

# Overview of Twentieth Century and Modernism

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

Many events and developments in society shaped the artistic movement known as Modernism. This lesson covers:

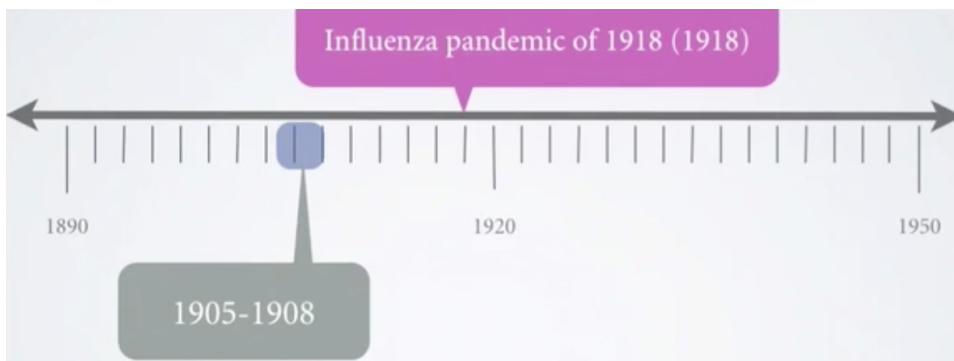


## BIG IDEA

Modernism was influenced by major developments in communication, transportation, science, and war.

## 1. Period and Location: Modernism

The art covered in this lesson falls between the years 1905 and 1908, as highlighted on the timeline below. France is the geographical region that we explore, specifically the cities of Nice, where Henri Matisse died in 1954, and Paris, close to the location that Wassily Kandinsky died in 1944.



## 2. Modernism

The idea of modern art, or **Modernism**, took off in the first half of the 20th century. During this time, tremendous growth was seen in the formal innovations of modern art. These innovations took modern art to a new level from what we saw at its beginning during the 19th century. It is this variety of formal innovation that makes Modernism unique from other major artistic periods, such as the Renaissance.

There is a central unifying theme: Modernist art was moving away from past traditions. The manner in which artists chose to depart was varied, however. There was not one particular style that defined Modernism;

rather, it is composed of many movements. These movements are related in some ways, but they are all distinct styles with specific characteristics.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Modernism**

A 20th-century art movement that parts from past artistic traditions and does not adhere to any one style.

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## 3. Changes

The early 20th century saw some of the most significant changes to human existence. These occurred within a very short period of time, and they had a major effect on Modernism.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

Consider the following developments in communication:

- Radio
- Television
- Cinema

Or, advancements in:

- Transportation
- Physics
- Molecular biology

How do you think these impacted Modernism and art?

The artist Pablo Picasso was born in 1881 and died in 1973. During his lifetime, he would have seen humanity move from the horse and buggy to the automobile. He would have read about Einstein's new theory of relativity, seen the rise of Communism, and witnessed the first airplanes and the first jets. He would have also seen early computers and man landing on the moon.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

How do you think these experiences might have influenced his art?

War was another huge influence on modern art. People's anxiety before the Great War—World War I—was almost palpable. Change was coming, and they could feel it. This was true particularly in Russia, which saw the October Revolution remove hundreds of years of tsarist rule and replace it with a socialist government.

Constructivist art, for example, was a movement that emerged along with this idea of a social **utopia**. It attempted to contribute to, and even create, this utopia for the good of society.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### **Utopia**

An idealized state of perfection.

## 4. Wassily Kandinsky

Other artists turned inward. Expressionism was a movement that explored the influence and depiction of human emotion. Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky took the ideas of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, which were ideas related to color theory, and applied them to his paintings to either portray, or try to evoke, an emotional experience.

➞ EXAMPLE Below is Kandinsky's painting "A Village Street" from 1908.



A Village Street by Wassily Kandinsky

1908

Oil on cardboard

His work gradually transformed from Expressionism to outright Abstract Expressionism as his career progressed. He was always trying to capture and depict this intangible quality.

Artists began to essentially get ahead of their time and society, especially the **bourgeoisie**. These artists weren't just reflecting the society they lived in, they were defining it. These innovations in art and culture were deemed **avant-garde**, which is a military term that means "advanced guard." It refers to being on the cutting edge of something.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Bourgeoisie

A term used to describe a condition of materialism or a status of the middle working class.

#### Avant-garde

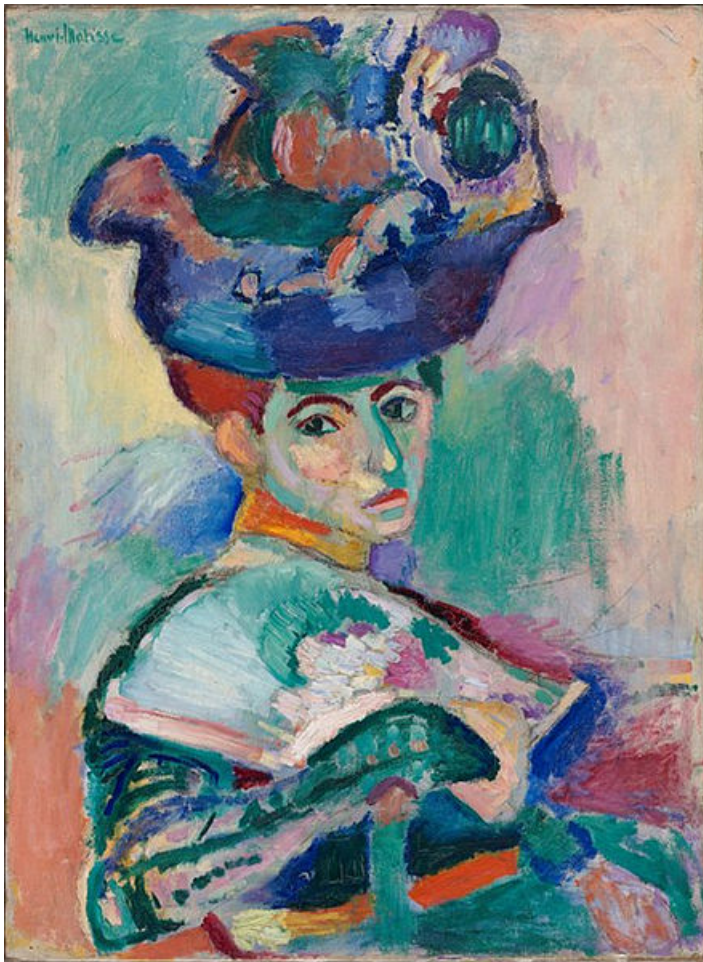
A French military term meaning “advance guard,” in the arts it is a term that describes artists whose work is characterized as being revolutionary, experimental, or innovative.

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## 5. Henri Matisse

Henri-Émile-Benoît Matisse and his artwork were considered avant-garde in how they ushered in a new type of art form that emphasized color and exaggerated forms in order to garner a reaction from the viewer. This was a movement in art called Expressionism. Artists such as Matisse really served as a bridge between the 19th-century past and the 20th-century future.

➔ EXAMPLE Below is Matisse’s painting “La Femme au Chapeau,” or “Woman with a Hat,” from 1905.



Woman with a Hat by Henri Matisse

1905

Oil on Canvas



### SUMMARY

Events and developments in society, such as developments in communication, transportation, science, and war, shaped the artistic movement known as Modernism. This lesson covered the

## location and period of Modernism.

This lesson also explored **Modernism**, a 20th-century art movement that parted from past artistic traditions and did not adhere to any one style, as well as the many **changes** that influenced the movement.

Finally in this lesson, you looked at two different artists: **Wassily Kandinsky** and **Henri Matisse**. Kandinsky took the ideas of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, which were related to color theory, and applied them to his paintings to portray an emotional experience. Artists such as Matisse served as a bridge between the past and the 20th century.

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



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