

Art Story: *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* by Wassily Kandinsky

Read by Julie Carmean

You are looking at a high resolution digital reproduction of an abstract painting made by the Russian artist, Wassily Kandinsky in 1913 titled *Improvisation 31*, also known as *Sea Battle*.

Who was Wassily Kandinsky?

Kandinsky helped invent this new way of painting called Abstraction that inspired much of the art made in Europe and America in the early 20th century. Before Kandinsky's time, artists mostly painted in a realistic manner, meaning viewers could easily recognize people, places, and objects and view them in the painting as they would appear in the real world.

Kandinsky was born in Moscow, Russia in 1866. As a child, he loved music and learned to play the piano and cello. He also took drawing lessons, later commenting, "I remember that drawing, and a little later painting, lifted me out of reality." Kandinsky became a lawyer but gave up law at age 30 to move to Munich, Germany and study modern painting. He soon became a leader in a modern art movement that embraced abstraction.

This painting, *Improvisation 31, Sea Battle*, is one of Kandinsky's early abstract masterpieces, expressing his innermost thoughts and feelings. What you see here, according to Kandinsky, is the essence of human emotion and ideas such as conflict or chaos that are transmitted through the colors, shapes, lines, and forms. It is possible that Kandinsky actually experienced each color as a specific sound and emotion. He created a detailed system that assigned each color to an emotion, feeling, or idea. For example, he wrote, "Blue is the typically heavenly color. In musical terms, light blue resembles the flute. Dark blue, the cello. Yellow is the typical earthly color. Yellow affects us like the shrill sound of a trumpet being played louder and louder."

Through his choice and arrangement of specific shapes, lines, and colors, Kandinsky wanted the viewer to experience a sequence of emotions, just as you would when listening to a musical score.