

# de Stijl

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

De Stijl was an all-encompassing, universal style of art that everyone could use in all parts of art and daily life. This lesson covers:



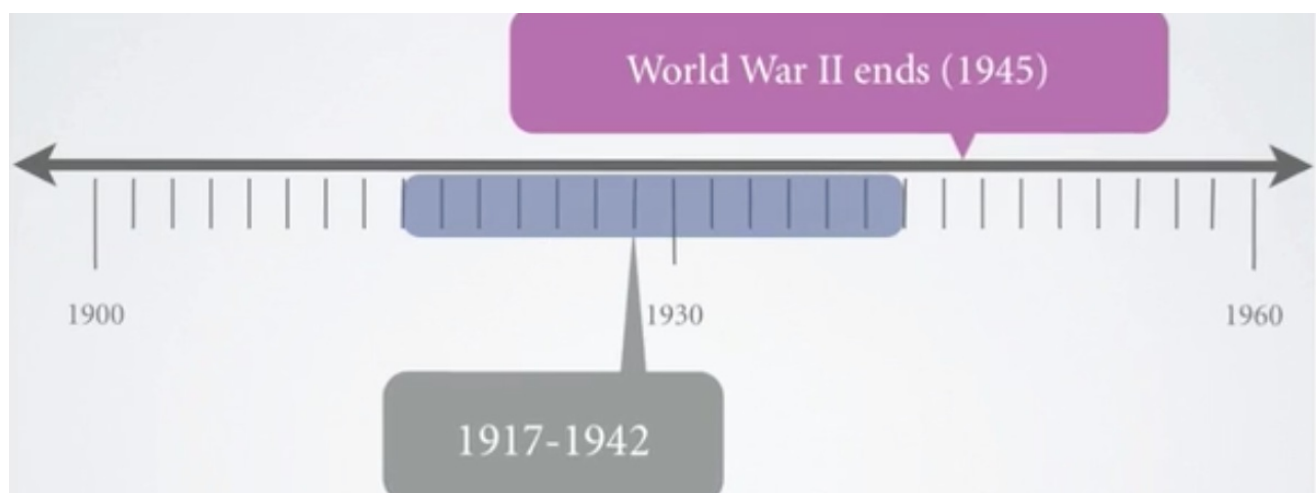
### BIG IDEA

de Stijl was created as a universal style that anyone could use in the arts, architecture, and all aspects of life. Essentially, it was all-encompassing.

## 1. Period and Location: de Stijl

The art, architecture, and design covered in this lesson dates between 1917 and 1942, as highlighted on the timeline below. The locations explored in this lesson are:

- Amsterdam in the Netherlands—Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian first met here around 1915
- Utrecht, Amsterdam—Schröder House is located here



## 2. de Stijl

In the spirit of simplification (and in keeping with de Stijl), this lesson will summarize the basic principles of the **de Stijl** movement, or “the style,” as it’s known. De Stijl is essentially the reduction of all forms to rectilinear shapes and lines, and all color to **primary colors** plus black and white.

The multi-talented artist Theo van Doesburg is considered the founder of de Stijl, which is Dutch for “the style” (and is pronounced about the same way), but he isn’t the only member. He met Pieter “Piet” Mondrian in Amsterdam around 1915, and they worked together to refine the aesthetic. Van Doesburg remained the most active and vocal member of the group and wrote a manifesto in which he outlined the philosophy behind the movement. He emphasized the idea of a universal style that everyone all around the world could use and that suppressed all natural forms and representations.



#### DID YOU KNOW

de Stijl is also known as **Neoplasticism**.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **de Stijl**

A utopian 20th-century Dutch art movement characterized by qualities of simplicity, function, primary colors, and rectangular forms.

##### **Primary Color**

Red, blue, or yellow.

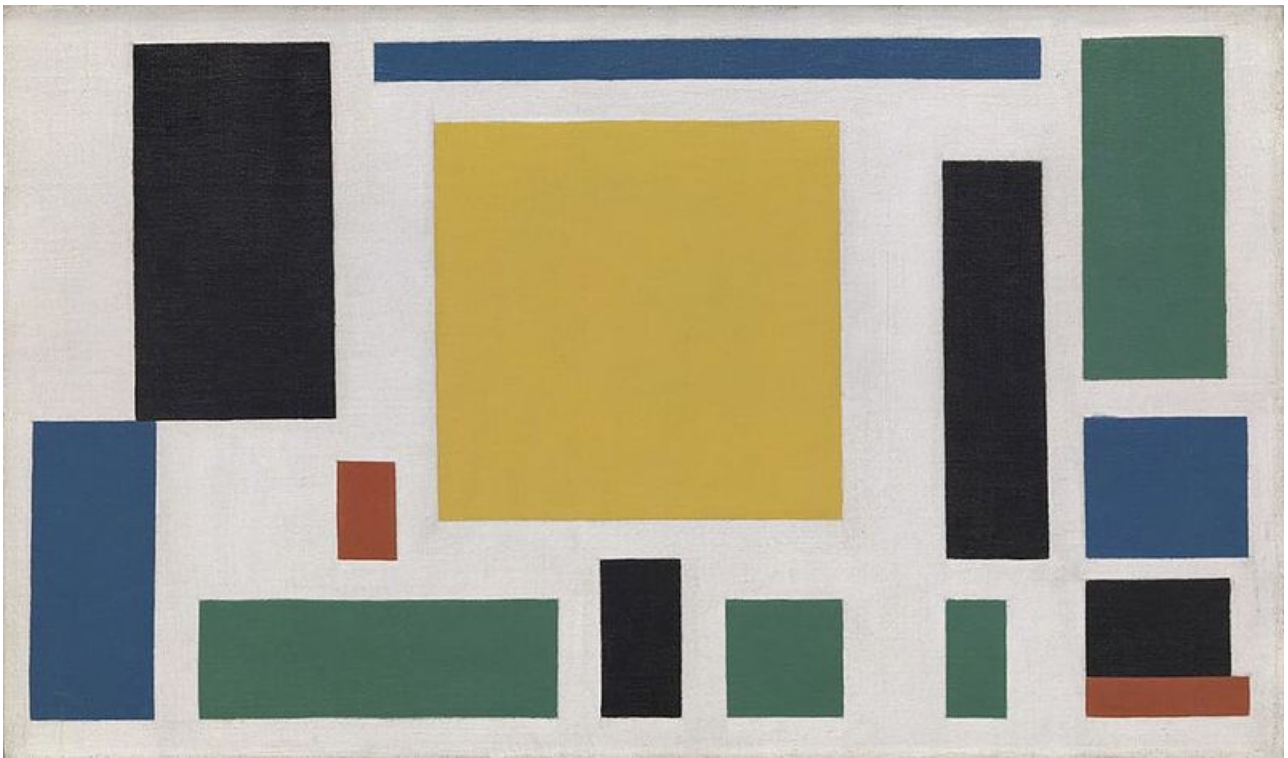
##### **Neoplasticism**

Also called “the style” or de Stijl; characterized by qualities of planes, primary colors, and vertical and horizontal lines.

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## 3. “Composition VIII” (“The Cow”)

Below is an excellent example of the suppression of natural form. This painting, called “Composition VIII,” or “The Cow,” is the de Stijl artist’s interpretation of an actual cow.



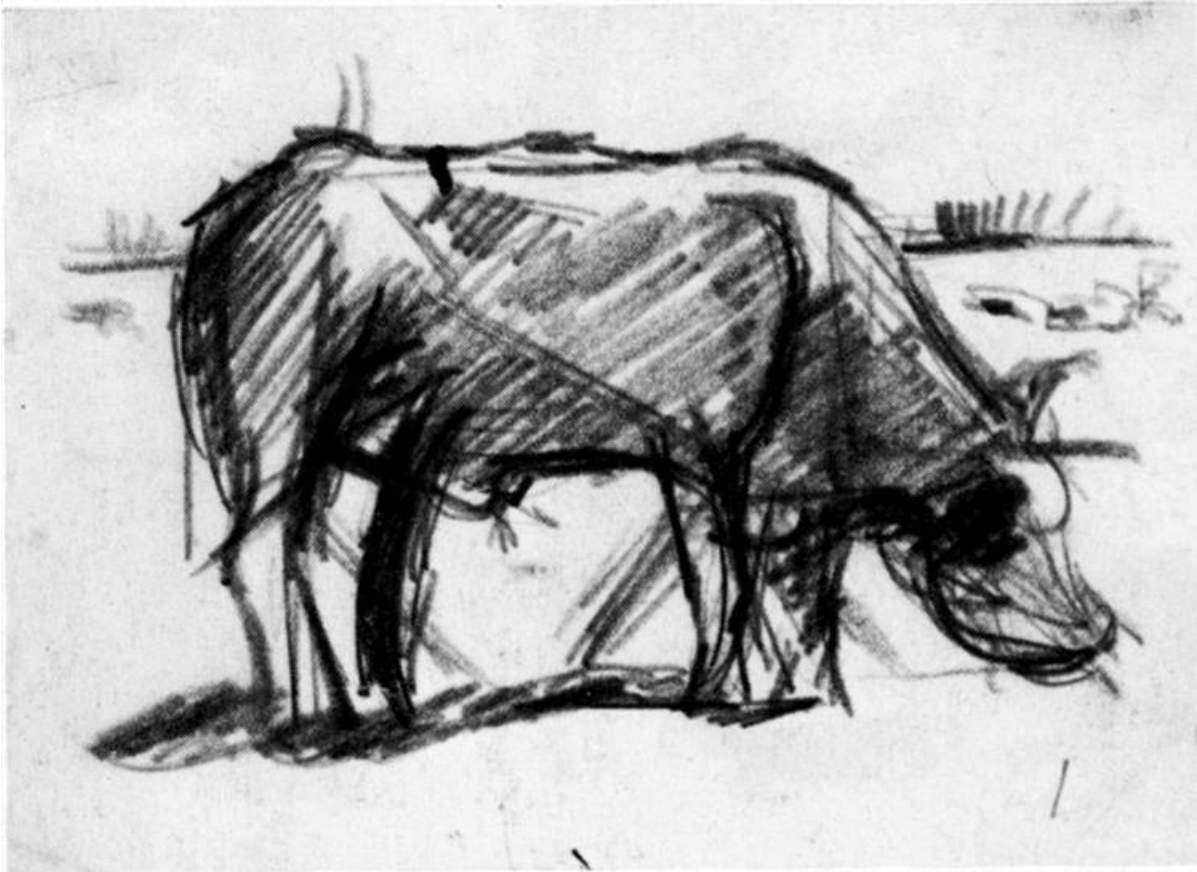
**Composition VIII (The Cow) by Theo van Doesburg**

**1918**

**Oil on canvas**

Let's take a look at the transition from natural to abstract using van Doesburg's own study drawings for this actual painting. Interestingly, he was essentially working in reverse, starting with the naturalistic image and breaking it down to its fundamental geometric shapes.

He starts with a cow, simply enough:

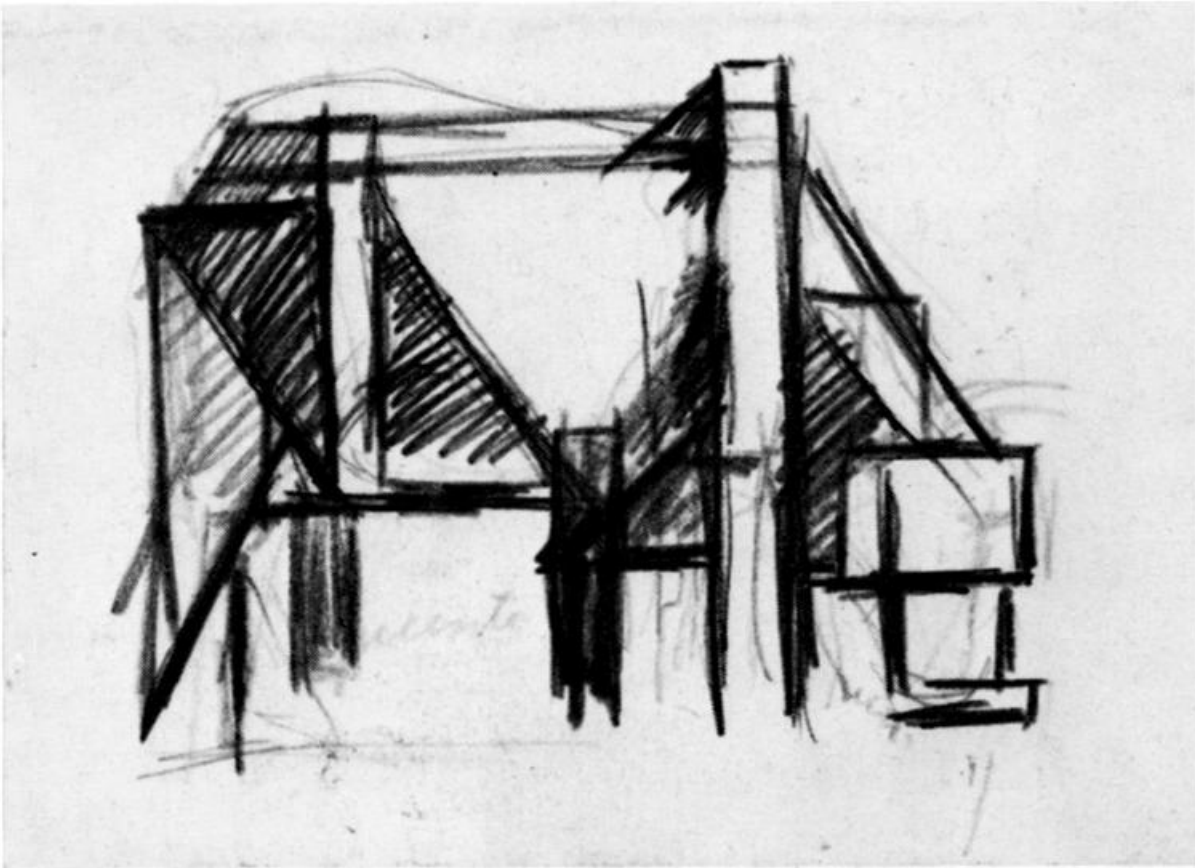


Study for Composition VIII (The Cow) by Theo van Doesburg

1917

Pencil on paper

In the next image, he breaks the cow's form into several connected geometric primitives, or rectangles, triangles, and the hint of one or two squares. It looks like a cow:



Study for Composition VIII (The Cow) by Theo van Doesburg

1917

Pencil on paper

In the next image, he's taking the further step of reducing it even more and adding in solid blocks of basic color. Even though it's more simplified, you can still see the essence of cow:



Study for Composition VIII (The Cow) by Theo van Doesburg

1917

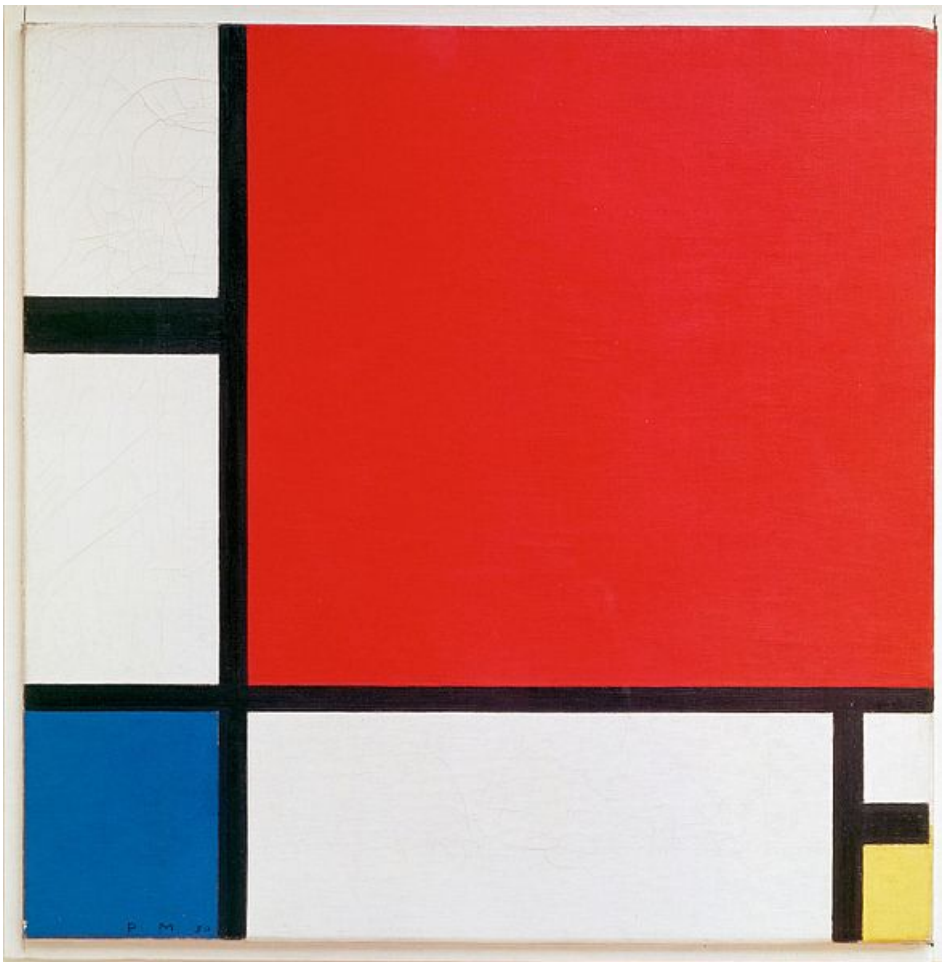
Tempura, oil, and charcoal on paper

With the final composition, van Doesburg has disconnected the primitives so they essentially float next to one another. And while the representation may be lost as a result, you can at least see how he arrived at his conclusion, or really, at the beginning.

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## 4. “Composition II in Red, Yellow, and Blue”; “Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red”

Piet Mondrian’s paintings are quintessential de Stijl in its purest form, or at least in terms of adhering most closely to the aesthetics. This is something he arrived at over many years. After meeting van Doesburg around 1915, he returned to Paris, France, where he was exposed to Cubism. Although identifying with the work, he felt that Cubism didn’t go far enough in reducing its forms to pure abstraction, as you see here:



Composition II in Red, Yellow, and Blue by Piet Mondrian

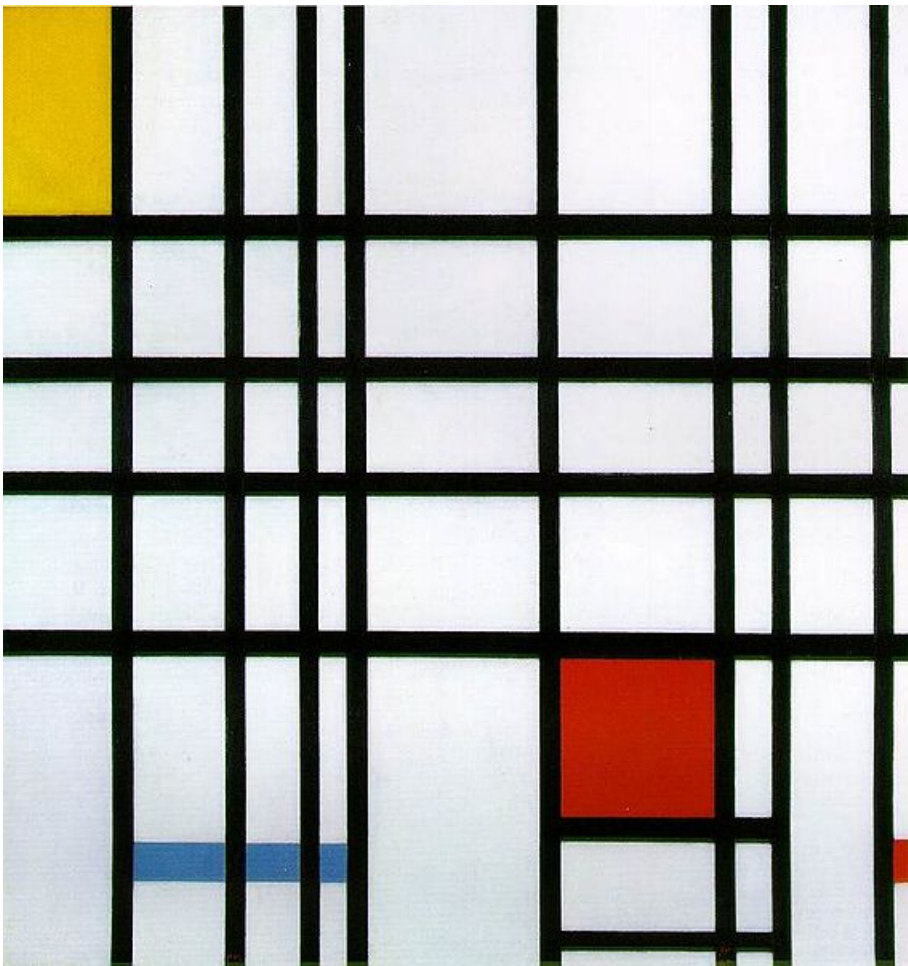
1930

Oil on canvas

This composition of Mondrian features **asymmetry**, where even the black lines in the composition are of different lengths.

He worked for many years in Paris, gradually refining his visual style until he arrived at something like this:





Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red by Piet Mondrian

1937-1942

Oil on canvas

Notice the thick, black, straight lines on a white background with bold blocks of evenly, or carefully, positioned color.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Asymmetrical**

In art, a compositional technique where unequal parts are balanced through the use of various sizes, shapes, colors, and placements.

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## 5. “Red and Blue Chair”

De Stijl was not just an artistic style. It was also present in architecture and design, although not to the extent of movements such as Arts and Crafts, for example. Gerrit Rietveld emerged as the most important figure in these areas and took the visual aesthetic of de Stijl to its three-dimensional conclusion.

One of his most iconic designs is the chair shown here, which recalls Mondrian’s paintings, but in three dimensions.





Red and Blue Chair by Gerrit Rietveld

1923

Painted wood

It's a reduction of the chair's basic elements, **rectangular planes** and solids, and painted in only four colors.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Rectangular Planes

Four-sided flat surfaces consisting of four 90° angles.

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## 6. Schröder House

The Schröder House in Utrecht, Netherlands, is the only architectural example in which the final building is constructed entirely based on the de Stijl design principles.



Schröder House by Gerrit Rietveld

1923-1924

Utrecht, Netherlands

This means from beginning to end, it's completely de Stijl. The entire structure is composed of intersecting perpendicular and parallel, or rectilinear, lines and planes. The interior, which is not pictured, is not designed in the traditional sense with separate rooms, but rather as a dynamic open area that could be partitioned in numerous ways, with the exception of the restroom, thankfully, which was in its own area. The principles carried down to even the smallest elements, such as the window hinges, which allow them to be open only to 90 degrees, or a right angle.

Rietveld opened a studio on the lower level and, upon the passing of his wife, moved in with Mrs. Truus Schröder, living there until his own death in 1965. Mrs. Truus Schröder was the person who commissioned the project. She actually lived in the house until her own passing in 1985, roughly 60 years after the house was designed.



## SUMMARY

The art movement called de Stijl was a universal style of art that everyone could use in all parts of art and daily life. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of de Stijl**.

De Stijl is essentially the reduction of all forms to rectilinear shapes and lines and all color to primary colors plus black and white. You looked at examples of de Stijl, including:

- “Composition VIII” (“The Cow”)
- “Composition II in Red, Yellow, and Blue”; “Composition with Yellow, Blue, and Red”
- “Red and Blue Chair”
- Schröder House

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR IAN MCCONNELL.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Asymmetrical**

In art, a compositional technique where unequal parts are balanced through the use of various sizes, shapes, colors, and placements.

### **Neoplasticism**

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