

Hashim Al-Azzam

The Denied

Line

**Transcultural Dimensions in Picasso's and
Kandinsky's Works: A Critical Examination of Oriental
Influences**



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Publiziert auf ART-Dok – Publikationsplattform Kunst- und Bildwissenschaften,
Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg 2021.

Die Online-Version dieser Publikation ist dauerhaft frei verfügbar (Open Access).
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/artdok.00008666>

Lektorat: Dr. Redhwan Alamri

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Abstract

This paper explores the connection between Islamic ornamental calligraphic expressions and the works of several classical modern artists, indicating similarities and an aesthetic nexus. Picasso and Kandinsky can be described as neophiles and innovators who admired traditional artefacts from foreign cultures. However, their artistic influences also reflect questionable behaviours, highlighting phenomena from the 19th and early 20th centuries where "the Orient" was not recognized as a civilized entity. Veiled and denied calligraphic linear aesthetics point to issues of Orientalism and primitivism. The artists sought purity and primitiveness in forms that would prompt a different perception for the avant-garde audience, cleansing their view from the beauty of idealism and the tangible world. Paradoxically, these attributes were characteristic of Islamic ornamentation, despite its symbolism and religious mysticism. Thus, modern artists' ambiguous attitudes must be examined, making this topic relevant to today's intercultural and transcultural discussions. Art allows viewers to experience and reflect on the artist's emotions and intentions. Early modern artists already depicted the Orient as a world of fantasy and exoticism while simultaneously portraying it as wild and threatening. Abstractions also reflect such controversies but with different artistic means. These problematic perspectives and veiled references fade over time behind the aura of such artworks. This issue is also present in Islamic ornamentation, whose grandfather, according to the author, is Plato. Consequently, the critical examination is crucial today to reflect on the concept of culture, detach pure ideas from their taken-for-grantedness, and unveil obscured intercultural and transcultural perspectives.

The denied Line: Transcultural Dimensions in Picasso's and Kandinsky's Works: A Critical Examination of Oriental Influences

Introduction

The artists of classical modernism, such as Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee, are considered not only highly esteemed and influential in the West but also in the "Orient." However, concerning these artists of classical modernism, controversial attitudes towards oriental artefacts can be identified. They tended to trivialize such artefacts as "foreign" art forms or even degraded them as "non-art," accidental, and empty. Yet, they were also fascinated by the pure, abstract nature of such artefacts. These judgments towards "foreign" artefacts are perceptible both directly and indirectly among artists of classical modernism. These artists were in search of similar geometric pictorial scenarios that they perceived as innovative and original. This pursuit of the new can be diagnosed as an "aesthetic neophilia,"¹ insofar as it could be seen as a "tradition phobia" – a fear of a tradition. On the other hand, non-western art forms and ideas played an essential role in favour of their new artistic achievements and innovations by being appropriated, reinterpreted, and presented as a result of their methodology. This means that such references were not considered as adopted creations, acknowledged as enrichments of their art, but rather presented as a part of their image-finding process.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Western subject felt threatened due to the upheaval of industrialization, leading to an existential crisis (Groys 2005, pp. 11-25). Similarly, religious metaphysics and the symbolism expressed in art were tabooed and instead avant-garde artists sought its surrogate in nature and among "primitive peoples." This scepticism can already be found among artists of Art Nouveau, as they rejected the religiosity of ornamentation and, therefore, attributed it to nature. Due to the taboos of modernity, Near Eastern artefacts were considered non-artistic, and their metaphysical expressions and ideas were viewed as backward. At the same time, abstraction in both classical modernist art and Islamic ornamentation can be understood as a purification of vision from the allure of reality. Both are two-dimensional, devoid of shadows and focused on inner images and supernatural ideas. Therefore, it is worth questioning whether the artists

¹ The term is frequently used in philosophy to refer to a "aversion to something new." Artists of classical modernism, such as Picasso and Kandinsky, always wanted to present something new, even if it came at the expense of others. For example, they backdated some of their paintings and silently and disownedly incorporated certain art forms or "foreign" creations. However, in this study, the term is used critically in the context of considering such artworks as expressions of colonialism and, therefore, should be ethically questioned. In other words, concealed intercultural dimensions of such works, which the artists presented as their creative achievements, should be deciphered and critically reflected upon.

of classical modernism could truly relinquish old traditions and the past or whether they adopted and obscured the metaphysical ideas, simplicity, and characteristics of traditional non-western creations. In this sense, such behaviours can be understood as phenomena and issues of "Orientalism" and "Primitivism" (Hattendorff 2018, p. 15). These phenomena were based on religious, political, and cultural crises of the 19th century, which influenced the tension between the "Orient" and the "Occident."

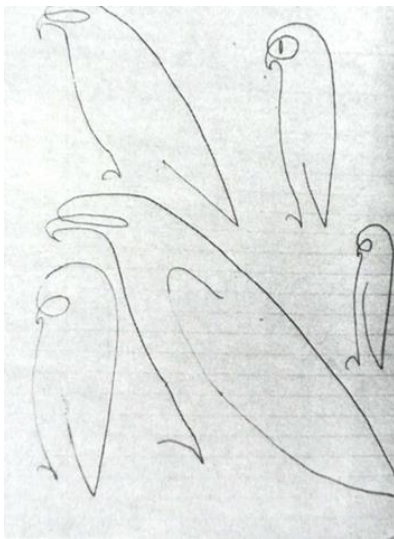
In the 19th century, there was talk of "metaphysical homelessness" (Idrobo 2019, p. 36) and a "disenchantment of the world" (Düsing 2000, p. 25). The rationality of the subject and its enlightenment-driven actions were emphasized and optimized, while religions and emotions were neglected. Such rational and intellectual abilities were associated with Western culture and, on the one hand, legitimized a colonialist attitude towards the "Other." On the other hand, for artists, this form of colonization of "Oriental" and African cultures represented a romantic refuge after the shock experienced by the Western European individual in the 19th century due to enlightenment thinking, industrialization, and electrification (ibid., pp. 26, 29). These entirely new and astounding developments overwhelmed the subject psychologically and led to an alienation from nature (Precht 2007, pp. 74-77). They can be described as consequences and phenomena that generated identity crises among artists of classical modernism, which were also reflected in their works.²

This study questions the approach of modern artists to non-European creations and cultural forms and focuses on a level of image analysis that reflects transcultural dimensions in the works of classical modernist artists. Their ambivalent attitudes raise the question of whether Kandinsky and Picasso concealed their calligraphic appropriations, references, and influences. This question cannot be separated from the next question of how the artists and their generation perceived Near Eastern culture. Critical reflection is considered here as a conceptual cultural justice, aiming to treat "foreign," intercultural dimensions in Western art history on an equal footing. In particular, the differences and similarities between the artistic attitudes of Picasso and Kandinsky are examined in this study. The two-dimensional expressive means of different abstract pictorial languages and aesthetic designs, referring to the script style and creations of Islamic ornamental art, are explored.

² For Kandinsky, a concept like religion was already outdated. Instead, he advocated following a "spiritual movement" that includes a new spirituality with moral and enlightening potentials. Kandinsky emphasizes: "When religion, science, and morality (the latter through the strong hand of Nietzsche) are shaken, and when the external supports are about to collapse, man turns his gaze away from externals and towards himself" (Kandinsky 1970, p. 43). Kandinsky's statement expresses doubts about the validity of science, religion, and moral concepts of his time. These three areas, which traditionally serve as the pillars of spiritual orientation for humanity, no longer hold authenticity and truth for the artist. Although they constitute the societal, material, and spiritual foundations of societies, they have lost credibility for Kandinsky because they have become purely rational and, consequently, stifle the further potential of human abilities.

This study critically discusses to what extent numerous artworks by these two artists are related to Islamic ornamental art and, therefore, to the concepts of "interculturality" and "transculturality." Authors such as M. Brüderlin, H. Belting, and C. Hattendorff have motivated the author of this work and are particularly used as sources to offer a new perspective on Western and Eastern art history. Transcultural reflection plays a crucial role in the subject's contemporary transcultural education. In other words, the discovery of new transcultural perspectives in the artworks of Western art history can change the view towards non-western cultures by uncovering, equalizing, and thus perceiving foreign references as part of the "self."

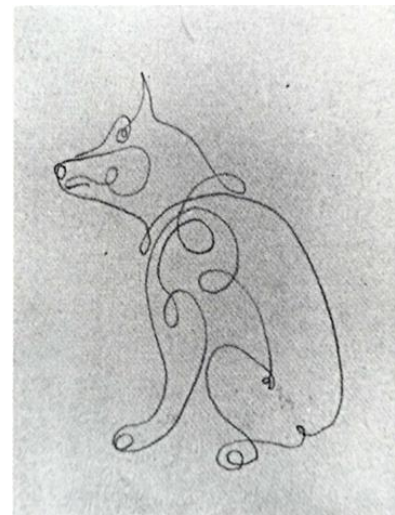
Example Picasso



(Fig. 1) Picasso. Studienblatt Adler und Eulen. Tusche auf Papier, 22 x 17.6 cm, 1907. Z.XXXVI, 182; LDA Vol. I, carnet n 7, SIR: Kruaier 1987. 49.

Picasso was known for his pursuit of innovation, which he found in artefacts from non-Western cultures that he incorporated into his works. Notably, the female figures in many of his paintings were influenced by African masks (Spies 2008, pp. 55-61, also referenced in Morris 2010, p. 81). Another potential influence can be identified, according to the author of this work, in Islamic calligraphy. Picasso was deeply fascinated by the pure and simple character of calligraphy, stating, "If I had known that there was such a thing as Islamic calligraphy, I would never have started painting" (Frembgen 2010, p. 10). Picasso's statements often puzzled critics, as he tried to conceal, deny, or obscure such appropriations. For instance, when asked about African arts, he responded provocatively, saying, "African art? I know nothing about it!" (Matzner 2016). However, similar calligraphic linear execution can be observed in numerous drawings, paintings, installations, and sculptures by Picasso. Gertrude Stein explained, "Calligraphy, as I understood it in (Picasso), had perhaps its most intense moment in the decor of Mercure. That was written, so simply written, no painting, pure calligraphy" (Bergruen 2006, p. 214). This investigation focuses on Picasso's studies conducted between 1907 and 1909, which depict birds and animals (Fig. 1-3) or specific animal forms reduced to a single line.³ These representations appear devoid of

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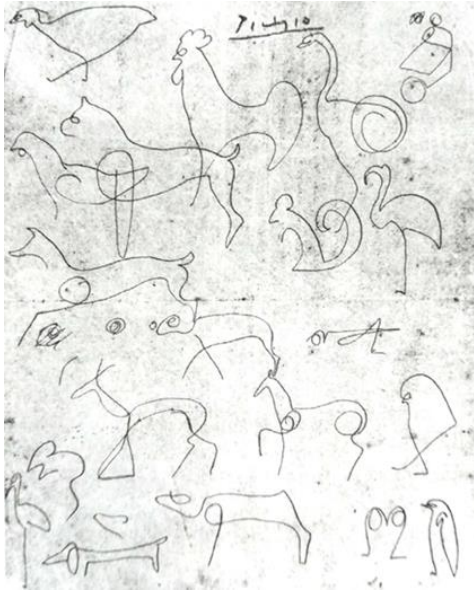


(Fig. 2) Picasso. Dog, drawing, pencil, 12.8 x 11.1 cm, 1918, Picasso Museum Paris.

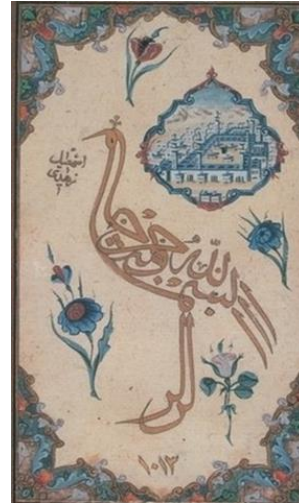
³ At this point, more than 30 studies of this kind can be identified. Further similar studies and sketches can be found in his later sketchbooks.

shadows and possess a calligraphy-like character. While the dove symbolically appears in Picasso's art, the drawn motifs were intended to be symbols." Picasso's simple, economical delineation of forms demonstrates the influence of calligraphic elements on his paintings, sculptures, and drawings. Picasso's drawings can be likened to sentimental poetic Islamic scripts, two-dimensional illustrations, or geometric representations found in Islamic manuscript illuminations. Similarities can also be observed in Picasso's later paintings, drawings, and even installations, which bear resemblance to Islamic medieval illustrations or perhaps have adopted the spontaneous expressive nature of Arabic calligraphic lines. The outline of the female figures and other motifs reduced to lines can be compared. Whether Picasso had seen Islamic medieval illustrations cannot be proven. Picasso admired Delacroix and his fascination with the "Orient," portraying images from his Algerian journey. Delacroix had brought hundreds of sketches from his trip, as North African culture reminded him of Greek antiquity (Morris 2010, p. 187). It is plausible that Islamic ornamentation, calligraphy, illustrations, constellations, and manuscript illuminations were generally accessible and visible to scholars and storytellers in Spanish and French museums and media due to the shared history of Islam and Spain (ibid.). It has become known in the scholarly research field that Picasso sought motifs and forms of expression that, on the one hand, would not lose their connection to the object and, on the other hand, could convey the idea of that object (Kusenbergh 1959, p. 13). Since the Middle Ages, Islamic art has been characterized by calligraphy and geometry, which created an ornamental cosmos.⁴ Calligraphy emerged as an independent art form with various styles. Of these scripts, the Thuluth script is worth mentioning, as calligraphers managed to develop certain calligraphic styles into shapes of animals and objects (e.g., birds, lions, plants, ships, etc.). For example, images of calligraphed animals from the 17th to 19th centuries can be seen (Fig. 4-6). Calligraphy was executed in the Arabic language. The script could be perceived as an image and should be felt as a "geometry of the soul," even though such calligraphies carry meanings and symbols.

⁴ Arabic script styles were influenced by other foreign scripts (e.g., Persian and Nabatean), and each script was popular at a certain time and under a specific dynasty. In the Ottoman Empire, the Thuluth script was highly significant, while during the Mamluk dynasty, the Muhaqqaq script was considered important (Mandel 2013, also see: Kühnel 1962).



(Fig. 3) Picasso. Sketches for illustrations for a proposed Bestiary by Guillaume Apollinaire, ink on paper, 26 x 20.5 cm, 1907, Z.XXXVI, 176; Max Jacob and Picasso, 73.



(Fig. 4) Islamic Thuluth script: Basmala by Ismael Zuhdi (A excerpt), 1798. (Note: "Basmala" refers to the phrase "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim," which translates to "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful" and is commonly used at the beginning of Islamic texts and prayers.)

The beauty and perfection of the Arabic script appeared in Islamic art for centuries as a replacement for naturalistic and figurative depictions (Khatibi and Sijelmassi 1995, p. 128). In contrast to Picasso's drawings, these calligraphic representations can be understood and perceived symbolically and with calligraphic content and ornamental aesthetics. Such calligraphic lines can be associated with the outer contouring used by Picasso in his paintings, drawings, lithographs, and installations. In other words, some motifs in Picasso's works can be linked to Islamic calligraphy due to their calligraphy-like character. Forms transform into movable abstracts, script-like lines, seemingly intuitively and spontaneously drawn. The question remains, however, of the expression Picasso intended to convey through the calligraphic line and what the Spanish artist extracted and retained from it. This principle of abstraction can be perceived as a development in his works with certain motifs, such as the evolution of the bull motif in Picasso's art (Theil 2006, 137a-137f), where this linear aesthetic referencing calligraphic execution can be recognized. The forms limited to the borderlines can also be found in Picasso's later works.



(Fig. 5) The Caliph 'Ali driving the camel with his sons Hasan and Husayn in tow. Anonymous Alevi-Bektashi calligraphy, Turkey, 19th century.



(Fig. 6) Calligraphy in the form of a Hoopoe bird, "In the Name of the Merciful": Unknown, 17th century. 187 x 171 cm, paper, ink, Museum of Islamic Art, State Museums of Berlin.

With Arabic calligraphy, Picasso was less interested in its symbolism and beauty than in the simple, re-hieroglyphic character of script forms. His motivation to incorporate foreign artefacts into art stemmed from a search for origins. Looking back at Picasso's studies, it becomes apparent that he not only abstracted the forms but also retained the expressive power of calligraphic line execution. This can be felt in the similar geometric character of the forms, which, in their simplicity, could harbour potentially "primitive" expressions. In this sense, such a linear aesthetic could be interpreted as an approximation of primitive, sacred purity. It can also be deduced that Picasso's approach involved appropriating, assimilating, and concealing the origins and original contexts of these foreign artefacts, regardless of the reasons and interests that led him to puzzle critics through denial and silence. Perhaps this should be considered in the historical

context of the time when a different public opinion prevailed. Due to the negative perception of the East, its values and characteristics had to be concealed by modern artists. A painter like Picasso might have secretly revered the "oriental" culture and its achievements, hence incorporating them into his art. However, as a public figure, he might not have been able to publicly admit it due to political or societal reasons. While Picasso remained silent about such foreign appropriations, influences, and mimesis, similar connections can be intuited and associated with Kandinsky. At the same time, such references by him were radically denied and strongly criticized, indicating an evident ambivalent attitude towards them.

Example: Kandinsky

Kandinsky is known for negating tradition artefacts and attempting to defend his art against an "ornament suspicion" and the dilettantism of oriental ornamentation (Brüderlin 2012, p. 348). For instance, he completely rejected any connection,

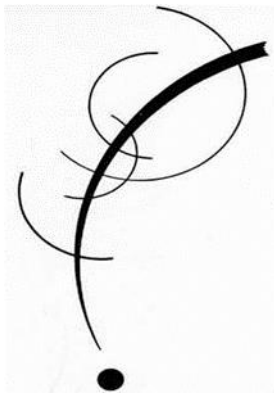
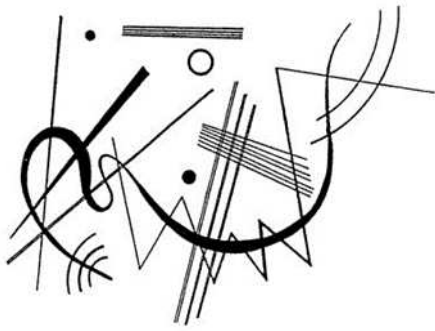
comparability, and even association between his abstract work and an ornamental aesthetic. However, his fascination with such ornaments, which he saw during his travels, museum visits, and in magazines, is puzzling. On the one hand, Kandinsky expressed his fascination with orient artefacts in his letters. On the other hand, he tried to articulate his radical critique of ornamentation.



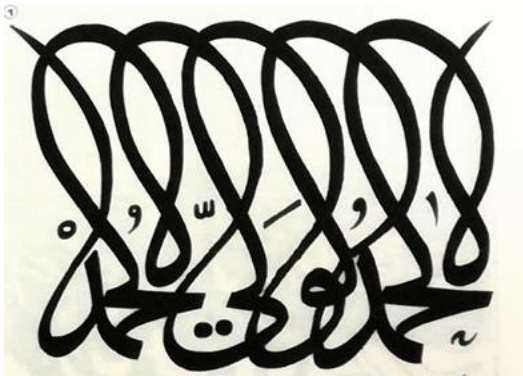
(Fig. 7) Kandinsky. *Movements*, watercolor and ink on paper, 33.7 x 47.3 cm, 1924, London, Christie's.

There are numerous examples where ornamental adaptations can be observed in Kandinsky's work. In this text, the focus is primarily on Islamic calligraphy, which can still be interpreted and even recognized in many of his later works. Kandinsky vehemently rejected any comparisons between his abstractions and ornamentation. According to Brüderlin, such associations were even considered a "fall from grace" by him (*ibid.*). This aversion to ornamentation is explicitly confirmed in several of Kandinsky's writings. He emphasized, "The danger of ornamentation was clear to me; the lifeless existence of stylized forms could only deter me" (Kandinsky 1955/b, p. 21), and also, "The danger of stylized form, which either is stillborn or soon dies, weakly alive. The danger of ornamental form, mainly the form of external beauty, which can and usually is outwardly expressive and inwardly inexpressive" (quoted in Rammert-Götz 1994, p. 168).⁵ On the other hand, Kandinsky's fascination with "oriental" ornamentation can be sensed and reflected in his work. He was inspired and influenced by both calligraphy and geometric folk arts, as well as Arabic two-dimensional figurative achievements. The Russian artist undertook two trips to the Orient.

⁵ Kandinsky's skeptical stance towards the function of ornament is aligned with Adolf Loos' anti-ornamental attitude, which he formulated in his famous purist statement against Art Nouveau in his essay "Ornament and Crime" (Loos 1908/1962): "(...) Modern ornament has no parents and no descendants, has no past and no future. It is welcomed with delight by uncivilized people (...) and denied after a short time" and "As ornament no longer has an organic connection to our culture, it is also no longer an expression of our time" (Loos 1908/1962).



(Fig. 8) Kandinsky. Lines from his book "Point and Line to Plane," print graphics, 1926.

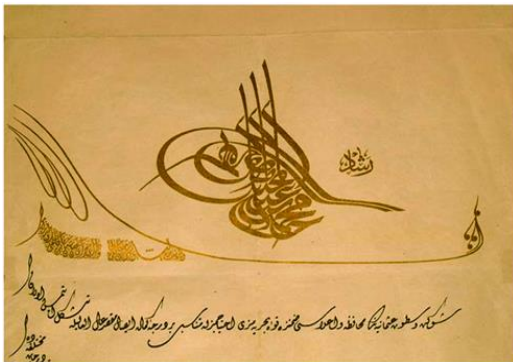


(Fig. 9) Islamic Calligraphy - Recreated Calligraphy. The original was composed by Ahmad Karahisari (1468-1556) for Sultan Suleiman, the terms al-hamad, al-wali, al-hamad (Attributes of God). Mosalsal script in Thuluth letters in the Gulzar style, 1547.

In 1905, Kandinsky visited Tunisia and made many journeys there (Zweite 1992, p. 10, 56). He discovered a new form of ornamentation there, after having been impressed by ornaments during his youth in Russia and his Art Nouveau period. He observed and sketched script characters during his stay in Tunisia (Fig. 12). The expressive Arabic script, used in various fields of art such as architectural writings, and crafts, not only impressed him but also led him to his form of playfulness, abstraction about the organic. Another testament to his interest in Islamic ornamentation and arts is evident in his museum visits and search for further abstract elements. In 1907, Kandinsky visited the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in Berlin and three years later, the exhibition "Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art" in Munich. He was highly fascinated by these exhibitions and certain Islamic artists. However, it is rare to speak about specific Islamic artworks and artists, as individuality was lacking in Islamic art. Calligraphic scripts repeated and appeared identical throughout the cultural sphere. Therefore, in this work, the discussion can only be about Islamic ornamentation or calligraphy in general, and not about a specific artwork, although Kandinsky engaged with specific folk arts in other experiments.

Upon observing Kandinsky's paintings and the linear wave-like motifs, the author of this work was reminded of Islamic calligraphy. In Kandinsky's painting "Two Movements," geometric and geometry-like motifs are visible (Fig. 7). The two lines that dominate the central area of the painting can be found repeated in numerous other paintings, graphics, and drawings by Kandinsky. In his books, such wavy lines can be seen in black-and-white print graphics, for example (Fig. 8). Although they appear meaningless and devoid of symbols, they possess a comparable aesthetic to Islamic calligraphy (Fig. 9-11), which carries symbolism

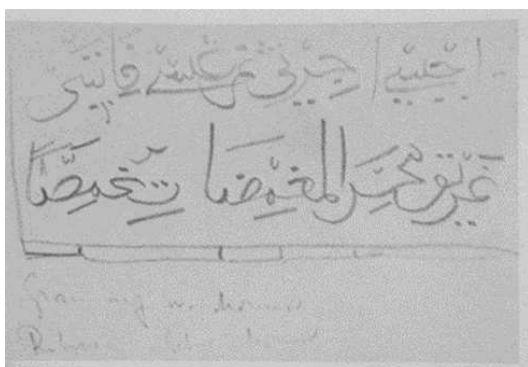
due to its religious content and epigraphic appearance. This calligraphy, serving modern art, can also be observed in Kandinsky's contemporary friend, Paul Klee (Fig. 13). In Klee's painting, a different style can be seen, which can be linked to the Arabic Maghribi script. Both abstract arts attempt to convey something through the purely abstract nature of geometry and the expressiveness of lines. The viewer encounters the geometry-like, linear abstractions, and ornaments similarly in the movements of the lines, with their expressive and organic aesthetics. They are two-dimensional, and geometric, and consist of almost comparable elements (e.g., basic shapes, points, and lines). They are devoid of objects and set themselves apart from the naturalistic, representational world. Both appear without shadows and yearn for supernatural, timeless worlds. Nina Kandinsky noted during the second trip to the Orient when observing the ornamentation of the Blue Mosque in Smyrna, Turkey: "When we entered the Blue Mosque, I believed that I saw Kandinsky's paintings before me" (Nina Kandinsky 1978, p. 208).



(Fig. 10) Islamic Calligraphy: The Diwani style was a formal calligraphy style of the Ottoman court and was used for important documents such as the diplomatic decree (Ferman) and legal documents (Berat). Note: The Diwani style of calligraphy is known for its intricate and decorative script, often used for official and prestigious purposes during the Ottoman era.)



(Fig. 11) The names of the Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar appear between the chapters. Anonymous Ottoman devotional manuscript, 19th century, Turkey. Private collection. Note: Abu Bakr and Umar were early Islamic caliphs who played significant roles in the history of Islam, particularly during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the expansion of the Islamic empire.)



(Fig. 12) W. Kandinsky, Arabic Calligraphy (Sketchbook from the Tunis trip), pencil on paper, 16.5 x 11 cm, 1905, Municipal Gallery at Lenbachhaus, Munich.

Islamic artists (geometers and calligraphers) were interested in beauty. Script adorned the walls of Islamic mosques and palaces as part of geometric and vegetal ornamental interlacing, symbolizing the presence of God. Through specific script styles, a beautiful expression was intended, symbolizing the beauty of God.⁶ In contrast, Kandinsky sought compositions that appeared chaotic and nature-like, tending towards other relationships than the symmetries, reflections, and repetitions of ornamentation. In other words, while Islamic geometers sought to symbolize divine attributes through geometry and calligraphy and achieve and express a paradisiacal premonition through geometry, Kandinsky pursued a parallel subjective world that the "god-like" artist could creatively shape.⁷ Hence, a spiritual conception of art was necessary, which should innovatively change the entire composition and conception of the painting. The craving for innovation, on the other hand, occurred at the expense of the Other, as modernist artists concealed such non-European influences and legitimized them as their own.

⁶ Limited to Islamic ornamental symbolism, it can be observed that, unlike Christian symbolism, it eschews the figurative and relies on the geometric and its effects. For example, when considering Islamic calligraphy, it can be agreed that it is not only about religious content or sacred scriptures, but also about a "beautiful" geometrical and ornamental appearance. Although the script, such as the "Kufic style," may be difficult to read due to its expressive form and decorative function, it is perceived ideographically and symbolically. It is meant to create a beautiful and mystical effect on the viewer, bringing joy in the sense of a supernatural happiness (Belting 2008, p. 85). The feeling and effect that medieval Islamic ornamentation should leave on the viewer should be a culmination of many attributes and symbols in a moment where, according to Altawhidi (922-1023), a "divine image" should be perceived momentarily in contrast to the "real image" (Al ssediq 2003, p. 181). In other words, the Islamic ornamentation is, according to the author of this text, to be regarded as a 'codex' in which medieval Islamic scriptures, the Islamic worldview, divine attributes, and Islamic metaphysics should be expressed. This means that Kandinsky's and Picasso's compositions, in contrast to ornamental de-compositions, are meant to represent a new, parallel world to nature, dealing with the 'organism' of nature and its laws. Like a god, the artist constructs his own world, which should not be dominated by an industrialized, materialized, and ideological world, but where the intuitively guided creation of emotion should take center stage, thus leading to a new spirituality. Therefore, the principle of abstraction in ornamentation differs from the principle of abstract art. While in Islamic ornamentation, divine beauty, understood as a symbol, was expressed, Picasso and Kandinsky were concerned with the symbol-less, the interesting, and the sublime, which are not separate from the modern scientific worldview. In this regard, they represent different ideological narratives and counter-narratives, interested in different existential dimensions and theories of knowledge.

⁷ Regarding "imitatio naturae," Costazza A. argues that the moral-psychological attention to the effect of art in early Enlightenment aesthetics, on one hand, and the aesthetics of genius and expression with its focus on the producing, creative artist, on the other hand, should have definitively displaced the rationalistic and objectivist principle of imitation (Costazza 1992, pp. 87 ff). This does not mean that Kandinsky abandoned nature, but rather that "imitatio naturae" shifted from the externality of nature to its internality, where the spiritual (soul) of nature can be imitated in art. This means that the artist should intuitively behave "like nature" itself.



(Fig. 13) Paul Klee. *Insula dulcamara*, oil colors on jute, 80 x 175 cm, 1938, Klee Foundation, Bern.

In other words, these foreign artefacts or Eastern ornamental arts were perceived by them as a source of spiritual inspiration and original magic, while their traditional, religious, and linguistic contexts were disregarded. His works may indicate this attitude, as his motifs appear without symbols and meaning, yet their external resemblance to geometric and calligraphic ornamentation cannot be ignored. Furthermore, both Kandinsky and Klee sought to invent a new script that could be understood through its spiritual power and movement. Kandinsky stated, "We see only that the letter consists of two elements which, in the end, express a sound" (Kandinsky 1955/a, p. 30). Neither Picasso nor Kandinsky can be found admitting appropriated non-European artefacts. Brüderlin formulates: "However, the eagerness with which the artists defended themselves against the suspicion of ornamentation reveals that the pioneers of abstract art instinctively sensed that this category had more influence on the foundation of non-representational art than they were willing to admit, beyond the obvious formal resemblance" (Brüderlin 2012, p. 348).

Comparable Avant-garde Habitus

This perception of non-Western artefacts raises the question of how the Islamic cultural sphere was viewed by the artists of classical modernism in the 19th century. A comparison between Picasso and Kandinsky can reveal differences, as Kandinsky abandoned representation, whereas Picasso, in contrast, still found a relation to it. Picasso said, "There is no abstract art..." (Kusenbergl 1959, p. 13). For example, it can be observed that Picasso's focus was on the identity of the subject (e.g., falcon, owl, horse, still life, etc.). The search for pure, primal characterizations comparable to the original, unmixed forms is similar. Both artists exhibit a striving for aesthetic purity. The form should relinquish much and liberate itself from the dominant theories of idealism. The purpose of art is no longer "the sensual appearance of the idea" but the creation of a parallel world to nature. This can be observed in both Picasso and Kandinsky. Therefore, the discussion at this point should focus on comparable mimetic behaviours. Kandinsky adopted certain motifs and altered them. In his contribution "Calculation" for the catalogue of the exhibition "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis," Kandinsky wrote the following:

"There is even more. In some cases, there is already a possibility today to 'dissect' a genuine work, which is not only amusing but often instructive. It may be as instructive as a special science called anatomy. Elements, proportions, and composition

can be expressed in numbers. As I think, every phenomenon permits." (quoted in Kandinsky 1955/a, p. 159).

Brüderlin confirmed this methodology by speaking of a "dissected arabesque." Unlike Kandinsky, Picasso imitated such forms from other "primitive" cultural forms. This means that Picasso engaged in 'mimesis of other arts' or an eclectic silent behaviour imitated, reworked, and at least learned from so-called foreign "primitive cultures" and drew inspiration from them. Art historian William Rubin sees that the artists of classical modernism found learning processes in such arts. He believes that artists of classical modernism were indeed fascinated by such arts but did not copy them; rather, they were inspired and influenced by them. Rubin points out that Picasso visited the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (Graaf 1984), and he further reports, "At that moment, it became clear to me, said Picasso, what art-making is really about" (quoted in *ibid.*). Opinions differ, however, as other critics argue that such works of classical modernism were a form of colonization and reinterpretation of non-Western art forms. This indicates the critical attitudes and attitudes of both artists towards such art forms, which can point to the consequences of colonialism (Hattendorff 2018, p. 15).

The developmental phases of both artists' works serve as a guide, culminating in their abstract character. At this point, the question arises as to why such ornamental references appear in the late stages of their aesthetic productions. The author of this work believes that influences from the development of the artwork itself can be considered a "rediscovery." This means that through the abstract transformed result of the artwork, the artists came back to the track of calligraphy (as memory and experience). In other words, in the later stages of their deconstructions, the line emerges as an independent or pure motif, even though the two artists pursued different artistic positions. In terms of these developmental stages, the artists became aware of the calligraphic aesthetic. This could have also happened intuitively, as Picasso and Kandinsky had already seen Islamic calligraphy and were convinced of its relevance. When the line, in the deconstructions of both artists, was seen as pure due to its reduced, geometry-like appearance, the expressive nature of Islamic calligraphy may have been recollected and implemented or transformed without symbols. While the artists and orientalists of earlier generations were interested in the figurative (Lemaire 2000, p. 8), the artists of classical modernism leaned towards the geometric, pure, and ornamental aesthetics that fascinated them. This aesthetic position cannot be separated from Kandinsky's and Picasso's "anti-Hegelianism," as they rejected ideal figurative representations and, in pursuit of their spiritual aspirations, sought a new exercise or a new pure primitive art.⁸ The pure expressive

⁸ The term "mysticism" was embraced by Kandinsky in relation to abstractions. In Kandinsky's context, "mysticism" is to be understood as intuition and in connection with his concept of "inner necessity." Through "a music-like" character of abstract art, the resonant aspect of emotion can be achieved, which, according to Kandinsky, can trigger a different, transcendent experience.

forms of abstract art were meant to enhance the perception of the subject through their "original primitive" character, offering a different quality of perception.

In Search of Pure Forms

The term "pure" or "purity" is used in various contexts. In a theological context, "purity" is defined as a perceived metaphysical idea. Such pure ideas are essentially mythical and religious and have later been ideologically instrumentalized. To this day, the term is intensely studied from a moral-psychological and philosophical perspective. Pure ideas usually strive for a certain homogeneity and protect themselves from foreign ideas. This can also be identified in social and cultural human orientations; for example, conservative individuals, as opposed to progressives, tend to have a shared pure conception and lean towards pure social worlds as they feel threatened by foreign ideas (Hübl 2019, pp. 14 ff). These notions can be associated with conservatism, fundamentalism, and other forms of decayed thinking. Religious, nationalist, ideological, and traditional orientations, for example, strive for pure ideas, unmixed societies, and unmixed cultures. For such ideas, there has always been a counterpart perceived as foreign, low, mixed, threatening, etc. During fascist times, the idea of a pure race, for instance, was elevated, instrumentalizing the ideas of idealism and legitimizing the colonization of the "other" for themselves. In their time, the artists of classical modernism tended towards pure art or an expression of aesthetic purity (Sedlmayr 1985, pp. 24 ff). They found such sought-after pure and simple forms in non-Western artefacts, which, however, would have arisen from accidental wild creativity and needed to be liberated through their artistic methods. Unlike Sedlmayr, who used the term "pure art" in the sense of autonomy and independence of the genre (ibid., p. 24), this work considers 'purity' in the sense of an abstract, unmixed aesthetic character of the element. A pure element is oriented towards a spiritual-mental expression and is connected to metaphysical dimensions. For example, a pure form of abstract art possesses an original, simple, and primal quality. It approaches the origin of the spiritual by detaching and distinguishing itself from the representational and thus can express a timeless character through geometry. Such archaic elements are described as "catharsis," guaranteeing a soulful cleansing for the perceivers. In other words, aesthetic purity and timelessness can be achieved through geometry and geometry-like expressions. In ornamentation, purity is to be understood as a geometric property and symbolism that strives against material reality. Ornamentation is seen as an expression of the idea of the Eternal, which seeks to transcend and dominate every sublime material space in favour of its symbolic effect. Pure abstract arts were conceived based on pure religious practices. The perceived purity between the two artefacts is comparable, as both separate themselves from the real world as a material distraction and restrict themselves to a pure soulful dialogue.

In the Islamic world, other forms of art and creations emerged that appeared symbolic, geometric, and geometry-like, and also separated themselves from the architecture and decorative functions of ornamentation. They were produced for

artistic and non-artistic purposes but were perceived by modern artists as primitive and empty, with their symbolism, religious content, and scientific connections veiled. Picasso and Kandinsky saw a certain original, primal quality in the ornamental forms.⁹ That means that such creations, in the eyes of these artists, should be considered timeless, contentless, and mutable, even though Islamic culture experienced a scientific, economic, and political flourishing during the time of ornamentation's origin (Belting 2008, pp. 37-44). In writing, Islamic artists, geometers, and philosophers saw a "geometry of the soul." According to the author of this work, the interest of Islamic artists in geometry was strongly related to Plato's world of ideas. "Idea" comes from the Greek word "ideal," which means seeing, recognizing, viewing, and originally refers to sensory perception as well as inner essence (Müller 1962, p. 68). In Plato, ideas are understood as perfect, unchanging, metaphysical archetypes and as metaphysical reality, from which sensory appearances are mere reflections (Müsse, online source). For example, the idea of Beauty is understood as Beauty itself (Stiller 2013, p. 4). In "Symposium," Diotima¹⁰ describes the essence of Beauty following Plato's teachings, stating that it is eternal and unchanging, not growing or perishing (Eckstein 1959, p. 100; Bernert 2013). Beauty cannot appear as an individual beauty; rather, Beauty itself is something remembered. Diotima suggests that what is pure and absolute, exists in itself and eternal in itself, while all other visible beauties participate in this idea of Beauty (ibid.). The same applies to the idea of the Good, the Just, the True, the Human, etc. (Müsse, online source). Plato saw or at least sensed these properties in geometry. Plato referred to geometry as follows:

"Yes, I readily agree, geometry is knowledge of what eternally exists. If that is so, it will be inclined to lead the soul towards truth and turn the philosophical intelligence upward, which is now falsely turned towards the earth." (Kuspit 1995, p. 88).

While Plato ascribes reality to the unchanging archetypes and ideas and describes the material reality as a poor imitation of such archetypes in the divine world, he perceives geometry as a sensually perceived ideal image that comes close to the archetype. These metaphysical ideals were highly esteemed and aestheticized by Islamic philosophers. The ideas of the transcendent world, in which the archetype of existence exists, had a certain comparability with geometrically ideal forms that are

⁹ At this time, Kandinsky was in Munich and had met H. Obrist, who, along with other artists of the Art Nouveau movement, can be considered a precursor to ornamental painting (Zweite 1992, p. 10). Kandinsky's writings can be associated with many thinkers and art movements that also influenced the artists of Art Nouveau. In particular, Worringer and Lipps should be mentioned, as they expressed a similar critical attitude towards religious ornamentation and favored a nature-like ornamental art. Theodor Lipps, for example, saw in the ornament that originates from nature "an ideal image of the thing." Steiner must also be mentioned, as he coined the term Anthroposophy and strongly influenced Kandinsky as well (Rykwert 1983, p. 73).

¹⁰ Diotima appears in Plato's Symposium and takes part in the dialogue. She makes an indirect appearance in the dialogue, as Socrates narrates that she informed him about eros (love, desire) (Eckstein, 1959, pp. 86-96).

immaterial or materially unchanging. According to Plato, geometry is more than basic forms that can be perceived sensually. He attributed significance to geometry concerning the concept of "anamnesis: recollection" (Müller 1962, p. 5). In his understanding, the term refers to the essence that dwells within the material or the thing, which can be referred to as recognized and remembered knowledge (Froese 2018, p. 18). In contrast to the real world, the transcendent world of ideas is eternal and can only be approached and not imitated pictorially. The soul yearns for the ideas of the Good, which is to be understood in the divine transcendent world (as a primal world of the soul) as knowledge. Anamnesis refers only to the idea. It remains active between material existence and the transcendent world of ideas and tries to reach and regain the transcendent ideas through dialectical deliberation (Schäfer 2007, p. 330).

This Platonic ideal conception, reflected in Islamic ornamentation, can be associated with the works of modern artists. In this sense, the metaphysical idea has shifted from heaven to earth. In other words, earthly originality emerges as a substitute for the divine transcendent idea and is considered the new transcendental existential meaning (Düsing 2000, pp. 29-35). The artists present themselves as seekers who, in the existential dimension of existence, search for pure primal forms and "soulful vibrations."¹¹ An aspired purity is evident in the works of the discussed artists of classical modernism through abstractions, geometric and geometry-like elements that should be tamed and liberated critically from their blind creativity, emptiness, wildness, and lack of content. Foreign achievements have been considered as products of primitive peoples rather than artistic cultural productions. Another problem was the adoption of the concept of purity from religious beliefs, which has been politically instrumentalized since the French Revolution, being associated with ideologies and paraphrased during the colonial era. A comparable habitus can also be found in the art of classical modernism, which, on the one hand, had clear references to non-Western ornamental artefacts. Artists negated reality and oriented themselves towards pure traces, primal forms, and the essence of things through their art. These ideas have little in common with the two-dimensionality of ornamental forms in ornamentation and, therefore, with the aesthetic anticipated conception of the Platonic idea. On the other hand, there is a suspicion that they concealed, suppressed, and denied such influences and aesthetic motivations.¹²

Abstractions and Orientalism

Through the similarities between the artefacts, it can be inferred that the Islamic "oriental" creations were mimetically assimilated by the artists of classical modernism in many cases. They were also internally imitated, as the artworks of

¹¹ One of the metaphors used by Kandinsky is "empathy," which signifies a sense of feeling and emotional connection.

¹² In this regard, the artists of classical modernism could be seen as having "ideological attitudes." In numerous phenomena of modernity and postmodernity, the boundaries between art and ideology have been blurred.

both artists have more or less to do with the concept of spirituality compared to ornamentation. On the other hand, Picasso and Kandinsky longed for a new religious meaning rather than religious symbolism and mysticism. Malraux once said of Picasso: "He is obsessed with something sacred that he does not know" (quoted in von Beyme 2005, p. 355). On the one hand, the artists were interested in certain ethics. On the other hand, they were radically oriented towards aesthetic innovations, blinding contexts and connections to non-Western artefacts and connecting them with their creativity (Hattendorff 2018, pp. 15-19). This phenomenon can be examined in the context of the problems of "primitivism" and "orientalism" of that time. Such terms need to be further questioned, as the 19th century saw an orientalizing of the Islamic cultural sphere, which was not only expressed through the images of romantic Orientalists (Said 2003). The Orient is a construct formed by Western culture. It is the constructive nature, above all, that led to a critical discourse on the term. This critical examination was shaped by Edward Said,¹³ who analyzed the subject deconstructively - in the sense of post-colonial theories. Based on this critical analysis, Said finally derived the term "orientalism," which assumes, in essence, an "orientalized Islamic space." The term Orientalism was also intended to describe and criticize the Western perception of the Orient (Schmidinger 2009). For the West, the Orient was considered foreign, static, devoid of history, backwards, and wild, as well as fantastic, mysterious, romantic, and exotic (Said 2003). Edward Said put it as follows: "While the West is the bearer of civilization, the Orient is a place of exoticism and threat" (quoted in Schmidinger 2009). Such a perception is also evident in the abstractions and pure forms of Picasso, Kandinsky, and their contemporaries, as they regarded Near Eastern artefacts as "non-art" and "coincidences" and reflected upon them. Picasso had almost no literary work where his attitude towards the Islamic cultural sphere could be analyzed. On the other hand, it must be repeated at this point that Picasso greatly provoked critics, confusing them with non-Western influences. However, political attitudes can only be deciphered through images. For example, in the lines of calligraphic medieval arts, Picasso might have found the same ancient primal creativity and sacredness as in African masks. The works of both Picasso and Kandinsky can be interpreted as intersecting differentiated art forms and forces, where different characteristics of various cultures meet. Coincidences can be felt in the abstract elements of both artists (e.g., spirituality and lack of symbolism, originality and innovation, etc.). On the other hand, the adopted foreign artefacts were not recognized by the two artists as an enhancement or dialectic, but as their own further developed forms that should be liberated from irrational contexts of past ethnic, primitive peoples. In this sense, such avant-garde behaviour can be perceived as ideological and Eurocentric. The perceived religious ideas, according to the author of this work, have been rewritten as unmixed primitive and nature-like primal forms.

¹³ Edward Said was born in 1935 in Jerusalem, Palestine. He worked as a professor of literature at Columbia University in New York. In 1978, he published his book "Orientalism."

Transcultural Dimensions (as a veiled dimension)

When considering the theme of culture and the attitudes of both artists towards non-Western cultures, one can reflect on both problematic behaviours and initiate a transcultural discussion in their works. This allows for a critical look back at contemporary history and how to deal with the calculated behaviours of both artists. Regarding Kandinsky's interest in foreign arts, Brüderlin writes: "But as we know, he was always inspired by folk art, whose ornamentation carries encrypted content across generations" (Brüderlin 2001, p. 114). Whether Picasso and Kandinsky regarded non-Western cultures as civilized cultures is doubtful. Through their silent references, "the foreign" can be reflected upon by them as a lower dimension. The Islamic cultural sphere was not seen as "cultural" by the artists of classical modernism but rather as "oriental," with their creations being labelled as accidental ornamental forms rather than artistic qualities. Forms were described as "historyless" and "wild," supposed to have emerged irrationally and putatively. On the other hand, such a perspective is illogical, as the Islamic cultural sphere experienced a high culture in the Middle Ages (Belting 2008, pp. 37, 105), and its ornamental abstract visual tradition can be seen as a testimony to this high culture, which was based on philosophies and sciences from other cultures. There were undoubtedly many reasons why the image of the Islamic cultural sphere was orientalized. After the long-standing conflict with the Ottoman Empire, a propagandistic image was reconstructed. This image was romanticized in the West due to internal political problems (e.g., princes, idealism, etc.). Another highly significant example of the influence of abstract artists is Rudolf Steiner, who spoke of the wisdom of the Orient in his lectures and books. According to Steiner, the Orient was limited to the wisdom of Christian and pre-Christian cultures that had not been lost despite subsequent cultures. Steiner said, "So, from the Orient, many things have flowed over, which were present there in harmony with the rest of Oriental wisdom" (Steiner 1909, p. 82). And: "In our case, the Oriental way of thinking is illuminated by the light of the West" (Steiner 1909, p. 85). Both the silent attitude and the radical denial of an "ornamental suspicion" lead to the problem of "Orientalism." On the one hand, internal and external similarities with Islamic medieval artefacts can be interpreted in the works of Picasso and Kandinsky. On the other hand, the artists expressed a fear of the past and an anti-traditional attitude. However, they also showed ambivalence in their approach to colonialism in Oriental and African cultural spheres, even though they revolutionized the ideologies of that time. Hattendorff states that this behaviour be described as a "colonial habitus" (Hattendorff 2018, p. 15). Likewise, Brüderlin's view is cited, in which he had a relation between ornament and abstractions: "Only the much-maligned 'postmodern climate' seemed to open up the view to a broader horizon, where ornament and avant-garde no longer appear as irreconcilable opposites, but as a fruitful dialectic of rupture and reconciliation, fall from grace and fulfilment (Brüderlin 2001, p. 19). Such critical questioning can be updated with today's discourse on "the familiar and the foreign," reflecting on external and internal similarities of both artists' works as problems that mirror

critical phenomena of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. This relationship with ornamental arts, based on spirituality and exoticism, can therefore be perceived as a blend of criticism and appropriation. Unlike the previous romantic Orientalists, the artists of classical modernism were against both their traditions and non-Western traditions, and they were interested in a kind of aesthetic neophilia that they discovered in the forms of non-Western creations. Despite their denials and contradictions, these behaviours attitudes of both artists express their visions of a future culture to which they both oriented themselves.

A clear notion of culture can be found in Kandinsky's writings, where he speaks of a so-called "unculture" that can be compared to Picasso's neoprimitivist direction, indicating that Kandinsky also welcomed primitivism. In the chapter on "An Unculture" in his book "Point and Line to Plane," Kandinsky talks about an "uncultural" principle of his art and forms: "The predominance of the dead-end theme excludes the designation 'culture' - the time is consistently 'uncultural,' although some seeds of future culture can be discovered here and there (...)" (Kandinsky 1955/a, p. 152, footnote 1). The concept of culture should be redefined from its starting point. Simplicity, purity, and originality are among its characteristics. In the view of the author of this work, the notion of a pure world (culture) and a veiling of the foreign in their works should not be considered as a random similarity. In this sense, the imagined "neo-primitive" culture or "unculture" should not be understood as "transculture." That means that the newly coined term "transculture" has a different meaning than the notions of both artists. Transculturality, in contrast to the neoprimitivism pursued by the artists of classical modernism, is about cultural "fairness" or an attitude of equal treatment towards the "foreign," and can only be legitimized through the recognition of the "foreign."

Conclusion

Restricted to the intercultural dimension of Western art history, it can be concluded that there is a lack of fairness towards non-Western cultures. Such behaviours of both artists are seen as controversial, as they negated non-Western influences but at the same time absorbed and veiled them. In this sense, Western abstract art conceals intercultural dimensions that inherently carry the definition of heterogeneous culture. Ambivalent attitudes can be discussed and questioned based on such artworks to critically assess the notion of cultural purity, which can be perceived as a replacement for earlier racist ideas and critical conservative thought patterns. The gazes of the artists and their time are concealed behind these images. Past fallacies can be observed or avoided today based on such images. Cultures, as shown in the deconstructions above, should be seen as multi-horizontal mixtures, in which the foreign already plays a part.

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(Fig. 1) The Picasso Project. (2014). Picasso's Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings and Sculpture, The African Period – 1907-1909. San Francisco.

(Fig. 2) The Picasso Project. (1995). Picasso's Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings and Sculpture, From Cubism to Neoclassicism – 1917-1919. San Francisco.

(Fig. 3) The Picasso Project. (2014). Picasso's Paintings, Watercolors, Drawings and Sculpture, The African Period – 1907-1909. San Francisco.

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