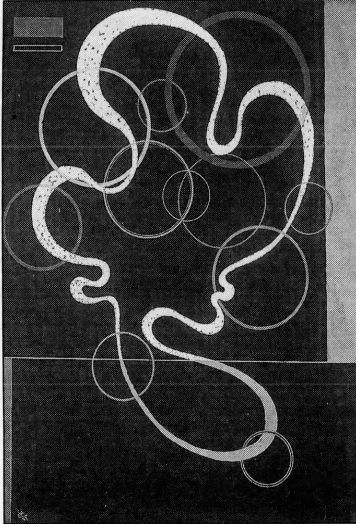


# the shape of the world



Line with accompaniment, 1937: gouache on black paper



An abstract landscape of 1912-13: Kandinsky at his most important and influential

particular importance with those of 1910-1914 — they seem either poor impulsive substitutes for them (though he worked extraordinarily hard to give the impression of impulse) or, worse, carefully contrived substitutes with never a stroke or touch of impulse, or, worse still,

justifications for theories that were both irrelevant and untenable, evidence specially produced to prove them right. He was much given to what young Picasso might have dubbed "dogmatic notions" — theories that far too many critics and historians have accepted as

Gospels of some sort that must be understood and accepted; they tell us something about Kandinsky's mind but precious little about art. He sought to distinguish between the "inner" and "outer" elements of painting, to persuade us that painting has some kind of

autonomy, that expression must have primacy, that a "spiritual vibration" is only achieved by combining internal meaning, inner resonance and "more refined emotions, as yet unnamed". There is much, much more of this kind, and we should have little patience with it.

Damning with faint praise, one can only say of this exhibition that it is a useful survey of Kandinsky's styles and references, but that the period 1910-1914 is too thinly represented to give even an inkling of the importance of these years, not merely for Kandinsky, but for the his-

tory of art in this century; nothing, and certainly not the disappointing impression of diligence and borrowing that this exhibition confirms, should be allowed to take away from him the marvel that was his brief flowering in his mid-forties — but it is only in Munich that one can experience it in all its impact. One good thing can be said for the Academy's exhibition — that it is accompanied by a catalogue more lucid, more sane and calm, more readable than any other work on Kandinsky, be it solid monograph or popular book of illustrations; not one note of hyperbole, not a single nonsense sentence mars a text that deftly interweaves the life and work, the women and his addle-pated theories of music and aesthetics, his absurd literary dabbings and taste for lederhosen, the Russian years as a communist commissar of sorts, the love affair with Germany and his Bauhaus years with Gropius and Klee, the oppression of the Nazis and the inclusion of his work in Hitler's notorious exhibition of Degenerate Art, and the survival of the war years in Paris, where his work was to influence the post-war generation of the School of Paris. If the Royal Academy's exhibition is a disappointment, then it can almost be forgiven, for in spanning Frank Whitford's catalogue it has done Kandinsky studies a great service.

● *Kandinsky Watercolours, Royal Academy, Piccadilly, W1. Daily 10am-6pm. Admission £6. Catalogue £18.95. Until 4 July.*

## Kandinsky Sewell Standard 2 of 2

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