

Exhibition text permanent collection

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Welcome

Here, on this spot, Piet Mondrian was born on 7 march 1872 in a family with five children. He went on to become one of the great artists of the modern era. Follow in his footsteps. Walk along with him, past the breeding grounds of his unique painting art. And look through the eyes of the man who kept reinventing himself and his work.

Body of work 1897 – 1944

Over 1500 works by Piet Mondrian are known. The oldest one is from 1897, the last one remained unfinished when he died in 1944. His work is full of evolution (and a few revolutions). These developments are linked to the major events in Mondrian's life. Submerge yourself in his work and the music of his time.

Early work 1897- 1907

Mondrian is best known for his abstract compositions with black lines and planes in primary colours. But early in his artistic career, he mainly painted landscapes in dark tones. During this period, the artist regularly cycled out of Amsterdam to capture nature and farm landscapes in the middle of the meadows.

All the works by Piet Mondrian in the Mondrian House collection were acquired with the support of the Rembrandt Association (thanks in part to its Mrs M. Boersma Fund, its LithDumont Fund and its Friends Lottery Acquisition Fund).

Farmhouse

1905

Oil on canvas

Collection Mondriaanhuis

Tip-up bridge in a meadow

1903

Oil on canvas
Collection Mondriaanhuis

Farmstead along the Gein screened by tall trees (Oil sketch)

1906-1907

Oil on canvas
Collection Mondriaanhuis

Pollard willows on a ditch outside Amsterdam

1905

Watercolour and crayon on paper
Collection Mondriaanhuis

The Lappenbrink in Winterswijk, view toward the Nieuwstraat

1899

Charcoal and colored chalk on paper | Collection Mondriaanhuis

Mondrian was eight years old when his father found employment in Winterswijk. The family moved to this village in the Achterhoek where young Piet developed and further mastered his drawing and painting skills. Mondrian created this drawing of the Lappenbrink around the age of 27, when he lived in Amsterdam.

Two cows lying in a barn in Brabant

1905

Oil on canvas | Private collection

In 1904, Mondrian became overwhelmed by the liveliness of Amsterdam city, and on the advice of a friend left the capital to temporarily set up base in the friendly town of Uden, Brabant. This is where he settled down to paint what he saw in his immediate surroundings: landscapes, farms, sunsets, mills and this peasant scene with two cows. After one year, Mondrian found himself missing the dynamics of the city and returned to Amsterdam.

East side mill

1906-1907

Oil on canvas | Private collection

Mondrian captured the Oostzijdse mill near Abcoude from various angles, and this version displays the mill from the other side of the Gein. Six similar works are known, three of which are presumed to have been finished in the painter's studio. He painted the remaining four – including this work in the Mondrian House – en plein-air.

Two haystacks in a field II

1907

Olieverf op doek | Oil on canvas

Particuliere collectie | Private collection

Farm along a canal

1897-1898

Olieverf op doek | Oil on canvas

Particuliere collectie | Private collection

Paris 1911 – 1938

Curious for the avant-garde, Mondrian left for Paris in 1911. He had returned briefly to the Netherlands in 1914 when the First World War broke out. During his forced stay in his neutral country of birth, he developed his groundbreaking ideas together with his companions of De Stijl. After the war Mondrian returned to Paris, which by then had become a magnet for innovative artists. American soldiers were leaving their musical traces in the nightlife.

Mondrian organised his studio there according to the rules and laws of his new world view. Fields of colour, furniture, his works: together they created the perfect coherence Mondrian was after. His guests experience the same: a place of tranquility and harmony. Mondrian is not a hermit, by the way: often enough, he visits the mundane world of cafes and clubs, and he constantly receives friends and curious people.

The building, already run down at the time, has been demolished. From historic photos and witnesses we know what exactly his studio looked like. On the basis of these the Mondriaanhuys has had a life-size reconstruction built, giving you a taste of the uniqueness of the place.

Life 1872-1944

Who is Piet Mondrian? A stern man, straightforward like his work? A hermit, alone in his studio? Or rather an avid dancer, always on the road? A womaniser, easily infatuated with young women? Various versions of his personality are circulating. He lived a life of contrasts, which makes him difficult to pigeonhole. Discover Mondrian's many sides here.

Pieter Cornelis

Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan was born on March 7, 1872, in this house on the Kortegracht in Amersfoort. He spent the first eight years of his life here. Mondriaan studied in Amsterdam, lived in Paris for a number of years and moved to New York in 1940, where he died in 1944. You are now entering the world of Pieter Cornelis.

Text on wall

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet

You desired faithfulness even in the womb; You taught me wisdom in that secret place. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. - Psalm 51:7

The Mondriaan family

Mondriaan grows up in a god-fearing protestant family, with an older sister and three younger brothers. Both his parents are from The Hague, where his mother's parents have a stone company and his father's grandparents have a posh store for hair care products and wigs. The store is later taken over by Frits Mondriaan, his father's eldest brother. Mondriaan's father's strict religious beliefs and grim political idealism heavily influence the family. A supporter of Abraham Kuyper's, for years he advocates the Christianizing of public schools. In his later life, Mondriaan admits that his relationship with his father is strained. They may resemble each other in looks and personality, but they are complete opposites when it comes to their convictions regarding life and religion. Mondriaan's mother struggles with poor health her whole life. At a very young age, Mondriaan's sister Christien has to take over many of the household duties whenever their mother is ill.

Mondriaan and Van Gogh: distant relatives

In 1716 David van Gogh (1697-1740) marries Alida Vermeulen (1691-1770). The marriage produces three children: Vincent, Jan and Josina. Jan van Gogh's great-great-grandson is artist Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Josina van Gogh's great-great-grandson is Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan senior, Mondriaan's father.

Young talent

In April of 1880 the Mondriaan family moves to Winterswijk into a large teacher's dwelling in one of the prettiest streets in the village. Mondriaan senior, a gifted draughtsman himself, notices his son's talent for drawing and encourages him. When he turns twelve, Mondriaan is allowed to assist his father in making commemorative and memorial plaques. At an early age, Mondriaan decides to become a plastic artist, but his father does not think this is a solid career choice and forces him to get a drawing certificate. Mondriaan prepares for the exam by taking lessons from his father and through self study: much to the amusement of his little brother Carel, Mondriaan once borrowed

a giant plaster arm from the local college in order to practice anatomical drawing. Mondriaan practices painting with his uncle, amateur painter Frits Mondriaan, who teaches him how to start a painting and shares his knowledge about the use of color, light, perspective and composition. Mondriaan often accompanies him on painting trips in the vast Achterhoek area. The paintings that Mondriaan makes strongly resemble his uncle's: they are classic landscapes in the tradition of the early The Hague School and the Romantic Oosterbeek School. In 1889 Mondriaan obtains his primary education teacher's certificate and teaches at his father's school for some time. Meanwhile, he studies for his secondary education teacher's certificate, but still aspires to become an artist.

Amersfoort circa 1872 (radio play)

"When my parents settled in Amersfoort in 1869, over half of the city's population, which consisted of circa 13,000 people, were living below the poverty line and unemployment was high. But thanks to a number of economic impulses, the situation improved: the building of barracks strengthened Amersfoort's position as a garrison city, the railway line to Utrecht stimulated trade and a railway workshop provided extra jobs. I did not really notice much of this prosperity where we lived, however..." "On the Kortegracht were houses, shops and a few 'small trades' like a tannery, a haberdasher's and a potato grocer. Nearby were a number of breweries that, for lack of a central water supply, took the water they needed to make beer from the canal in front of the building. The water was not clean and especially in the summer I could smell the unbearable stench." "Around the corner was the Langestraat, the main thoroughfare of the city where plenty of houses, shops and a few boarding houses were located. During the week it was always busy with shoppers and suppliers with their horse and carriage. On a quiet Sunday we walked along the street towards the protestant Joris Church."

The school on the Kortegracht (radio play)

"In 1869 my parents moved from The Hague to Amersfoort, where my father was appointed head teacher of the Christian National School. They moved into the teacher's dwelling adjoining the school. The following year, my sister Christien was born. I was born in 1872 in our house at the Kortegracht, where I spent the first eight years of my life." "Our house was charming, but not very

comfortable. The relatively small dwelling had no garden and bordered the courtyard next to the school. When it rained and the canal water was high, the house became damp. My father once mentioned in a letter that the house was 'infested with mushrooms'." "The school where my father taught and I received my first lessons consisted of four classrooms. The large room on the canal side was divided into two classrooms by way of partitions. At the rear, there were another two large classrooms. In a stuffy courtyard that measured less than five by ten meters, there were four toilets, a urinal and a sandbox. The décor of the school was plain, but all the necessary supplies like books, slates, blackboards, maps and prints were there and the school desks were new. You could still smell the paint."

Royal Academy

In 1892 Mondriaan, against his father's wishes, enrolls at the Royal Academy of Visual Arts in Amsterdam. Because he has already obtained his teaching certificates, he does not have to take the entrance exam. The first year, Mondriaan is able to attend the school thanks to the financial support of an unknown benefactor. The following years, he receives a scholarship from the Royal Family; his father refuses to pay for the cost of his studies. Until the spring of 1895, Mondriaan enjoys board and lodging at the reformist Wormser family and lives in a small room over their bookstore in the Kalverstraat. Mondriaan, who was baptized a protestant, joins a reformist church community. Still searching for his own identity, Mondriaan at first chooses a form of religion which is more conservative than his parents' protestant faith. Mondriaan is not an exceptional student; teachers describe him as 'diligent' and having 'reasonable skill'. He does receive high marks in the 'esthetics' class, however. His studies leave Mondriaan little time for painting. The Royal Academy offers a multitude of courses, like model drawing and painting, proportion study and composition, perspective, etching, sculpture, and esthetics.

Prix de Rome

"Dear Sirs, I am honored to hereby apply for the exam that will precede the competition of the Prix de Rome". This is how in 1898 Mondriaan applies for the prestigious Dutch artists' award, which comes with a grant for studying abroad for several years. Mondriaan fails the drawing of a nude model. He

tries again in the spring of 1901. This time, he has a good chance of winning, but in the end, the jury again rejects his study of a nude: “It does not meet the basic standards, for both its shape and its color have no relation to nature”.

Hand-to-mouth (radio play)

“Around 1895 I was living a simple and relatively reclusive life. I studied hard and spent my free time reading and going for long walks through Amsterdam with my little dog Beppie. In order to make money/support myself, I painted replicas of paintings in the Rijksmuseum on order – this was an honorable job at the time. Until I went to Paris for a longer period in 1912, I also taught drawing. And I taught painting to a number of young ladies. Among my students were Arda Boogers, artist Agatha Zethraeus and Emmy Seelig.”

“Around the turn of the century I had built up a substantial clientele. I painted portraits of wellto-do citizens and every now and then I sold one of my impressionist paintings. People were starting to notice my talent: critic Willem Steenhoff wrote in 1901 that ‘Mondriaan should be considered as one of the remarkable younger artists’.” “I had decorated my studio on the Rembrandtplein in oud-Hollands-style, according to the trend at the time, and was always impeccably dressed when I went out or visited my friends, exactly as the rules of etiquette dictated at the time. Sometimes I went to the Concertgebouw, the Stadsschouwburg or out to dinner with one of my friends: artist Simon Maris, forestry engineer Albert van den Briel and physician Rinus Ritsema van Eck. In order to be able to afford all of this, I lived an otherwise frugal life.”

Painting outside (radio play)

“Between 1895 and 1908 I made regular trips into the countryside to paint en plein-air. I either went alone, with Simon Maris or with other friends to the countryside surrounding Amsterdam: the Amstel, the Weesperzijde, the Omval and the river Gein, to paint and draw by the waterside. In order to make it easy for me to get out of town, I bought a bicycle. It carried a painter’s case with canvases, paper, tubes of paint and brushes. Using thumbtacks, I attached the canvas or paper to the lid and went to work. I used to paint impressionist landscapes with a loose, broad touch. The classic green and brown tones were reminiscent of my early works, but from 1907 I started to replace them more and more often by bright and light colors.”

Zeeuwse church tower (Domburg)

1911

Oil on canvas | 114 x 75 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In 1908 Mondriaan visits Domburg for the first time. He makes many return visits until the end of World War I. The flat Walcheren landscape, with the odd vertical object, inspires him to increasingly emphasize the contrast between the horizontal and the vertical lines in the landscape. He paints a number of versions of the church tower of Domburg, of the Westkapelle lighthouse, of dunescapes and of trees. Mondriaan no longer paints in a naturalistic way: Nature is still the starting point of his work, but more and more, he manipulates it in order to create a balanced painting.

Mill at sunlight

1908

Oil on canvas | 114 x 87 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In 1909 Mondriaan, together with Jan Sluijters and Cornelis Spoor, exhibits his work in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. He displays a number of his familiar, impressionist landscapes, along with Woods near Oele and Mill at sunlight, two 'modern' works which he creates during a trip to Zeeland. The art critics are shocked. "Never before have I seen such clear cases of acute decadence in such an obvious way. They are, what a physician would call, typically pathological", writes author and critic Frederik van Eeden. In the Nieuwe Courant of January 30, 1909, a review reads: 'a mill dripping with blood against a yellow sky with holes resembling Swiss cheese'. Merely a few people are on Mondriaan's side. A year later, however, the luminist art of Mondriaan, Sluijters and Spoor receives definite acclaim, when the Amsterdam art community speaks of 'the Domburg triumph' [following Jan Toorop's example, Mondriaan, Sluijters and other artists go to Domburg, where they are inspired by the Zeeuwse light].

Trees on the river Gein with rising moon

1907-08

Oil on canvas | 49 x 92.5 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In the drawing *Trees on the river Gein: moon rising* the emphasis is on the lines: the horizontal bank versus the vertical trees. In the painting with the same title (picture), the red sky and the bright yellow moon are the focal points. Mondriaan later writes: "The first thing I changed in my style of painting was the color. I replaced the natural color with the pure color. I had discovered that the colors of nature could not be transferred onto canvas. Instinctively, I felt that there was a need within the plastic arts for a new way of portraying the beauty of nature."

Evolution (triptych)

1911

Oil on canvas | center panel 183 x 87.5 cm, side panels 178 x 85 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In 1909 Mondriaan joins the Theosophical Society in Amsterdam. In 1910 Mondriaan writes to a friend: "I am still the same, only I like to think that I am a little more balanced. And I credit most of it to my theosophy studies. That knowledge has served me well: it really is a guide for developing one's consciousness." The key point of theosophy is that all beings are essentially one and that they all come from the same divine source. Also from this school of thought is the idea that the 'male' vertical and the 'female' horizontal are a contradiction. Mondriaan regularly philosophizes about theosophical matters with his good friend Albert van den Briel, artist Cees Spoor and artist Jacoba van Heemskerck and her friend Marie Tak van Poortvliet, with whom he spends a lot of time in Domburg. His whole life, Mondriaan remains fascinated by theosophy: he joins a theosophical society both in Paris and later in New York. A few years later, when Mondriaan is living in Paris, he creates his abstract paintings in which horizontal and vertical lines dominate the canvas. Whether Mondriaan was directly influenced by theosophical theories, is not sure. He does not talk about it as much anymore with friends, from which one might conclude that theosophy now plays a less prominent role than before.

Women

Mondriaan never marries. He does not want to give up being an artist in order to support a family. If he were to get married, though, Mondriaan knows it would be to a 'simple woman', someone with whom he does not share his work, his ideas or his thoughts. He feels the physical and the spiritual are better kept separate. But around 1906 it seems that Mondriaan has become engaged after all. He has a stately picture taken with merchant's daughter Greta Heybroek. In a letter to a friend, he later writes: "You will probably have heard that I was almost married last fall. Fortunately, I realized in time that my happiness had sadly been an illusion. Although I have always lived for art, I am also drawn to the beauty in life and that is why I sometimes do things that are out of character for me." Before and after Greta there are many girlfriends, like young Eva de Beneditty, artist Agatha Zethraeus and photographer Florence Henri. In 1931 Mondriaan spends time in Paris with poet Dop Bles and her daughter Lily. Mondriaan, who is 59 at the time, proposes to 21-year-old Lily Bles. While he waits for her answer, he buys a larger bed, rents the attic room above his apartment, puts together a baby crib and paints his entire studio; all the black is gone. Lily declines his proposal because her father thinks the age difference is too significant. In New York Mondriaan spends several invigorating months with copywriter Charmion von Wiegand. She sometimes observes him while he works on the Victory Boogie Woogie. Mondriaan sometimes asks her where to place the strips of colored tape, but then always decides they should be 'exactly the other way around'. In the end, Mondriaan finds her company too strenuous and exhorts her not to visit him anymore.

Lively Paris

By 1912 Mondriaan has built a reputation for being one of the best landscape painters in The Netherlands and his works sell well. But Mondriaan feels that it is time for radical, new steps. He wants to work in new, less stifling surroundings and experiment with new styles. He moves to Paris and rents a studio on the Rue du Départ in the Montparnasse district. From now on, Mondriaan signs his work P. Mondrian. This is easier for the French and at the same time, it distances him from his family and his uncle Frits, with whose classical paintings he no longer has much affinity. Inspired by Picasso and Braque's Cubism, Mondriaan experiments with geometric shapes in his work. Most noticeable is that his sparing use of color is in sharp contrast with works like the Red Mill and Evolution, which he painted in The Netherlands only a

year before. In Paris, Mondriaan finds himself in an exciting world of art, parties, alcohol and women. He visits art openings and has discussions with fellow artists like Peter Alma, Otto van Rees and Lodewijk Schelfhout. 'Piet Look-at-me', as he is jokingly referred to, at night often visits bars like La Rotonde and La Closerie des Lilas, where poets, critics and artists like Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera and Amadeo Modigliani meet.

World War I (radio play)

"In 1914 I left Paris to return to The Netherlands to visit my sick father. I planned to stay only a short time, but World War I forced me to stay a number of years. I stayed at friends and family across the country before deciding to settle in Laren. There I lived with composer Jacob van Domselaer and his girlfriend Maaïke van Middelkoop. To avoid being in each other's way during the day, I worked in a small studio that I rented from artist Otto van Rees."

"My network grew immensely through the Laren artistic milieu. I used to write to Theo van Doesburg about the magazine De Stijl that he was about to establish. I also spoke to him about artistic matters, such as our dislike of diagonals. I felt that only 'the rectangular shape exactly expresses balanced proportions'. I saw Bart van der Leek almost daily. We would exchange ideas and for a while we worked so closely together that we started to influence each other's work. However, we did part ways for a short time, when dissension arose between us over the use of diagonal lines. Van der Leek did not agree with Van Doesburg and me." "In Laren I also met art educationist H.P. Bremmer, who bought my Composition X for the collection of influential collector Helene Kröller-Müller. Thanks to Bremmer and Willem Steenhoff's mediation I received a monthly grant from her. In return I had to paint four mediumsized paintings every year for the Kröller-Müller collection." "In early 1914 I distanced myself from Cubism. I wrote to Bremmer that Cubism had paved the way for the great step towards abstraction, but that 'the contents were still too heavily influenced by previous beauty products'. I specialized in compositions with color panels. Around 1918 I made a series of diamond-shaped grid paintings based on the application of a mathematical system. By applying horizontal and vertical lines, I wanted to do away with any suggestion of space. I was not happy with the result: I did not like using mathematics as a tool or the even distribution of the panels."

Oval Composition with color panels 2

1914

Oil on canvas, 113 x 84.5 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In November of 1913 Mondriaan exhibits the Cubist paintings that he has been working on in Paris at the Moderne Kunstkring in Amsterdam. Critics consider him to be 'the most modern' of the Dutch exhibitors. From his work, it has become almost impossible to deduce what the starting point for the composition was. In the sketch 'Façade' and photo no. 4 next to it, one can deduce that a group of houses on the corner of the Boulevard Edgar Quinet and the Rue du Départ were the starting point. Mondriaan makes many of these kinds of sketches of street scenes, trees and façades or church frontals and incorporates them in his Cubist paintings. In his abstract Oval Composition the letters KUB can be seen. These were taken from a large billboard (see photo no. 4) and are a playful reference to Cubism.

De Stijl

"Repeated reading is recommended. However, that which De Stijl exhibits can only give you an indication of the essence that is the Nieuwe Beelding (Neo-Plasticism) and its connection to life; the works themselves will have to make you see what it means. Through intuition, careful observation and comparison, one will be able to fully appreciate the new." Piet Mondriaan, 1918 In 1917 De Stijl magazine is founded by painter and critic Theo van Doesburg as a way of providing a platform for likeminded spirits. Until Van Doesburg's death in 1931, the magazine provides a small international readership with information about abstract art. Mondriaan and Van Doesburg regularly write to each other about the contents of the magazine. Mondriaan sometimes even sends along suggestions for the layout. Mondriaan's article Neo-Plasticism in Painting is featured in the first issue. Mondriaan is to contribute heavily to the first years' issues of De Stijl. In addition to Mondriaan, artists like Vilmos Huszar and Bart van der Leek also write for the magazine, as do architect Jan Oud and poet Anthony Kok. The De Stijl artists have a common goal, but are not a society with members who regularly convene. In some ways, De Stijl is a response to World War I. Even though The Netherlands remain neutral, resistance to the establishment grows. De Stijl uses art to bring inner peace, harmony and order

in a chaotic world. Mondriaan's mindset fits in with this. The harmony and order in his work to him represent a universal truth, or the 'divine'.

Composition with red, black, yellow, blue and grey

1921

Oil on canvas, 80 x 50 cm

Collection Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In *Composition with red, black, yellow, blue and grey* Mondriaan no longer uses the beauty of nature as a starting point, but instead uses the imagination of 'that which is universal'. He feels that the artist, through a higher consciousness – that which is universal – is able to portray perfect harmony. He does not try to achieve a mathematically correct painting, but paints according to his emotions and intuition. Even though nature is no longer the starting point, the compositions with horizontal and vertical lines seem to be a reflection of the typically Dutch landscape, with its linear horizon and vertical objects like trees or a church tower, which inspires Mondriaan for years. It is also possible that the theosophical theory, which assumes a 'male' horizontal line and a 'female' vertical line, plays a part. He alters the painting many times before he is satisfied with it: the black lines keep shifting and underneath the yellow and red panels there is evidence of other colors. At first, the lines run as far as the edges, but Mondriaan decides to shorten the ends here and there. This way, the composition stays compact and does not give the impression that it continues outside the canvas. In order to make them more vivid, he varnishes the black lines. The yellow, blue and red are powerful, but contrary to the myth, they are not primary colors; Mondriaan never applies an unmixed color to canvas. In May 1921 Mondriaan writes a postcard to Van Doesburg, saying that Charley Toorop has bought the painting for 600 guilders.

Back in Paris

In the summer of 1919 Mondriaan returns to Paris. He now paints compositions with black horizontal and vertical lines with panels of grey, powerful yellow, blue and red. He works continuously, sometimes on six paintings at once. He also feels a growing need to put his theories in writing. His article *De Nieuwe Beelding* (Neo-Plasticism), *Le Néo-Plasticisme* in French, is published in both The Netherlands and France. When his father dies in early

1921, Mondriaan does not attend the funeral. His relationship with his father has always been difficult and Mondriaan cannot afford the trip to The Netherlands. He writes to Van Doesburg about his money troubles: "I shall try to stage one last exhibition before I call it quits. Because I do not see how I can go on". Luckily, he never actually quits. Every time he finds himself in a tight spot, Mondriaan sells a painting or his friends come to his aid. Ritsema van Eck invites Mondriaan to come and stay with him in the south of France for a while – an offer which he declines – and Charley Toorop raffles off one of Mondriaan's paintings in order to raise money for him. Mondriaan also makes a little money by 'dabbling in flowers', as he puts it. He paints roses and chrysanthemums in water colors and Sal Slijper sells them for him in The Netherlands. To Van Doesburg he writes: "You know I treat it like a trade: like I am doing arts and crafts. I want to stay in Paris. It has no relation to my art, you know that. P. Mondriaan and P. Mondrian are two different people".

Text on wall

"Holland has produced three great painters. The first was Rembrandt, the second was Van Gogh and the third is Mondriaan." Katherine Dreier, 1926

International recognition

In early 1930 Michel Seuphor and J. Torres Garcia found Cercle et Carré, a movement in which some thirty abstract artists unite in order to take a stand against Surrealism. Mondriaan and the other members, among which are Hans Arp, Vasily Kandinsky, Fernand Léger and Georges Vantongerloo, meet once every fortnight in Café Voltaire or Brasserie Lipp. Seuphor publishes an eponymous quarterly magazine and organizes a group exhibition of no less than 130 works at Galerie 23 in Paris. The group disbands when Seuphor becomes ill. Van Doesburg, who settles in Meudon (a Paris suburb) in 1929, is not a part of Cercle et Carré. He starts his own movement called Art Concret and disparages Cercle et Carré. Not for the first time, Mondriaan tells Van Doesburg their friendship is over. On March 7, 1931, Van Doesburg passes away; the friendship with Mondriaan was never restored. Cercle et Carré spawns the international Abstraction Création in 1931. The group has over 400 members worldwide and is an important force in the acceptance of abstract art. Through Abstraction Création Mondriaan is introduced to Antoine Pevsner, Naum Gabo, Gwen Lux and Ben Nicholson. Thanks to Nicholson and his wife

Winifred, Mondriaan is accepted into the circle of British abstract artists. Mondriaan is becoming more well-known thanks to his international contacts and his publications in several countries. American artist and collector Katherine Dreier (1877-1952) is one of Mondriaan's biggest admirers. She is a member of Abstraction Création and together with Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp founds the Société Anonyme: an influential US foundation which sponsors publications and lectures and organizes some 80 exhibits between 1920 and 1940, most of which in the field of abstract art. In 1927 the foundation acquires one of Mondriaan's paintings. And interest from the US grows: in 1932 gallery owner and collector Sidney Janis buys his first Mondriaan painting and in 1936 Alfred Barr, director of MOMA, comes to Paris to pick a painting by Mondriaan for the Cubism and Abstract Art exhibit. The Guggenheim Museum also acquires a painting. In 1936 Mondriaan's work can be seen at the Abstract and Concrete Art exhibit in London. Mondriaan sells two of his three works on display there.

Jazz and boogie woogie (radio play)

"I was a keen dancer and regularly went out at night to dance in halls. In Laren, where artists, writers and intellectuals used to meet in Hotel Hamdorff, I was given the nickname 'the dancing Madonna', because of my horizontal, linear way of moving." "In Paris, I quickly mastered the Foxtrot, the Shimmy and the One Step. To my friend Van Doesburg I wrote: "tell me what you think of the Shimmy. I think it is 'the' dance. At first, the heel-toe issue was sort of tricky. Nowadays, they find ways around it, but it is the foundation of the dance. It will serve you well and I am pleased that you will try it because it is an 'expression'. I cannot see Oud doing the Shimmy!" "I also loved the Charleston, the style of dance that made Josephine Baker famous and which was considered vulgar in several European countries. I went to see her perform at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées many times." "At the end of the 1920s my financial situation had improved and I was able to start an extensive collection of jazz records. My friend Georges Vantongerloo had given me a gramophone. Every now and then I visited chic dancing salons like the Jockey; a small, hip club on the Boulevard Montparnasse where the people were packed like sardines, listening to pianist Les Copeland and watching Floriane's naughty dances. I compared the harmony in my work to that of a jazz band; its basis is strictly organized, but there is room for improvisation and intuition." "In New York, at the end of the 1930s, I became fascinated by the Boogie Woogie.

When I was introduced to this modern form of jazz music on my first night in New York, I was immediately enthralled by it. The Boogie Woogie fit in with modern New York life. I listened to it in my studio while I painted. It inspired me to make two of my later masterpieces: the Broadway Boogie Woogie and the Victory Boogie Woogie. By then, the 'classical' jazz from my years in Paris did not interest me anymore."

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Mondriaan keeps in touch with his family mainly through his youngest brother Carel. They write to each other about personal and spiritual matters. In 1938 and 1939 Mondriaan sends a number of Disney-cards to his brother. He has seen the movie Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and is so impressed by it, that he plays the soundtrack LP at home. Mondriaan identifies with Snow White; he compares the animals in the forest with artists Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth, who help him through a difficult time in London. He later signs handmade cards 'Sleepy', the name of one of the dwarfs, and calls his brother 'Sneezy'. Mondriaan does not mention the movie in letters to his friends. Apparently, this is something just between him and his brother.

Art in complete freedom

In 1938, because of the Nazi regime and the looming threat of World War II, Mondriaan feels he has no choice but to leave Paris. After staying in London for a while he goes to New York, in response to an invitation by young American artist Harry Holtzman (1912-1987). Mondriaan and Holtzman met in 1934 in Paris and feel a deep kinship towards each other. Whatever Mondriaan needs in New York, Holtzman provides; Mondriaan moves into an apartment (353 East 56th Street) that is rented and paid for by Holtzman. In 1941 Mondriaan becomes an American citizen and at his request, is registered as Mondrian. The new surroundings are clearly influencing Mondriaan's work. He starts to add small color panels to the works he made when he was in London. In his recent works, he starts to replace the black lines with red, yellow and blue ones. He either paints the lines or uses colored tape, which makes it easy for him to experiment. In 1943 he successfully exhibits this series of New York paintings at the Valentine Gallery. The Broadway Boogie Woogie is sold there for 600 dollars. It is the highest amount that has ever been paid for his work so far.

Mondriaan considers himself a lucky man to be living in New York, where modern art is able to flourish in complete freedom. The American abstract artists are proud to have Mondriaan as a member and he is often invited to dinner parties and openings. In addition to Holtzman, the artists Mondriaan spends time with are Fritz Glarner and Jean Héliion, gallery owner Sidney Janis, James Johnson Sweeney, curator of the Museum of Modern Art, and art benefactress Peggy Guggenheim. In January of 1944 Mondriaan develops a neglected case of pneumonia. He is taken to Murray Hill Hospital, where he dies on February 1, at nearly 72 years of age, surrounded by his American friends. Over 200 artists, writers and collectors pay their last respects to Mondriaan at Cypress Hills Cemetery. Mondriaan leaves his possessions and the universal copyright to his works to Harry Holtzman.

Victory Boogie Woogie

1942-1944

Oil paint, paper, plastic and black crayon on canvas, 127 x 127 cm, vertical axis 179 cm

In June of 1942 Mondriaan starts to work on a large diamond-shaped painting that he alternately refers to as 'Victory painting', 'Boogie Woogie painting' or 'Diamond'. Mondriaan is looking for a way to portray the rhythm of America, something which he feels can be detected in the popular boogie woogie music. In October of 1943 Mondriaan uses tape to divide the narrow main lines in the painting into small red, blue, yellow and white-grey panels of varying sizes. He continues to work on the painting, thinking that there's still 'too much of the old stuck in the new'. By 'the old' Mondriaan means the old world, 'the new' is dynamic America. Several times, Mondriaan indicates to friends that the work is finished, but he keeps adding new pieces of colored tape and keeps 'shifting' the panels. On January 23, 1944, he again drastically alters the painting. Mondriaan dies on February 1; the painting remains unfinished on the easel in his studio.

Atelier New York

At the end of September 1943 Mondriaan moves to 15 East 59th Street. Because his financial situation has improved, Mondriaan is able to afford a larger apartment. He has a large studio at his disposal and a separate

bedroom/study. Mondriaan has the walls painted white and attaches red, yellow and blue pieces of cardboard that he arranges differently nearly every day. He makes furniture out of wooden transport crates, discarded canvas stretchers and orange crates. Except for his gramophone, the apartment lacks any kind of luxury.

Influence after his death

A few months after Mondriaan's death, the Victory Boogie Woogie is sold for 8000 dollars, over thirteen times more than Mondriaan ever received for one of his works when he was alive. That same year, New York fashion stores are teeming with dresses with Mondriaan prints; Mondriaan has been discovered by commercialism. In 1945 the Museum of Modern Art in New York is the first to devote a solo-exhibit to Mondriaan. In 1946 the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam follows suit. They are able to draw from, among others, the extensive collection of Mondriaan-collector Sal Slijper. In the mid-1960s, interest in Mondriaan's work grows. In 1965 Yves Saint Laurent designs a series of Mondriaan-dresses and Jennifer Muller writes a Mondriaan-ballet. In 1967 collector and gallery owner Sidney Janis donates over 100 works to the Museum of Modern Art, among which are six of Mondriaan's later works. From the mid-1970s until now, all kinds of products emerge in stores that feature the signature 'Mondriaan-design': clocks, calendars, biscuit tins, oven mitts, carpets, bow ties and aprons. Even the logo for Studio Line, a line of L'Oréal hair care products, is based on the red, blue and yellow panels in Mondriaan's abstract paintings. Numerous publications about Mondriaan appear and his work is extensively researched. In the mid-1990s, the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Museum of Modern Art in New York organize an expansive overview exhibit. In 1985 Stichting Mondriaan Huis is founded, its goal being "To keep alive and activate the meaning of the work and ideas of Pieter Cornelis Mondriaan (1872-1944)". The Foundation's first act is the purchase of the house where Mondriaan was born, as well as the adjacent school building. In 1997 the Victory Boogie Woogie is acquired by the Stichting Nationaal Fonds Kunstbezit for 82 million guilders. The Foundation is able to obtain the work thanks to a substantial donation by De Nederlandsche Bank. The Victory Boogie Woogie is now owned by the Dutch State, who has offered the painting on long term loan to the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, where the painting is on permanent display.

Even today, Mondriaan is a source of inspiration for countless artists, designers and architects.

Sal Slijper

In 1914 Mondriaan meets Blaricum realtor Sal Slijper in Laren. They get along well, even though Slijper at first has little appreciation for Mondriaan's art. This changes, however, when Slijper sees one of Mondriaan's paintings hanging on a wall in the establishment where both gentlemen regularly enjoy supper. Slijper becomes one of Mondriaan's most loyal customers. He leaves his collection of nearly 200 works to the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, and in doing so, lays the foundation for the largest Mondriaan-collection of any museum in the world.

Second World War

When the National Socialist Movement rose to power in 1933, Piet Mondrian began to worry about his safety. Hitler saw not only Jews, handicapped and gypsies as a threat, but also liberal artists and anyone that rebelled against him. With his abstract art and ideas, Mondrian had already been fighting against the traditional conventions of realistic art, the art preferred by the Nazis, for years. Meanwhile, Hitler's intolerance and expansionism continued to grow. When Mondrian's now famous white and coloured planes with white and coloured planes were declared "degenerate" by the Nazis in 1937, Mondrian decided to flee Paris.

Degenerate art

In 1937, two works by Mondrian were exhibited at the Entartete Kunst exhibition in Munich, which also included works by Chagall, Klee and Kandinsky. Here the Nazis presented 650 modern artworks that did not meet Social Nationalistic requirements. The message was clear: impressionism, Dadaism, cubism - all modern movements are "degenerate" and a threat to German morality. The exhibition travelled through the German Empire and attracted millions of visitors: the degenerate artists became enemies of the state.

Keeping track of the humiliation

The Nazis stole over 16,000 modern works of art from German museums. The majority were sold or destroyed. The fate of the paintings was recorded in this inventory, ordered by museum and artist. Of the four Mondrians from The Lower Saxony State Museum, two were sold ("V" for Verkauf + "K" for Kommission) and two were exhibited as Entartete Kunst.

Catalogue full of "art"

The artworks were ridiculed in the Entartete Kunst exhibition catalogue and the artists were cynically referred to as "artistes". By emphasising the insanely high prices of the artworks, the Nazis hoped to evoke anger and indignation in the public.

The crossing

After the Entartete Kunst exhibition, Mondrian wanted to go to New York. While awaiting a visa he fled first to London in 1938. He was not safe there either as Nazi air raids destroyed the city in 1940. He set sail shortly afterwards. The journey was dangerous and took two weeks. To avoid being attacked by German submarines, ships were blacked out day and night. Wearing his life vest over his coat, Mondrian spent the entire journey on deck, sitting on his suitcase of manuscripts.

The New Plastic Painting (text in suitcase)

Mondrian saw The New Plastic Painting or Neo-Plasticism, as he called his abstract art, as a harmonious, ordering principle for an unbalanced world. He published his art theory in many articles and believed that art had the capacity to break through totalitarian thinking. He feared that the Nazis would want to persecute him for this.

Liberated

Utterly exhausted after the crossing, Mondrian arrived on Ellis Island, where immigrants had to report. His friend Harry Holtzman picked him up and helped him find his way. Mondrian enjoyed the life of a New York artist and was enthralled by Boogie Woogie, the exciting, rhythmic, piano blues. In free New York, Mondrian abandoned “the captivity of black lines” that had been a constant element in his work since 1919. Mondrian said that his paintings also became “more Boogie Woogie”.

New friends

In contrast to some other refugee avant-garde artists, Mondrian was not homesick. He immersed himself in the life of a New York artist and went to cocktail parties, clubs and openings and befriended artists such as Yves Tanguy, Hans Richter, Ossip Zadkine and Fernand Léger.

Swinging in the studio

Mondrian was a big fan of jazz and was extremely impressed by the totally free improvisations of Boogie-woogie musicians. When he heard the music for the

first time he could only stammer “Enormous, enormous...” He amassed a collection of Boogie-woogie records, which he played regularly in his studio.

Victory Boogie Woogie

Over the last year and a half of his life, Mondrian worked on one painting, constantly refining and redesigning it, just like jazz musicians improvise during concerts. Victory Boogie Woogie remained unfinished in his studio after his death in 1944. After the war, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam organised the exhibition Piet Mondrian, with a copy of Victory Boogie Woogie that director Willem Sandberg had commissioned especially, as an ode to freedom. The exhibition embodied the gleaming victory of modern art over the Nazi regime.

Temporary exhibition

Due to regular renewal in temporary exhibitions, you will find those texts in a separated file on the website.

New York 1940 – 1944

1940. Mondrian's work has been banned by the Nazis. It rains bombs on London, where Mondrian has moved to from Paris two years earlier. The painter, who is approaching 70, decides to go to New York.

New York! Dynamic to its tiniest alleys, filled with the sound of Boogie-woogie and bebop and refuge for exiled thinkers, writers and artists from Europe. Mondrian embraced the city to the full, making new friends, dancing to the Boogie-woogie – and solving puzzles which kept him busy the previous years in Paris and London. He said goodbye to the black line, or, as he said himself: destroyed it. In its place pure colour appeared, lines becoming fields, free space, music on the canvas. It resulted in what may be his most famous work: the Victory Boogie Woogie. A fresh start – though he died before finishing it. Escorted by 200 old and new friends he was buried in the Cypress Hill Cemetery in New York in early February 1944.