

## PIONNIER DE L'ABSTRACTION

### GRAND PALAIS

21 MARCH – 30 JULY 2018

Kupka is one of the great pioneers of abstract art that emerged at the beginning of the 20th Century. But his highly personal work was not only marked by his rejection of conventional representation. It revisits a history of abstract art that has its roots in Viennese symbolism nurtured by a spiritual and philosophical heritage specific to Central Europe. In equally making a foray into scientific and technical breakthroughs that open up new horizons into the unknown, this abstract art stands out as a modern poetry of colours. As a journey back to Kupka's entire career from the 19th Century up to the post-war era, this exhibition sheds light on the steps leading to this transformation. Colours do not only maintain their representative character in the first Parisian portraits but tend to convey physical and physiological emotions, becoming instruments of dynamism and finally, simplifying painting by discarding the subject to reign supreme. This universal geometrical language upholds the painting as fragment of a world of harmony that banishes the boundary between the visible and the invisible.



# 1. FOLLOWING HIS OWN PATH

**THE MARK OF SYMBOLISM** - From the start of his artistic career in Vienna in the first half of the 1890s, Kupka's works integrated symbolist concepts. Exhibited at the Kunstverein in Vienna in 1895, his painting *Quam ad causam sumus*. *Why are we created?* demonstrates this sensibility and became the subject of polemical discussions about the modern representation of ideas. The philosophical vision of humanity that the artist forged for himself finds its expression in a number of works he produced in Paris, such as *Méditation* (1899), an introspective reflection that also alludes to Nietzschean philosophy and esoteric thoughts. The symbolist concept is one of the points of departure for Kupka's investigations into non-figurative art.

**WORKING FOR THE PRESS** - From the late 19th century to the very beginning of the 20th century, Kupka created several hundred graphic works for the press: symbolist compositions, news reports and satirical critiques of the social contract. These different registers correspond to the respective editorial lines of the periodicals to which he contributed: the literary and artistic journal *Cocorico*; the libertarian *L'Assiette au beurre*, *Le Canard sauvage* or *Les Temps nouveaux* by the anarchist Jean Grave; *La Vie en rose*, a moderately libertine and subversive publication, or *Das Album*, a Franco-German journal, as well as *La Vie illustrée*, *L'Illustration* and the *Berliner illustrierte Zeitung*, for which he worked as "illustrator-reporter". Although Kupka later stated that these works were above all his bread and butter, they are still also the expression of his convictions as a free thinker, and he was incredibly meticulous in producing each of these pieces that made him as famous in Paris as he was in his country of birth.

# 2. A NEW BEGINNING

**HISTORY AND MODERNITY** - His work on the illustrations for *L'Homme et la Terre*, the encyclopaedic writings of Élisée Reclus, gave Kupka the opportunity to indulge his passion for the history of humanity, bonding with the ideas of the anarchist geographer. However, like his works that followed relating to ancient Greece, this endeavour

did not prevent him from progressively returning to painting. Making the connection between social and aesthetic preoccupations, his series of «Gigolettes» is symbolic of an important stage in Kupka's research into the question of representation and its methods. In particular it demonstrates a remarkable archaic stylisation of physiognomy and attitudes, as well as new experiments with colour that tended towards synchrony.

**FOR BIBLIOPHILES** - Following his work on *L'Homme et la Terre* by Élisée Reclus, at a time when he wanted to focus solely on painting, Kupka agreed to illustrate three further literary works relating to ancient Greece: *Les Érinnyes* by Leconte de Lisle, followed by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, conceived together in a complementary way. These three projects allowed him to extend his understanding of ancient Greek art, further appreciating its originality and conceptual rigour.

**FIRST FORMAL MANIFESTOS** - From 1907 to 1911, Kupka's work soared to dizzying heights. Although he did not give up figurative art, he veered into a form of representation built around assertive colours and embarked on a journey towards transcription of movement. His work *L'Eau (La Baigneuse)* (1906-1909) is a metaphor of time and space where figures melt into colours. A symbolic self-portrait by the artist, *La Gamme jaune* (1907) reflects a complex image of its author: solar, radiant and melancholic. *La Petite Fille au ballon* (1908) and her nudity bursting out from nature represents Kupka's naturist ideal, and her ball heralds the lyrical flight of *Amorpha, Fugue à deux couleurs* (1912), a cosmic symbol of the pulse of the world.

**AESTHETICS OF COLOUR OUTLINES** - The programmatic overview of 1911, *Portrait de famille* and *Grand nu*. *Plans par couleurs* embody the transition from figurative to abstract art. Kupka's research works verge on fauvism and expressionism dominated by powerful forms and colours. Modelled on the conventional classical patterns of Michelangelo's *Léda*, the mounting of *Grand Nu*. *Plans par couleurs* maintains the character of a sculpture, highlighted by the treatment of volume through colours. Meanwhile, the division of the background into flat colour segments heralds

the new aesthetics of colour planes. It stands out through three paintings of 1910-1911 on which Kupka displays together at the «Salon des Indépendants» in 1912: *Plans par couleurs (Femme dans les triangles)*, *Portrait du musicien Follet* and *Le Miroir ovale* share a range of muffled colours, a composition levelled out into outlines that tend to wipe out the subject.

### 3. INVENTIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

#### BREAKING WITH MIMETIC TRADITION

In 1905, in a letter to his friend the satirical poet Josef Svatopluk Machar, Kupka already asserted that he only wished to paint concepts, syntheses and connections...

Launching into a range of experiments, such as the decomposition of volumes or movement with colour, Kupka came to therealization of the absurdity and dishonesty of art that borrowed from Nature. In his view, this could only lead artists into traps: betraying Nature or betraying their vision.

The painter thus decided to break from the mimetic tradition and to create another purely pictorial reality using only painting itself. He consummated this rupture with tradition, by painting such revolutionary works as *Le premier pas*, *Disques de Newton* and of course, *Amorpha*, *Fugue à deux couleurs* and *Amorpha*, *Chromatique chaude*, exhibited at the Salon d'automne of 1912, the first entirely non-figurative paintings to be presented to Parisian audiences.

**ORDERING IN SPACE** - Passionate about science, Kupka was interested in the issue of space and the space-time curvature. It was an interest he shared with other artists, particularly those of the Puteaux group. Like him, they were keen to reflect this new vision of the world in their creations. Excluding any imitation of elements from the palpable world, even the products of scientific concepts, Kupka emphasised the autonomy of the pictorial work born out of the artist's vision, his way of approaching the issue of space and order in space. He organised the space of a painting according to his requirements for plastic expression through formal, recognisable elements such as lines, vertical, horizontal and diagonal planes, or curves, as the promise of another dimension. For him, space as atmosphere featured human characters.

**IRREGULAR FORMS** - In his system of forms, when describing the ontology of verticals, horizontals and diagonals, Kupka also referred to the curves that expressed the dimension of time; for him, circles, ovals and spirals remained abstract. Irregular lines or forms, meanwhile, were a different matter. Irregularity connected the pictorial representation with an objective description and an expression of the organic world. Kupka likened irregular lines and forms to "tortuous meanders", referring to them – not without humour – as "talkative".

**POINTS, LINES, ARABESQUES** - At his personal exhibition at the Musée des Écoles Étrangères Contemporaines within the Jeu de Paume gallery in the Tuileries, in 1936, where he arranged his non-figurative work according to formal criteria for the first time, Kupka included the painting *Around a Point*, (1920-1930) in the "Circular" category. In his system of forms, Kupka developed a complex interpretation of the point, demonstrating respectable knowledge of spatial geometry by citing Poincaré's interpretation of the unit in relation to Euclid, for whom a dot was indivisible and inextensible. Kupka's interpretation of the dot did not overlook its symbolic potential: stars, the connection to the esoteric macro- and microcosm, and the localisation of the self, definable only in relation to another fixed point outside the self. Autour d'un point should be considered a work that encapsulates his investigations into the meaning of these formal elements.

Together, the lines joining the dots in the creative "self-space" of the artist and those joining the outer dots on the canvas create a superstructure; with their balance of rhythmic lines, the arabesques possess both narrative qualities and symbolic power.

### 4. REMINISCENCES AND SYNTHESSES

**ASCENDING ARCHITECTURE** - Architecture always played an important role in Kupka's investigations into the essential character of pictorial creation. For him, it represented a paradigm: in architecture, the thought/vision seeking the logical organisation of materials converts them "into dimensions, proportions and positions in space". A pictorial work as "abstract reality" is composed – and thus built – from invented formal elements, which is why he,

among others, believed the term “constructivism” to be the most fitting for describing the non-mimetic art, of which he was one of the most significant proponents. The architecture of the work allowed the painter to organise his visions and make them legible to the viewer. With its upward direction, his “ascending architecture” is imbued with a spiritual character. Inspiration could come from experiencing a Gothic interior or observing a simple physical phenomenon such as the rise, gushing or elevation of any matter, something that could contain a very clear spiritual message, as in the case of *Hindu Motif* (1919), indicated in the title.

**SHAPES AND STRUCTURES OF COLOUR** - Kupka always paid particular attention to colour as a mode of expression, dating back to 1912, where its existence implicitly implies the presence of a shape. In a chapter from *La Création dans les arts plastiques* with the title «Sens et sentiment de la couleur», he examines its uses from a physical, psychological and cultural point of view. Referring to the stained glass of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, he examines the different speeds of propagation of blue and red, two colours for which he sets out to define behaviour: blue colors give «an impression of turning in on themselves» and demand to be inscribed as «rectilinear forms, slim and extended», whereas vermilions and orange-tinted yellows «should demonstrate their exuberance in fluid and rounded shapes», their expansive force overflowing their contours with «explosive gyrations». Towards 1919, he began a series that he later referred to as «Shapes and structures of colours», in which he attempted to determine the best formal arrangement to suit individual colours.

## 5. LAST RENEWALS

**THE CRISIS OF «MACHINISM»** - At the end of the 1920s, interested in a potential analogy between innovations in painting and in engineering, Kupka created a set of paintings inspired by machinery. In a very sudden manner, he introduced elements drawn from reality at the risk of denaturing his own pictorial universe. His creations were profoundly transformed and he himself questioned the value of such experimentation. In a baroque style, this series allowed him to give pride of place to geometry, in complex

formal arrangements that are at times close to constructivism in spirit. Taking stock of this perturbing experimentation, following a process of conscientious abstraction, Kupka achieved a level of geometrification of shapes which seemed to inspire him to hark back to the spirit of his earliest non-figurative works.

**ABSTRACTION-CREATION** - In the 1930, Kupka's artistic universe welcomed a new generation of abstract artists nurtured by Theo van Doesbourg, one of the founders of *De Stijl* and the «Art concret» group. In 1931, Van Doesbourg invited Kupka to help set up the «Association Abstraction-Création» to promote geometric abstract art. While he distanced himself somewhat quickly from the movement, Kupka published several manifestos in the group's review to castigate «the lie of the third dimension». *His Peinture abstraite* (1930) with its orthogonal pattern exclusively built on interaction between black lines and the white background represents abstract art in its most absolute form. The gouaches and paintings of 1930 to 1938 harmonise drawings and colours through an array of sophisticated geometric shapes. The dispensation of balances between outlines, lines, and colours overpowers space with rhythms of harmony. From its title, the perfect square on *Eudia* (1933) is a tribute to its equilibrium, and the ideal measurements and perfection achieved by Kupka.

**C FOR CONTRASTS** - Beginning before the second world war and continuing into the 1950s, the «C Series» extended his work with constructions of shapes that he initiated at the start of the 1930s with his «Abstractions» in black and white. These paintings were in fact the result of a progressive balancing of the «relationships of the areas between themselves». The artist also works with the «complementarity of localisations» and, for a major part of this new creativity, seems to return to a general principal that he outlined in *La Création dans les arts plastiques*: «In all of the arts, when you highlight one thing, it is always in relationship to – and from the outset, because of – the presence of another.»

Initially «mobile», sometimes «minuscule», planes cross or avoid each other, giving birth to rigorous balance. The relationships are often chromatic, relying on a richly contrasting colour palate that

is highly characteristic, when not restricted to the shades of grey and brown that define the final works in this series.

**RÉALITÉS NOUVELLES** - At the end of the second world war, which he spent as a refugee in Beaugency in the Loire Valley, Kupka returned to his workshop in Puteaux. Following the death of Robert Delaunay in 1941 and Wassily Kandinsky in 1944, Kupka became one of the last remaining artists from the heroic early years of non-figurative art. Despite this, the number of supporters of such art was growing and the idea, long fundamental to Kupka, that pictorial creation could be considered as giving birth to another reality, was gaining traction. Always keeping himself out of the picture, he still took care to ensure the historical importance of his work was recognised, particularly in his regular involvement with the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles, created in 1946, where he exhibited until his death in 1957.

## Curators :

**Brigitte Leal**, Chief Curator and Assistant Director in charge of the Centre Georges Pompidou collections.

**Markéta Theinhardt**, art historian, Sorbonne.

**Pierre Brullé**, freelance art historian.

**Set design** : Véronique Dollfus

This exhibition has been organised by the Réunion des Musées Nationaux-Grand Palais in partnership with the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Národní Galerie v Praze, Prague, and the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki.



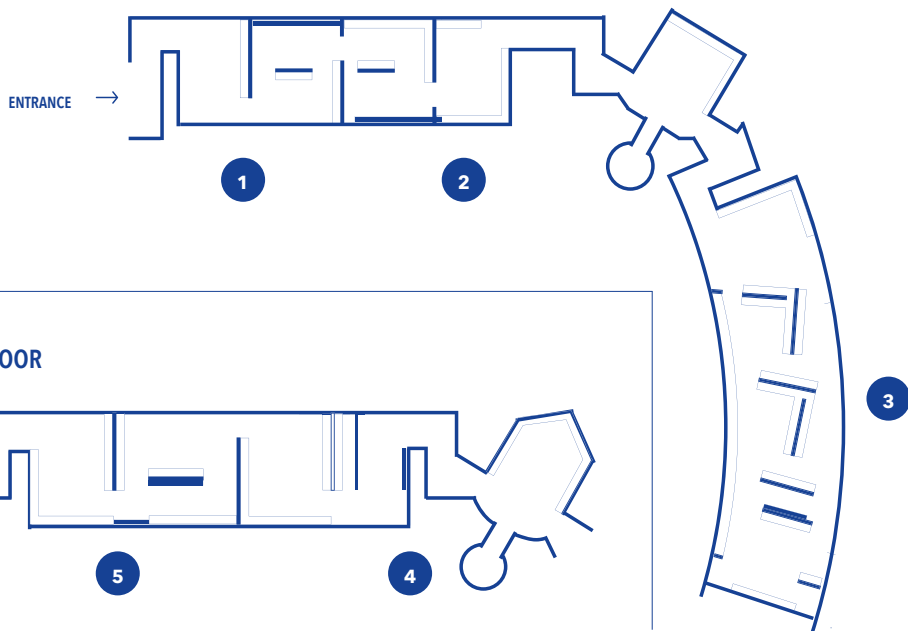
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ATENEUM

# EXHIBITION MAP

## 1ST FLOOR



# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

## CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Free entry to the Grand Palais auditorium. Priority access with an invitation available on [grandpalais.fr](http://grandpalais.fr)

### WEDNESDAY MEETINGS - 6.30 PM

#### Opening conference

##### Wednesday 21 March

##### *Kupka, Pioneer of abstraction*

Presentation of the exhibition by its three curators: Brigitte Leal, Chief Curator and Deputy Director of the Musée national d'art moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Markéta Theinhardt, art historian at the Sorbonne University, and Pierre Brullé, art historian  
Introduction by Sylvie Hubac, President of the Rmn - Grand Palais

#### Series "Kupka, painting in movement"

##### Wednesday 28 March

##### *Bad impressions: Kupka and satirical drawing*

Lecture by Emmanuel Pernoud, professor of the history of contemporary art at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

##### Wednesday 4 April

##### *Did Kupka invent abstraction?*

Lecture by Pascal Rousseau, professor of the history of contemporary art at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University.

##### Wednesday 16 May

##### *7 rue Lemaître, Kupka solitaire au cœur d'un foyer de création*

Conference by Germain Viatte, general heritage curator

### FRIDAY FILM SCREENINGS - 12 NOON

#### Series "An avant-garde spirit"

##### Friday 30 March

##### *Loves of a Blonde*

Milos Forman, 1965, with Hana Brejchová, Vladimír Pucholt and Vladimír Menšík, 1h30, VOSTF

##### Friday 11 May

##### *Who Wants to Kill Jessie?*

Václav Vorlíček, 1966, with Dana Medrická, Jiří Sovák and Olga Schoberová, 1h20, VOSTF

##### Friday 15 June

##### *Closely Observed Trains*

Jiri Menzel, 1967, with Václav Neckár, Jitka Bendová and Josef Somr, 1h35, VOSTF

### FAMILY DAY

Discover the riches of Czech and Slovak cinema as a family

#### Sunday 6 May

##### at 2.30 pm

*Pat and Mat*, animations by Marek Beneš, compiled for the cinema in 2013, 40'

Followed by *Mimi and Lisa*, animation by Katarína Kerekesová, 2016, 45'

(For ages 5 and over)

##### at 4 pm

*The Stolen Airship*, Karel Zeman, 1966, with Hanus Bor, Jan Cizek and Jan Malát, 1h30

(For ages 7 and over)

*This programme is also available for school groups on Thursday mornings, registration required*

### DOCUMENTARIES

#### *Kupka, pionnier de l'art abstrait*

Jacques Loeuille, 2017, 52'

at 12 noon on Thursday 22 and 29 March, 12 April, 17 and 31 May, 7, 14 and 28 June

at 2 pm on Friday 30 April, 11 May and 15 June

at 4 pm on Wednesday 21 and 28 March, 4 and 11 April, 2, 16 and 23 May and 6 June

#### *František Kupka, symphoniste des couleurs et peintre du cosmos*

Daniela Gébová, 2009, 32', VOSTF

at 5 pm on Wednesday 21 and 28 March, 4 and 11 April, 2, 16 and 23 May and 6 June

### EVENTS

#### Saturday 19 May

##### *European Night of Museums*

Late opening and free events from 8 pm until midnight

#### Thursday 21 June

*The Festival of Music* : Concert - Performance at 6.30 pm  
Bazel is an experimental musical project created by young artists Ewelina Chiu and Daniel Vlček. An electronic soundtrack accompanies a performance based on creativity in the art of František Kupka.

*This event is organised in collaboration with the Centre tchèque de Paris. Recording of Kupka provided by the Kampa Museum.*

## CULTURAL MEDIATION

### AUDIOGUIDES

**In situ**, in French, English and Spanish. Tour for young people in French. €5

**From the app**, in French and English. Tour for young people in French. Download on Google Play and the App Store (2,29€) : <http://www.tinyurl.com/expokupka>

### AUDIODESCRIPTION SOLO TOUR

Explore the Grand Palais exhibitions with a dozen tailored commentaries of artworks, combining technical descriptions, cultural context and art history. **Duration: 45 mins approx.**  
**Free of charge with MDPH card.**

Available at the exhibition audioguide counter.

### GUIDED TOURS book on [grandpalais.fr](http://grandpalais.fr)

#### Adults

**Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes**

**Price: €24 Concessions: €17**

**Group ticket offer (2 adults and 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €65**

#### Families (from 5 years)

**Duration: 1 hour Price: €22 Concessions: €15**

**Family ticket (2 adults and 2 children aged 16 and under): €49**

**Group ticket offer (2 adults and 2 young people aged 16 to 25): €59**

### LSF

**Thursday 12 April at 6 pm or Saturday 16 June at 10.15 am**

Explore new and surprising creative forces over the course of two hours with a sign language tour guide. **Duration: 2 hours**  
**Price for disability card holders: €7**

**Price for assistants: €10**

**Booking compulsory**

### WORKSHOP-TOURS

#### Adults

Take a tour with our tour guide and complete the pages of a sketch book inspired by one of the prime movers of modernism. *Drawing equipment not provided*

**Duration: 2 hours Price: €30 Concessions: €22**

#### Children

##### *Drawing movement*

**Duration: 2 hours Price: €10**

Online, support your children and pupils with play-activities for young people and learning materials on [www.grandpalais.fr/fr/jeune-public](http://www.grandpalais.fr/fr/jeune-public)

## PUBLICATIONS

### EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Directed by Brigitte Leal, Markéta Theinhardt and Pierre Brullé

25 x 27 cm, 304 pages, 325 illustrations, € 49

### EXHIBITION ALBUM

By Maximilien Theinhardt

25 x 27 cm, 48 pages, 40 illustrations, € 10

### REPRODUCTION

*Kupka, Four Stories of black and white*

25 x 33 cm, 32 sheets and 26 illustrations

Limited to 300 numbered copies, € 250

### EXHIBITION FILM, *Kupka, pionnier de l'art abstrait*,

broadcast on Arte in March 2018. DVD available, Rmn -

Grand Palais Arte co-production (€19.90). Also available as a download on VOD (ArteVod and iTunes).

## MULTIMEDIA



### THE EXHIBITION MOBILE APP

Free access to the online ticket office, practical information and cultural programming.

Taking it further: The exhibition Room by Room.

Available for a charge from audioguides (€2.29):

French, English. Tour for young people in French.

Download on Google Play and the App Store:

<http://tinyurl.com/expokupka>

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# SPRING 2018

## GRAND PALAIS

### ARTISTES & ROBOTS

5 April - 9 July 2018

The exhibition presents works of art made by machines, which in turn have been invented by artists. This interactive journey immerses visitors in the future of contemporary creation.

## MUSÉE DU LUXEMBOURG

### TINTORET. Birth of a genius

7 March - 1st July 2018

Celebrating the 500th anniversary of his birth, this exhibition traces the rise of Tintoretto and the decisive years of his career. It will explore how he built himself to become the most brilliant representative of the Venetian Mannerism.



**FROM 21 MARCH TO 30 JULY 2018**

AT THE GRAND PALAIS, SQUARE JEAN PERRIN ENTRANCE

OPEN EVERY DAY, CLOSED TUESDAYS

FROM 10 AM TO 8 PM, THURSDAY TO MONDAY, FROM 10 AM TO 10 PM, WEDNESDAYS

**Late night opening free to under 26s** on the first Wednesday of each month from 7 pm to 10 pm (last entry at 9.15 pm):  
Wednesday 4 April, 2 May, 6 June, 4 July

**European Night of Museums, 19 May** : the exhibition is open and free of charge from 8 pm. Doors open until midnight. Closes at 1 am.

Closes exceptionally at 6pm on 22 March  
Closed on Saturday 14 July

This exhibition is organized with the support of KPMG, the Eiffage Infrastructures Branch and Fondation Louis Roederer.



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