

# The conflict of Van Gogh's and Malevich's aesthetical conceptions

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**Abstract:** The conflict arises when comparing the creative path of Vincent van Gogh with the views of Kazimir Malevich will be examined in this article. The authors have used painting and writings of both artists to better understand their ideas and aesthetics approaches when considering this conflict. A comparison of their positions reveals a distinction that becomes very important for understanding of Malevich's view on the history of art and the observations of his articles

## 1 Introduction

The 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Van Gogh's death was in 2020. His art is very ambiguous to many people. Some do not consider Van Gogh to be a great artist; sometimes one might say that his paintings are not even art. Such views seem to belong to people whose aesthetic experience is built on the realistic paintings of artists such as Ivan Shishkin, whose images of nature are truly incredible.

Despite the "criticism" Van Gogh's art is recognized today, and both scholars and ordinary people are interested in his art. Examples include "Living canvases," an exhibition of his works on projector equipment; there are also many books on Van Gogh's life and legacy in stores; and clothing and stationery with engravings of Van Gogh's paintings can be found in stores. These statements show that Van Gogh's art is still important and relevant. His works are known worldwide for his unique artistic style, which was developed by Van Gogh, and finally, has come into its own, and it can be seen that in Van Gogh's late works.

Nevertheless, the technique is not the only thing that excels Van Gogh's later works, but because of the color scheme, it is not difficult to identify his paintings. Colors were important to the artist.

Another key point is what this artist's paintings hide in them. They are full of vitality. His works are much more complex than they seem. They contain feelings, thoughts. All Van Gogh's works were felt by him. His works, whose depictions of peasants are true art, were not made in studios but in peasant homes.

Van Gogh's letters to his friends and brother were used as his "autobiography" in this article, the paintings and drawings used in the review were found there and analyzed along with the letters. Texts by art historians were also used to see a different point of view. The works of philosophers' are important too in connection with their metaphysical review. The latter is extremely important in Van Gogh's art.

The authors looked at Van Gogh's ideas about his art and other people's thoughts, and a resonant opinion was found when looking through it: one of them proposed the idea of the dominance of dynamics in Van Gogh's works, and this is an example of an evolutionary approach to the history of art as a construct. This idea is resonant and strange because usually people can see notes about Van Gogh's bizarre forms and his attention to color.

The question of the constructiveness of the history of art is not new. In particular, the discussion of the problematic nature of art history as a discipline commenced in the 1970s [1, 2]. This article proposes to consider examples of such conscious construction of the historical line of visual change using specific material. At the same time, various attempts to create this line are a kind of symptom of socially important and topical problems [3]. Studies of such constructions seem to us in useful any field, as they demonstrate the principle of construction of the system of perception of events, memory, experience, etc. In this sense, the example from art history can also be applied to identify constructs in the field of science, which can be another pro-argument for the humanities in a technical university [4,5,6].

Therefore, the main goal of this article is to explore the conflict that arises appears between Van Gogh's thoughts and their understanding by the resonating author and artist, to be named later, in order to explore the degree of correctness in his articles.

## **2 Van Gogh's art in Martin Heidegger and Henri Perruchot's texts**

A reference to the views of the great German philosopher Martin Heidegger is necessary at the beginning of this discussion to elucidate the philosophical side of Van Gogh's works.

There are several references in Heidegger's texts to Van Gogh's paintings. The philosopher writes about the painting that depicts peasant shoes in his *The Origin of the Work of Art* [7].

An important thing about Van Gogh's art has been considered in Heidegger's writings. It can help in understanding what characterizes the artist's paintings. Feelings. In other words, if we use a painting that depicts shoes, we will see a picture of an object. However, it is not dominant. The inner "world" is just as important as the objects depicted. These shoes are the embodiment of the burthen, backwardness of peasant labor.

The artist would seem to display the metaphysical essence of these shoes in canvas; he shows the burden of labor through an element of the life of a peasant, a tool that would protect his feet. Nevertheless Heidegger is not the only one who speaks of metaphysics in Van Gogh's work. Similar thoughts can be found in Henri Perrushot. The art historian says very accurately that Van Gogh struggled with the ability to see his inner life behind the appearance of objects [8].

The art critic also notes that Van Gogh was learning to copy nature. Van Gogh explored the laws of perspective with special tools: he studied proportions. However, much more important are the statements that have already been said about the aspirations of this artist, as his work was not limited to simply copying nature. From here, Van Gogh becomes something of a mediator between the person looking at his canvas and the metaphysical world. Van Gogh deliberately simplifies his work, allowing the viewer to speculate, giving freedom of thought [9].

This suggests that the artist draws our attention to seemingly unremarkable things, but through his paintings, he reveals to us the complex issues of the severity of labor. Van Gogh's institute of labor in this situation becomes color and canvas as a material part, through which he can build a bridge between the inner life of things and the viewer.

### **3 Analysis of K.S. Malevich's assertions**

Starting the discussion of Malevich's views, it is important to say a few words about him. Kazimir Malevich is a Great Russian artist, the founder of the absolute art of Suprematism.

However, he was not only an artist, he left behind publications, thanks to which it is easier to get the philosophical foundations of the movement he created. In these same publications, Malevich's attitude to academic art can be traced. The artist says that the academic art is outdated, that new art should come to replace it, the purpose of which is not just a reflection of reality, not it is soulless copying (Malevich 2017).

Still, it can be seen that in the course of the discussion, Malevich identifies the movements that, in his opinion, are worthy of their time, which strive for the true meaning of art.

From these movements, Malevich emphasized two: Cubism and Futurism.

Cubism is characterized by the stress of forms. The location of the figures should create maximum stress. However, this trend is still subordinated to an aesthetic view of art, not just a semantic one.

Futurism has other goals. Dynamics, speed, mobility - that's what futurism wants to show. Nevertheless, artists still have to use the image of certain objects to convey speed.

In addition to the above, the author talks about how these trends appeared.

In other words, it is an evolutionary doctrine. Malevich says that both trends came from post-impressionism. They came from post-impressionism through intermediate links: Cubism came from the works of the artist Paul Cézanne, and Futurism owes its emergence to the works of Van Gogh.

It is an interesting idea, but where is the problem which we want to talk about? The problem is in Malevich's arguments for Van Gogh's involvement in Futurism standing.

The avant-garde painter used to say that Van Gogh sought to transfer speed that he was full of dynamic minds, and he sought to convey that in canvas. Therefore, Malevich pushes the inner world of the object to the background, paying attention to its dynamics.

However, the views of other authors on Van Gogh's work have already been considered, and, for instance, Heidegger's text does not speak of dynamism, highlighting the metaphysical component as the leading.

But who is right? What feature is more inherent in the works of the Dutch artist?

To understand this issue, we propose to turn to the author himself, to his letters and paintings.

### **4 Analysis of art values in van gogh's works**

#### **4.1 Reflection of life in Van Gogh's art**

Van Gogh spent a lot of time picturing the everyday life of the peasant and the worker. Weavers were also depicted. In the paintings with images of weavers, the painter depicted the weaver sitting at the loom - the worker is busy with his work. Nevertheless, he seems static. It is hard to say that the machine is dynamic in the moment as the viewer is looking at the picture. It is necessary to highlight an important thing, which sets off in the weaver canvases: there is a heavy mass of machinery in front of the worker's face. The mass is a

lattice, and because of this there is the postulate that the loom is a kind of prison for a worker.

The workman has to work because it is the only way to get money to survive. Consequently, a man cannot be free from his machine, from the loom.

Van Gogh does not talk about any movements of the mechanisms, the creaking of wheels, or about dynamics, nor do we. He talks about the machine [10]. He says that the viewer, looking at his drawing, would see a weaver even if he was not present in the picture. Looking at the most accurate technical drawing, the viewer sees only the machine but does not see the worker behind it.

Mention of the rooms, where the weaver worked can be found in some of the letters. They were so small, that it was really difficult to portray the weaver in that room. Even the weaver's surroundings tell us that the worker was in the cell.

Similar statements recounting the fate of the martyr weaver can be found in one of the books devoted to Van Gogh's work and life [11]. The above example shows how artists conveyed meanings. How he illustrates reality, not by idealizing working forms, but by conveying true things in hard work. And the man looks like a prisoner in his "cell".

Van Gogh's thoughts are very important. He wrote to his brother Theo, and from his letters, the reader can understand that in Van Gogh's view, an artist should get inside nature as deep as he can. And after that penetration the painter must put all his skills and feelings in his work, so that it would be clear to everyone.

## **4.2 Coloristic decisions in Van Gogh's works. Color commitment**

In the course of the work, we have already considered one of the essential features of the Dutch artist's work. The semantic component of his paintings, the inner life of the depicted objects dominates in Van Gogh's creative heritage.

Moreover, the way the artist expressed himself is also important. We are talking about the instruments he used in his works. This section will look at a very important feature of Van Gogh's art that is an integral part of it.

Van Gogh attached great importance to color. The abundance of color becomes one of the master's calling cards. Van Gogh studied the contrasts of different colors, how to combine them.

Equally important to Van Gogh was the overall flavor of the work. So, for example, looking at the painting «The Bedroom in Arles», the viewer might think that it shows the room as an object, whose appearance should appease the mind.

Van Gogh is reverent about color and color decisions. Watching the artist apply color is truly fascinating and engaging.

One of Van Gogh's bright and impressive paintings can verify the above statements. This painting is the "Olive Trees" of 1889. The canvas is truly fascinating. The abundance of yellow color that fills the entire space of the sky captivates the viewer's eyes. However, the analysis of this work is no less interesting. The viewer sees olive trees and purple mountains in the background of the artwork, and the sky, the hot, heated sky does not allow him to take his eyes off from the painting.

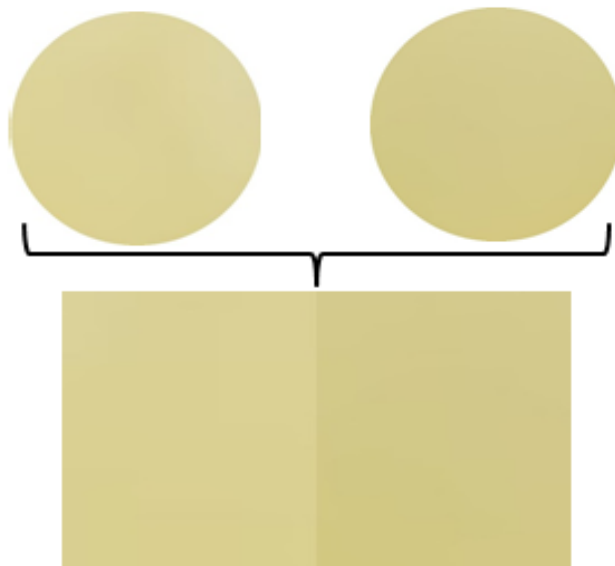
What is so interesting about this yellow sky? It was such a sultry and hot day when the artist painted this canvas. The sun was so scorching and bright that even the sky could be depicted in the same color as the sun, a huge red-hot star. This stands out at the artist's work, his skillful rendering of the state of nature through color solutions. However, it is not just nature. The artist no less skillful in conveying his state, his feelings and experiences at that moment. And this is achieved through color.

As everybody knows, Van Gogh appreciates color; for him, it was essential. We can find many environmental descriptions full of accurate color information.

For instance, Van Gogh describes landscapes in all details, listing not just a color of anything, but oil-colors too. Carmine, ocher, chrome is presented in his narratives. If it is no oil-colors, we will see just as many descriptions using words like old gold, copper, red gold, green red [9].

Extraordinary accuracy is inherent in this specification. Trembling and responsibility were inherent to the artist, as he filled his painting with colors.

Therefore, it becomes clear that color is dominant in Van Gogh’s art heritage. Color is one of his goals. There is a comparison of the colors from the work, which has been reviewed earlier. Figure 1 shows the average colors of the sun and the fragment of the sky.



**Fig. 1.** Comparison of the colors.

When comparing these colors, it is possible to say that they are close to being similar; Table 1 contains information about indices of each color in RAL, Pantone C, and Pantone U to give an illustration of their similarity.

The color of the sun is on the left side, and the color of the sky is on the right side.

The color of the sky is darker, and it can be explained by the presence of other – deeper – colors on the space of the sky, for example, the orange color.

**Table 1.** The indices of each color from Figure 1.

Color	RAL Design	Pantone U	Pantone C
Left (sun)	095 80 30	615 U	614 C
Right (sky)	095 85 30	616 U	615 C

In considering an example of the importance of color, its importance in Van Gogh’s work cannot be diminished. Color is something dominant, much more significant than dynamics and speed, which are hard to see in this work. Only the

strokes that create a kind of concentric circles suggest of the idea of movement. However, in the context of this painting, one must assume that this is a tool to convey the sunlight that fills the entire space.

### **4.3 Analysis of the dynamics of the painting “The Starry Night”**

Despite the considerations above, Van Gogh's heritage has a work that can be called dynamic. Looking at this work, it is hard to imagine what the artist saw when he was working on the canvas. It means that in this situation Van Gogh did not pursue the goal of reflecting reality but was after other goals. Looking at this canvas, we can say that in this work the artist tried to maximize the dynamics, which is dominant in this work. Consequently, it means, that Kazimir Malevich was right in his statements about Van Gogh's dynamic art.

The painting, which is interesting for review, in this case, is “The Starry Night”. It is full of dynamism: vortices, spirals - they create the dynamic power of this artwork. It is hard to believe that Van Gogh did see these spirals in the sky. So, Van Gogh created the dynamics. And it seems that his main goal in this picture was the creation of dynamism.

A few years ago, we could agree with Malevich's futuristic postulate because of “The Starry Night”. Presently, on the contrary, we can talk about the incorrectness of this idea and, maybe, about a fallacy. We can do this thanks to physicists.

In their article [12], scientists explore Van Gogh's painting, using laws of fluid dynamics. Their research is extremely helpful in our discussion.

In their research, the scientists used different methods. One of those was exploration based on the arguments about turbulence by Kolmogorov, the Soviet mathematician. Finally, they managed to prove that spirals in Van Gogh's painting are turbulent. And, as a result, they suggested that eddies, presented in the canvas, are birthplaces of stars [12].

Description of the turbulence of these eddies is important in this article. Using this fact, we can suggest that Van Gogh saw the unique phenomenon, and depicted it on canvas. As a result, we see the reflection of reality. It means that Van Gogh continued his way and transferred things with his inner world. It also means that the dynamics of this work are real, and it was not the goal of the depiction. He probably saw the turbulent clouds full of dynamism, and painted them because they were a part of nature, and not because his thoughts were full of speed and dynamics.

In the text above, we have discussed essential things, because thanks to these considerations it can be said that one of the most dynamic Van Gogh's works is a reflection of the reality that surrounded him and which he conveyed. And this already allows us to make some intermediate conclusions, which we will use in our further discussion.

## **5 Feasible reason of K.S. Malevich's incorrect assertions**

After analyzing the artist's works, we conclude that Kazimir Malevich was incorrect in his assertions, claiming that Van Gogh had an inherent desire to display dynamism as a dominant. If dynamism is present in his work, it is real. And its presence in a painting is due to its participation in the reflection of reality.

Now another question arises, which asks the reason for the distortion of the semantic component of Van Gogh's art. This question is why did Malevich misrepresent Van Gogh's thoughts?

It is an interesting question, moreover, it is very difficult and controversial at the same time.

One of the answers to this question is the trivial subjectivity and lack of information that Malevich possessed. Consequently, he could explain Van Gogh's art only from his point of

view. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that he does so very confidently and relentlessly in his texts as if these statements were the key to any question concerning Malevich's work.

On the other hand, the other answer to the question is much deeper. Many sources can be found in the course of researching this topic, a lot of sources can be found. One of them is Jean-Claude Markade's texts. The author notes that some of Malevich's works are too good for the period to which they are dated. Thus, we are talking about how Malevich forged his creative path to achieve semantic ordering by neglecting chronological ordering.

As a consequence, another question arises. Why did Malevich reconstruct his way? As the creator of absolute artistic Suprematism, Malevich reconstructed his creative way. He created a construct that leads us from impressionism to absolute non-objective art. Malevich's evolutionary tendencies can be found in various sources, including Fedorov-Davydov's text [13]. The author uses evolutionary terminology in his description.

Malevich's post-Suprematic Impressionism cannot hide his colossal experience in art as a painter who had relations with Cubo-Futurism and Suprematism. And because of this, his figures represent something intermediate between impressionism and avant-garde in his post-suprematic impressionism. For example, it is visible in his "Flowergirl" (1930).

Summarizing all of the above, we can give a potential answer to the question above. The answer lies in the construction created by Malevich. Speaking about the origins of Cubism and Futurism, he mentioned two important figures. These figures are Cézanne and Van Gogh. They stand at the origins of these two movements. Both of them aspired to one or another artistic goal, which Malevich considered important but insufficient for absolute art, and he himself created this movement by himself: Suprematism, which through intermediate forms, must become a descendant of Impressionism. It means that it must undergo evolutionary changes to become an absolute art. This makes it similar to Cubism and Futurism, which come from Post-Impressionism. This construction raises Malevich to the rank of creators of real art. However, Malevich created an absolute non-objective art, free from the slavery of form, paying attention only to the independence of color. This already puts him higher than Van Gogh and Cezanne, because the absolute is achieved.

## **6 Conclusion**

In the course of this work, a conflict between the views of two painters was detected. Both postulated ideas which were cognate to each other, and both conveyed them in their artworks. And each left a great art heritage.

However, the conflict, discussed in this article, is not between the artists personally, but through indirect interaction with the intermediary presented by the reader of the works of both. The reader, turning to their works, is confronted with some discrepancies in the interpretation of the meaning of the work of the Dutch artist, Vincent van Gogh. As we have already seen, Van Gogh was a colorist and painter of nature. He conveyed the state of nature and people very skillfully, putting the deep essence of nature into the canvas, becoming a conduit between the metaphysical and ordinary viewer. The way Van Gogh speaks of workers and miners makes one think of the sensual side of his work [10], which certainly was reflected in his painting.

Van Gogh appreciated the color too. Color became one of the artist's most important companions, one of his main tools. The color decisions in Van Gogh's canvases amaze and attract. However, they do not serve to convey the dynamism originating in the artist's head. His tools serve to convey the depths of nature.

And all if this in the conflict was opposed by the words of Malevich, who told us about the dynamism that Van Gogh sought to convey through objects [14]. Consideration of this



statement leads us to the fact that Malevich was incorrect in his assertions, speaking only about dynamism, losing the dominants in the works of the Dutch artist.

The consideration of “The Starry Night”(1889) is important. Using this painting as an example, we faced with a conflict within ourselves, having already come to some conclusions; we faced with a difficult question that is extremely difficult to resolve because “The Starry Night” seems to be a painting with only dynamic issues. It provides a basis for destroying all previous arguments because the painting is very dynamic. It could confirm Malevich’s futuristic thoughts. However, thanks to the physical research of scientists [12], it can come closer to what Van Gogh showed the viewer about nature in all its depth and the power of color and form.

The contradiction that arises in the analysis of the texts leads us to further discussions of the incorrectness of Malevich's assertion. The information that Malevich reconstructed his creative path is essential. And evolutionary ideas in creativity help us to get closer to answering the question of this work about the incorrectness of Malevich’s claim.

To summarize, it is clear that Malevich’s words about Van Gogh’s art are not quite correct, therefore the main goal of this article is achieved: a conclusion about the degree of Malevich’s correctness is drawn. This conclusion provides new confirmation of Malevich’s evolutionary views and his reconstructive movements, which are necessary to make semantic order, as well as his post-supremacist Impressionism.

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