

1918 ‘De Stijl’: Manifesto I

The famous first manifesto of the De Stijl group, the full importance of which can only now be assessed, appeared in November 1918 and introduced the second year of the periodical of the same name. A year earlier a group of radical artists had been formed in Leyden under the leadership of Theo van Doesburg (b. 1883 in Utrecht, d. 1931 in Davos). Their goal: the organic combination of architecture, sculpture and painting in a lucid, elemental, unsentimental construction. The group took the name ‘De Stijl’, thereby stating quite precisely that their constructive doctrine was aimed at a new aesthetic. The first word was ‘purity’; a ‘white’ world was to replace the ‘brown’ one.

1. There is an old and a new consciousness of the age. The old one is directed towards the individual. The new one is directed towards the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal may be seen both in the world war and in modern art.
2. The war is destroying the old world with its content: individual predominance in every field.
3. The new art has brought to light that which is contained in the new consciousness of the age: a relationship of equality between the universal and the individual.
4. The new consciousness of the age is prepared to realize itself in everything, including external life.
5. Tradition, dogmas and the predominance of the individual stand in the way of this realization.
6. Therefore the founders of the new culture call upon all who believe in reform of art and culture to destroy these obstacles to development, just as in the plastic arts – by doing away with natural form – they have eliminated that which stood in the way of pure artistic expression, the logical conclusion of every artistic concept.
7. The artists of today, all over the world, impelled by one and the same consciousness, have taken part on the spiritual plane in the world war against the domination of individualism, of arbitrariness. They therefore sympathize with all who are fighting spiritually or materially for the formation of an international unity in life, art, and culture.
8. The organ *De Stijl*, founded for this purpose, seeks to contribute towards

setting the new conception of life in a clear light. The collaboration of all is possible by:

Sending in (to the editorial board) as a proof of agreement the (exact) name, address, and profession.

Contributions in the broadest sense (critical, philosophical, architectural, scientific, literary, musical, etc., as well as reproductions) to the monthly magazine *De Stijl*.

Translation into other languages and propagation of the views published in *De Stijl*.

Signatures of the contributors:

Theo van Doesburg, painter / Robt. van't Hoff, architect / Vilmos Huszar, painter / Antony Kok, poet / Piet Mondrian, painter / G. Vantongerloo, sculptor / Jan Wils, architect.