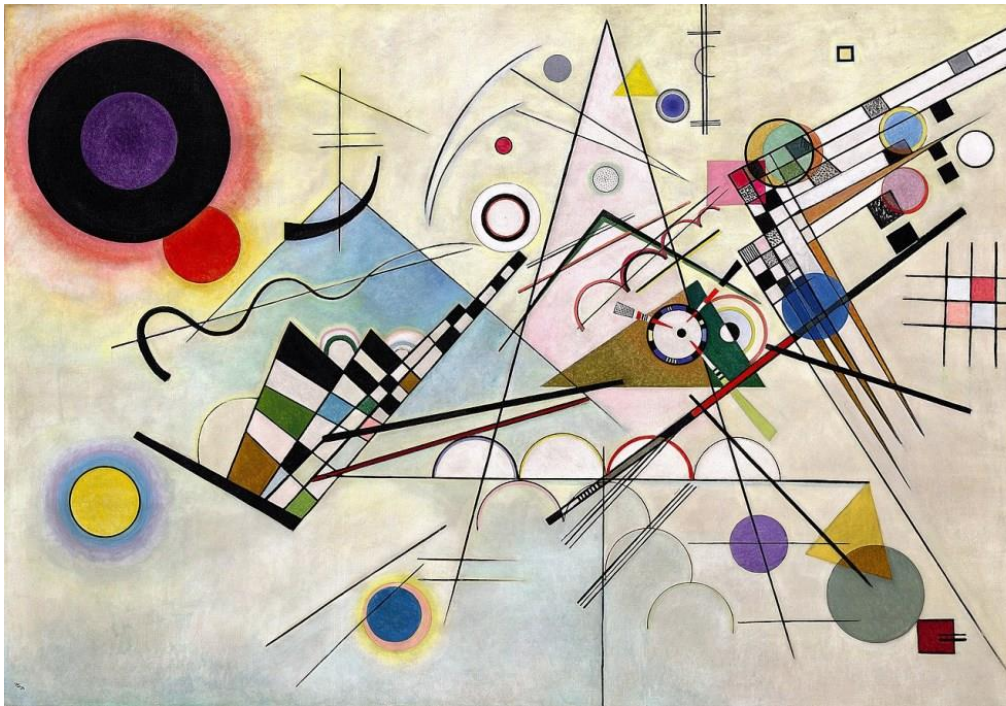


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Art
Gallery
NSW

Media Release

Art Gallery of New South Wales to showcase largest Kandinsky exhibition ever seen in Australia



Vasily Kandinsky *Composition 8* 1923, oil on canvas, 140 x 201 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, by gift

‘Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposely, to cause vibrations in the soul.’
—Vasily Kandinsky, 1911

This summer, as part of the Sydney International Art Series 2023-24, the Art Gallery of New South Wales will present [Kandinsky](#), a major exhibition exploring the work of one of the most influential and best-loved European modernists, Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944).

Featuring more than 50 works, the exhibition traces the full breadth of Kandinsky’s extraordinary artistic life, from his creative beginnings in Munich, to his return to his birthplace of Moscow with the outbreak of World War I, followed by the interwar years spent in Germany where he was an instructor at the Bauhaus, and his final experimental chapter in Paris.

The largest exhibition of the artist’s work ever to be seen in Australia, *Kandinsky* has been curated with the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum** in New York, which is home to one of the world’s most comprehensive Kandinsky holdings.

Kandinsky will feature some of the artist’s most admired paintings, usually a highlight of the display at the iconic Guggenheim Museum. Exhibition highlights include his early career masterpiece *Blue Mountain* (1908-09); *Painting with white border* (1913), evocative of his beloved Moscow; the buoyant *Dominant Curve* (1936); and *Composition 8* (1923), which Kandinsky regarded as the high point of his post-war achievement. Most of the works in this exhibition have never been seen in Australia before, making this a once in a lifetime experience, to be seen only in Sydney.

Born from her hugely successful *Vasily Kandinsky: Around the Circle* exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 2021–22, *Kandinsky* is curated for Sydney by **Megan Fontanella**, curator of modern art and provenance at the Guggenheim Museum, with **Jackie Dunn**, senior curator of exhibitions at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. *Kandinsky* is the next chapter in the Art Gallery's deep engagement with European modern artists, begun in 1975 with the landmark *Modern Masters* exhibition. More recent inquiries into the key figures of modernism have included *Monet and the Impressionists* (2008–09), *Picasso* (2011), *Masters of Modern Art from the Hermitage* (2018), *Matisse: Life & Spirit* (2021) and Kandinsky's contemporary Hilma af Klint in *The Secret Paintings* (2021).

Art Gallery of New South Wales director **Michael Brand** says the Art Gallery is excited to be staging this exhibition of one of the pioneers of European abstraction as part of the next edition of the Sydney International Art Series.

'To be able to show these spectacular works, most for the first time in Australia, is a great privilege and my thanks go to our colleagues in New York at the Guggenheim for their close collaboration. We are thrilled to offer a new generation of Australian audiences the chance to look afresh at this influential modernist's ground-breaking artistic vision,' said Brand.

'Kandinsky created some of the most ground-breaking and experimental work of the 20th-century against a backdrop of deep socio-political upheaval and conflict in Europe. The staging of this wide-ranging Kandinsky survey drawing upon the most recent scholarship will give our audiences the opportunity to take a new look at the modernist innovator who was resolute in his unwavering belief in the transformative power of art against all odds.'

Born in Moscow in 1866, Vasily Kandinsky was one of the great innovators of European abstraction, breaking new ground in painting during the first decades of the 20th-century. In his influential treatise, *On the spiritual in art*, published in 1911, he wrote about art's potential to 'stand alone', with imagery independent of the natural world. The development of a new subject matter based solely on the artist's 'inner necessity' would occupy him for the rest of his life.

The history of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation is deeply intertwined with the work of Kandinsky, more than any other artist of the 20th-century. Artist, art advisor, and the museum's first director Hilla Rebay encouraged founder Solomon R. Guggenheim to begin collecting Kandinsky's work in 1929 and to meet Kandinsky at the Bauhaus Dessau in July 1930. This introduction initiated ongoing acquisitions of Kandinsky's art, with more than one hundred fifty works ultimately entering the museum's collection, making it one of the largest collections of the artist's works in the world.

'The Guggenheim is thrilled by the opportunity to share its rich holdings and curatorial expertise of the great artist Vasily Kandinsky,' said **Naomi Beckwith**, deputy director and Jennifer and David Stockman chief curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. 'We hope this collaborative presentation with the Art Gallery of New South Wales is of exceptional fruition for visitors and beyond.'

Kandinsky is proudly supported by the NSW Government through the Create NSW Blockbusters Funding initiative and by its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW as part of the Sydney International Art Series, bringing the world's most outstanding exhibitions to Australia, exclusively to Sydney.

Minister for Arts, Music, Night-time Economy, Jobs and Tourism, **John Graham** said: 'Despite living and working on the other side of the world, Kandinsky has held a tight grip on the imagination of many Australian art fans. This is their chance to see many of these works for the first time in Australia. I congratulate the Art Gallery for this exhibition.'

The exhibition also includes music programming that explores the crucial relationship Kandinsky had with music. Within the exhibition space there is also a specially commissioned artist project by **Desmond Lazaro** that draws inspiration from the ideas that influenced Kandinsky and will form an immersive and wondrous experience for all ages.

In conjunction with *Kandinsky*, an adjunct exhibition of 'spirit drawings' created by British medium **Georgiana Houghton** in the 1860s and 70s will also be displayed at the Art Gallery from 4 November 2023 to 10 March 2024. The exhibition, [*Invisible Friends*](#), will bring together some of Houghton's unknown and rarely seen works in Sydney for the first time, and will highlight the significant role spiritualism played for artists in early modernism.

Kandinsky opens at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on 4 November 2023 and will be on show until 10 March 2024. Tickets for *Kandinsky* will be on sale from 6 September, alongside tickets for the Art Gallery's concurrent 2023-24 Sydney International Art Series exhibition [*Louise Bourgeois: Has the Day Invaded the Night or Has the Night Invaded the Day?*](#) (25 November 2023 – 28 April 2024). A discounted Gallery Pass for both exhibitions will be available, as well as an Art Pass which will provide access to the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia's Sydney International Art Series exhibition [*Tacita Dean*](#).

For more information, please [visit the Art Gallery website](#).

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