

**Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur**

**National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL)**

**Course Title**

**Visual Perception and Art: A survey across the cultures.**

**Lecture – 19**

**Abstract art 2**

**a**

**By**

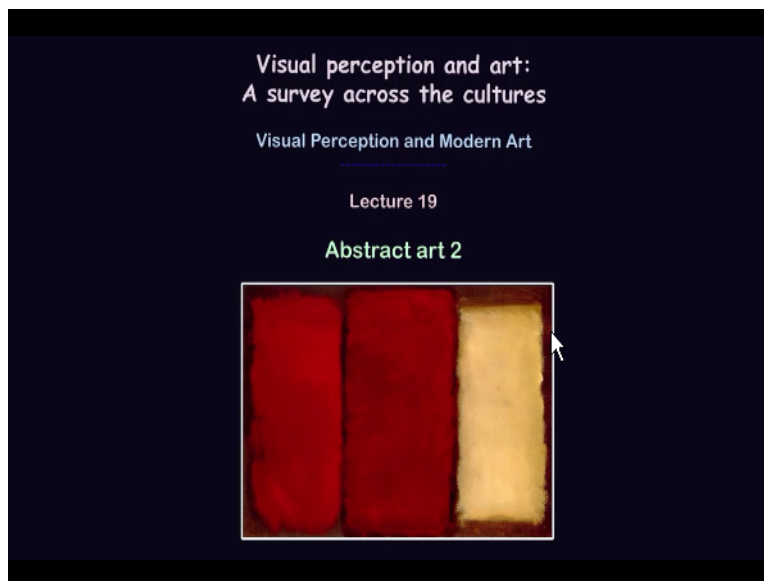
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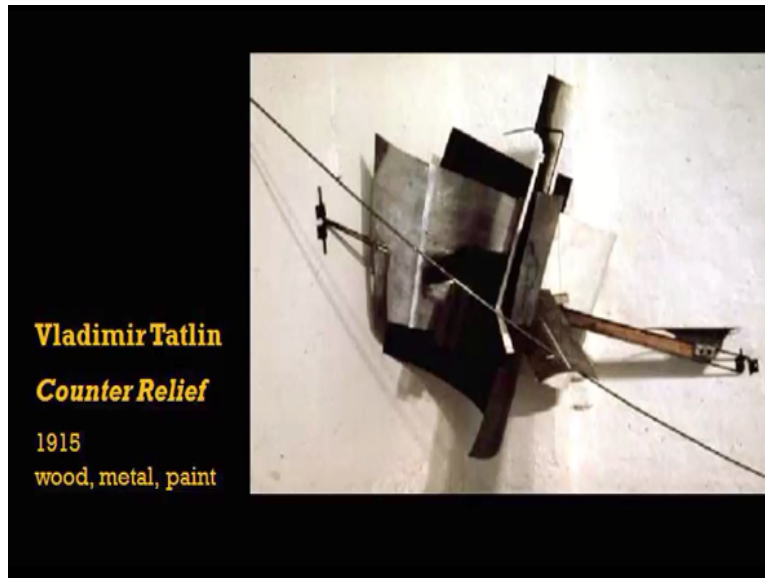
Welcome viewers to mook's online course on visual perception and art, a survey across the cultures.

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It is the lecture number 19. And it is an extension of our previous topic that is abstract art, hence it is called abstract art 2. Now we have already seen that abstract art or abstraction generally tends to do certain problems with regard to visual perception and our general habit or the familiar process about interpreting art, about making meaning, a sense of meaning of some art work has to take a very different route all together, in order to reach the four idea of any abstraction.

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**Vladimir Tatlin**

***Counter Relief***

1915

wood, metal, paint

Nevertheless right from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century we see a whole lot of artists from different ideas and based on different parameters where working out abstraction in their own ways. So we have somebody like Vladimir Tatlin a Russian artist who belong a movement called constructivism and because they were kind of focusing more on the idea of construction, the idea of the structural entity of a form rather than what it represents or rather than what it evokes emotionally.

Hence, the kind of art works that we see happening in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in many places in Europe, can be termed as very good significant and convincing examples of abstract art like this one.

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First two decades of 20th century witnessed the development of a new visual language that privileged independence of form over object-recognition.

CUBISM was one of them.



Georges Braque, *Glass on a Table*, 1909-10

And we also know that first two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development of a new visual language that privileged independence of form over object recognition. As oppose to the earlier example which belong to constructivism movement and this one for example, cubism or forbism though in these movement we see a very strong reference for abstraction, they are primarily not completely removed from any kind of representational connection.

Now the representational connection became of course very weak and because emphasis as I said is now more on independence of form, or independence of color, or independence of shape. But in the earlier art work by Vladimir Tatlin if we go back and see it again we shall see here not only that he has nothing to do with representational together. He has nothing to do with farmers, his mood into exploring the construction and structural possibilities of a visual entity.

Now cubism was certainly one of those movements where the privilege was given more to the independence of form over object recognition.

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**Pablo Picasso**  
*Guitar Player*  
1910

So when you look at these paintings by Picasso titled guitar player.

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**Picasso**  
*Girl with a Mandolin*  
1910



Or this painting titled girl with a mandolin of the faint presence of recognize will it tune the faint presence of identities or identification science whether it is the human body human figure or the mandolin or an object are still there but artists is also trying supersede.

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The process of creating abstraction by breaking an object or figure into fragments or units also happened in sculpture.



Henry Moore

This recognizing elements and bring forth the idea of independence of form. Now the process of creating abstraction by breaking an object or figure into its fragments or units also happened in sculptures as we have already seen in the previous class, now Henry Moore should be considered as one of those sculptures belonging to the early phase of 20<sup>th</sup> century who did some hundreds of experiments where he innovated dismantling a figure into units to the extent that though you might have a faint recognition of a figure or a reclining woman or a warrior or something like this. But when you look at the details of the sculpture what you find is simply unrecognizable abstract shapes and forms.

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Quite a few of these concepts of abstract art emerged from clear cut theoretical concerns, worked out within a very specific theoretical frameworks.

Apart from Cubism, Constructivism and Minimalism are two such more examples where 'abstraction' was a pre-conceived, well-planned, theoretically grounded idea. Not a spontaneous pictorial outcome of an exploration of visual perception.

In fact, in all these above art movements, not visual perception, but intellectual perception was the prime concern.

However, intellectual perception ultimately left a huge impact on the visual perception.

Now quite a few of this concepts of abstract art emerge from clear cut theoretical concerns worked out within a very specific theoretical frameworks, apart from Cubism constructivism and minimalism a two such more examples where abstraction was a preconceived well planned theoretically grounded idea, not a spontaneous pictorial outcome of an exploration of visual perception, cubism was rather spontaneous outcome of a visual exploration.

So was For visit but certainly not constructivism or minimalism which had a very, very strong theoretical base to the extent that they were not particularly the constructive artist and the minimalist artist where not thinking in terms of representation or art as a subject matter representing something matter at all, they are thinking about something else either about construction of an object or about the structural clarity and the structural character of an object.

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So in all these above art movements it was not visual perception but in intellectual perception that was the primed and the prime concern however intellectual perception ultimately left a huge impact from the visual perception as well.

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For example this it is slightly late for Pablo Picasso where he obviously intense to establish the identity of the form there is no intension what so ever to do a wave with any identity or a need cognizing elements yet it is very clear that is earlier engagement with cubios as now left a very strong impact on his later walk as well like these to sculptures.

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Or for that matter these two sculpture as well.

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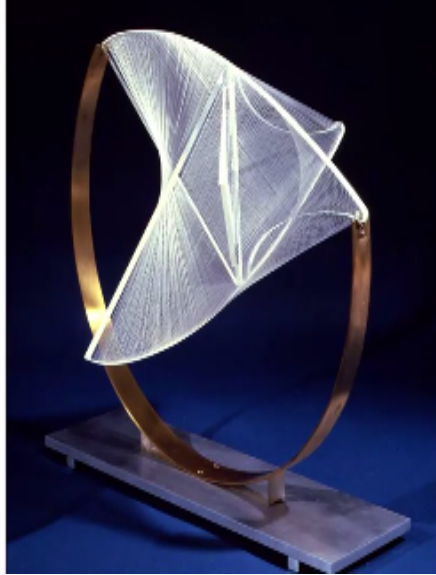
Constructivists proposed to replace art's traditional concern with composition with a focus on construction. Objects were to be created not in order to express beauty, or the artist's outlook, or to represent the world, but to carry out a fundamental analysis of the materials and forms of art, one which might lead to the design of functional objects. For many Constructivists, this entailed an ethic of "truth to materials", the belief that materials should be employed only in accordance with their capacities, and in such a way that demonstrated the uses to which they could be put.

Now if you look at the works by constructivists we feel that constructivists proposed to replace art's traditional concern with composition with the focus on construction, so if you find many works by constructivists artist's are compositionally slightly I would not say a dis balanced but slightly in go head at let us say not very symmetrical not very visually placing it is due to the fact that they are not looking at a work of art whether it is sculpture or painting in terms of need well balanced and well or canazed composition.

Where looking at work of art as a construction so objects where to be created not in order to express beauty or the artist's outlook how to represent the world, according to the constructivists but to carry out a fundamental analysis of the materials and forms of art one which might lead to the design of functional objects it is interesting that as I mentioned in the context of mandarin, in our lecture here to we find that many of this hard court abstract artist's like constructivists they were also thinking in terms of functional design.

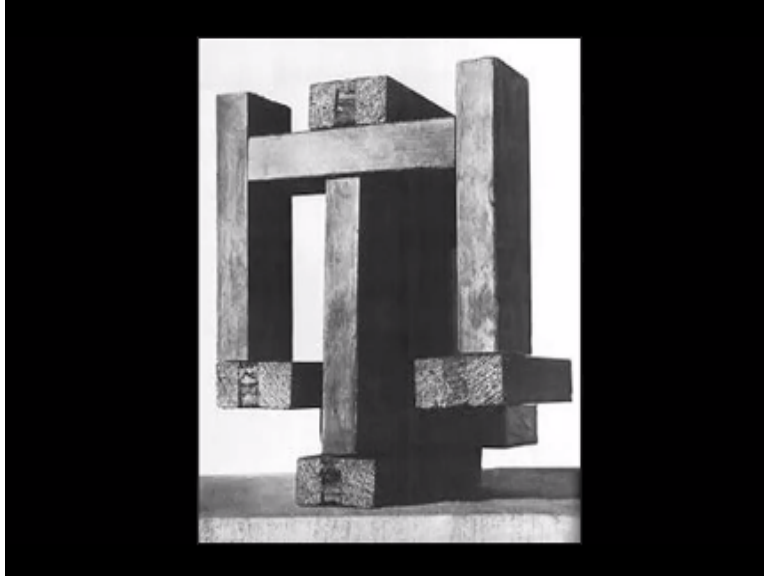
So abstraction got associated with functional design in the domain of fine arts, write from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century because for many constructivists this entitled and ethic of truth to materials we were talking about the truth of materials we were talking about the authenticity of the materials used and believe that materials should be employed only in accordance with their capacities and in such a way that demonstrated the uses to which they could be put.

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For example this one, if we are trying to derive some meaning in relation to the real life visual experiences it is bound to happen that we will be completely misreading the whole sculpture or work of art here. So we need to enjoy construction, we need to enjoy the structural capacities; we need to enjoy the material capacities and the material character and authenticities.

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In this sculptures and in this sculptures as well, so it is not very unlike you are very surprising let one of this artist would declare one day that beauty lies not in caricatures but in strict geometry.

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And beauty might also lie in an apparently blank canvas almost blank canvas like this one painted by Kasimir Malevich as early as 1918 it is a kind of but though he uses the word composition in the title white square on white but this composition has got nothing to do with the representational world of a life or the emotional life of the world, it is an independent art form completely.

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Or for that matter this one it is these are all sharing the similar concern about form, shape, object, geometry and most importantly independence of abstract shapes and ideas.

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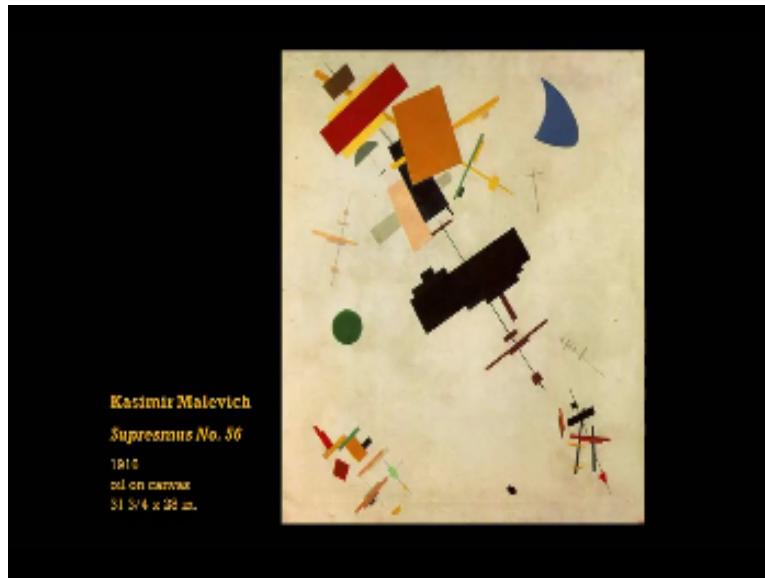


So when Malevich uses color shapes of various dimensions he is not ultimately trying to reach an object or a recognizable form, he is simply leaving it there now it is a difficult task for a painter because coming back to visual perception as I told you repeatedly that visual perception tends to identify form, it tends to give meaning to forms, it tends to give some real life familiar identities to an apparently abstract shapes and forms.

And an artist would also carry a similar kind of visual perception, so an abstract painter has to fight to struggle very strongly against this normal flow of the visual perception which always tries to give meaning and identity to abstract shapes.

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And when an artist like Malevich gets a grasp give this technique and over this medium and over the method of painting obviously you could explore and create a whole out of variation out of it like this one.

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Constructivist art often aimed to demonstrate how materials behaved - to ask, for instance, what different properties had materials such as wood, glass, and metal. The form an artwork would take would be dictated by its materials (not the other way around, as is the case in traditional art forms, in which the artist 'transforms' base materials into something very different and beautiful). For some, these inquiries were a means to an end, the goal being the translation of ideas and designs into mass production; for others it was an end in itself, a new and archetypal modern style expressing the dynamism of modern life.

Now constructive art often aimed to demonstrate how materials behaved to ask for instance what different properties had materials such as wood, glass and metal. The form and artwork would take would be dictated by its materials not the other way around as is in the case in traditional art forms in which the artist coat on coat transforms base materials into something very different and beautiful.

For some these inquiries were a means to an end the goal being the translation of ideas and designs into mass production and for others it was end in itself a new and archetypal modern style expressing the dynamism of modern life. So interestingly though they were talking about the independence of form in dependence of geometric shapes forms ultimately there is of course no representation but definitely there is an association with the real life for constructive art.

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And later on for even minimalist like this, what they believe that this kind of structure this kind of construction this kind of art idea reflects the contemporary modern life more than anything else. So there is a meaning inherent in the idea though not representational but the meaning is certainly philosophical and it is certainly there.

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## Minimalism

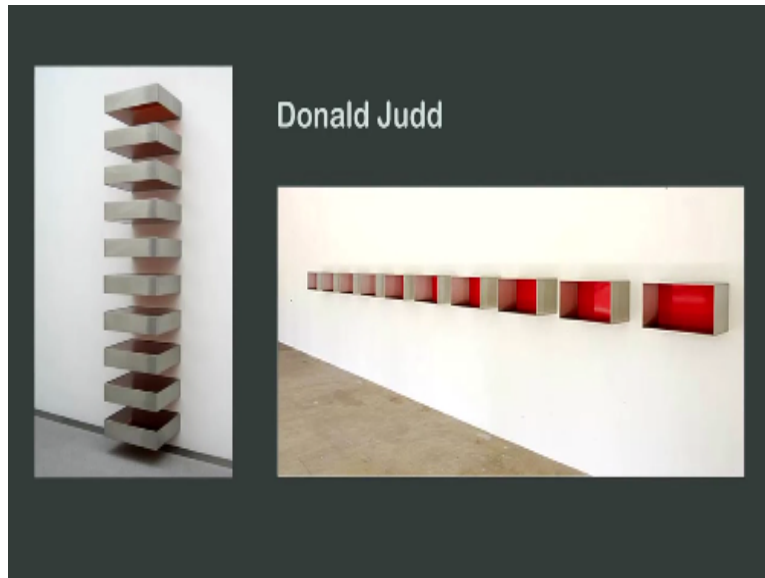
\* This denial of expression coupled with an interest in making objects that avoided the appearance of fine art led to the creation of sleek, geometric works that purposefully and radically eschew conventional aesthetic appeal.

\* Minimalists created works that resembled factory-built commodities and upended traditional definitions of art whose meaning was tied to a narrative or to the artist.

So minimalism if you look at minimalism as another area or another art movement where abstraction developed very rapidly and with great ambition then this very denial of expression any emotional expression are representation coupled with an interest in making objects that avoided the appearance of fine art led to the creation of sleek, geometric works that purposefully and radically eschew conventional aesthetic appeal.

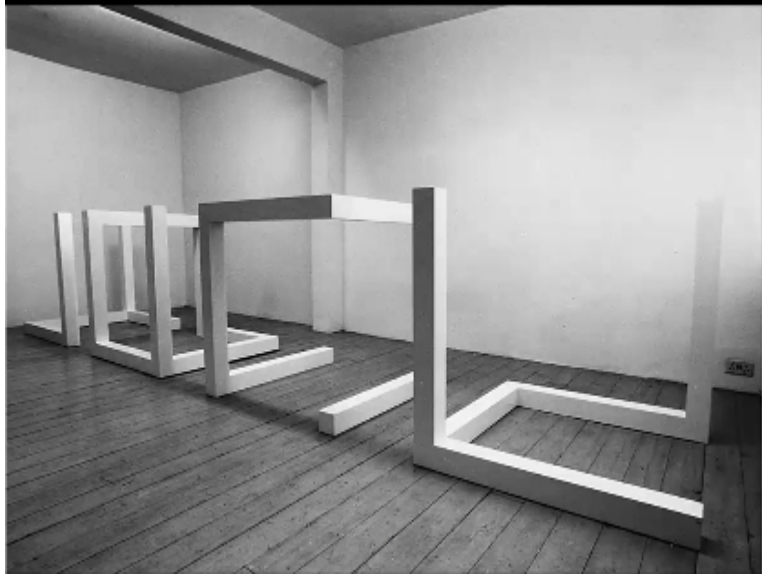
So when you look at any minimalist start work or any constructive start work it is true that you do not find any conventional esthetic appeal, even the very notion of beauty changes but our visual perception is habituated or it is conditioned by a certain notion of beauty which gets again challenged by these art of moments so minimal created works that resembled factory-built commodities and upended traditional definitions of art whose meaning was tied to a narrative or to the artist so this is also interesting that not only the abstract works created by constructive ways or minimal works or devoid of representation.

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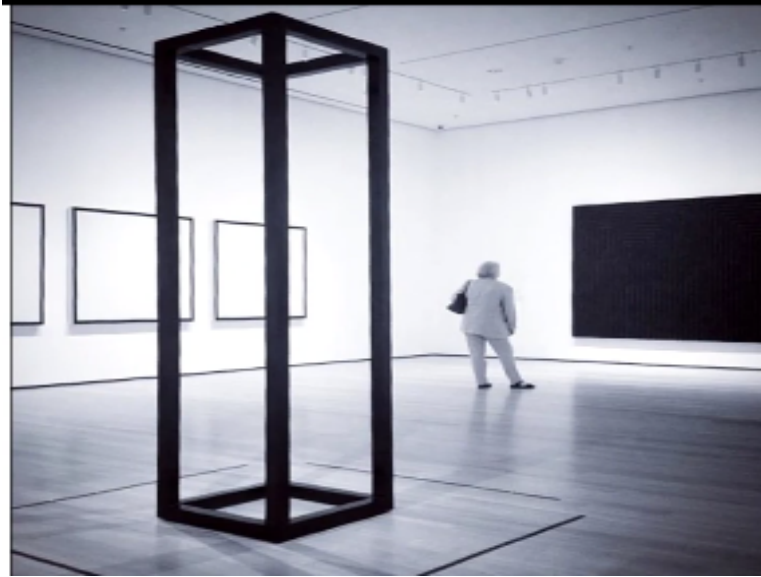
There also devoid of any kind of narrative for example when you look at this works by Donald Judd it don't except any story to unfold in these works you don't expect any representation to be identified.

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Here you simply have to understand the meaning and significance of these works in terms of what they physically visually geometrically art like this one or for this matter this one.

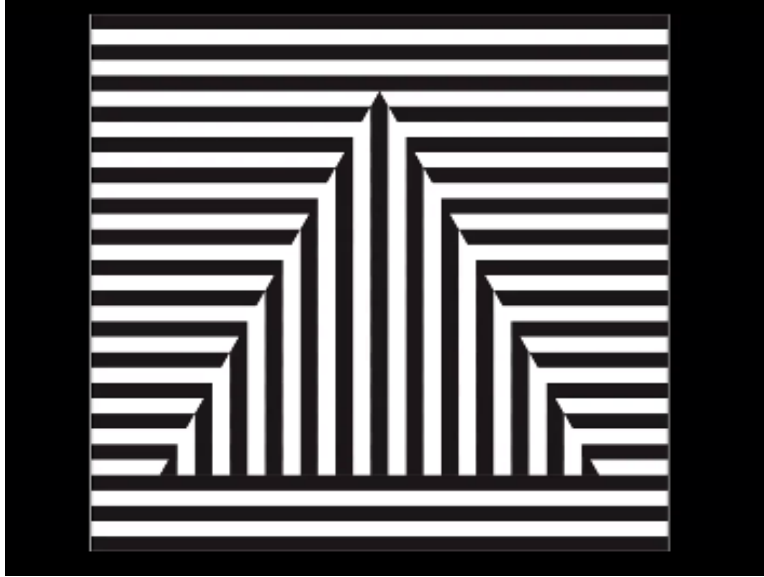
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Or for this one so you can always ask at which point and how does a simple geometrical structure like this become a work of art it is here that we need to look back at history and know the contacts little bit which I have already discussed and then only we will be able to see that becomes of works of art by various kinds of claims and assumptions.

And all these assumptions are very meaningful and significant here assumptions of form geometry shape construction sculptures not yet representation of the object and at the same time the very idea the very faith that now the time has come that this kind of works very appropriately express or relate ourselves with our life nothing else.

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So that also gives a lot of faith and distant to the artist to carry on with this kind of art works so in another art movement which is popularly known as of art it is with optical illusion and optical riddles and optical kind of methods and strategies to accurate very kinds of works of art.

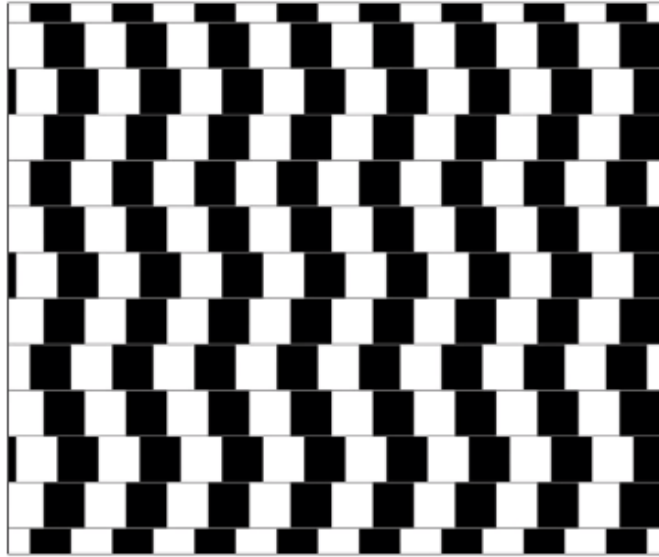
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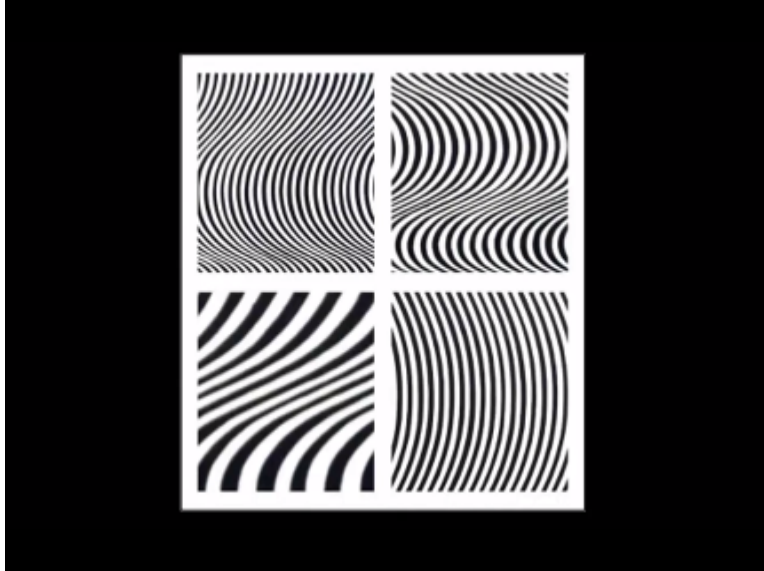
So we have solve it we have Joseph alphas is here all of them again in their works.

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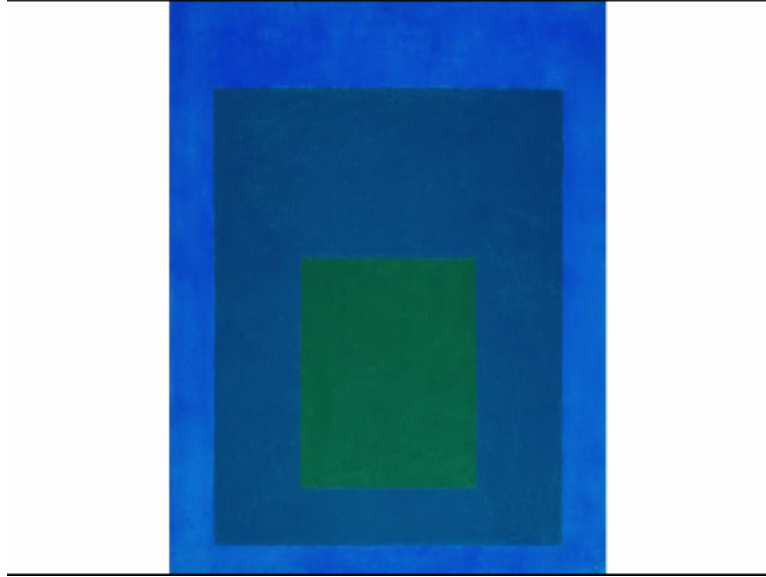
Have nothing to do with narration nothing to do with representation even nothing to do with emotions are artist's own life it is about exploring geometry and optical illusions.

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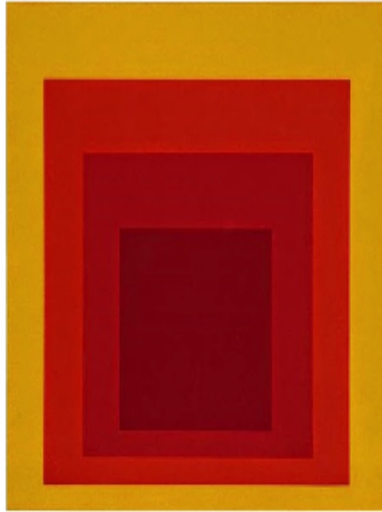
It is about exploring the possibilities of using line shape in a way a very if not that very disturbing but definitely a very mesmerizing impact on our eyes and that is these art works are about.

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So when abler paints a painting like this square in the square you are not suppose to see the room in a room in this painting, you simply have to respond to the settle orient variation and the relationships these squares create with each other. Now how to do that? It is matter of practice; it is matter of training our visual perception along this line.

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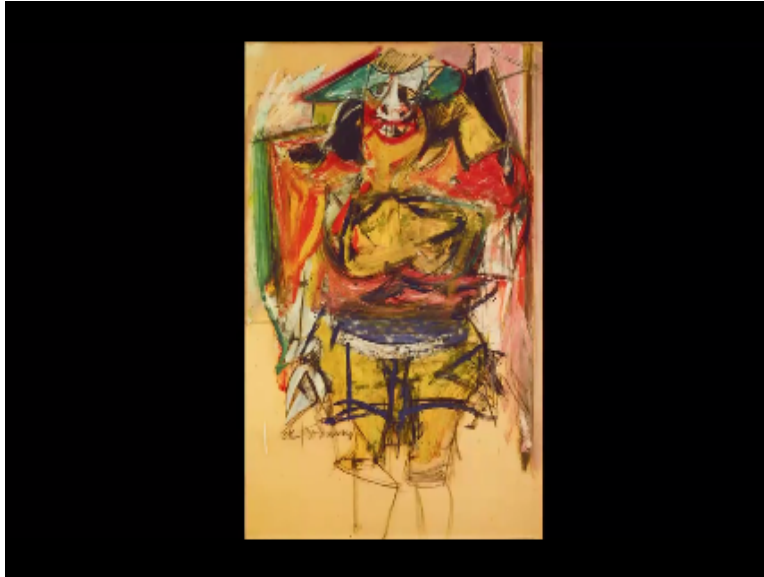
Only that is how you can enjoy, to say the list understand and even engage with this box of art.

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And of course we have such of plenty abstract works all over the world in western art, Indian art, where abstraction is outcome of passion. Very impulsive drawings very impulsive applications of colors, very passionate engagement with your basic elevate of painting like line color shape form space etc. can led to a kind of abstract art which is not certainly geometrical not minimal, not constructive waste but definitely very expressionistic.

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Though it is not presentational of in this abstract painting there is little bit element but similar kind of abstract and impulses that drive a painter towards this kind of painting.

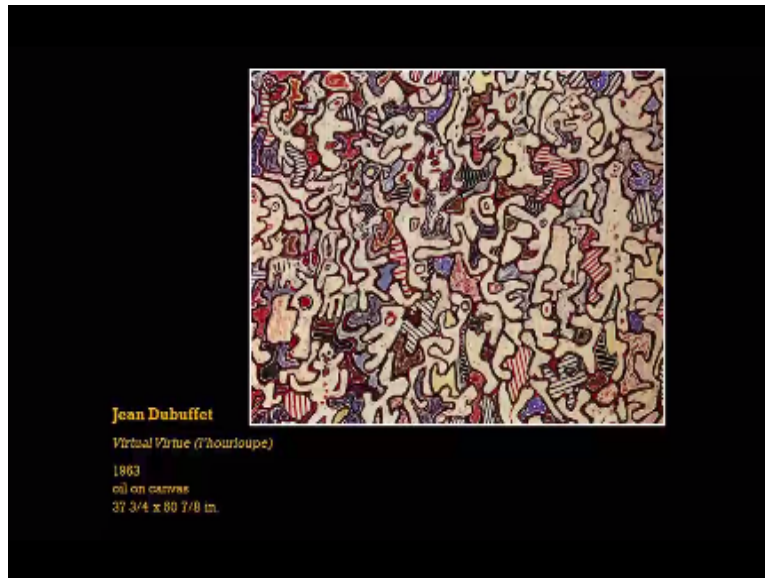
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Will have like this one from by France client will have no such lateral narrative representation association at all.

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Or this painting by Dubuffet.

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This painting by famous painter Jackson Pollock, obviously these paintings do not have anything to do with any representation but it will be wrong to say that, these painting do not have anything to do with emotions also; no definitely a kind of emotional engagement is there. A passionate engagement is there.

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And for many of these painters these passionate and emotional engagements have resulted in beautiful abstract paintings, abstract sculptures very different in appearance in look than the abstract art works created by the constructive, or the minimalist or the cubist thank you.

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