

## Artículo de investigación

## The structural and spiritual influence of music on art

La influencia estructural y espiritual de la música sobre el arte  
A influência estrutural e espiritual da música na arte

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### Abstract

Music as one of the most abstract forms of art and most appealing to the soul has influenced the art of painting in general and specifically abstract painting that is manifested in the works of numerous painters.

At times, artists have primarily employed rationality in the foreground of their perception and tended to take nature as the basis of their work. At other times, emotionality became more prominent where artists still looked at nature but acted upon signs from their memory set. In this respect, music becomes a factor by affecting the soul in creating what is spiritual. Many artists have been influenced by music in the creation of their works. Despite having different disciplines, music and painting that employ similar instruments when translated into feelings transform into a more abstract version. When reaching the abstract in painting, the most abstract form of art that is music ultimately has substantial importance. In this article, the structural influence of music on the painting is explicitly studied through the works of Paul Klee, and the spiritual effect of music on painting through the study of Wassily Kandinsky's works are examined. Music's influence on the discipline is vast, and most artists have been influenced spiritually or structurally by it which finds representation in art and painting.

**Keywords:** Art, spiritual, abstract, painting, music.

### Resumen

La música, como una de las formas de arte más abstractas y más atractivas para el alma, ha influido en el arte de la pintura en general y específicamente en la pintura abstracta que se manifiesta en las obras de numerosos pintores.

A veces, los artistas han empleado principalmente la racionalidad en el primer plano de su percepción y han tendido a tomar la naturaleza como la base de su trabajo. En otros momentos, la emotividad se hizo más prominente cuando los artistas aún miraban la naturaleza pero actuaban sobre los signos de su memoria. En este sentido, la música se convierte en un factor que afecta al alma al crear lo que es espiritual. Muchos artistas han sido influenciados por la música en la creación de sus obras. A pesar de tener diferentes disciplinas, la música y la pintura que emplean instrumentos similares cuando se traducen en sentimientos se transforman en una versión más abstracta. Al llegar a lo abstracto en la pintura, la forma más abstracta de arte que es la música, en última instancia, tiene una importancia sustancial. En este artículo, la influencia estructural de la música en la pintura se estudia explícitamente a través de las obras de Paul Klee, y se examina el efecto espiritual de la música en la pintura a través del estudio de las obras de Wassily Kandinsky. La influencia de la música en la disciplina es enorme, y la mayoría de los artistas han sido influenciados espiritualmente o estructuralmente por ella, que encuentra representación en el arte y la pintura.

**Palabras claves:** Arte, espiritual, abstracto, pintura, música.

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## Resumo

A música como uma das formas mais abstratas de arte e mais atraente para a alma influenciou a arte da pintura em geral e especificamente a pintura abstrata que se manifesta nas obras de numerosos pintores. Às vezes, os artistas empregaram principalmente a racionalidade no primeiro plano de sua percepção e tenderam a tomar a natureza como base de seu trabalho. Outras vezes, a emotividade tornou-se mais proeminente onde os artistas ainda olhavam para a natureza, mas agiam com base em sinais de seu conjunto de memórias. Nesse aspecto, a música se torna um fator ao afetar a alma na criação do que é espiritual. Muitos artistas foram influenciados pela música na criação de suas obras. Apesar de ter diferentes disciplinas, a música e a pintura que empregam instrumentos similares quando traduzidas em sentimentos se transformam em uma versão mais abstrata. Ao alcançar o resumo na pintura, a forma mais abstrata de arte que é música, em última análise, tem importância substancial. Neste artigo, a influência estrutural da música na pintura é explicitamente estudada através dos trabalhos de Paul Klee, e o efeito espiritual da música na pintura através do estudo das obras de Wassily Kandinsky é examinado. A influência da música na disciplina é vasta, e a maioria dos artistas tem sido influenciada espiritualmente ou estruturalmente por ela, o que encontra representação na arte e na pintura.

**Palavras-chave:** Arte, espiritual, abstrato, pintura, música.

## Introduction

The cross-fertilisation between forms of art and practices of everyday life is also traceable between music and art. Music as a more spiritual form, which satisfies the sense of hearing has tended to influence arts regarding creativity and painting also got its share. Theodor W. Adorno (1995) categorised these two forms of art as 'temporal art' and painting as 'spatial art'. Although this categorization falls outside the obvious distinction of appealing to different senses, it stresses the time aspect of music and spatial aspect of art at the core of our understanding.

Therefore, although music and painting do not have common technics in terms of their production used in their form, they still share the commonality in the effective representation.

İpşiroğlu (2006) defines representation in the art of music as verbal harmony and rhythm, while it is the pattern, shading/light and colour in painting. The interaction between music and painting has become very intense, and many artists painted about music especially within the 20th Century and the abstract form of art.

Music's rhythm that influences our soul through the sense of hearing is reflected in the picture and becomes visible through the more effective use of colours and lines of the artist in painting.

The complexity of this outweighs the interaction of painting with other artistic areas. Artists could produce their works without music, no doubt about it. However, if we accept the colours on our palate as the practice of everyday life, then music is almost indispensable when we think that of the colours that create the artist's palate as everyday life. Music is refined with the resonances of everyday life and resonance images of the emotional and spiritual aspects that affect our souls and is indispensable as colours that make up the palate.

### The Structural Influence of Music on Painting

Paul Klee, who was both an artist and a violin player, studied the works of Bach intensively. As a painter, he came up with a method to transfer music into painting. One of the paintings in which his mathematical calculations created an image is *Highways and byways* (Figure 1, 1929). Gelhaar explains that although at first, the painting looks like the meeting point of narrow and wide pathways; they are also arranged similarly to the values of notes in music (semibreve into two half notes, two half notes into four crotchets, four crotchets into eight quavers and eight quavers into sixteen semi-quavers).



Figure 1. Paul Klee, Highways and Byways, 1929.

Klee had adapted his theories of visual representation of music in his art by relating painting to rhythm, notes, polyphony that form the structure of music. The visualisation of music gets reflected in his painting. Sharon L. Kennedy (Kennedy, 2007, p. 3) summarizes his abstraction as “using a small format Klee rendered nature by using gradations of color and repetitions of shapes to give a sense of unfolding parallel to music.” Although he had set out to paint, his works were not detached from music, and he had painted through the form of music. His musical background and interest produced this cross-fertilisation and hybridisation of art.

Another painting of Klee in which musical elements create a visual which is intertwined with music is available (in Figure 2). In this painting, it can be said that specific motifs of the artist can be arranged in a musical rhythm that an

orchestra can make with a sequential time interval. As (Dennis, 1996, p. 13) clearly states “Briefly, rhythm in music represents a micro-structure (the macro being the total phrase structure) and in some ways rhythm in music is a more exact counter-part of form in painting, being often ‘felt’ in a similar way.”

This is presented to the audience with the structural advantage of painting. As points out İpşiroğlu (2006) similar paintings of Klee are based on his "divisible" principle. These are the colour dots that form the “dividuell” structure which is divisible. This is the structure of the image, similar to harmony in music, as the supporting element. It is the lines that are carried by this indivisible, "individuell" structure, which are the counterpart of the melody in music.

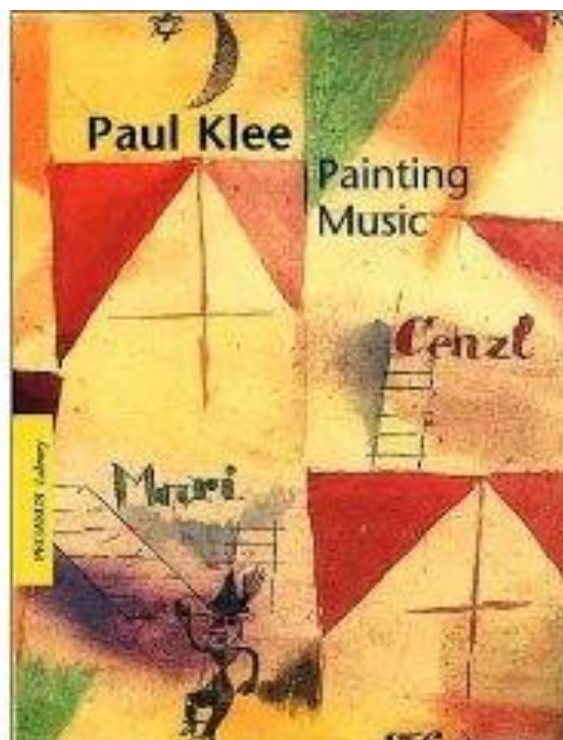


Figure 2. Paul Klee, Painting-Music, 1934.

Steinway pianos honoured Paul Klee in 1938 by naming one of their series of pianos due to his works which intertwined both art forms structurally. Klee's intuition surfaced as his paintings portrayed the mathematical aspects of music. "Seeing and sensing: There was almost no distinction for Klee between these two. In the first account of the 1920s Creative Belief, the function of art is not to reproduce the appearance; art makes it visible" (Lynton, 2004, p. 223). In as much as the structure of music influenced Klee, the spirituality aspect of music also influenced him.

Matisse is a rare artist who could use sound as colour. He painted as if he felt the powerful spiritual vibrations of music. Since the colors were trailing in the room just like music notes. Matisse used colors skillfully and boldly and tried to get rid of the imitation of nature by benefiting from Japanese and Islamic art. However, in finding the path in his artistic journey, he owes a lot to music. To influence the light in the picture, similar to the usage of chords in music, he played with different layers of colours, instead of dark and light shadow techniques. He did not use the colours to imitate reality or nature, but he was just using colours to express his feelings.

Matisse created his paintings with a minimalist understanding without using too much colour but instead created a strong colour harmony – similar to that of repeated melodies administered in the creation of rhythm in all parts of a piece. The objects used are simplified and move in a way that appeals to the soul, just like in music. The vibrant colours are pure and clean in their simplest form. İpşiroğlu (2006) who uses the colours just like the notes explains that if music can only be produced with seven shades, the use of few colours to produce our compositions could not be prevented.

#### **The Impact of the Spirituality of Music on Abstract painting**

At the beginning of the 20th century, abstract painting was used to describe the simplified or modified distortions of realistic forms in Cubism and Futurism. Later, Abstract painting became an art movement, especially with Wassily Kandinsky. It was Kandinsky who eliminated natural images since they were imitations of reality. For this, he is accepted as the first painter to apply what is now referred to as the abstract and non-figurative form of art.

It was the colours that were essential for Kandinsky (Figure 3). He believed that everything in the world could be expressed through colours. According to him, as the notes

in music are enough for musical expression, so are the colours enough for visual expression in the same way.



Figure 3. Wassily Kandinsky, Colour Study - Squares And Concentric Circles, 1923.

The artist, who claimed that colours similar to musical notes created vibrations in the human soul, transferred the object images in painting into colour and then turned them into abstract, obliterating their object forms. As Yılmaz (2005) points out since reality is a spiritual thing, art should reflect it and be emancipating itself from the oppression of the object.

In short, abstract painting projects the distancing from mimicry of nature as the main principle. Hence music attains a crucial role in the process of abstractification through its spiritual influence. Kandinsky as the pioneer of abstract painting, - with the influence of spirituality in music-forefronts mysticism appealing to the soul instead of material, as his purpose.

He has utilised music as a resource in his creative achievement. Kandinsky (2009) suggests that the sound of music travels direct to the soul and there, it is immediately echoed because music is innate in man. The artist, who claimed that music is a more advanced form of art, believed that he could portray the desired spirituality with the use of music more easily in his paintings. As expresses Kandinsky (2009) that in general colours directly influence the soul. 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 purposively to cause vibrations in the soul.

Kandinsky, similar to Klee, was not interested in painting by using musical structure although he knew the technical side of music. He was interested in the spiritual side of art, and the music was his guide in that sense. Instead of dealing with the outside world, he was only interested in his inner world, that is to say, he was interested in his inner voice and listened to his inner voice. He, therefore, needed to make things abstract, and he preferred to do this with the aid of abstract music. The artist explains this with the concept of 'inner necessity principle'. The 'inner necessity principle' was the key concept of Kandinsky's artistic creation as well as his life. As Gülnar Öney's translation (2003, 81-82) of Kandinsky clarifies everything should be connected to this concept [inner necessity]; this concept is the source of credibility, verifiability, of Kandinsky's entire expression.

In "Yellow-Red-Blue", which is accepted as the symbol of abstract painting, the artist depicts the blue as a circle, the red as a rectangle, and the triangle as a triangle, creating a colour harmony on the whole surface with colour transitions just like the variations in music. Kandinsky prefers geometric shapes and lines to images of real

nature, and this is one of the main reasons for his shift towards abstract. A triangle filled with yellow, a blue as a circle, a green as square, green as a triangle, a wrapped circle, a blue square, etc. All of these are entirely different and differently acting entities. Kandinsky (2009) With the use of rhythmic lines and geometric shapes, the artist captures the mystical approach of music, while the intertwining colours reveal the intermediate tones and make the audience feel a similar experience to that of an orchestra with varied and rich instruments.

With the influence and aid of music, abstract painting loses its ties with the matter, altering its approach away from reason, towards feelings. Kandinsky's simplified lines and colours boil down to red, blue and yellow rectangles with Piet Mondrian. This movement reaches its peak of simplicity with Kazimir Malevich's painting of a single black square on a white surface. Besides the spiritual influence of music, the metaphysical influence of Cubism will also be effective in the adventure of abstract art. Tunalı (2008) expresses that there is no other form of being, outside the abstract form. Being is only in absolute form.

Miro, another renowned artist, influenced by the spirituality of music, mentions that he paints while listening to Bach and Mozart. Unlike Klee, Miro did not know the elements of music apart from listening and enjoying it. The structure of the music did not interest him at all, only the effect that the music left on him was enough to make him paint.

Starting with the early period paintings, all the paintings of Miro have rhythm. In the landscapes he made during his youth, objects of nature appear in a rhythmical manner. His later paintings, which are entirely abstract have the same rhythmic pattern. Most likely, Miro was also applying existing fundamental law of nature, rhythm, in his paintings. The fact that he has done quite a lot of paintings about the universe may be related to this. İpşiroğlu quotes (İpşiroğlu, 2000, p.130) "At night, music and the stars began to play an impressive role in my pictures. Music has always attracted me, but now in the 20's, poetry has started to play music, especially Bach and Mozart."

However, no matter what, the artist has lost his link to nature, and become subsumed to his emotions and the resonances in the artist's ear

through the musical rhythm of the inner world. It is a journey to eternity, and there is no return.

## Conclusion

Creating a visual representation of sound and music is a difficult task in itself and may transgress into aim that goes beyond the aim of the art of painting. The task requires mastery in both of the disciplines. The end product of such an attempt would be confined concerning creativity and would be subject to the scrutiny of the scientific outlook. An example to this is Pierre Y. Karinthi who tries to identify the transposition between the two forms of art that leads to a scientific outlook states, "To build transposition rules we need keys for the transposition of sounds to lines and colours as well as keys for the transposition of time to space."

However, the influence of music as the most abstract form of art on painting is more comprehensible and natural. The artist is vulnerable to influence from the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is natural and rational to use music as a stimulus for creativity from the artists' perspective.

In order to contribute to this transformative plain, İpşiroğlu (2000) states that the differing reception of Klee and Miro is caused by the differences in their approach and treatment of music in their works. In this sense, the reception of Miro's works could vibrate more music in the broader frame than the works of Klee.

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