

To help Mondrian financially, in June 1930 Walter Gropius (founder of the German Bauhaus), Gideon, Arp, and Moholy-Nagy organized a lottery, the proceeds of which were used to buy a painting by Mondrian for the winner. The drawing took place in Mondrian's studio in January 1931. Twenty-five people bought a ticket and the prize, a composition from 1930, was won by a German graphic artist.

Mondrian's contacts with American art collectors grew. His leading position on the modern movement was recognized by James Johnson Sweeney and by Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

Works by him was also shown at exhibitions in Stockholm, Brussels and in The Netherlands.

Together with Michel Seuphor, in the early 1930's Mondrian took part in the group exhibitions of "Cercle et Carré" and "Abstraction et Création".

32 and **33** : The choice of the lozenge format gives greater breadth to the composition.

It makes it possible to use lines of various lengths. New relations of tension are established between the orthogonal planes and the diagonal sides of the painting. The four corners of the lozenge generate a centrifugal energy and seem to expand the plane of the canvas along its two median axes. The lozenge therefore already seems in itself a way to make the equivalence of opposites, i.e. the square, more dynamic.

32 presents a square defined by four sides.

The meeting points of the opposite directions are practically no longer visible in this work.

The contrast and opposition between vertical and horizontal lines is resolved here in a continuous space that finds unity by following the square form uninterruptedly from one side to the other.

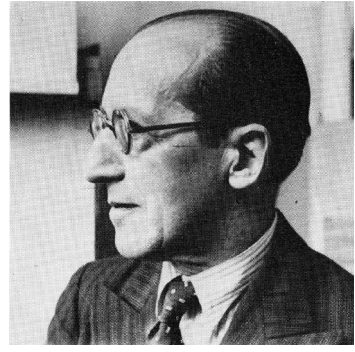
For the first time, all the four lines forming the square field differ in thickness, which increases as we proceed clockwise from the vertical on the right. We thus see a square that progressively tends to expand beyond our field of vision. The tendency toward expansion generated by the position of the lines (above all the upper horizontal) is counterbalanced by an opposite tendency toward concentration. The line moving furthest away (upward) is in fact also the thickest and therefore the one that exerts the greatest downward pressure. Proceeding clockwise from the right vertical side, we see a square that grows heavier as it exits the canvas, i.e. tends to become more solid and permanent while it disappears: a simultaneously changing and comparatively constant space.

Mondrian seeks in these works to open and expand the square while maintaining its visibility at the same time.

The concept of space here is still essentially the one that inspired his work from the very beginning: opening up to variety and mutability on the one hand while tending to concentrate on the other and thereby generating an ideal, more constant synthesis which then re-opens to variety and mutability.

In the rectangular canvases Mondrian opens the synthesis to multiplicity (the square duplicates, undergoes interpenetration with the lines and becomes yellow, red or blue) whereas in the lozenges the composition concentrates on one single square which should intrinsically express both unity and multiplicity.

In this phase Mondrian is like a composer who gradually reduces the orchestra to a solo instrument, an almost imperceptible sound that can still be varied in an effort to express the whole. In a white field crossed by four black lines, the thickness of a line can also serve in a space moving toward ever-greater synthesis to calibrate the weights and influence the overall economy of the composition.



Mondrian around 1930

"Every human being is born with a natural vocation towards the universal and those who believe that painting means using only brushes and not the head are incapacitated who would like to reduce man to less than what he really is." (Seuphor)

33: The square in this lozenge composition has the same proportions as the canvas and the relationship between the two appears more balanced than in **32**.

Once again, the four lines show a progressive increase in thickness as we move clockwise from the vertical on the right. The increase in the thickness of the lines can be seen as the vertical incorporating a slight horizontal expansion or conversely as the horizontal growing thicker in response to barely perceptible vertical pressure.

For a fraction of a second, the space of the lines is simultaneously vertical and horizontal, i.e. a synthesis of the opposite directions. From this point of view the lines seem to transform into embryonic planes.

We actually talk about a square that we do not really see in full since the lines never meet inside the canvas.

In point of fact each line could well continue on its own towards infinite space without being really concerned to relate with the opposite lines as to give birth to a square proportion.

Our mind translates infinite space (the uninterrupted lines) into a presumed finite space (a square form); four different elements (their variable thickness) hint at probable square unit which is, however, beyond our field of vision.

Doesn't an invisible unity bring to our mind what some call God while others try to investigate and eventually explain through a rational never ending process named science?

The more important innovation is obviously the fact that, for the first time, the lines are no longer black but yellow. The field is uniformly white and the yellow shape almost appears to be born out of the white rather than in opposition to it, as in the case of the black. Yellow is an intermediate value between black and white, sufficiently dark to be differentiated from white but, at the same time, not so radically opposite as black.

The opposite values now seem communicate and achieve unitary expression in terms both of form and of color, with horizontal and vertical simultaneously present for an instant in every line and the synthesis of black and white in an intermediate color, which yellow appears to constitute in this case.

On observing this square and contemplating the differing thickness of the lines, we are faced with a unity undergoing transformation from one side to the other; a synthesis that already appears comparatively manifold in itself.

We perceive a unity that tends to become rather than to be. It endures but changes at the same time; a square that is open, dynamic, asymmetric, and entirely expressed by color. This composition goes to the heart of the problem: to show the manifold in unitary form; to open up unity, i.e. the postulate of consciousness, to the changing aspect of the natural universe and existence in time but without losing sight of it.

With the canvases of the late 1920's and above all this lozenge of 1933 (**33**), the artist appears to have given material expression to an idea that had guided him, canvas after canvas, for roughly twenty years of work, namely to express the multiple in unitary form and endow it with the stability required by consciousness without, however, causing it to atrophy in overly rigid and constant geometric forms. The artist felt for a moment that he had achieved his objective with a square undergoing transformation while remaining relatively stable.

Nonetheless, if we compare **33** with the previous works and in particular with those produced up to 1920 (**19** to **26**), it appears immediately obvious that by 1933 the multiple aspect had been considerably reduced almost to the point of elimination. Around 1930 Mondrian painted in black and white or with one or two colors inside predominantly white fields. In the span of a decade, the manifold space (**19** to **26**) appears to have been completely absorbed by the square, which was used between 1922 and 1933 (**30** to **33**) (Fig. 33 to 40) in an attempt to reformulate in conceptual synthesis a space that is in reality far more structured and complex.

The square we see in **33** is a symbolic representation that does not suggest the variety of the real world.

In 1933 the space of external reality had undergone marked internalization in the far more condensed forms of thought; the physical seemed to be expressed in excessively mental terms. The painter was soon to realize that his canvases did not convey a sense of the variety perceived by the eye in nature or urban space, the rich and multiform aspect of color previously captured with his dunes and trees, his Cubist works, and his checkerboard compositions. While **33** can therefore be regarded as a point of arrival, at the same time, as in other moments of Mondrian's artistic development, the work also represents a new point of departure.

As Michel Seuphor puts it in his beautiful biography of Mondrian: *"Sometimes he thinks he has found it. So he stops, observes the work, and says: It's done. But the clock of his life keeps on ticking and is already driving him forward. He soon realizes that nothing is done and everything has to start all over again."*

Let us now go back for a moment and examine two more lozenge compositions (Fig. 39 and 40) which Mondrian painted respectively in 1925 and 1931.

Fig. 39: Two vertical and one horizontal line run across the canvas and divide it into various sections.

The horizontal and the right vertical appear to be of equal thickness while the vertical on the left is thicker, which seems to make up for its lesser extension.

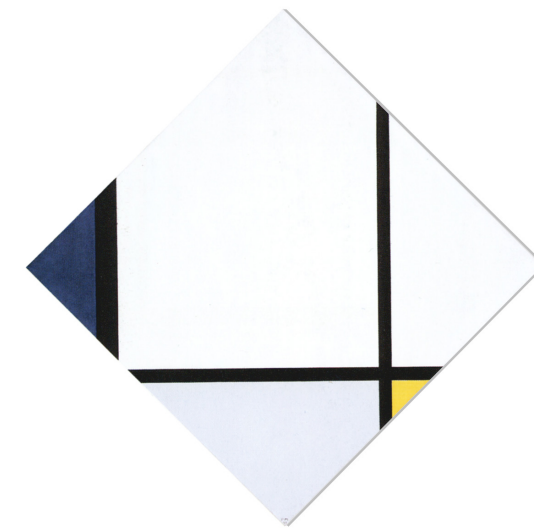


Fig. 39 - Tableau N. 1, Lozenge with Three Lines, Blue, Gray and Yellow, 1925, Oil on Canvas, cm. 80 x 80 - Diagonal cm 112

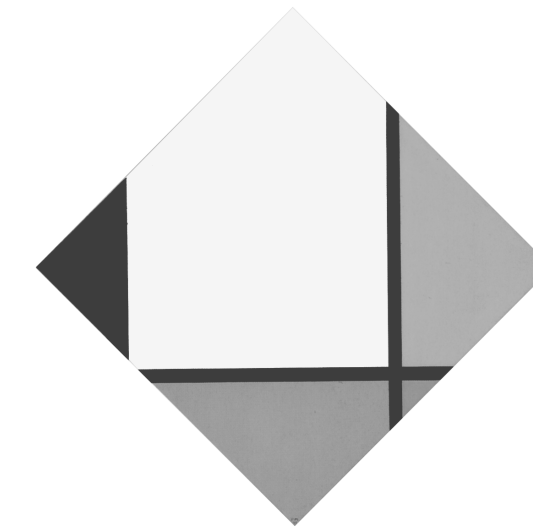


Fig. 39 - Diagram A

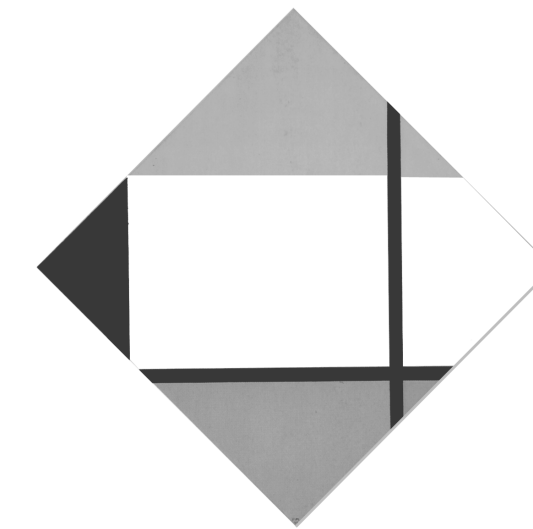


Fig. 39 - Diagram B

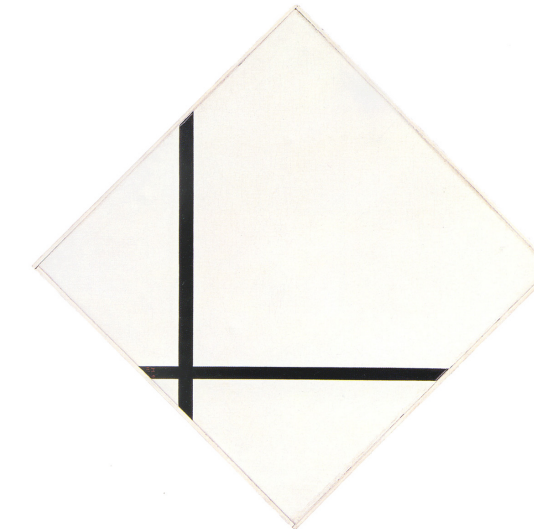


Fig. 40 - Lozenge Composition with Two Lines, 1931, Oil on Canvas, cm. 80 x 80 - Diagonal cm 112

Examination of the horizontal line in relation to the right vertical reveals a rectangular area extending upward (diagram A), while the relationship between the same horizontal, the left vertical and the blue plane tends to generate a horizontal field that the right corner of the lozenge draws toward itself (diagram B).

The eye is drawn respectively downward and upward by the horizontal (diagram B) and the vertical (diagram A) areas, the relationship between which generates an indefinite square field that expands and contracts under the influence of the contending directions. The space as a whole is in a state of unstable equilibrium and attains unified expression for an instant through the progressive and almost simultaneous recombination of parts, none of which - it should be noted - constitutes in itself a definite square.

The virtual square expands upward beyond the perimeter of the canvas, projected ideally toward the infinite, while the notes of color (above all the blue on the left) draw the eye back toward the lower central area.

In the Neoplastic vocabulary white symbolizes the spiritual and the primary colors the natural.

We can therefore imagine this composition as a metaphor of the relationship between the absolute drives of the spiritual drawn back toward the concrete by the part of man that is closest to the natural world: a dynamic relationship between opposite drives that attain equilibrium for an instant through reconciliation.

These lozenge compositions constitute the moment of greatest correspondence between the one and the many.

The peak is reached with Fig. 40 where just two black lines allude to a "square field" that can barely be intuited, a square that is no sooner generated than it becomes an infinite space. Here too, the top and right corners of the lozenge accentuate the dynamic expansion of the central field. The space of the square is no longer delimited by the lines but extends with them far beyond the canvas. The finite space almost seems to coincide with infinite space. The subjective unity (the square) extends so as to encompass ideally all the multiplicity of objective space (formerly expressed by an oval) that the canvas can never contain. It is like the squaring of the circle.

The square and the oval we see in **22** tended now to become one and the same thing.