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| Delaunay, Robert (1885-1941) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Robert-Victor-Félix Delaunay was one of the precursors of abstract painting in Europe. He played a critical role in establishing abstract painting before the First World War and had a strong influence on the later development of abstract art. Delaunay became a representative of Orphism, a term coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in reference to Orpheus, the legendary musician and poet in Greek mythology. Delaunay wrote many letters to other artists like August Macke, Franz Mark and Wassily Kandinsky, which reveal that his main concerns were related to the luminous essence and to the movement of colours in nature.  Robert Delaunay was the son of George Delaunay and the countess Berthe Félicie de Rose. During his childhood his parents got divorced and he was raised by his mother’s sister, Marie, and her husband Charles Damour in La Rouchère. In 1902 he started studying in the Rosin’s atelier for decorative arts in Belleville. The following year he left Rosin’s to focus only on painting and in 1904 he exhibited some of his works in the *Salon des Indépendants*. These first works were strongly influenced by *Impressionism*. Between 1905 and 1907 Delaunay began studying the colour theory of Michel Eugène Chevreul. His works of this period were strongly influenced by *Neo-Impressionism*, particularly the works of Paul Cézanne. In 1907 he served as regimental librarian for the Military Forces in Laon. |
| Robert-Victor-Félix Delaunay was one of the precursors of abstract painting in Europe. He played a critical role in establishing abstract painting before the First World War and had a strong influence on the later development of abstract art. Delaunay became a representative of Orphism, a term coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in reference to Orpheus, the legendary musician and poet in Greek mythology. Delaunay wrote many letters to other artists like August Macke, Franz Mark and Wassily Kandinsky, which reveal that his main concerns were related to the luminous essence and to the movement of colours in nature.  ‘*In this movement of colours I find the essence,*  *which does not arise from a system, or an a priori theory.*’  (part of a letter written to August Macke (Expressionist painter), 1912)  Robert Delaunay was the son of George Delaunay and the countess Berthe Félicie de Rose. During his childhood his parents got divorced and he was raised by his mother’s sister, Marie, and her husband Charles Damour in La Rouchère. In 1902 he started studying in the Rosin’s atelier for decorative arts in Belleville. The following year he left Rosin’s to focus only on painting and in 1904 he exhibited some of his works in the *Salon des Indépendants*. These first works were strongly influenced by *Impressionism*. Between 1905 and 1907 Delaunay began studying the colour theory of Michel Eugène Chevreul. His works of this period were strongly influenced by *Neo-Impressionism*, particularly the works of Paul Cézanne. In 1907 he served as regimental librarian for the Military Forces in Laon.  File: RobertDelaunayTimeline.jpg  Figure . A brief timeline of Delaunay's life and works (Schroder).  Source: Contributor’s own creation in MS Word – screenshot taken to maintain formatting. Text available in original file.  After one year of military service, Delaunay returned to Paris and got in contact with *Cubist* painters. He participated in early *Cubism*, but was mainly interested in introducing chromatic and abstract experiments into the cubist geometric aesthetics. He then developed his series of the *Eiffel Tower*, a series of works that contains a more personal chromatic cubist style, which was later labelled *Orphism* by Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire associated the rhythmic possibilities of colours made by Delaunay with the abstract harmony of music. In 1910 Robert married the Russian painter Sonia Terk, with whom he shared the interest in the harmonic, rhythmic and emotional effects of colour in painting. One year later their son, Charles, was born.  In 1911 Robert met Wassily Kandinsky, who invited him to participate in the first exhibition of *Der Blaue Reiter*, a German group of expressionist painters. The following year he had his first solo exhibitions in Paris and Zurich. From then on his work became more and more abstract. Delaunay came to believe that light could be expressed as pure colour independent of any objective content. In 1913 he began the *Circular Forms,* a series of paintings that consist of coloured discs with no reference to any kind of object, in which colour contrasts created the structure of the picture.  Between 1914 and 1920 due to the outbreak of the First World War, Robert and Sonia Delaunay lived in Portugal and Spain, where they discussed artistic partnerships with different artists. In 1920 they returned to Paris, Robert continued to work in an abstract style and in 1937 he directed the decoration of the Aeronautics and Railway Pavilions at *Paris’ World Exhibition*. His last major works, mostly vertical and diagonal stacks of disks and haloes of colour joined in a rhythmical design, are often entitled Rhythm without End.  Delaunay died of cancer in 1941 in Montpellier at the age of 56. His body was reburied in 1952 in Gambais. |
| Further reading:  (Robert Delaunay)  (Düchting)  (Kuspit)  (Riley)  (Robertson) |