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The Far-Reaching Influence of Momentous Modern Abstract Paintings

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Modern is tricky. If I say I want a modern apartment I mean one suited toward today's lifestyle: one that's wired, green, open and light-filled. If I say I love modern abstract paintings, I mean ones painted before World War II. In the art world, modern refers to Modernism, a movement in the early 20th Century that focused on newness. Modern abstract paintings challenged and transformed humanity's visual lexicon. The concepts and imagery explored by many iconic modern abstract paintings continue to be relevant today.

Modern Abstract Paintings that Still Influence Us Today

[Kasimir Malevich \(/magazine/kazimir-malevich\)](#) was the founder of a modern art movement called [Suprematism \(/magazine/suprematism\)](#). The fundamental belief of the Suprematists was that the artist's feelings were of the utmost importance. They focused on paintings simple compositions that utilized a limited range of colors in order to present the most direct emotional statement possible. Malevich's seminal work from this period is called "Black Square." About his intentions, the artist once said, "*To the Suprematist the visual phenomena of the objective world are, in themselves, meaningless; the significant thing is feeling*".

Suprematism continues to be a profound influence on contemporary abstract artists. As the world has only continued to become more complicated and more technologically advanced, the quest to prioritize human feeling through simplified visuals is more relevant than ever. The work of the American abstract painter [Elizabeth Gourlay \(/artist/elizabeth-gourlay\)](#) explores a simplified vocabulary of forms and draws on a contemporary palette. Her work is reminiscent of Suprematist ideas, while adding interpretive layers through the use of layering and line.



Elizabeth Gourlay - [Broken Line Blue](/artwork/elizabeth-gourlay/broken-line-blue) (/artwork/elizabeth-gourlay/broken-line-blue), 2014, Graphite and gouache on vellum

Color and Shape

The [Orphist](/magazine/orphism) (/magazine/orphism) movement was a modern art tendency that focused on the elements of bold colors and geometric forms. The artist [Sonia Delaunay](/magazine/sonia-delaunay) (/magazine/sonia-delaunay) co-founded the movement with her husband Robert, also an abstract painter. Sonia's work focused on the visual and emotional impact created by various colors when presented in proximity to each other on a surface. Although Sonia did focus on geometric forms, she famously commented that the forms were irrelevant. Said Sonia, "...geometric forms do not characterize our art...colors can be effected as well with complex forms, such as flowers...only the handling of these would be a little more delicate."

[Jessica Snow](/artist/jessica-snow) (/artist/jessica-snow) is a contemporary American abstract artist working with themes and concepts informed by Delaunay's thinking. Snow works intuitively to create organic, gestural forms, combining the forms with bold colors and balancing them with neutral hues of grey. Her canvases convey a sense of effortless balance, and achieve the vibrational harmony sought by the Orphists nearly a century ago.