

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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KANDINSKY EXHIBITION OPENS APRIL 26

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 10, 1981. Kandinsky: The Improvisations, the first exhibition devoted solely to the Improvisations series of modern European master Wassily Kandinsky, will open in the National Gallery of Art's East Building on April 26. The exhibition, offering twenty-nine paintings, drawings, watercolors and prints from major European and U.S. collections, will continue through August 2.

Painted between 1909 and 1914, the Improvisations were long thought to be among the first formal and thematic abstractions in modern art and to bear out Kandinsky's claim that they were "spontaneous" creations. The exhibition brings together eighteen preliminary studies and eleven finished paintings and challenges those earlier assertions by decoding the imagery used in the works and by revealing the relation of the studies to the paintings.

Kandinsky is known to have painted thirty-six Improvisations, of which seven are no longer extant or have disappeared. This exhibition, by including drawings, watercolors and prints as well as oil paintings, offers a broad survey of the series. Of the finished works, Improvisations 2, 3, 8, 12, 14, 19a, 23, 27, 28a, 30 and 31 are on view, while Improvisations 1, 5, 7, 10, 18, 20, 24 and 25 are represented by preliminary studies and graphics.

The Improvisations are widely dispersed in collections around the world. Lenders to the exhibition include the Gabriele Münter Foundation at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus and the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Neue Pinakothek, Munich; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. U.S. collections represented are The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,

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Yale University Art Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum, The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, The Museum of Modern Art, The New York Public Library, Princeton University Library and The Library of Congress.

Organized by E.A. Carmean, Jr., curator of twentieth-century art at the Gallery, the exhibition is based on scholarly investigations of the last twenty-five years, including important research begun by Mr. Carmean in 1978 when Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle) entered the Gallery's collection. These investigations have demonstrated not only that the works contain identifiable imagery often biblical in character, but also that the paintings had been preceded by numerous preliminary studies, which casts doubt on the spontaneity of execution. While some of the earlier Improvisations evoke a world of medieval legends and court scenes, the majority have religious imagery pertaining to the Deluge and the Apocalypse. Many of the studies, particularly those in black and white, show that Kandinsky first created the imagery using linear forms, then reduced the forms to their utmost simplicity, and then in the final paintings used color to obscure rather than reinforce the simplified linear motifs.

Two publications will appear in conjunction with the exhibition. A guide to the exhibition offers an introduction to the series. A more extended volume contains an essay by Mr. Carmean and a technical and art historical study of Improvisation 31 by Mr. Carmean with Gallery conservator Ann Hoenigswald and William Leisher, formerly with the Gallery and now conservator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It also includes a selected chronology and bibliography prepared by Trinkett Clark, assistant curator in the Gallery's department of twentieth-century art, and a catalogue raisonné supplemented by listings compiled by Miss Clark with the assistance of Mr. Carmean.

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