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| Kupka, František (1871-1957) |
| Frank Kupka | Francois Kupka |
| František Kupka, a Czech-born painter and graphic artist active in France, was a pioneer of abstract painting. His *Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colours*, shown at the Salon d’Autumne in 1912, was the first manifestation of abstract art in Paris. *Vertical Schemes I* (1912), exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1913, was later celebrated by Alfred H. Barr, founding director of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, as the first pure geometrical abstraction. While Guillaume Apollinaire appreciated Kupka’s work and included him in Orphism, Kupka was not fully accepted into avant-garde circles, and despite his contact with the Puteaux Cubists, he refused to be identified with them.  Kupka views motion and light as the only forces that can penetrate and melt matter. From his viewpoint, spiritual reality, or cosmic order, can be found in nature and is present in all natural forms. While in the 1890s Kupka incorporated elements of symbolism, naturalism, and decorative stylisation into his works, in 1910 he gradually began to liberate colour as a result of his belief in the deep spiritual and cosmological meaning of art. This conceptual approach led him to develop a scientific and theoretical basis for his work: he studied optics and the colour theories of various scientists, including Isaac Newton and Michel-Eugène Chevreul, who were also engaged in biology, physiology, anthropology, and other fields, and applied these interests to his own artistic concerns. |
| František Kupka (23 September 1871-24 June 1957), a Czech-born painter and graphic artist active in France, was a pioneer of abstract painting. His *Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colours*, shown at the Salon d’Autumne in 1912, was the first manifestation of abstract art in Paris. *Vertical Schemes I* (1912), exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants in 1913, was later celebrated by Alfred H. Barr, founding director of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, as the first pure geometrical abstraction. While Guillaume Apollinaire appreciated Kupka’s work and included him in Orphism, Kupka was not fully accepted into avant-garde circles, and despite his contact with the Puteaux Cubists, he refused to be identified with them.  File: Kupka\_Amorpha\_Fugue\_in\_Two\_Colours.jpg  Figure 1: *Amorpha: Fugue in Two Colours* (1912). Oil on canvas, 211 x 220 cm. National Gallery in Prague.  Kupka views motion and light as the only forces that can penetrate and melt matter. From his viewpoint, spiritual reality, or cosmic order, can be found in nature and is present in all natural forms. While in the 1890s Kupka incorporated elements of symbolism, naturalism, and decorative stylisation into his works, in 1910 he gradually began to liberate colour as a result of his belief in the deep spiritual and cosmological meaning of art. This conceptual approach led him to develop a scientific and theoretical basis for his work: he studied optics and the colour theories of various scientists, including Isaac Newton and Michel-Eugène Chevreul, who were also engaged in biology, physiology, anthropology, and other fields, and applied these interests to his own artistic concerns. Like Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, Kupka was also influenced by anthroposophist ideas.  Kupka began his artistic training at the School of Arts and Crafts in Jaroměř (now the Czech Republic). He continued his studies of religious painting in the studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (1887-1891), and later attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (1892-1893). After settling in Paris in 1896, Kupka earned a living by doing illustrations for various periodicals; his first success came when he published the lithographic series *Money, Religion, Peace* in the satirical weekly *L’Assiette au Beurre* between 1901 and 1904. Around this time, he unsuccessfully exhibited at the Société Nationale de Beaux-Arts.  As is evident in his *Piano Keys: The Lake* (1909), Kupka believed in a close analogy between visual art and musical expression. His interest in cosmological themes and biological and geological phenomena is reflected in his series *Cosmic Spring* — paintings consisting of colourfully luminous shapes intertwined in rotational movements — which he worked on during the second decade of the twentieth century.  In the 1920s Kupka continued to use vertical and diagonal schemes. His *Vortex* (1923) shows that he also experimented with circular movements, such as spirals and multiform rotations. In the second half of 1920s, Kupka turned to contemporary phenomena and began painting a series of canvases, among them *Comic* *Machine* (1927-1928), evoking jazz rhythms and steel machines. Being dissatisfied with the results, he returned to pure abstraction at the beginning of the 1930s. In contrast to his previous dynamic forms, Kupka created simple harmonic and balanced compositions consisting of lines, circles, trapezoids, and rectangles in red and blue on a white background; *Sun* (1930) is one such example.  Kupka was a founding member of the group *Abstraction-Création* in 1931, which connected him with the interwar avant-garde. During and after World War II his painting activity decreased. In 1946 he presented his paintings at the first Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris, where he then exhibited regularly until his death. A re-evaluation of his life’s work and recognition of his importance to the history of modern art did not come until his posthumous exhibition in Paris in 1958. |
| Further reading:  (Fauchereau)  (Galerie Gmurzynska)  (Jaroslav and Dorothy)  (Kupka)  (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris)  (Musée National d'Art Moderne)  (Musilová and Kupka)  (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum)  (Vachtová) |