

Michael Wille

Michael Wille was raised in rural Pontiac, Illinois. As a teenager he was interested in sports and art, but did not believe he could make a career out of art. He thought he would become a teacher, coach a high school sports team, and maybe do some graphic arts stuff on the side. He is now the Director of the School of Art at Illinois State University.



Rome No. 61 | 12 in. x 12 in. | acrylic on paper



Locate No. 5 | 16 in x 12 in | acrylic and volcanic ash on canvas

"...utilizing the iconic Roman arch found in the terra cotta roof tiles throughout the Mediterranean, this tile is transformed within the confines of abstract painting."

"I now only utilize color, shape, and composition when making my paintings."

-Michael Wille

Wille's art stems from a deep understanding of the history of painting and a desire to explore the new "trajectories" the art can forge. He began his art training as a **figure** painter, but was inspired to explore **abstract** painting after seeing *Mural* by Jackson Pollock in person and feeling "moved" by the experience. His work is influenced by abstract expressionist artists and some of the Bay Area Figurative School, which was a group of artists who returned to figurative painting.

Subjective: These two paintings are from two different periods in Michael Wille's career. What do you see? What does this look like to you? Can you determine which is older? Which one do you like more and why? Do the colors and shapes used evoke any emotions?

Structural: How do you think these paintings were made? What can you say about the use of color? How does color affect the composition? How does Wille use space in the composition? What is a figure and what is the background. What is transparent and what is solid? What tells you this?

Cultural: What style of art is this? What do you think Wille is trying to say with his art? Who do you think his audience is?

In his early abstractions Wille thought he needed to make art about a specific subject as a reference for imagery. That subject could have been a piece of architecture or a landscape. Later he decides to trust his “brain to dream up what the paintings’ imagery would be,” and now his work is primarily **non-representational**. He is keen to let his audience decide what they see in a painting and what it means to them. He feels that this moves the conversation about a painting away from the “what” of the image and more towards the “what” of the painting itself in respect to its composition, color, and techniques.

Wille also works in series with dozens of paintings originating from the imagery dreamt up by his brain. It is important to him that the “what” conversation also takes into consideration one painting in relation to the next and the **gestalt** of the whole.



Meandering No. 1 | 22 in x 16 in | acrylic on canvas

“...ignoring tired claims that this particular medium has long been exhausted and is no longer relevant. Rather than being daunted by painting’s undeniable weighty history, [Wille and other artists in exhibition] accept the challenge. They recognize the treasure trove that this history provides them, and draw inspiration from its virtually unlimited resources, picking up where others left off, and continuing conversations.”

— Daniel Stumeier, St. Louis Magazine

ART MAKING

- 🎨 Find a painter whose work “moves” you, and research their technique to use in your own art making.
- 🎨 Choose an image and map out how to represent it figuratively. Draw a practice. Now pick an element of the image you want to work with to create an abstract painting through repetition, distortion, etc.
- 🎨 Create a composition that challenges the viewer’s perception of space and depth through the use of color.
- 🎨 Create a series of paintings based on a common idea. Explore how these separate paintings fit together, and what they say on their own.
- 🎨 Choose an identifiable figure. Develop a series of painting in which the audience can clearly identify steps in abstraction from the first to the last.



Tewksbury Hollow No. 7
19" x 16" - acrylic on panel



Tewksbury Hollow No. 10
19" x 16" - acrylic on panel



Tewksbury Hollow No. 12
19" x 16" - acrylic on panel



Tewksbury Hollow No. 13
19" x 16" - acrylic on panel



Tewksbury Hollow No. 14
19" x 16" - acrylic on panel

Looking Back to Move Forward

Piet /pēt/ Mondrian (1872-1944) was a Dutch painter, originally trained in the Hague School landscape painting tradition, and became a pioneer in abstract painting. He influenced by the work of Pablo Picasso and other cubists during his time living in Paris. Eventually, he moved from representational landscape to paintings that were purely abstract using only geometric shapes and primary colors. He called his art neo-plasticism which he defined as an ideal or pure form of art that adhered to strict rules of composition. Below you can see the evolution of Mondrian's style as his career progressed.



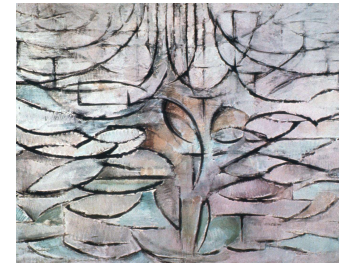
1905 Geinrust Farm in Watery Landscape



1910 Red Tree



1911 Gray Tree



1912 Flowing Apple Tree



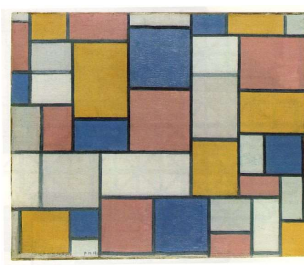
1913 The Tree



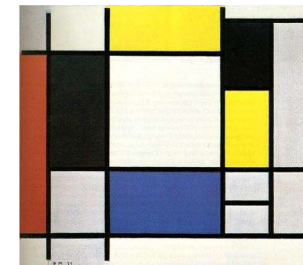
1913 Composition No. VII



1916 Composition



1917 Composition III



1920 Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, and Gray

Compare

Through neo-plasticism Mondrian was attempting to reduce art to its purest form. He thought that this pure art would allow for a “**transcendental** harmony” due to the balance created by the strict compositional elements of vertical and horizontal lines, squares and rectangles, and the primary and non-colors. How is this view of art similar to Michael Wille’s desire for his viewers to discuss his art based solely on the techniques and colors he uses? Both artists use color in very different ways. How does their use of color help to achieve their artistic goals? Do you think that either artist’s painting can achieve a transcendental experience? Why or why not? Which one do you like more, and what do you like about it? What other artists are you familiar with who use color and composition in similar ways?

“Perhaps this was the artist’s challenge and goal; to push non-objectivity as far as possible, so that the forms become independent of what is expected, nameless, yet very much there. This nameless presence is what keeps this body of work rooted in human experience; the phenomenal and emotional currents that we experience beyond the manifestation of words.”

– Mary Laube, assistant professor – painting and drawing,
University of Tennessee Knoxville

Vocabulary

- 🎨 **Figure:** indicates the representation of a human being. It can also have a much more general meaning of an element—abstract or not—which distinguishes itself from those by which it is surrounded.
- 🎨 **Abstract:** umbrella term for any painting or sculpture which does not portray recognizable objects or scenes
- 🎨 **Non-representational:** a departure from reality in the depiction of imagery
- 🎨 **Gestalt:** an organized whole that is seen as more than the sum of its parts.
- 🎨 **Transcendental:** extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience – sometimes seen as a spiritual experience that explores a universal truth.

Resources:

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