

Piet Mondrian

Like so many other artists of his generation, Piet Mondrian was obsessed with making sense of an increasingly complicated, even labyrinthine, world. Born in the Netherlands in 1872, Mondrian traveled extensively as a young artist before returning to his home country before the outbreak of World War I. During the war years, he met other Dutch artists (notably Theo van Doesburg) who, like him, were appalled by the war and the mechanization of man. Together, they began reimagining art's role in the world. The resulting De Stijl (Dutch for "the style") movement was determined to create a new culture through art, one directed at the universal rather than the individual.

Mondrian's focus was singular: to free art (and, by extension, the world) from the oppression of subjectivity. In his view, art was the interplay of an artist and a subjective observer. This meant that a viewer could largely dictate what a work of art meant and what it was. And without total equality of viewers, not to mention total equality between visionary and viewer, there could be no equality in the world. Thus, Mondrian came up with a new art form: Only primary colors would be used to fill in solid geometric shapes and lines, creating a completely abstract work that could be interpreted by everyone in exactly the same way. Without depicting reality, Mondrian's art would be devoid of any personal experiences or narratives. All of us, in theory, could look at the canvas and see the shapes and colors as the artist intended. Through the simple forms, Mondrian believed he could get closer to expressing real truth through what he called the most "basic forms of beauty."

If this sounds a bit like Fascism, that's because it is. It is a Fascist ideal of art: complete uniformity and objectivity. Thus, it is hard not to feel that Mondrian missed something about art. All art is widely subjective. There is no way of knowing what personal experience, what memory, what scars a person might bring to the art gallery. For God's sake, most of us cannot look at something as ubiquitous as a cloud without disagreement. I might look and see nothing more than a collection of gases, while you might look and see your favorite childhood stuffed animal, or the faces of Mount Rushmore. A yellow square with black lines is no less open to interpretation. Yet despite my obvious reluctance to embrace Mondrian's manifesto, it is impossible not to be overwhelmed by the complex simplicity—a true oxymoron—of his remarkable work. Though I may not see what is intended in his work, I can still be moved by what I see or *think* I see.

1) As used in paragraph 1, the word **labyrinthine** most nearly means?

- A. overly complex
- B. completely trouble
- C. utterly horrifying
- D. rigidly strict
- E. pleasantly surprising

2) It can be inferred from the passage that the De Stijl artists saw a correlation between

- A. World War I and objective art
- B. art and culture
- C. subjectivity and geometry

D. equality and World War I

E. truth and aesthetics

3) As used in paragraph 1, the word **appalled** belongs to which of the following word groups?

A. bombarded, assaulted, attacked

B. ameliorated, improved, augmented

C. shocked, disgusted, horrified

D. overwhelmed, dumbfounded, puzzled

E. disappointed, upset, downcast

4) According to the author, Mondrian helped create the De Stijl movement as a reaction to

I. World War I

II. the mechanization of man

III. objectivity in art

A. I only

B. II only

C. I and II only

D. II and III only

E. I, II, and III

5) According to the author, Mondrian was all of the following EXCEPT

A. a Dutch painter

B. a founder of the De Stijl movement

C. interested in objectivity

D. a believer in Fascism

E. interested in equality

6) Which of the following best describes the function of paragraph 3?

A. It introduces the author's principal argument about Mondrian.

B. It explores a metaphor about Mondrian's work.

C. It provides an important detail about Mondrian's life

D. It concludes the story of Mondrian's art and life.

E. It anticipates a possible question a reader might have about Mondrian.

7) On which of the following statements would the author and Mondrian most likely agree?

- A. Subjectivity in art has created inequality in the world.
- B. The De Stijl ideas are rooted primarily in Fascism.
- C. There is no true objectivity in anything, including art.
- D. Primary colors and geometric shapes are impossible to misinterpret.
- E. Viewing art can be a largely subjective experience.

8) The discussion of clouds in the third paragraph serves to

- A. exemplify a problem with Mondrian's view.
- B. inform the reader about an aspect of Mondrian's art.
- C. introduce an example of a specific work by Mondrian.
- D. describe how some have interpreted Mondrian's work.
- E. serve as a metaphor for a perceived problem in the world.

9) Based on its use in the final paragraph, it can be inferred that which of the following is an **oxymoron**?

- A. soundless rage
- B. pitiful love
- C. anxious apprehension
- D. tedious work
- E. hasty patience

10) Explain in your own words why the author refers to Mondrian's art style as "fascist."
