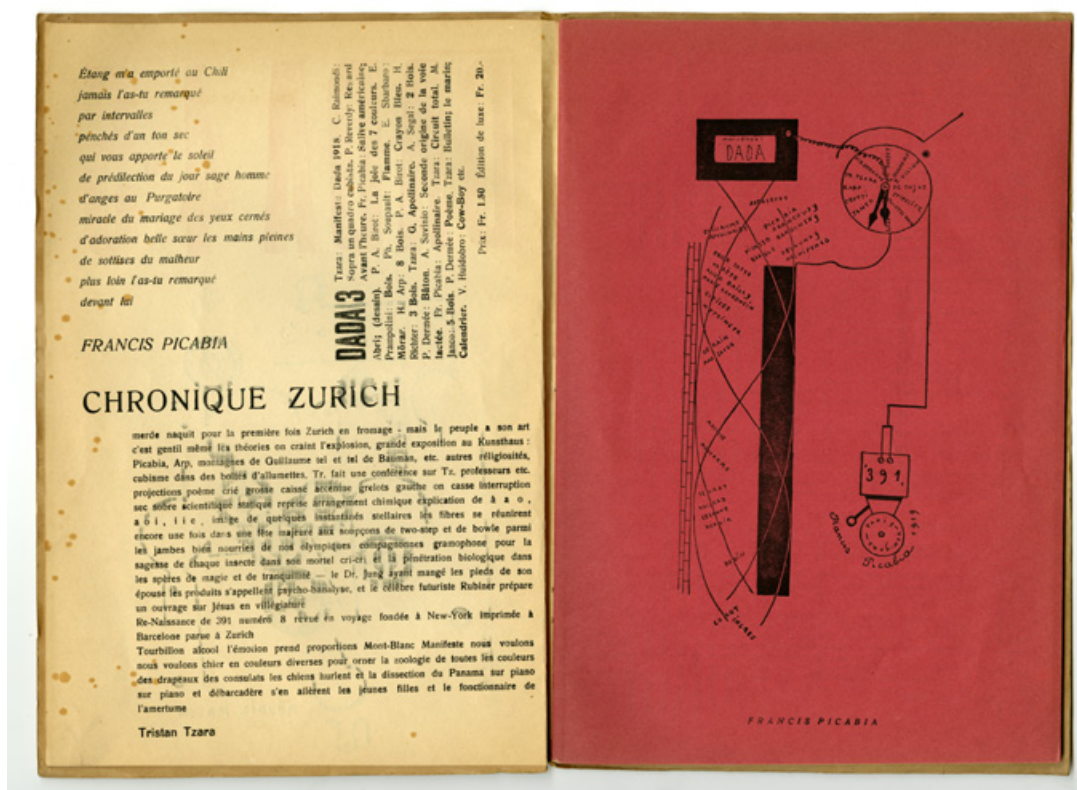
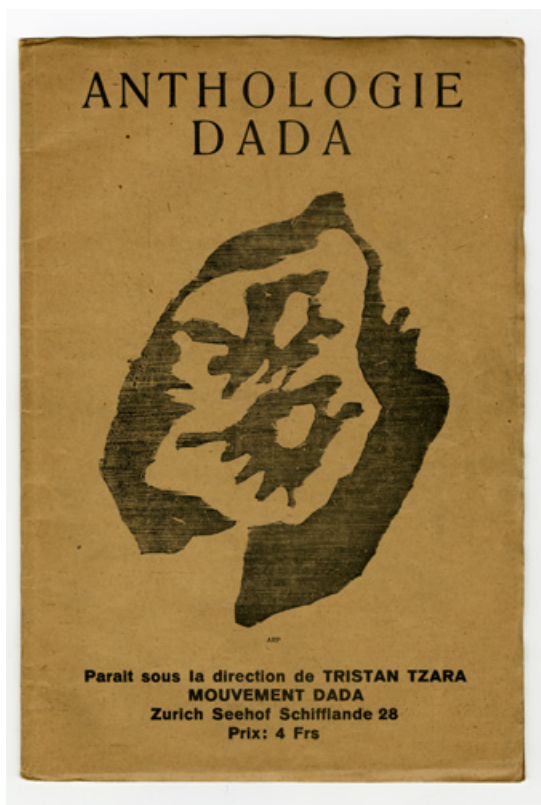
Graphite on paper; 47 x 30 cm  
 Private collection



52 **GEORGES RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES**  
Great Musician, 1920

Oil on cardboard; 75.6 x 57 cm  
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims





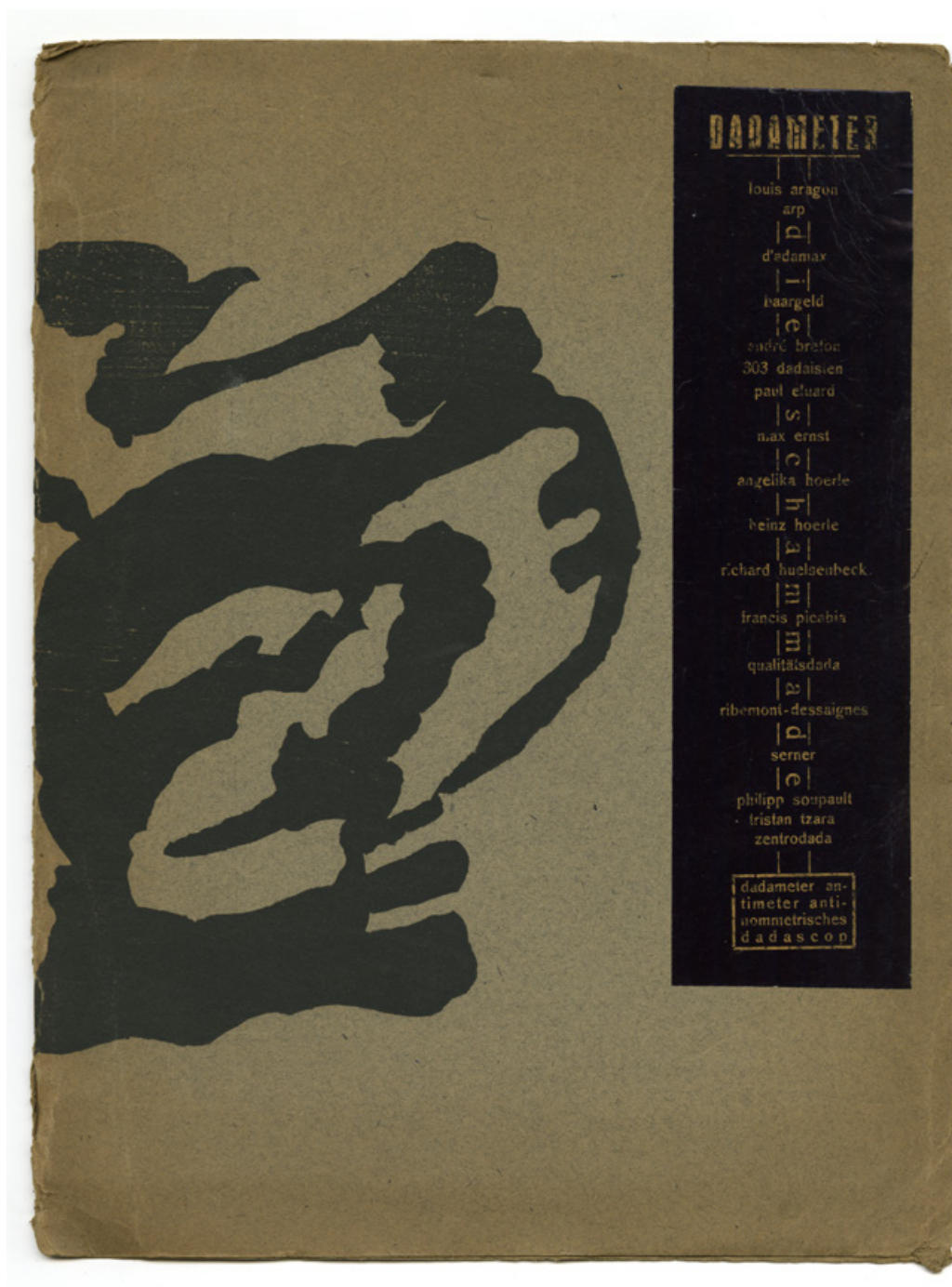
53 HANS ARP, FRANCIS PICABIA  
Magazine *Anthologie Dada* no. 4-5, edited by Tristan Tzara, 1919



54 **FRANCIS PICABIA**  
Surrealism Crucified, c. 1924–5

Pencil and watercolour on paper; 31.8 x 25.2 cm  
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Inv. AMD 942





55 **HANS ARP**

Cover of the magazine *Dadameter*, edited by Max Ernst, 1920

Print; 33 x 25 cm  
Private collection



56 **HANS ARP**  
Head, 1926

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Watercolour on paper; 22.5 x 19.5 cm  
Private collection





Fig.1 Lucia Moholy, Theo and Nelly van Doesburg in Weimar, 1921. RKD

# Behind the terrace

I am standing on the roof of my hotel and in the distance I see Goethe's house. Weimar, my first visit, the city brings to mind Hansel and Gretel as much as Theo and Nelly van Doesburg. I have travelled here for their work, looked up a few poems that were written by or for them here.

They arrived in the spring of 1921, Theo full of sounds without meaning, Nelly full of the new music, which she soon played here at soirées: Stravinsky, Rieti, Satie.

Van Doesburg wrote this poem, under the pseudonym I.K. Bonset, in the house rented from Count Keyserling, Am Horn 53, on a hill behind a park.

U'	J—	m'	n'
U	J—	m'	n'
V—	F—	K'	Q'
F'	V—	Q'	K'
X'	Q'	V'	W'
X'	Q'	W	V
U'	J—	m—	n—
g'			
A—	O—	P'	B'
A—	O—	P'	B'
D—	T—	O'	E—
d	t	o	e
O' E'			
B' D'			
Z'	C	S	B P D
j			

A year later Tristan Tzara attended a Dadaist conference in Weimar with an equally free poem for Nelly, whose full name was Petronella van Moorsel. Raised in a deeply Catholic environment, this pianist from The Hague had fled her parental home and landed in Weimar after a long journey through Europe with Van Doesburg, sixteen years her senior.

*An Pétro*  
*madame*

*madame*  
*madme*  
*madamame*  
*madamame*  
*e*  
*mudame*  
*madame*  
*madame*  
*madame*  
*madame*  
*madame*

Tzara's poem later appeared in *Merz* 7 (1924), Kurt Schwitters's magazine. At the conference, Pétro/Nelly was proclaimed as Europe's indispensable Dadaist musical instrument.

There she stands in a small group of Dadaists before a building in Weimar. What nonsense they talked to one another: Kurt Schwitters (far left), behind Hans Arp, Hans Richter (fifth from left), Van Doesburg (fourth from right), next to Nelly, wearing a hat. Tzara is not even in the photo, he had entered Weimar, heading for Goethe.

This is where Van Doesburg put together the Dada magazine *Mécabo* and worked on his colour schemes for the middle-class houses and schools of architect C.R. de Boer in Drachten.

A full-time job. Façades, side walls, halls, stairs, walls, roofs, kitchens, gardens and then a mower, digger and sower in glass and lead for the agricultural college. He made almost no paintings in Weimar. This is where the colour emerged for an entire street. He had a large studio in Oberweimar.

In a city that is new to you, you get distracted by all kinds of things, you experience things in which Theo and Nelly do not make an appearance.

Or do they?

After standing for half an hour on the roof of the hotel, I see, down below, a chess set in a shop on the corner. I immediately recognise it from pictures, but I have never seen it in the flesh.

That it exists. The pieces resemble the battlements of a castle. There is something monolithic about them, they lack the elegance of a Staunton chess set.

Still it is beautiful. How much does it cost? Almost 500 euro, it is half hidden on a tiny little label. Wait, I can also photograph the set. It then becomes flat, but I have in a sense made it my own. The device refuses, is completely jammed.

Return to the roof of my hotel to have a better view of it there with the floods of light? I'm already there, looking left, stretching. I can't see Schiller's house from the roof, Goethe's however, still. Turn, keep turning, the camera is just as stuck here, even more so.

Goethe to the left and wham, the word 'FOTO' looms up out of nothing, above a shop, quite large, so it should be on one of the photos I've taken from the roof.

I can do something with that, quickly to the shop. Before I cross over, to the corner for a moment. Buy it anyway? The chess set looks tempting, I already know where I want to put it at home.

It is a design by Josef Hartwig, while he was studying at the Bauhaus in Weimar, in the years from 1923 to 1924. It says so on it. A little cross on the head of the bishop, allowed on any diagonal, the direction is visible on every piece.

The photographer Louis Held has been established in Marienstrasse since 1862, a shop with brown wainscoting and an air of not quite vanquished poverty.

On the wall, close to one another, photos of stars in each sphere, Marlene Dietrich, George Grosz, Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus, this is where, I step aside, Franz Liszt also enters, to pose for a spot.

Only yesterday I walked through his house at the Hofgärtnerei, a somewhat hidden entrance, with many trees. Liszt was no philanthropist. They say that it is still arranged exactly as in the years 1869 to 1886, when he lived there.

The absent composer is honoured in the dimly lit interior. It is somehow suffocating. His simple bed stands in a corner, he can only get out on one side, I sit on it for a moment. It doesn't bounce.

Then it occurs to me that Liszt worked here on his *Via Crucis*, the Stations of the Cross. I hear echoes of it on the stairs, Reinbert de Leeuw on the disappearance of Henk Bernlef, October 2012. The resurrection of a melody, interspersed with silences, collapses, starts up again, falls down.

The salesman at Held's unblocked the camera with a couple of twists. Did Theo and Nelly also have themselves photographed here? They roared into Weimar in March 1921, just too early to be able to play chess with Josef Hartwig and too late to hear at Liszt's house how art in the twentieth century would become blown up.

Together with Nelly van Moorsel, Theo had left the Netherlands, going via Paris, they spoke to Duchamp, Tzara, Brancusi, Nelly told so me so herself.

Through to Menton, the Belgian sculptor Georges Vantongerloo lived here, and then on to Milan where

Van Doesburg wanted to present his twenty-one-year-old beloved to the Futurist Marinetti, but he was in Sicily.

I walk to the square diagonally in front of the Goethehaus and sit at a terrace. Behind me, a woman, fat covering the entire body, her beauty seeks a way out.

A couple of tables away a man is playing a game of chess from the newspaper, no Hartwig, the most ordinary pieces are enough. What kind of position, should I check my step later or even better buy a paper myself?

From Italy via Austria to Munich, where Nelly and Theo enjoyed Cranach the Elder in the Alte Pinakothek. A tip from Duchamp in Paris? Ten years earlier Marcel also visited the Pinakothek and that is how Duchamp's bride got, in his rented room around the corner, on Barerstrasse, the ochre tint of Cranach's nudes.

What did Theo and Nelly do in those first weeks in Weimar? Did they also let themselves be distracted by all kinds of things?

The Cranach altarpiece from 1555 is located in the Herderkirche, I walk there in their steps. The triptych in the middle of the little Evangelical-Lutheran church appears a bit less serious than most crucifixions.

Lucas Cranach the Elder is in it himself, between John the Baptist and Martin Luther. The painter wears a brown fur coat and yellow boots. The blood from Christ's breast reaches Cranach's greying hair in a long jet, as though he has been selected to make this work, or is Lucas mocking this scene with this worldly turn?

In the distance Adam tries with raised arms to escape the fire. Theo nudges Nelly, something in Adam's showy step reveals that the first being also already knows: it's just a game, I can go home soon, when my role is over.

The Van Doesburgs' various houses were not far from one another, Weimar is not so big. In the Am Horn house, Paul Klee also rented rooms when he was

teaching at Bauhaus. The white house from 1923 of Georg Muche was close by.

Spacious houses in the better neighbourhoods. They only stayed a short while at 25 Lisztstrasse, on the other side of town, and yet the apartment was selected with care, something between London's Kensington and Amsterdam-South. Here the founder of anthropology Rudolf Steiner potted around, his name is up on a little plaque.

The routes of the Van Doesburgs through Weimar have remained unchanged. From the Am Horn house I walk through the park in twenty-five minutes to Belvederer Allee 48. They stayed here the longest.

The number is fixed in wrought iron onto the façade. If it wasn't so high up, you could easily stick an arm behind it.

There is something aloof about the three main Van Doesburg houses, they turn away from too much humanity. *Poètes à l'écart – Anthologie der Abseitigen* is the title of the collection in which Carola Giedion-Welcker in 1946 brought together a number of poets, including Jarry, Ball, Arp and also Theo van Doesburg.

The anthologist mainly chose poets from the visual arts. Work in the margins, a small edition, sometimes in no more than ten copies. Such an edition is closer to an etching or a lithograph than to a book.

From the house at number 48 I walk to the Bauhaus, a little further on. It consists of a few buildings on the same avenue as number 48, I am especially curious about the walls painted by Oskar Schlemmer on a spiral staircase.

No more distinction between a chess set, a building and a painting. For Van Doesburg, that was the future. It resulted in an attack by De Stijl on the soft powers in the Bauhaus. Lecturer Johannes Itten was sometimes dressed in a monk's cowl.

Van Doesburg visited once in a while, he preferred to receive students at his studio, in Oberweimar. 'I have frightful numbers of visitors here', he wrote on 23 June



1921 to Evert Rinsema, 'a whole mob of young people, who are leaning towards the new.'

Without knowing where the Bauhaus is exactly, I try to predict the location as I walk. I saw on the map that it lies diagonally across from Franz Liszt. That house is not easy to distinguish from the greenery either.

Then I hear the tinkling of silver spoons against china, a little higher up, between the leaves, here and there I see a seated back. That way then?

My legs are half-seduced that way, I try not to give in. What does this café have to do with the Bauhaus? It only distracts me from something new that I hope to discover about Van Doesburg in Weimar. Yet on the other hand you think: it's very close by.

I walk up the stairs. 'The reader himself is always, more or less, the subject of the verse', perhaps that helps. It is a sentence by Van Doesburg, which Jan Hanlo used as a motto in his collection *Niet ongelijk* (Not Dissimilar) (1957).

A terrace amid greenery, I should keep on walking. Eight people drink coffee, spread between fifteen small tables.

A bit further on there are silver jugs with little white cups. More people are bound to come at lunchtime, it is still early.

Another coffee, I want to pay. 'No, you don't need to pay, do you?' says the young waiter and he walks away with a steady step.

When is a scene over, is there possibly something else coming? Drinking coffee, it could not be simpler, and yet it is as though I am missing something to be able to appreciate the episode.

It feels like the run-up to an event, such as the high or long jump, without anything following. No effort. No need to participate in anything.

One of the few paintings that Van Doesburg made in Weimar, *Composition XXII*, has a large yellow plane, I remember. It partly covers the other, smaller areas of

red, black, blue, grey, white—as though someone is standing halfway or diagonally in front of something that you cannot entirely see.

That is also what makes the 1922 canvas so lively. The whole is not a conscious end point, rather an intermediate arrangement of various forms, which never arrive at a fixed place.

Van Doesburg painted the canvas in Weimar for a friend, the shoemaker-painter Thijs Rinsema, from Drachten. I stand up to carry on searching, the many sides of being somewhere. Quickly back to the Bauhaus, the road directly in front of me knows approximately where I need to go.

Is the run-up to an occurrence sometimes part of temporary knowledge, of everything you only need to remember for a short while: the departure time of a train, a healed graze or the price of a shirt? Or are the run-ups to what does not take place actually in the majority, if you compare them with the temporary facts?

I walk down the stairs and have not paid, I turn around once more, the waiter does not come after me.

The fat woman on the terrace in Weimar, not spoken to, the music of Liszt on his own grand piano, not heard, Mathilde von Freytag-Loringhoven (1860–1941), not looked up.

Somewhere round here is supposed to be a Schirm-museum, a museum for umbrellas, the receptionist at my hotel is unaware of it and I can't even find the poem that Hans Arp wrote for Theo van Doesburg.

A web of run-ups and temporary knowledge, that is existence. With Van Doesburg it becomes elementary. It is never over, what is elementary can, at most, be the beginning of what partly escapes you.

You have to manage with that, you can't expand it. Van Doesburg allows himself the luxury of showing it in this incomplete state, always the beginning of whatever it may be.

A pleasant face you only glimpse in the tram. Moments later, through an open window, the bittersweet aroma of a dish that you unfortunately will not taste.

I frame Weimar, as Van Doesburg does in *Composition XXII*, something he sees, in his studio or outside, things that are slightly in each other's way. He expands that on a canvas into something that can happen everywhere, complete with the limitations.

Back to the terrace. What makes Hartwig's chess set so attractive is that it departs from the norm. You would not play a game with it so soon, I think. You cannot fight with something too beautiful.

A run-up, a temporary fact, it must have been the late breakfast, or perhaps the moment spent drinking coffee just before lunch, that held me back from expanding into something larger.

Among the greenery on the wall there is a glass door. I only see it now. The waiter greets me, recognises me, finds that I not only belong on the terrace, but also here in the dining room. Yes, I really belong there. He thinks that is where I just came from.

Then I go inside. It is a hotel, and not such a small one. People are sitting down to breakfast, having lunch, what time is it? The Leonardo Hotel, that's its name, the broad staircase rises elegantly in the spacious hallway, 'For Theo van Doesburg' by Hans Arp, I found it after all:

head down  
legs in the air  
he plunges into the emptiness  
from which he came

he no longer takes pride in his body  
he no longer bites eagerly into a bite  
he no longer returns a greeting  
he no longer even pays attention  
when one kneels before him

head down  
legs in the air  
he plunges into the emptiness  
from which he came

like a hairy dish  
like a nursing chair with four legs  
like a deaf echo-branch  
half full half empty

head down  
legs in the air  
he plunges into the emptiness  
from which he came

hans arp (meudon, march 1931)







5-6

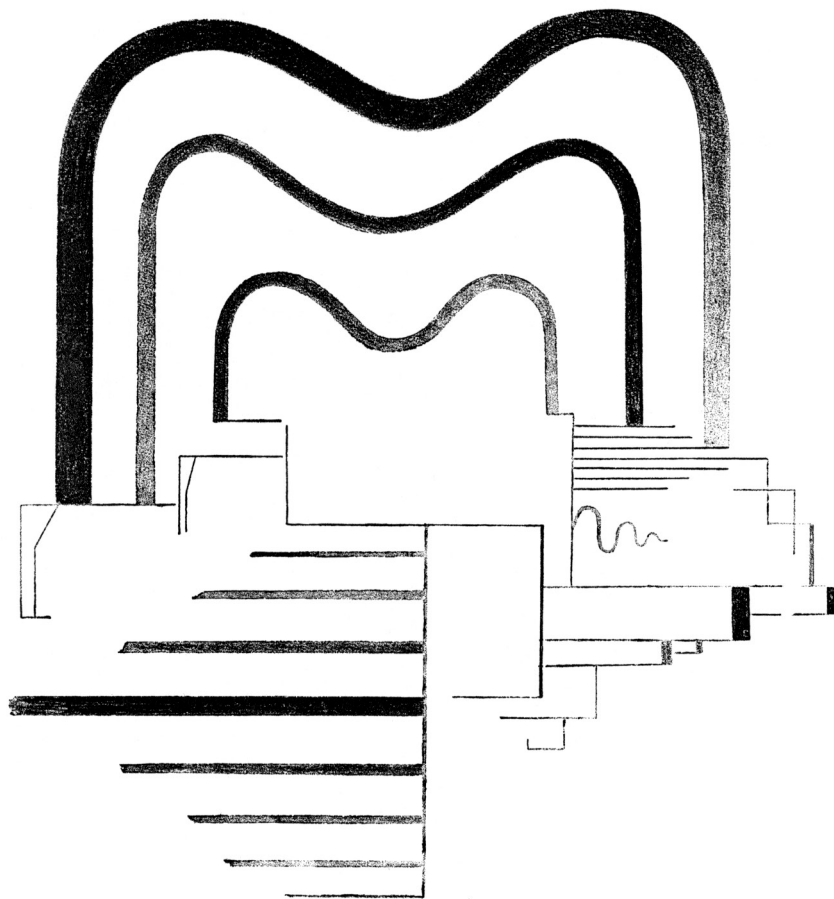






57 **VICTOR SERVRAECKX**  
Opus 11 (Ciné), 1920

Gouache on paper; 28.5 x 28.5 cm  
Private collection, Ghent

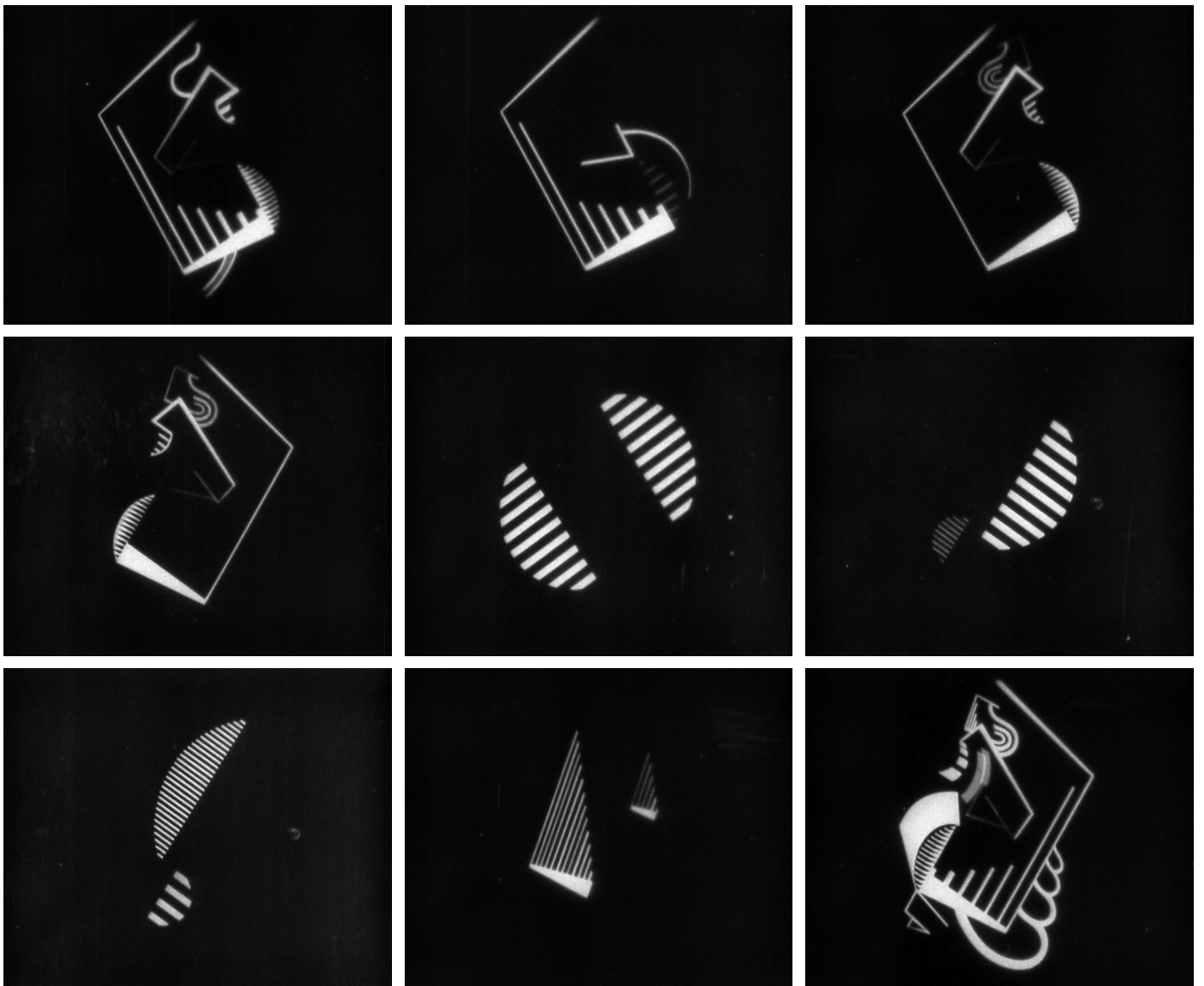


58 **VICTOR EGGELING**

Detail of the Horizontal-Vertical Orchestra,  
from the magazine *De Stijl* 7, 1921

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Print; 21 x 26 cm  
Private collection

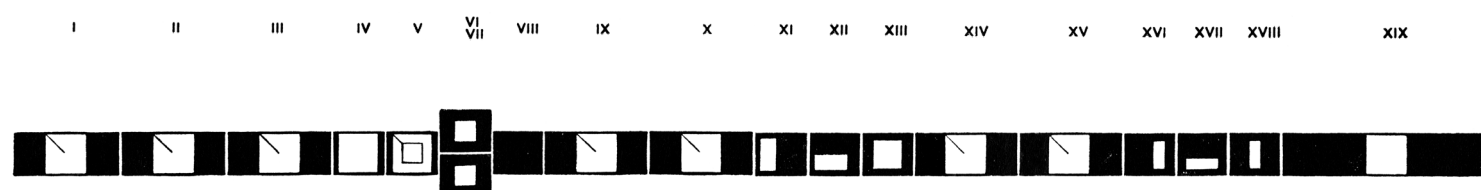


59 **VICTOR EGGELING**  
**Diagonal Symphony, 1924 (film stills)**

7 min., no sound, 35 mm  
 Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Inv. MOMFi 81



# FILMPARTITUR KOMP. II/22



sec  
0 1 1/2 3 →

## 60 WERNER GRAEFF

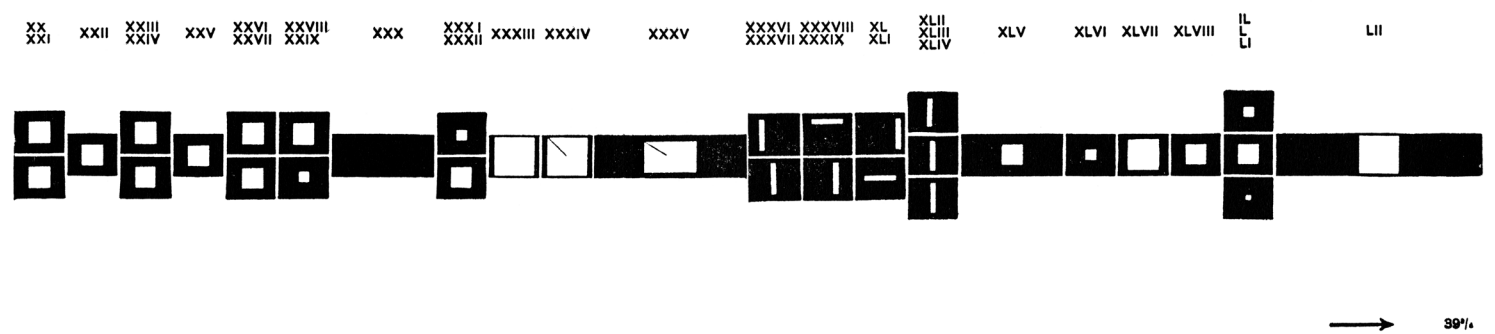
Film Score, Composition II/22, 1922-77

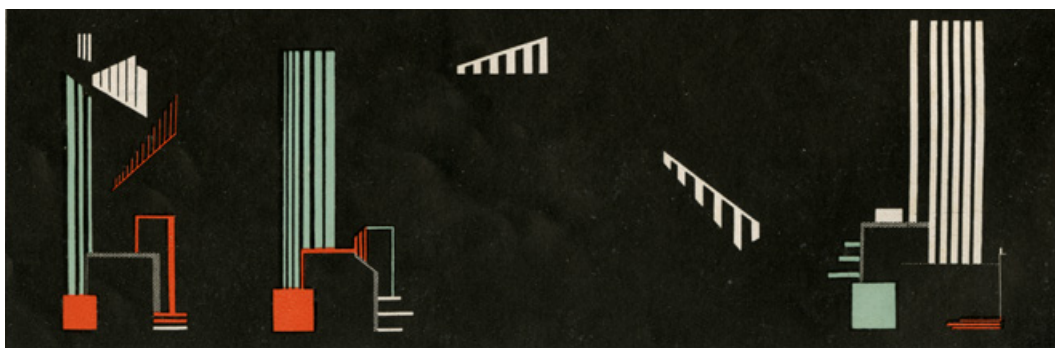
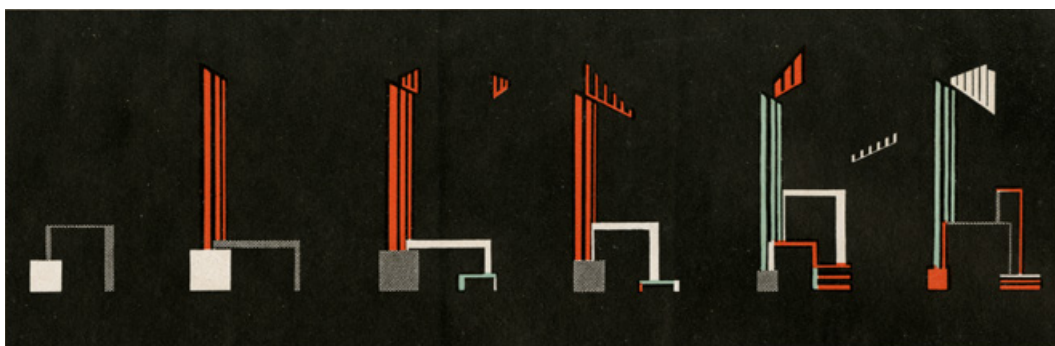
2 min. 09 sec., no sound, 16 mm

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle, Paris.

Inv. AM1978-F1029

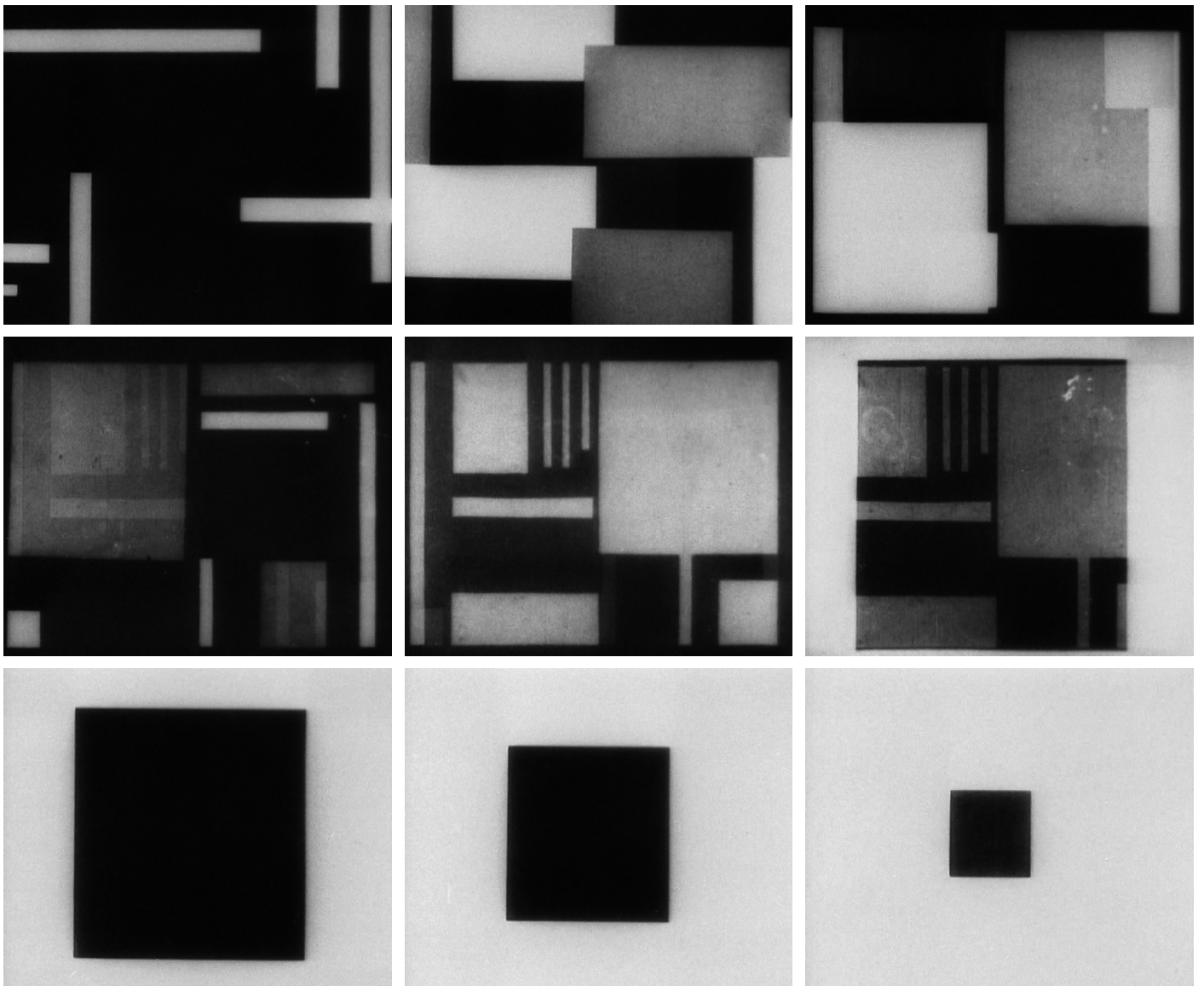
WERNER GRÄFF





<sup>61</sup> **HANS RICHTER**  
Fugue from an Absolute Film, 1926

Print; 25 x 34 cm (open)  
From the magazine G, no. 5-6 (on cinema), 1926



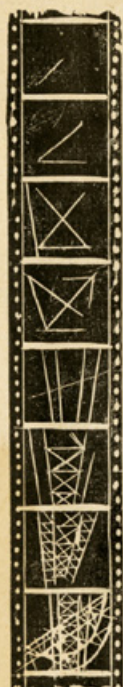
62 **HANS RICHTER**  
Rhythms 21, 1921-4 (film stills)

3 min. 30 sec., no sound, 35 mm  
XXXX

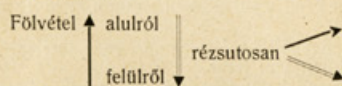


# MOHOLY-NAGY: FILMVÁZ • A NAGYVÁROS dinamikája

Minden jog, különösen a fordítás és filmben való megvalósítás joga, fentartva  
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Vasdaru építése  
(A trükkasztal-fölvétel — rajz — lassan természetfölvételbe olvad át)  
Házépítésnél mozgó emelő



Tégla-fölvonó.  
Körben-mozgó darú



Ezt a mozgást tovább folytatja egy automobil, amelyik balra rohan. A kép közepén folyton egy és ugyanazt a házat látni; (t. i. a házat mindig vissza kell a középbe fotografálni). Megjelenik egy másik automobil, amelyik az elsővel egyidejűleg, csak ellenkező irányban, száguld.  
Az utca egyik házsora ugyanebben az irányban rohan úgy, hogy a kép közepén levő ház átlátszik rajta. A házsor elfut: és visszajön

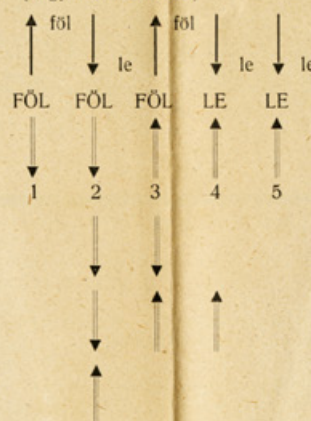
TEMPO  
TEMPO

Szemközti házsorok egymáson átlátszóan ellentétes irányban rohannak és az autók is mindig gyorsabban, hogy rövidesen káprázik a szem belé.

Tigris TIGRIS jár ketrecében  
dühösen föl s alá  
Magasan — fönt — tisztán szemaforok



automatikusan  
a-u-t-o-m-a-t-i-k-u-s-a-n  
mozognak (nagy részletfölvétel)



Teherpályaudvar  
Váltoállomás  
Raktárépületek és pincék

SÖTET SÖTÉT  
SÖTÉTSEG

Vasut:  
Országút (járművekkel). Hid. Viadukt. A mélyben: uszó hajók. Fölötte lebegő vasut (Elberfeld)

Vonatfölvétel magas töltésről: rézsutosan  
Bakter haptákban szalutál  
Szemei megüvegesednek (Nagy RÉSZLET-fölvétel)  
A vonat egy hidról: fölülről

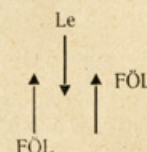
Alulról: egy a sinek közötti árokból a vonat hasa, ahogy elvágtat  
Kerék forog — elmosódott vibrálásig



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Áruházban üveg-fölvonók négergyerekkel  
Ferdén  
Eltorzított perspektiva



Kilátás. CSÖDÜLET

A bejáratnál kikötött kutyák  
Az üveg-fölvonók mellett üveges telefonfülke telefonálással  
Földszintfölvétel az üveglapokon át  
A telefonálónak foszfóreszkáló anyaggal bedörzsölt (hogy ne keletkezzék sziluett) ARCA közvetlenül a fölvévegép mellett lassan elfordul jobbra  
Feje fölött spirálisan húzódik el egy messziről röpülő aeroplán



Röpülőfölvétel csekély magasságból: tér, ahová sok utca torkollik



Járművek tömege: villanyos, autó, teherkocsi, konflis, bicikli, autóbusz, ciklonett hajt gyors tempóban kifelé egyszerre visszafordul mind a közepén összefutnak



Rézsút  
Rézsút  
RÉZSÚT



a tér közepe megnyílik, minden belesüllyed

(A felvevőgépet fölbillentik, hogy a nézőben a zuhanás érzése támadjon)

TEMP

Földalatti  
Kábelek  
Gáztartály  
Csatornák (mélyen a város  
alatt kiépített kloakák)

Fény tükrözik a vizeken

Iv lámpa



Szikra SPRICCEL  
Autót út éjjel, csillogó aszfalt

Földről és elszuhanó <sup>részút</sup> autók  
5 MÁSODPERCIG csak FEKETE vászon  
Fényreklám eltűnő és megjelenő fényírással:

szöveg szöveg

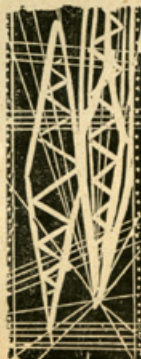
Tűzijáték az Angolparkban



Utazás a  
Hullámvasuton  
Száguld  
ÓRIÁSKERÉK  
A csudaház  
Torztükrök  
MÁS VICCEK  
Kiállítás- vagy pályaudvar-csarnok felvétel:  
A felvevőgépet vízszintes körben,  
utána függőleges körben forgatják  
Feszülő  
Telefónhuzalok és sürgönydrótok a házak között

Porcellánszigetelő-tornyok

Antennák a háztetőn



Gyár:



Kerekek forognak

Artista forog, bukfacezik

Rudugrás. Lezuhan. 10X egymásután.

Varieté. Örült tevékenység  
Labdarugóperkőzés. Gorombán. Erős tempó  
Nőbirkózás. Giccs!  
Jazzbandhangszerek (Részletfelvétel)



A PUBLIKUM ELLEN

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Egy ember  
villámgyorsan  
elrántja tőle a  
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(csak a víz tükre nagy részletfelvételen)  
Mozgásban  
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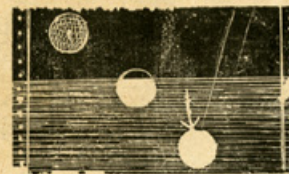
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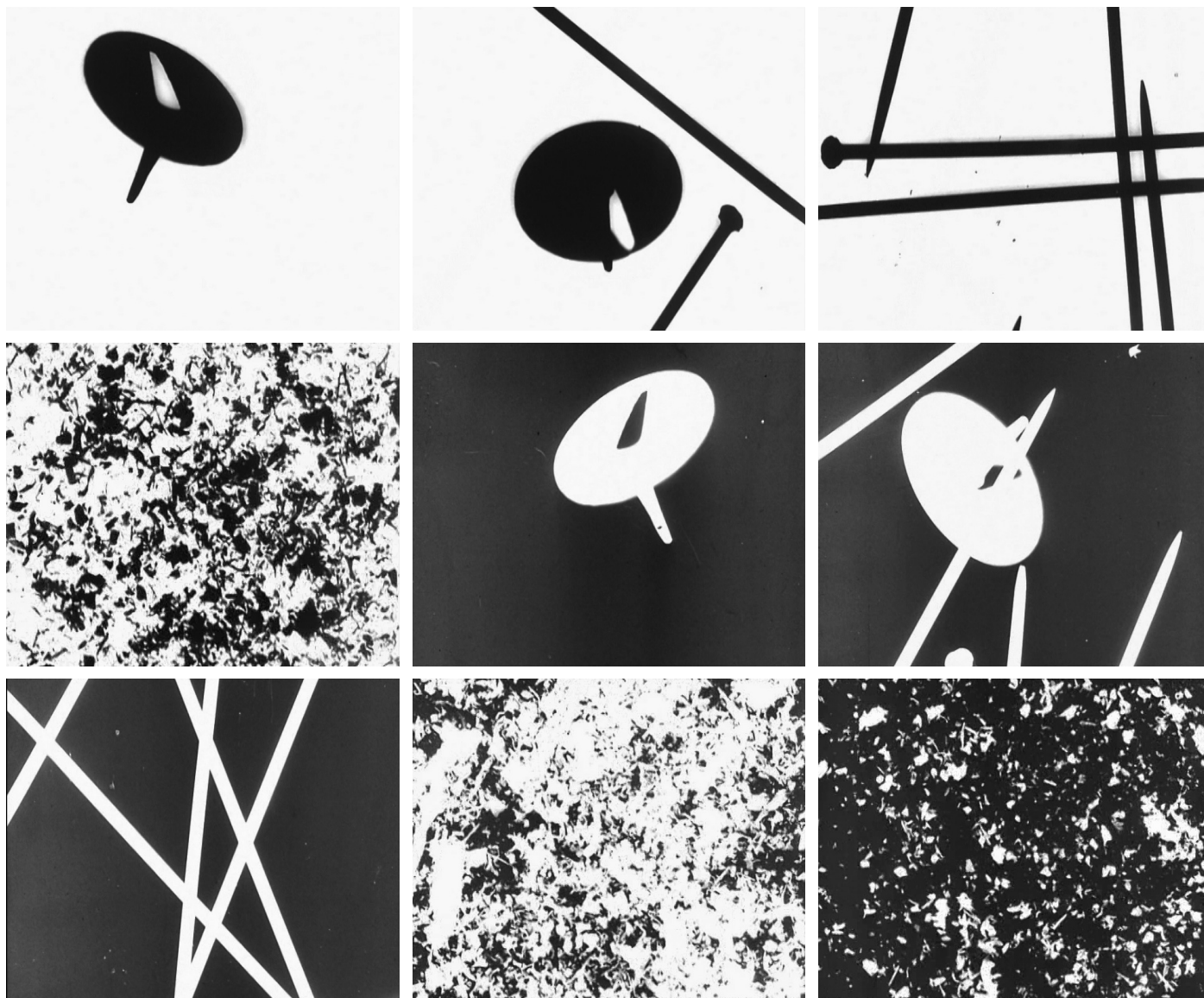
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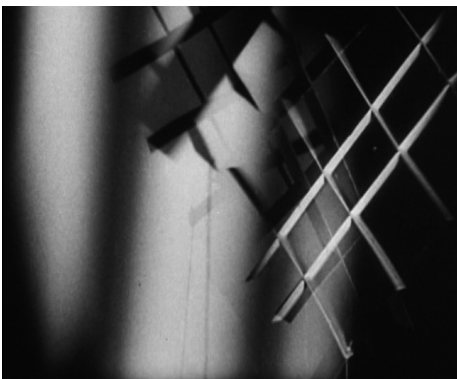
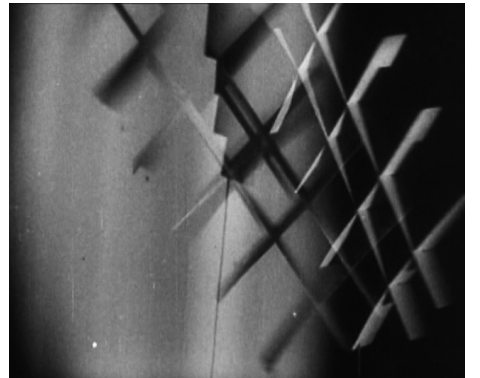
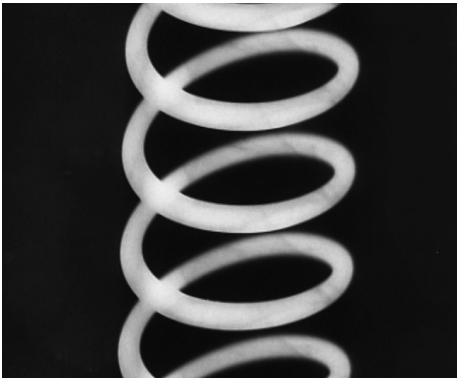
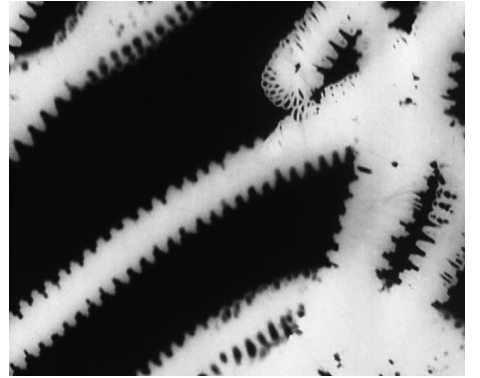
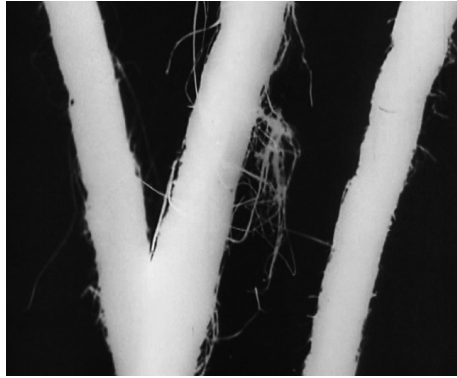
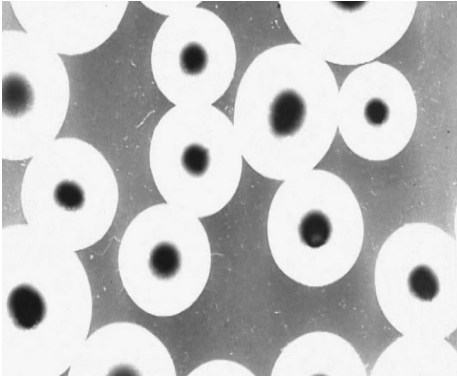
TEMPÓ





64 **MAN RAY**  
Return to Reason, 1923 (film stills)

2 min., no sound, 35 mm  
XXXX







65 **MAN RAY**  
Rayograph, 1923

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Gelatin silver print; 29.1 x 21.9 cm  
Museum Folkwang, Essen. Inv. 785a/82



66 **MAN RAY**  
Rayograph, 1921

---

Gelatin silver print; 29.3 x 22.1 cm  
Museum Folkwang, Essen. Inv. 786a/82



<sup>67</sup> **LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY**  
Untitled, 1925

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Gelatin silver print; 23.9 x 17.9 cm  
Museum Folkwang, Essen. Inv. 20/95



<sup>68</sup> **LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY**  
Untitled, 1925–8

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Gelatin silver print; 23.9 x 17.9 cm  
Museum Folkwang, Essen. Inv. 46/95



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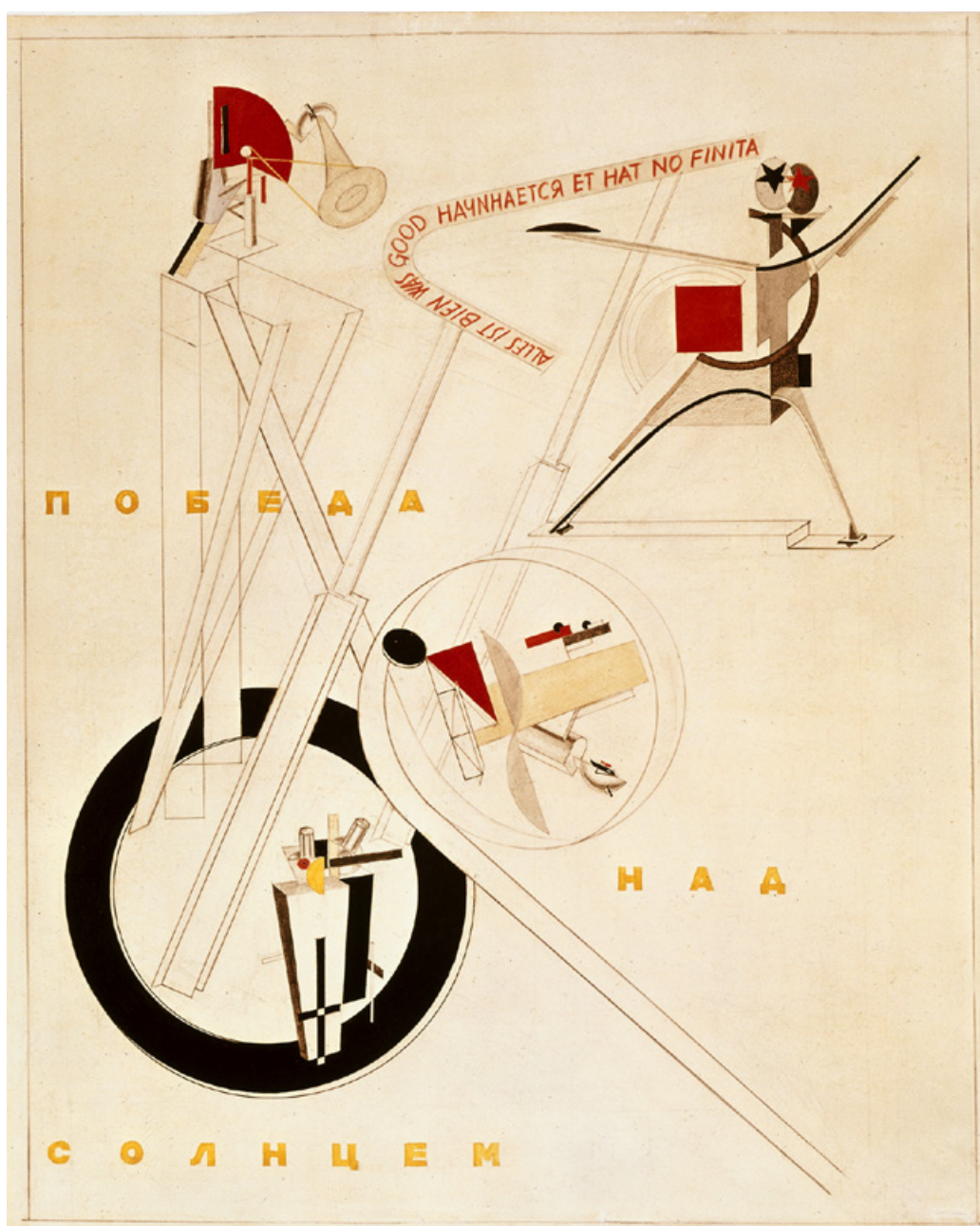


**69 EL LISSITZKY**

Proun, c. 1922-3

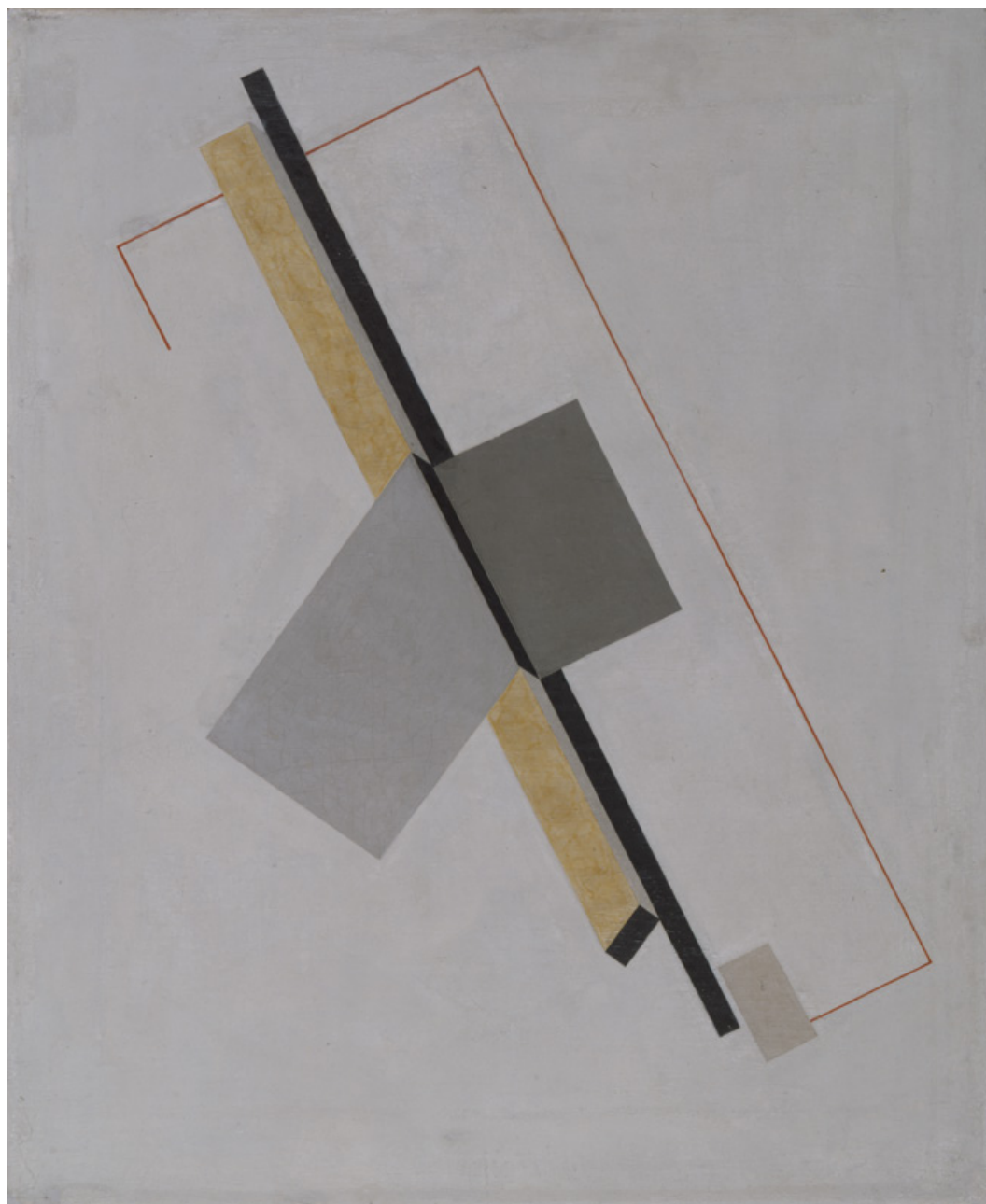
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Pencil and gouache on paper; 52 x 50 cm  
Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Inv. 271



70 **EL LISSITZKY**  
 Design for the Title Page of 'Teil der Schaumachinerie', n.d.

Pencil and gouache on paper; 53.3 x 47.2 cm  
 Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Inv. 247



<sup>71</sup> **EL LISSITZKY**

Proun 55. Small Canvas, 1919–26

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Tempera on canvas; 58 x 47.5 cm

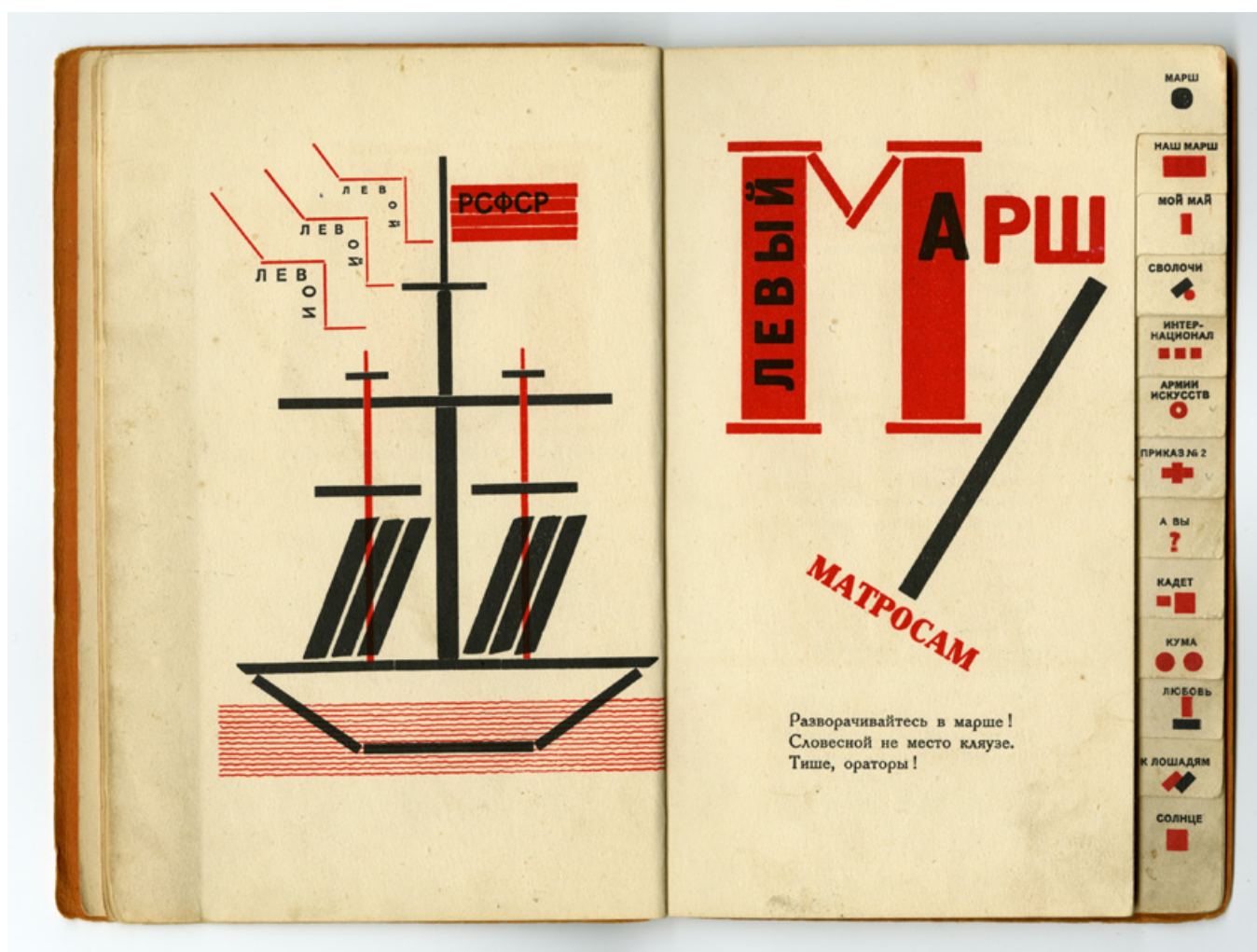
Kunstmuseum Moritzburg Halle (Saale), Halle (Sachsen-Anhalt). Inv. MOI00321





72 **EL LISSITZKY, HANS ARP**  
The Isms of Art, 1914-1924, 1925

Book; 26.2 x 20.6 cm  
Private collection



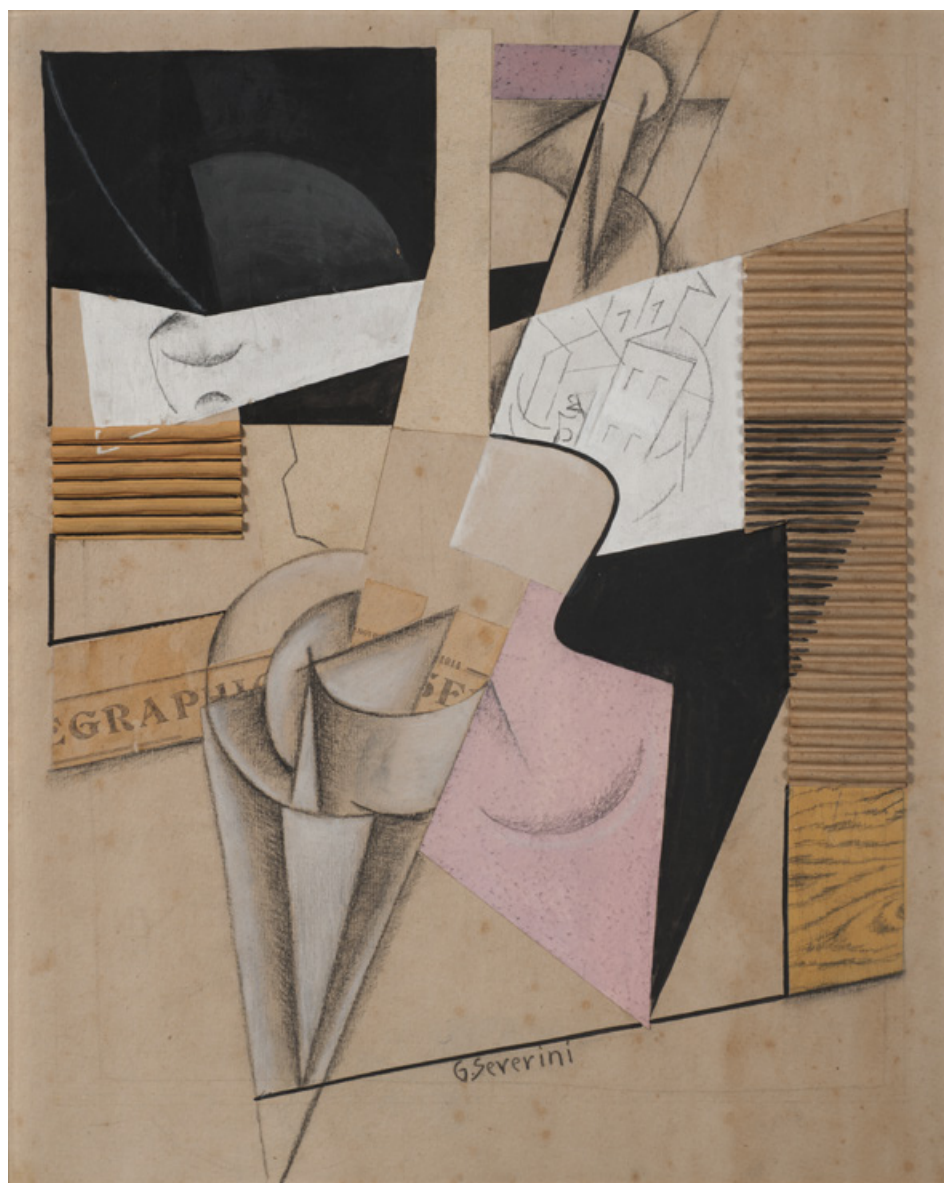
73 **EL LISSITZKY**

Typography for Vladimir Mayakovsky's volume of poetry  
'Dlia golosa' [For the voice], 1923

Book; 19 x 13.5 cm  
Private collection







74 **GINO SEVERINI**  
Untitled, c. 1914–16

Collage; 50 x 45.5 cm  
Private collection



75 **JULIUS EVOLA**  
 Inner Landscape, 10:30 a.m., 1918

Oil on canvas; 100 x 63 cm  
 Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome. Inv. 5183





**76 ENRICO PRAMPOLINI**

Portrait of F.T. Marinetti, Plastic Synthesis, 1924-5

Oil on panel; 78 x 77 cm

GAM - Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. Inv. P/1691

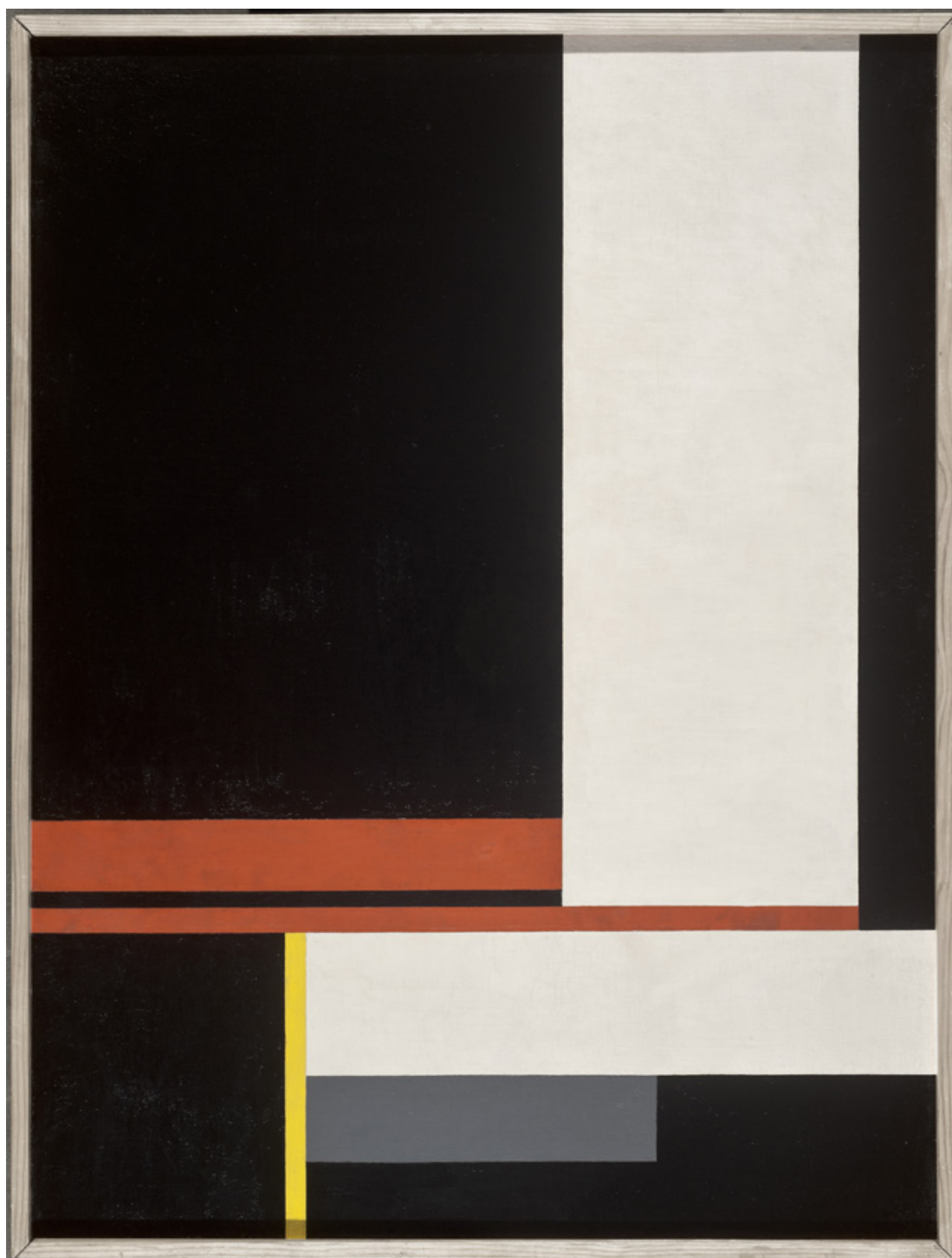




**77 WALTER DEXEL**  
**Composition 24 A with Black Square, 1924**

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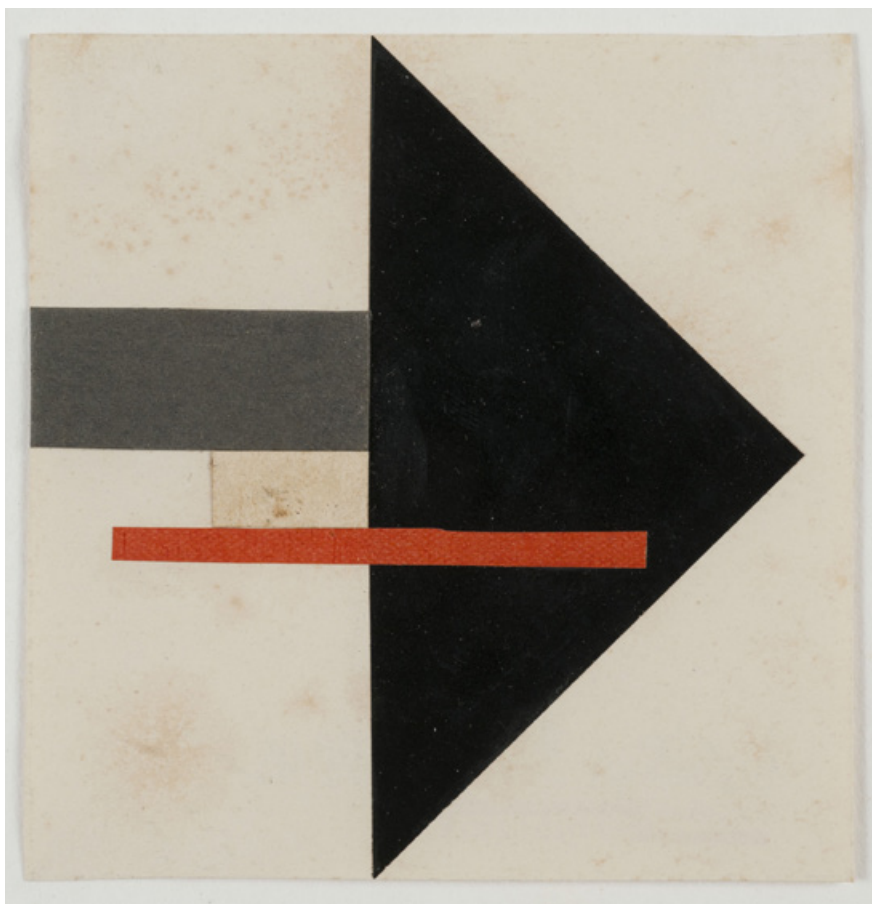
Oil on canvas; 59.8 x 60.3 cm  
Galerie Berinson, Berlin



78 **WALTER DEXEL**  
1927 or Composition on a Black Background, February 1927

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Oil on canvas; 94 x 71.5 cm (with frame)  
Galerie Berinson, Berlin



<sup>79</sup> **WALTER DEXEL**  
Untitled, 1923

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Collage; 9.9 x 9.4 cm  
Gilles Gheerbrant Collection, France

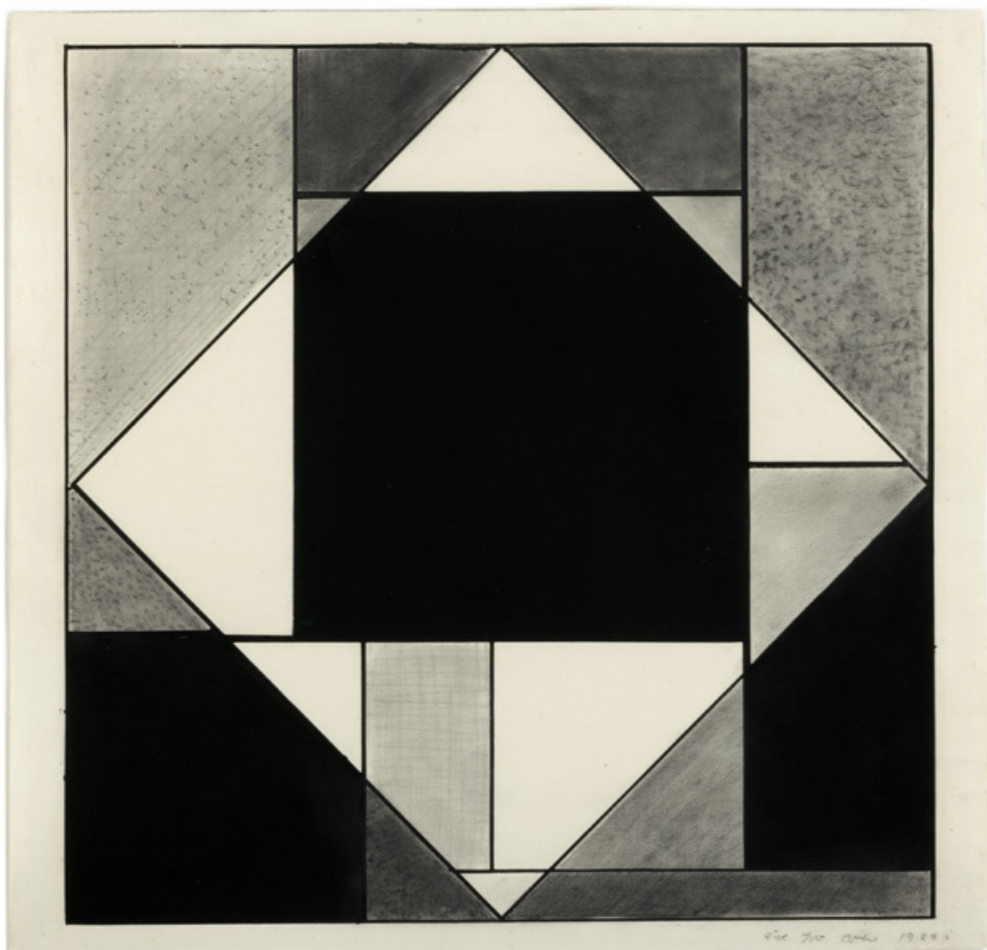




80 **KARL PETER RÖHL**  
Untitled, n.d.

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Gouache on paper; 79 x 64 cm (with frame)  
Private collection



81 **KARL PETER RÖHL**  
Composition with a Square Turned Upside-Down, 1921

Pencil and Indian ink on paper; 32.5 x 31.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG



82 **KARL PETER RÖHL**  
De Stijl Composition, 1922

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Oil on canvas; 46.8 x 39.8 cm  
Galerie Berinson, Berlin



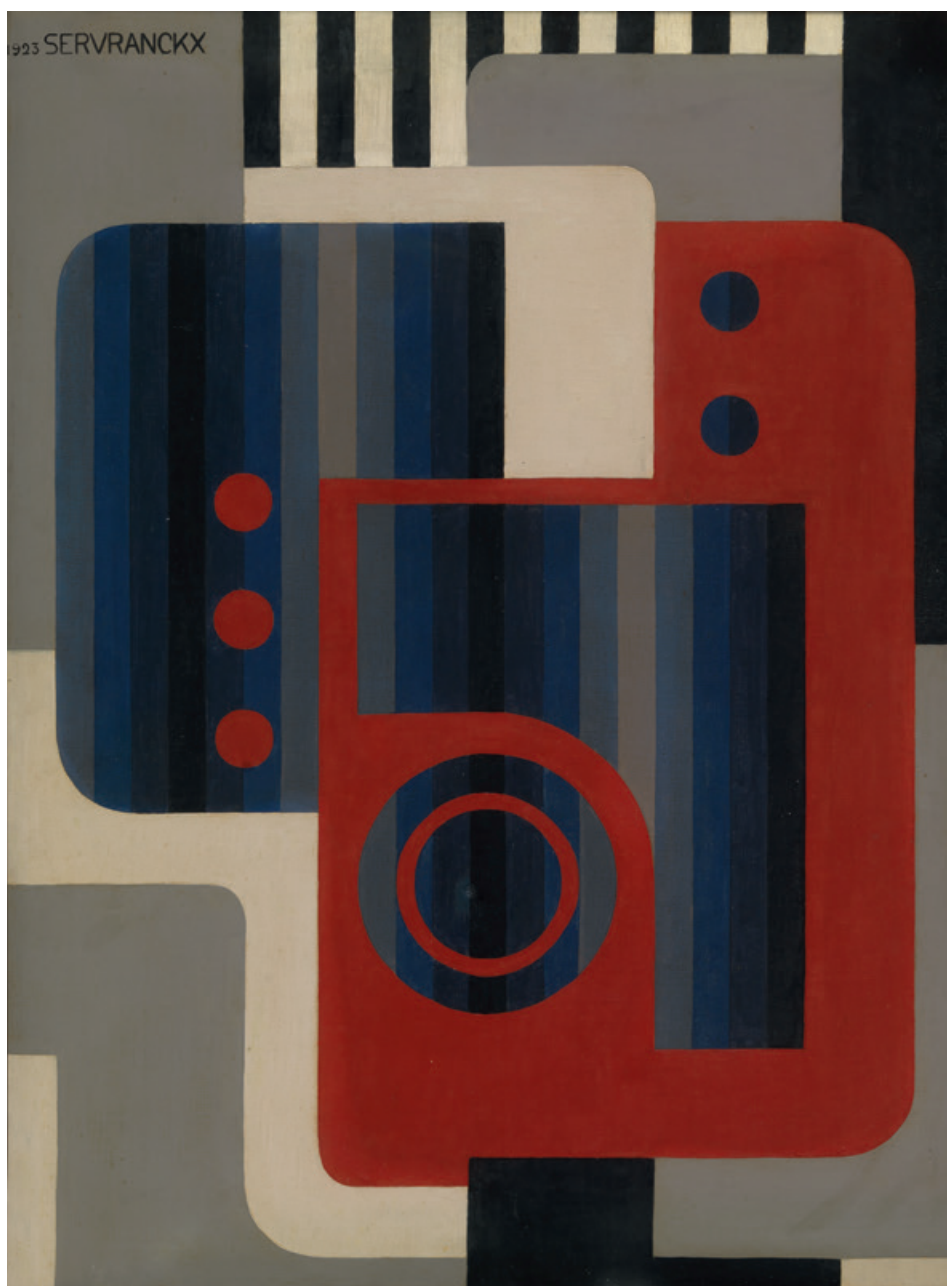




83 **PAUL JOOSTENS**  
Dada Object, c. 1920

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Wood assemblage; 28 x 25.7 x 14.7 cm  
Private collection, courtesy Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels

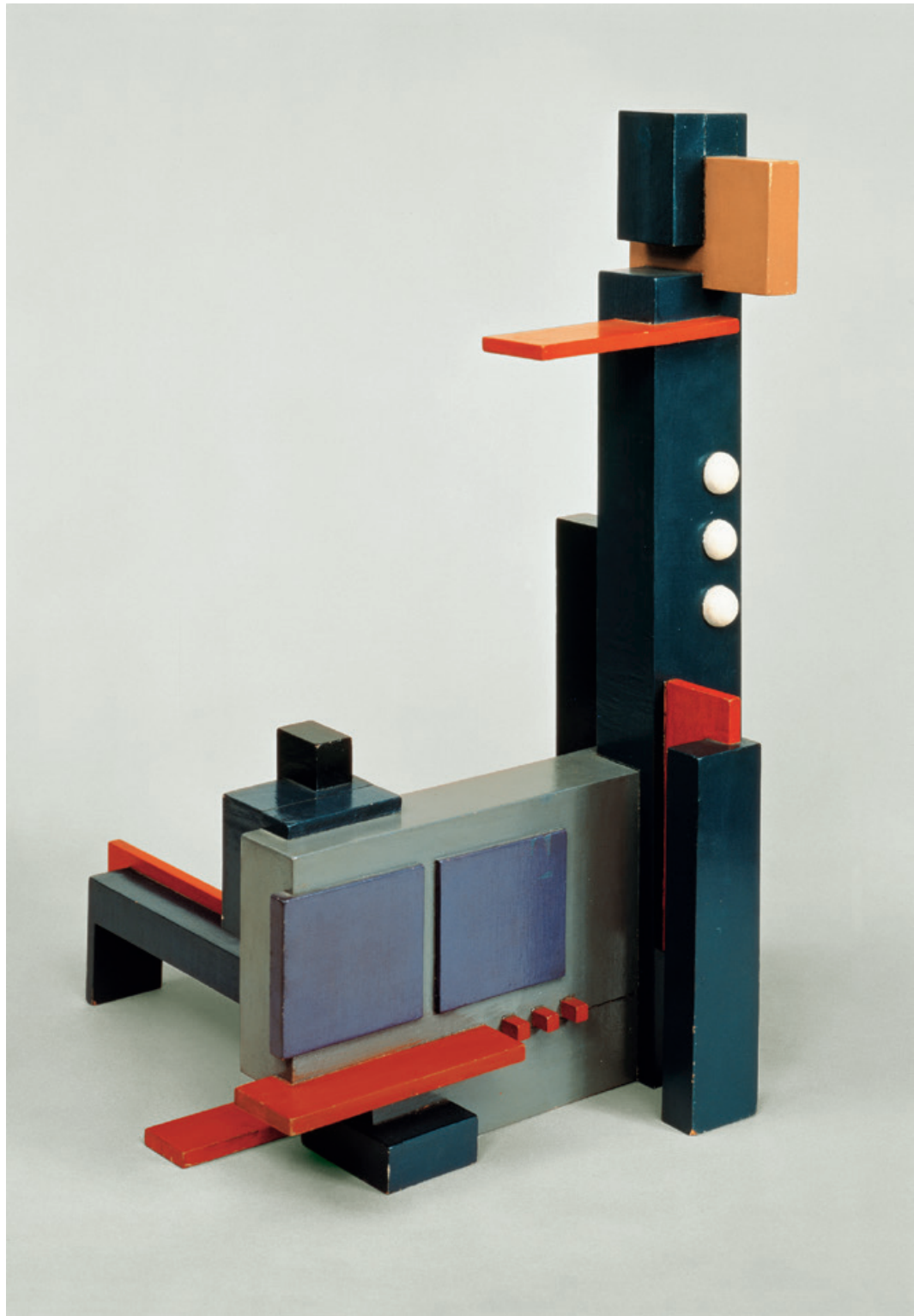


<sup>84</sup> **VICTOR SERVVRANCKX**  
Opus 43, 1923

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Oil on canvas; 70 x 52 cm  
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. Inv. 6616





85 **VICTOR SERVLANCKX**  
**Opus 1, 1925**

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Wood, varnished; 65.5 x 48 x 45.5 cm  
Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg. Inv. 1694/1974



86 **JOZEF PEETERS**  
**Synthesis, 1924**

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Oil on canvas; 196 x 100 cm  
Private collection, courtesy Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels



87 **JOZEF PEETERS**

Oil no. 21, 1924

---

Oil on canvas; 144 x 166.5 cm

Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. Inv. 6892





88 **HUIB HOSTE**  
Abstract Composition, c. 1925

---

Oil on glass; 29.5 x 22.5 cm  
FIBAC, Edegem



89 **KAREL MAES**

Oil no. 2, 1921

Oil on canvas; 63 x 42 cm

Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Administration Générale de la Culture –  
Direction du Patrimoine culturel – Pôle Valorisation, Brussels. Inv. 13.432

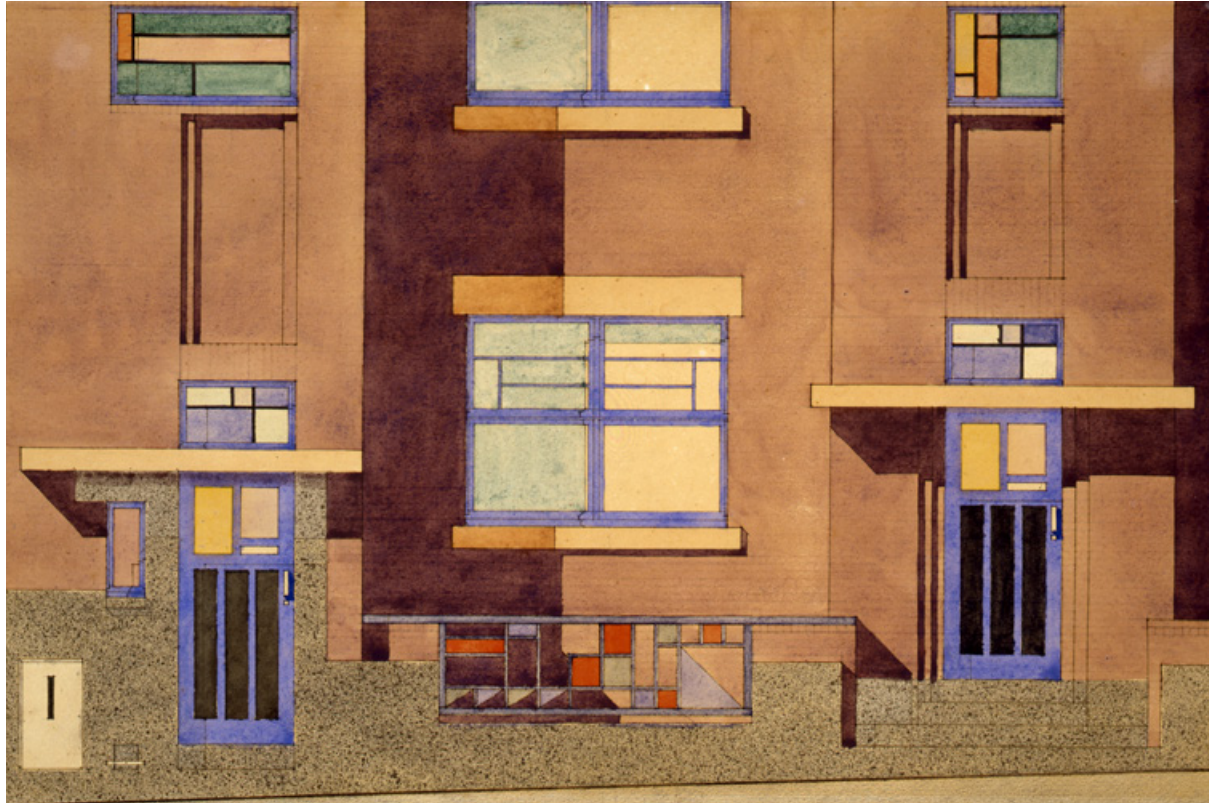


Fig.1 Victor Bourgeois, Apartment building in the Kubismestraat in Koekelberg, 1922-3.  
Detail of the façade with leaded-glass windows. A.A.M., Brussels



IWAN STRAUVEN  
PAUL DUJARDIN

## De Stijl and Belgium

That a profound cultural exchange existed in the first years of the inter-war period between Dutch Neoplasticism and the Belgian art scene is not, at first sight, very obvious. Apart from the work of Georges Vantongerloo, the only Belgian member of De Stijl, and Marthe Donas, links between Belgium and the Dutch art movement seem limited to a handful of personal contacts, two lectures by Theo van Doesburg in the early 1920s (in Antwerp and Brussels), and a number of rather superficial exchanges in the context of the publication of avant-garde magazines.<sup>1</sup> But the influence of Van Doesburg and De Stijl was not superficial in the least. Let us therefore follow the trail of two leading Belgian architects from the inter-war period: Huib Hoste and Victor Bourgeois.

The work of the Belgian avant-garde from the 1920s can be read as several 'unorthodox variations on prevalent styles', as the synthesis and personal interpretation of countless international avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism and the Bauhaus.<sup>2</sup> Neoplasticism does not seem to occupy a dominant position in this international arena. Certainly, as regards architecture, its influence appears virtually non-existent. No icon emerged in Belgium between the wars that could bear comparison with the Rietveld-Schröder House in Utrecht. Neither did Belgian architects design projects such as the Maison d'artiste of Cornelis van Eesteren and Theo van Doesburg, the designs for which were exhibited in the Galerie de L'Effort Moderne in Paris. The distinctive architecture of De Stijl – the use of primary colours and the quest for anti-cubist spatiality – was unknown in Belgian architecture of the 1920s. A cursory glance might conclude from this that there is little or no affinity

between Belgian architecture, painting and sculpture from the 1920s and De Stijl. Nothing could be less true.

De Stijl and its leading spokesman, Theo van Doesburg, played an important role in the emergence of the various Belgian avant-garde movements at the start of the inter-war period. After the First World War, painters in Antwerp and Brussels rapidly converted to abstract art. Prosper De Troyer, Felix De Boeck, Oscar and Floris Jespers, Jos Léonard, Jozef Peeters, Edmond Van Doren, Karel Maes, Victor Servranckx, Pierre-Louis Flouquet, René Magritte: after the publication of the 'Manifesto I' of De Stijl in November 1918, they were all indebted to a greater or lesser extent to the ideas that Van Doesburg defended so vehemently. This influence was as broad as it was deep. It concerns not only the conceptual framework and the precise terminology in which the groundbreaking abstract art was discussed in writing, but also a wide range of disciplines: painting, sculpture, and perhaps, above all, architecture and interior design.

There are several reasons why this influence fell into oblivion. The first concerns the ambivalent and tempestuous character of Theo van Doesburg. As a networker in the early 1920s, he visited with a strategic instinct the art scenes of the two competing cities, Antwerp and Brussels, in the hope of being noticed in Paris via French-speaking Belgian circles. But despite his initial enthusiasm, he would gradually become very negative about the work of his southern neighbours.<sup>3</sup> It was undoubtedly for this reason that the Belgians turned their backs on him and played down their indebtedness to the ideas and achievements of De Stijl, or at least refrained from discussing it explicitly.

Another reason why the influence faded somewhat into the background is because the exchanges took place very early on. They happened during the so-called early years of *De Stijl*, between 1917 and 1922, even before Van Doesburg published his *De Stijl* manifesto on architecture under the title 'Vers une construction collective' (Towards a Collective Construction) in 1924 and before his architectural projects, typically dominated by primary colours, came into being. The first contacts took place during the war years, when a number of Belgian artists and architects fled occupied Belgium to go into voluntary exile in the neutral Netherlands. Huib Hoste is perhaps the first who got to know various members of *De Stijl* in this way. He was the only Belgian to publish a text on architecture in the *De Stijl* magazine. Georges Vantongerloo also fled to the Netherlands during the war and was thereby introduced, via the Belgian Futurist Jules Schmalzigaug, to Theo van Doesburg and Neoplasticism.

In an intense exchange with Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo's work evolved between 1917 and 1920 from figuration to abstraction. The ideas of the Dutch priest Mathieu Schoenmaekers and the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza also played a fundamental role in his development. Vantongerloo contributed a series of articles to the *De Stijl* magazine and was the only Belgian to sign the first *De Stijl* manifesto, eventually becoming the most famous Belgian pioneer of abstract art. After the war, Vantongerloo returned briefly to Brussels, where he undoubtedly contributed to spreading the ideas of *De Stijl*, before settling for good in France and distancing himself from the Dutch avant-garde movement.

### **Le cubisme architectural**

Unlike Georges Vantongerloo, Huib Hoste would return to Belgium after the armistice and remained in touch with members of *De Stijl* such as Robert van

't Hof, whom he invited to speak at the Second Congress for Modern Art in Antwerp in 1922. Even during the First World War his own work had been transformed under the influence of *De Stijl*. The neo-Gothic approach of his pre-war early years made way for work that gradually found its place in the style of the international modern movement. His Neoplastic formal experiments in the garden cities of Klein Rusland in Zelzate and Kapelleveld in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe were a fundamental step in this direction. He found inspiration in the early examples of *De Stijl* architecture, particularly the Villa Henny (1915–19) in Huis ter Heide (municipality of Zeist) by the Dutch architect Van 't Hof, who was a member of *De Stijl* from 1917 to 1919, and the hotel *De Dubbele Sleutel* by Jan Wils, who was also a short-lived member of the Dutch avant-garde group. These projects are considered key works from the early period of *De Stijl* and betray an admiration for the work of the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. They do not yet have the characteristic *De Stijl* signature that came into being from 1922–3 in a series of projects by Rietveld and by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren.

As is apparent from the title of Hoste's contribution to *De Stijl*, 'De roeping der moderne architectuur' (The Mission of Modern Architecture), these achievements were not merely stylistic imitations, but were rooted in the profound conviction that Neoplasticism held the promise of the feasibility of a new, radically democratic art and world order after the First World War. Hoste tried in this context to reconcile the theosophic concepts of Piet Mondrian and other members of *De Stijl* with his own Catholic beliefs, and integrated them into a syncretic, mystical vision of architecture and society. Hoste maintained close contacts with the Antwerp avant-garde group around Jozef Peeters and presided over the Second Congress for Modern Art, of which the third session was organized in Bruges in 1923.



Fig. 2 Huib Hoste, terraced houses in the garden city of Kapelleveld in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, 1923–6. Sint-Lukasarchief, Brussels

The experiences of Huib Hoste, the most important Flemish modernist architect from the inter-war period, are not unique. Victor Bourgeois, his much younger French-speaking counterpart, came under the influence of *De Stijl* in the early 1920s. After his training during the war years at the Brussels Fine Arts Academy, he became, with his brother Pierre, one of the driving forces behind the Centre d'Art and avant-garde magazines such as *Au Volant*, *Le Geste* and *7 Arts*. The latter weekly appeared from 1922 to 1929 and grew into one of the most important avant-garde publications from this period in Belgium. Just before the launch of *7 Arts*, Bourgeois undertook a number of study trips to the Netherlands. To prepare for these, he contacted Van Doesburg, who sent him this remarkable answer from Weimar: 'It's a great, great pity that I am absent from Holland. I have been staying and work-

ing for two months in Weimar and in this Weimar very isolated from everyone, after a long journey in Italy, Austria, Belgium, France, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, etc. [...] I really like your idea, then, to publish a Modern Art review and when this review is particularly radical and constructive, I will gladly collaborate with it. But I am not aware of events in my country. I read no Dutch papers and I left Holland on 7 March 1921 forever! It was no longer possible for me to stay there, amid that bourgeoisie – buttered and fat and reactionary (including artists. They are all content!) The Dutch are assassins of each personality (look at the old artists and modern ones included): the 3 Maris brothers (fugitives), the Israels (fugitives) Kees Van Dongen (fugitive), Vincent v. Gogh (fugitive), Piet Mondrian and many more! When you go to Holland don't forget the whip. The only modern things there are the traces





Fig. 3 Jan Wils, housing complex Daal en Berg, Papaverhof in The Hague, 1921. Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam



Fig. 4 Jan Wils, De Dubbele Sleutel in Woerden, 1918. Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Van Moorsel donation

of my spirit. Everything in architecture, everything in painting (by me and my friend Mondrian). Everything was sculpture and applied arts, poetry and literature included. [sic]<sup>4</sup>

Van Doesburg then gives a detailed summary of his own achievements in the Netherlands, mostly designs for leaded-glass windows realized in collaboration with the architects Oud and Wils. The list includes the most important architectural experiments by the De Stijl group: the housing blocks in the Spangen district of Rotterdam, the house of Mayor De Geus in Broek in Waterland, the De Vonk holiday home in Noordwijkerhout, and Villa Allegonda in Katwijk aan Zee, all four by Oud; the De Lange House in Alkmaar, the school and a country house in Bergermeer as well as the Daal en Berg (Papaverhof) district in The Hague, all three designed by Wils. He also mentions the Villa Henny by Van 't Hof. A week later, Van Doesburg adds to this list, sending a separate little card mentioning Wils's hotel-café-restaurant De Dubbele Sleutel in Woerden: 'a very modern building.'<sup>5</sup>

Although we cannot precisely determine which projects Bourgeois visited, the encounter with the early architecture of De Stijl would exert a profound influence on his conception of modern architecture, as is reflected in the famous *Cité Moderne* (1922–5)

in Sint-Agatha-Berchem.<sup>6</sup> But the influence of De Stijl goes much further than is generally assumed. It is not only recognizable in the work of a number of architects, of which Hoste and Bourgeois are the most prominent, but also emerges in the terminology used in writings about the first experiments in the new architecture in Belgium. Not only *7 Arts* but also more established architectural magazines such as *La Cité* refer to 'le cubisme architectural', a critical term that originated in the Netherlands, especially in the writings of Oud, which was frequently used by members of De Stijl. Four years after Bourgeois's journey, an article in *7 Arts* talks of 'cubisme architectural hollando-belge', as if it were one and the same movement that opposed the *romantisme fantaisiste* and *l'ivresse de l'invention perpétuelle* of the Amsterdam school.

### Gesamtkunstwerk

Like *De Stijl*, the *7 Arts* magazine, as is evident from its name, sought a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that was to come into existence through the integration of the various arts in architecture. To achieve this aim Bourgeois invited the painter Pierre-Louis Flouquet to design leaded-glass windows after the example of Van Doesburg for the main building of the *Cité Moderne*. In



Fig. 5 Victor Bourgeois, Cité Moderne in Sint-Agatha-Berchem, 1922-5. A.A.M., Brussels

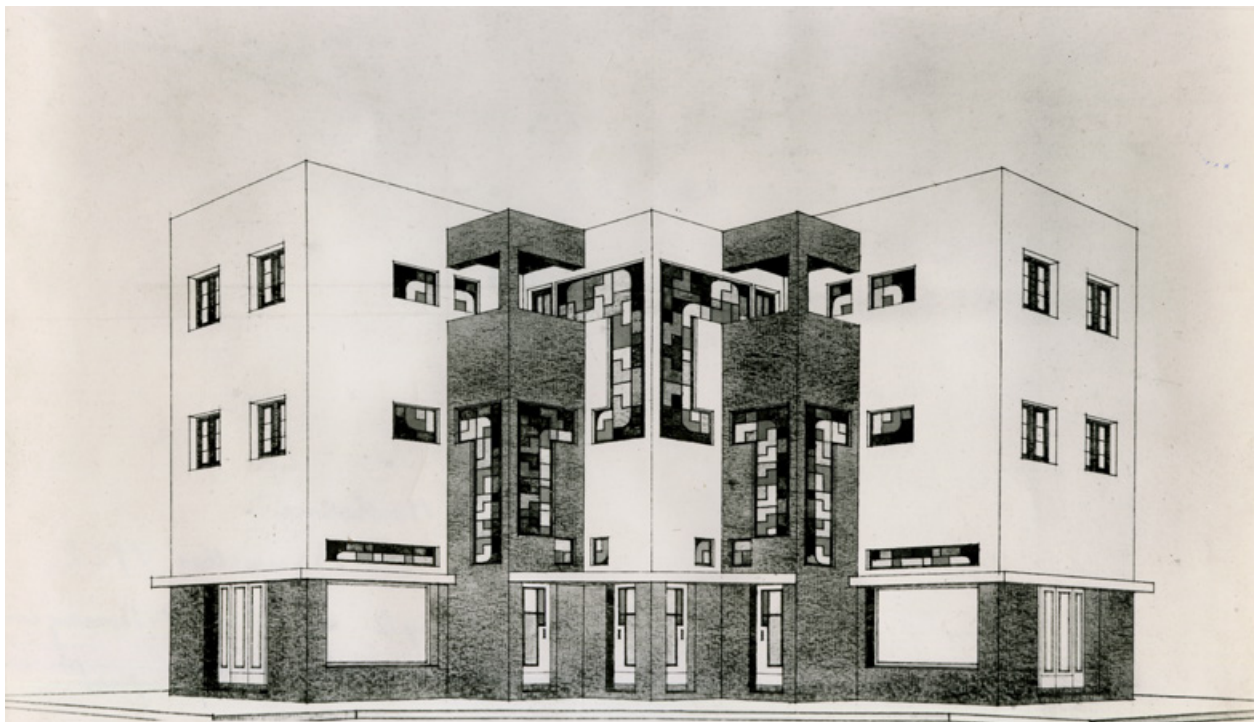


Fig. 6 Pierre-Louis Flouquet, preliminary designs for leaded-glass windows for the main building of the Cité Moderne in Sint-Agatha-Berchem, 1922-5. A.A.M., Brussels

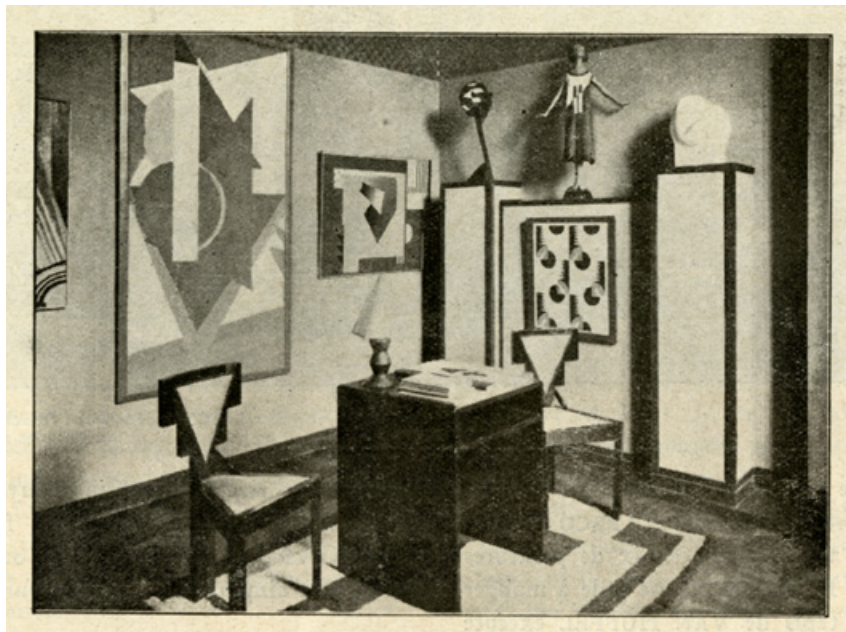


Fig. 7 Stand 7 Arts, II<sup>e</sup> Biennale internazionale delle arti decorative di Monza. With work by J.J. Gaillard, K. Maes, J. Peeters, P.-L. Flouquet, V. Servranckx, E. Henvaux, M. Eemans and M.-L. Baugniet. The furniture was designed by Victor Bourgeois.

his earlier work, too, the apartment building in the Kubismestraat in Koekelberg, we encounter similar leaded-glass windows. That the *7 Arts* magazine, especially in the early years, adopted the programme of the early period of *De Stijl*, is perhaps most apparent from the term used to refer to the new abstract art: 'La Plastique Pure', a literal translation – perhaps by Van Doesburg himself – of 'de Zuivere Beelding' (pure plastic). On 13 March 1920, two years after the foundation of *7 Arts*, Van Doesburg had given a lecture in the Centre d'Art run by the Bourgeois brothers on Coudenberg 6, a stone's throw away from the place where Victor Horta a few years later would build the Centre for Fine Arts. Only around fifteen people attended the lecture, including Victor Servranckx, René Magritte, Georges Vantongerloo, Karel Maes, Pierre-Louis Flouquet and the Bourgeois brothers. Two years later the latter four would be part of the editorial board of *7 Arts*, which, according to Pierre Bourgeois, emerged out of the enthusiasm for the

lecture by Van Doesburg. Initially, Van Doesburg's lecture was translated simultaneously by War Van Overstraeten, but, dissatisfied with the latter's choice of words, the spokesman of *De Stijl* decided to continue in French. Pierre Bourgeois would later recall the event as follows: 'the bilingualism proved itself to be surprisingly expressive ... The enthusiasm was all the greater.' Furthermore: 'It was Van Doesburg [...] who was the very first to talk to us about Piet Mondrian and non-figurative art.'<sup>8</sup>

Van Doesburg's Brussels appearance came one month after a major conference in Antwerp, where on 13 February 1920 he had given his lecture 'Klassiek-Barok-Modern' (Classic, Baroque, Modern) before a wide audience. In Antwerp, too, the reception of the ideas of *De Stijl* would initially be very positive. Jozef Peeters, the editor-in-chief of *Het Overzicht* and later of *De Driehoek*, invariably referred in his writings to the 'Zuivere Beelding' and its community of artists in reference to the burgeoning abstract art movement



that the Antwerp avant-garde considered of paramount importance. A key link between the Antwerp and Brussels art scenes was Karel Maes, a young painter and furniture designer from Brussels who was a member of the Moderne Kunst circle in Antwerp, led by Peeters, and who was also one of the five editors of *7 Arts*. He was the only Belgian to co-sign with Van Doesburg and other international stars in 1922 the famous manifesto of the International Union of Neoplastic Constructivists in Weimar, and he applied the new ideas in his furniture and carpet designs. In this way he explored the possibilities of 'Zuivere Beelding' in the development of the modern interior. Among other things he designed furniture for the council chamber of Bourgeois's Cité Moderne. Marcel-Louis Baugniet, Louis-Herman De Koninck, Bourgeois and Hoste would also design Neoplastic interiors during this period, in which furniture, floor coverings and paintings contributed to the creation of a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

### Europe under reconstruction

As can be seen from these examples, the 'Plastique Pure' of the Bourgeois brothers and 'Zuivere Beelding' of Jozef Peeters – more so than 'le cubisme architectural' – are very elastic concepts, with which both avant-garde groups around the two leading magazines *7 Arts* and *Het Overzicht* referred to the new abstract art. However, they never cover the same strictly geometric connotation, but show the way to unorthodox variations on the prevailing styles discussed above. They might be considered as container concepts, in which countless avant-garde experiments were placed. Nevertheless, the precise terms in which the Belgian avant-garde from the 1920s described its own achievements all refer to the decisive importance of Van Doesburg and De Stijl in the development of Belgian abstract art after the First World War.

Van Doesburg's role in the development of twentieth-century Belgian art and architecture gives us a good picture of the *modus operandi* and undeniable influence of one of the most important artistic networkers in Europe during the 1920s. Thanks to a handful of artists with whom Theo van Doesburg was in contact in Belgium, we can see how the frontman of De Stijl operated: besides intensive, in-depth exchanges with, among others, Vantongerloo and Hoste, there were rather more superficial exchanges of an editorial nature for publications in the local avant-garde magazines after the end of the war. But it is through his lectures that Van Doesburg's infectious enthusiasm and mobilizing force most strongly emerges. We can conclude that on a theoretical level Neoplasticism met with a strong response in Belgium, lending a conceptual framework to the formal experiments of the local architectural scene. It was precisely these cross-border encounters in what was then a highly political cultural world that turned Van Doesburg into one of the most eminent embodiments of a cultural Europe under reconstruction.

### NOTES

1. See Ceri-Anne Van de Geer, Angelica Overwater and Laura Kollwelter, 'Het internationalisme van de modernistische tijdschriften', in Ghent 2013, pp. 165–85.
2. Eric Pil, 'Verschuivingen binnen de avant-garde. Evolutes in de plastische kunsten in België', in Eliane De Wilde and Lydia Schoonbaert, *Avant-garde in België. 1917–1929*, Brussels, 1992, p. 59; Jean Weisgerber (ed.), *Les Avant-gardes littéraires en Belgique: au confluent des arts et des langues, 1880–1950*, Brussels, 1991, p. 20.
3. See also Marguerite Tuijn's contribution in this publication.
4. See the letter from Van Doesburg to Bourgeois, 7 July 1921 (ahk 12.750).
5. Postcard from Van Doesburg to Bourgeois, 14 July 1921 (ahk 12.751).
6. Iwan Strauven, *Victor Bourgeois 1897–1962. Radicaliteit en Pragmatisme. Moderniteit en Traditie*, Mechelen, 2015.
7. 'Pavillons d'Honneur, La Servitude du Luxe, Belgique et Hollande', *7 Arts*, 3 (30 April 1925) no. 25, pp. 2–3.
8. Albert Guislain, 'Architecture et poésie... interview avec Pierre Bourgeois', *Le Soir*, 17 December 1962.

**V.**



1917

192

# NEO-PLASTICISME

ELEMENTARIS

PEINTURE  
SCULPTURE  
LITTÉRATURE  
MUSIQUE  
DANSE  
FILM-ARTE  
ARCHITECTURE  
URBANISME

1928







90 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Composition XXI, 1923

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Oil on canvas; 41 x 33.5 cm  
Private collection

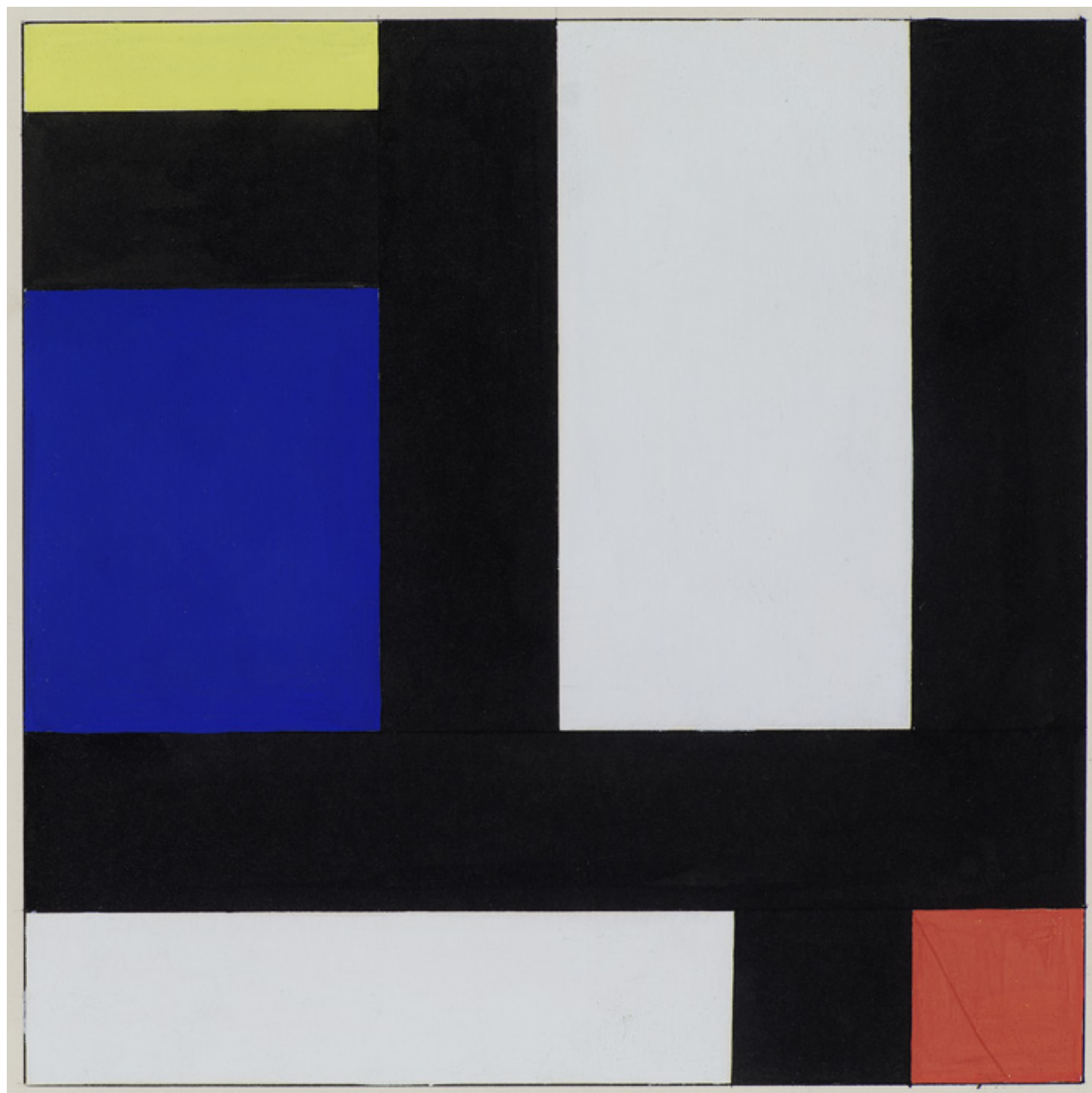


<sup>91</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Counter-Composition XII, 1924

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Oil on canvas; 52.5 x 21.5 cm (with frame)  
Musée de Grenoble. Inv. MG 3359





**92 THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Counter-Composition IV, 1925**

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Gouache on cardboard; 69 x 58.5 cm  
Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAKK), Cologne. Inv. MK 15 w



<sup>93</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Counter-Composition XIII, 1925-6

Oil on canvas; 49.9 x 50 cm  
Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York), Venice



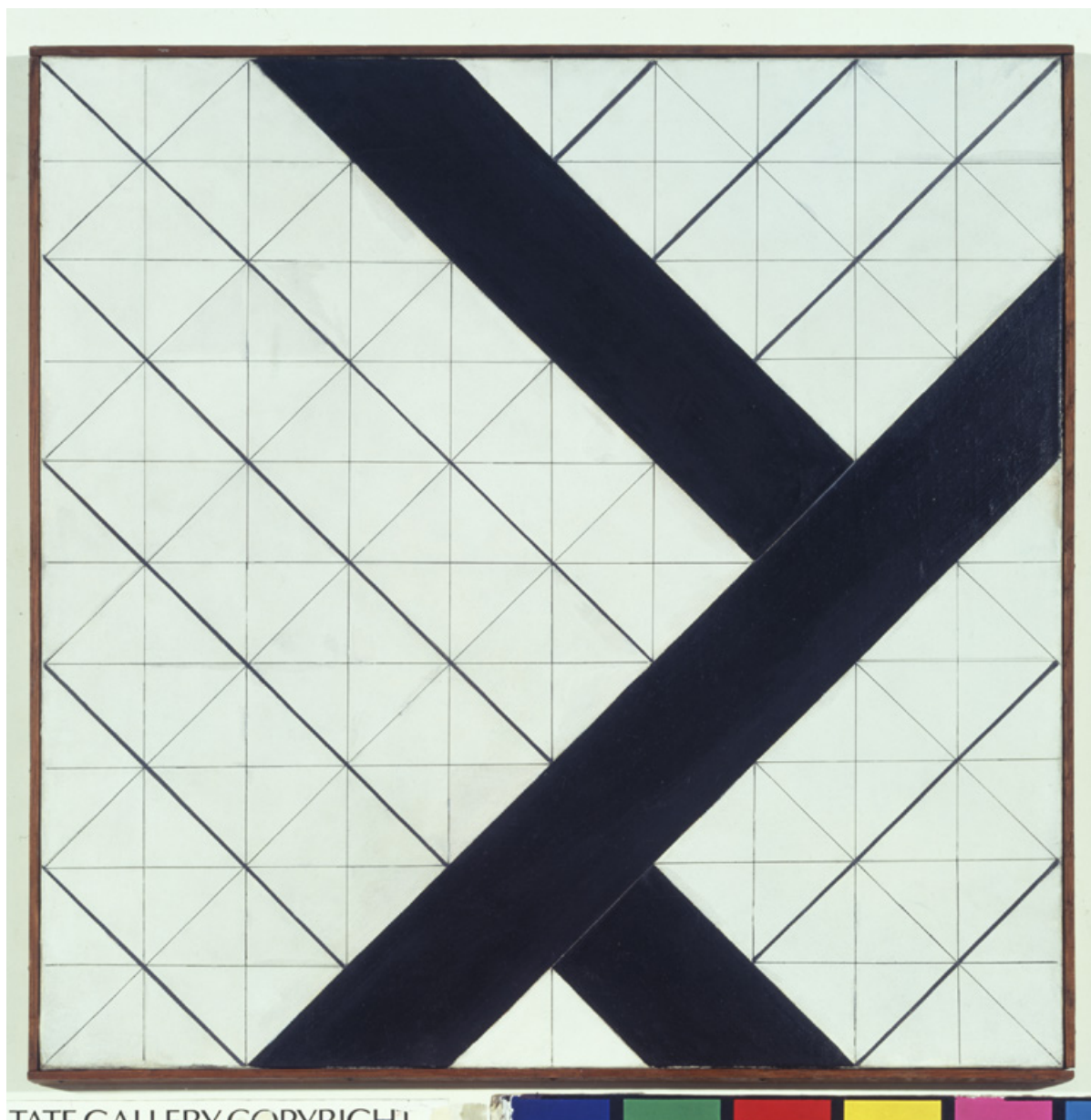
**94 THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Counter-Composition V, 1924**

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Oil on canvas; 100 x 100 cm  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Inv. VD A 567

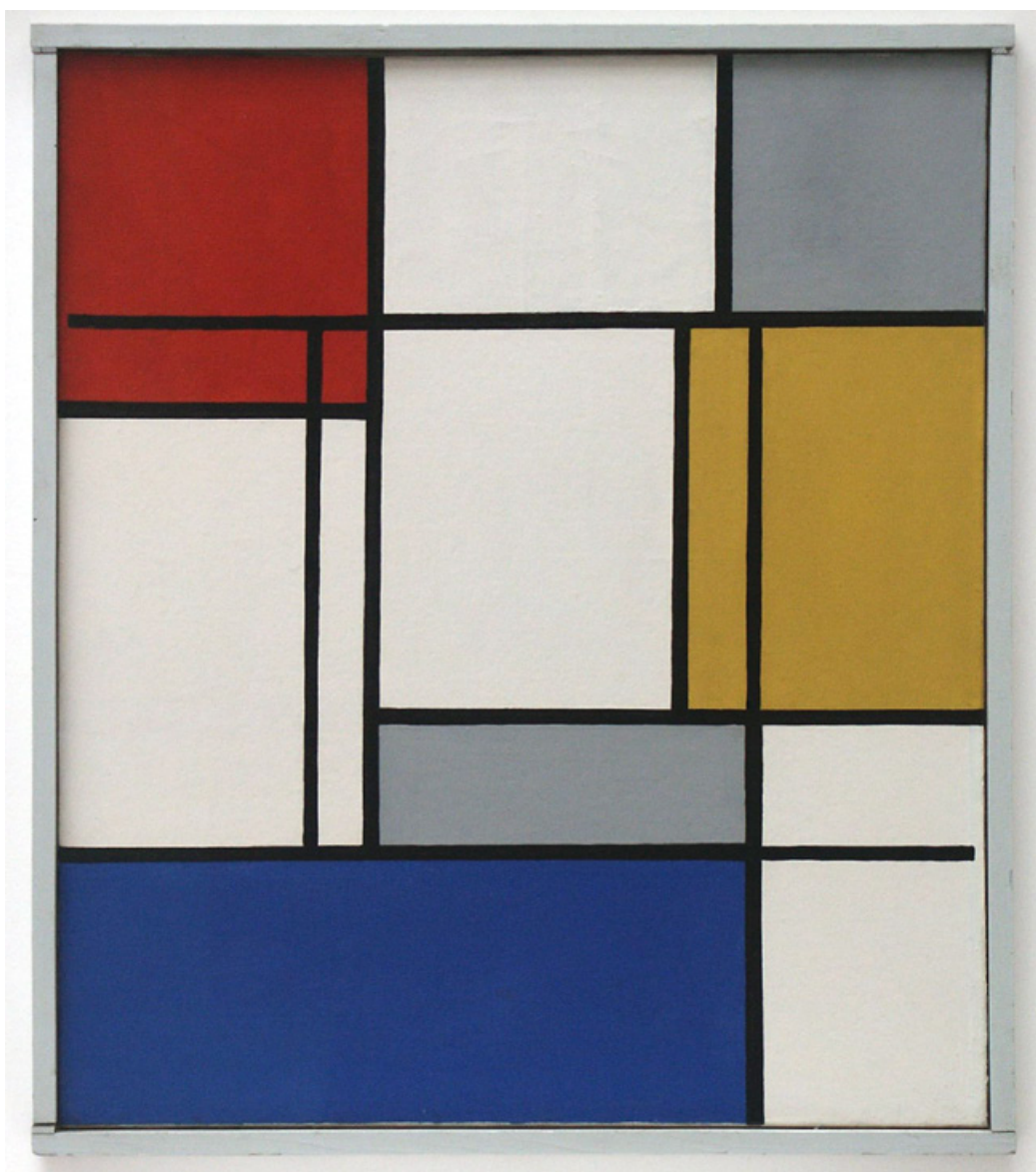






<sup>95</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Counter-Composition VI\*, 1925

Oil on canvas; 50 x 50 cm  
Tate, London



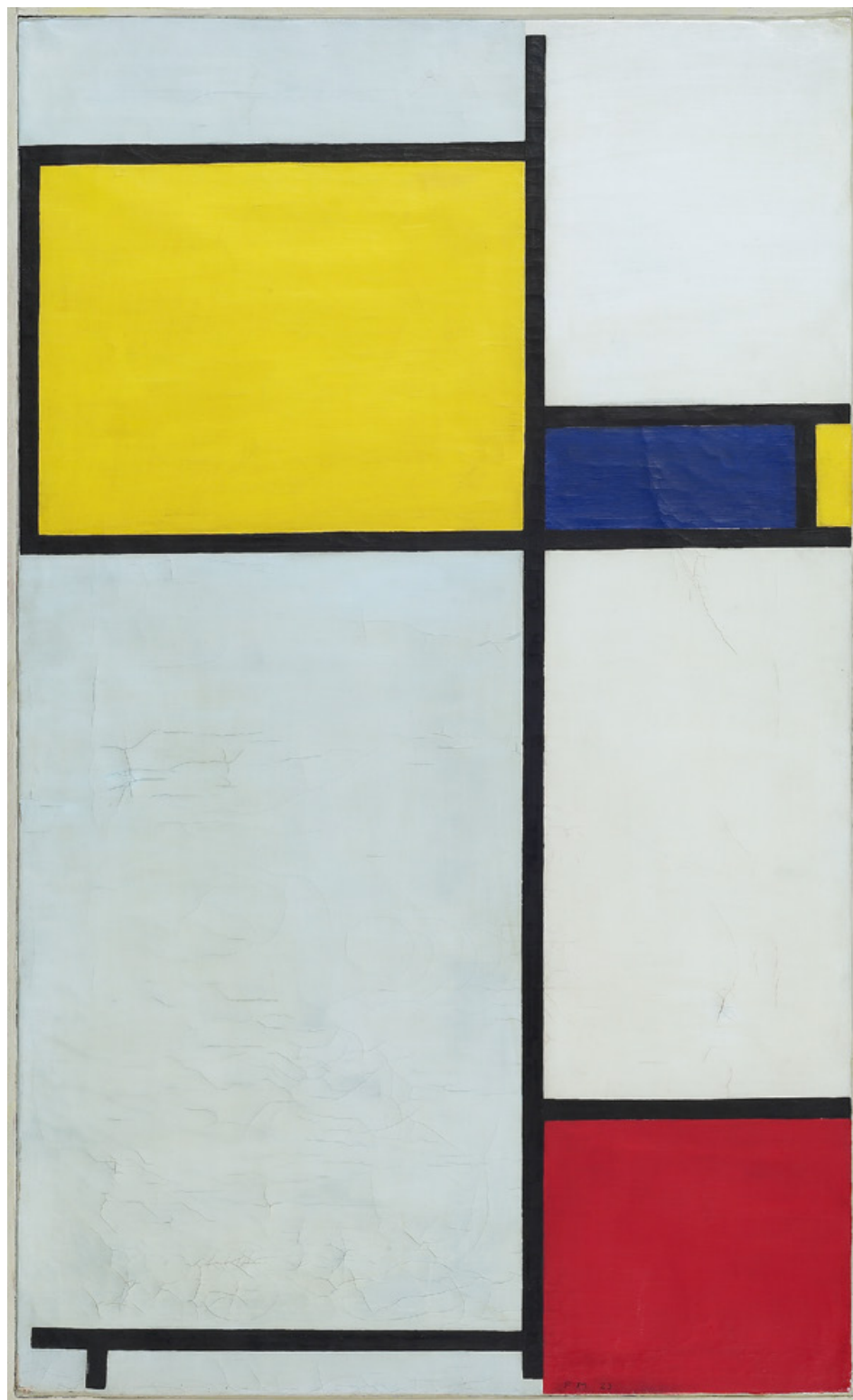
<sup>96</sup> **JEAN GORIN**

Composition no. 3 (Flowing Forth  
from the Equilateral Triangle), 1926-7

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Enamel paint on canvas; 68.5 x 59.5 cm  
Private collection





97 **PIET MONDRIAN**  
Untitled, 1923

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Oil on canvas; XXXXXXXXXX  
Private collection





<sup>98</sup> **CESAR DOMELA**  
Neoplastic Composition no. 5A, 1924

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Oil on canvas; 58 x 58 cm  
Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, on loan from the Triton Foundation Collection



**99 CESAR DOMELA**  
Neoplastic Composition no. 5C, 1925

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Oil on canvas; 70.6 x 61 cm  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. 18450



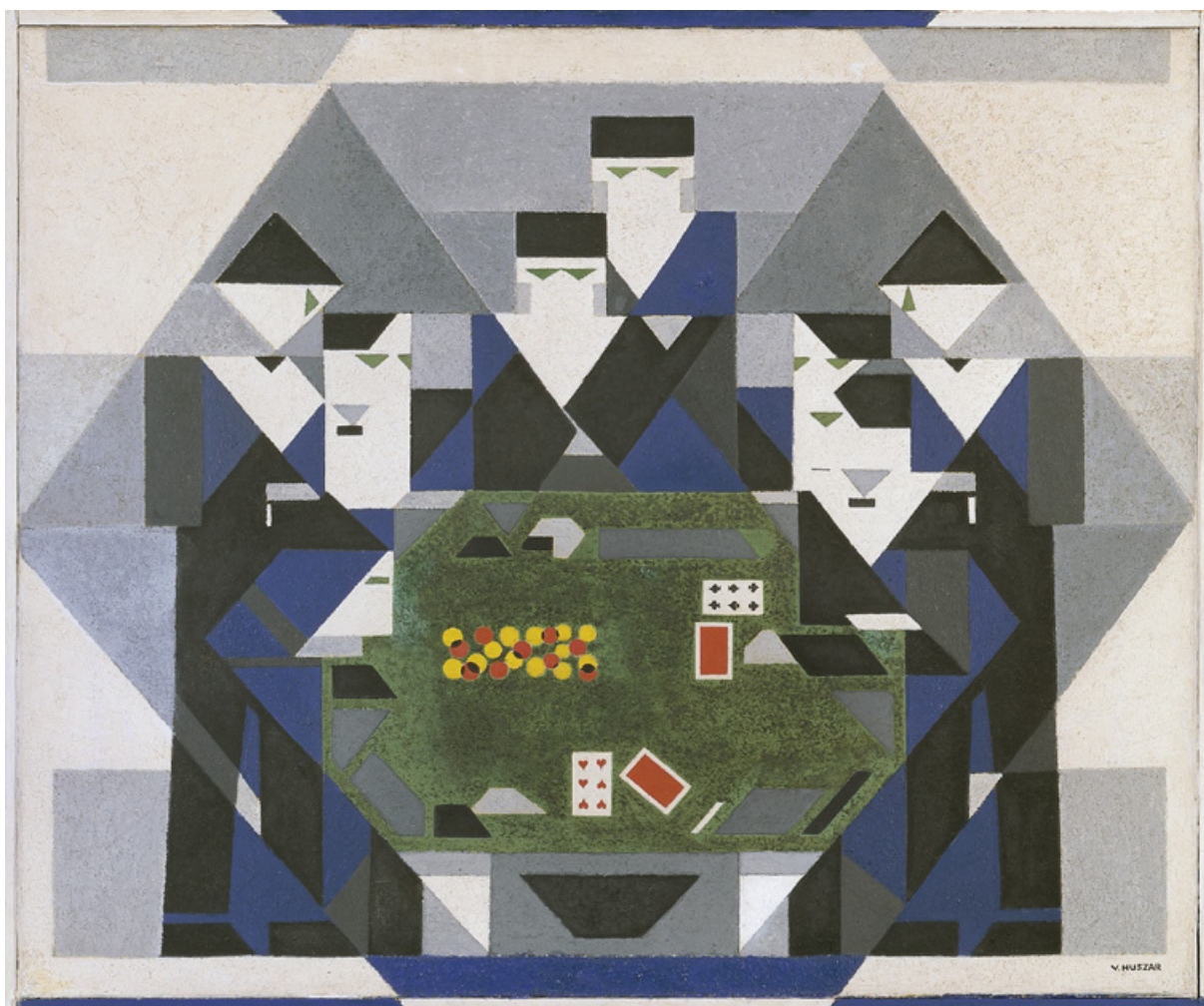


100 **CESAR DOMELA**  
Composition no. 5K, 1926

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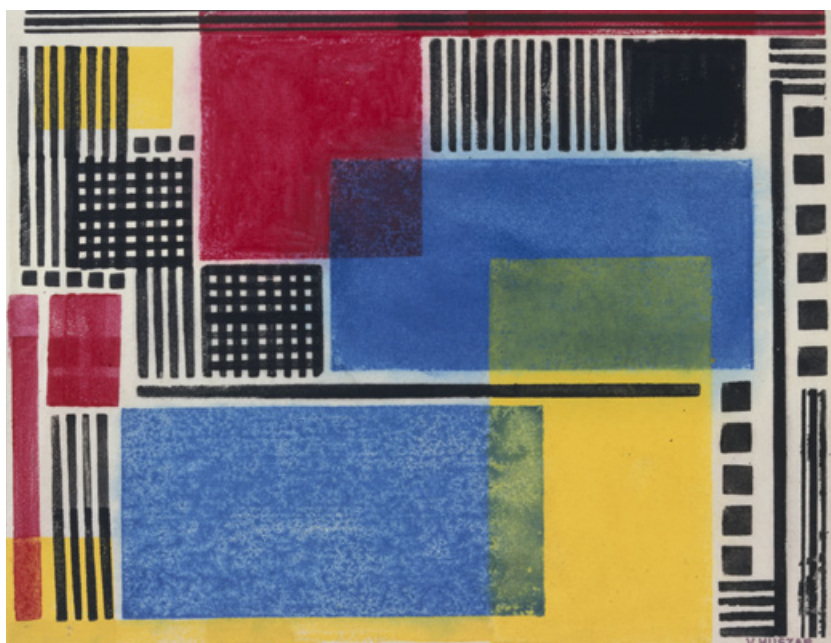
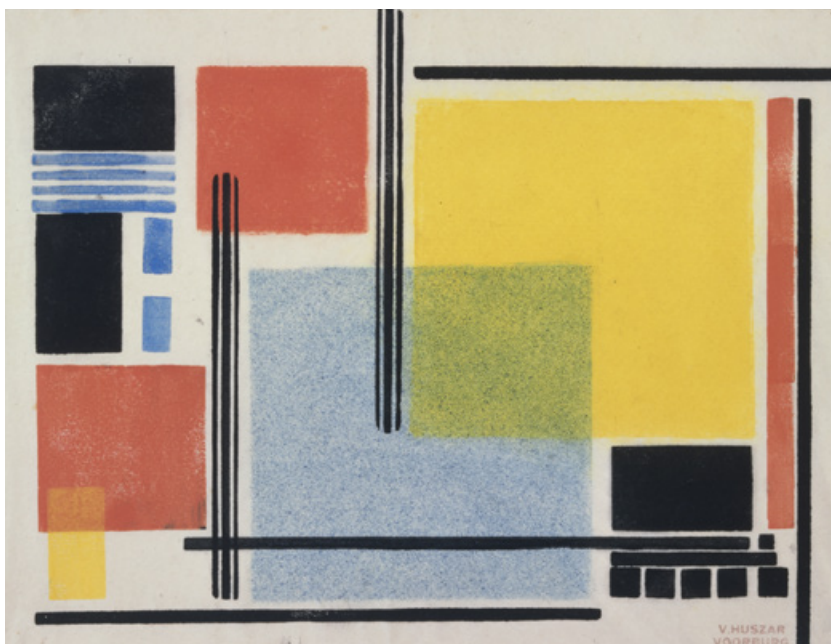
Oil on canvas; 55 x 74 cm  
Private collection Atelier Domela, Paris





101 **VILMOS HUSZÁR**  
Baccarat Game, c. 1928–9

Oil on canvas; 67.6 x 82.2 cm  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Inv. 598 (1979.79)



102 **VILMOS HUSZÁR**  
Monotype, 1924

Gouache on paper; 23.3 x 30.5 cm / 23 x 30.3 cm  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. 27423 and 27424

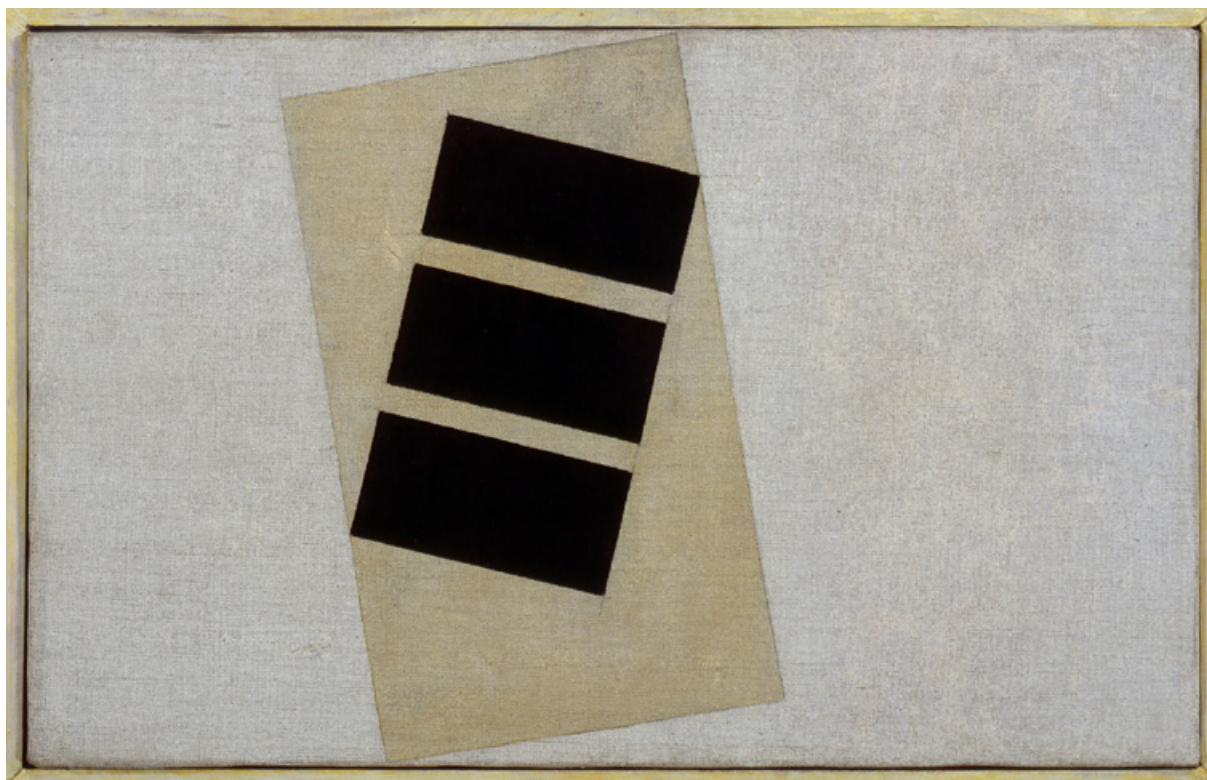




103 **VILMOS HUSZÁR**  
Composition: The Human Form, 1926

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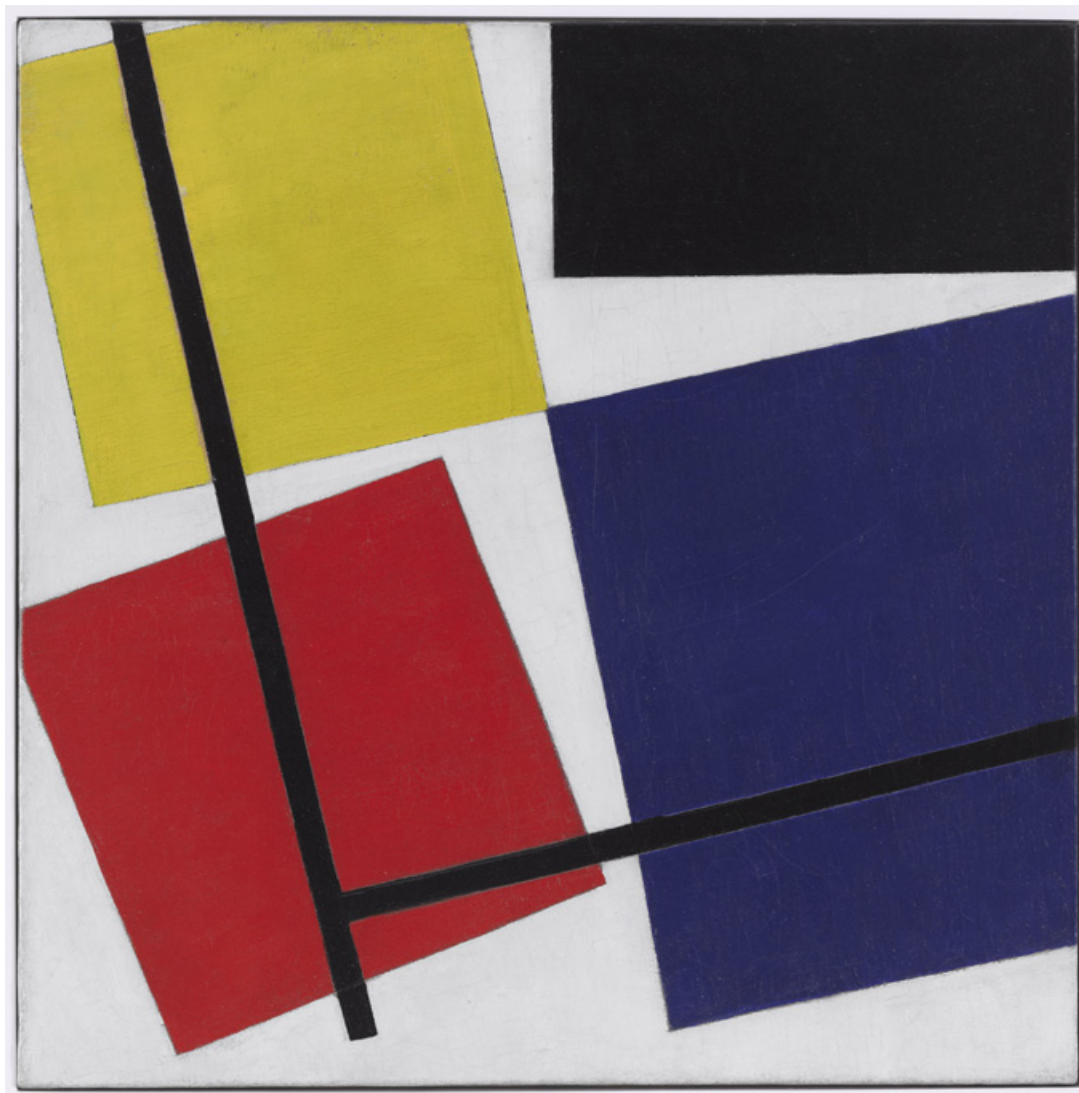
Oil on canvas; 61 x 54 cm  
Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź. Inv. MS/SN/M/35



104 **FRIEDRICH VORDEMBERGE-GILDEWART**  
Composition no. 60, 1930

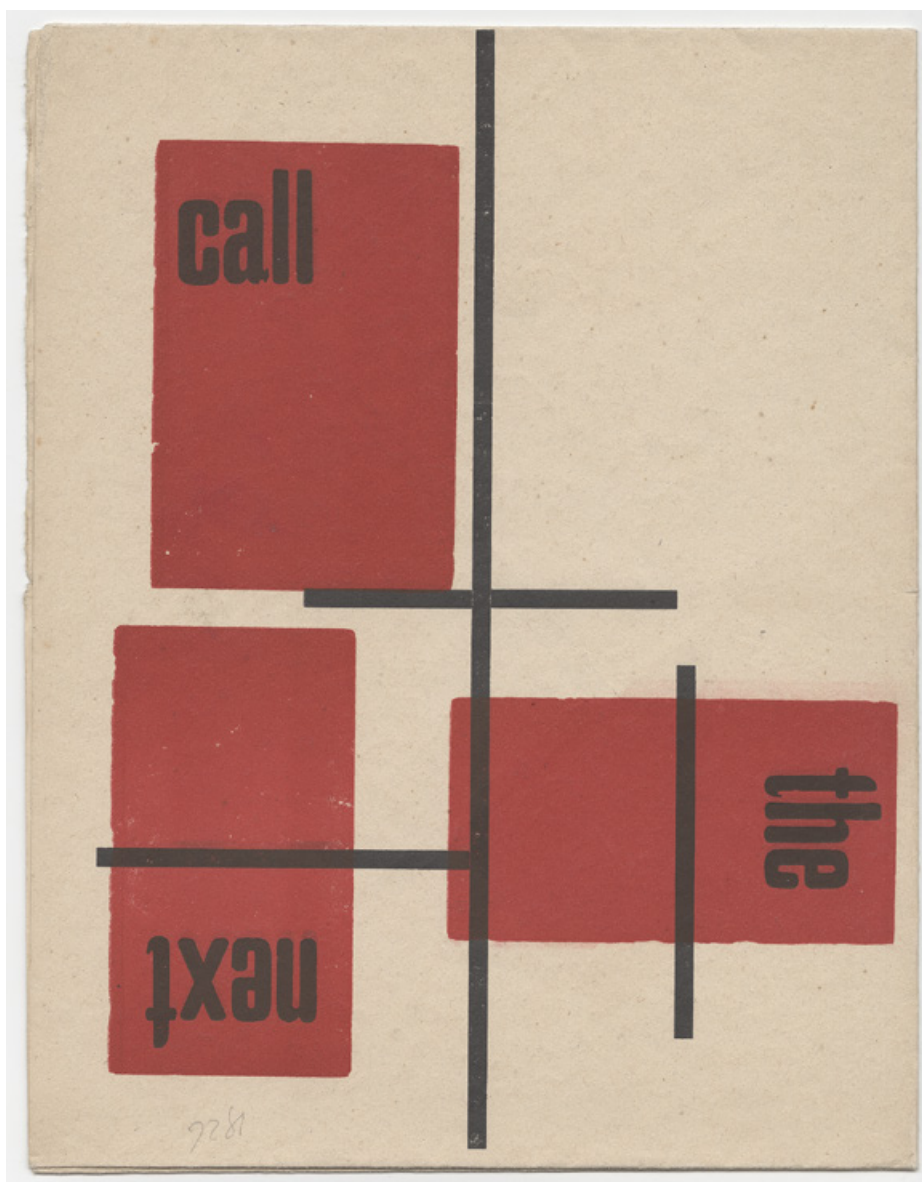
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Oil on canvas; 24.5 x 40 cm  
Collection Annely Juda Fine Art, London. Inv. FVG0164



105 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Simultaneous Counter-Composition\***, 1930

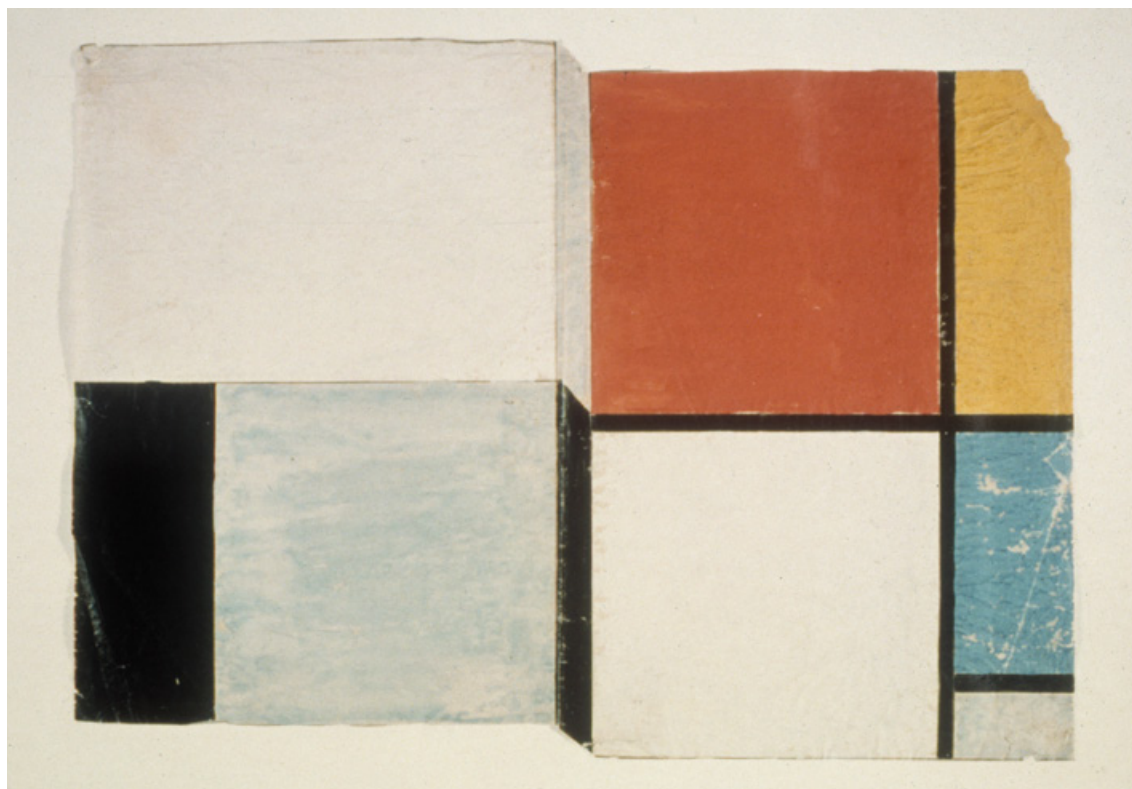
Oil on canvas; 50 x 50 cm  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Sydney and Harriet Janis Collection. Inv. 588.1967



106 **HENDRIK NICOLAAS WERKMAN**  
The Next Call 7, 1926

Print and linocut, ink on paper; 27.5 x 21.5 cm  
Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. Inv. PRE-1968-003





107 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**

Cover Design for 'Grundbegriffe der neuen  
gestaltenden Kunst', 1924

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Indian ink and gouache on transparent paper; 20.5 x 28.5 cm (open folder)  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht, long-term loan from the Cultural Heritage Agency  
of the Netherlands (RCE). Inv. AB4998



108 **PIET ZWART**  
Publicity Card for Vickers House, 1922-3

Postcard; 11 x 15.5 cm  
Gilles Gheerbrant Collection, France



109 PIET ZWART

Page for the Advertising Book Trio 1931, 1931

Print; 31 x 22 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. Inv. PRE-1970-0350



<sup>110</sup> **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
View of the north-eastern façade  
of the Schröder House, Utrecht, 1925

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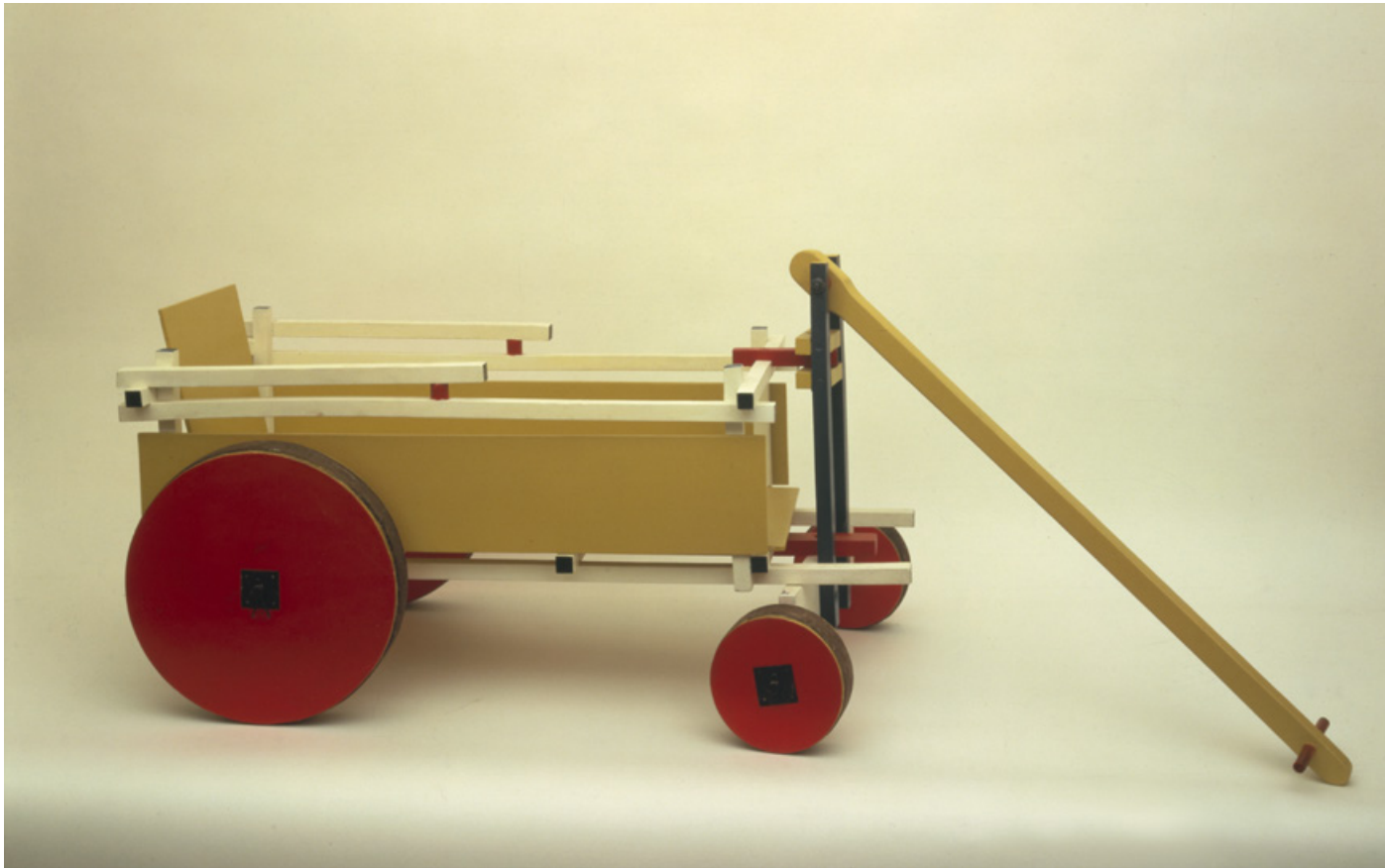


<sup>111</sup> **GERRIT RIETVELD**

Lamp with Three Tubes, 1920 (manufactured in the early 1950s)

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Neon tubes, painted oak ceiling, painted fittings; 80 x 40 x 40 cm  
Private collection, courtesy Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels



112 **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Trolley, 1922 (manufactured in 1925)

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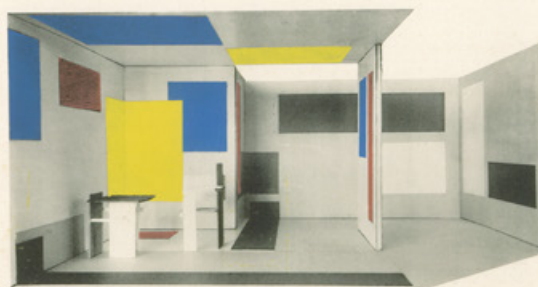
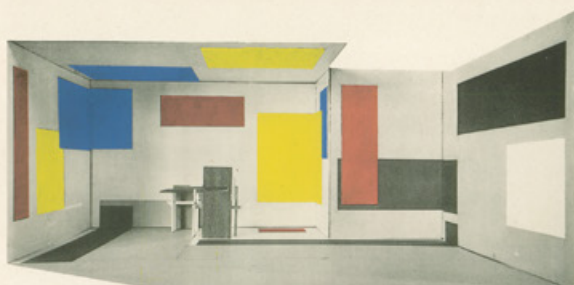
Pine, beech, oak, plywood, 65 x 112 x 65 cm (with folded handle)  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. 22756



113 **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Red-Blue Chair, 1918-23

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Beech, plywood, 86 x 66 x 87 cm  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Inv. 29266



MAQUETTE

V. HUSZAR  
INTERIEUR 1924

*Une telle composition demande une interprétation -  
un commentaire - qui n'est point capricieuse! -  
Je ne comprends rien de ces choses!... R 1924*

Editions Albert Morand  
Copyright 1924

114 **VILMOS HUSZÁR, GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Model of Composition-Space-Colour,  
from *L'Architecture vivante*, autumn-winter 1924





115 **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Berlin Chair, 1923

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Plywood, beechwood; 106 x 69.9 x 54.9 cm  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Inv. KNA 1271



116 **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Military Chair, 1923

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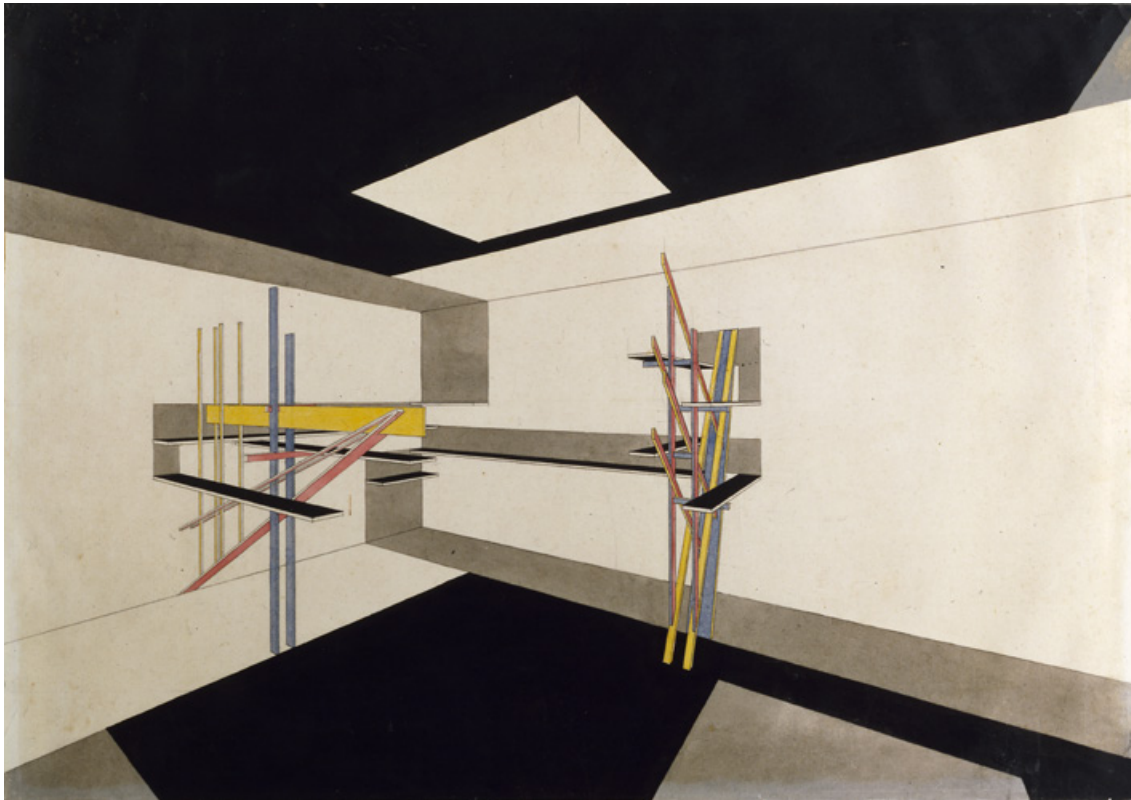
Painted oak; 90.5 x 41 x 51 cm  
Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAKK), Cologne. Inv. A 1957 W



117 **GERRIT RIETVELD**  
Zigzag Chair, 1923

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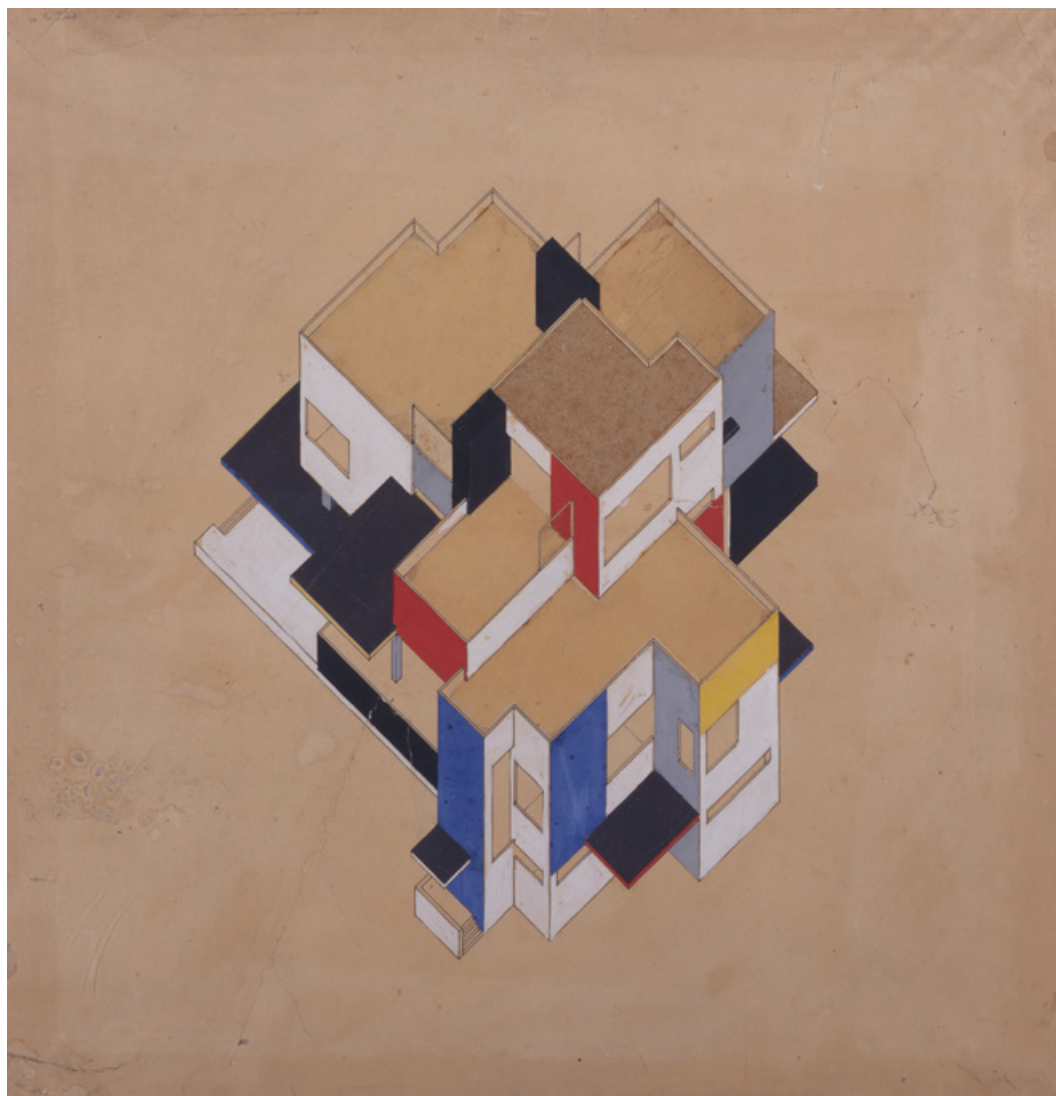
Painted oak; 78 x 38 x 38 cm  
Museum für Angewandte Kunst (MAKK), Cologne. Inv. A 1960 W



118 **PIET ZWART**  
Design for an Annual Fair Stand, c. 1923

Watercolour, Indian ink and colour pencil on paper on cardboard; 45 x 64.7 cm  
Collection Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. Inv. TEK-1970-0208





119 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Axonometric Projection of Maison Particulière, 1923**

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Indian ink, gouache and collage on paper; 56 x 56 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, on loan from the Van Eesteren-Fluck &  
Van Lohuizen Foundation, The Hague. Inv. EEST 3.181/p54



120 **JACOBUS JOHANNES PIETER OUD**  
Café De Unie, 1925

Colour pencil, ink, watercolour and gouache on paper; 73 x 84 cm  
Private collection



121 **THEO VAN DOESBURG, CORNELIS VAN EESTEREN**

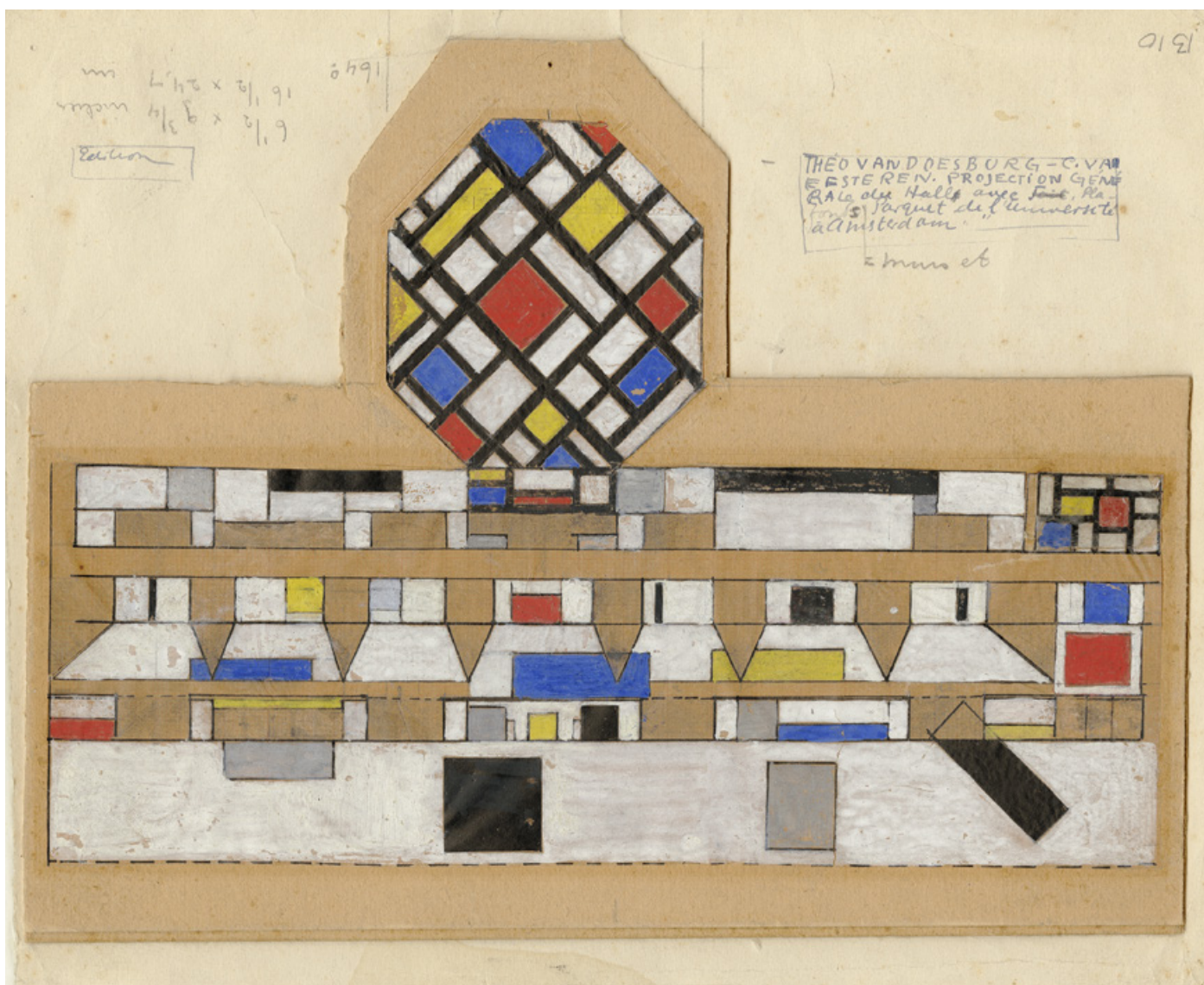
Perspective with Final Colour Design for the Shopping Arcade,  
with Café-Restaurant Laan van Meerdervoort, The Hague, 1924

Pencil, Indian ink, gouache and collage on paper; 53 x 51.5 cm

Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, on loan from the Van Eesteren-Fluck &  
Van Lohuizen Foundation. Inv. EEST 3.250







122 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**

Colour Design for the Floor, Walls and Ceiling,  
Looking Towards the Stairwell, University Hall, 1923

Pencil, Indian ink and gouache on cardboard on paper; 13.5 x 17.5 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Van Moorsel donation. Inv. EEST p13





123 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**

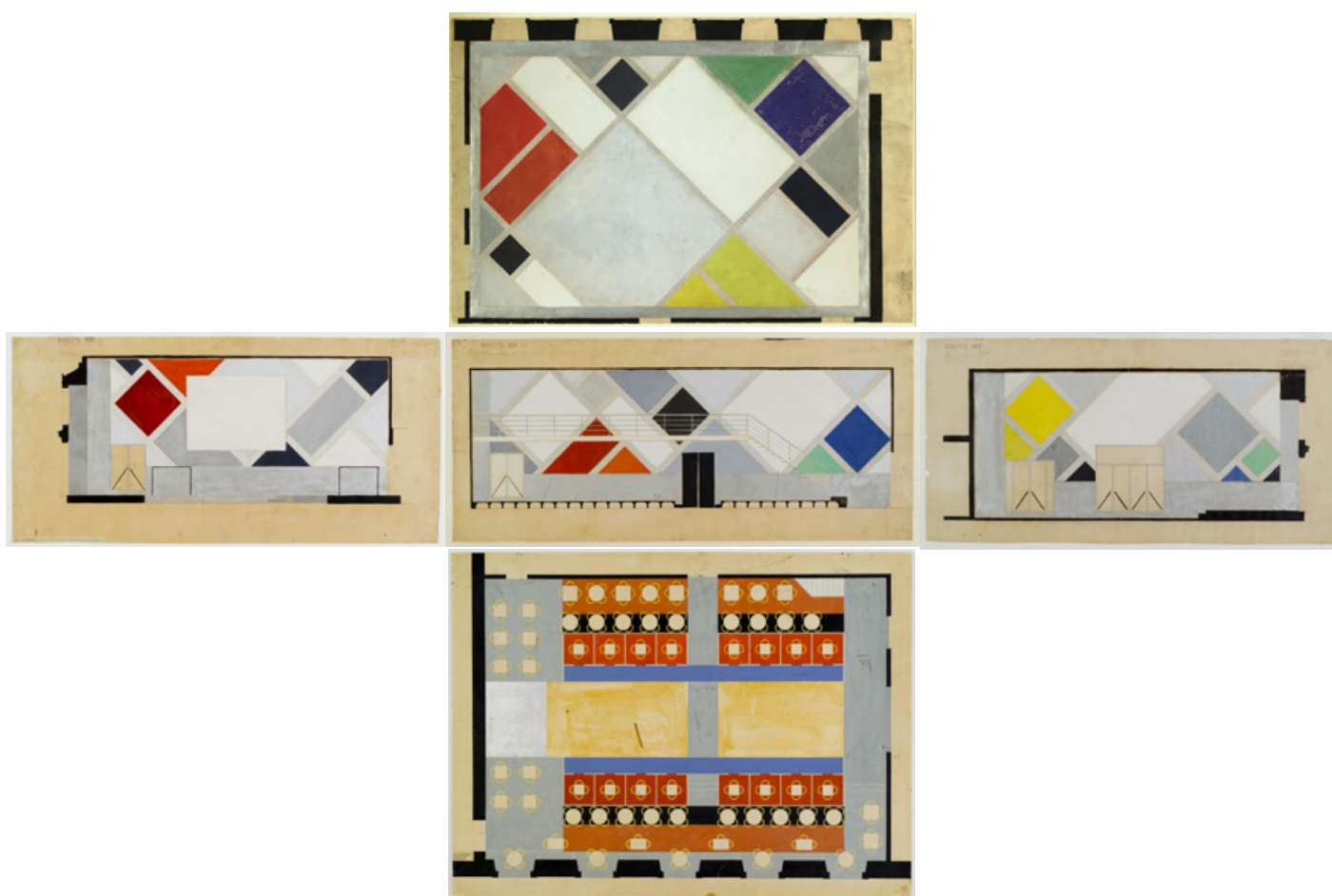
Perspective Colour Design for the University Hall of Amsterdam,  
Looking Towards the Stairwell\*, 1923

Pencil, gouache and collage on paper; 62 x 144 cm

Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. On loan from the Van Eesteren-Fluck &  
Van Lohuizen Foundation. Inv. III 168







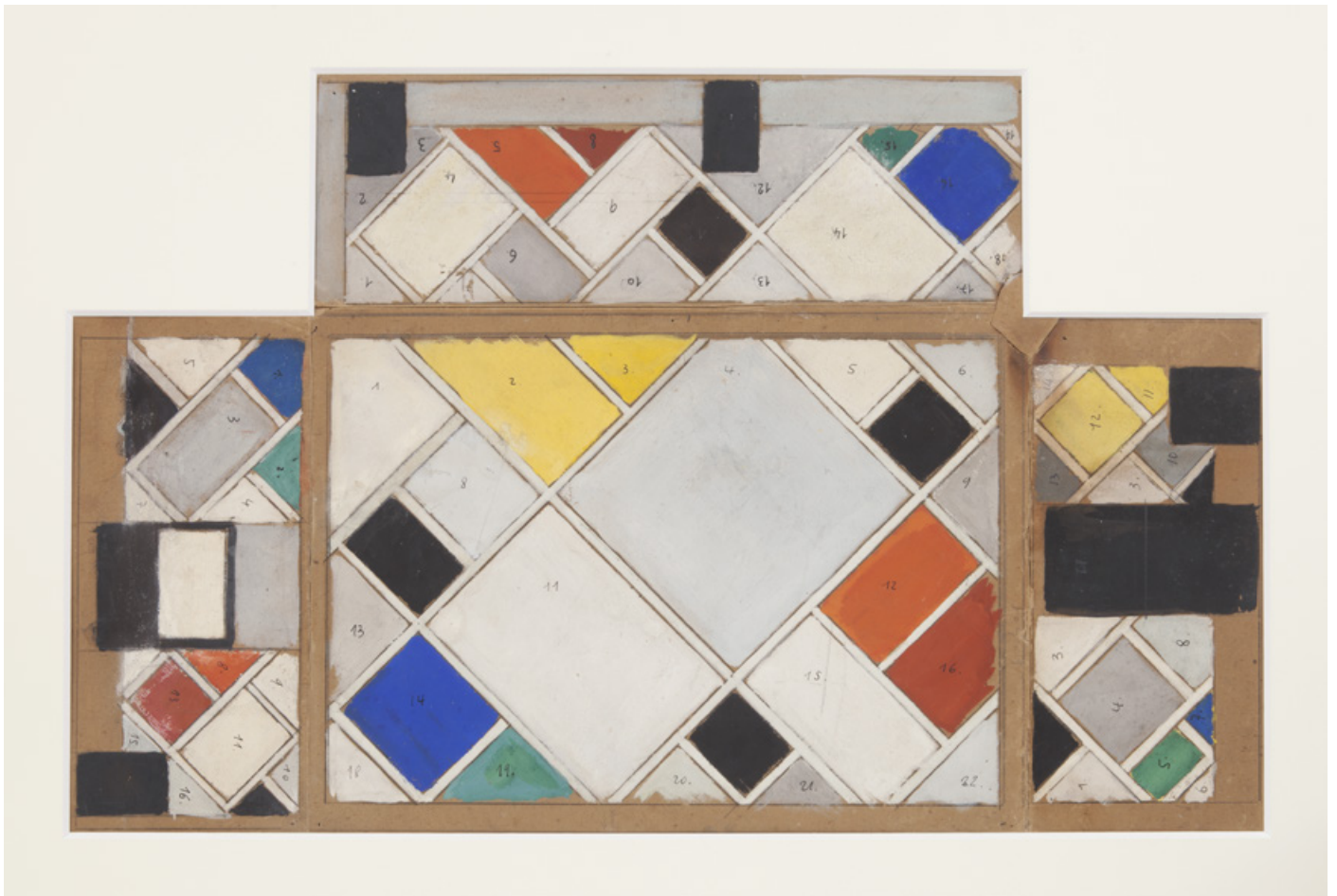
## 124 THEO VAN DOESBURG

### Design for the Main Hall in the Aubette, 1927

Pencil, Indian ink and gouache on collotype

Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, Van Moorsel donation. Inv. DOES AB5160 (floor, 79.5 x 107 cm), DOES AB5206 (wall with film screen, 46 x 105 cm), DOES AB5209 (wall with gallery, 46 x 105.5 cm), DOES AB5208 (wall on the side of the Small Party Hall, 44.5 x 89 cm), DOES AB5188 (ceiling, 73 x 110 cm)





125 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**

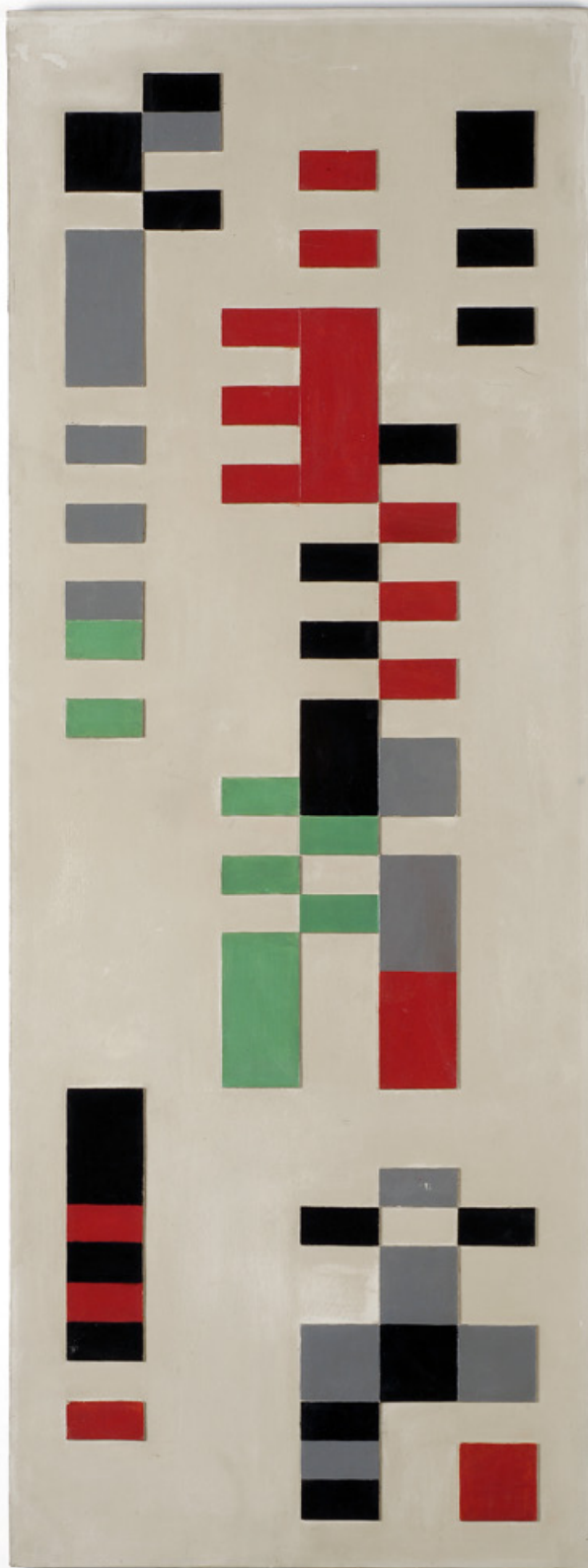
Colour Design for Ceiling and Three Walls  
in the Café de l'Aubette Ciné-Dancing, Strasbourg, 1926-7

Gouache on cardboard; 43 x 74.5 cm  
Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska AG



126 **SOPHIE TAUEBER-ARP**  
**Two Outstretched Figures, 1926**

Gouache on paper; 28 x 21 cm  
Private collection



127 **SOPHIE TAUEBER-ARP**  
**Composition Aubette, n.d.**

Painted cardboard on Pavatex; 108 x 39.5 cm  
Strasbourg Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg. Inv. 55.974.0.842



128 **HANS ARP**  
**Winter Head, 1928**

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Glued cardboard; 64 x 53 cm (with frame)  
Private collection





129 **HANS ARP**  
Head (Scottish Lips), 1927

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Painted and cut-up cardboard; 64 x 53 cm (with frame)  
Private collection



130 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Stool and Armchair for Studio House in Meudon, 1929

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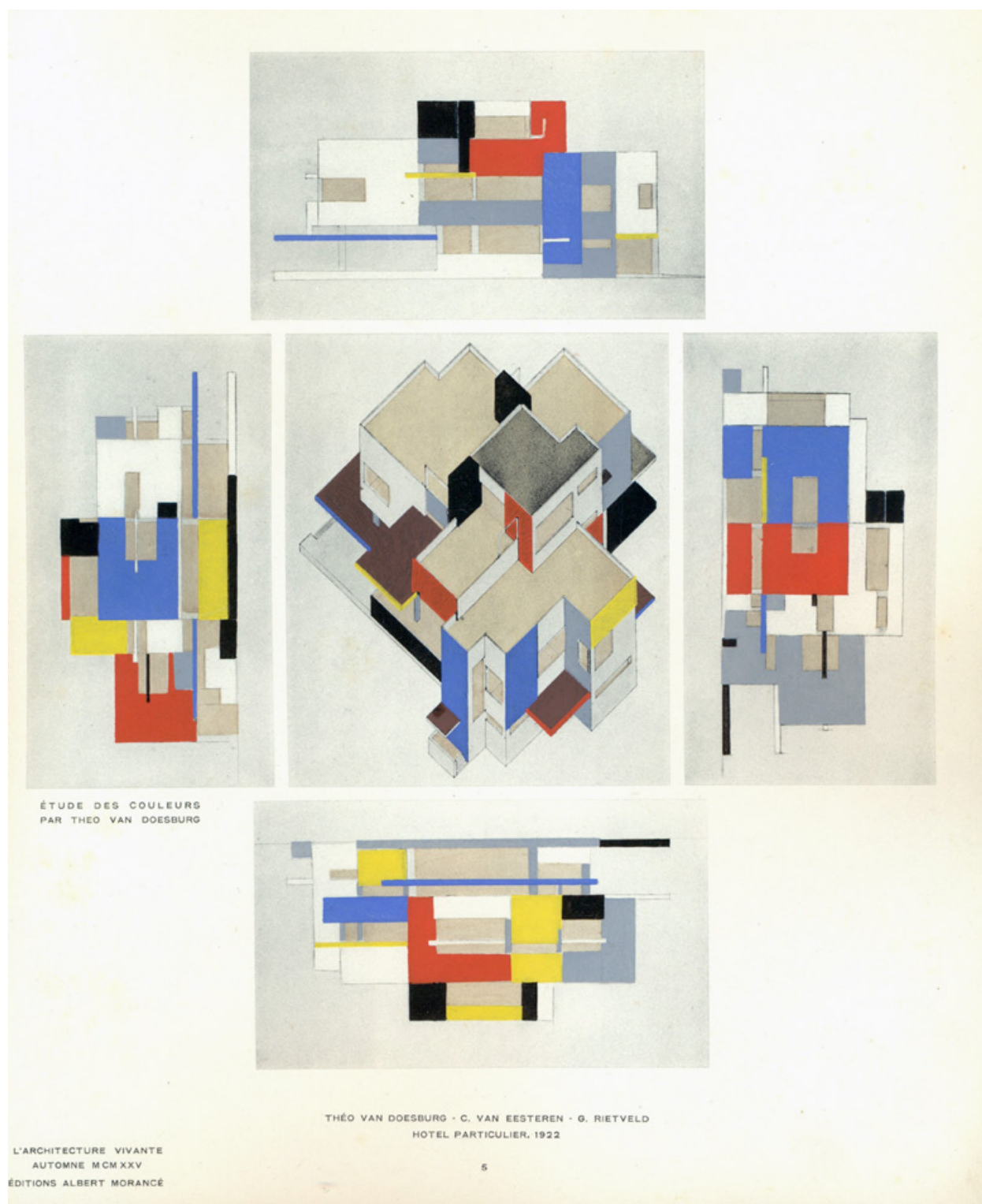
Metal, imitation leather; 45.5 x 42 x 42 cm / 61 x 55.5 x 57.5 cm  
Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), on loan to Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden.  
Inv. B 1488 (RCE AB5379) and B 1489 (RCE AB5380)



<sup>131</sup> **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Model for Studio House in Meudon, reconstruction 1982

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Mixed media (metal, synthetics, paint); 20.6 x 46.7 x 26.7 cm  
Collection Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam. Inv. MAQV114



**Fig.1** Theo van Doesburg, Colour study for *Hôtel Particulier* 1922 (actually 1923), from the magazine *L'Architecture vivante*, autumn 1925, published by Albert Morencé. Private collection



## The desire for an animated space

The precise moment when Theo van Doesburg became 'modern' can be traced to the summer of 1914. On 8 August, a week after the outbreak of the First World War, an article of his appeared in the weekly *Eenheid*. It was written by a driven artist, one who wanted to release art from its 'crutch', namely nature. Readers of dailies and weeklies had known Van Doesburg since 1912 for his writings on art. Until now, he had written that a new art would emerge in a comprehensible language and that it would deliver the 'message of Love'.<sup>1</sup> In recent years the young painter and writer had indeed followed the latest developments in the arts, but rejected Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism. For instance, he found that with the work of Wassily Kandinsky, 'the greatest possible egoism has been achieved in painting'. Free of representation, the latter's art contradicted the 'inviolable law under which natural forms remain essential to the understanding of art'.<sup>2</sup> Van Doesburg's own paintings and drawings were figurative and mediocre, and in places betray his admiration for a range of artists such as Rembrandt, Honoré Daumier, Vincent van Gogh and Matthijs Maris. His early diaries reveal a romantic personality, one that experiences life and art in a heightened manner. He had discovered early on that he also had a literary talent, and his first trials in writing are, according to current standards, more promising than his visual art. In 1906, after hearing the sound of a heavy, horse-drawn brewers' cart coming over a wooden drawbridge, he wrote the following in his diary, noting that this was the new poetry:

planke - planke; - planke - planke;  
planke - planke, plots;  
plonke, plonke, plets;  
plots - plits - plots - plits  
prrrrrrrrr ....<sup>3</sup>

That the outbreak of war played an important, if not defining role in his artistic conversion is apparent from the facts and confidences that have been passed down to us. In *Een Biecht* (A Confession), a manuscript dated 18 November 1914 written during his mobilization on the Belgian-Dutch border (the Netherlands was neutral during the war), one reads: 'Did I not preach: Love as the basis of all forms of art. Yes, that I did [...] I was on the verge of bravely encircling and seizing the entire old world of Art and of the intellect, when suddenly, like a grenade providing relief, the thought of the possibility of a European war struck in my brain (that meant for me the victory of that dirty hypocritical world over the spiritual, noble world). The possibility of this war that destroys all beauty and culture had already made me feel personally overcome. I had had too much confidence in the higher, the spiritual in humankind. Suddenly I was confronted with raw Reality. Not Art, nor Love, nor Wisdom, but grenades, grenades, grenades! I wrote one last time [...] of Love: 'The Song of the Wild Beast' [...] I sent it one hour before the mobilization and then said goodbye to everything: My ideals, my passions, everything.'<sup>4</sup>

The sincerity of his words is demonstrated by the following: he embraced Kandinsky, the Cubists and

the Futurists, started applying their principles to his own art, established contact with progressive artists, adapted his vision to the development of art, left his wife and home and sought out a new circle of friends. After meeting Piet Mondrian in 1915 and Bart van der Leek the following year, his development gained momentum. By 1917 his work hardly needed the 'crutch of nature' any longer and Van Doesburg had become an important representative of a new abstract movement. He now devoted all his energy into disseminating the message of this new art, which Mondrian called Neoplasticism. The editorship of the *De Stijl* magazine, of which the first issue appeared in October 1917, was in fact only one facet of this. For Van Doesburg this was the beginning of a period of writing and travelling in order to establish and maintain contacts with artists, museum curators, exhibition organizers, collectors, potential clients and editors, to give talks and courses, and to promote the De Stijl movement. Although his initial enthusiasm was frequently tempered by disappointments, each time a new momentum and drive for innovation resurfaced in him. Van Doesburg had developed into an inventive pioneer, for whom collaboration was ideologically of central importance, even though he realized that surrendering individuality was problematic for any individual, not to mention an artist. And yet collaboration between individuals and individual disciplines, such as architecture, painting and sculpture, was paramount not only for himself, but also for the other artists around De Stijl. The new art they envisioned needed to have a universal character and contribute to a dynamic, spiritually stimulating environment that, from an ethical perspective, raised the individual to a higher level.

Van Doesburg increasingly put his art at the service of the plastic realization of this environment. That meant that he especially had to form an opinion about architecture. Although innovations were happening within the visual arts, in his view architecture lagged

behind. In the Netherlands, the architect H.P. Berlage, with his rationalist approach, was perhaps the most progressive. In his buildings, the structure is clearly highlighted, and accentuated rather by the decoration rather than disguised by it. But his practice of a 'collective art', in which artists from other disciplines placed their works in locations designated by the architect, and his stubborn adherence to the use of decoration deterred Van Doesburg and his De Stijl followers from the very beginning. It is true that their conception of a total work of art did not essentially deviate from Berlage's, but their difference of opinion focused on the primacy of architecture. The De Stijl movement held the idea that there must be a strict division of labour founded on an egalitarian basis: architect, painter and sculptor must work together to create a plastic work of art, without one dominating the other. In practice this was a huge task. The theory of Neoplasticism, of which the essence was formulated by Piet Mondrian and published in *De Stijl* from October 1917, poses conditions for the design of new art that apply equally to architecture. The objective was a search for harmony by balancing opposites, striving for an order in art and in life that reflects the equilibrium of the cosmos. For the whole of society, but for plastic art and architecture in particular, it was necessary to re-establish the basic elements on which to 'build' the new world-view. Thus one arrives at a formal language of rectangular surfaces, primary colours (red, yellow and blue), the non-colours white, black and grey, horizontal and vertical lines, and cubic volumes. From illustrative art the aim was to move to an art that scrutinizes nature, in which the mind predominates and the individual is subordinate to the general. There was talk of the conquest of nature by the mind. For architecture this meant that any historicizing tendency must be suppressed and that an elementary means of expression must be developed on the basis of the general principles of Neoplasticism.

For Van Doesburg the quest for an ideal architecture went through several phases. Initially, in 1916, still in the spirit of collective art, he made a comparison between the Egyptian pyramids and the medieval cathedrals, in which architects, painters and sculptors worked together to create a microcosm as a representation of the macrocosm. In the future, the new, abstract painting must ensure that contact with the universe emerged through the application of its mathematical relationships on the flat surface of the wall. Thus the ideal edifice was still a temple, which was also the term used by Van Doesburg.<sup>5</sup> In his vision, the painter, like a priest, would have to show the architect and the sculptor the way. About eight years later his insights had matured to form a comprehensive vision, which he summarized in sixteen points and which would remain his guiding principle until his death, albeit with various adaptations and shifts in emphasis.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the new architecture he claimed that it must be elementary, that is, based on function, mass, surface, time, space, light, colour and material, the plastic elements. Practical requirements must be considered. If form is necessary at all, it must be determined by rectangular surfaces. There should be no passive elements such as a hole or void. The layout must be open. There should no longer be any distinction between inside and outside. Walls should be broken through and no longer have a load-bearing function, which would be reduced to support points. This involved creating a continuous space, divided by means of movable partitions. Space and time were one. The new architecture was anti-cubist, its spatial units should be projected outwards from the centre, and the whole must give the impression of floating. There should be neither symmetry nor repetition, but a balanced relationship between unequal parts. There should be no façade, but be founded on a multi-directional spatio-temporal design. Colour should be incorporated as means of organic expression.

Van Doesburg's dream, above all, was to use these principles to create an atmosphere in which colour played the leading role. He wanted 'clear and bright enclosed spaces, accented with deep and pure colours' with 'a moral impact on the inhabitants, since the environment controls all their actions and thoughts'.<sup>7</sup> Colour, light, time and movement were all necessary to achieve that goal. The objective was to create an architecture that radiates spiritual value and demonstrates the triumph of the mind not only over nature and matter, but also over technology. What means did Van Doesburg use to achieve this goal? I will here discuss three of his favourite practices: the use of leaded glass, the application of colour inside and out, and the integration of light as an architectonic element.

Almost unseen since the Middle Ages, leaded glass made a glorious comeback onto the Dutch art scene in the late nineteenth century. Filled with ancient and modern symbols, and supported by the contemporary Roman Catholic resurgence, this artistic medium soon became ubiquitous. Leaded glass was popular even in private houses and a number of workshops producing leaded glass emerged. Van Doesburg used it from his first collaboration with architects in 1916 until his death in 1931. At the beginning, this was not unusual, since it tied in with current practice. Van Doesburg understood immediately how coloured glazing could awake in the visitor an almost mystical perception of space. With straight lead lines and flat glass planes, it was possible to create a legible and clearly defined composition with balanced proportions. The combination of colour and light could achieve the dematerialization of the architectonic space. The medium fitted the artist's perception of space, essentially inspired by religious experience, and his indestructible faith in colour as a primary architectonic element. In 1929 and 1930 he still devoted a series of articles to leaded glass, in part to defend his use of a technique seen as old-fashioned. He thought that leaded glass had a role to play as an

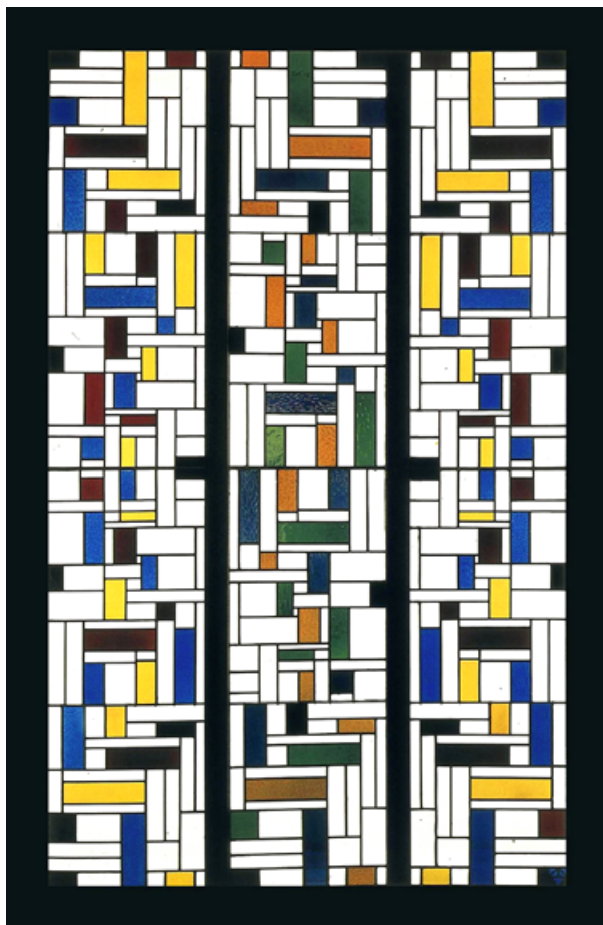


Fig. 2 Theo van Doesburg, *Leaded-Glass Composition IV*, 1917. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

exponent of creative thought and as a counterweight to rationalism: 'The new painting conceived as a liturgy of light cannot manifest itself any more grandly than in the most intimate connection with architecture, whether in three dimensions as interior painting or as leaded glass.'<sup>8</sup> The architects J.J.P. Oud, Jan Wils and C.R. de Boer gave Van Doesburg the opportunity to design windows for several of their buildings. For instance, in 1917, he created a series of identical landing windows for a teacher's house in Sint Anthoniepolder designed by Wils. Their collaboration on the De Lange House in Alkmaar (1917; fig. 2) resulted among other things in a monumental triptych in the stairwell; Van Doesburg noted with pleasure how the chromatic com-

position appeared 'completely free in space'. In the late 1920s, when he was in sole charge of the renovation of the apartment of André Horn, one of the managers of the Aubette building in Strasbourg, he seized the opportunity to have a vast ensemble of leaded-glass windows made after his own design and those of Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. There is also leaded glass in his own house, which he designed and had built in 1929–30, in the form of a skylight in his study.

Painting in the form of colour applied to the interior and exterior of buildings was another mode of 'Plasticism' used by Van Doesburg from 1917 until his death. In the first issues of *De Stijl* the artist Bart van der Leek explained how the painter and the architect must work together in the new art: the architect provides the construction, the mass, while the painter uses colour (and light) to provide balance. Colour destroys – Van der Leek uses the word 'destructivize', Van Doesburg prefers 'loosening' – the heaviness, opening up the architecture and reinforcing spatial proportions: 'If architecture is the limitation of space, colour and the spatial representation of proportions complement its cosmic nature.'<sup>9</sup> Van Doesburg initially applied this principle by spreading colour across walls, floors and ceilings. This 'painting in three dimensions', as he called it, can be seen in the colour composition made in 1919 for a room in Bart de Ligt's house in Katwijk aan Zee. The principle was to apply Neoplasticist compositions across four, five or six surfaces in the same space, which should all be seen at a single glance. Having realized that this was difficult, perhaps impossible to achieve, in later projects he paid greater attention to the fact that one must move through the space and experience the colours in succession. This enabled him to give a place to the dynamic relationship between time and space. For instance, in the colour design for the flower room of the Villa Noailles in Hyères (fig. 3), in the south of France, which Rob Mallet-Stevens built in 1924–5 for the Viscount de Noailles, the colour surfaces were



positioned obliquely. The reciprocal relationships between colours and surfaces animate the space. The placement of colours in different rooms or on exterior walls was thus of great importance and Van Doesburg began to explore this principle further. He did so not only intuitively, but also by experimenting with different methods, as can be seen in the collaboration with the architect Oud on housing blocks VIII and IX in Spangen (Rotterdam). The design of the colour scheme for the exterior of these apartment buildings, on which Van Doesburg worked in the course of 1921, marked the end of their collaboration. Van Doesburg had distributed a 'triad' of blue, yellow and green across the façades in a pattern of arches, diagonals and rectangles. When Oud, who was initially enthusiastic, raised objections, Van Doesburg brought the issue to a head and demanded that his plan be executed in its entirety or not at all. Oud refused and the break up became a reality. Van Doesburg's conviction that he had a role to play in architecture was only heightened as a result. In the models for two houses he designed in 1923 with Cor van Eesteren, the *Maison particulière* (fig. 4) and the *Maison d'artiste*, colour was more a building material, no longer the vehicle of a disordering composition, but an element that influences the perception of space. Van Doesburg then applied primary colours as well as black, white and grey across all of the walls, floors and ceilings, and in some cases across parts of the wall delimited by windows or corners. He allowed these to coincide with architectural elements and thereby colour immediately reinforced the role of light as an element that resists gravity.

Light as an architectonic element continued to fascinate Van Doesburg. He associated light with movement and the dynamization of time and space, whereby he increasingly distanced himself from Mondrian in the mid-1920s. The latter asserted that the suspension of time and space, that is to say, an everlasting static and harmonious balance, must be a central tenet of Neo-

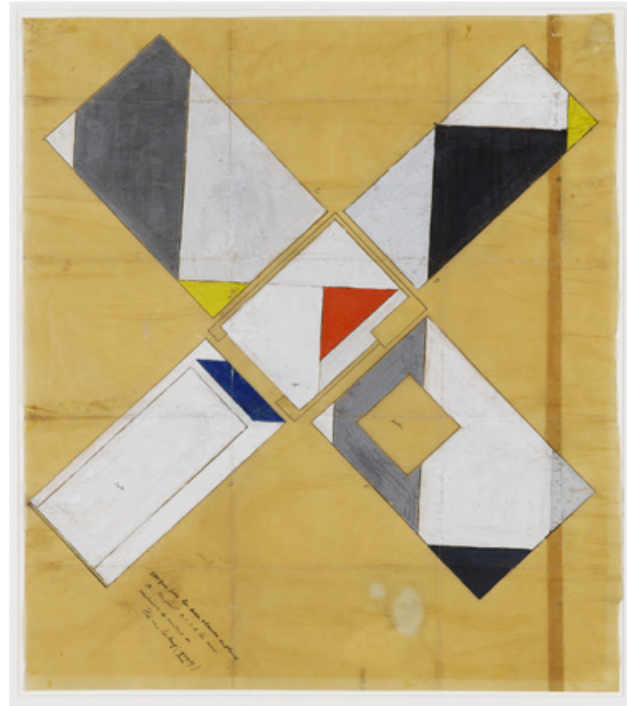


Fig. 3 Theo van Doesburg, *Colour Design for the Flower Room in Villa Noailles, Hyères, 1924-5*. Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

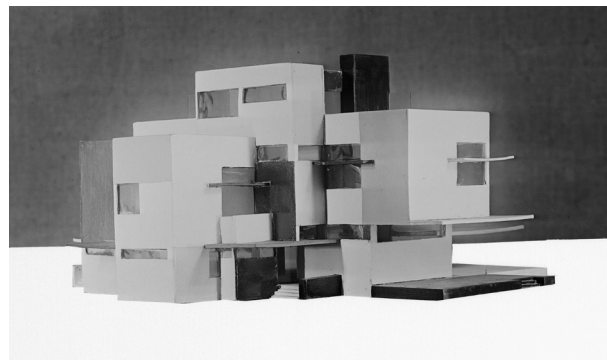


Fig. 4 Theo van Doesburg, *Model for a Private Home (lost), 1923*

plasticism. It was precisely this point that led to the difference of opinion with Van Doesburg, who sought to represent a dynamic balance by harnessing the tension between time and space. That he was going to use the diagonal for this purpose did not bother Mondrian, but he was unhappy about the infringement of the Neoplasticist dogma of the suspension of time. In 1919 Mondrian himself used the diagonal. Neither was he opposed to the 'oblique position', in the 1920s, as long as the lines crossed at the perpendicular and the surfaces had right angles. He observed in 1927 that 'in Neoplastic art the rectangular position is the essential question, the relationship obtained in this way, rather than what is vertical or horizontal. Because it is this relationship which represents the immovable versus movable nature. One can therefore make very fine work, when one places the relationship obliquely.'<sup>10</sup> In the literature it has been quite often suggested that Van Doesburg's use of the diagonal was the cause of the temporary estrangement between the two artists, but Mondrian's statement proves that this was not the case.<sup>11</sup>

Light and movement (and therefore also time) played an important role in Van Doesburg's designs for the Aubette in Strasbourg (fig. 5). This can be seen for instance in the sophisticated circulation plan for the complex, in which he attempted to let the spaces flow into one another in such a way that the public could come and go without feeling obliged to stay in any particular room. This also appears in the use of mirrors, reflective materials and polished surfaces, as well as in the use of slight relief between the bands of colour and in the treatment of artificial lighting as an integral part of the design. His intention was that every room in the complex should have the same generous lighting, with as few shadows as possible. Van Doesburg also intended the façade to be dominated by neon lighting (used for advertising), but failed to obtain permission. His plans for a mobile light architecture were genuinely utopian. Enthusiastic about the potential offered by film, he

philosophized about the possibility of synchronizing the audience's space with that of the projection. In this way spectators could experience the film both psychically and physically through the creation of a space like a fusion between the 'sequence' of music and the 'juxtaposition' of painting. This boundless film continuum would be built up by means of light, movement, time, shadow and colour, and developed in collaboration with scientific specialists.<sup>12</sup> The yearning for an animated space was never far away with Van Doesburg. He continued to think of the Neoplasticist space as a temple, an impressive monumental ensemble in which the three dimensions converge over time and man could feel at one with the universe. On various occasions he made comparisons between aspects of Neoplasticism and religion. Neoplasticism was for him a belief, in the same way as science was also a religion for him. A constant in his work (and life) was the testing of the boundary between understanding and not understanding, and of seeking to reverse this border, once he believed he had grasped it. This attitude seems typical of an avant-gardist of the first generation. Van Doesburg saw himself as a pioneer, whose mission was to be the herald of a revolution in culture. Or as Bart van der Leek has written: '[...] we are [...] the primitives of the new age and it is only a matter of finding the right image of the new zeitgeist.'<sup>13</sup>

With such conceptions about belief and science there is no room for unrealistic expectations concerning technique. Technology must indeed serve the advancement of the universal at the expense of the personal, but it must also be mastered by the mind and contribute to a living environment in which there is no place for materialism and rationalism. Technological advances must help bring the society of Neoplasticism closer. On one hand Van Doesburg was very interested in the development of new materials and he expected a lot from them: 'Only those involved in the world of matter according to the ideal aesthetic will discover

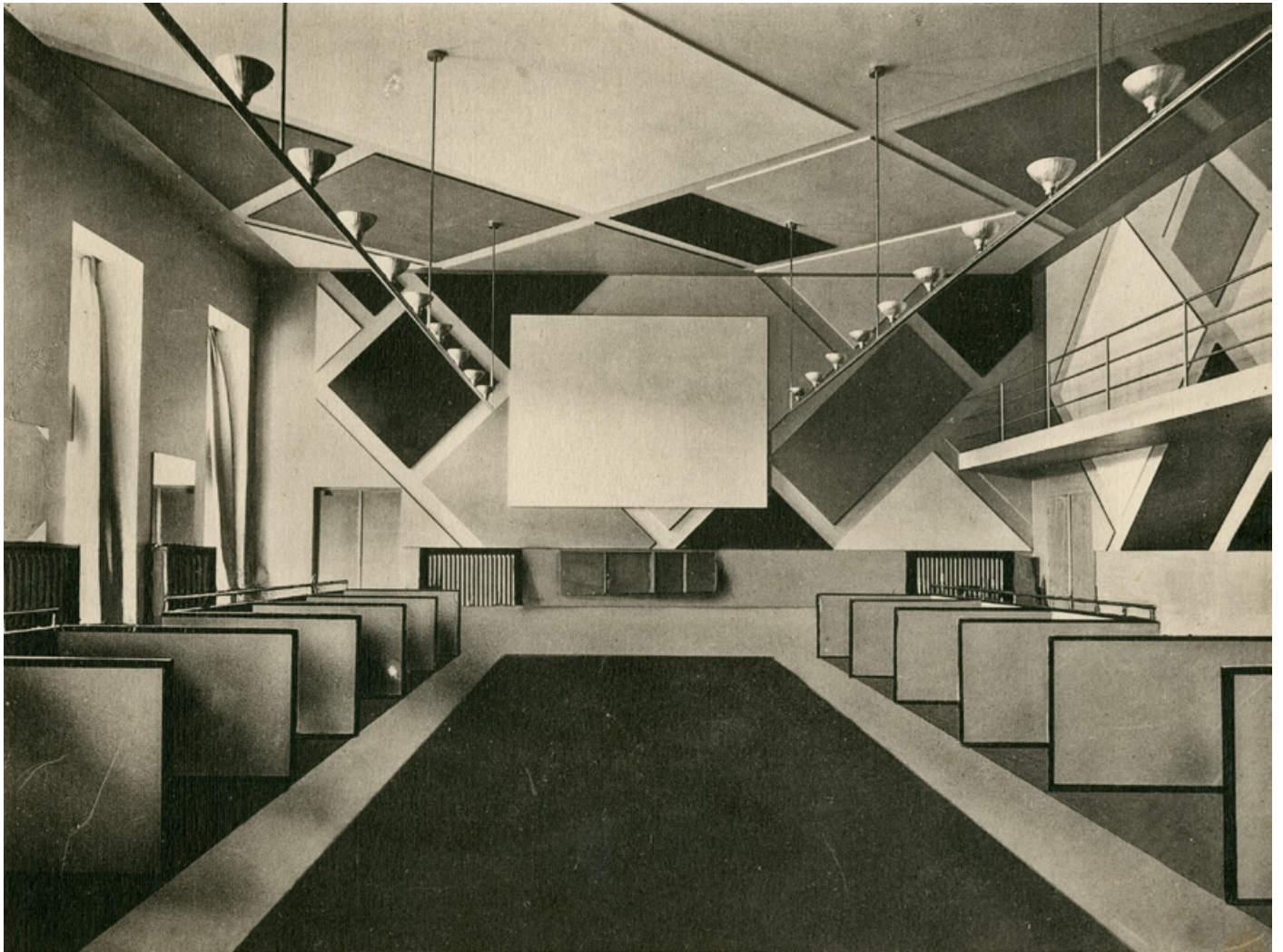


Fig. 5 Café de l'Aubette Ciné-Dancing in Strasbourg (interior)



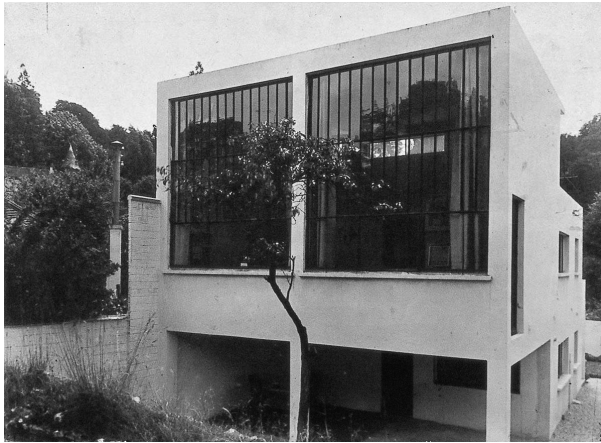


Fig. 6 Van Doesburg's studio house in Meudon, seen from the garden, early 1930. VDA



Fig. 7 Van Doesburg's studio house, view from the landing at the top of the stairs leading to the roof terrace, early 1930. VDA

along a mechanical-technical path the materials which, through their contrasting, dissonant or complementary energy, will enable the application of Neoplasticism in architecture.<sup>14</sup> Thus he hoped that a perfectly coloured building material could be developed, which would make painting superfluous. On the other hand, when it came to designing, he did not allow himself to be guided only by what was technically possible. Mick Eekhout, until 2015 a professor of product development at Delft University of Technology, recently investigated with his students whether the design for the *Maison d'artiste* could feasibly be constructed. His conclusion was that, given the large cantilevered spaces built around a small core, construction to a fifth of the envisaged scale would be possible with the help of steel, concrete and composites, but that the current state of technology made it impossible to go any further.<sup>15</sup>

What is it like to live in an environment on which such complex demands are made? In Van Doesburg's almost messianic vision regarding the task of the artist, the person for whom this new culture was being fashioned played a subordinate role. Within *De Stijl*, the viewer or the inhabitant was also primarily a circumstantial object, a part of a score. What 'one' thought of it naturally came to expression in the reactions of exhibition visitors, readers of the *De Stijl* magazine, critics,

and so forth. It is precisely in the contacts between artists and architects that the absence of man in the Neoplastic universe became an obstacle. The architect was not only the supplier of the building (often with his own ego), but also the mouthpiece of the client, the inhabitant or the user(s). The conflicts over Van Doesburg's architectural projects (and those of his *De Stijl* colleagues) therefore generally had to do with the neglect of the interests of the other involved parties. The principle of an equal collaboration between the artistic disciplines could only be achieved when the egos were silenced and attention was simultaneously paid to the other people involved. In the case of the *Aubette* the situation seemed ideal: the clients were well-disposed towards the artists – Arp, Taeuber-Arp and Van Doesburg – who had been commissioned to design a number of rooms in the eighteenth-century building. There was no architect, but a draughtsman who could translate the ideas into architectural forms. Consideration was given to the circulation routes within the complex, as though it were a functional city. Nevertheless, the clients were quick to reorganize the interiors when the public failed to show. In addition, Van Doesburg could not accept 'the rudeness with which the public behaves in Strasbourg' and consoled himself with the thought that here, in any case, an attempt had been made 'con-



trary to rationalism, to make everything coincide to create the atmosphere of a plastic architecture'.<sup>16</sup>

Collaboration based on the division of labour was a central tenet for De Stijl. In the early years, Van Doesburg had the opportunity to realize a number of diverse projects with different architects. He took on the role of a painter, stripping architecture of its heaviness with colour, for instance with Wils in the De Lange House and with Oud in the De Vonk House. But as soon as the architect considered that the painter's contribution had gone too far Van Doesburg withdrew, as in the case of Oud with the designs for apartment blocks VIII and IX in Spangen. In the meantime, Van Doesburg's ideas about architecture were so far developed that he no longer took any pleasure in a 'subordinate' role as painter. When in 1923 he worked with Van Eesteren on the models for the Maison particulière and the Maison d'artiste, the collaboration was based on an equal relationship. It was a rare example of successful cooperation, something we owe to the fact that Van Eesteren, as a newly graduated architect, was still in his formative years, and Van Doesburg needed an architect with building knowledge, but above all thanks to the creative synergy that arose between the two men. Also with Van Eesteren, he subsequently developed a number of chromatic compositions, building on his previous designs, for the Van Zessen House in Alblasserdam in 1923, and for a shopping arcade in The Hague in 1924. Thereafter Van Doesburg took the lead. For the design of his own house in Meudon (figs. 6–7), for instance, in 1929 he hired the young architect Abraham Elzas. Throughout all these years the same pattern emerges in Van Doesburg of alternating enthusiasm and disappointment: he immerses himself in architecture, fails to receive any commissions, rejects architecture, immerses himself in painting, etc. Little remained by this time of his high expectations about collaboration. He had reached the conclusion—and in this he was not unique—that art was primarily an individual responsi-

bility, which must be borne alone. Collaboration was a nice ideal, but when push comes to shove, it appeared that only one person could be in charge. If Mondrian had already arrived at that insight earlier on, it was also the inevitable conclusion that Van Doesburg himself came to in the late 1920s: 'Only that which comes from individual himself (at least that is my conviction) can be of any importance for the community ...'<sup>17</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Theo van Doesburg, 'Onafhankelijke bespiegelingen over de kunst (Slot)', *Van oude en nieuwe waarden*, *De Avondpost* (28 February 1914). Quoted in Joosten 1982.
2. Theo van Doesburg, 'Onafhankelijke bespiegelingen over de kunst (Slot)', *De Avondpost* (18 October 1913). Quoted in Joosten 1982.
3. Theo van Doesburg, *Dagboek I*, The Hague, RKD, quoted in Straaten 1983, p. 29.
4. Theo van Doesburg, *Brieven aan Bertha. Derde Brief*, in Hoek 2000, pp. 623–4, the quote is on p. 624. 'Het Lied van het Wilde Beest' was published in *Eenheid* (1 August 1914) and is reprinted in Hoek 2000, p. 620.
5. Theo van Doesburg, 'De schilderkunst en haar omgeving' (June 1916), in Straaten 1988, pp. 12–13.
6. Theo van Doesburg, 'Tot een beeldende architectuur', *De Stijl* 6 (1924) no. 6/7, pp. 78–83.
7. Theo van Doesburg, 'De beteekenis der mechanische esthetiek voor de architectuur en de andere vakken', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 42 (1921) no. 25, p. 220.
8. Theo van Doesburg, 'Het glas-in-lood in de oude en de nieuwe architectuur', *Bouwbedrijf* 7 (1930) no. 2, p. 124.
9. Bart van der Leek, 'De plaats van het moderne schilderen in de architectuur', *De Stijl* 1 (October 1917) no. 1, pp. 6–7. For 'destructivize' and 'loosening', see also Straaten 1988, pp. 39–40.
10. See Piet Mondrian, 'Neo-Plasticisme. De Woning – De Straat – De Stad', *i10* 1 (1927) no. 1, pp. 12–18, quoted on p. 16.
11. For example by Carsten-Peter Warncke, *Het ideaal als kunst. De Stijl 1917–1931*, Cologne, 1990, p. 172; Overly 1991, pp. 69–70, and Serge Lemoine, *Mondrian et De Stijl*, Paris, 2010, p. 82.
12. Theo van Doesburg, 'Film als reine Gestaltung', in *Die Form* 4 (1929) no. 10, pp. 241–8. See also Straaten 1988, pp. 190–5.
13. Bart van der Leek, 'Over schilderen en bouwen', *De Stijl* 1 (February 1918) no. 4, pp. 37–8.
14. Theo van Doesburg, 'Van de esthetiek naar het materiaal', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43 (1922) no. 38, p. 374.
15. Mick Eekhout, *Technologisch ontwerpen in spagaat tussen innovaties en wetenschap*, Delft, 2015, pp. 15–19.
16. Theo van Doesburg, 'Architectuurvernieuwing in het buitenland. De ombeelding van de Aubette in Straatsburg', *Bouwbedrijf* 6 (1929) no. 6, pp. 116–22. Quotes on p. 122.
17. Theo van Doesburg, '10 Jaren Stijl. Algemeene Inleiding', *De Stijl* 7 (1927) no. 79/84, p. 3.

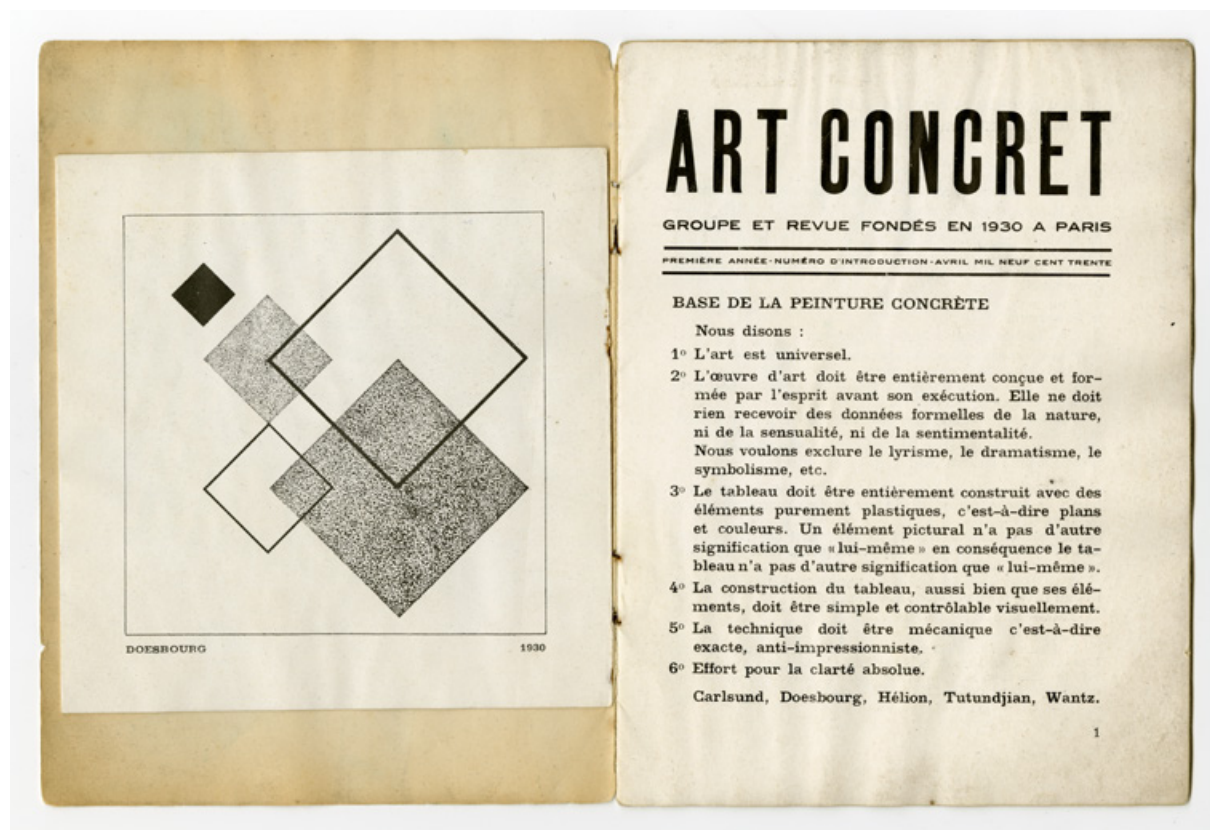
**VI.**





**NUMÉRO D'INTRODUCTION DU GROUPE  
DE LA REVUE ART CONCRET. 3 FRs**

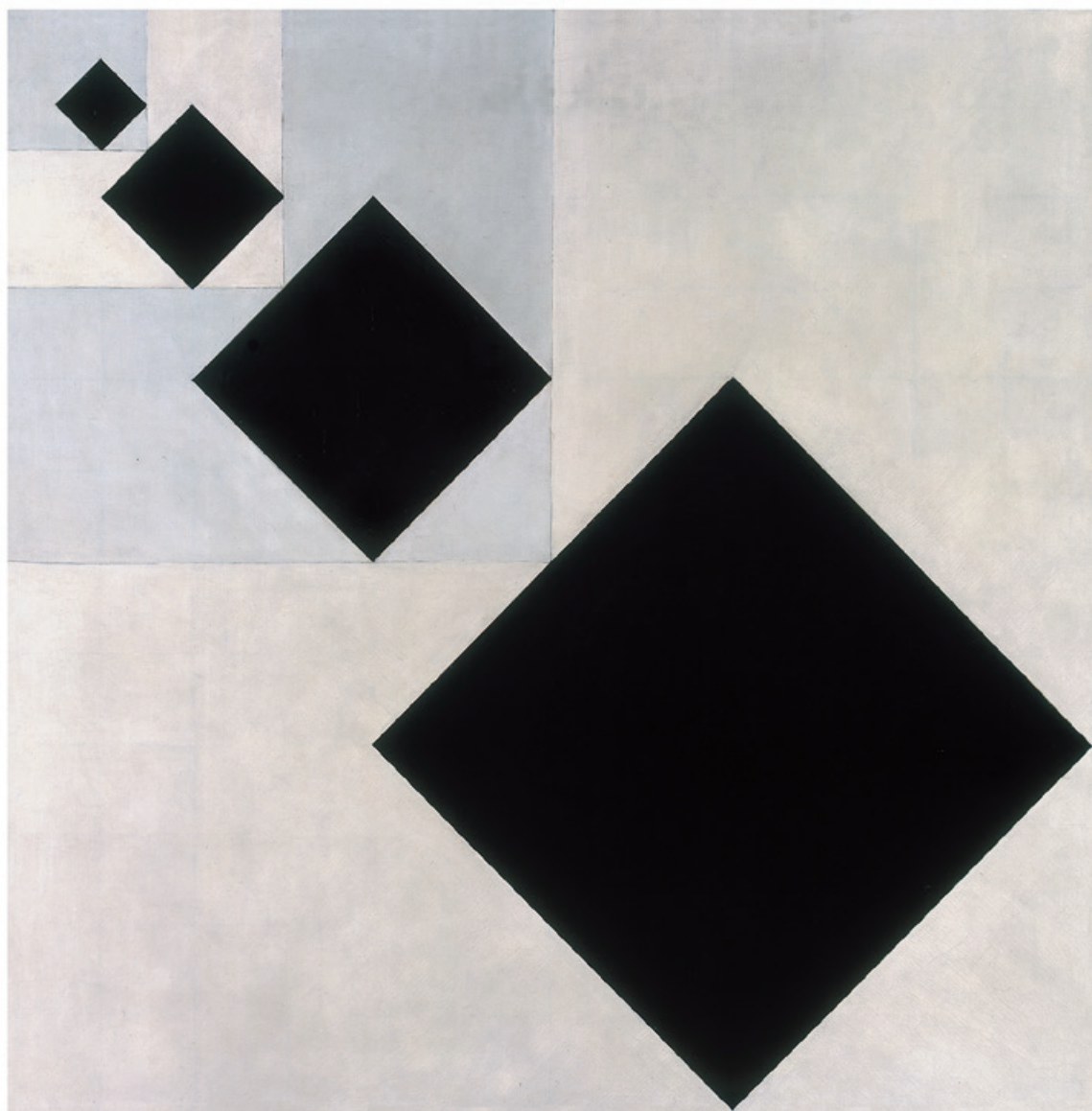




132 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
Magazine *Art Concret*, April 1930, no. 1. First year

Print; 18.5 x 14 cm  
Private collection





133 **THEO VAN DOESBURG**  
**Arithmetic Composition, 1929-30**

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Oil on canvas, 101 x 101 cm  
Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur



134 **OTTO GUSTAF CARLSUND**  
Manifesto for Art Concret, 1930

Oil on panel; 33 x 33 cm (each)  
Eskilstuna Konstmuseum, Eskilstuna. Inv. 126, 264, 265, 266 and 270



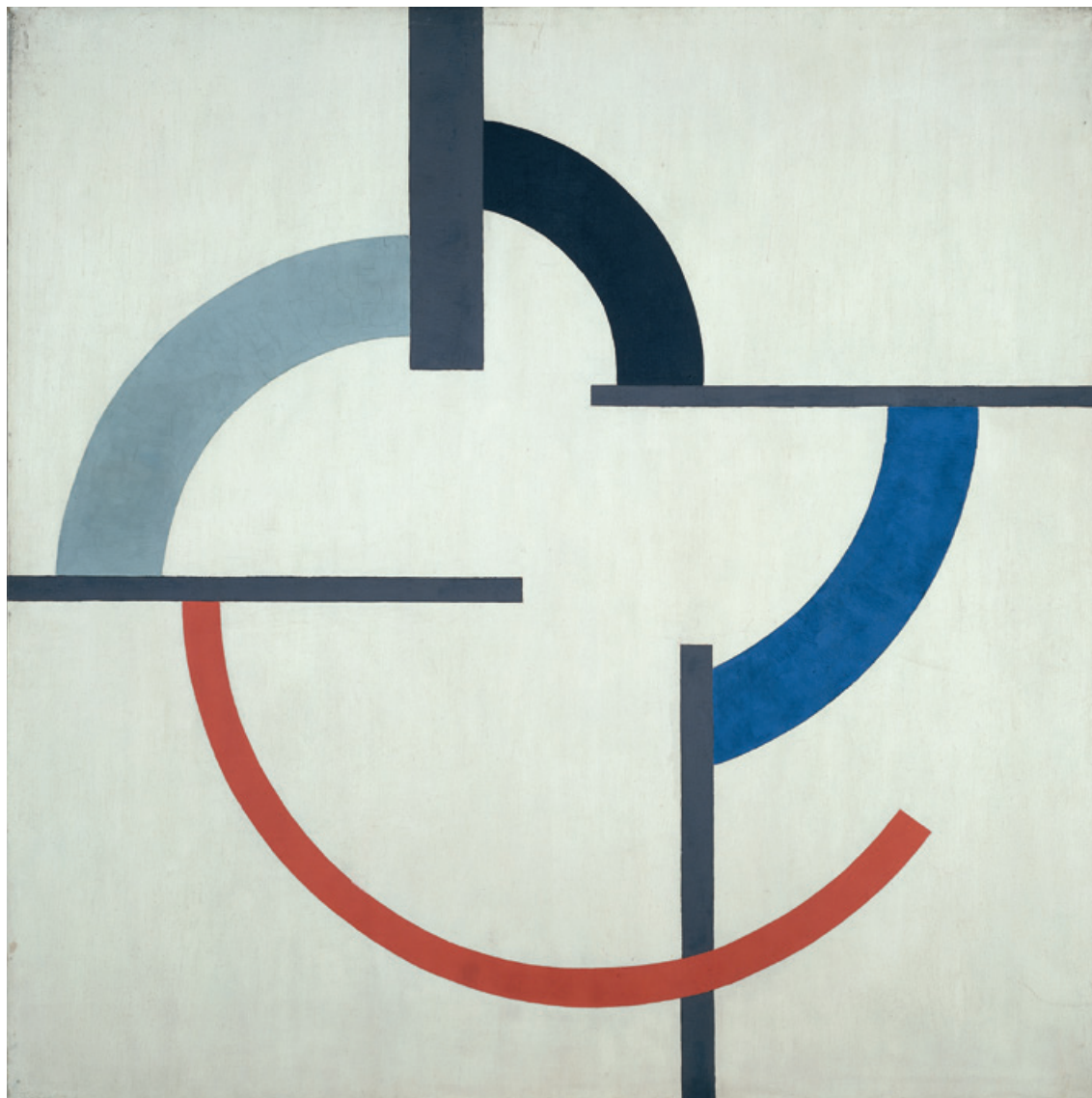
135 **OTTO GUSTAF CARLSUND**  
Manifesto for Art Concret (Fourth Programme Painting), 1930

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Oil on panel; 33 x 33 cm  
Eskilstuna Konstmuseum, Eskilstuna. Inv. 265



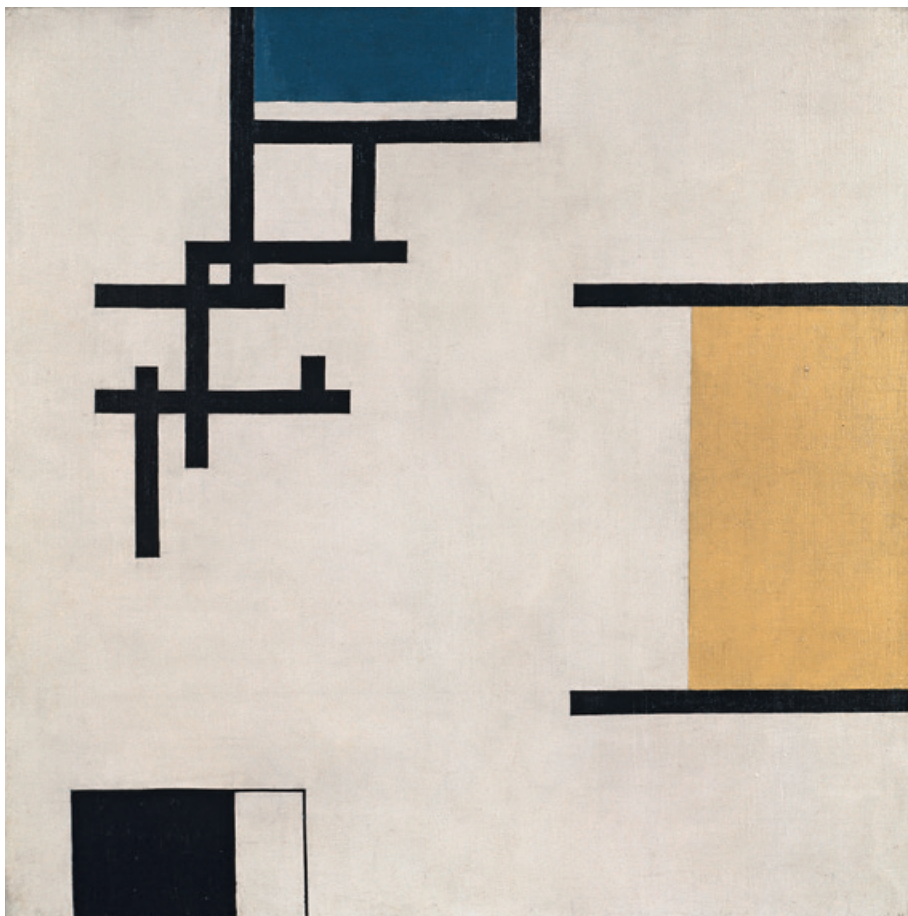




136 **JEAN HÉLION**  
Circular Tensions, 1931-2

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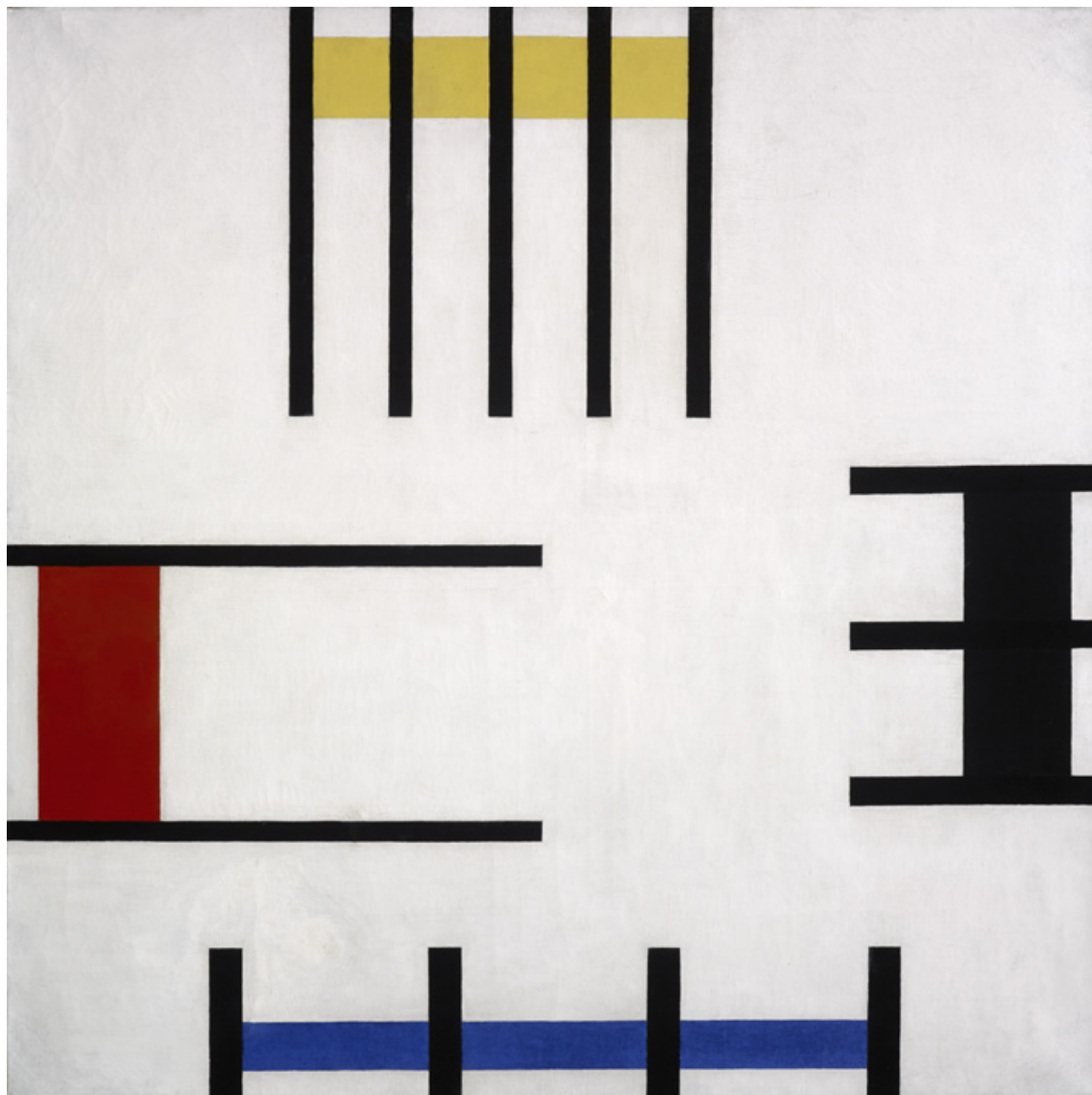
Oil on canvas; 75 x 75 cm  
Private collection



137 **JEAN HÉLION**  
**Composition, 1930**

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Oil on canvas; 50 x 50 cm  
Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Łódź. Inv. MS/SN/M/22



138 **JEAN HÉLION**  
**Composition, 1932**

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Oil on canvas; 90 x 90 cm  
Musée de Grenoble. Inv. MG 1993-7-1



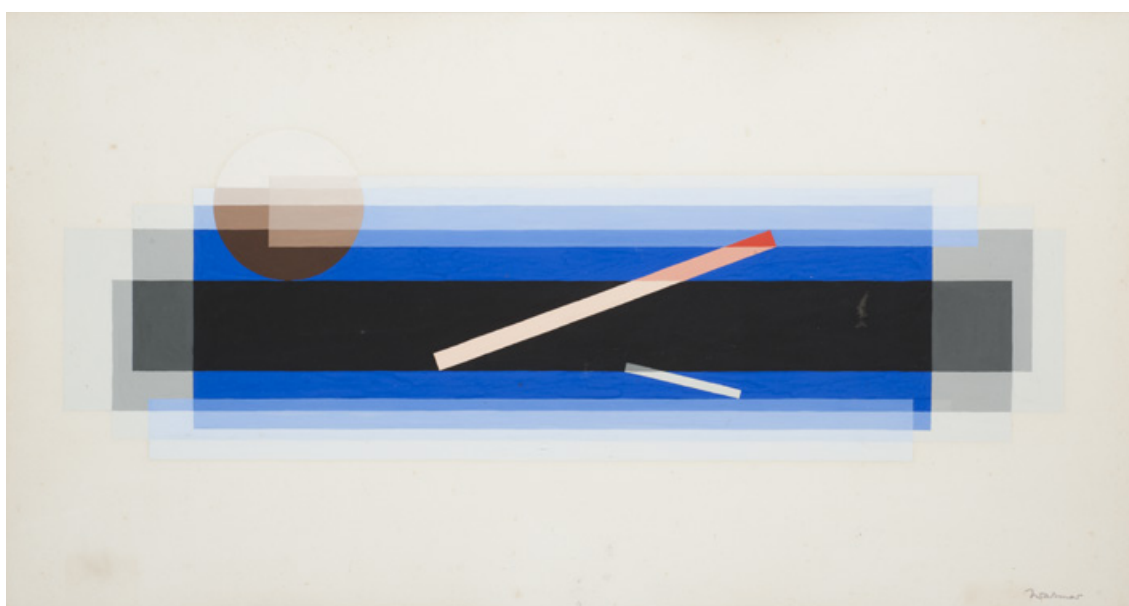




139 **WALMAR SHWAB**  
Integral Painting, Fluid Background, 1929–30

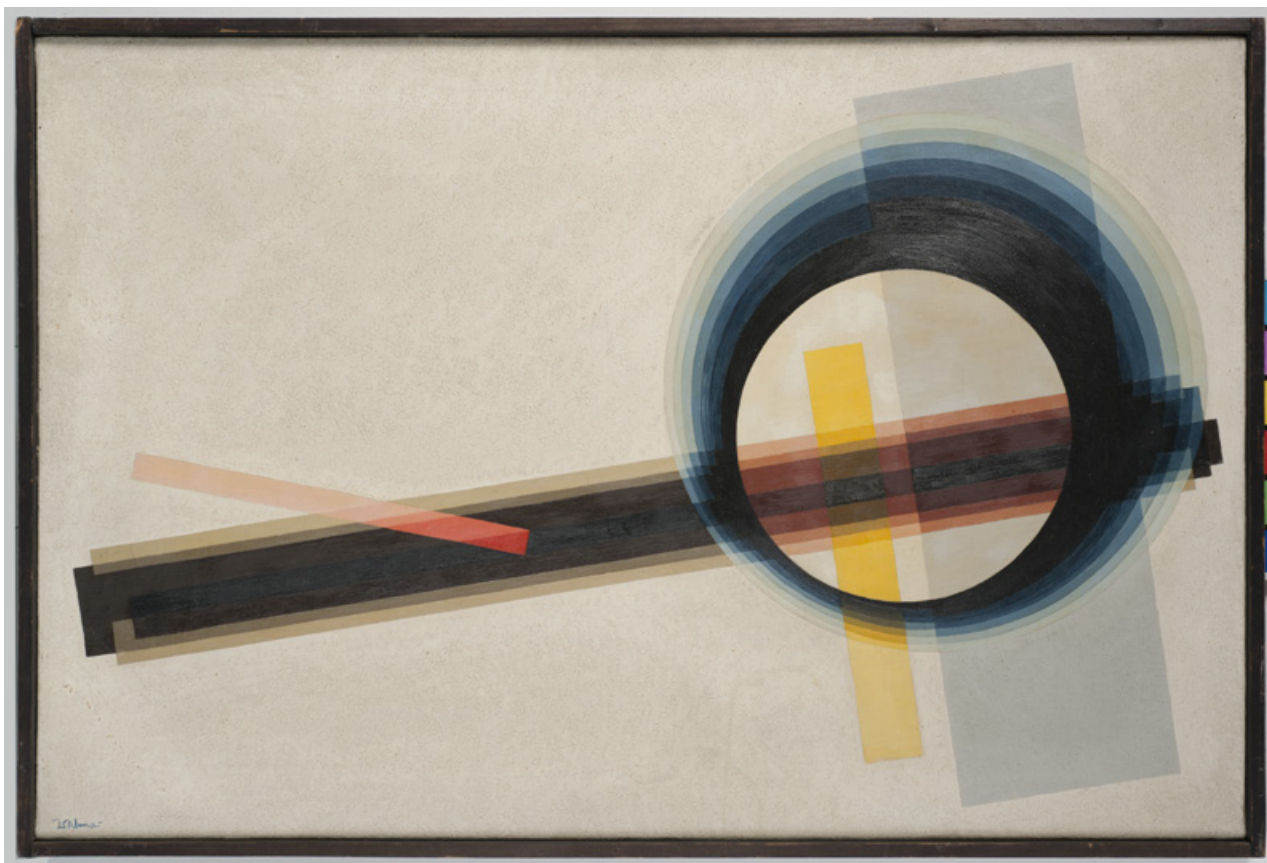
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Gouache on paper; 61.5 x 61.5 cm (with frame)  
Private collection



140 **WALMAR SHWAB**  
Integral Painting, Blue, Horizontal, c. 1927

Gouache on paper; 30.5 x 57 cm  
Private collection



141 **WALMAR SHWAB**  
Integral Painting, 1927-8

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Oil on canvas; 56 x 83 cm (with frame)  
Private collection

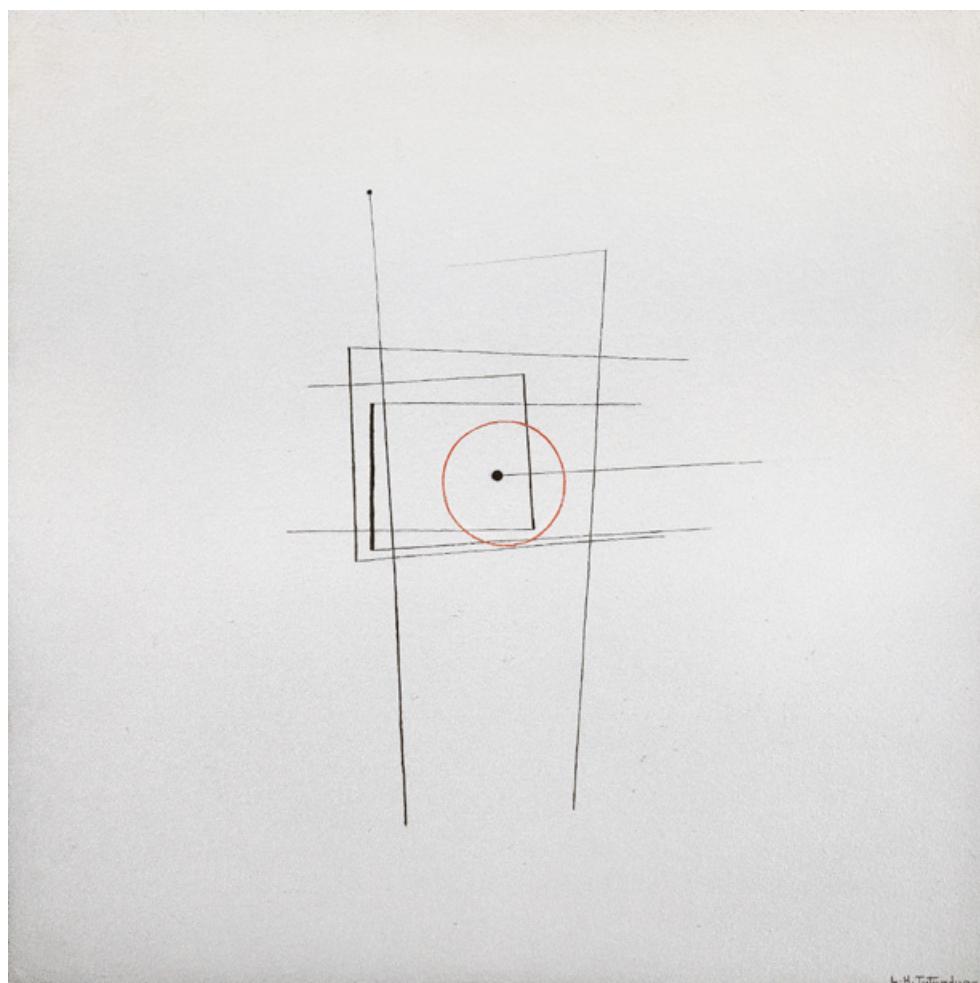


142 **LÉON TUTUNDJIAN**  
Untitled, 1929

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Reverse glass painting; 12.5 x 16.5 cm  
Private collection

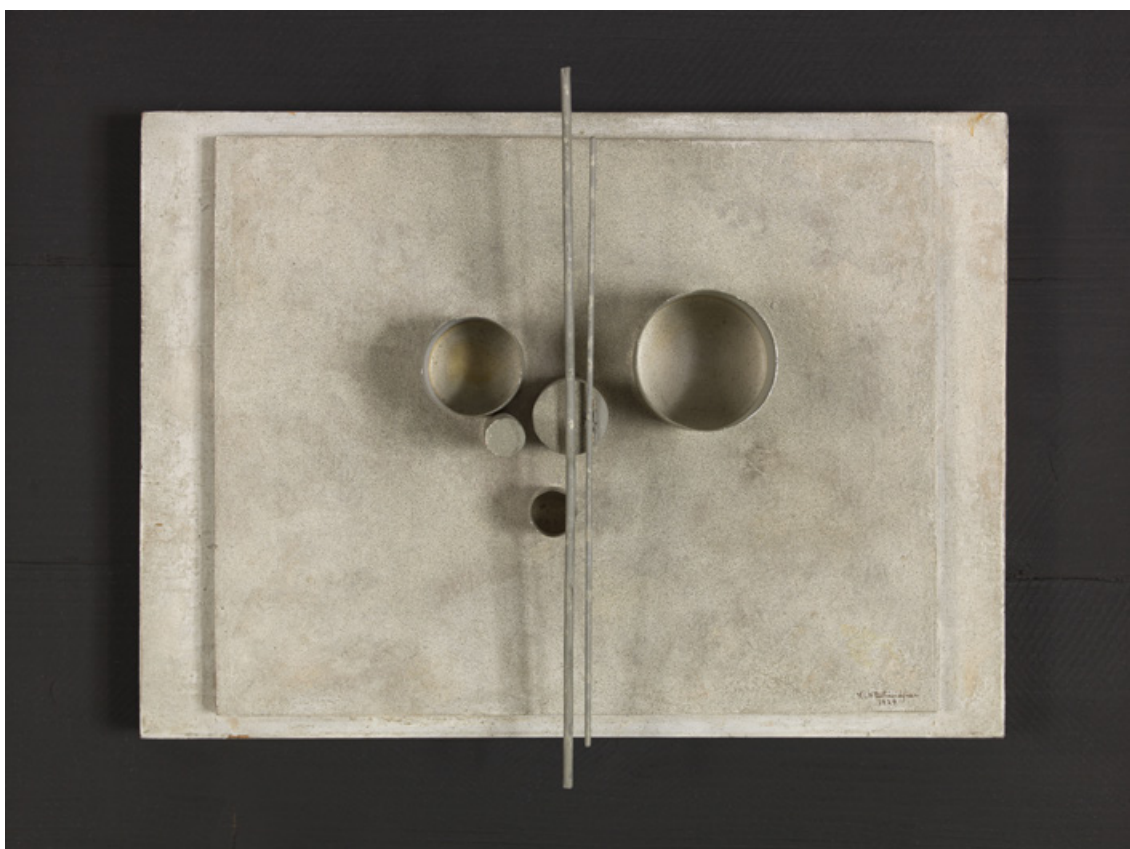




143 **LÉON TUTUNDJIAN**  
Untitled, 1927

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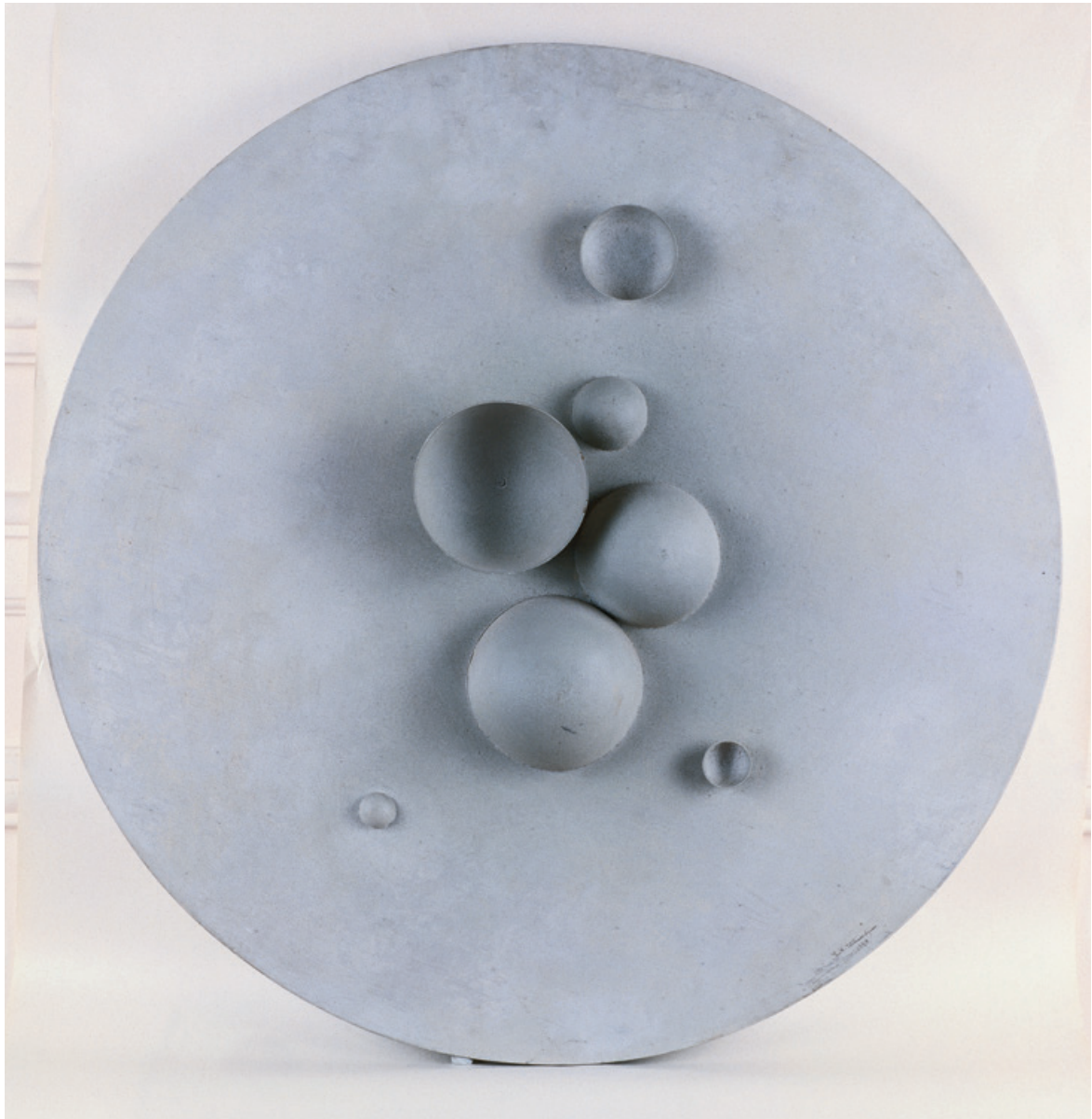
Oil on canvas; 46 x 46 cm (with frame)  
Private collection. LTH026



144 **LÉON TUTUNDJIAN**  
Untitled, 1929

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Wood and metal painted grey; 23.5 x 29 x 8 cm  
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Inv. AMVP-2015-2



145 **LÉON TUTUNDJIAN**  
Relief, 1929

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Wood and metal; 56 cm (diam.)  
Private collection. LTR06

## CHRONOLOGY

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Theo van Doesburg (1883 – 1931)





1



2

**1916** After his discharge from the army, Theo van Doesburg travels to Laren in the Netherlands to meet Piet Mondrian. Here he also meets the composer Jakob van Domselaer, who is exploring the possibilities of Neoplasticism in music, and the theosopher and mathematician Mathieu Schoenmaekers.

**March–May:** Erich Wichmann, Louis Saalborn and Van Doesburg found the artists' group De Anderen in The Hague. They organize an exhibition at the Audretsch Gallery (7 May–7 June), in which Vilmos Huszár also participates. In late May, Van Doesburg co-founds, with architects J.J.P. Oud and Jan Wils, the De Sphinx art club in Leiden, where he was then living.

Mondrian introduces Bart van der Leek to Van Doesburg. Together with Vilmos Huszár he visits Helene Kröller-Müller's house to see Van der Leek's triptych *The Mine*. Due to his ill health, Georges Vantongerloo cannot be called up and moves to The Hague to escape the war in Belgium.

**1917** Van Doesburg is introduced to Gino Severini through the Dutch poet Dop Bles. Severini introduces him in turn to Mario Broglio, the future editor of the Italian magazine *Valori Plastici* (1918–22) and distributor of *De Stijl* in Italy.

**June:** Together with Bino Sanminiatielli, Enrico Prampolini founds the magazine *Noi* (1917–25) in Rome.

**October:** Van Doesburg publishes the first issue of *De Stijl* in Leiden. Fellow founders include Piet Mondrian, J.J.P. Oud, Antony Kok, Vilmos Huszár and Bart van der Leek. The issue contains articles by Jan Wils, Gino Severini and Robert van 't Hoff.

**1918** **September–October:** Van Doesburg exhibits with the De Branding group in The Hague.

**November:** 'Manifesto I' of *De Stijl*, co-signed by Van Doesburg, Robert van 't Hoff, Vilmos Huszár, Anthony Kok,

Piet Mondrian, Georges Vantongerloo and Jan Wils (*De Stijl*, 2, no. 1).

**December:** First session of the November Group in Berlin.

**1919** Van Doesburg, Charley Toorop, Nico Eekman, Vilmos Huszár, Matthijs Vermeulen, Antony Kok, Gerrit Rietveld and Jan Wils petition the Dutch parliament to resume intellectual relations with Russia.

The Bauhaus art school opens its doors in Weimar, under the direction of Walter Gropius.

Piet Mondrian returns to Paris.

**October:** Meeting of the International Association of Expressionists, Cubists and Futurists in Berlin, which is later joined by László Moholy-Nagy, Lothar Schreyer, László Péri, Ivan Puni, Erich Buchholz and Ruggero Vasari.



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**1920** Van Doesburg publishes *Klassiek-Barok-Modern* (Classic, Baroque, Modern) in Antwerp. A French edition appears in Paris the following year.

Van Doesburg undertakes his first international trips to spread the ideas of De Stijl. The magazine *Le Geste* (1920), founded by architect Victor Bourgeois, invites Van Doesburg to give a lecture in Brussels. Georges Vantongerloo, René Magritte, Pierre-Louis Flouquet, Victor Servranckx and War van Overstraeten are among the audience.

During a short stay in Paris, Van Doesburg attends a Dada performance with Piet Mondrian and visits the Salon des Indépendants. He also views the exhibition of La Section d'Or at Galerie La Boétie and meets many of its artists as well as art dealer Léonce Rosenberg.

**April:** Van Doesburg co-signs with Piet Mondrian and Antony Kok the 'Manifesto II' of De Stijl: 'De literatuur' (Literature) in Leiden (*De Stijl*, 3, no. 6).

**May:** Van Doesburg publishes the poem 'X-Beelden' (X-images) under his new pseudonym, I.K. Bonset (*De Stijl*, 3, no. 7).

**June–August:** The First International Dada Fair is held in the shop of the art dealer Dr Otto Burchard in Berlin.

Van Doesburg organizes a touring exhibition of La Section d'Or in Rotterdam, The Hague, Arnhem, Amsterdam and Brussels, adding works by Vilmos Huszár, Piet Mondrian and himself to an abbreviated version of the French selection.

Two new modern art magazines are launched: *Bleu* in Mantua (1920–1), edited by Gino Cantarelli and Aldo Fiozzi, and whose first issue features Van Doesburg's article 'Monumentale Kunst' (Monumental Art); and *L'Esprit nouveau* in Paris (1920–5), directed by Paul Dermée, Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier.

The touring exhibition *Junge Niederländische Kunst* (Young Dutch Art) visits

Berlin, Leipzig, Hanover, Hamburg and Düsseldorf, featuring work by Piet Mondrian, Vilmos Huszár, Van Doesburg among others.

Van Doesburg travels to Berlin where he meets Adolf Behne, Bruno Taut, Walter Gropius, Adolf Meyer, Alfréd Forbát, Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

**1921** El Lissitzky is appointed director of the VKhUTEMAS (Higher Art and Technical Studios) in Moscow.

**January:** *De Stijl* is published with a new format and cover design.

Ilya Ehrenburg arrives in Paris from Moscow on 8 May and spends a few months in Brussels before settling in Berlin in November. He asks Van Doesburg for pictures for his book *A vse taki ona vertitsa* (And yet it [the world] goes round). In exchange, he sends Van Doesburg photos of Russian avant-garde works.



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Van Doesburg and Nelly van Moorsel (later his third wife) leave the Netherlands and embark on a long trip through Belgium (Antwerp and Brussels, where he lectures), France, Italy and Germany.

**April–May:** Enrico Prampolini brings the Section d'Or exhibition to Rome and adds works by himself, Van Doesburg and Giacomo Balla to the original French selection.

Theo and Nelly van Doesburg settle in Weimar, where they meet Bauhaus students Peter Röhl, Werner Graeff, Marcel Breuer and Max Burchartz. *De Stijl* is published from Weimar from June.

**June:** Writing under the pseudonym Aldo Camini, Van Doesburg publishes the first part of his 'anti-philosophical' Dadaist essay in the June issue of *De Stijl* (4, no. 5). Van Doesburg stays with Hans Richter in Klein Kölzig.

Kurt Schwitters gives poetry recitals and lectures in Dresden, Erfurt, Leipzig,

Jena and Weimar, where he most probably meets Van Doesburg for the first time as well as Hans Arp. Van Doesburg publishes the first poems in *De Stijl* (4, no. 7). Michel Seuphor publishes the first issue of the magazine *Het overzicht* (1921–5) in Antwerp.

**August:** 'Manifesto III' of *De Stijl*: 'Tot een nieuwe wereldbeelding' (Towards a New Formation of the World) (*De Stijl*, 4, no. 8).

**October:** At the invitation of Jozef Peeters, Van Doesburg gives a lecture in Antwerp. 'Aufruf zur elementaren Kunst' (The Call to Elementary Art). It is published in *De Stijl* (4, no. 10), co-signed in Berlin by Raoul Hausmann, Hans Arp, Ivan Puni and László Moholy-Nagy.

**December:** Nelly van Doesburg gives a concert in Vienna and meets the composers Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Béla Bartók, Vittorio Rieti and Josef Matthias Hauer.

**Late 1921:** El Lissitzky leaves Russia and settles in Berlin.

**1922** Van Doesburg meets El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg in Berlin.

**February–March:** Van Doesburg publishes the article 'Der Wille zum Stil (Neugestaltung von Leben, Kunst und Technik)' (The Will to Style: The Redesign of Life, Art and Technology) (*De Stijl*, 5, nos 2–3).

I.K. Bonset (Van Doesburg) publishes the first issue of the Dada magazine *Mécano* (1922–4) in Weimar. It includes the article 'Antikunstenzuivereredemanifest' (Manifesto Against Art and Pure Reason) signed by I.K. Bonset. *Mécano* would feature contributions by artists like Tristan Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, Peter Röhl, László Moholy-Nagy, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Serge Charchoune, Piet Mondrian, Cornelis van Eesteren, Jean Crotti, Georges Vantongerloo, Francis Picabia, Max Ernst and Marthe Donas.





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A Constructivist group gathers in Gert Caden's studio in Berlin: Hans Richter, El Lissitzky, Naum Gabo, Theo van Doesburg, Nathan Altmann, Antoine Pevsner, Alfréd Kemény, László Moholy-Nagy, László Péri, Ernő Kállai, Hans Arp, Willi Baumeister, Viking Eggeling, Werner Graeff, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Cornelis van Eesteren.

**March-May:** El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg publish three issues of the magazine *Veshch*, *Gegenstand*, *Objet* in Berlin. The double issue 1-2 features Van Doesburg's article 'Monumentale Kunst' (Monumental Art).

In Peter Röhl's studio in Weimar, Van Doesburg teaches 'De Stijl Kurs I', a series of independent classes, to the Bauhaus students Werner Graeff, Andor Weininger, Max Burchartz, Farkas Molnár, Karel Maes, Egon Engelen, Peter Keler, Kurt Schmidt, Gyula Pap and others.

**May-July:** The *First International Art Exhibition* takes place in Düsseldorf.

**Late May:** The International Congress of Progressive Artists takes place in Düsseldorf. Among the attendees are Van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, Werner Graeff, Franz Seiwert, Viking Eggeling, Cornelis van Eesteren, Enrico Prampolini, Ivan Puni, Raoul Hausmann, Hans Richter, Otto Dix and Tomoyoshi Murayama. Van Doesburg calls for the development of a universal means of expression and advocates the communion of art and life. Together with El Lissitzky and Hans Richter, he co-signs the 'Deklaration an den ersten Kongress fortschrittlicher Künstler' (Declaration of the First International Congress of Progressive Artists) (*De Stijl*, 5, no. 4).

**August:** Van Doesburg co-signs with Hans Richter, El Lissitzky, Karel Maes and Max Burchartz the manifesto 'KI: Konstruktivistische Internationale beeldende Arbeidsgemeenschap'

(KI: International Union of Neoplastic Constructivists) (*De Stijl*, 5, no. 8).

**September:** The International Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists is held in the Hotel Fürstenhof in Weimar, hosted by Van Doesburg and attended by Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Nelly van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter, Hannah Höch, Cornelius van Eesteren, Karel Maes, Alfréd Kemény, Werner Graeff, Peter Röhl, Max Burchartz, Nini Smith, Harry Scheibe, Bernhard Sturtz Kopf and Hans Vogel.

**27 September:** 'Dada Jena' soirée at the Kunstverein Jena (under the direction of Walter Dixel).

**29 September:** 'Dada Revon' soirée at Galerie von Garvens in Hanover, with Theo and Nelly van Doesburg, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Walter Dixel, Lucia and László Moholy-Nagy, Max Burchartz and El Lissitzky.





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**30 September:** 'Dada Revon' soirée at Galerie von Garvens in Hanover, with Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, and Nelly and Theo van Doesburg.

**October:** The *First Russian Art Exhibition* is held at Galerie van Diemen in Berlin. 'Dada/Hollande I.K.B.' appears in the magazine *Der Sturm* (13, no. 10).

**December:** László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény publish the manifesto 'Dynamisch-konstruktives Kraftsystem' (Dynamic-Constructive Power System) in the magazine *Der Sturm*.

**1923** Van Doesburg publishes the booklet *Wat is Dada???????* in The Hague.

Jean Badovici founds the journal *L'Architecture vivante* (1923–33) in Paris, and Hans Richter the magazine *G* (1923–6) in Berlin.

Van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren start working together on the three models of the *Hôtel particulier* commis-

sioned by Leóonce Rosenberg. They also collaborate on the models of the *Maison particulière* and *Maison d'artiste*.

**January:** Kurt Schwitters publishes the first issue of the magazine *Merz* (1923–32) in Hanover under the title *Merz 1. Holland Dada*.

El Lissitzky has a solo exhibition at the Kestnagesellschaft in Hanover.

**January–February:** The Dada tour in the Netherlands begins, with Nelly and Theo van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters and Vilmos Huszár.

**March:** After the departure of Johannes Itten, László Moholy-Nagy is appointed to teach the introductory course at the Bauhaus.

Through his friend Hans Richter, Van Doesburg meets Frederick Kiesler in Berlin.

**April:** The 'Manifesto of Proletarian Art' appears in the second issue of *Merz*,

signed by Van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara and Christof Spengemann.

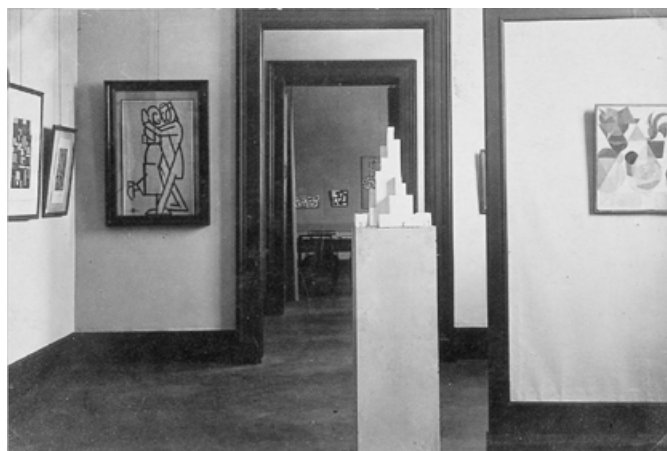
Theo and Nelly van Doesburg move to Paris, where they settle at 51 rue du Moulin Vert. They get to know the composers Arthur Honegger and George Antheil.

**May–September:** The November Group section of the *Great Berlin Art Exhibition* features works by Van Doesburg, Vilmos Huszár, Gerrit Rietveld, César Domela, Egon Engelen, Max Burchartz, Walter Dexel, Werner Graeff and Peter Röhl, among others. El Lissitzky presents his *Prounen Raum* (Proun Room).

**7 July:** The *Dada Soirée du Coeur à barbe* at the Théâtre Michel in Paris, organized by Tristan Tzara and attended by Theo and Nelly van Doesburg, ends in a dispute between André Breton and Tristan Tzara.



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**August–September:** Major Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar.

**October–November:** De Stijl architecture exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie de L'Effort Moderne in Paris. Van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren present drawings and models for the *Maison particulière*. Also on show is work by Vilmos Huszár, Willem Van Leusden, J.J.P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, Jan Wils and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The Viscount Charles de Noailles is so impressed that in mid-1924 he commissions Van Doesburg to create a colour composition for a room in his summer villa in Hyères, designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens.

**December 1923–January 1924:** Van Doesburg has a solo exhibition at the Landesmuseum in Weimar.

**1924** Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren publish the De Stijl manifesto, 'Vers une construction collective' (Towards a Collective Construction), dated Paris 1923 (*De Stijl*, 6, nos 6–7).

A list appears in *De Stijl* (6, no. 8) of the magazine's artistic and literary exchanges with seventy-five avant-garde magazines published in Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and the United States. In Paris Léonce Rosenberg publishes the *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne* (1924–7).

Working in close collaboration with the commissioning client Truus Schröder-Schröder, Gerrit Rietveld designs the Rietveld-Schröder House in Utrecht, the first house built according to De Stijl principles.

Frederick Kiesler organizes and designs the *International Exhibition of New Theatre Techniques* in Vienna.

César Domela meets Van Doesburg and Mondrian and becomes a member of De Stijl.

**February:** Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Mart Stam welcome El Lissitzky to Zurich. He begins a long stay in a sanatorium in Davos to treat his tuberculosis.

Mieczysław Szczuka and Teresa Źarnower start the avant-garde art magazine *Blok* in Warsaw (1924–6). Artuš Źerník publishes *Pasmo* in Brno (1924–6).

**Spring:** Van Doesburg organizes an exhibition at the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture on boulevard Raspail in Paris that features architectural projects by himself, Gerrit Rietveld and Cornelis van Eesteren. At the same time, copies of these architectural designs are shown in a retrospective exhibition in the Landesmuseum in Weimar. The exhibition in Paris leads Albert Morancé to give an overview of what De Stijl has achieved since 1915 in the autumn-winter issue of *L'Architecture vivante* (3, no. 9, 1925). It features contributions by Jean Badovici, Piet Mondrian and Van Doesburg, and



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is warmly received by progressive architects and artists in Paris.

**April:** Van Doesburg has a solo exhibition at the Kestnergesellschaft in Hanover.

**May:** Exhibition by the Gruppe K at the Kestnergesellschaft in Hanover, with work by Hans Nitzschke and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, among others.

**August:** After clashing with Van Doesburg over the introduction of diagonals in his painting, Mondrian writes his last contributions in *De Stijl* (6, nos 6–7).

**October:** Van Doesburg lectures in Vienna and Prague.

Exhibition with work by Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp and Alexej von Jawlensky at the Kestnergesellschaft in Hanover.

**December:** The Bauhaus in Weimar closes its doors for economic and political reasons.

**1925** Piet Mondrian's *Neue Gestaltung: Neoplastizismus Nieuwe Beelding* is published in Munich as no. 5 in the Bauhaus Books series.

The children's book *Die Scheuche: Märchen* (The Scarecrow: A Fairytale), co-authored by Kurt Schwitters, Käthe Steinitz and Van Doesburg, is published in Hanover.

Van Doesburg's *Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden Kunst* (Principles of Neoplastic Art) is published in Munich as no. 6 in the Bauhaus Books series.

**January:** Nelly van Doesburg gives a concert at the Der Quader Gallery in Hanover.

**February:** Evening recital in Potsdam by Kurt Schwitters with Nelly van Doesburg on the piano. Schwitters gives his first performance of his poem *Ursonate*.

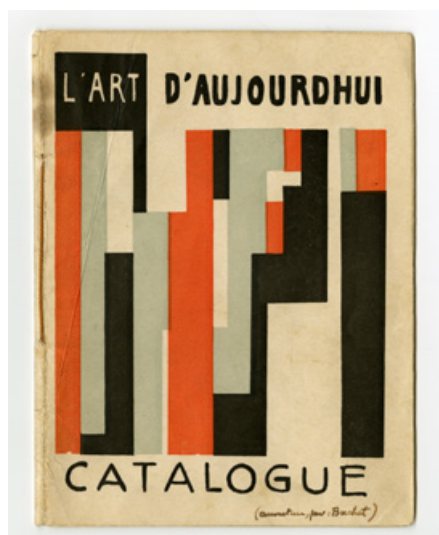
**1 March:** Van Doesburg has a solo exhibition at the Der Quader Gallery in Hanover.

**March–April:** Van Doesburg takes part in a group exhibition at the Little Review Gallery in New York.

**May:** In Berlin, the November Group organizes the film matinee *Der Absolute Film: sechs Kurzfilme* with works by Walter Ruttmann, Hans Richter, Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack, Viking Eggeling, René Clair, Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy.

**July:** Van Doesburg and László Moholy-Nagy visit together the *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris, which had rejected a De Stijl pavilion. Van Doesburg subsequently publishes in *De Stijl* (6, nos. 10–11) the 'Appel de Protestation contre le refus de la participation du groupe "De Stijl" à l'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs (Section des Pays-Bas)' (Call for Protest Against the Rejection of the Participation of the De Stijl Group in the Exhibition of Decorative Arts).





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**October:** The Bauhaus reopens its doors in Dessau.

**December:** The group exhibition *L'Art d'Aujourd'hui* is the first international non-figurative art exhibition held in Paris since the end of the war, with an important contribution from De Stijl and German artists.

**1926 March:** De Stijl participates in the *Second Annual Exhibition* at Galeries Poirel in Nancy.

**July:** Two 'manifesto fragments' on 'Elementarism' are published in *De Stijl* (issues 75–6 and 78 of year 7), signed respectively in Rome in July and in Paris in December.

In Italy, where he is vacationing, Van Doesburg meets Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Ivo Pannaggi, Giacomo Balla and Ruggero Vasari.

**September:** Van Doesburg, Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp begin collabo-

rating on the interior renovation of the Aubette building in Strasbourg.

**1927** Van Doesburg prepares a special 'tenth anniversary' issue of *De Stijl* celebrating the achievements of the group over the previous decade.

Continuation of the joint renovation project at the Aubette building in Strasbourg, with Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Also in Strasbourg, Van Doesburg undertakes the reconstruction of the Meyer House.

A work by Van Doesburg is included in the Abstract Cabinet designed by El Lissitzky at what was then called the Provinzialmuseum of Hanover.

Eugene Jolas founds the literary journal *Transition* in Paris (1927–38). Sidney Hunt publishes the two issues of *Ray: Art Miscellany* in London (1927). Its second issue features Van Doesburg's article 'The Progress of the Modern Movement in Holland'.

**May–June:** Van Doesburg participates in the Neue Reklame (New Advertising) exhibition at the Kunstverein Jena.

Together with César Domela, László Moholy-Nagy and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Kurt Schwitters co-founds the Ring neuer Werbegestalter (Circle of New Advertising Designers). Other artists that are part of the group are Willi Baumeister, Walter Dexel and Max Burchartz, among others.

**1928 February:** The Aubette opens in Strasbourg. The last issue of *De Stijl* (87–9) is dedicated to it.

**June:** Le Corbusier, Gerrit Rietveld, Sigfried Giedion, Mart Stam, Alberto Sartoris, Hannes Meyer, Victor Bourgeois and others co-sign the Declaration of La Sarraz in Switzerland, which hosted the first International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM).





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**1929** With the help of architect Abraham Elzas, Van Doesburg designs his studio house in Meudon, which was built the following year.

**May-June:** The international exhibition *Film und Foto*, organized by the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen), opens in the Interim-theaterplatz in Stuttgart, with works by László Moholy-Nagy and Sigfried Giedon in the main room.

**August:** The Ring neuer Werbegestalter (Circle of New Advertising Designers) organizes in Magdeburg the *Special Exhibition of New Typography*, featuring work by Willi Baumeister, Max Burchartz, Walter Dexel, César Domela, Hannes Meyer, Paul Schuitema, Kurt Schwitters, Jan Tschichold, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart and Walmar Shwab, and guest artists Van Doesburg, Herbert Bayer, John Heartfield, Lajos Kassák and László Moholy-Nagy.

Nelly van Doesburg organizes the *Expositions sélectes d'art contemporain* (ESAC) at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (October–November) and at Pulchri Studio in The Hague (December–January), featuring work by Van Doesburg, Cupera (Nelly van Doesburg), Hans Arp, Marcelle Cahn, Massimo Campigli, Serge Charchoune, Pierre Daura, Serge Férat, Ernest Engel-Pak, Otto Freundlich, Luis Fernández, Joaquín Torres-García, Jean Crotti, Frantisek Kupka, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, Vicente do Rego Monteiro, Pablo Picasso, Gino Severini, Léopold Survage, Léon Tutundjian, Walmar Shwab, Jacques Villon, Hannah Kosnick-Kloss and Francisco de Asis Planas Doria.

**October–November:** Van Doesburg participates in the *Abstract and Surrealist Painting and Sculpture* exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich.

Otto Carlund, Auguste Herbin, Léon Tutundjian and Van Doesburg exhibit in the first Salon des Surindépendants in Paris.

Van Doesburg takes part in the *Exposición de Arte Moderno Nacional y Extranjero* at Galerías Dalmau in Barcelona.

**December:** Meetings at Café Le Zeyer in Paris of Van Doesburg, Otto Carlund, Luis Fernández, Jean Hélion, Antoine Pevsner, Walmar Shwab and Léon Tutundjian lead to the founding of the Art Concret group.

**1930 March:** Michel Seuphor and Joaquín Torres-García set up the international art association Cercle et Carré in Paris and the eponymous magazine.

**April:** Foundation of the Art Concret group in Paris, whose members (Van Doesburg, Otto Carlund, Jean Hélion, Léon Tutundjian and Walmar Shwab) publish the first and only issue of the eponymous magazine, including on its first page the manifesto 'Base de la peinture concrète' (The Basis of Concrete Painting). Shwab did not sign the manifesto, unlike Marcel Wantz,



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a typographer who was also briefly active as a painter.

**April-May:** First and only exhibition of *Cercle et Carré* at Galerie 23 in Paris.

Van Doesburg lectures on architecture in Madrid and Barcelona.

**August:** Otto Carlsund, co-founder of the Art Concret group, curates the *International Exhibition of Post-Cubist Art* in Stockholm, with a largely similar selection to the earlier *Select Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* but including more Swedish avant-garde artists.

**October-November:** Works by Van Doesburg are also on show at the exhibition *Production Paris 1930: Werke der Malerei und Plastik* at the Kunstsalon Wolfsberg in Zurich, curated by Hans Arp and Sigfried Giedion.

Theo and Nelly van Doesburg attend a performance of the wire puppets of Cirque Calder in Paris.

**1931 February:** The Abstraction-Création artist group is founded in Paris, with Auguste Herbin as president, Van Doesburg as vice-president, Jean Hélion as treasurer, and Hans Arp, Léon Tutundjian, Albert Gleizes, Frantisek Kupka and Georges Valmier as committee members.

**7 March:** Van Doesburg dies of a heart attack after a bout of asthma in Davos, Switzerland.

**June:** The *1940: First Exhibition* at Galerie de la Renaissance in Paris, curated by Auguste Herbin, shows work by mostly non-figurative artists including Van Doesburg.

In order to give the proletariat of Łódź a collection of avant-garde art, Polish artists Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński and Polish poets Jan Brzdkowski and Julian Przyboś collect works by international artists living and working in Paris and Poland. The collection comprises works by Hans Arp,

Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Van Doesburg, Georges Vantongerloo, Piet Mondrian, Enrico Prampolini and Max Ernst.

**1932 January:** Van Doesburg's life and work are commemorated in a special edition of *De Stijl*.

**January-February:** The *1940: Second Retrospective Van Doesburg Exhibition* in the Parc des Expositions at the Porte de Versailles in Paris shows fifty-nine works.

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2. Lena Milius and Theo van Doesburg in a studio in Kort Galgewater, Leiden, April 1917
3. Magazine *Klassiek-Barok-Modern*, 1920. Gilles Gheerbrant Collection.
4. Theo and Nelly van Doesburg with Harry Scheibe in Van Doesburg's studio, Am Schanzen-graben, in Weimar, 1922. RKD.
5. Postcard of the Bauhaus building, sent to Antony Kok by Theo van Doesburg, 12 September 1921. RKD
6. Magazine *Veshch, Gegenstand, Objet*, no. 1–2, March–April 1922, layout by El Lissitzky and Ilia Ehrenberg
7. Photograph taken during the meeting of the Constructivists and the Dadaists in Dusseldorf, May 1922
8. Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists, Weimar, September 1922. RKD
9. Booklet *What is Dada?* (Dada tour of the Netherlands, 10 January–14 February 1923), The Hague, 1923. Centraal Museum, Utrecht
10. Cornelis van Eesteren and Theo van Doesburg working on the model of the *Maison particulière* in Van Doesburg's studio on rue du Moulin Vert, Paris, 1923
11. De Stijl architecture exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie de L'Effort Moderne, Paris, 1923
12. View of the monographic exhibition devoted to Theo van Doesburg at the Landesmuseum, Weimar, 1923. Instituut Collectie Nederland
13. Theo van Doesburg. Exhibition in Weimar, 1923. Photograph taken from the magazine *De Stijl* 6 (1924) no. 6–7
14. Magazine *L'Architecture vivante, Fascicule spécial consacré aux architectes du groupe De Stijl en Hollande*, éditions Albert Morancé, 1927. Private collection
15. Hans Nitschke's studio in Hanover, 1925. From left to right: Kurt Schwitters, Hans Nitschke, Käte Steinitz, Nelly van Doesburg, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart and Theo van Doesburg
16. *L'Art d'aujourd'hui*, exhibition catalogue, 1925. Private collection
17. Theo van Doesburg, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Jean Arp, Place Kléber, opposite the Aubette complex in Strasbourg, spring 1927
18. Theo van Doesburg in Meudon
19. Members of the Art Concret group in Léon Tutundjian's studio in Paris, 1929. With Theo and Nelly van Doesburg, Otto Carlsund, Jean Hélion, Tutundjian and their respective spouses and Marcel Wantz, 1929. RKD
20. Magazine *Cercle et Carré*, no. 1–2–3, 1929
- 21, 22. Final issue of the *De Stijl* magazine, devoted to Theo van Doesburg, 1932





1917

1916

In almost every city groups of artists were struggling for recognition: in Amsterdam *Het Signaal*, led by the French cubist Le Fauconnier, *De Hollandsche Kunstkring* led by Conrad Kickert, and *De Onafhankelijken*. In Rotterdam *De Branding* was intensely active under the leadership of Laurens van Kuik, the Sensitivist; in The Hague Erich Wichmann and I founded *De Anderen* as a meeting-place, and in Leyden the architect Oud and I started the *Sphinx* group.

[...]

We did make propaganda for our efforts in more peaceable ways, though. Almost all representatives of a particular trend would arrange lectures, even in the smallest villages. (Between 1914 and 1920, for instance, I gave about 60 public talks in Holland and Belgium defending the new art; people often came to blows at these lectures.) And so the new artistic ideas were propagated as far afield as the tiniest villages in Holland, and their practical realization was called for.

[...]

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The criterion for a work of art became: to demand the New.

We wanted to replace the *brown world* by a *white* one. These two colour concepts covered the entire inner difference between Old and New.

[...]

In 1917, however, things had not got as far as collective construction, although certain painters, in collaboration with architects (Van der Leek with Berlage, myself with Oud, etc.), were attempting to transfer their ideas about painting in an organized context with architecture into three-dimensional space, instead of onto canvas. The idea of a universal stylistic idea was already latent in the attempt to forge an organic link between architecture and painting. At a time when the most radical artists working in Holland were cutting themselves off from public artistic life, the idea was born of making use of an organ to combat individualism, to obtain clarity about common work and to assemble all the creative forces which had taken the consequence of the New in their own fields. This collective need for clarification, certainty and organization in the new artistic desires led me to found the *De Stijl* review.

[...]

**1918**

#### *Manifesto I of De Stijl. 1918*

- 1 There is an old and a new awareness of the times.  
The old one is connected with the individual.  
The new one is connected with the universal.  
The struggle of the individual against the universal is becoming apparent in our warring world and in the art of our times.
- 2 The war is destroying the old world and all it means: individual domination in every aspect.

- 3 The new art has brought forward what the new awareness of the times concerns: an equal balance of universal and individual.
- 4 The new awareness of the times is ready to be applied to everything, including external life.
- 5 Traditions, dogmas and domination of the individual (the natural being) are obstacles to this.
- 6 The founders of the new plastic art therefore call upon all who believe in the reformation of art and culture to annihilate these obstacles to development, as they have annihilated (by abolishing natural form) that which prevents art from being expressed purely, the utmost consequence of all understanding of art.
- 7 The artists of today, urged on by the same awareness all over the world, have therefore taken intellectual part in this war against the domination of individualism, of arbitrariness. They therefore sympathize with all who are working to form an international unity in Life, Art, Culture, either intellectually or materially.
- 8 The monthly editions of *De Stijl*, founded for that purpose, attempt to contribute to displaying the new idea of life.
- 9 You can cooperate by:
  - I. Sending your name, full address and profession to the editors of *De Stijl*.
  - II. Sending critical, philosophical, architectural, scientific, literary, musical articles or reproductions for the monthly *De Stijl*.
  - III. Translating articles into other languages and disseminating the ideas published in *De Stijl*.

Signed by the present collaborators:

Theo van Doesburg, Robert van 't Hoff,  
Vilmos Huszár, Antony Kok, Piet Mondrian,  
G. Vantongerloo, Jan Wils

1919

Nothing meant more to us than to verify our ideas and work by comparing them with those of artists from other countries. *Valori Plastici* was the first foreign journal to deal in detail with our attempts at innovation and to publish a series of articles on the aims of De Stijl to make our endeavours more comprehensible. The publication of the November Manifesto convinced the Italians that we were serious in our struggle for a new style. The editors responded to our manifesto by publishing an article in which the cultural importance of De Stijl occupied a major part.

[...]

### New Plasticity and Production

Before the principles of De Stijl were generalized and taken over by architects and decorators, before there even was a Stijl *school*, one main concept covered all the secondary concepts. We used the word *beelding* to express the fundamental concept in the sense of creative production.

In our new terminology, however, the word meant something *basically* different from what was currently understood. We perceived the word in a new light; to us it meant something supra-rational, alogical, inexplicable; depths rising to the surface, internal and external equilibrium, the fruits of victory in our creative battle with ourselves.

We developed a new terminology in which we expressed the collective idea, the mainspring of our joint action. All art-forms, acoustical or optical, literary or architectonic, were rooted in one and the same term: plasticity. The intellectual-creative initiative of the individual was what counted with us, and thus a clear distinction should be made between it and material *production*. Every work of art was meant to be a new intellectual invention, diametrically opposed to the artefact, the material product.

It was not until later, when our ideas were translated into other languages (around 1921), that people began to confuse the two basically different terms of new (intellectual) *plasticity* and new, up-to-date (mechanical, standardized) *production*.

It was not possible to confuse the two at the start (as is now commonly the case, particularly in Germany) because our creative work had been preceded much earlier by the entire ideology before there had ever been a Stijl movement.

In several newspaper articles published by the author since 1912 (*Eenheid*, *De Avondpost*, *Nieuwe Amsterdammer*, etc.) the basis of a new style had been described, not only as to its principles but also as to its outward appearance.

For example, the necessity had been established of the straight line and the rectangular as a means of expressing the art and architecture of the future.

[...]

### Word-Art

After a great deal of effort spent fighting prejudice and convention, and in several youthful works, only fragments of which have been published, the poet Bonset succeeded in innovating language, using it instrumentally instead of conceptually, purely creatively instead of mythically.

Although it is quite correct that the first attempts to make purely verbal art took place at a very early date, 1909, in Italy and France, they differed fundamentally from the poetry of Bonset and Kok, which had less to do with lyric than with forming an elementary poetical language by *means of contrast*. This strips the word of all conventional tendencies (mythical, descriptive, symbolical, etc.). The word was perceived in a totally new way: as *energy*, as a direct structural element. The goal was neither myth nor parable, neither anecdote nor symbol, but *unequivocal* verbal structure.

We issued our literature manifesto in 1920, the year that the *X-Beelden* were published in *De Stijl*.

[...]

Say what you like about Dadaism, which originated in 1918 [this appears to be a mistake by VD; 1916 is the correct date] in Switzerland (Zurich); from our point of view it was simply a reaction to the constructive, mechanical era in which we live.

The Dadaists wanted to pierce the metal surface of the age, to shatter it, but they lacked the strength and fled from time in the past into romanticism and lyricism. Nonetheless, the Dada movement provided poetry with new impulses, for out of the chaotic ruins of the old world Dadaism used the word to create a new imaginary world, a newly formed world of pure poetry.

It is no coincidence that the two diametrically opposed trends, Neo-Plasticism and Dadaism (now surrealism), ran parallel: in creative verbal art. It also explains why the leaders of *De Stijl*, despite violent opposition from many of their colleagues, sympathized with Dada and publicly declared their sympathy.

At the opposite pole the changes in the world had been felt just as strongly, providing a suitable atmosphere for a new intellectual language for poetry capable of listing the words to structure the meaning of the world.

[...]

#### 1921-1923

Several architects and art historians came to Holland to find out more about the collective activity of our group. Many of them only knew this new Holland from *De Stijl*, the organ responsible for the changed mentality.

During this period the initiators of the movement were invited to other countries. Students and young artists organized lectures for us in Belgium (Antwerp,

Brussels, Ghent, Bruges etc.); our first active appearance in Germany (at the instigation of Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter first, and later of the architect Adolf Meyer and the young Weimar artists) took place in 1921. This is where the encounters were most vigorous and positive. In Germany, where in 1919 the *Bauhaus* had been founded at Weimar under the leadership of Walter Gropius, encouraging declarations had been spread, and it was in Germany that it appeared possible for us to step up our propaganda in close contact with our German colleagues.

[...]

The work of *De Stijl*, coming as it did from the calm, flat Dutch countryside, must therefore have seemed quite strange to them. Nonetheless, the innovative ideas of *De Stijl* had already crossed the threshold of the Weimar Bauhaus. Not only had our review spread our principles, the school had put them into practice as well. The *cube compositions* made by Itten's pupils were derived from Vantongerloo's sculptures. Mondrian's black-and-white pictures, and paintings by Van der Leek and myself, were used as patterns for embroidery and tapestries. It was this decorative application that contained the seeds of the present-day Bauhaus baroque.

[...]

#### 1923-1924

It was due to the initiative of Léonce Rosenberg that the *Stijl* group embarked on an active propaganda campaign in Paris in 1923. According to Rosenberg there were good prospects of realizing new projects; at the first demonstrative exhibition several new projects were in fact to be seen, as well as works which had already been carried out. The show was held in November and December 1923 at the *L'Effort Moderne* gallery, and provided a good deal of stimulus to the



young Parisian architects (Mallet-Stevens, Le Corbusier, Guévrékian, Lurçat and others). It was also a turning-point for De Stijl. Instead of repeating what we already knew, we wanted to raise architecture and painting to hitherto unknown heights in the narrowest plastic context.

[...]

### **Towards a collective construction**

(*Manifesto IV of De Stijl*)

- 1 In our collective work we have examined architecture as the unity of all the arts, industry, technique, etc., and have found the consequence to be a new style.
- 2 We have examined the laws of space and their infinite variations (i.e. spatial contrasts, spatial dissonance, spatial complements, etc.), and have found that all these spatial variations can be governed as a balanced unity.
- 3 We have examined the *laws of colour* in space and in time, and have found that the balanced relationships of these elements finally result in a new, positive unity.
- 4 We have examined the relationship between space and time, and have found that the appearance colour gives to these two elements expresses a new dimension.
- 5 We have examined the reciprocal relationships of size, proportion, space, time and material, and have found the definitive method of constructing them as one unity.
- 6 By breaking out of the enclosed area (walls, etc.), we have eliminated the duality of interior and exterior.
- 7 We have given colour its rightful place in architecture, and we declare that painting detached from the architectural conception (i.e. the picture) has no justifiable existence.

- 8 The age of destruction is over and done with. A new age starts today: the age of *Construction*.

Paris, 1923.

Theo van Doesburg, C. van Eesteren, G. Rietveld.

### **1926-1929**

I am firmly convinced that the principles of De Stijl will have a lasting effect on culture. Even now it is no longer possible to list in chronological order all the fruits of our reformation since 1916. Every new achievement is somehow linked with De Stijl's ideas. Young Italian, Spanish, Russian and Japanese artists have joined our ranks. In technical, applied art and architectural schools, students demand to learn about our movement. Universities invite us to give courses on the new aesthetic we have created. We are halfway to victory ... and we have remained vigorous, cheerful and productive.

Recent years have primarily been devoted to practical work.

Between 1926 and 1928 the author, in collaboration with Hans Arp, re-designed the Aubette, a public building in the centre of Strasbourg, chiefly on the lines of neo-plasticism and elementarism.

[...]

Scientific explanation (by Lorentz, Minkovsky, Hinton, Einstein) of the space-time continuum has got rid of the occult, magical notion people had of it, and it is now time to introduce the concept of a fourth dimension to the plastic arts.

The first to do so, theoretically at least, was the painter Gino Severini (*De Stijl*, vol. 1, *La Peinture d'Avant-Garde*). As far as music is concerned, George Antheil has created new possibilities by re-orienting his ideas, as have Mondrian, Doesburg, Eesteren and

Rietveld in painting and architecture, Kiesler for the theatre.

### **The Function of the Work of Art.**

Like objects, a work of art does not really have a function at all, only a reciprocal relationship with the beholder. A picture is for looking at, but what can you see? Only artistic equilibrium. That means neither acrobatic nor mechanical balance, but harmony resulting from the way the contrasting expressive means have been evaluated. The function of the work of art is to demand this new harmony, to conjure up a new dimension in the beholder's mind. What form satisfies this function? None, for a picture is its own form, and the means used to construct it is colour, and colour *has no form*.

The forms which objects possess in keeping with their function are merely an expression of the physical-material function. There are also counter-physical functions, i.e. intellectual functions which are the very ones most useful to man.

The conquest of the new space-time territory for artistic creation explains decisively the expressive possibilities and hence the function of art.

This has accordingly resulted in a new set of optics (synoptics), not only for the visual arts but also for poetry. Synoptic perception makes it possible to experience space time and plastic-phonetic impressions as a unity.

Theo van Doesburg

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Note: works in the catalogue section of this publication, whose titles are marked with an asterisk, were not part of the exhibition.

The English translation of Theo van Doesburg's text 'Der Kampf um den neuen Stil', originally published in German, is taken from *Het Nieuwe Bouwen. De Nieuwe Beelding in de architectuur. Neo-Plasticism in Architecture. De Stijl*, Haags Gemeente Museum, Delft University Press, 1983. The translation is by Ruth Koenig.

### *Cover*

Theo van Doesburg. *Counter-Composition V*, 1924, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (Cat. 94, p. 173)

### *Illustrations chapter dividers*

- I. Magazine *De Stijl. Anthologie 1917-22*. Private collection
- II. Magazine *Mécane* no. 4/5 *White, Blanc, Wit, Weiss*, 1924 (detail), *Mécane* no. *Jaune, Geel, Gelb, Yellow*, 1924 (detail), and an address card. Centraal Museum, Utrecht
- III. Magazine *G*, no. 5-6, April 1926. Private collection
- IV. Back cover of the magazine *Noi*, no. 6-7-8-9. Special issue *Teatro e Scena futurista*, Rome, 1924. Private collection
- V. Magazine *De Stijl*, no. 79-84, *10 jaren Stijl 1917-1927*, 1928. Anniversary issue
- VI. Magazine *Art Concret*, no. 1, April 1930 (detail). Private collection

p. 1 Theo van Doesburg in Café de l'Aubette Ciné-Dancing in Strasbourg, 1927

p. 5 Nelly and Theo van Doesburg, the dog Dada and dancer Kamares in front of *Counter-Composition XVI* in 1925

