

Artyfacts Episode 3

What is Suprematism?

Can there truly be such a thing as purity? The term purity would suggest perfection which is an impossibility. Nothing can be sincerely uncontaminated by the world around us, be it in a literal sense or a more metaphoric sense; our ideas, our works and our very lives have been spoiled by the beauty and vibrancy of the natural world. Suprematism is the answer to the pollution of naturalism that plagued and manipulated our visual mediums since their conception.

I would like to start us off by looking at the manifesto of Suprematism.

Titled: From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism written by KAZIMIR MALEVICH, 1915

‘once the Madonnas and Venuses in pictures disappear, will we witness a purely painterly work of art.’

This is one of the primary sentiments of this manifesto, it states that once the idea of paintings needing to be based on subject matter has vanished; will works of art be truly graceful.

‘I have transformed myself in the zero of form...I have destroyed the ring of the horizon and escaped the circle of objects...This accursed ring, by continually revealing novelty after novelty, leads the artist away from the aim of destruction. And only cowardly consciousness and insolvency of creative power...afraid of losing the foundation on which the savage and the academy have based their art.’

The zero of form is a statement regarding the idea of the root of a shape, or in other words the starting point of structure. The ring of the horizon is a reference to landscapes, the circle of objects is a reference to still life's and perhaps portraiture. It then accuses these types of works to be the root of stagnation on the artist community; it addresses that the reason we haven't ventured into new fields of art is due to a failure in creativity. Because of academia and the way in which they judge and teach art to new students, without their benchmark they wouldn't have anything to teach or evaluate by.

‘The savage was the first to establish the principle of naturalism:...he attempted to transmit his own image. This first attempt laid the basis for the conscious imitation of nature's forms... The more his consciousness embraced nature, the more his experience and skill increased. His consciousness developed in only one direction, toward nature's creation and not toward new forms of art. Therefore his primitive depictions cannot be considered creative work.’

He believes that painting an item already to exists, in and of itself is an uncreative act. It is only a depiction of once skill as an artist, but not of one's creativity furthermore it drives one to repeat themselves as they become custom to painting landscapes. It may allow them to increase their skill but not the creative process that is needed in art.

'And the outline became more and more involved and achieved its flowering in antiquity and the Renaissance. The masters of these two epochs depicted man in his complete form, both outward and inward. Man was assembled, and his inward state was expressed. But despite their enormous skill, they did not, however, perfect the savage's idea.'

The masters during the Renaissance were skillful, however they were not creative; they began to express new ways his depicting nature with more color and vibrancy. However they were still depicting that which already exists a fruitless effort of coping off of someone else worksheet.

'Forms move and are born, and we are forever making new discoveries. And what we discover must not be concealed...The technological side of our age advances further and further ahead, but people try to push art further and further back.'

Academies, critics and galleries alike will always belittle that which they do not understand, as they live in the past and worship the artists of old.

'the realism of the nineteenth century is much greater than the ideal forms found in the aesthetic experience of the ages of the Renaissance and Greece. The masters of Rome and Greece,...and their realism was pomaded and powdered with the taste of aestheticism. Hence their perfect line and nice colours. Aesthetic taste diverted them from the realism of the earth, and they reached the impasse of idealism.'

It is his belief that art of the 19th center is much more vivid and of a higher skill, due to the masters of the Renaissance and Greece; because they found an ideal style and from which they then started to idealize as the one true form of art. This is a problem as when one begins to see something as perfect, then it's stops them from wanted to progress and develop new skills.

'Because art should not advance toward abbreviation or simplification, but toward complexity...All the masters of the Renaissance achieved great results in anatomy. But they did not achieve veracity in their impression of the body. Their painting does not transmit the body, and their landscapes do not transmit living light,...The art of naturalism is the savage's idea, the aspiration to transmit what is seen, but not to create a new form.'

Malevich thinks that trying to separate a form into its key components is lazy. The artists of the past were amazing at recreation; however they had no conception of expressing emotion and skill without creativity will not lead to new ideas.

'Because we see in their pictures only repetitions of the real forms of life in settings richer than those of their ancestor, the savage...Similarly their composition should not be considered creation, for in most cases the arrangement of figures depends on the subject'

We consider the classical painters to be the first true creatives in the arts, however Malevich believes that arranging things with inside a frame such as the Rule of

Thirds; isn't a form of creative as without new ideas or forms being brought into conception, it is just a show of technique and interior design.

'In repeating or tracing the forms of nature, we have nurtured our consciousness with a false conception of art. The work of the primitives was taken for creation. The classics also. If you put the same glass down twenty times, that's also creation. Art, as the ability to transmit what we see onto a canvas, was considered creation... I think quite differently. The transmission of real objects onto a canvas is the art of skilful reproduction, that's all.'

This is a very important view that helps separate two examples of the definition of art, some believe that the very act transforming something is itself artistic; as it shows evidence of human intervention. Others like Malevich believe that it must have a creative will behind it, as well must bring something new into existence; be a thought or a form in a sense the artist intent.

'And this is possible when we free all art of philistine ideas and subject matter and teach our consciousness to see everything in nature not as real objects and forms, but as material, as masses from which forms must be made that have nothing in common with nature.'

The way in which we teach the next generation in schools, must be not only focused on perfecting only skill; but must also nurture the creative thought process. We must show them the ideas of abstraction, where what we draw might have symbolism but by no means is a replication of nature.

'Color and texture are of the greatest value in painterly creation — they are the essence of painting; but this essence has always been killed by the subject...And any hewn pentagon or hexagon would have been a greater work of sculpture than the Venus de Milo or David...Painting was the aesthetic side of the object. But it was never an end in itself.'

This is a passing comment on impressionism, that color and texture shouldn't be the only relevance in a painting. A painting should be about form as well as color, otherwise it becomes a pure form of abstraction which is color with no shape.

'Nearer our time, young artists devoted themselves to pornography and turned painting into lascivious trash. There were no attempts at purely painterly tasks as such, without any appurtenances of real life.'

It is his belief that painting the human form is just as bad as painting nature, to paint the nude figure is a thing of beauty however to continue doing so is just self-indulgence.

'And given the academy rag-and-bone man a slap in the face with their proclamation of futurism. They began in a mighty movement to hammer at the consciousness as if at nails in a stone wall...Futurism opened up the "new" in modern life:...And we, who only yesterday were futurists, have reached new forms through speed, new relationships with nature and objects.'

The academy was just reselling old ideas of skill and the employment of art theory, however the artist community come up with the movement Futurism. That abandons many of the old teaching in order to create new forms of art; via the use of a new subject matter that the masters never had accesses to. The subject of mechanical speed and which in itself is a man-made invention.

'We have abandoned futurism, and we, bravest of the brave, have spat on the altar of its art. But can cowards spit on their idols— As we did yesterday!!!'

They no longer idolize or hold futurism on a pedestal, just as the advent of futurism made the other movements seemed finalized in their theory; so did Suprematism on to its predecessors.

'And I hate these secondhand-clothes dealers...You, too, spit on the old dresses and clothe art in something new. We rejected futurism not because it was outdated, and its end had come.'

They dislike the critics and gallery's that only sell the ideals of futurism and do not look towards the future of new and developing art movements.

'They made a huge step forward: they abandoned meat and glorified the machine.'

This is a pure statement on the idea that painting nudes and landscapes as being barbaric in nature and that futurism was the first true movement to change and challenge the topic or art.

'Painting will remain the means of transmitting this or that condition of life's forms. But the futurists forbade the painting of nudity not in the name of the liberation of painting and the word, so that they would become ends in themselves!'

Due to the nature of the visual language, the iconographic of nature and the body was all the artist really had at their exposal. To truly express their visual ideas they needed to put those ideas in a familiar setting, it was only with the advent of new technology that new iconography become available.

'But the efforts of the futurists to produce purely painterly plasticity as such were not met with success. They could not settle accounts with objectism, which would have made their task easier. When they had driven reason halfway from the field of the picture, from the old calloused habit of seeing everything naturally, they managed to make a picture of the new life of new things, but that is all. In the transmission of movement...But in order to transmit the movement of modern life, one must operate with its forms.'

In other words the futurist failed to produce a pure painting that lacked naturalism.

This is due to the fact that they were taught the arts and gained a visual knowledge of the arts through exposure to naturalism. This and their painting style operated on the expression of naturalism with their painting style. As well as the idea of movement being a human construct first discovered by the observation of nature, thus rendering their entire movement pre-exposed to the influence of nature.

‘Underlying this destruction lay primarily not the transmission of the movement of objects, but their destruction for the sake of pure painterly essence, i.e., toward attainment of nonobjective creation. The rapid interchange of objects struck the new naturalists — the futurists—and they began to seek means of transmitting it. The state of the object has become more important than its essence and meaning...’

So the idea of using movement as a way to transform objects into new visuals, though the discretion of old ideals and theory was an incomplete theory. However a theory that held ground and helped push forward new transformative ideas. That of the state of an object being more important than the object itself.

‘After rejecting reason, the futurists proclaimed intuition as the subconscious. But they created their pictures not out of the subconscious forms of intuition, but used the forms of utilitarian reason. Consequently, only the discovery of the difference between the two lives of the old and the new art will fall to the lot of intuitive feeling. We do not see the subconscious in the actual construction of the picture. Rather do we see the conscious calculation of construction.’

This is the major flaw of futurism, in their attempts to create a new visual language, all they managed to do was create a juxtaposition between the two states of an object. That being the old and the new, this contrast only painted a picture of the theme of movement, but not the ideals behind the theme of the futuristic movement itself.

‘I consider that the intuitive in art had to be understood as the aim of our sense of search for objects. And it followed a purely conscious path, blazing its decisive trail through the artist. (Its form is like two types of consciousness fighting between themselves.) But the consciousness, accustomed to the training of utilitarian reason, could not agree with the sense that led to the destruction of objectism. The artist did not understand this aim and, submitting to this sense, betrayed reason and distorted form. The art of utilitarian reason has a definite purpose.’

In other words Futurism was a movement created by writers, trying to help artist portray a new visual language and philosophy through their art. However the artists didn't understand the reasoning behind the movement itself, instead they only understood the visual language; even then the artist only knew how to work in the method they had been taught to work in. They had no idea how to create a new visual language but only follow the old whilst adding a new accent towards it.

“I want it like that, I like it like that. ...” Ultimately, this desire was ascribed to creative will. Consequently, the intuitive feeling did not speak clearly. And thereafter its state became not only subconscious but completely unconscious. These

concepts were all mixed together in pictures. The picture was half-real, half-distorted.'

Thus the works the artists created were an amalgamation of the old and the new, whilst not truly expressing either form; they only understood the old way of painting, however they wanted to paint the new. They could not comprehend the need for a new method of production and just worked with what they knew. It would be like someone trying to eat soup with a fork.

'The forms of suprematism, the new painterly realism, already testify to the construction of forms out of nothing, discovered by intuitive reason. The cubist attempt to distort real form and its breakup of objects were aimed at giving the creative will the independent life of its created forms.'

One of the principles of Suprematism is the creation of new forms via spontaneity; Cubists tried to do by distorting the world around them, but they didn't take it to the premise to the logical conclusion.

'The futurists advocate the dynamics of painterly plasticity as the most important aspect of a painting. But in failing to destroy objectivism, they achieve only the dynamics of things....And suprematism is the purely painterly art of color whose independence cannot be reduced to a single color....Painters should abandon subject matter and objects if they wish to be pure painters.'

The Futurists main aim was to create something new, a repatriation of the mordent world. However they couldn't get rid of their past methodology, thus their work remaining in the realm of naturalism. This gives way to the second principle of Suprematism, that all things represented in this form will be a basis of color and cannot be expressed though one color alone. The third principle is that Suprematism requires the painting to have no true basis of subject matter, making it independent from the natural world.

'The demand to achieve the dynamics of painterly plasticity points to the impulse of painterly masses to emerge from the object and arrive at color as an end in itself, at the domination of purely painterly forms as ends in themselves over content and things, at nonobjective suprematism—at the new painterly realism, at absolute creation. Futurism approaches the dynamism of painting through the academism of And both endeavors essentially aspire to suprematism in painting.'

So when one paints in the form of Suprematism they need to paint a pure form comprised on a single color. This allows the object to be nonobjective and have no relation to the world we live in. The aim of Futurism was much the same as Suprematism, with them wanting to achieve a new form visual language.

'If we examine the art cubism, the question arises what energy in objects incited the intuitive feeling to activity; we shall see that painterly energy was of secondary importance. The object itself, as well as its essence, purpose, sense, or the fullness of its representation (as the cubists thought), was also unnecessary.'

In Cubism the expression of the world around them through a new visual language, was an attempt at correcting the theories of the Impressionists. To make sure form and color were given equal importance, however their idea of focusing on removing the work from naturalism was not the main focus of the movement.

‘But it transpired that one more situation was found in objects—which reveals a new beauty to us. Namely: intuitive feeling discovered in objects the energy of dissonance, a dissonance obtained from the confrontation of two contrasting ideas. Objects contain a mass of temporal moments. Their forms are diverse, and consequently, the ways in which they are painted are diverse. All these temporal aspects of things and their anatomy (the rings of a tree) have become more important than their essence and meaning. And these new situations were adopted by the cubists as a means of constructing pictures. Moreover, these means were constructed so that the unexpected confrontation of two forms would produce a dissonance of maximum force and tension. And the scale of each form is arbitrary. Which justifies the appearance of parts of real objects in places that do not correspond to nature.’

Objects although being inanimate thus having a potential to exist forever, lacking an end in essence. But having no life which renders this eternal existence meaningless paints a contrast of ideas. Their form can be interpreted in any way we wish to do so, which in quintessentially makes all representations worthless, so to give a connotation to that which can truly have none due to its multiple depictions. They had to strip away all relations to the object in order to create new objects with a single portrayal.

‘A picture is made, but the object is not transmitted. Hence this conclusion: Over the past millennia, the artist has striven to approach the depiction of an object as closely as possible, to transmit its essence and meaning; then in our era of Cubism the artist destroyed objects together with their meaning, essence and purpose.’

We have always tried to depict the object as well as we could, however Cubism changed the foundation of how we think about art. It isn't the object that has meaning, but what we paint that has meaning.

‘Cubism, futurism, and the Wanderers differ in their aims, but are almost equal in a painterly sense. Cubism builds its pictures from the forms of lines and from a variety of painterly textures, and in this case, words and letters are introduced as a confrontation of various forms in the picture. Its graphic meaning is important. It is all for the sake of achieving dissonance. And this proves that the aim of painting is the one least touched upon. Because the construction of such forms is based more on actual superimposition than on coloring, which can be obtained simply by black and white paint or by drawing.’

All art movements that have tried to shake the foundations of the academy, have all had a common ideal. Where they wished to create a new iconography, however they did this by introducing new styles and rules; in the process of producing a unified theme and theory on which to govern the artist mediums. However they never managed to escape the objective forms of naturalism, which can simply be

achieved by using pure forms of black and white which is what we see in Superimposition.

'To sum up: Any painted surface turned into a convex painterly relief is an artificial, colored sculpture, and any relief turned into surface is painting. The proof of intuitive creation in the art of painting was false, for distortion is the result of the inner struggle of intuition in the form of the real.

Intuition is a new reason, consciously creating forms. But the artist, enslaved by utilitarian reason, wages an unconscious struggle, now submitting to an object, now distorting it.'

Basically put the manger guiding ideal behind Suprematism, is the true spontaneity and instinct of the artist. The distortion of form is part of the artists skirmish with the taught, pre-exposure of the academies methodology and the feelings of man which are the true need to create new forms be it technological advances or a form of pure painterly expression.

'But I have transformed myself in the zero of form and through zero have reached creation, that is, suprematism, the new painterly realism — nonobjective creation.'

This is perhaps the most important quote from this manifesto, he has become zero; meaning has become the beginning and the end. He has become the beginning of a new method and the end of the old; he has become zero the point where true black and white meet to form a gray an absence of color and form. He has become this nonform in order to start from the beginning and to give rise to new shapes for use to build an original methodology from. This statements also attributes that our understanding of any subject, in the grander scheme of things is completely worthless. That that true understanding and appreciation of any subject, can only be found once one has comprehended the most basic facts, theory's and forms. On top of all of this it emphasizes the importance of individuality and creativity.

'Before Our world of art has become new, nonobjective, pure. Everything has disappeared; a mass of material is left from which a new form will be built. In the art of suprematism, forms will live, like all living forms of nature. These forms announce that man has attained his equilibrium; he has left the level of single reason and reached one of double reason. (Utilitarian reason and intuitive reason.)'

The point or zero is the state of equilibrium, where we have no connection to nature and no connection to man; the new object that are created under the reasoning of Suprematism are living in a sense of having nothing in common with what we current understands as art.

'The group of suprematists...has waged the struggle for the liberation of objects from the obligations of art. And appeals to the academy to renounce the inquisition of nature. Idealism and the demands of aesthetic sense are the instruments of torture... Aestheticism is the garbage of intuitive feeling.'

They wish for Suprematism to be taught and understood by the masses, so that current and future artist might understand that there is more to art than naturalism,

the academic methodology or the masters of old. So that galleries and critics might gain a new view of art and stop judging art condescendingly based on skill and style alone. So that all artist has the right to pursue the nontangible and non-objective form.

Now I wish to move on to looking at the visual media behind this art movement, however due to a lack of diverse media behind this genre; I will be looking be looking at a few notable pieces of work and outlining the phases of Suprematism. Malevitch originally stated that there are three phases that being of Black, Colour and White. However, I believe there to be an additional two phase, being that of Depth and Fading.

The first phase is the Black Phase, which can be seen as the introduction of the ideals of Suprematism. A singular object upon a white background, this defined from of a singular object is the start of a new visual language. Once based on a pure form with nothing to dilute the impact of this immovable and flawless object, the first instance of this can be seen in the image. Study for The Decor of Victory Over the Sun (1913) and the perfected later in the painting Black Square (1913)

The second phase is that of Colour, where we can see the introduction of primary colours into Malevich's work. It gives the suggestion of individuality and help develop the relation between shape and colour; to allow for a wider variety of possible arrangements and augmentations to the already established theory. This can be seen in the painting Red Square (Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions) 1915 and highlighted in the work Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack - Color Masses in the Fourth Dimension 1915. The names themselves imply that the objects themselves are alive in some manner, or at the very least representations of living beings.

The third phase which I like to call the phase of Depth, is where the see the introduction of overlapping objects. In his works the objects are often touching or parallel from one another, however when the objects do overlap it creates the illusion of depth. More over the object this is overlapping or being over lapped by another, is always black or in close proximity to a black object. This is to ensure that the illusion of depth is not obscured via a lack of contrast between two colours. I believe most evident painting of this kind is, Suprematism Composition with Plane in Projection 1915. However, the beginning of this idea can be seen in the sketch Composition 1 e (Suprematism: The Square on the diagonal of the surface) 1915

The forth phase is what I like to think of as the Fading phase, where the once perfect objects start to show a subtle decline of colour, which resembles an object slowly sinking into a rivers water or perhaps a building extending out of our field of view off into the distance. I believe the earliest example of this is the sketch, Suprematism: Two Intersecting Planes, Fading/ Suprematism: Three Intersecting

Planes, Fading. 1917-1918. This stylistic choice can be seen in greater detail in the paintings, Yellow Plane in Dissolution 1917-18 and Dissolution of a Plane 1917.

The fifth and last phase of his work is that of the White phase, the works from this phase of his art can perhaps be considered the logical conclusion of Suprematism, as well as perhaps the first steps to modern day monochrome art. Everything in this phase is of a pure white, with only very little tone separating the objects from the background. These works remind me of looking at a white building through a dense fog, but the real reason for this stylistic choice is to blur the boundaries between background and foreground. To create a new form of objects-scape which has no relation to the real world other than our views which we put upon it. The same can perhaps be said about all of the works attributed to the Suprematism movement, however I believe that this painting does their job the best. Construction in Dissolution (three arches on a diagonal element in white) – 1917 and White Planes in Dissolution - 1917/1918.

In a sense these paintings are a love note to the sentiment of his original statement **'zero of form and through zero have reached creation, that is, suprematism'**

Architecture

Generally speaking all architecture is designed for a specific purpose, there are strict laws and guidelines one must follow in the design and construction of any building. This is not even scratching the surface of the bureaucracy and the complex design process, so it is no wonder why Malevitch saw the need to tackle the issue plaguing architects. He saw the need to change the way we think about the creation of a structure, to help allow for creative justification of non-traditional design choices. As such he chose to apply the methodology of Suprematism to architecture, he coined the term Blind Architecture in 1923 via his piece titled under the same name. The term blind architecture refers to the idea of non-objectivity, but in a much different sense than we have previously seen. For you see in Suprematism building design, there is always a lack of the fine details such as windows and doors and the buildings are nonsensical in the way they are structured. As you can see in this image titled Partially Fragmented by I (Architecture Alpha) 1925-26. But why is this an important issue to bring up? Well it shows that this architecture is blind in two different senses, the first way to interpret it is that the building is literally blind allowing for no view of the outside world inhabited by naturalism. The second way it could be read is that, Malevitch is acutely the blind; not literally but instead by his ideals and he is leading the blind those stuck in the hole of traditions, laws and design principles.

Finally let's talk about the four phases Malevitch illustrated in this table.

Table 1. Formula of Suprematism 1913

In this we can see the four stages quite clearly, allow me to quickly elaborate on it, as it has all of the same principals of Malevich's work that we previously talked about.

The first stage shown in figure 1 on the top left, shows a solid pure cube with no detail; presumably it would be hollow, thus making it a building. This bears much of a resemblance to the Black Phase and most likely has the same base ideas of creating a pure and solid object.

Stage seen in the figure on the top right, show the same Cube however with the additions of a rectangular cylinder and both of the left sides of the objects being coloured; this would A-line with the second phase of the introduction of colour.

The next stage shown in figure three on the bottom left, is the introduction of the phase of Depth. The figure shows three painted rectangular cylinders and one additional unpainted rectangular cylinder going through them. It is most likely that the three painted cylinders, increase in size towards the back, this is also very probable of the unpainted cylinder. With this structure, the building would give the illusion of depth from a straight on perspective.

The final stage shown in panel 4 in the bottom left, shows the final phases being that of Fading and White. The illustration shows two interlocking rectangular cylinders both pashing though each other at an odd angle, with an additional small cylinder placed alongside them. I Believe that all these cylinders were meant to be a pure white in colour, this combined with the positioning of the in the potential relation to their size; would theoretically give the sensation of the building fading off into the distance. As the pure white combines with the other buildings in the background or the clouds in the sky.

Before I rap this episode up, I would like to give a quick mention to the short documentary tiled Malevitch Suprematism which was Directed by Lutz Becker. The reason I am not going to go into detail about it, is because I do not consider it work of Suprematism itself, rather something that just references the movement.

I'll leave a link in the description so you can watch the full short film at your leisure

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-malevich-suprematism-1971-online>

Over researching and writing this episode, I have come to gain a true understanding and love for this art movement. It's theory's and points are at sometimes flowed in their accusations. However, its application and guiding rules, truly pioneered and expanded the arts and design in ways we can only imagen.